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Oral history interview with Frederick James
Cummings, 1982 July 22

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Contact Information

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

Transcript

Interview

DB: DENNIS BARRIE

FC: FREDERICK CUMMINGS

DB: Today is July 22, 1982 and I am here at the home of Doctor Frederick Cummings, Director of the Detroit Institute of Arts. My name is Dennis Barrie. This is the first of our tapes. We thought we would start off today, Fred, talking about just how you and why you came to the DIA, what was the story behind your appointment here?

FC: Okay, Dennis, thank you very much. Actually we're sitting here, looking out on the golf course and sitting among the pink geraniums and the coffee cups and the cookies and it's very relaxed and pleasant. That's probably about the way this will go.

DB: We may never go to work.

FC: I came to the Detroit Art Institute in 1964. At that time I was teaching at the University of Missouri, where I was teaching classes in ancient art and archeology, Greek and Roman art and archeology, and Renaissance art history, Baroque art history, seventeenth century and also American art. I taught the American course there. I had two courses as a teacher per semester. And then I was just getting started at that time. And I was the acting director of the University Museum which was just getting started at that time. Today it's a much more elaborate operation but in those days it was just starting as a part of the museum. It housed the museum's library and small galleries and the small Kress Collection. Saul and Gladyn Weinbert, the ancient classical archaeologists were on the staff. Saul was head of the department and they were very anxious to build the museum. They had put me in charge of it. We had almost no staff at all. It was a very small, a very interesting operation. They had just installed the Kress things in the gallery of the museum with a lot of fanfare. People were giving gifts and we were publishing an annual report to tell what had been done and what had been created. People in New York City were giving gifts. It was a very interesting situation. But I had been at the University of Missouri for three years. As you know, it's out in Columbia, out really in the middle of the state and far away from everything and I was really very isolated. That was my first job. Although the three years at the University were very important years for me and the whole teaching process was extremely useful, it was a great learning period. I worked terribly hard and enjoyed it enormously, but I was ready to leave. Three years was enough. When I took that job I thought I'd take a job anywhere in America because I had a family and my wife's family were wondering if I would ever get to take a job anywhere.

DB: career.

FC: I said I would take a job anywhere. And I did. It was a very interesting job and it was very useful. I'm so happy I've had the teaching background. But it was very clear to me that the museum was more interesting. It involved people, it involved people working in relation to works of art and that fascinated me even on that limited scale. At that time I heard that the curatorship of European art at the Detroit museum was available. I'm not sure, I don't remember exactly how that came to my attention, but I certainly was writing to colleagues all over the country and abroad and I heard about it in some way. And when I did hear that it was available I made every effort to obtain the job and wrote to them. I wrote to Bill Woods who was Director of the Museum at the time and told him of my interest. And I got people from all over the world to write letters actually. Ellis Waterhouse wrote a letter which was wonderful. People from the University of Chicago who had been interested in my career wrote letters. And Bill asked me to come to Detroit, which I did. Came to the airport, met many of the trustees. Bill had just been director for two years at that time. He was just getting established. Larry Fleishman was the Arts Commission president. And I met the Fleischmans, I saw their home, saw their collection of American paintings, American furniture, and of course, was greatly engaged by their enthusiasm, was then and remain so. I was quite interested in that situation. I was offered the position, this was early in the autumn. I was offered the position, I think, in about August or September, and accepted it and came to take up residence. I think it was October 24 or something like that.

DB: Of 1964?

FC: Of 1964. So why did I come? Because the museum had a great reputation. I had been to the museum only a couple of times before when I traveled from the University of Chicago to see the collections. And especially when the Leonardo de Vinci painting was purchased it created so much publicity and we discussed it in classes and its authenticity and its relationship with other works of art. Of course I came to Detroit to see the painting at that time, so I knew a little bit about the collections. I think I knew the Museum most through the Art Quarterly, that scholarly publication that carried the name of the museum everywhere and gave it tremendous distinction. I knew about Valentiner. I knew about Richardson and the work he had done. I had tremendous respect for the

Museum. So, of course when the job was offered to me I took it immediately. I was very excited about that.

DB: Let me just make sure the needle is recording. Let's talk about your position as curator of European art. What I would really like to know is, when you came here could you kind of assess what had gone on in the department and what changes you decided to make, if any?

FC: Okay, well, here we are in the autumn of 1964. I had taken the Civil Service examination out in Columbia and come here.

DB: I forgot about that.

FC: I didn't mention that but I had to take the City of Detroit examination. Of course I had to become familiar with a whole new city and a new kind of institution. Bill Woods was the director. Bill Bostick was the administrator. Those were the two key officers in the Museum at the time. Larry Fleischman was president of the Arts Commission at the moment. The other key personality was Bob Tannahill who was formerly the curator of American art and remained a great patron of the museum. He was on both the Founders board, no he was not on the Arts Commission at that time. He was on the Founders Society board and followed the museum's daily life with tremendous interest. I'll have more to say about that as we go along, but he literally followed it as if it were a heartbeat on a daily basis. The Tannahill story, of course, is one which has to be told at this point. When I came to the Museum as the curator in 1964 we were still in the 1927 Paul Cret building. The Ford Wing had been begun, its construction had begun in 1964, but it was not yet completed. It was to take two or three years before it would be completed. As it turned out, part of my job was to reorganize the installation of the collections had been established by Paul Grigaut who was curator up to 1960, I believe, I'd have to check that.

