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Oral history interview with Berthe Von  
Moschzisker, 1988 Aug. 29

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## **Transcript**

### **Preface**

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Berthe Von Moschzisker on August 29, 1988. The interview took place in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and was conducted by Ruth Fine for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The original transcript was edited. In 2024 the Archives retranscribed the original audio and attempted to create a verbatim transcript. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. Additional information from the original transcript has been added in brackets and given an -Ed. attribution.

### **Interview**

[00:00:02.03]

RUTH FINE: Let me just make sure it gets that much time. This is Ruth Fine interviewing Berthe Von Moschzisker at her home in Philadelphia in Society Hill on August 29, 1988. Why don't you say something so we're sure?

[00:00:23.77]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: This is Berthe Von Moschzisker being interviewed by Ruth Fine. [Laughs.]

[00:00:27.44]

RUTH FINE: Okay.

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:00:32.33]

I'd like to start out by having some information about your background, where you were born, where you went to school, what your interests as a child were—that kind of thing.

[00:00:46.63]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I was born in Philadelphia, 2101 Delancey Street, third floor front. People had babies in their houses in those days. And I went to private schools in Philadelphia. I did not go to college. My interest in prints was because my father and mother collected in a small way. My grandfather out in Pittsburgh, who'd been a glass manufacturer, had been a collector in a small way. And when the dealers from New York came to Pittsburgh to sell to the steel and glass [manufacturers -Ed.] and so forth—and metal factories—they used to stay at his house and show their wares from there. And so the interest in prints was

in my genes, I guess.

[00:01:35.71]

RUTH FINE: So your grandfather really did collect.

[00:01:37.78]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: In small fashion, yes, and he was friends with some of the dealers.

[00:01:42.20]

RUTH FINE: Which dealers?

[00:01:43.39]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Well, Mr. [Frederick -Ed.] Keppel in particular.

[00:01:47.44]

RUTH FINE: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What was he interested in?

[00:01:49.36]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Oh, very conservative in his taste.

[00:01:52.63]

RUTH FINE: [Joseph -Ed.] Pennell? McBey?

[00:01:54.10]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Well, no, my grandfather was before Pennell's day. My parents were interested in Pennell and were great friends with McBeys. But my grandfather was before those days. He was in the 19th century.

[00:02:13.64]

RUTH FINE: Yeah. I should make a note of when you were born. What year?

[00:02:18.12]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I was born on March 22, 1915.

[00:02:21.60]

RUTH FINE: 1915.

[00:02:22.92]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: My parents had married late in life.

[00:02:26.86]

RUTH FINE: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And when did your parents come to Philadelphia?

[00:02:29.44]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: My father was born in Philadelphia.

[00:02:33.21]

RUTH FINE: Your mother was born in Pittsburgh?

[00:02:34.65]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: My mother was born in Pittsburgh. And my father was on the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. And they met in Pittsburgh, when the court was sitting out

there, and then were married and lived in Philadelphia.

[00:02:46.59]

RUTH FINE: I remember reading someplace about your parents having to do with the founding of the Print Club in Philadelphia. But there was a reference in what I was reading to a print club in Pittsburgh before that.

[00:03:00.39]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes. My mother had been interested in that, and I don't know anything really about that one. But the Print Club in Philadelphia was founded by a group of private collectors, like my parents. Because at that time, there was no Philadelphia Museum of Art with a print collection. There was nobody doing anything about contemporary printmakers. And what they were primarily interested in was doing a—forming some sort of organization that would give contemporary printmakers some exposure. And they first met in private houses, and they would have, say, Mr. Pennell, come for tea and bring his prints. And they'd invite some of their friends.

[00:03:41.77]

RUTH FINE: And this was really right when you were born.

[00:03:44.17]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Before I was born.

[00:03:44.92]

RUTH FINE: I remember it was—1914 was the first meeting. And then 1916 was—

[00:03:48.80]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes, and I was born in 1915. I always say that—when they first discussed forming the Print Club, it was a hot night on the fire escape of the old Art Club—no longer exists. It was on Broad Street. So I always say, I was conceived at the same time as the Print Club.

[00:04:05.35]

RUTH FINE: That's great. [They laugh.]

[00:04:05.71]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Because I was born the following year, and the Print Club was, too.

[00:04:08.91]

RUTH FINE: Where on Broad Street was the art club?

[00:04:11.59]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: It was between the Bellevue [Stratford Hotel -Ed.] and the Union League.

[00:04:17.07]

RUTH FINE: Right around Broad and Walnut. Interesting. What private schools did you go to?

[00:04:21.64]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: First, a little French school, where we got to have all our lessons in French—it did no good for me with languages at all—I've always been lousy at them—and then to Shady Hill, which unfortunately decided, at that point, to go progressive. And the headmistress was an old lady who had no more idea of what progressive education was about. And we children all went haywire, and we had a perfectly marvelous time. But

they threw out all the top classes and started over again. So then I went to Ms. Irwin's for two years, and then abroad to school for a year.

[00:05:03.49]

RUTH FINE: Where?

[00:05:04.00]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: In Paris. And then I came back and went to Springside, finished up there. But I didn't go on to college.

[00:05:15.45]

RUTH FINE: And so you were abroad when you were about fourteen or fifteen?

[00:05:19.20]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Fifteen, yes.

[00:05:20.31]

RUTH FINE: Did you do traveling during that year, or stay in one place?

[00:05:23.31]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: My sister was older than me, and she was being so-called "finished." And we had a chaperone in an apartment in Paris for the—we'd been in England with the family in the summer. Then we were in Paris that winter. And in the spring, we went to Italy with our chaperone and traveled around Italy.

[00:05:39.30]

RUTH FINE: Sounds lovely.

[00:05:40.15]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: It was lovely. It was.

[00:05:41.43]

RUTH FINE: Now, I don't know about your siblings. I knew your brother once because I got some cats from your brother. Michael?

[00:05:48.36]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: You got cats from Michael?

[00:05:50.01]

RUTH FINE: Yeah.

[00:05:50.40]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: It amazes me. Well, I have an older sister, 18 months older than me—Kate. And she lives in Maine. And she was married, divorced. And I have my younger brother, Michael, who lives in Chestnut Hill, was a lawyer. He's had various careers.

[00:06:15.88]

RUTH FINE: He did writing for the newspaper at some point.

[00:06:18.07]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: At one time, yes. And now in his retirement, he's taken up acting, and he's having an absolute ball.

[00:06:24.25]

RUTH FINE: Oh, good for him.

[00:06:25.24]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: He's acting in all these amateur companies around town, sometimes being paid something.

[00:06:30.04]

RUTH FINE: Lovely. Where in Maine does Kate live?

[00:06:32.29]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Kate lives in Falmouth Foreside.

[00:06:34.93]

RUTH FINE: Do you get up there?

[00:06:35.86]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Oh, yes. I visit her about once a year.

[00:06:38.38]

RUTH FINE: Great. And so when you finished with your schooling and didn't go to college, what did you do immediately after that?

[00:06:46.12]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I wanted something to do, so I went, actually, to work as a volunteer at the Print Club for a couple of years. And then—

[00:06:55.21]

RUTH FINE: Was it in its building at that time, at 1614 Latimer?

[00:06:57.88]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Oh, yes. Yes, it was. We had the whole building by then. I can remember going into it with my mother and father when it was upstairs. You had to climb up these stairs above a framing shop. Yeah.

[00:07:12.49]

RUTH FINE: My memory is about 1927 is when they got the whole building. Does that sound right?

[00:07:17.78]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I forget. The information would be in those things you have. I'm terrible at dates. It was about then. Well, where was I?

[00:07:28.84]

RUTH FINE: That you volunteered at the Print Club.

[00:07:30.50]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes, I volunteered for one or two years there. And then I spent part of a winter in New York. I wanted to learn more about prints, and I browsed around in the Metropolitan Print Collection and at the dealers and so on, trying to learn a little. And while I was there, I heard about a course that was going to be given at Harvard at the Fogg Art Museum. Dr. Jacob Rosenberg, who was one of the German refugees, he'd been a curator of prints at Berlin. And so I wrote him a letter and said that I was—I'd never been to college, that I did not speak German, that I wanted to take his course.

