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Oral history interview with Rachael Griffin, 1983 Feb. 19-20

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Rachel Smith Griffin on February 19 and 20, 1983. The interview took place in Portland, Oregon, and was conducted by Bruce Guenther for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

[RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN had been hospitalized for serious illness, but was home for a brief period during which this interview was conducted. Shortly thereafter, she returned to the hospital, and died on April 5, 1983.--Ed.]

FEBRUARY 19, 1983

BRUCE GUENTHER: Rachael, you were born in Portland, Oregon, in 1906.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Uh huh. Yes, and went to school here before I went to college. You would be safe in saying that I'm certainly a product of the pacific northwest and, indeed, of Portland, Oregon.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Your parents were from here, or had they moved here?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: My parents came as children to the northwest-- exactly when they came to Portland-- around 1900. My father was a lawyer in the civil service; he was in the Department of Naturalization and Labor. My mother was a teacher and a librarian.

BRUCE GUENTHER: I know you local education-- you had mentioned that you attended Saturday classes at the museum?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes. I say I probably have the longest contact if you include that-- of anybody in the world-- with the Portland Art Museum. The school was started in 1908, I think held the first classes in 1909. I should perhaps say right at this point that the museum and school that I attached so early to, were the first public cultural institutions in Portland. I can think of none other and I did a little research on that. Reed College was not yet built. The public library-- though there was a library-- was a subscription library... But the public library, I think, was after that. In any case, it's so very early in the cultural life of the community that it just is something to note, that is, for the west coast.

BRUCE GUENTHER: The association was actually begun in the previous century-- 1898?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: '92. But soon after that-- I believe in '98-- they acquired the Greek and Roman casts (plaster casts) which were their only collection for some time. And this was shown on a floor of the then-library.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Oh, the subscription library.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Probably, yes; I don't think we should be too exact about this. I merely wish to establish that the museum was extremely early. I don't think it's usually the first cultural institution in a city. And ours may have been-- at any rate it was very close. [The] exact moment when the library became public instead of subscription, I'm not sure. In any case, we had these plaster casts. The then-director, or as she was called, curator-- actually from the moment she appeared she was directing-- Anna B. Crocker, said that she thought that they were wisely advised to purchase these plaster casts because-- I'm paraphrasing this, now-- but her thought was that they might well have been misguided if they had bought paintings of the time, which would have been what they could afford, which might not have been-- or turned out to be of very high quality later. And for a far western community it was felt that the plaster casts-- the classical casts were part of the education of an educated person, to have that view of that visual aspect of the culture of Greece and Rome. So, they bought those.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And did those become part of the Saturday class-- or the children's class you might have taken part in?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, they were around. They were around. They were still-- because this little museum-- this leads me to another I think interesting point-- shall I go on in this-- this mode?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Uh huh. [positive]

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: You can stop me when you like.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, I think the early history of the museum's very interesting. The first painting was what, 1907?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: 1908. In that sense, the museum and school started together. There were no collections. You really can't count the casts as collections because they weren't originals; of course, they were turned out by the thousands. That first original painting was Mount Hood by Childe Hassam-- the American impressionist-- who came out here frequently, had a friend on the board-- C.E.S. Wood. And this was the first painting-- the first original work of art in the museum's collection was Childe Hassam in 1908. It was purchased by a group of people-- by five or six people maybe-- went together and bought it. People were buying Hassam out here then because of Hassam coming out. He liked to sketch around the state; he made many friends here. So the classes in the school wee proposed by Mrs. Lee Hoffman of the Hoffman Portland family, contractors (now) who are still interested in the school and the museum. Anyway, at the same time-- the same year that the museum acquired its first painting. So they really did start together-- the classes and the collections.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Collections.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: And I think that's kind of interesting.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, but it-- so as a small child you had a chance of taking.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, those plaster casts were all around the building. They filled it up-- little building down on Fifth and Taylor and which is now, I think, Chamber of Commerce (or maybe something like that). Anyhow, they were everywhere and we had the first, another first,-- oh, it's more for the public schools, I guess, than it is for-- for the museum. But the public schools at that time--and by "that time" I would mean World War I and after for quite a while, a number of years-- the public schools paid a docent to take classes through the museum which meant through the plaster casts, really-- well, there were some paintings, too, by that time. I mean paintings began to come in, of course, and paintings were borrowed to hang. Fortunately, our first director had background and judgment-- no degrees or anything of that sort, but she had studied art, just intensively all she possible could, and she had ideals and background to make good choices. So she didn't borrow local paintings that weren't of quality from local collections. So what was there was good. And that was upstairs; downstairs on the first floor were all those plaster casts crowded together. All those white Greek and Roman works with their maple leaves. And we used to have a housekeeper, sort of, that served tea and things. She used to say, "Well, outside, the leaves fall in the autumn. But in here they fall in the spring." She was funny. And so there you were in a forest of white Greek and Roman sculptures and then in two other large rooms the classes were held. Day classes, evening classes, and Saturday classes. And I went to this-- these Saturday classes in what must have been about, well, I don't know-- World War I.

BRUCE GUENTHER: 1913, 1914-- somewhere in that area?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Somewhere in there, I suppose. Uh huh. [positive]

BRUCE GUENTHER: So was this your first interest in art. Then you went to the University of Oregon--that was in 1924...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Most little kids that are going to end up doing something in art are always drawing. And I was like that-- I was always drawing things. And so the family was kind of conscious of it. However, when it came time to face facts in high school, I was also interested in history. And so it wasn't thought to be a very sensible thing to go down to the university and take art, so-- and I was interested in history and was glad to do this-- I registered as a history major. And really enjoyed it very much. But my interest in art kept growing and I kept finding myself-- I guess this is a pattern, too-- kept finding myself over in the art department looking at what they were doing and-- and somewhere along the line I also got acquainted with the museum-- reacquainted with the Museum Art School in Portland and that looked pretty good to me. And so I ended up there...

BRUCE GUENTHER: After-- what-- two years at the university, you came up and went to the Museum Art School, which...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: And graduated or whatever you do when [I] got a sort of certificate.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And I think the date was 1929.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh, yes. I should say that if you went down to the university and went there four years you-- you know, got a B.A. Those were in the great crazy days when everybody thought that it would continue forever-- that there would be a job for everybody that graduated from the university. And I was going to be a history teacher. Looked pretty good, and, of course, in any case I didn't try, but I wouldn't have gotten a job anyway.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, after the Museum Art School, did you major in sort of across the board, or did you focus on sculpture or painting?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, I took whatever they gave you. And it tended to be then largely painting and drawing, and design-- marvelous design class. But it wasn't yet focused down on specializing. It was a--you know you have to creep back through the decades and see what art meant then. Everywhere art meant painting.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yes. Well, was Mrs. Crocker still teaching?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Miss.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Miss.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: She never really taught. She was just the spirit of the place. And she was so remarkable a woman, and her ideals and ideas were so high and her ideas were so practical in the main that-- that she-- her spirit was everywhere in the association of the two organizations, school and museum.

BRUCE GUENTHER: So was Harry Wentz there then?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: And Wentz came, I think, in 1910.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Ah, so he was-- would have been...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: So he probably was there when I was down there. I'm not absolutely sure about that-- '10 or '11. Very early, in any case.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Was he still active in '28 and '29 when you went to school?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh yes, much longer than that.

BRUCE GUENTHER: So he was your teacher.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, right.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Did he do the design course, or just sort of taught across the board?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Leta Kennedy taught the design. And I believe she is still to be interviewed for the archives. Well, she was another great teacher. There were three great teachers. You know, that doesn't happen very much. They were-- it's easy to say it, but-- but teachers that were, as they say, absolutely committed to the teaching of art and to what it meant and its values. And there were three of them. And Harry Wentz was one. They each did something the other did not do. Miss Crocker was certainly the intellectual of the three, and could make connections with the philosophy and history and literature. And she-- she believed just totally, in the educative power of art. She didn't think it was just--here, I think she would perhaps differ slightly, but not very much from later thinking at the school-- she didn't think it was just to train professionals. She thought that if you approached an art education properly, in good hands, you would be an educated person just as if you had decided to major in history, say. And I grew up thinking that. And it affects your teaching. Harry Wentz was an entirely different kind of person. He was a practicing artist. And the museum owns some of his work, some very beautiful watercolors. And they are around-- Portland people bought them. He was-- his ideals come partly from the manual training movement. I don't know whether it was called that or not, but it was when crafts like that-- woodwork-- first entered into the public schools of, well everywhere-- America. It was a new thing when he was...

BRUCE GUENTHER: So it was in a sense like the arts and crafts movement-- that sense of...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Of which Mrs. Lee Hoffman was already deeply into when she proposed the school-- the design school. I don't know whether I said that or not, but...

BRUCE GUENTHER: No, no you didn't-- you left it out.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, I think we got sidetracked there. But anyway, yes, all of those things came together. Mrs. Lee Hoffman had established the Arts and Crafts School here in, I think, 1902. Classes...

BRUCE GUENTHER: It later became the Oregon School of Arts and Crafts.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Later. It had very low lows and very good ups, but it maintained itself. And sometimes it was just-- would be just a class in silver. I remember a time when it did that. But it kept alive. And Mrs. Hoffman was committed to the idea of the old arts and crafts movement in the nineteenth century. Now, back to Miss Crocker and those three teachers.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Harry Wentz.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Harry Wentz we were talking about. Well, Harry had taught manual training, I think, in the public schools. But he had gone to Europe; he was an artist. He had gone to Europe, he had studied in New York, and so on. And Miss Crocker had traveled as well. They were not just local products that shot up out here in the west. But Harry was much more, of course, focused on the "making side" than Miss Crocker. They got along together, fortunately. Sometimes I'm sure they had differences, but they so much approved of each other's directions and ideals, that they got on. There wasn't any feeling of--well, as far as the school was concerned there was never a dean. They were just-- they all believed alike. I mean they just worked together. Well, as late as the last time I studied with Harry, I never sensed this dichotomy-- this separation that many people felt later. In any case...

BRUCE GUENTHER: And then Leta Kennedy.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Leta Kennedy was a local girl who went to the art school and then went back to Columbia and to Teachers College which was then a great-- that's where you went if you wanted to be the teacher on earth in art. So she studied with people like Dow-- Arthur.

BRUCE GUENTHER: You mean Arthur Dow?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yeah. And-- I'm a little insecure on that. And she, too, just came back and settled down and taught in the school. Miss Crocker was here guiding light and she was a fantastic teacher. She managed to make every student feel that what he was doing was of the utmost importance. And you better not muff it, you know. It wasn't-- she never said anything like that, but she made you feel that-- that if you were working with art at all, it was never inconsequential. Therefore, we'll do this very carefully. And we'll get it-- we'll get it right. She made me feel and I'm sure that she did almost every student that she had, that--that the design of a work of art was really its-- now what shall I say here? Well, it's its structure, of course, but it's a structure that has to be blended with--and I'm feeling my way-- blended with and come out of the spirit of what you're doing-- the reality of it-- the core of it. That is, design can't be learned and applied-- it has to arise from the meaning of the work. Then, the structure will be right for it. Now that's they way she taught. And then she also-- you know, it's hard to remember this now, but, let's see-- when did you say I was there? '29?

BRUCE GUENTHER: 1929.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I was there, of course, after that a lot, but-- just came back and took classes.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And then you went to Reed?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: No, wait a minute, wait a minute.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Okay.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I don't want to lose this thought. I guess I have lost it. I was talking about Leta and...

BRUCE GUENTHER: The importance of the activity and the object.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: The importance of the activity and so on...

BRUCE GUENTHER: ...and focus.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I'll come-- I'll find it. Well, I took classes several times at Reed.

BRUCE GUENTHER: In '30 and '31.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: And I took classes that probably nobody ever knew about at PSU. They turned out to be not really very well worth taking. In those days it was not PSU, it wasn't PSC--I don't know what it was. But they did offer classes for teachers and I could see that I was going to be teaching. In fact, I liked teaching. And, so I took courses there as well.

BRUCE GUENTHER: So...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: We were talking about the teachers...

BRUCE GUENTHER: And they way that worked. Then with the varied education at the beginning of the Depression...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh yes.

BRUCE GUENTHER: ...with your personal life-- did you marry then?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh, I married in '30. Yeah, '30-- right. Oh yes, and then...

BRUCE GUENTHER: To?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh! Richard Griffin. My name-- I don't use that Smith, by the way. I think Rachel Griffin is really my name. I never have.

BRUCE GUENTHER: It's been for many years.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes. And it was the Depression. And it was terrible, of course, for everybody. But young people didn't notice it so much. In '37 and '39 I had two children. And one of them is a film writer and the other one teaches at UC Berkeley.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Their names?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Their names are Andrew-- I'm not trying to conceal these children of whom I'm very proud-- Andrew Griffin teaches in the English Department, associate professor at UC Berkeley; and Molly Gregory is a film writer and very active in film organizations-- she was president of Women in Film and she writes generally for documentaries and has a very rich life in the film world in Los Angeles. Well, they were born in '37 and '39. My husband was a biologist-- commercial biologist. And the thirties were, in general. rather grim times for everybody. There was certainly no job for a young woman teacher who wanted to teach art. In time, however, I did teach--if that's-- this is the course you wish to pursue-- and I like teaching. I-- in fact, in some sense, I think I'm always doing it, want it or not. I taught at the Gable Country Day School-- I taught at Riverdale. And I think it's typical for the times what happened there. Riverdale is a nice school in a very prosperous district outside of Portland. And they had always had an art teacher form the Museum School of Art or from someplace like that. They offered a slightly richer curriculum that most of the public schools. I taught there a year and- I don't know whether this is interesting or not, but it does throw some light on how people were at the beginning of the Depression and how idealistic young people are-- so crazy. There was a principal there who was kind of a three R's type. Well, she was pretty good, but I didn't see that then-- I was only twenty something-or-other and I thought she was-- her ideals were not exactly like Miss Crocker's and so giving it a lot of thought-- that was about '32 I think-- I decided that I couldn't corrupt or lower the high standards I had acquired at the museum. Everybody thought like that if they had been to that school. So, because I didn't think the atmosphere was "friendly to creative work," I quit. Well, at that time I was earning sixty dollars for two afternoons work. And that was-- our family could live on sixty dollars. I quit in '32. So that-- I kind of learned a lesson from that.

BRUCE GUENTHER: I'm sure.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I learned that we really needed that sixty dollars.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, then you started teaching Saturday classes at the Museum Art School in '33 to '36...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: All right.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And then again in '39 and '40. Then where does Saint Helens Hall Junior College...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I'm not quite sure. Well, Saint Helens Hall-- I taught at Saint Helens Hall in '36. You know, you can have several jobs. Things were tough.

BRUCE GUENTHER: They were always sort of part time or one day, a couple of days.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yeah. All these were part-time teaching jobs. And to me very instructive. I learned almost every level of--you know, every age level. And very interesting I found it.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And then Reed College for a while?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: And I taught at Reed once. And that's a strange experience because these kids are so intellectual--everything that goes on for them is in their heads and on a different level entirely. Not entirely, but it was hard for them to grasp; or maybe I didn't know how to do it. But I've heard others say that. Timmy McCarthy says that; that it's awfully hard to get to Reed kids because they...

BRUCE GUENTHER: They don't understand something.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh, it has to all be mental with them. It has to use those processes only. Anyway, I taught there and I taught at-- eventually at Catlin-Gabel. Gabel Country Day School, which brought me some very young kids. That was different from Saint Helens Hall and Reed. And there-- sometimes I would teach a

class of older people-- just a class, that you know, that wouldn't be on the record. And so those years were very useful in learning to teach and deal with all ages and all kinds of people.

BRUCE GUENTHER: I would imagine it-- it's the kind of thing where you-- it was the training you get to verbalize, to open doors for an art experience or understand a painting or something.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes. And try this and see what does work and what doesn't work. I remember the very first class I had when I was still a student with Miss Crocker; she had organized up a class of ladies and had asked me to teach it. And I don't-- I really thought I was kind of confident. Well, anyway, it surprised me to find that when I stood up in front of these ladies, I was unable to say a single word. That perhaps seems a little strange to you.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Not from my experience. It's a different point in your career.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: So I said nothing at all. Quite uncomfortable. She did it. She just took over and introduced the problem. What I had prepared was perfectly all right, but I couldn't say it. Well, that never happened again.

BRUCE GUENTHER: It's the kind of experience that grounds you. Well then, at that point, you know, you were through with the degree process, you-- you found your way, you're teaching art. You also were doing publicity for the Gabel School? Was this in the thirties, late thirties, I suppose-- that was '39 or into the forties.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, I have certainly done publicity, and I did it at the museum. But wherever I've been as time went on, I've dome writing for that school or organization. And so, sometime come in to doing something for the papers and so on. But I'm not putting publicity down, either; I'm not intending to do that.

BRUCE GUENTHER: But it's that use that comes out of an activity naturally that involves you-- with your teaching-- you never taught in the public schools?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: No, except that first school I mentioned, Riverdale, which was not very much like a public school. The classes were small and the curriculum was enriched. But I don't think I ever taught in a public school. The reason was that we-- we were taught that you couldn't do a good job, and I don't think you can, teaching forty kids for forty-five minutes. I mean somebody has to do it and we have to have art in the public schools, but I couldn't have done it. And we know that that isn't the way to do it.

BRUCE GUENTHER: No, no, of course you have to have the time. When you were a student at the Museum Art School, who else was there? Do you remember some of the other students? It's about the time that several...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, of course, I remember one of them-- or I mean quite a few, but they would not be names that would mean very much. But Louis Bunce, who is a very well known artist here, and certainly has done-- become known outside this region-- was a student there when I was there. And William Givler was a close friend of his and became dean of the school. They both went off to New York together. There have been a number-- well, Pietro-- the great Pietro Belluschi who is internationally known for his architecture. And...

BRUCE GUENTHER: So he took classes at the school when...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: He took classes at the school. When he came to Portland as a young man to work with A.E. Doyle here, our most noted architectural firm, he was very much an art person. He was a virtuoso draftsman. My goodness, he could draw. And he wanted, of course, an evening class. So he went to-- because he was working-- he went to the school when Harry Wentz was teaching there. And they formed a close association. Harry had a considerable effect on his work.

[Side 2]

BRUCE GUENTHER: It's the thirties, and we're talking about your teaching at various times, but at the same time, were you making art and working with it at that point?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, if I didn't, I felt guilty. If you went to the Museum Art School, the tendency was to think that if you weren't painting, you weren't doing anything. Now that wasn't, I don't think, something that the founders had intended, but the strength was naturally in the painting and drawing departments as it was everywhere. Sculpture wasn't-- hadn't yet by any means come into its own. And as they used to say in an exhibition, "Sculpture's something that you bump into when you're trying to look at a painting." And so there would be just a scattered two or three sculptures in a big show, say, of the local work. It was very little going on. I was always interested in sculpture, but I didn't really get into it until the end of the thirties.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Was Frederic Litman here then?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: He came, actually, along about that time-- very early forties or late thirties. He was a sculptor who came from-- he was Hungarian. He had been in Paris for some time. His wife was also a sculptor and they came to America, stopping at some other place first, and finally at Reed College where he was an artist-in-residence. But that was at the end of the thirties or the very early forties.

BRUCE GUENTHER: So there were-- did the art associations sponsor exhibits in the thirties? The thirties was-- the WPA was here-- what was the art scene like in the thirties?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, we're going to have to take it piece by piece, I suppose. It was the decade of the-- of WPA. Nineteen hundred thirty-six and 1937 was the building of Timberline--Timberline Lodge, our famous lodge-- the interior completely dome by hand craftsmen and artists under the leadership of Marjorie Hoffman Smith, who was a designer, interior designer here. This, of course, was a wonderful thing to be doing. And I think most of the craftsmen who were working on that enormous project got something out of it-- felt that they were doing something important. The paintings were purchased by Mrs. Smith through another branch of WPA--I would have to remember the various departments-- but in any case, they were all done on WPA. And it was a grand period. It was kind of an uplifting thing.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Was she, Marjorie Hoffman Smith, a part of the Hoffman family that...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: She was. It was her mother, in fact-- who I believe we never did quite get to this-- Mrs. Lee Hoffman, who had-- yes we did, we talked about arts and crafts...who was so deeply committed to the arts and crafts movement which-- one of whose precepts of which was that simple people could learn to do good things in crafts.

BRUCE GUENTHER: So Timberline really ended up being a manifestation of her mother's vision, and what Harry Wentz had talked about.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Indeed, indeed it did. Her mother had a tremendous influence on Marjorie, who had taken fine arts in one of the women's-- eastern women's colleges. I'm not quite sure which one at the moment. In any case, she became an art person. She tried painting for a while-- now we're talking about Marjorie Hoffman Smith-- and then went into interior design, interior decoration as it used to be called more. And her mother did have a great influence on her. And she did use this precept, I mean she taught people who were unskilled. She provided the designs, most of the designs; she taught people to weave who didn't know how, had them taught, again providing the designs. She had women do applique and there was a character throughout the lodge which was arts-and-crafts like. It was simple, direct, strong; and then there were various themes that she evolved. And these related to the flora and fauna on the mountain. And this, by the way, is now I think pretty much agreed upon-- agreed upon that Timberline Lodge-- the interior of Timberline Lodge is one of the really great accomplishments of WPA. And they are now, of course, recreating it. And I'm on that board and have worked on that project.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, yes, in a way digressing but following that for a moment, you were very involved then in the restoration process...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I am now.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yeah, now involved.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Uh huh. [positive] The restoration process.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And you did a publication in connection with Timberline?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, I've written quite a few articles on Timberline. And I did that book--I edited the book with another person, Sarah Munroe, who is our archivist, and it's well received. We had it printed again, and I think it's a reliable-- it's the only reliable, full book on the lodge. On the building of the lodge and the interior and the collections and the restoration. Am I straying away from...

BRUCE GUENTHER: No, no, I think it's valuable. It's...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: We were back in the thirties.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yes, but, you know, it's exciting to see that-- that you remember the creation of the lodge and then you were able to bring the lodge back to...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I was able to help. And I did a guidebook for the lodge recently as well. It's an extraordinary place. I didn't have much to do with the beginning because I was having children then and I-- however, I did do one WPA thing of which I'm not proud at all. It was so-- would you like to hear how it was to do something on WPA? Would that be interesting?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yes. Yeah, I think that would be very interesting.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Now some people did magnificent things on WPA. C.S. Price, perhaps our best-known artist, certainly was well-known a few years ago, perhaps not so much now--but what he did in the art history books, a lot of them for American art, is a person of great importance in art here-- he was said to be the first one, the first person down at the office where they were taking people on for the art project. And he was, you know, he had-- was a very poor person because he had given up his lucrative advertising illustration to go into serious painting, so he needed the money badly. And he did wonderful things. Two big beautiful panels that are up there now. Well, the way I got into it was that someone said to me-- I was down at the museum and somebody who was on WPA, on the art project-- on "the project" as it was always referred to-- and said, "Rachael, aren't you doing anything on the project?" And I said, "I don't think I quite qualify because you know my husband has some kind of job, and I don't think I qualify for WPA." "Oh yes you do," they said, "everybody does." No, not quite like that, but "you're poor enough." And so I said, "Oh well, all right." And so I went down to the place and sat and waited and waited for a little while and was called in. And I decided not to dress in rags or anything of that sort-- I guess I shouldn't make jokes, should I. So I did my best to look okay and look all right. And there were two nice men there; one of them was Barker-- what was Barker's first name? The other one was an engineer, a very well-known engineer in town. These were men of importance in the city. And they were...Burt Rombacher, well-known in Portland. And they were to sort of screen the people that came in. And it was clear very early on that they felt embarrassed at asking me about my financial condition. And, so they never really did, not really. And, I mean, I don't think it's possible that Burt Rombacher recognized me at that time, I don't know. But anyhow there were these two men sitting-- these two great men of Portland-- sitting up there screening people who came in for WPA. And so they said, "Well, could you do a portrait?" I said, "Well, yes, I think I could; I could do a portrait." And so they gave me a name of a person to do, and I did it. It was a man who had been-- who was in the historical society and had sort of been known around town for a long time, but I forget for what. And I didn't do a very good job; I didn't do it very well. And I have an awful feeling; you know, there was a terrible cynicism that was also operating at the time. It was a great complex of-- of responses to a big project like that. And reminds me of--I'm presenting myself in a very bad light here, perhaps worse than I should. But it reminds me of something I saw on somebody's desk once that said, "If it isn't worth doing at all, it isn't worth doing well." And that's a frightful saying...

BRUCE GUENTHER: Attitude.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Attitude. Well, I think something like that entered in. This man that I was painting was a surly and cynical man. He couldn't talk about anything except that had he bought property on Fifth and Morrison he'd be rich now. And, I don't know, wee just didn't get off to anything like a good start and somehow... But all my life I felt slightly guilty about it. I felt it wasn't up to my best standards, that I owed it to-- and what I got for it, I don't remember that either. But I think it was forty-eight dollars. It was not what it was worth. Well, all right, so that's my only personal contact with WPA. But a thing as glorious as--as the lodge, of course, takes the curse off a lot of dumb little things that were done.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, the lodge, really for me, has always rationalized a great deal of activity that was supportive of artists but not necessarily advancing art. You know, but Timberline, it must have electrified the community-- the opportunity that it-- and the project as a whole--offered here.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I wasn't close enough to it to know, at least-- I'm sure it did-- electrified the community I think would be too much, but that it affected the lives of everyone who worked on it. That I'm sure of. And then, you know, for a long time it just almost disappeared. Things were stolen, it was closed up, and damaged. It was in terrible shape. Then the present area operator, Dick Comstead, took it on and wanted to do something with it. And then in 1975 they organized the Friends of Timberline. Now, about the rest of the thirties.

BRUCE GUENTHER: You've mentioned C.S. Price.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes. I can't really tell very much about WPA; someone else could do that better. In ways, it did a great many good things here. Had theater and music and it wasn't all-- it was a good thing.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Were there galleries then? What...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: All right, galleries.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Price-- did Price have his framing shop and gallery at that point?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Price?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Did he ever do that? Something in my mind sticks that he would make the frames for his works and I didn't know if that...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: He made his own frames, and they looked marvelous in those frames. I don't think he ever had a shop. If I-- if he did, it must have been very brief indeed because I don't know anything about it. He came up here in the twenties, and he, again, he was another kind of... He was another great leader type, he really affected the minds of his--the people who were in his circle, like Charles Heaney, for example. And people who were not artists who remember him with reverence. He had a kind of Buddhist orientation to his thought. And was a very gently person. And he linked his art, which was, as you know, mostly about domestic animals and people who lived on farms-- he linked his art to his philosophy. And a pity and-- or a compassion and understanding for domestic animals...

BRUCE GUENTHER: A sense of toil and...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, a sense of heavy burdens and you feel wrenched sometimes when you look at those poor horses. But, other times, of course, it's cowboy horses and cowboys and Indians--not cowboys and Indians in that way, but he did sometimes do Indians. There's one of huckleberry pickers. And...

BRUCE GUENTHER: That's always been one of my favorites.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, that's a beauty-- that's a beautiful painting.

BRUCE GUENTHER: I remember when I worked at the museum with you, we had it hanging in the office for a short time.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, now it's at Timberline and...

BRUCE GUENTHER: Where it's home is.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: It was made for Timberline. It passed through horrendous adventures, finally got to the museum, and Timberline asked for it, and it was Francis J. Newton, the director then, who decided it should go there because it belonged there. Many people thought he shouldn't have done that, he should have kept it safe in the art museum. Josh Taylor thought he shouldn't have let it go. But that's been his philosophy. If something can be shown to its best advantage someplace else-- anyway, it's up there and it looks great. Now, you were asking again about the thirties. So I didn't have very much touch with, very strong touch with WPA. And what was happening in Portland in the thirties...

BRUCE GUENTHER: You were teaching at various locations, having your family...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yeah. I was thinking of what was happening outside my life.

BRUCE GUENTHER: The Runquist brothers were active at that time.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: The Runquist brothers and Charles Heaney were important here. And they were important each in their different ways. The Runquists were very radical politically, and one of them, Arthur, did lots of working people. And Albert more lyrical things that were landscapes. And these--I think these works hold up very well. Charles Heaney was the one artist who was-- lived from the period of-- I don't know, 1910 or World War I. He was the only one that lived straight through into the present day, and exhibited and worked all that time. And so he-- he was important, at least to us. Has a beautiful painting up at the lodge and was greatly influenced by C.S. Price. These artists had their studios in a building way downtown. I cannot remember the name of that building now. Lots of artists worked there and lived there, had their studios and kind of managed to live in those old offices and make studios out of them.

BRUCE GUENTHER: So they were in sort of an office building that the artists had kind of taken over.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yeah, kind of, right. It had gotten downhill and they-- they rented cheap studios there. And some of them, as I say, managed to live there, too, I think. Anyway, Heaney was one of the important ones of that group. Now as to galleries, I must feel my way very carefully-- I was about to say there weren't any. And I would have to--the first of the galleries of consequence, I would say, was Louis Bunce's gallery, the Kharouba. I think it's Persian. But to absolutely date this would be-- I would have to go back. It's an easy date to get though, and I think it should be in there. Louis and his wife, Deeda, had that and they-- it was a good little gallery, too. They showed Northwest work almost entirely. Louis was excellent as a designer as hanging-- for hanging an exhibition. He was first rate at that. And this gallery endured for several years. And it-- it was the first gallery of importance in Portland. And now I'd have to stop and think about other thirties manifestations. Do you want me to do that?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, I was wondering in linking this then, there were definable artists' circles. Was-- and they were teaching art at Reed-- were there annual artist exhibitions? Did the art association then-- the thirties was the building of the Portland Art Museum.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Right. That's right. I think it says '32 on it. And the building-- the two-- the school and the museum moved up there together. The school was on the--over the basement of the old Ladd School that had been there before. They put a -- just built the studios, seven or eight good, sizable studios with skylights, on top of a portion of the Ladd School basement. And it lasted until, what was it, 1968?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yeah. Making those temporary solutions is very...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Those temporary solutions, watch for them, because they're likely to be permanent. So, you mentioned something a moment ago that I've always been intrigued about, and I never quite understood it. But that group around C.S. Price were a kind of separate artist group. They didn't have anything-- really didn't have much to do with the museum. They were their own thing. And it may be that this was another example of a museum and practicing artists not always seeing things the same way. I always wondered why the museum never had a C.S. Price show. Because he was obviously a very good painter. And he-- they didn't-- Miss Crocker I believe left in '36. And it was--she should have done it. And why she didn't, I don't know. So none of those people, you see-- well, [to] say none of them came out of the museum, that's not true. Charles Heaney, this long-lived person that bridged the whole art history of Portland, who is now dead, he had gone to evening classes. He was--he was a jewelry engraver, I think, for most of-- I mean that's the way he made his money. Such as it was. He was very poor and he had to support his poor mother. And it was-- you know, the thirties for them, too. In any case, it was even before the thirties, he somehow managed to go to the evening art classes at the museum. And met Harry Wentz, that great saint of the art school, and he said, I mean obviously Harry saw that he was very serious and very poor. And so one time he said, Heaney told me this, that Harry at the end of the class they were talking and he brought out and gave him a stretched canvas. And he had never held a stretched canvas in his hands before. And it was a great moment in his life. So, I shouldn't say that there was not much connection; that was a big connection. And he studied with Harry in the evening classes. But still there was a kind of-- a kind of separation, they weren't just all one big thing together. And I guess it was quite a while before Heaney had a class too-- I mean not a class, an exhibition, at the museum. But you asked another question in connection with that, and I'm feeling my way towards--

BRUCE GUENTHER: Okay, now we're back on. We had talked about big group exhibits of artists of the period. Were there such things in the thirties?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Not very much. In fact, the exhibition that we had for so many years, The Artists of Oregon, evolved. There were-- there were one-man shows. There was a group of artists had organized themselves. They were an invitational group, sort of. And they claimed that they had standards that-- I was in it. And what they were asking-- they asked the museum for, was a room in which they would guarantee to keep an exhibition of work by Oregon artists always on view. And they said that they would keep up the quality and they-- I think they in general did. They were serious about the project. But it was, in a way, outside the purview of the museum. That is, the director, who would have been Robert Davis then, didn't really pass on what went in. And that's an uncomfortable position for a museum person. He had-- just had to trust them. When--when the new director, Thomas Colt, came in-- now wait just a minute...this is very intricate in here.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, yeah. Well that would have been...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Tom came in 1948, didn't he.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yes. In '48 and...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: And I think that this guild of painters and sculptors came in just-- you mean in '40?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Four.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: '44.

BRUCE GUENTHER: I think so.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I see, good.

BRUCE GUENTHER: That was the Oregon Guild of Painters and Sculptors.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Painters and Sculptors. We're-- we're consulting some papers here for dates. This is what I just described, these people-- this independent group that kept this gallery full of paintings and sculptures on a monthly basis. Now when Tom Colt came in, he felt that the quality had gone down and discontinued it. But during-- also during Bob Davis' tenure he had several shows which he called the "All Oregon." And they were kind of a big free-for-all, really they were. They-- I think they guaranteed-- and this will show you how, how slim a stream of art it was in those days as compared with now-- it would be impossible to do now-- I think they guaranteed to show something by every artist who brought in work. And that would be just a flood now. They

were able to do it. They used the entire upper floor and they really-- maybe they filled--almost filled the museum except where permanent collections were installed. And it was really a mixed bag, I tell you. It wasn't all good, by any means. Yet, it was also supported by the professional artists and it was, of course, very popular. But it was not at all the kind of thinking that Tom Colt brought with him in-- did Tom come in '50, does it say that? 1949?

BRUCE GUENTHER: '49.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: '49.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Or actually '48.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: '48. And he-- his view was that an exhibition to be of high quality would have to be a juried exhibition, not a free-for-all like the "All Oregon." Now I shouldn't sound as though Bob Davis didn't have standards. He felt that at this time in the history of Portland that seeing a great big cross-section, a sort of big circus, had its values. And so he was willing to do it. There's nothing that says he was going to do it forever, but he did probably a couple of times.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Oh, and that was in the forties when a number of large traveling shows sponsored by corporations were happening, the war was on.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, it was a rather confused period. And he was always--his attitude to the job was rather, I won't say promotional exactly, but he was very-- he liked working with the community. And he would sometimes do things like flower shows in the sculpture court there, and he worked with the community organizations, did things for the war effort. And-- and this-- "All Oregon" was kind of along his way of thinking. But as I say, it doesn't mean he didn't have any standards. It's just that he emphasized activities with the community and involving people a lot. And it did. It had some good sides to it. I think the previous-- Miss Crocker's administration-- had been what some people would call old fashioned in the way that it didn't make big gestures out into the community. It was there, and it did its job, and she certainly valued the community. I'm now kind of comparing these directors a little bit and what they can-- what they-- what they brought to the job. Well, so Bob was a kind of a reaction against a long period in which dignity was the keyword, I suppose you would say. And then Tom Colt wanted to bring in a highly professional view. Professional museum view, and a view of professional artists that was different. And so, in '49, you said, I believe-- '48? '49? He believed in showing art of the region, but he was--his idea was to make it just a professional, just as high-- a high level as he could. So he brought in a jury from out of town. I-- I don't know, two museum directors and both of them from outside of the region as I recall it. And the artists responded by sending in a lot of work. Now it isn't a lot as compared with now. And I don't know whether our records-- I'm sure our records show how many. But the jury cut it down to something like, ah...