[00:08:20.21]

And he didn't understand that I didn't speak German. Although, I should be honest about that—I could read a little German. He had me come up and talk to him. And he said he wanted somebody to act as a sort of office boy for him, see that his letters were in decent English, see that the students knew what their assignments were, because his English was quite broken still at that time—at least he thought it was—and things of that sort. And if I was a volunteer at the museum doing these things for him, I could take his course. So of course, I did it.

[00:08:59.15]

RUTH FINE: Oh, great.

[00:08:59.99]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: And it was marvelous.

[00:09:01.25]

RUTH FINE: So what year would this have been? This would have been in—around '35?

[00:09:06.68]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: A little later than that.

[00:09:08.53]

RUTH FINE: '37?

[00:09:09.08]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes. I was going to go back the following year. And by that time, I'd made friends with a great many people at the Fogg, and I'm pretty sure I could get a volunteer job. But my father died, and I had to stay home and help mother close up the house and so on.

[00:09:27.76]

RUTH FINE: Was this still on Delancey Street?

[00:09:29.17]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yeah.

[00:09:29.61]

RUTH FINE: 2100.

[00:09:31.30]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: And so I did not go back. Then the Second World War broke out. Oh, I was offered a job at the Academy of Fine Arts. They had a collection of around 60,000 prints. No money to pay anybody anything other than their train expenses. And they wanted somebody to go through it and tell them whether they should do something about it or just forget it.

[00:10:03.39]

RUTH FINE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:10:05.98]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: So I went through it for, I think, two or three years I was doing that—two years, maybe. I forget how long—two or three. And it was a fascinating collection that's now at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. They did have a great many very worthwhile things. And they didn't have any reference books for cataloging or anything of that sort. So you just—the little knowledge I had, and Adam von Bartsch—they did have *The Illustrated Bartsch*. I had to go just with that.

[00:10:36.87]

But they had some things like—they had more [Jacques -Ed.] Bellange etchings than any place else in the United States. Well, I happened to be particularly interested in Bellange when I was at Harvard because one of my boyfriends was doing his thesis on it. And so I knew how many there were supposed to be in the United States. And I came across all these others nobody knew were there. There were all sorts of exciting things like that I do just enough to spot.

[00:11:06.58]

RUTH FINE: Yeah. What was Rosenberg's course like at Harvard? What kinds of things did he teach? Or how did he go about it?

[00:11:14.86]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: He lectured—well, some of his best lectures, I always say, you were most moved—for instance, his one on Rembrandt and his one on [Martin -Ed.] Schongauer and one on [Albrecht -Ed.] Dürer. He was a very good lecturer.

[00:11:33.10]

RUTH FINE: Did they work with the Fogg collection? Was the whole connoisseurship idea that the Fogg was—

[00:11:38.14]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes. And you had to also—you'd be given a pile of prints. You were supposed to go through them and see what you might discover about them. And I remember there was one pile where there were several prints in it that were—part of the print was the original old, and the rest had been—wasn't. And they'd been—well, the wire lines and the paper and all had been all carefully faked.

[00:12:09.22]

RUTH FINE: Wow.

[00:12:10.73]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: But you could tell if you held it up to the light, if you thought that something was a little bit wrong. So things like that they were having us do.

[00:12:19.87]

RUTH FINE: Was Betty Mongan there when you were there?

[00:12:22.39]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Betty was here at Rosenwald's then.

[00:12:24.70]

RUTH FINE: So she'd already finished at the Fogg.

[00:12:25.79]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: But Agnes [Mongan -Ed.] was there, of course, as the Curator of Drawings.

[00:12:30.79]

RUTH FINE: Yeah. And at the Academy, where did you work? In the downstairs vault?

[00:12:37.61]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Oh, a room—big room there that's now an exhibition gallery that then had the library and various staff members there. I worked in any corner I could get. And I used to use up four or five or six dusters a day. These prints were pasted down in



portfolios, and were filthy. And you had to dust them off before you could see what was there.

[00:13:01.53]

And there was a ledger he'd kept of everything he had, just "Parmigiano, Bartsch," such and such a number, and which portfolio it was in. And so that was the only thing you had to follow. And he had some fascinating things. His idea of collecting was to buy every print that had ever been made, regardless of whether the artist was important or not, regardless of whether it was a good impression or not.

[00:13:35.04]

RUTH FINE: I'm going blank on the collector's name. I know it very well.

[00:13:37.65]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: [John S. -Ed.] Phillips.

[00:13:38.61]

RUTH FINE: Of course. Right.

[00:13:42.92]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: He also had some drawings, which I wasn't doing, but I spotted them as being remarkable. And I got somebody from the Boston Museum to come down and look at those. And they were. But all this has been gone now to—

[00:13:55.55]

RUTH FINE: This is what the Bermans [Philip and Muriel -Ed.] bought for the Philadelphia Museum.

[00:13:58.80]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yeah. Yeah.

[00:14:00.59]

RUTH FINE: A wonderful [A. Hendrik -Ed.] Goltzius show was selected from that collection. That's the one that I've seen.

[00:14:04.67]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Well, they had some wonderful things. They had, in addition to [Giovanni Battista -Ed.] Piranesi's prisons, that—I forget now. It was so long ago. But there were supposed to only be three of that edition, because the title page had one letter missing, or one letter added, or something of the sort. And here was a fourth. And nobody knew it was there.

[00:14:28.59]

RUTH FINE: It was exciting to make those kinds of discoveries.

[00:14:30.31]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yeah.

[00:14:31.01]

RUTH FINE: And were you interested in contemporary prints, too, at this time?

[00:14:34.19]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes, I was, definitely. So anyway, I was there. And then I began to feel that I must be in war work. So I went into war work and left the Academy. And towards the very end of the war, the woman who had been director of the Print Club, Mrs.

[Andrew Wright -Ed.] Crawford, for about 18 years, died. And again, it was a situation in which they couldn't offer the job to somebody who was fully qualified that would demand a real good salary. So they came and asked me if I was interested.

[00:15:12.39]

RUTH FINE: It sounded like you were fully qualified, but that you were generous as well. [Laughs.]

[00:15:19.71]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: And so I went—I took the job. And there I was for the next 26 or 27 years.

[00:15:29.88]

RUTH FINE: What kind of war work were you doing?

[00:15:32.61]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I'd been at the Army Signal Corps for a while, and I hated that so much because they had me running machines, and I can't run an alarm clock. So I quit that, and I worked for the interceptor command. And that was rather fun.

[00:15:49.70]

RUTH FINE: And what were you doing? What did that—

[00:15:51.32]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Plotting planes' courses.

[00:15:52.73]

RUTH FINE: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Wow.

[00:15:58.75]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: So when I went to the Print Club, it was in very bad shape, partly because of my predecessor, and partly because of the war.

[00:16:10.66]

RUTH FINE: In what sense? What things were—

[00:16:13.32]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Well, the membership was down to around just 300 or 400 or something. I forget the exact figures. It's probably in some of those things you have.

[00:16:21.40]

RUTH FINE: Actually, I don't know. I haven't run a membership figure for that time.

[00:16:25.27]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: And sales were almost nonexistent. We hardly had the money to buy—we had an old coal furnace. And with the war just winding down, there were coal strikes, and you couldn't—coal rationing, and you couldn't get coal. And we'd have to write—send a letter out to the members asking them to bring in paper bags full of coal so we could have some heat. I can remember working there with galoshes and mittens on because we had no heat.

[00:16:53.87]

RUTH FINE: Wow.

[00:16:56.89]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I even sold some of the furniture, which I didn't feel was suitable furniture—horsehair sofas and things like that—at Freeman's in order to get a little money to keep running.

[00:17:09.92]

RUTH FINE: Wow. Do you have any memory of what the dues were for membership at all?

[00:17:15.66]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Oh, five dollars for artists, I think, and ten dollars for—

[00:17:19.44]

RUTH FINE: Collectors.