[Side 3]

BRUCE GUENTHER: Continuing our discussion, you were talking about The Artists of Oregon and the way those exhibits evolved at the museum.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, The Artists of Oregon evolved or was dictated by Tom Colt, who did not approve of big free-for-alls and had the show juried. It was juried down quite low. And I'm guessing a little, but it will give you the general idea; the show was maybe forty or fifty works. And the artists here weren't prepared for this. I don't think it's-- the percentages are so wildly wrong, but I mean the percentage of what was chosen against what was entered--but they-- they really weren't prepared for it and there was a tremendous uproar. It got in the papers, and it was an uproar. And so Tom Colt, who always knew when to fight and when to run, set up conferences-- he was besieged by the artists and-- because a lot of the best valued artists here--the most valued here, were eliminated. And their following was incensed. And it was a big thing on the art scene, was this fight between the artists and the museum. But out of it came a plan that endured and it was give and take on both sides. Tom Colt held out for a jury, and what right-minded person wouldn't? I mean how else? And-- and the artists got their way in insisting on a local person-- or at least regional person...

BRUCE GUENTHER: As part of the jury.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: As a part of the jury. It would be a jury of three and, oh, I think they started out by having one regional, one local, and one national or something like that. That didn't always hold, but that plan more of less endured for many years. In fact right through-- for many years is all I can say. It was the way we did the show. And now, of course, it's different than--the present administration doesn't do it. Of course those big shows went out of date, as a matter of fact, a long time ago, and many people thought that we were hanging onto it out of pure intransigence. But actually, just mossbacks want to keep on doing it. Actually, they're such a job that no museum person in their right mind would want to do those big annuals. And in those days, the works had to be brought in, not just the slides. So it was an awful hassle. And nobody wanted it but the artists. They

liked it. And it was hard to discontinue. But we were talking of the thirties, and perhaps you'd like to get back there.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, and to talk more specifically about your activities. You were--you had begun to teach the Saturday children's classes, 1933 to '36 and '39 to '40. And then you were teaching sculpture at the Museum School in, what, '48, '51, by that point?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I was probably taking it then. I don't know, I did a lot of teaching. But I think something that is interesting, at least, about me here is that I had always, you know, thought I should paint and I really wasn't- it wasn't my thing. And yet I had this guilt feeling. But I did discover clay, and the museum had not had sculpture when I was there and not for a long, quite some time, when I was a student, I mean. And not for some time thereafter. As soon as they did, I returned and took classes. And Fred Litman, who we spoke of earlier was, by then, teaching at the museum. And I studied with him. And I taught some evening classes in claywork. That must be then. [1948-51]

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yeah.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: And I really discovered for me, discovered clay and loved it. And so I did quite a bit of sculpture in clay--terra cotta-- and even had a little show at Contemporary Crafts which, by the way, was certainly a-- speaking of the thirties--one of the big things besides Timberline, was the initiation of, the beginning of Contemporary Crafts, which was then called...

BRUCE GUENTHER: Oregon Ceramics Studio.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oregon Ceramics Studio, right. And it was established by Lydia Herrick Hodge, an ex-University of Oregon person in sculpture and pottery. And she collected around her a group of professionals out of the university alumni and started that remarkable institution which has endured to the present day and will go on. It's in a very strong period right now. That was--so there was big beginnings in the thirties. And as I said, Timberline Lodge and Contemporary Crafts...

BRUCE GUENTHER: The building of the museum building...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: And the building of the new museum and school. And, of course, a steady growth on the part of both the museum and school. And possible the Kharouba Gallery was established in the late thirties. We'll have to get the date of that. But it was-- the scene was quiet nevertheless, because there was no gallery scene to speak of as it is now. It made it urgent to artists that the museum do a lot for artists because there was no place else to turn, really. Very little. There may have been some small gallery attempts, but there really was no place to show.

BRUCE GUENTHER: During this period, did you know some of the early collectors like Sally Lewis or was that later when you were involved at the museum?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well I didn't know her then. She was, of course, who brought earlier than that--who brought highly contemporary works to the art museum. Shocking, indeed, to people at the time. And she was a great patron and lover of-- of modern art--you know, we then called it modern art and it meant revolutionary art. She did much to bring it to Portland. However, she couldn't have done so if she hadn't had the absolute support and sympathy of-- and this is where the network that forms the fabric of Portland's art community comes in-- if it hadn't been for Miss Crocker who was dying to have these things come to the museum. And Harry Wentz who appreciated it and understood then as well. So that...

BRUCE GUENTHER: So Sally Lewis was the one who brought the Nude Descending the Staircase by Duchamp in what, right after the Armory Show.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Right after the-- I'm not absolutely sure she got that through Sally, but, yes that did happen. And of course it just turned Portland on its ear. But a story that they tell-- that Anna Crocker told me-- was that when it came, neither Harry nor Miss Crocker had seen it, and they didn't know the color, and- you must remember color reproduction was not widespread, either-- and they were astonished that it was so neutral in color. And they were disappointed. They were a little let down. Because they thought people weren't even going to notice it. So they got out a-- they found a fabric in blue that they thought would make it more striking and people would really notice it. And, well, they did notice it. And, you know, it's shocking, she said that men on the way back to their clubs or on their way to their clubs for lunch would stop to have their shock at this terrible art. But that-- it just shows you a contrast between them-- I mean really open and welcoming whatever was contemporary and good. And so, of course, Sally Lewis, who brought I think two exhibitions--of course she would go with them sometimes and-- to the various museums-- and often be subject to very rude remarks. A really, kind of, persecution for bringing these things to the various cities that she managed to go to. I think, and of course here in Portland they knew who Miss Sally Lewis was and just couldn't understand this. But she was a

great person, and of course, eventually...the Brancusi sculpture, The Muse, came to us from her.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Were these great pieces?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh yes. Yes this is something that we have that people would dearly love to have.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Then, coming up, you were hired by the museum in 1950 by Thomas Colt, as a...?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: He hired me to write the monthly bulletin which in those days was not a newsletter but it was a kind of an attempt to tell something about what was going on, I mean a little more than a newsletter is what I mean. And, also to do the publicity, which meant writing a weekly release for the papers and that's about all it did mean because they didn't do the kind of publicity that's as far reaching as what any modern, contemporary museum would probably do. What it really meant was a lot of writing and getting acquainted with the people on the newspapers.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Then at that period you worked until 1956?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I'm glad to see you're scurrying up the dates because I don't have them very well.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Into 1960 with both the museum education and the publicity.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh, yes I'm not quite sure exactly when I became what was called Director of Education, and then those were still combined. You know we were a very poor museum. Everybody had to do a lot of things and it was supposed to be a half time job when I took it. The combination continued for quite a little while and I at least got up a rationale that we considered they publicity to be educationally work and so, and to some extent it is, at least it's not pure promotion. I learned a lot from it. Writing releases gets very tiresome, but it's educational. What's the name of the great uh, Taylor, the great Director of the Metropolitan, is it Francis?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yes.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I once was on a bus with him at some museum meeting and there I was sitting beside the great Francis Taylor and so he asked me what I did and so I had to say, "Well, really publicity," and he said, "Well, never mind," he said, "I've labored in that vineyard plenty." Very heartening, but it was a very long time ago. But the picture of the thirties in general is of a quiet city as far as art was concerned. Quiet but very earnest and growing and attempting new things, but still not opened up to anything like the present scene.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Do you think that Price's move towards cubism, did that come as a result of the things that he could see at the museum at the time, or his own inclination and movement in that direction?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, of course, he was in California before, but when exactly I would have to get out past notes to see exactly when he began to be influenced by cubist forms, cubist style, I wouldn't really think so. I would think that it couldn't have been very much in the way of, just hardly any. And you know cubist originals, I would think this would have come to him either in California before he came, because he didn't come until the twenties, or from publications, books. He was a very serious artist and a very serious person and thinker and, I think that whatever was going on he would be deeply interested in knowing about. But there were plenty of magazines and books you know, and I would think that a lot of it would come from there, perhaps someone else would correct me but I don't quite see where it would have been.

BRUCE GUENTHER: I think at this point in time we lose sight of the role that publications, Cahiers des Arts, those sort of publications that were on the west coast in those days.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, yes. Of course it was a period still of reproductions. We, as you were saying, we all had reproductions in out houses, like college kids. There weren't that many originals purchases by that many people-- but he would be the kind of person who would know anything. He would be the kind of person, the kind of artist who would know everything that was going on-- in Paris or wherever-- through publications.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Returning to your information position-- you were supervisor for the children's classes at the museum-- then in 1955 you started the weekly museum radio program that went on for almost twenty years.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: A long, long time. Yes, and I enjoyed that. I think one thing that's to be understood, because it's true of a lot of people and I suppose it's put down by purists, but the truth is I enjoyed anything that had to do with art. Almost anything. If it was good. And if I could help make it better, and support it, and all that, I liked doing it. Now I would not have been contented to do releases all my life I can tell you that, but it didn't hurt me for a brief time and I didn't have to do it for all that long. Anything that I could see as really helping the cause of art and the values of art, and helping artists, which I still like to do, I don't write very much anymore but I write a little all the time. I like to write about artists whose work I think wants a hearing. I only write about regional artists now, and, when I get acquainted with some artist who I think deserves to be seen, then I like to

try to study that art and find out what it's like and what there is in it, and then go on and try to be helpful.

Now that relates to your question although I do realize we're up into 1983 when I say that, but it doesn't change that much. For example, when an exhibition was coming-- now we are back in the fifties-- and they would send us the materials, the museum who had organized it or whatever, send us the materials so we would just study up on that. And find out all you can, since you know as a museum person that unfortunately you have to write it all before you see the show. But the point is that you're writing about art for a purpose, so you might write that out for the bulletin in a way, addressed to members, and a little more specific than you might write for the newspapers. You write the same thing for the newspapers but not the same way, and then you would be addressing another audience on the radio. And you might, if you have the chance, write a catalogue introduction or so on. In any case, I'm trying to say that there are a great many interesting jobs that relate to art and that are absorbing and educational for the person who is doing them and I didn't know it then but that was my attitude, that was my approach. I thought I was doing what I was told to do, but all the time you're working up without knowing it, your own philosophy of museum work in this case. And that's what I was doing and that remains my view, for me. Now for some people that would seem a dreadful life, those who wanted to get into their studios and do nothing but their painting, they are artists, that's another thing. Or, they are scholars and they want to know, uh, they have a period just so long, a place just so wide, and they want to do everything they can to find out about that. And then there are other ways of getting into it, teaching and so on. I regarded most of the writing I did as a form of teaching. Uh, that's all I have to say about that.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Thinking about the fifties, thinking about editing museum bulletins, the Museum Art School Quarterly, which I didn't realize they published, The Oregon Artist?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well they did it for a while, and it was a pretty good little thing but it needed a lot impetus. I wrote it and I was pleased with it. They felt that the association should express that side of its work and so they called it The Oregon Artist and it was addressed to artists, it was about artists, it was about the practicing side of the association's task. But it didn't endure very long.

BRUCE GUENTHER: How long, a couple of years?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Something like that, maybe a little longer but not very long. You know getting out a paper is a lot of work. I was willing to do my part which was write it, but you had to get the copy...they wanted to write it which I thought was good, then it had to be assembled and edited and...and artists really would rather paint or do their work.

BRUCE GUENTHER: You were involved in a policy plan on museum television, in 1955, and ended up being quoted in a publication on museum television.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh yes. Well it was, when did television come in exactly, do you happen to know? It was after the was certainly, after World War II. Precisely when it became widespread I have forgotten. At the time there was a lot of exploration of, well, if would have been a great thing if they had paid some attention, a lot of exploration of the kind of cultural service that television could perform and so I was on some kind of commission that was examining that. My part was, of course, the museum and others, and I think we probably did a pretty good job. But you know, it's really not going to come out the way you plan it- it was commercial television and that's all there is to it. We did, however, in those early days, while there was a scramble for getting the channels-- they had to have a certain amount of public service work. There was a little period in there where you could do a good deal, and so we did several series, those were sort of my thing and there was a man on KOIN who was very sympathetic, Luke Roberts, and I think we did some pretty good things-- we certainly tried to.

BRUCE GUENTHER: So, you did both television and then the weekly radio program?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And then, your resume mentioned several slide-tape programs for introduction to exhibits. That seems early to me for using the media in that way.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I don't know but I think we used it very fully. It may have been. We were very proud of our early efforts, for good reason or not I don't know, but we did introductions to big exhibitions that you could go to the auditorium first and hear a slide-tape program to introduce you, to take you into the show and we think we did those pretty well. And then we did our public school series, that was a big undertaking.

BRUCE GUENTHER: What was that?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, um, this was an assignment that we got so to speak, that was paid for by the Rockefeller Foundation. Maybe I will have to correct that, I don't know-- I think we should look something up. I was wrong about the dates; it was in 1961 and it was supported be the Ford Foundation, this project of which I

think we are rightly proud. It was a course on the understanding of art and it came as a result of a great examination and critique of high school curricula across the land. I don't know exactly which cities they chose to do it-- Portland was one and this thing that we did was unique. Nobody else did it and it was really widely publicized and widely used. It was done for the Portland Public Schools. We-- a committee investigated each subject area in the schools here. It was the Ford Foundation's idea to upgrade the high schools of America, and the part that we were interested in and were appointed to work with was Art. One of the conclusions that we came to-- we made some recommendations for the practice of art in the studios of the high schools, of course-- but it was our contention that some knowledge about art was necessary for a high school graduate to have.

So we created a course-- of I think it was seventeen or eighteen lessons-- and there was to be a lesson for each week and then the teacher was supposed to supply the auxiliary learning and teaching that would go on in relation to this period-long slide-tape program. Now we entered this so she would have a term's work. She would take this material that we provided, wrote and assembled and she would have a term's work. She would have a slide table on which these slides could be shown, as well as in the classroom, they could be looked at any time. It came at art, not historically, but a great variety of entries into the world of art were provided. I remember we did one on C.S. Price, showing how a young artist without training might arrive at where he got, showing the stages in his career, what they meant and how they came to him. We had a program on prints; we had one on Portland, on the look of Portland, and various buildings around Portland that you could go to.

BRUCE GUENTHER: So it was a program on architecture?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, architecture too. And then there were programs on symbolism in art, and on the black and white and color and so on. It provided as wide a variety of entries into the world of art as it would be possible to do, and the teachers who really used it did a good job. We provided this giant package for every high school in Portland. Now eventually of course, it dissipated and slides got lost and so one, but while it lasted I think it was good.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Was there then the encouragement to bring classes?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, there was encouragement to bring classes to the museum and they did; the good ones did. It's hard to get high school classes out, easy to get grade schools but for some reason, something to do with the way classes are, and they miss other classes and so it's hard to do, but we tried. I think we made something that was very worthwhile, now it's very dated; they don't use it now at all. We tried to introduce something that was very contemporary at that time and, well as I say, every possible entry, and we wrote them. I wrote some and the director wrote some, Donald Jenkins wrote some and then we passed them through other hands and worked them up to something as near to perfection as we could get.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Did actual objects ever go out and visit the schools?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: That came later, but it did. Well, it's like this. There's no limit to what a good teacher could do with that. A teacher that liked teaching and didn't like just the old routine could start off from that package we gave her. We also gave her a syllabus full of stuff that she could do, could do just anything with it. She could just take off. Then if she didn't have much imagination or didn't care it wouldn't be much good, but at least they would see the slide-tapes.

BRUCE GUENTHER: It would be interesting to know what artists we enjoy today in 1983, who were touched at the beginning of the 1960's by that course, living here in Portland.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: We did sometime after that, we went around and tried to see what they were doing. Oh yes, another thing we did was have the teachers in and talk to them and showed them things. We really did get carried away with this, because it was an important grant to have from the Ford Foundation.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Particularly to a museum of this scale.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: And honor. So we did our very best. Well that was 1960 (1961-62).

BRUCE GUENTHER: By that time the staff would have changed quite a bit. Perhaps we can talk about that for a bit because you would have been shifting from Curator of Education to Curator of the Collections.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: That's right. When was I Curator of the Collections, have you got it there?

BRUCE GUENTHER: 1960.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: 1960. Yes, well what happened was that slowly, slowly, while I was Curator of Education, I began to do a lot of Curatorial work, I mean I wrote the introductions for catalogues-- I would have to get out some of them, but I don't have them right at hand now. I was also in the selection process of a lot of

things.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Of the exhibitions, or...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes. And it began to be as curatorial as it was educational.

[Side 4]

BRUCE GUENTHER: Rachael, in 1957 you were appointed Curator of Education. Initially I suppose they called it Director of Education and then it was shifted. I'm interested in that period because that was a time when a number of things that one takes for granted, in the museum of 1983, were just beginning. Things like docent programs, film programs, and you were intimately involved in beginning them here.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes. I think we were, if not in the vanguard, were still were up with the times. We started during that period, and I do mean we-- the docent program with the public schools. At first it was a Junior League program and worked very well. Later the Junior Leaguers, as they usually do, pulled away after it was well established, but it continued with us at the same high level. At this point, and this became a big, regular daily thing in the museum, hundreds of school children came. That had not been done before, or been done very improperly-- that is they just kind of dragged them through.