[00:17:20.01]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: —collectors. Something of that sort.

[00:17:21.75]

RUTH FINE: And was it fairly evenly divided, even then, between artists and collectors?

[00:17:26.85]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: No. The artist membership had fallen off rather badly because Mrs. Crawford, my predecessor, had not liked artists. She was partly Jewish, but didn't want to admit it. So she was very unwelcoming to any Jewish people, except for somebody like [Lessing -Ed.] Rosenwald. She was a social climber. What she was using the club for was for those kind of purposes or her social-climbing friends. And she wasn't there a lot of the time. And it had its good days for a while, but then it'd gone down.

[00:18:13.99]

RUTH FINE: It fell off.

[00:18:15.32]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: So it really had to be built up from scratch again. And we had a very conservative board. And that first spring that I was there, Stanley William Hayter won a prize in our etching show for his print "Laocoön," which is out there in the hall. And I was very excited by this print. So I wrote and asked him if he'd let us have a show of his work in the autumn. And he said yes, and he came over to see us, and told me about the workshop he had in New York. And I had lunch with Ben Spruance and he that day. And we decided that we'd invite him to start a workshop in Philadelphia.

[00:19:01.63]

RUTH FINE: Oh, great.

[00:19:02.35]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: And so we did have, for several years, a workshop that met—I think it was on Wednesday evenings. And Hayter would come over once a month. And we got other artists, like Louis Schanker and Adja Yunkers and Will Barnet and so on to pay visits, or sometimes they'd just be on their own.

[00:19:22.27]

Oh, my board had a little trouble with them about showing things like the—well, the Hayter show was highly successful. But, I mean, they didn't want—they wanted John Taylor Arms and Thomas Nason and so on, who, of course, did beautiful technical work, but they weren't very exciting, showing or doing anything new.

[00:19:48.66]

And I wanted to be showing Louis Schanker and Hayter and people of that sort. So I had to

prove to them that I could sell these things. And I had to keep charts of what type of thing we were selling. And of course, right away, I was able to—sales were going up, and we were selling.

[00:20:10.58]

RUTH FINE: How did you bring people in? Was there any kind of advertising? Or when you—  
[Cross talk].

[00:20:15.62]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Well, no. It was just that we were friendly when people came in. Instead of working in my little office, I used to do my work out at a long table in the gallery. So when people came in, I could say, "Hello, let us know if you want any help." And I would just be doing—we hand-addressed all the invitations—

[00:20:37.34]

RUTH FINE: I remember. [Laughs.]

[00:20:37.76]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: —and all the notices and stuff. This was work that could be interrupted, obviously. We put a tea tray out every afternoon at four o'clock—

[00:20:46.22]

RUTH FINE: Oh, how nice.

[00:20:47.54]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: —with cookies. And we, the staff, wanted our tea and a break. And so anybody that was in would sit down and would chat with us and have tea. And we financed that by having a little piggy bank on the tea tray and people put in money. I think we better break for lunch—well, I'll go look at the soufflé and—

[00:21:12.44]

RUTH FINE: Okay.

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:21:16.34]

I'd be interested in knowing a little bit more about where you would have seen contemporary prints, either in New York or in Philadelphia, during the time just prior to your coming to the Print Club.

[00:21:30.87]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Well, it was really prior to my going up to Cambridge, to Harvard. I was taking some German lessons from a German refugee artist, Werner Drewes—you know his work—in New York. They were living in terrible poverty conditions. And [Carl - Ed.] Ziggrosser was still at Weyhe Gallery, I guess, then. And I said I wanted to get some German lessons. And so he arranged for me to go to Werner Drewes for them. And he had portfolios with some of the German expressionist prints.

[00:22:11.95]

Is it working?

[00:22:17.69]

RUTH FINE: I think it is. But, yeah. Yeah. Okay. It was that popping I was looking at, but it should be okay. We could listen for a minute and make sure.

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:22:32.71]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: And here are these portfolios with the German expressionists in it. And I'd never seen anything like this in my life. [Telephone rings.]

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:22:41.47]

RUTH FINE: [In progress]—sure we're picking it up just fine.

[00:22:45.31]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: And that really was my introduction to contemporary prints.

[00:22:53.52]

RUTH FINE: Really? And this would have been early '30s, I guess?

[00:23:00.24]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: No, wait a second.

[00:23:01.62]

RUTH FINE: Middle '30s?

[00:23:02.67]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Middle '30s.

[00:23:03.36]

RUTH FINE: Middle '30s. I forget when Drewes came here, but it would have been right about the time he came to New York. And how did you know Zigrosser at that time? From going to Weyhe?

[00:23:13.44]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: From when I'd been in New—well, I mean, yeah. Well, Weyhe was one of the places I was hanging around and Knoedlers and Keppels and Metropolitan Print Collection.

[00:23:26.55]

RUTH FINE: Yeah. But they were really handling not modern prints.

[00:23:32.85]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Well, Weyhe has some. But Knoedlers and Keppels didn't.

[00:23:39.91]

RUTH FINE: And who interested you that Weyhe had?

[00:23:47.31]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I don't know who told me about Zigrosser and Weyhe. I can't remember. You know, if somebody's interested, they hear these things, I guess.

[00:23:56.52]

RUTH FINE: And what were the artists that you got involved with at that time by going to Weyhe?

[00:24:01.05]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I didn't get involved with any, but I just became a little more—

[00:24:04.95]

RUTH FINE: Aware of them.

[00:24:05.67]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: —aware of them—familiar. And then I went up to Cambridge. And of course, there, people at the Fogg Art Museum, who—and the Institute of Contemporary Art—

[00:24:16.70]

Gingey! [Clapping.]

[00:24:19.68]

—in Boston, which we'd all go enjoy the exhibits there. I began to hear and see things that opened my eyes a bit more.

[00:24:35.58]

RUTH FINE: Anything from the ICA stand out in particular?

[00:24:40.32]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I think there was a [Georges -Ed.] Roualt while I was there.

[00:24:45.09]

RUTH FINE: And so when you took on the Print Club, what sorts of things were in the bins? Had it been [Cross talk]—

[00:24:53.24]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: John Taylor Arms, Stow Wengenroth, Thomas Nason. And those were the better things that were in the bins and followers of all of them. Oh, goodness. Of course, Benton Spruance, who started showing his prints, having won his first acclaim there.

[00:25:18.45]

RUTH FINE: Yeah. And that would have been in '29. So he would have been showing there through the '30s as well.

[00:25:26.08]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes, yes. And [Robert -Ed.] Riggs.

[00:25:26.73]

RUTH FINE: But I suppose there was some real strong, supportive Philadelphians, like Spruance and Riggs or—

[00:25:32.79]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes.

[00:25:36.48]

RUTH FINE: I never knew Riggs.

[00:25:37.71]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: And then McBey and people like that they had. McBey, actually, was a very charming man. I think he did do some very fine prints.

[00:25:50.22]

RUTH FINE: And so you immediately started to expand the sorts of things that—

[00:25:54.49]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes, we had a Max Kahn, Eleanor Coen exhibit. We had the Hayter exhibit. We had a Louis Schanker exhibit, and so on. And between the workshops—and then, of course, some of the local artists, like Ezio Martinelli, who was teaching at the College of Art, as it was called then—they became excited at the possibilities of what the Print Club could do with a director there who was interested in doing these kind of things.

[00:26:25.50]

RUTH FINE: Who were the artists that came to the Wednesday night workshops?

[00:26:28.98]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Martinelli, and [Dmitri -Ed.] Petroff, and Leonard Nelson. And Spruance came.

[00:26:38.22]

RUTH FINE: I don't know Petroff.

[00:26:39.69]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Well, he was very talented, but left Philadelphia, oh, after two or three years here—I mean, he'd been born here, I think, but only two or three years active in the art world—to go to New York. He got into advertising, and he wanted to make money. And he dropped out of fine arts. And I don't know what's happened to him. Oh, Leon Karp was another one of my people. And of course, Ed Colker, and Sam Maitin, and Jerry Kaplan, and Eugene Feldman came on a little bit later. They I always consider my children.