This was in the administration of Dr. Francis J. Newton, who was very encouraging to this kind of program and he was curator then. He took a very great interest in it, and a very dynamic woman, Mrs. D.B. Jennings, on our board, proposed the Junior League connection and developed it. Our part in it was to schedule the tours and handle all the mechanics. But also to provide an education program that would make it possible for these girls to do a good job. We have had very superior young women, who, you see it was before the women's movement, who often had talents-- girls who had been fine arts majors and so on, but they hadn't been able to use.

So we had awfully good people and they had an awfully good education program. And that was my part in it. We investigated carefully other museum programs of the same kind and it endured and kept on developing and still exists, of course. Also, at that time, we were fortunate enough to have a man in Portland, teaching at Portland State University in film, who had been in Hollywood and had come up to Portland [Andries Deinum--Ed.]. It occurred to us that we had someone here, and he was an intellectual; he wasn't just a movie man, and he knew the history of film and so on. So we had a very substantial-- it was done in Portland certainly-- we were the first to introduce people to serious film watching. Well, you know, we managed to do it, we brought it off. But the first series, it was hard to fill the seats, because the people weren't ready for it. Most people's minds were still on going to the movies.

BRUCE GUENTHER: In the thirties sense.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Right, in the thirties sense. The idea for looking at films seriously as an art, which we were trying to get them to do, well it was not alien to everybody of course, but to a very large, large number it was. Why should they go and watch "Man of Iron" or something like that and find out why that was good, when they could be seeing something that was just plain fun. So it wasn't easy, but we put it across and we were very proud of it and it succeeded later.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, eventually the museum developed the Pacific Northwest Film Study Center.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: That was in 1971, and we have been interested in film in between. But the idea of a film study center was alien to a lot of people in the museum and some of us who were for it had to work very hard to get that over finally. Now I think that Jack Eyerly first began talking that up. And then a fellow named Sheldon Renan, whose folks were Portlanders, and who was head of the center at Berkeley, which is quite famous-- he also came in. I mean there was talk about this going on, and talked to me about such an idea. He was very sure it could be done and he was a very colorful character-- and he didn't live here, he could go back home, but we had to push it over. And then as I told you, Jack and others came in and talked about it and finally we did it. It wasn't-- you know, boards don't necessarily respond to adding to expenses and starting something new, and it would seem that somehow we got it across and fortunately Dr. Newton was in favor of it and was able to speak for it. I would say that all of this happened under his leadership, and so he is responsible in large part for everything, as directors find out, for everything bad or good that happens. Anyway, the Film Study Center has been a smashing success. It brings in a lot of money and it reaches many thousands of people, not only in Oregon, but in Washington. It has many services; not just the showing of films, but classes in video and film, and it's a resource for advice and counsel, works with the public schools, it's a fully equipped and serviced film study center and I, at least, am very proud of it.

BRUCE GUENTHER: It's important, and I'm sure your part in getting it started was in no way modest.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I think I had a lot to do with it, no question. You know, Bruce, I'll tell you about all this.

When you're working in a group you're not working alone, so you're just faking it if you take the credit, because everybody of some group has important input, as they say, and so there was help on all sides. Sometimes it was not help on all sides, but at any rate it's never a single thing, it's a group thing.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And particularly at the museum. Over the years its staff has never been large and you have shared responsibility.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: That's true and I think that's its strength. You know, getting up a great building is a group activity, and a ballet is a group activity, and the theater is a group activity. I don't put group activity down, I think if you can get the work done by a group that's its power and strength.

BRUCE GUENTHER: There was an organization called the Northwest Division of the American Society of Aesthetics that you were involved with.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, quite a long time back.

BRUCE GUENTHER: In the fifties?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I think we were still active then; I don't know what it's doing now. I know this is kind of a problem to some people because of the degrees that I don't have, but I did read and publish in the Journal of Aesthetics, and such activities were not alien to me, and I used to go to their meetings and take part. I thought it was an excellent publication and a very worthwhile activity. The museum would sometimes be host to these meetings; it really goes back, I think that began in the thirties.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And then Northwest Poets, you called together the first meeting.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh yes, let's see how did that go. Yes, I guess so, yes, I did. At the museum partly. And we got out publications at which a little folder on each of the poets, with some poems, and a work by an Oregon artist. I hope some of those still exist, they were a nice thing. It was a really uplifting and joyous occasion. And it was bootstrap, there was no money for it at all. Did they tell you when that was?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, in 1957-1960.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, and we had some parties, and poetry readings, and the artists joined in. Oh yes, that was long before poetry readings were very big. There was a gallery in the fifties, yes I have had some connection with poetry that I have liked. There was a gallery in the fifties or early sixties, called the New Design; it was a gallery that Lee Kelley and Ann Rollin, B.J. Gardner and uh, Marlene Gable, and all the young Turks at the time, now getting along to being no longer young Turks... Anyway, I thought it would be a nice idea for this upcoming gallery to have a contemporary poet do something on contemporary poetry. So we got Ken Hanson of Portland and, to his great astonishment, he got paid. You know they are never paid, and I just decided that they should be paid for doing a series of lectures on modern poetry and people had to pay to come and we just packed the little house with people who came to this. So I liked those combinations of things. In those days they were more rare.

BRUCE GUENTHER: I think there were what, eight poetry leaflets at the time, in 1959?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: And so we had eight Oregon artists, I've forgotten all of whom.

BRUCE GUENTHER: So there was an exhibition and then the poetry.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Nice.

BRUCE GUENTHER: That's wonderful because speaking of northwest artists who have continued to do that, Jack McLarty has continued to make woodcuts and work with poets and George Johansen has done...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I think he was one of the artists, yes he was, I remember his painting. And I suppose I say that because if you've done promotion as I have and if you don't have a lot of degrees, you may be thought of as really skimming the surface you know, not getting into the real stuff, but I think some of these things are real stuff. Aesthetics, et cetera.

BRUCE GUENTHER: That's true. I want to talk about the weekly radio show. The list of people you interviewed were amazing.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, I couldn't possible remember who they were.

BRUCE GUENTHER: David Smith, the Huxleys, [James] Mitchner...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I remember Mitchner. I tried to grab everybody [of national renown] who went through the museum. They were fifteen minute programs, and then ten. I thought we did a pretty good job and at the end when they finally took it off which was very late, they really got a lot of calls. It was a popular program; it was the longest running cultural program, they told me, that Portland had every done. And it was based on what was going on at the museum. Sometimes I would get tired of that and we would just take a topic if we had someone or a series of people who were up to it and we would explore something and that was usually worthwhile. And sometimes when I had something that I was interested in and wanted to do in a very tidy way, not just conversation, I would write it all out and I probably someplace, have many of those radio programs. I don't know. I think it was 2-1/2 pages double-spaced. Anyway, they were popular and it was a good thing in Portland and I liked to interview, I liked the give and take. Some people are awfully hard to interview, you know.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Do you remember David Smith's interview? Why was he in Portland?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I think he was in Portland for and Equity thing.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Oh, Artists' Equity?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, I think so. Jim Haseltine, who has just resigned I think, as chairman of the Washington Arts Commission, was then-president of Equity. Someone said to me he was not the president of Equity but he was the moral center of Equity. He was getting up an ethics thing for Equity. Anyway, we were doing a lot of Equity stuff and I really think that David was maybe out for that and he might have even talked about Equity. I'm sorry I don't remember what he said, I wish I did now. I remember what Mitchem said, roughly. He, as you know, is a Japanese print scholar and he also was advising a museum, some small museum on their purchasing policy and he said, "If you are buying contemporary," and I guess that's what he was advising them on, "you are lucky if fifty percent of the works hold up as time passes." Maybe it was an even smaller percent, but he thought he was pretty good at selecting. I mean he cared about it, and he talked a lot about museum collecting and about the hazards and having to sometimes admit that you were just absolutely wrong and sometimes he said if you hang in there another fifteen years you may be right. So I remember what he said. But that's a long time ago and if you do one a week it's impossible. I'd have to look back over some kinds of records. But I had some pretty distinguished people and I was proud to be on the some program with them.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Artists' Equity was very active in the fifties and sixties here?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: The first Equity meeting, I think Jack McLarty was the one who sort of initiated it. I think they had the meeting at my house actually, or maybe not, I'm not so sure about that. It was newish and a lot of people were very excited about it. In Portland there was a problem about-- you know we're very sticklish for quality and Equity actually, I believe it is for any professional. I don't think they make any distinction at all about whether the work's any good or not do they, I mean they're like a union. I'm not putting it down, it's one view, and it was supposed to protect artists' interests I believe, just as Actors Equity does, but some people found that very hard to take.

BRUCE GUENTHER: The artist making the distinction between the quality of painter.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Right. And I really know nothing about Equity now, but they were very active for a while here.

BRUCE GUENTHER: What about the Oregon Art Alliance? It was in 1953 and you were acting secretary in 1956.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oregon Art Alliance? Well, the names are so much alike. I'll have to pass on that, something seems to be coming back, but you know, it was a long time. Something was going on all the time.

BRUCE GUENTHER: So your working at what started out as a half-time job, raising two active children, and then it keeps on going, it becomes more and more encompassing...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, right, more and more wonderful.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Your children went to school in Portland?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: And then, Andy went to Harvard and Molly went to, eventually to NYU where she also got her masters. Andy got his Ph.D. at Harvard, but they were bright kids they were getting scholarships. In the fifties when they were going to school, the late fifties was a great time for scholarships. But they would have made it anyway, they might not have gone to Harvard, but I wasn't back here with my nose to the grindstone.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, it's always a question, particularly now, people who are parenting have to deal with, balancing the career and the absorption in your life with family.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, I suppose there was a certain amount of anxiety about that but, let's see, they

were already in college in 1955. So that the four years before that they were in high school. I am an example of a person who didn't go to work until I was 45. That's not quite true because I went through all those teaching jobs, but teaching two or three days a week in several little places, from time to time, that never hurt anybody's kids-- to settle down into what really is a full time job right from the start. In 1950 they pretended it was a half-time job and I only got half-pay but...let's see, that was in 1950 and I was 45 and anyway, nobody's kids were hurt as I say. It was just fantastic, to think that there was that wonderful world to work in, that's the way it felt.

BRUCE GUENTHER: That's the way it feels to me.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: It's really a great world, and you're lucky if you can get into a slot where you can do...that's really what you have to beware of-- getting stuck in a place where you can't do things. Then it would be not a great world. But if you can still find a place, wherever it is, where you can really do something, and because of the national grants now, all the national funds for which one can apply, even if you are in a smaller museum, you can bring them right into your own. Like our big, big grant which we got for the Bicentennial, our wood shows-- a whole series of major wood shows with major catalogues, major in our sense, and, really very high level, and very costly because the works came from all over.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And how many shows?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: There was the Christian Traditions, the Northwest Show, the Contemporary Show,-- the Twentieth Century Show, which Jan Van Der Mark did; we hired curators for these, for some of them. Were there four or five?

BRUCE GUENTHER: The woodcuts?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: The woodcuts, yes. That's four. Anyway, those spread out through the year of the Bicentennial and they attracted very good attention.

BRUCE GUENTHER: That was 1976, you had retired from the museum, or was that your last major project?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I guess so, I guess so. It must have been the last. 1976? I did come back. Yes, I was asked back, so that I had a continuity that lasted through those shows because I had worked with them all the way.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Because you had retired in 1974.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: But I did come back.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Then you were hired back. Then you did the Northwest Component as curator.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Myself, yes. But anyway, if it was only four major shows. We did them consecutively, it wasn't one a year, it was not right against each other but very close, so...

BRUCE GUENTHER: Did Donald Jenkins do an Asian show?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Asian. Of course. Yes, that's the fifth. It was a beautiful show. They were all very good, and nothing to be ashamed of. And they were the kind of show that a small museum might consider to be--one of them might be their major show for that year. And to organize, and considering that we did them, just a few months apart, was surprising. Well, I was only pointing it out because there are things you can do even if you're not in a great museum if you're really working hard at it and can find the support for it and you can do it in a smaller museum.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And that series of shows would have been significant in any museum.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: No one needed to be ashamed of them. And, oh yes, I had wonderful photography done for that Northwest show, every artist done in his own setting, not just ordinary photographs. So it was a beautiful book as well, just to look at for the photography. Well, so, maybe we have done my life and times.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Hardly, I have lists, lists. Perhaps we're tiring. We're coming close to the end of a tape. You were the chairman of the Visual Arts
Subcommittee for the Oregon Centennial Commission.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, right I was on all that.

BRUCE GUENTHER: There was the Century of Oregon Architecture.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: And there was the print show, and there was the painting show of the Oregon scene,

Newt did that show; Isabel Chapel did the prints, yes I was chairman of that project.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Again pulling together many different parts and...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Talents, big talents.

BRUCE GUENTHER: In 1960 you were appointed curator of the museum and Dr. Newton had become director earlier and from then on...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: You mean how was it different?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yes how was it different, how did it change?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, the Art Committee, that is I served with the Art Committee of the board in planning the exhibitions and considering acquisitions. The major change was that I had a great deal, most of what I did as curator was related to exhibitions and so it moved out of just writing the catalogues and all of that work, into actually forming exhibitions. So, if it had been a museum that really had people tagged for what they did I would have been exhibitions curator, and even that was of course always a group thing because the director was keenly interested in exhibitions and also in acquisitions in the collections. He was, I think, more of a curatorial mind than I am, and I just naturally turned the other way, towards the exhibitions, towards the changing program and towards the writing in connection with it.

And the writing, a whole lot of the museum's writing, whether signed or not, was by me, which I was perfectly glad to do, that's what writers do. But, I did a great deal of writing for the museum, some of it very important and beneficial, and liked doing it. But I don't think I answered your question, how has it changed. Well, another thing, to be open in a little museum like ours was then, and in fact still is, pretty little, there weren't many slots. There weren't very many jobs you know; there was the director and there was one curator and one curator of education and a registrar, now stop me when I run out of professionals and I just about have.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And then they might or might not have assistants or people who worked with them.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, and most of them did not. When I was curator of education I had a secretary assistant, Polly, an invaluable person.

BRUCE GUENTHER: That was Pauline Eyerly. But she was Polly Illo then.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Right. She and I together did the Landmarks that we have been calling on... Oh, let me tell you a nice thing, have you got time?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yes.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: It's partly because of our emphasis on education, I had a heavy emphasis on that, that we decided at one point that possibly all the people that had come to work at the museum, and during that period when the docents started and the women's committee...

[Side 5]

BRUCE GUENTHER: Continuing with your story...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, that's one thing I wanted to tell because I'm proud of it. It was the kind of thing that didn't get as publicized as things like our big exhibitions, things like that. It was this: the museum was growing while we were there, and particularly the volunteer thing happened then. There really were no volunteers then, Tom Colt, though he was in many ways and I could give you nice thumbnail sketches of each of the directors, but Tom wasn't interested in volunteers, he really wanted to keep them out and he did until Newton was director and-- or maybe it was during part of Max Sullivan's short tenure as director that all of the volunteers came in, the docents and all the others. This changed the museum considerably because it was a large number of people. Well, they also didn't know very much about the museum itself, they knew their assignments but they didn't really know what the museum was about, so I think I instituted this-- if somebody else says they did you can believe them, because it's always this group activity thing, but I carried it off and so we had a course of study, sort of.

We got as many volunteers as we could to come-- anyway every organization within the museum was represented, whether professional or volunteer or school or whatever, and we set out to give them the total background on what the museum was and what it stood for, what its values were and its history, when everything happened. I tried to make it very interesting, I think we served something usually, they all collected in what is now the shop, upstairs on the main floor, we had it in there and we had slides. Sometimes I think we did it in the auditorium, and we gave it once a week I think, and this thing that we've been reading from, this

Landmarks, was one of a series of mimeographs, in those days it was mimeographs-- sheets, several collected together on each subject, on the museum. It's called the Landmarks. One of them was the museum's collections. One of them was the museum's exhibition program. One of them was the museum and the artists of the region. And one of them was this so-called Landmarks, which is every important point in the museum's history. Well you know, we had high morale after that, I mean we always had good morale, but these people during those years, they knew what they were doing there...

BRUCE GUENTHER: They knew what they were part of.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: They knew what they were part of, not just that they met some kids at the door if they were Docents, every Tuesday or whatever. Or not just that they served tea or gave whatever it was, each of the volunteers had several different assignments. And it was an awfully nice atmosphere, and it was a huge amount of work... There again Polly was indispensable. She loves to look up stuff and get it right, and that's why I say that we can depend on these Landmarks and I hope that they're not all gone. No, she would save some. So, it's part of the unseen work of a museum and yet probably one of the most important things you can do.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Because it manifests itself in every public contact with the museum.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: You hope it will and I believe it does. I think that that's, well, it's hard to...this is very important and it doesn't endure forever, things go up and down you know, but that kind of a thing. Well like, maybe even the board hardly knew what was going on. No, I guess we did sometimes get a board member. We asked for representatives of every group that had anything to do with the association and I loved it.

BRUCE GUENTHER: It's a valuable thing, something we don't do any more. We have a huge volunteer corps at Seattle.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I know you do and I know that you have had a marvelous education program with your docents. Gee, those ladies we've kept in touch with them, we couldn't do a program quite as, what shall I say, quite as heavy as the one that you people have for docents.

BRUCE GUENTHER: But the docents here I think are very good in a way.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well at least they're a well-trained bunch, they don't make mistakes in the galleries, I'm sure of that. I think you give examinations, we tried to do that and we couldn't get away with it.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yes I think we do. I don't like it.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Ours didn't like it, I'll tell you that. They were very challenged by it, they were very daunted, they felt that they were going to fail, you know.

BRUCE GUENTHER: You've always been involved, as a curator, with the art of the present, with the art of the region.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, that's where my heart is. That's another thing that's considered not quite serious.

BRUCE GUENTHER: That they want to...there's always that tug at the mainstring.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes.

BRUCE GUENTHER: But, when I think back on your career I think of all those points. So your activities were as much outside the museum as inside in a way? with the Contemporary Crafts, with the artists?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes. I was on the board of Contemporary Crafts and I was kind of in a way, in their beginnings, though I can't claim any early service there. I was always very conscious of it and I did volunteer writing for them, and then later I did become much more active. And whatever the Art Alliance was, it just dimly figures now. Yes, I was in a lot of outside things, I was on several boards, in Portland.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Such as?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, Portland Dance Theater, Catlin Gable School, Boys and Girls Aid Society, Albina Arts Center...

BRUCE GUENTHER: Were you in the initial phases with the Albina Arts Center?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, I was, early on, right early, I was very proud of that. We had the first meeting of the membership of the Albina Arts Center at the museum and, yes, I don't know what happened to it eventually, but...

BRUCE GUENTHER: Perhaps it's background, but the Albina Arts Center was in a neighborhood area of Portland.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, it was in Albina.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, people in Washington don't know where that is.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh, well, it was worthwhile we did it and I think it did some very good things.

BRUCE GUENTHER: It was an arts center in the black community.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: It was an arts center in the black community, they had a very dynamic black leader who went outside to get his board.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Who was that, I don't remember?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Rufus Butler, and my, he was some leader. He was kind of careless and did a lot of crazy things but he...it was due to him that the thing came into being and I found it very stimulating to work with him.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Do you remember the year, was that in the late sixties?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Late sixties, yes, I'm sure it must have been.

BRUCE GUENTHER: It was an important part of that community, they did mural projects.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: They did a lot of good things, I think finally they did a lot of music and it was supposed to be an arts center, but they had exhibitions and...

BRUCE GUENTHER: What do you feel the role of, how would you categorize your role in the Northwest art scene?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, I wouldn't be able to do that. You can't get outside yourself enough to do that. I've certainly been active and I think largely on the credit side. I don't know whether I've been successful in this but I certainly have worked very hard for Oregon artists and I did that because, first of all I think we have to do this all the time because we're so far out here. We were talking about this earlier, the difficulties an artist has-- deciding to stay, deciding to go back east-- we are all torn on this subject. You want to have an active art community where you're living, you certainly want that and people need it, they need their community to have a good art activity and lots of... You want a scene in which art is bought and sold; money is spent for it. You have that more in Seattle than in Portland, and you want good galleries and a good mix of galleries. But there is a kind of brain-drain of [a] sort, you know. It's little out here and the scope is not so great, so people are drawn off. Any case, one of the wonderful things about being in a museum is that you have an opportunity to help good artists-- and should be constantly alert for them, and you are automatically. You want to help young artists and you want to bring out somebody who is fading for whatever reason and shouldn't, and you want constantly to provide opportunities. Now I think I have done a good deal of that.

BRUCE GUENTHER: To the point that you were criticized for being too partisan.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh yes, but, you know if you can't stand the heat...no, no...or too local and not caring about the rest of it. Well, I do care about the rest of the dilemma of Bill Chiego-- what could he do in Portland? I mean his interest. This was not a big museum of French 18th century material. You might be a curator of, well, ethnic (as some people call it) collections, and be here, but, I don't know whether I would even be-- I really am interested in the 14th century, I'm interested in the art that's being done right here in my own time. Scholarship of this kind is recent you know, of the kind that I'm talking about, real scholars of the separate smaller areas of historic art history. It's a very recent time, whereas people have always been interested surely in the art that's being done under their very noses, and I am. On the other hand, I don't like to see artists as they used to do, think that they would be regional, be self-consciously regional, I don't think that gets anywhere.

BRUCE GUENTHER: In 1968 you organized West Coast Now. It was a major regional show, one I remember as a young art student seeing and being moved by. What was that part of?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, that was part of our diamond jubilee celebration. The museum, the association, was established in 1892 and so, I don't know how my arithmetic is, but right along in those two years, we did a number of shows. We did the great Picasso show and we did the West Coast Now. That was my show. And it was along with my interests which were always in the contemporary scene. But we wanted to do more than show our own work and so we did the West Coast Now. The idea was to bring together a show as contemporary as we could make it, that is the last things of good artists and of course they weren't all done in that year, but the idea was to show what the highly contemporary artist was doing on the west coast at that time. It took in Los Angeles which gave it a great deal of prestige, because Los Angeles was then, and I don't know-- there was a time when

Los Angeles, you would know a great deal more about this than I, Bruce, when Los Angeles was considered it would be another New York. Now whether that came out or whether that can be said to be true or not...

BRUCE GUENTHER: I think that's what they felt then, and they're feeling it again.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Are they? Because I thought for a while as though it wasn't happening. But anyway we wanted to include Los Angeles and so I appointed a curator for each of the centers on the west coast and they selected...

BRUCE GUENTHER: Who was that?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Henry Hopkins in Los Angeles.

BRUCE GUENTHER: At UCLA. He was at Frederick Wight, at UCLA at that time wasn't he?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I'm not sure. In any case, I have a catalogue right in there someplace.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And who was in Seattle?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Who was in Seattle? Wait a minute, did Tom do it? No, I don't think so. We should get the catalogue. I'll tell a little bit about...it's just a little catalogue you know and we're just bringing it in now. That was the process and you had to depend o those curators. I felt this was kind of interesting, who would-- yes it was Henry Hopkins, and he was at the county then apparently. So you had to pick the people very carefully, people you knew you could depend on. I think it's better that people on the spot who know the work and know right where to go, instead of wasting a lot of time getting into the background which you really can't do yourself, unless you have a year's time to prepare, and I didn't. And so you might say that every show, every group that came up was a kind of combination of the person choosing it and the character of the work that was being done there. Gerry Nordland in San Francisco--I think he was the director of the San Francisco Museum then, wasn't he? Tom Robbins was an art critic then and did Seattle. And Alvin Balkind, yes, that was in Vancouver, and we went to Vancouver, good for us-- clear from Los Angeles to Vancouver, we covered the west coast. And at least I knew I had people who were keen about the contemporary scene, were right into it, and it was quite an interesting show. And some of the artists whose names I had never heard of then are now very well known artists. Well, we thought we would celebrate, it would be a good idea to celebrate the diamond jubilee with something highly contemporary, not at all like a diamond jubilee, and then have a diamond jubilee show which we did have. We had a show of room settings from the period from 1892, and costumes, and it was very nostalgic and a well chosen, excellent exhibition. So, that was one of the ways we chose to celebrate and I'm still proud of that show.

BRUCE GUENTHER: West Coast Now was a mostly sculptural show.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Much more than would have happened ten years before that.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Or perhaps now.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, and much more than now, much more I would say. And there were nearly all of the manifestations that were current at the time, and yes, that's true about the sculpture. It was probably sort of the breakthrough time for sculpture. And sculpture of all kind, lights and soft sculpture...

BRUCE GUENTHER: Inflated sculpture.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Mechanical sculpture and great big massive sculpture, and lots of, quite a few small works that had their own particular appeal. In any case, I'm sure there are shows made up of all the west coast cities, but when was the last one you saw, you see. I don't think very many. It's quite a job.

BRUCE GUENTHER: It was a catalogue that Doug Lynch designed.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: He designed that.

BRUCE GUENTHER: He's a man with whom you've associated yourself, who has designed many of the sterling publications...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh yes, Doug has done a beautiful job for us, and this little book I think is just charming. He has done some much more stately things for other kinds of exhibitions. He's dome a great deal of the museum's designing.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Is he a local person then?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, he taught at the museum school. He was a designer who kept to his own, how shall I put this. Designers, you know, move very fast with the times, and Doug managed to keep a kind of pace to his work. It had dignity and grace and yet it looked contemporary; and he did a lot of fine things for the museum.

BRUCE GUENTHER: The Picasso show. Was that a show that was assembled by the museum??

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, oh wait. That was Newt's show. If you have an opportunity you should talk to him about that. I was thinking of another show that he did. He was very interested in bringing masterpieces to Portland, great exhibitions of high importance and individual objects that seldom came out here. I'm trying to think whether the Picasso show was...unfortunately, how shall I put this, it came right about the time of his death; I believe we had the show on at the time when Picasso died. It came piece by piece from museums around the country; it wasn't in any sort of package.

Well, none of the things we are talking about are packages, they are all exhibitions that we organized ourselves, those we're discussing here. We were always on the lookout for occasions that would make it possible. I mean, if you're writing to a museum, say, for its great Picasso, which it doesn't want to lend very much to a little place out west, it helps to be able to say, we are celebrating the 75th anniversary of this museum and then send the publications to show what the museum is in case it slipped their mind a little, and this is a unique occasion in the history of the museum. So you can make of the occasion important enough to let them let loose of their important painting and it takes a lot of ground work to get this done as I don't need to tell you. Dr. Newton was very good at that, he was a long term planner so that we always had something afoot. All museums have to do this but I really think we were particularly good at it, because we are so far out and so really small and it takes a lot of planning to get what we need to do to fill our slots.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Another show that you did that was in a way a similar ground breaking show was Body Works in 1974.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: BodyCrafts.

BRUCE GUENTHER: BodyCrafts, a show of wearable art.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: BodyCraft, oh, I loved that BodyCraft show. Works of art to wear. That was a kind of a ground breaker too. Oh, what fun that was. We brought together clothes, garments, hats, dresses, everything done by craftsmen, not just cross-stitchers, but all done by craftsmen, not seamstresses.

BRUCE GUENTHER: No, artist craftsmen.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Artist craftsmen, creative craftsmen. And we got things as far up, we went to Canada because there's a lot going on there in unusual crafts. We filled the whole lower floor of the museum, the sculpture court, the Greek gallery, for hats and like that, and it was sensational.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And the catalogue was a tabloid.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: The catalogue was a tabloid and I was very proud of that. I really enjoyed doing that. Now some people might disagree, but somehow we managed through education [to] persuade them, but I think that a museum has to be lively. I think that there has to be a sense of something going on and something a little bit unusual, and yet without ever, ever letting the quality down. It's not necessary to let the quality down at all, but it should be lively. The program should move fast enough and it shouldn't be addressed to just people who have scholarly leanings, say, to Japanese prints, or to Northwest Indian, or whatever-- but just to people, who have responses waiting back in their heads and hearts and nerve centers, and they need to have them awakened. So you have to think about that; you have to address some shows to a large group and others to a smaller group. But anyway, BodyCraft, works of art to wear, was one of those shows. And there was nothing in it that anybody would be ashamed of, it was just highly contemporary craft work, of highly contemporary art.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And then there was modeling of some of the garments, television happened with that show.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, we did a good promotional job and, it had to have that, but it also lent itself to that. We had a style show on the night of the opening-- real people wearing the garments; and we had suitable music, contemporary music-- it was a nice rich program with it.

BRUCE GUENTHER: As a curator I think you've always made it part of your program to support the traditionally known craft area, that interface of the utilitarian with the art.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh, well I have always been interested in crafts and as I said, I had some connection with Contemporary Crafts. It was one of its objectives to bring forward the Oregon craftsmen. And at that time, as I say it was very early, to raise the standards of Oregon crafts, and to raise the standards of the purchasing

public, aim for a discriminating public and teach that public. Those were the objectives of Contemporary Crafts and, you know, I was young then too, so I was formed by that, partly.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, it's surprising, it continues to be a dialogue that happens here.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, the crafts came out then, I mean in a few years the crafts had come forward so strongly that everybody was in it.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Why don't we stop for today, we're almost at the end of this tape.

[Side 6]

BRUCE GUENTHER: Rachael, over your career you've worked with at least five of the directors of the museum. You knew Anna B. Crocker, who we have talked about, who was one of the first directors of the institution, and then I think the first one you really worked with was Robert Tyler Davis.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, as you say, I worked with all of them, the founder, Miss Crocker, whom I think we spoke of a good deal as you said. She was an enormous influence and her influence maintained itself in the organization actually through the administration of the following directors. The next director who stayed for a number of years, one who wasn't quite right for us, nor us for him, but one who stayed after Miss Crocker, who stayed and made some impact and gave the museum the stamp of his personality, was Robert Tyler Davis, Bob Davis, who was here for what, five or six years.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yes, 1939 to 1947, I think.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, a little longer, seven or eight years. And he, let's see, how shall I put this, he was welcomed I felt by the board; they thought they had got the right man to follow Miss Crocker. Miss Crocker I remember interviewed him, he went out and talked to her. She liked him very much, but his view of what a museum in a community should be was quite different from hers and it was more contemporary, of course. He believed in a lot of interaction with the community and he liked to draw in groups. I remember that some people were horrified that he permitted a flower show in the sculpture court. That's the big indoor court in the museum; it's a very beautiful space, the whole museum was designed by Pietro Belluschi. To see people bringing in boxes and setting up flower arrangements that were perhaps not classically beautiful, but anyway, it was the community participating and he tried every way he could to do that. I think he believed that it hadn't been done sufficiently before, yet he was an ingratiating person and he had no intention of obliterating the museum behind him, the old museum, but merely wanted to bring it farther out into the community. And there were I think performances of sorts there and he was very interested I remember in the children's classes, which had maintained themselves since 1908. In all ways he opened up the museum, as I say, [and] some people didn't like that. You can't do anything that's different without making a few enemies. In general, I think though, his direction was amiable and gently and outward moving and I think that was his chief...

BRUCE GUENTHER: Contribution?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, right.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Those were the war years and Portland was really changing then. That was the first real migration of blacks to the community and the war industries opened up.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, it was certainly changing and he was very generous about being a part of the war effort. It's rather a question in my mind of perhaps, it shouldn't be how much that influx of "Okies" as people up here called them, and blacks, how much it touched the museum or the museum touched it. Probably not very much. It probably was nothing like the sixties, let's put it that way, when there was a kind of invasion of museums from the outside and they were harshly criticized for not taking notice of minorities. It wasn't like that, but times were still what they were. The sixties hadn't happened. And there was probably not very much contact between the newcomers, many of whom stayed, and the art museum. However, to the extent that it was done he would have been open to almost any proposal and I think in the main his was a good administration. As I said, he was interested in the children's classes; brought in his own expert in children's art, it was a great period for children's art.

BRUCE GUENTHER: You were involved as a supervisor and...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Right, I was, and then as a teacher and, so it was interesting to talk to these people. He was a lively director. Now the next one was...

BRUCE GUENTHER: Thomas Colt.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: And Thomas Colt was another pair of sleeves altogether. He was a Marine colonel

wasn't it, a major colonel, major wasn't it?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Major Thomas C. Colt, Jr.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Thomas C. Colt, Jr. He had a sign on his front lawn that announced that the house was Major Thomas C. Colt, Jr.'s house. And, although he was not by any means a West Point man, I think he was in the Marines wasn't he, he had lost his heart in the military, so to speak, and so he tended to like to run things in as much of a military way as he could. So there were memos, and some of them quite long and turgid. I'm mentioning these things which were sort of funny and purely personal, but they had their effect. What he did bring on the positive side was a sense of the museum as a professional organization among other professionals. And right here there comes what I think is a very interesting aspect of museum work, which is always having to be settled over and over. And that is, are you most of all, out here in the west, an institution operating for the good of the community? Are you there to raise the sights, the discriminatory powers, of the people that may or may not come to you? Are you there to enliven their minds and wake up their responses to art-- in short, is your job right there where you are, are you trying to be something in this community, have an effect on it, delight it and inform it, is that what you're supposed to be doing? Or are you in a kind of friendly and productive, we hope, competition with other museums to show how professional you are? I mean, what have you done lately that shows that you're a better museum than Seattle, for example. What have you initiated, have you got a staff that can initiate exhibitions, are you as alert as Hoving on acquisitions.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And so Colt brought that, in a sense, competitiveness.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes. And we hadn't thought much about that before. Fortunately, you know, the two are not necessarily in conflict. I mean, if you lowered your sights because you're working in the community, then you have failed the community because you have to keep raising them. So they're not in conflict but they are at times...different directions emerge, oh no, let's say different emphasis.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, that was a period when a number of major works came to the museum. Through his activities or a combination of his professional ambition with board members. They Kirchner and the Fragonards came in then, and that was also the time of Curt Valentin's gifts to the collection.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, the Colts, they were very...I don't know whether she was called curator; I think she was. Anyway, she was the second in command and took a very active part; she was prepared to too, she had the background for it. They were very close to Valentin and they were constantly trying to arouse people to have closer connections with New York and, yes, they did wish to buy. However, I don't know that it turned out to be a great acquisition, but you're right that they hoped to improve the collections very much. Sometimes Tom wasn't able to and it was very frustrating to him, because he was asking for more than the board were going to let him, I mean he was ahead of the board and he wasn't terribly persuasive. I mean he might have been able to pull the museum along a little better, a little faster, if it had come easily to him to sit down with people and talk to them about the importance of these things. I mean, he found it hard.

BRUCE GUENTHER: That was the time that the museum had an auction, from the permanent collection, wasn't it?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh, yes.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Those were simpler times in museum ethics I think perhaps.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I don't know whether...I mean it would be hard for me to assess now. But there were things there that were prizes for the private collector. Now, when I see them in people's houses I think, oh gosh, was that the right thing to do? But, I think he was desperate for funds to do what he wanted to do and he felt that the museum collection needed "weeding out," a very dangerous phrase. He did one thing that I don't think had ever been done before. We had an enormous northwest Indian collection, by no means could we begin to show it all, and it wasn't all our thing, it was more utilitarian. He created several small collections out of that enormous collection, and it was huge, and he got them up as small collections that would be sold to small museums as their northwest Indian collection. So he sold not just one at a time, but as small groups.