[00:27:21.36]

RUTH FINE: Yeah. What about [Morris -Ed.] Blackburn?

[00:27:23.70]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Blackburn was already active there.

[00:27:28.33]

RUTH FINE: And were there close ties between the club and the various art schools from the time you started?

[00:27:34.92]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Well, when I started, we immediately had close ties with the College of Arts—very shortly after I started. There weren't ties when I started, particularly.

[00:27:44.79]

RUTH FINE: And how did that work? Just by a kind of warmth and friendliness and—

[00:27:48.72]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yeah, word of mouth.

[00:27:50.67]

RUTH FINE: Inviting people to come. I mean, certainly, my memory, which would be the late '50s, was that it was, as an art student, one of the places that you had to go. And you knew you were treated like an adult and welcomed as if you were a professional. And it was kind of a wonderful way to start.

[00:28:12.46]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Well, you know what it was like. I mean, it's hard for me to say why or what, because—but maybe one doesn't know what impression one's making on other people, I guess.

[00:28:23.67]

RUTH FINE: Sure. But there were lectures going on before you took over? Or had that kind of petered out?

[00:28:30.07]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: That kind of thing petered out.

[00:28:31.11]

RUTH FINE: So in all of the things that you read about the Print Club—

[00:28:32.94]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: They had, back in the very early days, a panel would speak there, and Albert Sterner and various people. But that kind of thing had pretty well—

[00:28:45.01]

RUTH FINE: So between the director and the war, all of the things that one reads about the Print Club from the '20s in the '30s and early '40s had quieted down.

[00:28:54.16]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes.

[00:28:54.45]

RUTH FINE: So when you took over, it was a matter of reinstating some of the old traditions. And then, what kinds of new things did you bring in that perhaps had never been done there?

[00:29:06.09]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Well, the workshop.

[00:29:07.08]

RUTH FINE: The workshop.

[00:29:08.05]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: And then we had a drawing class at night. And then we—

[00:29:12.24]

RUTH FINE: Was there a model?

[00:29:13.11]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yeah, life class.

[00:29:18.13]

RUTH FINE: Which anyone taught, or it really functioned—

[00:29:19.92]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Well, we had various teachers. But this would also make artists feel welcome. We were doing something for them besides exhibits. And then, of course, we had the openings, which they'd always had. But the openings had been very much a social occasion that the artists didn't really come to. They became more a mixture of the social and the artists.

[00:29:52.44]

RUTH FINE: And the membership started growing.



[00:29:54.09]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes. Then the thing that gave the membership a tremendous boost was when John Canaday put that big article in *New York Times*.

[END OF TRACK AAA\_vonmos88\_7511\_m]

[00:00:03.29]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: [In progress:]—the Canaday article, really.

[00:00:06.01]

RUTH FINE: It just needs a minute to start. Okay, that's enough. So you were talking about the Canaday article—

[00:00:13.69]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: It came out when the club was shut for the summer. And our membership just about doubled as a result of it. We got letters from as far away as Australia asking about the club and membership and so forth. And I answered all of them by hand that summer because I had no secretary or anything. Every day, I was answering them.

[00:00:38.59]

RUTH FINE: About when was this article—do you remember?

[00:00:40.87]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: You must—don't you have it somewhere?

[00:00:42.07]

RUTH FINE: I don't remember if that's in here. But I can check the year.

[00:00:47.23]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: But you haven't seen that article? I might have a duplicate of it upstairs. When we're finished, I can go look.

[00:00:58.17]

RUTH FINE: Okay.

[00:01:00.10]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I forget just what year it was. But he devoted his full column that day in the *New York Times*—

[00:01:08.91]

RUTH FINE: To the Philadelphia Print Club?

[00:01:10.29]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yeah. By the way, it's the Print Club of Philadelphia, not the Philadelphia Print Club. [Laughs.]

[00:01:14.76]

RUTH FINE: Okay. All right. What was the staff, generally? Were you on your own?

[00:01:23.96]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I had a part-time bookkeeper and full-time secretary when I started out. And then after a number of years, we got an Assistant to the Director. And then—that must have been about the time Prints in Progress started. Maybe we got that person because—or just before Prints in Progress started. And the Assistant to the Director helped

run Prints in Progress.

[00:01:55.40]

RUTH FINE: That was about 1958. Was Brooks Jackson the first person who did that? I was trying to remember if there was somebody before that.

[00:01:58.16]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: No, not the first. There was somebody—and, finally, Prints in Progress had just their own person because they were too busy to share somebody with us. And then we had a maid that came in once a week for cleaning. But all the parcel wrapping, we did ourselves. And finally, we got an addressograph machine—bang, bang, bang—so we didn't have to do the addressing by hand.

[00:02:30.95]

RUTH FINE: Did you have student help at any time for various special projects?

[00:02:35.18]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Volunteers when we could get them, but we didn't always have them. You can't always count on volunteers. Some were good and could be counted on to come a couple of times a week. Some, you never could count on. But we certainly—when we could get them, we had them.

[00:02:50.51]

RUTH FINE: Yeah. I remember Lucinda Collins working there on that.

[00:02:53.09]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yeah, she was secretary.

[00:02:54.27]

RUTH FINE: She was the secretary probably when I first started.

[00:02:57.65]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yeah. Yeah, she was secretary for a while.

[00:03:01.07]

RUTH FINE: She was one of the earliest.

[00:03:02.15]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: But we paid very bad salaries. I would have to—when I was hiring somebody—tell them, look, you're not going to earn much. But you're going to have a lot of fun, meet interesting people. And we are flexible about things like if you need time off for the doctor—or anything of this sort—to try to compensate for the bad salaries.

[00:03:26.31]

RUTH FINE: When did you start doing publishing, publishing prints and publishing books? And was that something you instituted?

[00:03:33.54]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes, that was one of the things I instituted. I forget the exact year. It's the year that the [Leonard -Ed.] Baskin book was published. I think that was our first thing—that and an Ed Colker print. And the Baskin book is up at the College of Art now, an exhibit. So this date will be in there. But on Valentine's Day, I opened the mail, and there was a check for, I think, something like \$3,000 from somebody in New York I'd never heard of. And that was big money to us.

[00:04:17.38]

Prints in those days were selling for \$25 or \$30. And \$3,000 is a lot of money. And I found out eventually who had done it. It was Seymour Adelman had bought something at auction. And then he found out this man in New York wanted it terribly, what he bought at auction. And the man had a family reason for wanting it. So Seymour said to the man, all right, you may have it, provided you send the Print Club of Philadelphia a check for \$3,000.

[00:04:50.81]

RUTH FINE: How wonderful. [Laughs.]

[00:04:53.95]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: That's the kind of thing Seymour did. And so I was faced with this check. And, of course, I didn't want to just put it into the general fund. I wanted to do something special with it—and decided to publish. This would give us a nest egg for starting it. And the Baskin book—the proceeds for The Print Club, it sold to the members for eight dollars with eight illustrations, I believe, in it and sold to the public for fifteen dollars. [Laughs.]

[00:05:30.60]

RUTH FINE: Extraordinary.

[00:05:31.56]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: And we only asked Baskin to do three illustrations, and he got so interested in it, he did the others for us. We didn't have to pay extra or anything. And the Colker print that we published was—I forgot the title of it. But the proceeds from that went to our pension fund. We had started at that time a pension fund. When an employee retired, they could be given a check and then something every year. So every year, we used to publish at least one print then for the pension fund. And the others were published for—

[00:06:14.72]

RUTH FINE: Who were some of the people that were published over the years?

[00:06:19.81]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: [Gabor -Ed.] Peterdi, [Mauricio -Ed.] Lasansky, Jerry Kaplan, Ed Colker, Sam Maitin, [Benton -Ed.] Spruance, Carol Summers, [Antonio -Ed.] Frasconi.

[00:06:35.57]

RUTH FINE: Pretty wide range of styles.