BRUCE GUENTHER: So that was from the larger Axel Rasmussen holdings?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Uh huh [positive], now how many of those were acquisitioned, but, that would be something that he would decide that, because whether they should be let to go or not, because the board wouldn't know really, wouldn't have the knowledge, the background to say whether that was a good idea or not. Now if we were to look back at those prices we would just faint dead away, that we would let something go for that price. I didn't have anything to do with that at the time, I wasn't in that role. But everybody was to some extent-- interested you know, and, of course they were just pitifully small, the amounts, but everything was low then. So yes, he did do those things and he worked on the collection and he disposed of things and he was a

man to make decisions and then find a way to get them and some of them were good and, like everything else, some of them not so good probably.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, his tenure lasted from 1948 to 1956, and then he was followed by Max Sullivan.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes. Max came, I think, from Rhode Island and I believe it was thought that given that art institution, he would have a feeling for the school and the museum as a double entity.

BRUCE GUENTHER: With the Rhode Island School of Design having both so strong.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, right. How long did you say he stayed, or did you say? I have a feeling it was not long, and he had physical disabilities that did make it a problem for him.

BRUCE GUENTHER: He only stayed until mid-1960, from 1957, so three years.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, that's kind of minimum you know. So that I would say, he was a very charming man, I would say that his grasp of the task was very faint, very light, he didn't initiate very much and he didn't actually take very much vigorous action. I remember however, certain thing about him. He did take an interest in the school and he, I think it was during his administration that the school was accredited. I suppose we have made it clear all along that the museum and the school existed together in this, almost from the beginning. He got accredited by the American Schools of Art, and that was a very good thing. He also took a great interest in the building. He was sort of architecturally oriented and he really cared about the building. And though he didn't do anything very far reaching, I remember that (it seems strange now because we would never do it) but he covered the walls with a kind of gathered fabric. Now that wouldn't do now at all, but we must remember that that was still quite a while ago and this pale neutral, gathered fabric looked very handsome. And when you hung gold frames against it or even paintings that came up into this century, because the bigger changes hadn't happened...

BRUCE GUENTHER: No. So the walls were colored before, do you remember, I mean that's an interesting point. I remember the gathered fabric.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I think that the walls before were a kind of painted sackcloth, gunny stuff you know. And I think they looked a little more universal, less tied to a period, than the gathered cloth. I think that's what they were, but they were worn and it was time they went. They were in bad shape, and he chose...maybe he chose the work with Belluschi, I haven't any idea about that, I suspect he just did it. He felt quite confident about his judgments and when they were new, with the travertine, it really was quite elegant, it looked good. Then they just passed out of date, that's all. And it was time for it to go anyway.

BRUCE GUENTHER: When did Francis Newton come? He arrived on the scene as a curator earlier.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: He came as curator from...

BRUCE GUENTHER: Did he work with Colt at all or was it with Sullivan?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Now, wait a minute. He worked with Tom, with Tom Colt and he always respected Tom's aspirations for the Museum and was with him; it's just that one can't want everyone to be everything, and they can't be, that's all. Then they sent out a search committee after Tom and they got somebody who was the exact opposite, as I said; Tom had a military approach to things and he didn't like meetings. He liked to give orders, and of course, there was a lot of jokes about that, about his memos. Max, on the other hand, was a very charming man, and very easy in his manners and also, when he talked about what he thought the museum school should be he sounded good, but he was not well enough for the job and as I say his hold on the whole thing was very faint. I'm sure there were other things he did besides getting the school accredited and putting up those walls...he was interested in design and he brought two or three exhibitions that went in that direction. He did a toy exhibition and he did an American design exhibition, which was very boring, but that wasn't his fault, that was his kind of interest.

BRUCE GUENTHER: I noticed also that 1959 was the Oregon centennial. You organized a major exhibit of paintings and sculptures of the Pacific Northwest.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, we don't have Max as director then, do we?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yes. That was his last year.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: His last year. It seems to me as though it were Newton, because Newton was doing so much of the work.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yes. And then there were the paintings and drawings of Van Gogh.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh yes, it was a tremendous undertaking. Yes, that was the year of the centennial...of the state, that is. We didn't--again we are often comparing ourselves with Seattle-- we didn't have anything like the giant celebration and all of the accomplishments and construction that went with Seattle's centennial. But we did our own thing and we had art exhibitions and I was in charge of all of them I guess, or almost; very interesting and worthwhile. The museum, of course, took part as well. As I say, all of this seems more like the administration of Dr. Newton than Max because Max's health really failed and he was not very active then.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And then he resigned in 1960 and Dr. Newton was appointed in 1960.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, and he had a rather long administration then, until he retired. About fifteen years, anyway it was a good long time. Now his administration was a very important one because it was the longest one outside of Miss Crocker's and we have the exact dates somewhere; it was very long. And he did an interesting thing: I think this would characterize Dr. Newton's administration-- I hope that you will have a chance to talk with him-- but to me it's one of its strongest points, and this is the virtue in having time to look back on it, because when you're in it you're so busy, you don't really see the forest for the trees. But, his administration, he took the view that the people that were there and the work that was going on had value and he built on it and he often referred us to the objectives and this will lead us into, if we wish, to a comparison of the two museums so close together out here on the west coast. That the objectives of the association as written down-- and we have the very book-- at the time in 1892 when the association was formed-- I think we could maybe at some point even read the names of the first trustees; there weren't very many, it wasn't a twenty-five member board the way they got to be later. In any case, the objectives and I think I can remember them if I don't have them here, but we were almost taught to learn these and, because they are so solid a foundation and so capacious, anything we would do we would wish to do for the museum or the school would fit in with these. Alright, the objectives were: 1) To make a collection of works of art. 2) To erect a suitable building in which the same may be studied and exhibited. It was interesting that they didn't say exhibited and studied. 3) To develop and encourage the study of art. And 4) To receive gifts or bequests of works of art, money, real or personal property, for the uses of the association. And to have those simple, straight forward, but imminently practical and, as I say, capacious, directives, in 1892, was really a great boon for this association. You could without strings follow these, and yet they were flexible enough to admit almost any good thing relating to art. We always knew them, everybody knew them because they were written down, of course. But he pointed them out and I think he used them, see, when he came in, well it was one of those kind of desperation candidates, they couldn't start another search right away and so there was Newt as curator, he seemed to be doing a good job so why not take him, so they did. And the president of the board then, David Lloyd Davies, agreed with Newt, well Newt asked for it I believe, that he would go over someplace out of town and write up what he thought the museum should be about, and if David didn't like it then he wouldn't take the job-- I mean they weren't destined to be together. And, if he did like it he would take it. And, actually I don't think David had much choice, or maybe he did, maybe he saw them and was very impressed, I wouldn't have known. And so he embarked on his plan and it was entered in, I mean this, the objectives from the beginning.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, you and Newt developed, I remember as a participant, a real working relationship that I could see that was melded through years of mutual respect and so forth. You were appointed curator in 1960 when Newt became director and then you were moved from education and that activity into care for the collection and...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Soon after, yes. Now my emphasis was never so much on the collections as on the exhibitions.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Right, that's very true. The changing exhibition program was the prominent factor.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: And in fact Newt, who had his Ph.D. from Iowa in art history and was really an art history man, was awfully interested in the collections, and so it was the emphasis. I wasn't totally separated by any means, but my emphasis went towards programs and exhibitions and I would like to have that clear, because I'm not really a scholar and Newt's interests were on the collections, the objects that we had. In fact he started something that-- you know that there's very little in a scholarly way that a little museum out here can do, not very much, we just don't have the departments, we don't have the staff or anything-- but Newt started something really, I say we because there is one thing down at the museum I honestly think however mad you got at it, there was a kind of feeling of "we" down there, I mean the whole bunch of us in it some way or other. He started a little folder, a little printed well-designed folder, the size of typewriting paper, well-designed, which we called Notes on the Collections. And we got it out, I'm not sure whether it was quarterly or maybe we didn't have a regular schedule on it, and that meant that each of these times, it wasn't always we who wrote it in the museum. We called in scholars to write these, to take one piece, one object in the collection and really write it as thoroughly as it could be done by this person. And he was always very proud of that because he thought it kept our reputation among certain people outside of the museum, in other museums and so on. And it was the kind of thing that was possible for us to do and yet, could be respected.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Those publications I think were very good, I remember then as almost annual, elegant in design.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Maybe they went with the annual report.

BRUCE GUENTHER: They were very simple; there was one I particularly remember was the Chinese relief, the Han Dynasty.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I think somebody from Seattle did that, we did sometimes call on either Trubner or Fuller...

BRUCE GUENTHER: To write certain things?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes. Oh no, it was long before Donald Jenkins. But for an oriental thing that's where we would have turned. I remember that one, I haven't quite got the author, I remember quite a few of them. It's discontinued.

BRUCE GUENTHER: I agree that kind of contribution that a small museum can make, those pieces in its collection... But it relates to the kind of publishing activity that you were involved with, with the exhibition program and the artists of the region, the artists living and working not only in Oregon but in the greater northwest, and that's a series of exhibits I think I would like to talk about for a moment. We're coming to the end of a tape and I think I'll stop it.

[Side 7]

BRUCE GUENTHER: Rachael, we were talking about museum publications and the publications that Francis Newton started on aspects of the collection. You have always been active writing for the museum and various organizations, and particularly your writing on artists of the region has been an important service. I mean particularly a series of small folded printouts on a series of exhibits you staged of artists of Oregon, and I think there ended up being 18 total.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: That's about what I was thinking. Was that the '59, did you say?

BRUCE GUENTHER: That was the series that I think you began in '69 or '70.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, we were aiming to have it complete and publishable (that is, bound, I should say), because each had its folder, but we were aiming to have that for the bicentennial (US-1976), and that it would cover some years before and be complete then. And we thought we would add as we went along and we'd have a better picture. We started it in advance. Yes. I think this whole, the arts of the region-- See every, every subject that you bring up has its bearings on a lot of larger ideas, or larger objectives. And this one, we were talking about museums being either professionals or service organizations (of course, they never are either). Now here, when we're talking about artists of the region, we're opening up several other kinds of ideas and aspects that relate. For example, how much are you trying to help artists of the region, and how much is that the role of the museum? Well, hardly at all now, maybe. But the farther back you go, in the periods that we're covering, in the decades that we're covering, the more the museum ought to do, because the less there is going on someplace else. If a young man or woman (usually it was a man then) were just entering the art community or entering on a career as an artist, where will they go, where will they turn? They have to get this work shown somehow or other because that's what they were born to do, is to make art and let people profit from it. Well, very little in the way of galleries, just very little. I forget-- the Fountain came along in the '60s, but others kind of came and went and, let's put it this way, it may have [galleries] in Seattle, I talked about that earlier, but in Portland there wasn't very much going on. You had to hustle, and a group of young artists would start their own gallery, and those were very useful, but in any case, the farther back you go, the larger the museum looms as the one way that you will get known. So, it made the annuals very important, because you had your little chance to get in there and be shown with a hundred or so other artists, and some of them very well known. Well, maybe that service aspect would be of no interest at all to some people. Almost had to be in Portland, and I think this enters in, too, and ought to be talked about. In Portland at any rate, artists were very vocal. And, as we were saying some time ago, when the first annual brought in by Major Colt, with his two jurors wiped out hundreds of good artists, there was a great uproar. Artists would also-- deputations of artists would come in and talk to the director or the curator about how it ought to go. And since they were usually teaching right over there in the school, we knew who they were and knew what they would say. (laughs)

BRUCE GUENTHER: It was hard to avoid them; it's a small town.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Couldn't avoid them, and we're supposed to be their brothers. Anyway, I remember one time, maybe I mentioned this before; if I did stop me. But it's kind of interesting and I couldn't have gone that way in Seattle, I don't think. The annual, that is, the big free-for-all (which has almost disappeared, hasn't it? It

certainly has down here and we were the last to go, so to speak) was beginning to be discontinued, and I remember it was my idea. I thought, well instead of having this backbreaker, that is kind of passe' now, why don't we have a series of quarterly exhibitions. There could be a lot of variety in these, they could be based on materials, they could be even thematic, or whatever. They could be artists between 30 and whatever. But you know there's just a thousand ways you can go. And I thought wouldn't that be fun, be interesting to have something going on all the time, and yet it wouldn't be quite so--And it could be partly invitational, or all invitational, or [no one] could-- Anyway, I thought it was great and I began to talk it up, and so, I had a deputation wait on me, of artists who, led by Manuel Izquierdo, who was a very vocal person, and quite powerful, he was a well-known sculptor in Portland, then and now, so I remember they came in, three or four big guns and sat down and told me what I should do. Well, I gave up my idea. I mean, not because it wasn't a good idea. It was. I think it would have been a better idea than what we did, but I saw that it meant so much to them. Now exactly why, these were artists who would have been in almost any shows I would have done.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Who really didn't need them.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Who didn't need them.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Incredible.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: No, they weren't like the kids that needed to get in, but they felt that it was a point in each year somehow, I won't say a high point exactly, but a significant thing in the art calendar of the place. What they said, "Well sure, go ahead and do your shows, but do the annual, too. Well, it just couldn't be done, I mean you couldn't do four shows and the annual, but...

BRUCE GUENTHER: The museum would be full of art of the region and you'd never see anything else.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Never see anything else. That would have been fine with them. Almost, no, no, no, I shouldn't say that about them. But, of course, they did need and want a great deal. Well, I bring this in because it shows how these two organizations in the same building worked upon each other, because these were mostly fellows from the school. And it also shows how, that sometimes you have to give way. So for a few years more they did it, and I don't think it hurt anybody.

BRUCE GUENTHER: No.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I mean, I would like to have done it the other way.

BRUCE GUENTHER: No, but it does serve a purpose. How involved were you with acquisitions during your tenure as curator?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well...

BRUCE GUENTHER: It was not an active period of acquisitions, necessarily. The exhibition program was vigorous.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I would have to go back over what things I had anything to do with. I sat on the art committee. The art committee in our situation, then, was an art committee of the board and sometimes people invited in from outside, experts, and the director and the curator sat on that committee. Everything that was purchased had to be passed by the board. Gifts could be accepted by the art committee, but anything purchased, of course-- We had very, very little money for purchases, and of course the acquisitions would often be gifts, and some of them were very worthwhile indeed and many, of course, rejected. Oh well, let's see, I think I would say, without consulting the record, that the greatest acquisition of that period at the end of my tenure, and sort of the end of Dr. Newton's, too, was the Cameroon collection from Dr. and Mrs. Gebauer. And that was a major acquisition, that's a high point; there's no question about that. That was a collection brought together by missionaries, very intelligent people, actually; Dr. Gebauer was a missionary to Cameroon; his wife was a graduate of the Chicago Art Institute, and they collected while they were there. They were there for a long time, 20 or 30 years. And, as I say, though, people of discrimination and high morality, wonderful people to work with. There can be no doubt about the authenticity of everything in the collection. African collections are very suspect, because there's so much that isn't authentic or isn't what it says it is. And since these were collected by these people, just those two, and they never left Cameroon, it is one of the few highly specialized African collections that's actually authentic and also very fine.

BRUCE GUENTHER: That collection, their collection was ultimately divided between Portland and the Metropolitan? There are some Gebauer pieces at the Met I know.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, we have the major collection.

BRUCE GUENTHER: You have the major portion?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh yes. Yes, there are Metropolitan pieces, you are right.

BRUCE GUENTHER: So, you and Dr. Gebauer worked together, there was eventually a Gebauer catalogue?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, and that was more or less as I was going out, so I didn't work on that. We made a plan with them in which they did get something out of it, too; it wasn't totally a gift. But one of those things that you carefully over many months work out the financial plans for it. And it was certainly a triumph to have it. Yes, I forgot for a moment about that Met part.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, while you were there, the three major ethnic collections of the museum were installed in the Hirsch wing, on the main floor.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes.

BRUCE GUENTHER: The Gebauer collection we've been discussing.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes. The Northwest Indian collection.

BRUCE GUENTHER: The Northwest Indian collection from the Rasmussen holdings, and then the pre-Columbian. You were responsible for much of that interface with designers in selecting materials.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yeah.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Would you like to talk about that? What was the concept that led you to choose that? Why? How?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: You mean, to put them there together? Well, you know, you have to work from the design of the building. First place, where can they go? And we had in this setup, this arrangement, and as much as is possible, we tried to make the building and the collections planned in such a way that the viewer's movement around the museum can make some kind of sense. And in this case you walk into our museum and you see two collections on either side of the door that are not alike at all, but nicely separated. That is the Chinese collection and the Greek vases, the classical collection.

And as you walk further into the museum, you come to the Hirsch wing where there are these three galleries contiguous to each other-- And, if you had all the collections in the world to choose among, you might not put a Cameroon collection and a Northwest Indian, and probably certainly not a pre-Columbian, that is Mexican and South American, and so on. You wouldn't, you might not choose to do that. But given what we have and what the building is like, the three made sense. And they are completely separated.

You move from the pre-Columbian collection through a door into a new gallery, which is clearly very different. All the works in the pre-Columbian are all mostly stone or ceramic, in the Northwest Indian are almost all wood, and then you go out in the corridor, and (or is there now a door between those? I don't think so) you move into the Cameroon collection. Now that's interesting. You might make a good connection there, because there's a great deal of wood in both (at least the great masks are), and the cultures are, they're somewhere on a level, whereas, of course, the pre-Columbian is much more advanced. But those two make a good point together. Anyway, you can have one experience, move to the next, have another experience. And these are, we think, a very powerful arm of the museum's collections. And, like everything else, nobody gave you a blank check, and (laughs) so they were done, they weren't all done together; they were done at different times. And we always...

BRUCE GUENTHER: The Gebauer first and then, as I remember, the pre-Columbian...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: And then the Northwest.