[00:06:36.58]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Oh, yes, I tried—well, in our exhibits, we tried to have a wide range of styles and media and locale. Oh, and [Paul -Ed.] Wunderlich.

[00:06:50.46]

RUTH FINE: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. All of this was basically your decision? Did you—

[00:06:53.41]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Absolutely. The director—

[00:06:54.66]

RUTH FINE: You made the selections.

[00:06:55.46]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes. I decided what we were going to show, what we'd keep in stock, what we were going to publish. What I did do—because I didn't want my board to feel too left out—was I would—in the, let's say, April board meeting—I would go with a list of the shows that I wanted to have the following year—leaving a couple of vacancies for something

that might turn up—and the publications I wanted to do, and why. And then if a board member came up with a good idea, I certainly welcomed it. But they pretty much gave me a free hand.

[00:07:34.57]

RUTH FINE: Yeah. How big was the board then?

[00:07:39.06]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I suppose around fifteen people, or something like that.

[00:07:42.33]

RUTH FINE: I know Bonnie Wintersteen was one of the presidents in the '50s.

[00:07:46.41]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes. And Mrs. Raymond Wright was president for quite a while. Bodine, [Mrs. Austin Lamont -Ed.] was president.

[00:07:55.79]

RUTH FINE: How is she?

[00:07:57.55]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: How is she? She's fine. She lives—

[00:07:59.74]

RUTH FINE: Haven't seen her in years.

[00:08:00.03]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: —in Maine now all year round.

[00:08:02.11]

RUTH FINE: She's so lovely.

[00:08:06.86]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Let's see. Who else? Mrs. [Edward -Ed.] Budd was president.

[00:08:16.73]

RUTH FINE: And Peter Mather was president. Was that after you were no longer director?

[00:08:21.75]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I think that was after me.

[00:08:23.85]

RUTH FINE: And Bob Hauslohner was president.

[00:08:26.55]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: He was president when I was retiring. Don't ask me about him.

[00:08:34.87]

RUTH FINE: Okay. [They laugh.] I promise. And you had board meetings once a month?

[00:08:42.19]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Once a month on Mondays, lunchtime.

[00:08:45.01]

RUTH FINE: And what kinds of issues were discussed, usually, at the meetings?

[00:08:48.52]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Of course, you'd have a financial report and a membership report. Then you would report on anything that's been happening of interest at the club. And then in spring meetings, we'd be discussing the following year's schedule. Remember, we had our openings for each show. We had a Friday afternoon opening for each show, one opening a month. And those were hosted by members of the club, who sometimes would be one person, sometimes be several together. We shared the expenses. And they didn't have—we rarely served liquor in those days. It was tea and coffee and cookies.

[00:09:37.66]

RUTH FINE: It was so elegant. There was always a silver tea service, as I recall.

[00:09:42.22]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes. And then very occasionally, somebody would say they wanted to have a liquor or wine. And that was fine if they wanted to pay for it.

[00:09:51.20]

RUTH FINE: They were wonderful. I remember them.

[00:09:54.00]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: And that was another thing I had to do, is find the people who would host these things. That was a tedious job.

[00:10:01.77]

RUTH FINE: And what about lectures? Did they usually—if you would charge for a lecture, that would pay for the lecture?

[00:10:09.49]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: We didn't charge anybody for the lectures. We paid the artists out of our own funds—I mean, the club funds.

[00:10:23.22]

RUTH FINE: And were they planned in advance on a kind of schedule or—

[00:10:28.86]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes. We always—when we were doing the spring schedule for the next year, we'd plan some of them. But then things would turn up you thought would be good. And you could pop them in—

[00:10:40.80]

RUTH FINE: So if someone happened to be in town at the time—

[00:10:44.58]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes.

[00:10:45.18]

RUTH FINE: —you could add them to the schedule. By the time you were director, Zigrosser had come to Philadelphia.

[00:10:53.53]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Oh, yes. He'd been here for a while, actually.

[00:10:56.32]

RUTH FINE: And what were the interactions between the museum [Philadelphia Museum of Art -Ed.] and The Print Club?

[00:11:00.25]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Well, we had The Print Club permanent collection, which we started just before I came to the club. And they're no longer doing it. I don't know why, but they aren't. That, we raised money from the members every year. And a committee composed of—most of the time it was Lessing Rosenwald, Carl Zigrosser, and third person. Sturgis Ingersoll

was on it for a while, and various different people.

[00:11:29.64]

Oh, they would get together some prints Carl wanted for the museum. And let's say we had \$5,000 that we'd raised. And that would go quite far in those days when prints were less expensive. Some of them would be contemporary prints. Some would be old master. And the committee would meet and decide what we would buy. The club would get a commission on the sale from the artists or from the dealer. And the permanent collection fund would pay for the prints, and they'd become part of the permanent collection of the museum. Then another thing—now, that was already started when I came. But I started to think that our prize-winning prints in the various juried exhibits would be purchase prizes and go to the museum.

[00:12:40.38]

RUTH FINE: And they were added to that collection as well?

[00:12:43.65]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes, they were part of the permanent collection, really, but not selected in the same way.

[00:12:53.88]

RUTH FINE: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It's a fairly large collection. I remember, at various times, there were exhibitions at the museum for the permanent collection.

[00:13:05.17]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Oh, yeah. Now, I must say, my successes at the club have done a splendid job of raising vast sums of money for purchase prizes and so on. But they're not all purchase prizes anymore. Some of them are just outright cash prizes for the artist. And it got a little difficult to make the purchase prices when the artist prices were shooting up so high.

[00:13:29.49]

RUTH FINE: Really? Yeah. I guess even in your time there, the prices started getting astronomical, relatively speaking. Although—

[00:13:38.32]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Beginning to go up, yeah, but they weren't really—

[00:13:41.43]

RUTH FINE: Yeah. So if you retired in '69, that would have been ten years after Tamarind [Lithography Workshop -Ed.] started. Were you interested in that kind of development? Or what was your opinion on that?

[00:13:53.71]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Well, June Wayne and I never hit it off very well. I certainly

was interested in what she was doing. But just—we had a personality clash. [Laughs.]

[00:14:08.04]

RUTH FINE: Good for you. I remember she came to the club. And I can't remember if that was—

[00:14:11.13]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: She came a couple of times. She was a member.

[00:14:15.99]

RUTH FINE: But the whole notion of the artists working in workshops, the way prints have—

[00:14:23.46]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: We had a lithograph workshop for a very short time at the club. Remember Paul Narkiewicz?

[00:14:27.24]

RUTH FINE: Yeah, I do, middle '60s.

[00:14:29.79]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yeah. Yes. Unfortunately, it didn't work out.

[00:14:33.60]

RUTH FINE: What had inspired that idea? Was that your idea to try it?

[00:14:38.52]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Well, the artist had been wanting it. We had the etching press upstairs. And some of the artists said we ought to do something with lithography. And so we got some money from—I think it was the Ford Foundation. And Paul unfortunately didn't have the ability to run that kind of a workshop, or the maturity.

[00:15:06.06]

RUTH FINE: Well, there was also a problem with the board not wanting it to be advertised, and so it took a long time to get the word out about it.

[00:15:15.09]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I can't remember the board not wanting it to be advertised.

[00:15:17.52]

RUTH FINE: No? I thought there was some reason for not advertising it.

[00:15:21.39]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: No.

[00:15:22.17]

RUTH FINE: I don't know. Really?

[00:15:23.55]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: No, we tried to get the word out. But Paul, he didn't follow up on his commitments often.

[00:15:38.45]

RUTH FINE: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. There were some publications—I remember a Spruance print was published by the workshop.

[00:15:43.70]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes. We published a couple of things like that to help raise money for the workshop.

[00:15:50.69]

RUTH FINE: It's too bad that didn't work.

[00:15:52.44]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: It was too bad.

[00:15:55.72]

RUTH FINE: I don't know if there's any talk about trying one again. I guess the workshop that's really taken off in Philadelphia in a big way has been the Brandywine Workshop.

[00:16:03.91]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes, they're doing a good job.