BRUCE GUENTHER: The Northwest.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: The Gebauer was done on a shoestring. We didn't have any money to do it really at all. And I asked a designer at Portland State, Bob Kasal, to do it as a service, really. I don't think we paid anything. Or anyway so little that it was-- I think he got a kind of a kick out of it, and he's a very volatile type and very easily angered, and so he was angry a lot of the time there, while he was doing that, because he didn't have any money. And, try as I would, I did everything but kneel before him, to get this cooperation. It was never quite enough. And so it was a rather harrowing thing. But, considering what he had to work with, he did a fantastic job.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, it's a very elegant room.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: It's a very elegant room, and he did it for nothing! I think we didn't build a case; I think he got the cases from downstairs, and it's just elegant. However, when we came to do the pre-Columbian, I knew

Ken Shores, another artist here in Portland, artist-craftsman. Well, let's call him an artist, who had traveled much and collected pre-Columbian art, knew all of those cultures very well. And he also was a very fine designer. Very fine! And so I asked him to do the pre-Columbian, and for elegance, you know, that's one of best little the spots in the museum, I think. Now maybe you disagree.

BRUCE GUENTHER: It's very dramatic.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: It's very dramatic. Why not?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Oh exactly, with that material.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: With that material.

BRUCE GUENTHER: With the pre-Columbian and the Northwest Indian, which was installed following that, or almost simultaneously, in '73-'74, '72-'73, I think, because I was at the museum in '73, and it happened when I was there. Was that supported by NEA money? Had you managed to get a grant so that they can be more finished?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I don't remember where the money came from. That's one of those things where you make a decision and it's got a 50 50 chance. I think that Ken wanted to do that (the NW Indian galleries), and that he would have done a better job.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yeah.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Because I think he would have. I think he would have seen what to do to make-- after all, the Northwest Indian collection, and the Northwest Indian cultures, are exceedingly colorful cultures! And I think he would have made something that stood up to those qualities in the pre-Columbian gallery without being just like it. I think he would. Anyway, he did this--We should say, in the pre-Columbian, it's all very dark, there's no outside lighting, and it's black, kind of polished black on the interior, but things are very well lit, you know, spot lighting the objects, and it's like being inside one of the pyramids and, I mean, a little bit. It recalls that, let's put it that way.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Um hmm. [positive]

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: And it is really, I think, permissibly dramatic, and very beautiful. Okay. Now, when I say that maybe I should have asked Ken to go ahead, two things entered in. First of all I do think that Bob Kasal is a good designer, and, second, I owed him. You know, he had done this marvelous favor for us. He had gotten up, just single-handed by main strength and skill, and no money at all, he had gotten that Gebauer collection up in what was supposed to be a temporary installation, but which has stood up over the years, and there was no time when somebody says, "Oh, we should get that thing down." Never! It was good. So I did owe him, and he wanted to do it! So I did it.

Now, two things. Granted it's not the greatest installation in the world, and, second, we don't know that Ken would have this done as well on the middle one, but I'm really opening my heart. I mean, this is the way things are done in real life, in a museum. At least, I felt that I owed it to Bob. And I knew he was a good designer. However, it didn't come out very well, mostly-- that is, I shouldn't say it didn't come out very well, it's perfectly good. It's perfectly good, but it's not as amazing on either counts as the other two are. That is the cost.

BRUCE GUENTHER: What-- It lacks the drama in a way. But, the amount of material, and its susceptibility to bright lights, I think predicates a certain kind of darkness in the gallery.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yeah. Well, the gallery was never that bright. I kept leaning for that. But that's a big cost and I suppose anyone listening who wants to know anything about small museums must know that you're always running with a hundred dollars where you need two thousand, and then multiply that, so--but that's the way it is. And what we have in the pre-Columbian, I mean in the Northwest Indian, is a well-designed, but very conventional, case-oriented exhibition, display.

Another thing we have to remember is that we were in the period where damage was done all the time. These were very valuable works, the masks, for example. And everything had to be behind glass. When that came in, you know just before that it was get everything out of the cases, and then came the damage, and that's never quite ceased. So, it had to be in cases, some way, somehow, and it was much more susceptible to damage than the stone or ceramic pieces in the...

BRUCE GUENTHER: Pre-Columbian?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Pre-Columbian. But the chief thing that's wrong is-- Also, I wanted to close those windows on that side, and somebody, I can't remember who, fortunately, just held out. I wanted to cover the

windows so that we could have it all artificial lighting.

BRUCE GUENTHER: A controlled atmosphere.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Because it's not good for it anyway for it to be forever in the sunshine. And you had to always be lowering and-- I don't think everything has to be in an art museum, as some people want it to be, no windows at all; I think that's a mistake, too. But this really needed it. It would have given another wall on which things could have been hung high and dramatically. As it is, we've got a wall of windows, there. And it makes the gallery almost useless. So that's a really confidential story about how things come to pass in a museum this size, perhaps a museum anywhere.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Oh, I suspect...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Of whatever size.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Just at the Met they're able to keep throwing dollars at their property.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Ah, well.

BRUCE GUENTHER: In '72-'73 the Northwest conservation laboratory was set up at the museum.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: That was wholly the doing of Dr. Newton, who got an enormous grant, from the N.E.A., a very carefully thought-out proposal to serve-- You see he had a different way of reaching out, I spoke of the other two men- He wanted to serve the region where something wasn't done. And this was to provide a van equipped to examine a work of art and to do something very minimal. And this van would go around the region as museums requested it. And they would have the works that they thought needed working on, needed conservation work, out, and then Jack Lucas, a local conservator, would, with an assistant, go there and examine their works, as much as one could do under those circumstances, and tell them which things needed help badly, and make a plan to do it. And before that, each was on his own, as far as-- Very few museums out there had conservation labs, and-- I know one or two which were not good, I mean, on the whole west coast, I'm talking. And there were, in a very big city, there will be a conservator who works on the collection, and so on. But this was, the idea behind this was to provide a real service.

BRUCE GUENTHER: To the regional historical societies, museums, historic houses...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Anyone whose collections came under the expertise of an art conservator. I mean I don't think that there's certain things that they wouldn't maybe do paper documents or anything like that.

BRUCE GUENTHER: So, it provided not only this regional service, but it then assisted with the museum's own conservation.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Always! Oh yes, and they had a conservation lab, fully equipped lab, in the school building, which was built in '68. So that things could be brought back there, and then the conservator, who would be the same person throughout. No, later it wasn't, I think. For a while they had, well we did have conservators who did not go out, but just worked in the museum. So, it was a good, good start.

BRUCE GUENTHER: An important service. You mentioned the school building. That was added in '68 to '70.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: It opened in '70 or '71, yes.

BRUCE GUENTHER: That was a major expansion. Before that, you were mentioning, that they were living in a kind of temporary type solution.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yeah. The front wing, the Ayer wing, the money given by W. D. Ayer, of the Board of Trustees, was built in 1932, and the Hirsch Wing, the wing that runs along Jefferson Street, was added in, I think, '38.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And at that time the sculpture court was developed. With the Hirsch, or with the Ayers?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: The sculpture court. No, with the Hirsch.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And then with the addition in '68-70, the auditorium, and the...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: And the other wing went on the other side, which was the Madison Street...

BRUCE GUENTHER: The school.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: What became the school. And Peitro Belluschi was one of the, was the consulting architect. Wolf-Zimmer, Gunsel & Frasca were the architects. At the same time, for, I think it was for $200,000 more, they got permission to block off that block and make it into a mall.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Vacate the street.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: And vacate the street and all of that. Yes.

BRUCE GUENTHER: It was one of the best small public spaces in Portland for many years.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Leaving the park blocks in the residential area.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, right.

BRUCE GUENTHER: You had a vision for a sculpture collection there?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes. (laughs). Well, you can't have, you know, you win a few, lose a few.

BRUCE GUENTHER: But there were sculptures installed for a time there.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: There were sculptures installed for a while. And we had a-- Oh, Newt [Dr. Newton] had worked up a great plan with George Segal, to do a Segal that would relate to and be partly in the fountain. And we thought we were really going to get that. He was interested, but it was too flashy, too extreme for some people, and so we couldn't do that. We had some disappointments in relation to that space; it could have been very nice. As it is now, it's used a great deal for-- people park in there and everything, and it's just too bad. But anyway, the area's there and they can do something with it when they want to.

BRUCE GUENTHER: The auditorium was dedicated to...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, it was...

BRUCE GUENTHER: Caroline _____?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh. Oh, to-- Oh, it'll come to me in a minute. And largely paid for by her husband, Caroline-- Oh, I'll think of it in a minute. The auditorium was a very important part, of course, of the new building. We had never had a proper auditorium in the museum. I know you always had one in Seattle, didn't you?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Um hmm. [positive]

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes. Caroline Berg Swann was her name. The Berg family here, very well known, had a store in Portland, a nice big store. And Carolyn was a talented young woman who went east and got into television, married a man named Swann, and died of cancer far too young. And Swann gave a large sum to the auditorium, and it's called the Caroline Berg Swann Auditorium. And of course, the school had to have an auditorium; they never had one before, but any school does, and we needed it badly, and so it was an important part of the new construction, which was five stories, I believe, including a basement and a kind of little supply store.

[Side 8]

BRUCE GUENTHER: How did the education things happen without an auditorium? Your film series, did you show them in a gallery then?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, you mean, our first film series?

BRUCE GUENTHER: I mean your first film series.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I'm so glad you asked about that, because I'd forgotten about that, and that was such a pioneering thing. No. We had a room of sorts, I don't know what it had been planned for, but it was in the basement. This is where all the offices are now.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Where the staff offices were, are still.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: All. Yeah. The Jefferson Street entrance that goes past. That's where it was.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Ah. So there was a multipurpose room there?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yeah. It was just empty and had moveable chairs and was not a very good place, but that's where everything was held. And there was no way. Well, there was no way to do anything the least bit beyond the most ordinary-- I mean, it wasn't a real stage, it was just a sort of platform. However, that's where we showed the first films, and so it was a great relief to all when this nice auditorium was built.

BRUCE GUENTHER: I see. It's a wonderful hall.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yeah, it was. It's got good acoustics.

BRUCE GUENTHER: So then the staff offices occupied the rest of the floor at the time and slowly expanded. The museum has a library, it's always served both the staff and the school, so...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Um hmm. School.

BRUCE GUENTHER: In thinking of other collections, we've talked about the ethnic collection and the Gebauers. Did you do much with Margery Hoffman Smith? Her great collection of Chinese furniture has come to the museum.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yeah. She's long been a friend of the museum, as her family, Hoffman family have always been close to us. Margie was a wonderfully colorful woman. She lived, what did she live to be, 95 or something like that? She, though I don't think she had the least idea this was true, but she, her master work was, of course, the interior of Timberline Lodge on Mount Hood. Well, she was always a collector, she was a great interior designer. She loved Oriental art pieces, and we have, as you know, many of them in the collection. We had always kept her as a friend, and she didn't forget us. She was, as I say, a very colorful woman. She wasn't afraid of man nor beast. And it would have taken that to grasp this assignment at the lodge, and to do it as well as she did, to-- I mean she didn't let herself be deflected into any small bypasses, or, no, no, I mean any small deadends on the decoration of the lodge. She kept it absolutely unified. I mean, the style, throughout, this, what was it, 50 or 60 rooms, or more than that, I guess. And some of them very big and ambitious to decorate. It was unified. It was a job of design. But it also was full of variety. Now that's what takes the doing. To keep the thing looking that the same hand dictated it, and that it's all of a piece, but full of the little, full of all kinds of variety. The color, too. She wanted the color to be strong, and it was like a mountain inn, you know. That was the way she thought of it. And yet, each room would have a slightly different scheme, and that's really-- I'd go on and on about this and sort of stutter about it, because it was really an enormous accomplishment. And then, of course, she went to San Francisco and was a well known designer down there, was the friend of museums down there as well. Always a patron of the arts. But she never forgot Portland.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Did she come back for family...?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh, yeah, she came back a lot. And contributed largely to the Arts and Crafts School here, School of the Arts and Crafts, which her mother had started, of course, in I think 1902, but right, way back there.

BRUCE GUENTHER: She's one of many names associated with the museum. Edwin Binney, 3rd...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, he certainly-- she is early and he is late. Ed Binney was a collector of miniatures, started with Persian miniatures, and increased his holdings to Indian, East Indian. He had family here, and was a little boy here. He said once, told me that he was always a collector, that he had once collected every transfer (in those days we had trolley cars) every transfer from every trolley. That is, every kind of transfer. So he had the definitive collection of trolley transfers in Portland, Oregon. (laughs)

BRUCE GUENTHER: (laughs) Somehow, it doesn't seem like such a large step to Indian miniatures.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Indian miniatures, right. So he continued to collect, and he also is an expert on ballet, and in fact-- I may be wrong about this, but I think he got his PhD at Harvard in something to do with ballet. Right, I'm not quite sure what it was. He has of course a lot of ballet prints, as well. In any case, he, like Margery, thought of the museum in his own city. And he came into the museum, and Dr. Newt, and we became, all of us, very deeply involved with Ed Binney and his collection. He gave to us, and he showed major exhibitions here. What we did for him was provide very good catalogues, and they were always handsome, well designed. I mean it's always a two-way street. It's a nice thing. You're not just cynically developing somebody to give to the museum, you're, though of course that's in it, but you can each do something for the other, and for the public at the same time. For art lovers, wherever you are, and certainly for the museum and the museum's collection. So he was, yes, a generous donor, and good, good friend.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And the museum did, what, three major shows from his collection, I believe.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Three catalogues, I think.

BRUCE GUENTHER: One traveled, I know.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, yes. Traveled widely.

BRUCE GUENTHER: The Mughal Deccani works.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: And he was the kind of person who, who got in the act. I mean, there are ways to do that, you know, that are valuable and ways that are destructive. And he had good taste and so he got down into everything: the design of the catalogue, and he had, of course, done many catalogues. He was very knowledgeable about all that; I mean he came with a marvelous background. And I guess we, I think it's been a very good association.

BRUCE GUENTHER: He's also been interested in French material, and over the years has supported...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yeah. Oh, yes. I was trying to think what his thesis was, and I don't quite get it back. It was French, it was in French, whatever it was, because he knows French perfectly, and I thought it was connected with ballet. But I've a little bit forgotten now. He also is, well, he's an art history man. He likes all of art, you know, all of, and will quickly-- He loved to do radio programs.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Oh, really.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: So I interviewed him a lot. Whenever he was in town, we did a radio program. And he liked to "speak to the doe-cents", as he says. And knew them, I mean he got to be family, a person in the family, in the association family. The docents always asked for him, when he came, to give them a talk as part of the education program that I told you about, that I developed for them. And then he got hooked on doing radio programs. And that was fine with me; we had several in the bank every time he came, every time he came to town. Sorry we weren't doing television; I think he would have loved that. Anyway, he was interested in all aspects of the work.

BRUCE GUENTHER: I remember him as a tall, sort of flamboyant man.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Very, very tall.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Very expansive...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Very. And often sort of embarrassing, because he didn't care what he said, and he spoke loudly, as you say, and he was a very tall man. He was so fascinated with ballet that he learned it, he took ballet. And I'm sure he must have gotten pretty good, as good as you get when you learn it as a grown person, and as a person that tall. Because, he was taller than most men.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well over six feet.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes. Well over six feet. Well, those are some of the, actually, the real joys about museum work, working with people like the Gebauers and Ed Binney. Those were two, three remarkable people, and altogether trustworthy and delightful and without, without-- I was going to say without a lot of ego. Ed had plenty of ego, but not in any way that impinged on other people, in a disagreeable way, not a bit.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Did you ever have dealings with John Yeon, or...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes. John, in fact, has played quite a part, in a way. John and I were in school together, so I've known him for a very long time. And he was one, like Belluschi, he was one of the people tremendously influenced by, and there were many, by Harry Wentz in the school. He disagreed with the museum. Now we have to go back to 1848; not 1848, 1948, which I think was the time when we got the Indian collection. I wasn't there, but wasn't that right?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yeah.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: '48. Well, whoever, in case anyone should be listening to this, God knows what year it will be, but even right now in 1983, the difference between those two years, '83 and '48, are simply immense. You have to remember that World War II hadn't happened, and primitive art is another example of Portland's, and there are really many of these, though Portland can't claim to be as in front line the way Seattle is. We don't have as much money, there are a lot of things we don't or can't do. We've usually done things first. We are really far, we have been a small museum, that nevertheless all through its decades has been ahead. When we got our Indian collection, I believe that was in the administration of Bob Davis, and I think it was probably his greatest-- I knew there was something important, very important, and that's it. Isn't it?

BRUCE GUENTHER: It was, it says Axel Rasmussen collection by subscription in 1948.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: That's it.

BRUCE GUENTHER: It was just at the end, then, of Tyler Davis and the beginning of Colt?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: That's right. But it was Bob that did it, Bob Davis. Absolutely. And it was strange, still, for an ordinary art museum, with the usual collections, to buy ethnic.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: That was quite a step in '48. There were many that were against it. But there were enough for it, to subscribe and get it. John Yeon was against it. He thought that it was absolutely out of place in a museum of Western art, museum in the Western tradition. Oriental was not out of place; he didn't think that. But he thought these were primitive, and there many works and they were out of place, and he was against it. And he made, I think he resigned from the board, and he just couldn't see it, that's all.