[00:16:06.05]

RUTH FINE: That one existed now for a long time.

[00:16:08.27]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: And I noticed that they seem to be doing a lot with the Print Club, having exhibits at the Print Club and things of that sort, which is good—lectures that they arrange together.

[00:16:20.80]

RUTH FINE: Did you do traveling in Europe to find out what was happening abroad? You mentioned earlier your interest in Asger Jorn and the Danes. Were there specific—

[00:16:29.86]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Well, I did some of that, yes. And we did send an exhibit through the Swedish Arts Council of American prints to Sweden. And that toured Sweden for a couple of years. And I went over while I was there. And I saw it, one of the places it was being shown.

[00:16:50.14]

RUTH FINE: When would that have been, about?

[00:16:58.06]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Around '60.

[00:17:04.83]

RUTH FINE: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I suppose by having the international exhibitions that artists would have sent into the Print Club, and that would have been a way to learn what was happening.

[00:17:12.67]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes. We always got some international entries—not as many as I would have liked, but we always got some. That's how I found Wunderlich, was—he sent into one of them, so we gave him a show, and we published a print.

[00:17:28.88]

RUTH FINE: And what other kinds of things—you were talking before about showing pots and showing small sculpture. And what got you started doing that?



[00:17:40.51]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: It just—that I thought that the art of those artists needed a place to be exposed. And as long as they were small and didn't interfere with the picture line and compete with the prints in any sense in that way, I thought it warmed the gallery up and made it more interesting and would bring in people who wouldn't normally come in, and might make new members and make some additional sales. And I didn't see how it would compete in the print sales. Because if somebody wanted a piece of sculpture, it wasn't a choice between getting a print or a piece of sculpture. They wanted a piece of sculpture.

[00:18:21.06]

RUTH FINE: And it was Kenneth—

[00:18:22.73]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Gordon.

[00:18:23.27]

RUTH FINE: —Gordon's sculpture.

[00:18:23.72]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: There's three of us right there.

[00:18:25.25]

RUTH FINE: Right. And Ann Kaplan's pots, and—

[00:18:29.30]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: And, well, John Baxter's sculpture—a piece of his over there on that chest. Oh, a number of people's pots—what was the name of that man who was out in Wallingford? Oh, I can't remember now.

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:18:57.44]

RUTH FINE: I'd be interested in knowing about your relationship with Zigrosser, both professionally and friendly, and with Betty Mongan. And what kinds of interactions were there? Did you discuss ideas with them?

[00:19:14.60]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: With Zigrosser, certainly. Betty was terribly busy in those days. I didn't see too much of her. We had a very friendly relationship, but I wasn't going to her, "Who shall I show?" But Carl was on the board, and so he was in on those sort of things. And we were never intimate the way—my friendship with, say, Jerry Kaplan or Sam, or—I always looked up to him and wanted his advice.

[00:19:53.99]

RUTH FINE: What about Una Johnson? [Curator of Prints, Brooklyn Museum -Ed.]

[00:19:57.60]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I'm very fond of her. I used to see her at Print Council meetings and things of that.

[00:20:03.50]

RUTH FINE: You were a member of the Print Council when it first started.

[00:20:06.81]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes.

[00:20:07.44]

RUTH FINE: Who were the other curators? Even today, there aren't that many curators that I think of as being interested in contemporary prints.

[00:20:14.01]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Well, I felt very lost in that group, really, because they were scholarly curators. And I wasn't a curator. I was interested in promoting the living artists. Our problems that we were working with were entirely different. So I definitely felt very uncomfortable at those meetings.

[00:20:37.71]

RUTH FINE: Who—besides Ms. Johnson and Carl Zigrosser did you think of as being interested?

[00:20:44.82]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Alan Fern. He was lovely. And [Edgar -Ed.] Breitenbach was somewhat interested. And who was the guy out in Cincinnati?

[00:20:56.46]

RUTH FINE: Oh, Gustave Von Groschwitz.

[00:20:57.66]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes.

[00:20:57.93]

RUTH FINE: Of course. He did all those wonderful lithography shows in the '50s.

[00:21:02.34]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yeah. And I went out to one of those and stayed with them. But those were sort of the Print Council of people I could communicate with.

[00:21:12.51]

RUTH FINE: Yeah, a very limited group. It's still a limited group. That hasn't changed.

[00:21:16.95]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Do you belong to it now? [Cross talk.]

[00:21:18.33]

RUTH FINE: —[Inaudible] interest in contemporary prints. It's still a small number of people who are really involved.

[00:21:25.57]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: But even about contemporary prints, I wasn't a scholar. I mean, my relationship was not that of a scholar.

[00:21:31.41]

RUTH FINE: But knowing the artists is how you're a scholar in terms of contemporary prints. Having them as your friends and talking to them about their ideas, that's—

[00:21:42.15]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: [Claps.] Gingey!

[00:21:43.24]

RUTH FINE: You were a scholar in that sense.

[00:21:45.78]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: [Inaudible] scholar.

[00:21:47.40]

RUTH FINE: Was there a big difference when Zigrosser left and [Kneeland -Ed.] McNulty took over?

[00:21:52.41]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: No.

[00:21:52.65]

RUTH FINE: And you were still director then, or did it kind of just—

[00:21:54.84]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I was still director, and McNulty was on our board also and was a friend. And so the transition was simple.

[00:22:05.09]

RUTH FINE: I can't remember—had he been an assistant to Zigrosser?

[00:22:07.99]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes, yes. Oh, yes, quite a number of years.

[00:22:10.53]

RUTH FINE: So it really was following in the mold. And what about Mr. Rosenwald? Was he—

[00:22:17.28]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Mr. Rosenwald—he was terribly good to me. I held him in awe. But he always couldn't have been kinder or more generous to The Print Club. And he several times had open days for members of the club to come out and see his collection. He would spend hours with them.

[00:22:39.06]

RUTH FINE: Oh, good. I didn't know that. Did he come in and see most of the shows?

[00:22:46.00]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: A great many of the shows, yeah. And he bought some things from us.

[00:22:50.41]

RUTH FINE: Did Betty pick things from the shows? Or did he pick things from the shows?

[00:22:54.28]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: He finally did the picking. But you haven't asked about Prints in Progress. Well, that's—again, I forget the exact date, but that was Billy Wolf's baby.

[00:23:08.71]

RUTH FINE: Right.

[00:23:09.16]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: And he was on—

[00:23:09.86]

[Doorbell rings.]

[00:23:10.66]

—has a girl for the—

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:23:12.93]

RUTH FINE: Let's talk about Prints in Progress.

[00:23:15.20]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Well, Billy Wolf had the idea.

[00:23:17.38]

RUTH FINE: Had he been a board member?

[00:23:18.52]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes, he was a board member at that time. And it was a good idea. And we followed through on it. It started by having the demonstrations—as you remember—in the schools, the artists going in, and the press going in. And, eventually, that stopped and workshops were opened in, I guess, poor, ghetto areas with artists in residence at the workshops and classes several times a week where children in the neighborhood could come. And that is no longer part of the Print Club. It got too big. It had to have its own space.

[00:24:04.03]

RUTH FINE: Yeah. It was right when Ofelia [Garcia -Ed.] took over that that broke off. I forget exactly the year. But I do remember it was right after she took over.

[00:24:11.72]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: And so they now have their own office, and they raise their own money and are completely independent. But it was a very worthwhile thing for the club to have gotten started.

[00:24:25.40]

RUTH FINE: It was a marvelous program with—didn't it grow out of—I never knew what Young Audiences was. It's something that—[Cross talk.]

[00:24:33.79]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Billy's wife, Irene [Wolf -Ed.], was very active in Young Audiences. And that's what gave Billy the idea of what could we do similar.

[00:24:41.66]

RUTH FINE: And what was Young Audiences, taking musical people into the schools?

[00:24:45.56]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes.

[00:24:46.16]

RUTH FINE: Performers?

[00:24:47.12]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes.

[00:24:47.84]

RUTH FINE: And Prints in Progress took artists into the schools.

[00:24:50.14]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes.

[00:24:50.33]

RUTH FINE: And they did print demonstrations.

[00:24:50.93]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: That was opened for these children who had very few cultural opportunities, which opened some doors for them—or windows, or however you want to put it—and showed them some other sides of life. And I'm sure Young Audiences probably does things about scholarship money. And the Prints in Progress has also scholarship money for the art schools for kids that are particularly talented.

[00:25:23.76]

RUTH FINE: And didn't the Fabric Workshop in a sense grow out of Kippy Stroud's involvement with Prints in Progress?

[00:25:29.25]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes, Kippy was a volunteer at Prints in Progress for us. And through that, she got the idea of the Fabric Workshop, signed off on her own on that.

[00:25:40.83]

RUTH FINE: And that's now had more than its tenth anniversary.

[00:25:43.74]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes.

[00:25:43.98]

RUTH FINE: It's amazing how long that's been. And my sense was, at the beginning, she took people who had been introduced to printmaking in the Print in Progress workshops. And they were the first people who came to work in the Fabric Workshops.

[00:25:56.25]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: They may have been. I don't remember.

[00:25:58.49]

RUTH FINE: So it was a kind of desire for a continuity beyond high school on her part that got that going. In the time you were director, can you explain what you perceived as some of the major changes that took place in the way artists approached their work or the ideas artists were involved with?

[00:26:31.67]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: When I first went there, you almost never saw a color print in the exhibits. It was all—you might have in an open-juried exhibit—let's say the National Etching Show, or International—you might have two prints in color—same with woodcut or lithography. And so that was one of the big—then the size of prints. They used to all be four by six inches. Suddenly, you have these ones that are practically mural size. I think one of the things I don't approve of at all is the skyrocketing prices for prints. I think the artists have priced themselves out of their market.

[00:27:30.48]

RUTH FINE: And that really started as well while you were director.

[00:27:35.16]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Well, it was just beginning to start, the high prices.

[00:27:39.34]

RUTH FINE: And the interest in photography, that blossomed while you were director.

[00:27:43.24]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: That was starting. And I did include photographs in a couple of shows and had a couple of one-man type shows of photography. But my successors have emphasized much more of that.

[END OF TRACK AAA\_vonmos88\_7512\_m]

[00:00:04.50]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: So now they're not very easy to get out.

[00:00:07.56]

RUTH FINE: I know the [Print Club -Ed.] archives are at the Historical Society. And I had actually hoped to go through all of them before I came here. And that was one of the things that kept holding me up. And I decided, well, we'll just do it without going through them.

[00:00:23.19]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: To go through them, it'll take you a week. I mean, there's so much. And it's not very—it hasn't been sorted out. And it's been gone through a couple of times for exhibits. And I don't know—God knows how it was put back.

[00:00:36.82]

RUTH FINE: I thought the scrapbooks would be interesting. Did you keep the scrapbooks?

[00:00:41.31]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Oh, yes. I did. But I don't know whether my successors did. I doubt it somehow. But they were very useful and very interesting.

[00:00:50.31]

RUTH FINE: Now Robert Grigor-Taylor was the first person after you.

[00:00:53.91]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes.

[00:00:54.66]

RUTH FINE: And then Margo Dolan.

[00:00:56.64]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes.

[00:00:57.30]

RUTH FINE: And then Ofelia Garcia.

[00:00:59.22]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yeah. And now—

[00:01:00.27]

RUTH FINE: And now Ann Schuster.

[00:01:01.22]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes.

[00:01:03.49]

RUTH FINE: So that in the eighteen years, there have been four, as distinct from the—

[00:01:08.85]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: One for 26 [years].

[00:01:11.64]

RUTH FINE: How long the sense of continuity happens there. You were talking about there being very few color prints. Were you involved at all with the American Color Print Society?

[00:01:23.37]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes. They always—I was never on their board by choice. But they exhibited for years at the club. And we would hang the show and parcels would arrive there. And we'd open them and check them in. But they would select their jury. And they established the ground rules. Not us. That was the only other organization that we gave gallery space to. All the other shows were our own shows.

[00:02:00.30]

RUTH FINE: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Were there other cultural institutions you were on the board of?

[00:02:06.28]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: No, frankly. The only boards I was on were social service type boards.

[00:02:12.97]

RUTH FINE: For example?

[00:02:14.63]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I was on the board of the International Program for Social Workers and Youth Leaders. And of the board of the Rebecca Gratz House, which was a place for girls with emotional problems.

[00:02:28.38]

RUTH FINE: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And were you on them through the years, or was it only —

[00:02:31.92]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: It was only towards the end of my tenure at the Club that I went on those boards. Not in the early years.

[00:02:39.47]

RUTH FINE: And what have you been doing since?

[00:02:42.35]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I'm on the—well, while I was still at the Print Club, I became active at Christ Church. And I've been on the vestry there as the first woman vestry. Of course, now there's been several others since. I chaired various committees there, and still serve on their outreach committee, which I chaired for ten years. And resigned as chairman after ten years. I decided it was time to get out. Let somebody younger take over.

[00:03:15.08]

RUTH FINE: Weren't there some publications at some point that were sponsored by—

[00:03:18.74]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes. We did several publications of prints and of books there. But we paid the artist. I never asked an artist to do something for nothing. But of course because they were friends of mine, they were willing to maybe charge less. We always—in the Club publications and also in the Christ Church publications, the artists kept a certain number that they could do what they wished with. And we had a certain number that we sold for a certain price for the "benefit of," in one case the Print Club, in the other case at Christ Church.

[00:04:01.59]

RUTH FINE: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I think Claire Van Vliet was involved.

[00:04:03.69]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yeah. She did one thing for us. And Naomi Lamont did a lovely book. And Sam Maitin did a lovely book. And Ben Spruance did a couple of prints. And Helen Siegl did a book and some prints.

[00:04:17.45]

RUTH FINE: And Spruance really was the godfather of everybody. There was a sense. Did you see him that way?

[00:04:25.30]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes.

[00:04:26.44]

RUTH FINE: A very powerful and influential.

[00:04:32.01]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Mm hmm [affirmative]. Definitely.

[00:04:38.06]

RUTH FINE: Was he the best known of the Philadelphia artists of his generation?

[00:04:42.32]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: No. I'd say Franklin Watkins and Walter Stuempfig were probably better known internationally. But Spruance was certainly one of the most known and influential loved ones in Philadelphia.

[00:05:02.42]

RUTH FINE: And the other two were not terribly involved with prints.

[00:05:05.54]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: No. They weren't involved with prints. No.

[00:05:07.22]

RUTH FINE: [Inaudible] print world.

[00:05:09.05]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: He was in the print world, definitely. Important one.

[00:05:20.61]

RUTH FINE: And then it was Jerry Kaplan and Sam, were the next generation?

[00:05:25.08]



BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Ezio Martinelli came in between. And so did Leon Karp. Leon was one of the loveliest men I've ever known. Did you know him?

[00:05:32.67]

RUTH FINE: No. I never met him.

[00:05:34.23]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Died young unfortunately. Very, very giving, loving, beautiful human being.

[00:05:44.50]

RUTH FINE: And then Peter Paone came after that.

[00:05:47.02]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes. Well, Peter Paone started showing at the Club when he was about 15. And we'd occasionally have a children's show. And he would walk off with all the prizes.

[00:05:58.33]

RUTH FINE: And who among the artists are you still in touch with? Do you hear from Claire [Van Vliet -Ed.] at all?

[00:06:03.16]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I haven't heard from Claire recently. I was in touch for a long time. She designed that pillow, which I did in needlepoint. I mean, I did the color design. But she did the drawing on canvas for me. Yeah. I kept very close touch with the Kaplans. And I do see Helen Siegl, and Sam Maitin, and Rosina Feldman, and a few of the others. Ed Colker.

[00:06:36.16]

RUTH FINE: There were—

[00:06:37.18]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I did—I purposely had to cut the umbilical cord when I left the Club after being there that long and that involved. I found it was very difficult to go back when you're not the one running the show.