And he also was of two minds about the school. I think John was a person who was the victim of his absolute taste. He had remarkable taste in the things that he knew. Remarkable, like absolute pitch, but when you fell outside of that, and the same standards didn't apply, he, I think-- I could say this as I'm very fond of him, and he's done a great deal for the region; he's an architect-- I think he was kind of at a loss. And when teaching in the school changed from the total idealism and the absolute, the loftiness of the founders-- which it's bound to do, you know; everybody can't keep on being just like the founders. He lost them, too. And so he wasn't very much in favor of the school. So, his contribution has been great, but flawed
a little bit, I think, by these weaknesses, or anyway, conservatism, maybe too much conservatism.

I think he would always have been in favor of absolute perfection of what you have, and not to break the mold, not to do anything that would change the course too much. I've have a certain amount of it myself; we all do. I'm not in favor of knocking the thing to pieces and starting over, anything of that sort. But, I was in favor of the collection, though I wasn't there as a curator or anything. But I thought it was a great step, and I favored those who agreed, and who did come together and buy it.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, I've often wondered about his lack, seeming lack of participation as a designer or an architect, or as an individual in the institutution in recent years.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, I think there was a kind of break, and I don't know whether he was ever asked to come back on the board and didn't choose to. He would be perfectly capable of that. I'm sure he resigned over one of these issues. He, while he was with us, he was, of course, of great value. But he was a very stringent person, and he, if we were talking morality instead of art, I'd say he was a Puritan, you know. He...

BRUCE GUENTHER: There's a clarity in his design for the Nelson-Atkins gallery Asian collection [in Kansas City], that talks of great discipline.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh, there's no question about that. But you know his galleries in San Francisco...

BRUCE GUENTHER: Tapestry galleries...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Um hmm. [positive] Medieval galleries, is what they are. And of course, we brought him back. He did a fabulous job. No, we didn't do that. He did the fresco [classical] gallery, but it's not like that anymore. When he did it, he made us--Well, I must have been there in the beginning, because I this-- I don't remember the date when that was installed. It was very early. I had some connection with it, anyway. It was perfect, and I think it was a very beautiful gallery. It was a kind of blue that he chose for the inside of the gallery, the cases, was just lovely with the vases.

We had a certain way of marking where each vase stood, and if he came in-- See, Newt insisted (I guess Newt was there), he insisted that we had to have those cases so that the vases could be stored under the cases, if necessary. That is, that we could use that gallery when we had case material. And I don't think he liked that, but he did that, and so the pieces could be, and are, often, brought down and underneath the cases, and then we could put them back. Well, we had them marked in a certain way so that they would never be by a millimeter different from where they were...

BRUCE GUENTHER: In the original plan.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: In the original plan. And we did it! We held to it. In fact, but we respected it, you know. It was, I thought, a very beautiful installation. But it's not now, you can hardly imagine, because it's been changed and changed and people have forgotten all that. Then he did the Margie Smith, I mean the Chinese gallery.

BRUCE GUENTHER: So he has been working with the museum?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yeah. And we always would bring him back when we could. I consider that we've remained, in a sort of way, friends, and Newt certainly respected him. He was difficult as all get out, but if you respected his view as a designer, and I think he's human, he's like some of them are better than others, but they're always, they have that pristine quality, and they're always his point of view-- I mean he doesn't get mixed up; he knows what he wants to say. And I think he's really been an important person in the history of the association, even though he sort of came and went.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Uh huh. [positive] Another person, who, I suppose I'm reminded because of personality, is Ed Cauduro. You did an exhibition of his collection.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh, yes! Seems to me we're always talking about people who are difficult. But the fact is that collectors are difficult, and it's the nature of collectors, and I'll bet you, you would have to say the same.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Of course.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: It's the nature of collectors. Now the fact that Ed Binney and the Gebauers were not the least bit difficult, or at least not in any really troublesome way, was kind of remarkable. Ed Cauduro is a Portland collector; he's the only collector we have of contemporary, really contemporary, hot off the galleries in New York art. And you have several up in Seattle; I don't know how many. We have this one, just one. And many Northwest collections but just one American contemporary collection.

BRUCE GUENTHER: In either of the major shows, his collection in '72 with a catalogue.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Was that the first one?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yes.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, I kind of insisted on that show because he was our only collector, and we should certainly have had it. And we made a, I was able to make a, kind of a big page, one of those kind of big folds, that they make so many of now, on that collection. And then, I've forgotten, a few years later, as his collection grew, and grew more radical, it was more extraordinary, more modern, than his first collection, we had another one.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Actually, I was wrong. The second one was the orange-covered catalogue; that was '72.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: That was '72. When was the first one?

BRUCE GUENTHER: The first one I guess that would have been in the sixties then. Was it Pop Art, was he doing that?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: No. He was doing those Washington colorists, extraction.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Oh, the color field people, Louis, and...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh I wish I had the little sheet we made out. No, that was sixties, right.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Gene Davis?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: And an Olitski, we had a-- But it was more on the beauty side. But no one else in Portland was doing anything like that. If '72 was the time we did the real catalogue, then this was maybe three years before that, something like that, three or four. We did it in the sculpture court; it was very beautiful. And we did that sheet catalogue, one-sheet catalogue. That was kind of nice, it was well-designed, and it was high time we did it, and he certainly thought so. And...

BRUCE GUENTHER: I bet he did. (laughs)

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: (laughs) And then we did the one upstairs. He didn't like the walls upstairs, and-- What did we do? Well, we changed the walls, I guess.

BRUCE GUENTHER: They were stripped and painted?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yeah, I've forgotten what kind of concession we made on those now, but he was so horrified at the walls.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Did the gathered fabric come down at that point?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Maybe the gathered, it may have been! I think it was. Of course they couldn't be shown

against that. And so we brought it down. Then, I remember it-- it was kind of a brown gunnysack material underneath that. Right?

BRUCE GUENTHER: And that's what was being shown on. (laughs)

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: (laughs) Oh, it's all put together. Now if he hadn't, God knows what we would have done, probably something just as disastrous, tried to hang those on the fabric. Never have done, would never have done. And anyway, it wasn't perfect the way it was, but it was better. And we did have a real catalogue then.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Um hmm. [positive] Well, it was an important show for Portland.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: It was an important show for us. It was long overdue, you might say, but, anyway, after that, we became friends and-- Well, collectors are hard to deal with, that's all. And I sort of understand the feeling. If you've-- It's the reason that artists are hard to deal with: It matters so much. We used to have a comptroller who always refer to the artists as "those God-damn artists." Never any other way. Because they made such problems. (laughs) Well, if you're an artist, and you're going to hang a show that has been important to you, you're in there just stripped naked, so to speak, just skinned alive. And while it doesn't matter that much to the curator or anyone else over there, you know, it matters to the artist. Some of them; not all, but some. And then they become very obstreperous and you just have an awful time. And I think it mattered a lot to Ed. It was the first real showing with a catalogue that he had had, probably anywhere, and certainly not in his hometown. And it was the center of his life, without any question, and so he felt it. And when he said, "These curtains have to come down," you know, and- - - (laughs) Well, you know, I can understand it, is what I'm trying to say.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, then subsequently the gathered fabric was removed from the rest of the galleries...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, it all went down. I don't know if I did.

BRUCE GUENTHER: The final bit came down in-- I was at the museum in '74. We took the last off the Hirsch wing.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: There you are; you participated in the history. You...

BRUCE GUENTHER: I even covered my daybed in the fabric. (laughs)

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: (laughs) Well, there was plenty of it.

BRUCE GUENTHER: There was. A great deal! That same year, the Portland Center for the Visual Arts opened. [1972] That was seen by some as a reaction to the museum.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh, I'm sure it was. Everything is a reaction to the museum, every new thing. I mean, the museum is the mother of art institutions in Portland. It was here first, it was always biggest, always the most powerful, and still is. And if you didn't like what was going on at the museum, you could, you know, you could write a letter to the Oregonian [Portland newspaper], you could send up a deputation, or you could start something new. And it was thought by some of the people in PCVA that they were doing, they had to do this because the museum wasn't doing its job.

And, you had to, then, think about what your job really was. Is it our job to bring out the very latest in this rather unpromising setting where highly contemporary things at that period didn't look very good? We had that big interior sculpture court, it's true, fortunately, otherwise we couldn't have done anything. But whether that was really our role, how much time and money, of what we had, should be spent on getting the very latest thing out of the New York galleries? Well, some people thought, "Yes! Get in there and do it," and other people thought that you just have to measure your time, your money, and your public, and see how much should be given to this costly, it's very costly to bring out too often. And I think most people thought we were doing the percentages about right. Some people didn't, and it gave them, fortunately indeed, if it gave them an impetus to start PCVA, which is one of the-- (It's a darling of mine, feeling the way I do about contemporary art.) If it gave them the impetus to start it, marvelous. Isn't that better than our cramming the sculpture court full of it?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Once or twice a year, never quite a year-long program?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh, no! I really don't think so. That would be my view, much as I like it. The thing like West Coast Now, was a sort of one-time thing. Maybe you might do one of those a year, but I don't know, you'd stand in, when you were having one a month down at contemporary, or not one a month, but pert near [pretty near], down at PCVA-- we should say that's called Portland Center for the Visual Arts, but that doesn't describe it. It was an organization that set out to bring to Portland, which it didn't have enough of, it's certainly true, contemporary American art. So that many people here felt deprived because they didn't have it, and felt that it was the museum's duty to provide it.

BRUCE GUENTHER: The museum board, of course, didn't take that view. The museum board is always...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, they tend to be conservative.

BRUCE GUENTHER: More conservative, yes.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Right. I don't think you could have sold it, ever. For them to do...

[Side 9]

BRUCE GUENTHER: Continuing with PCVA and the role of contemporary art-- there was, there's always the balancing between this national art, the call for the moment, in the international scene, with the balancing, particularly outside of New York, with the recognition of the artists of the region.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yeah. Right. Those are two...

BRUCE GUENTHER: And the Portland Center for the Visual Arts initially did not show any local artists.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: No.

BRUCE GUENTHER: And that burden was still carried by the museum and whatever galleries happened to be surviving at the time.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, I don't know why they started showing local artists, as a matter of fact. Because, well because two artists powerful in the organization were also artists of importance here, but there is now, there are now quite a few places to show. Not like Seattle, but really nobody needs to be without a hearing here, without a showing. An energetic artist will find a way to show here. At least I keep saying that, don't I. Not enough, I know. But it's not as bad as it used to be. The museum, we agreed I think, doesn't have to carry that whole load any longer. But if what we need, and then what we said we needed was to know more about what's going on in New York, then they shouldn't be wasting too much time on what's going on right here. I kind of feel that way. Maybe they, too, didn't have much money. PCVA, like everybody else, must run out of money.

BRUCE GUENTHER: What changes did you feel, as a curator, took place when NEA and, most recently, after your retirement, the State Arts Commission and the Percent for Art laws started happening? Because you, your activity has stretched from the WPA...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: (laughs)

BRUCE GUENTHER: To the present, and...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, at least my life. I wasn't very active in the thirties, but anyway. Yes, I mean, it made all the difference in the world, as you well know. Every, almost every big thing we did was supported; we were very fortunate in grants from the Endowment. Almost every big thing we did was supported, all the things we've been speaking of: the conservation lab (that would be impossible for anybody, any museum to do on its own, a museum like ours), and all of those wood shows-- Many other big things were supported by the Endowment; it made life an entirely different thing. No question about it. Just two different worlds. And may the Endowment never shrink.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Although it seems like it...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Although it seems like it. No, we've worked very well with the Endowment and I'm sure that Seattle has, too. Seattle has, of course, larger funds to draw on locally.

BRUCE GUENTHER: You were involved in helping the Percent for Art come to Oregon?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, yes. We, a lot of us worked on that, and I certainly did. And a lot of good things have come out of that, too. But that was toward the end and after I was, maybe I was already retired when we were working most on that.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Um hmm. [positive] I think that was one of your "now I have time."

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: That's right. That's right.

BRUCE GUENTHER: You retired in 1974.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: And I came back, and I've forgotten how long I worked where there was kind of interim and there was no curator.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Right, and that was the wood shows...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: '75. They happened right toward the end. It wasn't all just-- (You know, I worked right on through at my desk down there, so I must have been there.) on both the Northwest and the 20th Century-- What was that one called? I forget. What'd we call that? The one that he was...

BRUCE GUENTHER: Jan Van der Marck.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Van der Marck was the curator.

BRUCE GUENTHER: I think it was Twentieth Century Wood.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Works in Art in Wood they were all called, I think, weren't they?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Masterworks in Wood.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Masterworks in Wood: The Twentieth Century! Oh, we did a good job on that. It was a very costly show; that came to us from a great many places, Europe, too.

BRUCE GUENTHER: The catalogues are a wonderful series.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes, they're-- And he said, laughing, "It's made me an expert on modern works in wood." I guess it has. Because it was awfully well done.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Yes. It was. Beautiful selection.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Um hmm. [positive] He's nice to work with, although he had a sort of nervous breakdown in the middle of it; but he's a high-strung man, but wonderfully informed. He just knows everything, and-- that is, he can put his hands on it; he's a real, a universal scholar. And he was, he got interested in it. I remember, I don't know how you do this, but Newt's always felt that people should be paid for what they do, and I remember when I went, well [I simply said], "I want de Graff [she means Van der Marck] to do this," and so I went up into his house, and we were sitting there talking about it; I was telling him what we had in mind about the whole project and so on. He was very interested in-- Right away when we began to talk about Twentieth Century, he began to talk about what it should have in it, and the way it should go. His essay is just first rate! And so I said, "We'll pay a thousand dollars for the curator of this show, and this is what we want them to do. And he was very surprised. I think he thought we were asking him to do it free. And, of course, he's a college professor, and these things are a part of his-- You know, they do a lot of things free for the community. And he really was, he was very loyal to that. I think he, I think it surprised him, and it made him respect us, not that he didn't already; we were all good friends. But he was to write the essay, and select the works, and open the negotiations where it would help to have him do it, and then we would go on from there and do all the rest. And I don't know why I'm telling this, particularly, but people so little understand what goes into a show like that. And we really had awfully good relations with our curators. And we got the money to pay them. It may not sound like very much for all that work, but actually it's sizeable.

BRUCE GUENTHER: With those exhibits, your activities at the museum then decrease, and your writing activities in recent years have increased again, and you've been able to...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: My activities at the museum didn't decrease; they stopped. I mean, I didn't do anything after I retired, except when I was brought back to...

BRUCE GUENTHER: Hold the ship together while they bumped around...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: While they didn't have a curator. Yeah, they stopped; I retired. I retired late, but, yeah-- Well, I didn't have a hard time finding things to do, of course. I always write. I just always write something. I'm writing a piece now on portraiture; it's much more interesting than you'd think! And I take part in causes. I'm on the board at Timberline, and I've done a lot of writing for them. Timberline Lodge, Friends of Timberline. And those things keep coming up. Was that your question?

BRUCE GUENTHER: Um hmm. [positive] The kind of things you've been absorbing yourself in.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh, I've done several exhibitions, of course. I did an exhibition called The Sun in Art, at the time of the solar eclipse, for OMSI, Oregon Museum of Science and Industry, and these works were all to be by Portland artists, quite interesting. Works in which the sun figured, and we did a minimal sort of catalogue. But it was fun! It's interesting to get to do a theme show like that.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Right. Just slightly outside what you would have normally done?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Yes. I would have never thought of doing it at all! But they asked me to, and I did it. And I did a show on Belluschi's churches, did a very nice little book with that, and got a very good, very good local photographer. We did that for Contemporary Crafts. And I've done a couple more, but I can't for the moment fish them out. It's been now several years since I retired.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Wood, you did another wood show for Contemporary Crafts?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: I did another-- The show you're thinking of is the show I did for Timberline.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Oh, that was up at Timberline?

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: That was up at Timberline. We have given, every two years, a show we call Mountain High. And it's either, it has to relate in some way to Timberline Lodge. And this was a wood show. Those three, perhaps, but then, there's always something interesting to do.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Oh sure. You've...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Do you want to do? Oh, go ahead.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Well, while we're sort of reflecting back, I was wondering. When one retires, one thinks back over a career, and you think of things, and you come away with a feeling...

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, I have in the last few hours, anyway.

BRUCE GUENTHER: Certainly. (laughs) The present keeps one moving. I mean, Tom Hoving, maybe, when he retired from the MET, would point to two or three items and half the museum built, rebuilt. But what do you feel was your contribution? What absorbed you, in your life in the museum? That's a funny kind of question, I mean it's almost sappy, I'm sorry.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Well, I don't think it's sappy; it's not quite...

BRUCE GUENTHER: Formed well enough, perhaps.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: Oh, let's see. Well, as you saw when you mentioned those poetry meetings, and paintings, and all that, I thought that was one of greatest fun and didn't cost anything, and it was-- I like to do something new. I like to do something that hadn't been done before that didn't, but that in some sense carried on what the objectives of the museum were, that I read to you. And I mean, I have no desire to rub out the past; I hate that, but I like, I like to do something new, I like to [bring] a change on things. So, I did a good deal of that. There were a good many, one would find a good many firsts that I had something to do with, like the film study center and the first films we showed, and those poetry things, and-- Oh, I'm sure we could dig up a lot of them. So I like that. I guess, though, that since you're determined to make me write my own, not obituary, but write the kudos for myself, I think probably it's that I have got a gift for communication about art. And people said to me, have often said this, enough so that I believe it, and (I guess-- Yes, I will now tell you, and perhaps we can close with this, if we don't want to do those comparisons of museums) I think the greatest compliment I ever got was, after giving a talk on a contemporary exhibition, a gallery talk, a woman came up to me and said, "My husband says, 'That lady could make it interesting to watch the grass grow.'" (laughs) So, that's, that's where I would, I would stop there.

BRUCE GUENTHER: That's a really wonderful compliment.

RACHEL SMITH GRIFFIN: It was; I thought so. Better than that, I thought, you can't get.

END OF INTERVIEW

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