[00:06:54.85]

RUTH FINE: Sure. Especially if you don't like exactly the way someone else is doing things.

[00:06:59.73]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes. I'm more comfortable there now with Ann than I have been. But of course that's partly because I've distanced myself from it all as it's such a different generation. But also because I like her feeling about the Club and things.

[00:07:16.80]

RUTH FINE: Are you on the board now?

[00:07:18.05]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: No. No. I wouldn't go back.

[00:07:21.89]

RUTH FINE: It's interesting that when you were there you got involved with books as well as prints. And all of the things that have now become extremely popular. Artist books are a whole genre in itself, which certainly wasn't true when you were director. Or wasn't discussed quite the way it is now.

[00:07:42.83]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: We published some books too. We did have Helen Siegl and the Baskin book. Did we do any other there?

[00:07:50.55]

RUTH FINE: Wasn't there an Ed Porter book at one time?

[00:07:52.92]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: That was for the Church. Do you want me to go up and see what I can find in the files?

[00:08:05.60]

RUTH FINE: That would be great. Just to put in some dates.

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

The \$3,000 donation that started the publications was in 1957. And Prints in Progress actually started in 1960.

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:08:22.50]

Were there any people in your education that were particularly important besides Rosenberg? Or that was really the most important teacher in terms of what you later came to do?

[00:08:33.00]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes, definitely. I had a history of art at grade school and high school. But there was nobody that was inspiring.

[00:08:45.44]

RUTH FINE: Any thoughts as a woman who spent her life as a professional woman about the whole kind of feminist activity that's happened in the last years?

[00:08:54.36]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: A lot of it bores me to death. No. This business of using all-inclusive language in the Bible, say, I find ridiculous. I don't feel because God's a man that I'm shut out in any fashion.

[00:09:14.06]

RUTH FINE: Yeah. Did you have any feelings as you were sort of pursuing your years as a career person?

[00:09:21.02]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Well, when I worked for the Army Signal Corps during the war. And the men were allowed to smoke at their machines, and we women weren't. So that made me very angry. That kind of thing. Or unfair pay for the work you were doing makes me angry. But by golly, we're going to call a manhole a manhole. Not a woman—Not a she-hole. [They laugh.]

[00:09:55.85]

RUTH FINE: Are there other people that we haven't mentioned that you think were important to the Print Club over the years in any capacity? Sylvia Egnol came up in passing.

[00:10:03.80]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes. Sylvia. Then there was Mrs. William B. Lynn, who was one

of the very early members. I think she was one of the founders actually. And until shortly before her death she was active there. She was secretary of the board for years. One of the most generous women to contemporary artists in the world. And one of the loveliest human beings. She certainly did a great deal for the Club. Bodine Lamont was one of the presidents. Did I say that? In my day.

[00:10:47.04]

Really, I couldn't have done any of the things I did if it hadn't been for the cooperation of the artists that became members of the club, and were active there, like Ed, and Sam, and Jerry, and Ben. And then the out of town ones like Hayter, and Frascioni, and Baskin, and so on. They all were very good friends to the club. And had some of them had their first shows there too. Got their first prizes there. But they kept up the relationship for years.

[00:11:21.03]

RUTH FINE: They actually came and visited?

[00:11:22.93]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: They came and visited and lectured. And they had things are on consignment. Another person who was—don't think he ever was a member—but was very generous to the club was Curt Valentin. The dealer in New York. He used to let us have things on consignment like [Max -Ed.] Beckmanns, and Henry Moores, and things of that sort that we could not get direct ourselves from the artists.

[00:11:48.09]

RUTH FINE: Basically, everything was on consignment that was in the—

[00:11:51.06]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Consignment from the artists or from dealers. But mostly from the artists.

[00:11:59.87]

RUTH FINE: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You collected prints over the years, obviously from seeing what's on the walls.

[00:12:03.98]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yes.

[00:12:04.04]

RUTH FINE: A lot of these things gifts from—

[00:12:06.32]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Some were gifts. Some I bought.

[00:12:08.42]

RUTH FINE: Did you have any program in terms of what you liked personally and what you bought personally?

[00:12:15.27]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I bought something I loved. Occasionally, I would buy something because I thought the artist needed to make a sale. Sure.

[00:12:24.54]

RUTH FINE: Are your favorite artists among the ones you bought? I mean, I know who you liked as people. Were they necessarily the same ones whose art—

[00:12:31.29]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: No. Often bought somebody as a person whose work I didn't like. And that could be a little awkward.

[00:12:37.64]

RUTH FINE: Yeah. Who were the artists whose work you most admired?

[00:12:43.52]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Among the contemporary ones?

[00:12:46.58]

RUTH FINE: Yeah.

[00:12:47.60]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I mean, I'm discounting Picassos and Rouaults.

[00:12:53.15]

RUTH FINE: The pantheon.

[00:12:53.87]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yeah. I would say Ezio Martinelli, and Sam, and Jerry, of course. Hayter. Agathe Sorel. Valerie Thornton. I loved that Armin Landeck work when we gave him the show. That was a one-shot thing.

[00:13:35.10]

RUTH FINE: What else are you involved with personally in terms of theater, or reading?

[00:13:41.21]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I do a lot of needlepoint. I'm active in the Church. I help to maintain the walkway next to this house, which is city property. But they were neglecting it. And so some of us in the neighborhood maintain it. I raise money every year so we can buy plants and have a little professional pruning, things of that sort.

[00:14:11.25]

RUTH FINE: You would have really have seen the whole transition in Society Hill.

[00:14:14.85]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I came down here in '57 when it was only about ten of us, new wave of people.

[00:14:22.29]

RUTH FINE: What brought you here? What made you decide this is where you wanted to settle?

[00:14:27.20]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: I had an apartment uptown. And I sat at my landlord's house for dinner one night. I sat next to Charlie Peterson who was with the Federal Park Service. And he was doing-over two houses down here. He was the first person to do-over the new wave of people. To restore. And I think he was an architectural historian.

[00:14:51.30]

And he talked about what he was doing, and what he hoped for down here. And that was in May. And in September, I got a cocktail invitation from him, and so I thought it would be rather fun to go down and see what he'd been talking about. And I came down and the house he was working on wasn't finished, and he let us go through the house. And I saw this apartment on the third floor, which I loved. I liked it better than the one I was in. So I wrote

him and said, "I can offer you so much for that apartment." Rent. Not buying it. And he said okay, so I moved in.

[00:15:28.86]

RUTH FINE: And just loved the neighborhood.

[00:15:30.33]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Yeah. And then three years later, he was talking about raising the rent. And by that time, I loved the neighborhood. And I didn't know it was going to become fashionable. It wasn't then. I mean we—

[00:15:41.78]

RUTH FINE: Who were some of the other people who moved down, then? Any people who were important in the cultural world in Philadelphia?

[00:15:49.49]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: No.

[00:15:49.64]

RUTH FINE: Then you really were a pioneer here, too.

[00:15:51.47]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Well, John Canaday did come down here. He was in Washington Square a little bit later.

[00:16:01.46]

RUTH FINE: Yeah.

[00:16:05.85]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: And Sam Maitin came down. Is that it?

[00:16:16.90]

RUTH FINE: Have we missed anything that you can think of?

[00:16:19.44]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: Not that I can think of. I think we finished.

[00:16:21.51]

RUTH FINE: Anything else in terms of—

[00:16:22.63]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: What do you do? You will then edit this and write it up?

[00:16:26.67]

RUTH FINE: I turn it into the Archives, and they transcribe it. And write it up. Transcribe it. I will give the tapes over to the young woman now. She's at the Presbyterian Society. Am I missing anything about personal things? The idea is that if someone wants to write a book about you in 50 years.

[00:16:52.77]

BERTHE VON MOSCHZISKER: They're not going to want to. So we don't have to worry about that. [Laughs.]

[00:16:57.61]

RUTH FINE: I may just, after all. Look at all you do.

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:17:04.92]

That tape was Ruth Fine interviewing Berthe von Moschzisker on August 29, 1988 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]