DB: Somewhere in there.

FC: There was a period of a year there, he came back for a time and who had been gone to Ann Arbor to the museum there. The European collections were all housed in the galleries on the main floor around the Kresge Court, beginning, as continues today, although we have only Italian there now. It began with the early Italian things and went around to Flemish with Bruegel in one of the galleries and then with a few French things interspersed. The Georges de la Tour Saint Sabstian, which of course I knew, was a school piece, it was still called Georges de la Tour, was on view with a Poussin in one gallery. And then going around to the Italian Eighteenth Century works of art all housed in that area. One of the very odd things to me and one of the things I remember and I think tells a great deal about what the museum was like in those days was that all the paintings had small picture lights over them.

DB: Oh really.

FC: There was no gallery light as such. Even today in the Paul Cret building we have a lot of trouble with gallery lighting. But at that time they simply hadn't over come the problem of high ceilings and the top lighting and all of the paintings had picture lights which really was old fashioned.

DB: Kind of overwhelming.

FC: It really wa, it was hokey. So what we did was to get the picture lights off the paintings to get them lighted from the top of the room, no matter how imperfectly. I mean it wasn't always perfect. The circuits were not sufficient to support the amount of electricity required for the individual lights so the lights went out frequently like a tomb. We'd put them on and we have lights out immediately. But anyway we struggled as we continued with that problem and got them lighted properly and rehung. And I began to take down things that were obviously misattributed. And there were several works misattributed as hangovers from the Valentin days. One of the most complicated was the Leonardo de Vinci. It would have been very difficult to change the attribution of that picture in view of the people who had given money, Eleanor Ford and so forth. Finally, and I've forgotten the year now, one day I simply put the picture in the basement. Bill Woods didn't find out about that for some time.

DB: You quietly put it in the basement?

FC: I quietly put it in the basement and Bill didn't find out about it for a long time and when he did he was terribly miffed, terribly miffed. But he didn't change the situation. Then subsequently the picture, oh, but after several years later, and after I was director, the picture was brought back. We rehung it and installed all the galleries and the Italian galleries it was brought back under a different attribution, which I think today should be Fifteenth Century Florentine. I think that's the best.

DB: The best way?

FC: I hope maybe fifteenth century might be. And that's the way it's shown now. It might in fact be called the

Circle of Verrocchio at this point. In any case we put the Georges de la Tour Saint Sebastian in storage. We took down some of the obviously dull and ugly pictures that were shaky in the attribution. But over that period of three years I think that one of the important things that was done was to take a group of French pictures and establish three galleries for French art. There had never been any galleries for French art.

DB: That's very interesting.

FC: We took the three corner galleries, the three galleries behind the large Baroque gallery and to the right of the Woodward entry and made them into galleries for French art. In those days the Kanzler room was installed back there and then we made that a room for seventeenth century French art and then the corner gallery we established as an eighteenth century French gallery with the Kanzler room in the center where we had some French decorative arts. All of that occurred at the time of the the opening of what then was called the South Wing, which is the Ford Wing. And we had taken the Flemish paintings and installed them there and the British and we installed the French art in the main building for the first time in the museum's history. That was an exciting thing to me because I felt that the French collections had been rather badly neglected. I don't know if there was a prejudice against French art. I think there might have been a little bit of prejudice. Mrs. Dodge was collecting avidly in that field. I think there was some feeling that her taste was a little bit too flashy. And I think that Eleanor Ford and Bob Tannahil were much more interested in American and English furniture in their homes and they were not interested in ormolu or furniture mounted with ormolu. I think they felt that that was a little too grand. And they also felt that the American wooden pieces were more sturdy, more attractive when they were enriched with pretty, beautiful textiles and so forth. That that was good taste, whereas Mrs. Dodge didn't have good taste. It may have been that general attitude that kept French collections from growing because Paul Grigaut was very present, he loved French art. Yet there never had been a great emphasis on French art in the museum. So we got it established in that way and it was an exciting thing from my point of view. So from that process we also opened the South Wing and reorganized the collections, put the Flemish paintings on the third floor of the Ford Wing, the Dutch collection that Valentiner had built on the third floor, and then a section for British art was introduced after the German art. And it remains that way today. I think now that Patrice Mandel is here we may have some revision of that concept and some new installations. I'm not sure yet what's going to happen there. But that was the point 1967 that rearrangement was established. So as the curator I had to organize the whole move. We had a lot of pictures cleaned and restored and so forth. In those days Mr. Korony was our conservator along with Billy Seuer. They were itinerant conservators and they came out from New York. I think itinerant is the right word.

DB: I think you are right.

FC: They came from New York or from Florida and took care of the collection. Which was a very haphazard way of handling it, which we changed, of course, in the course of, we began to change in 1970. I'll get to in a moment. At that point And they were wonderful people. I mean I think it's very important to say about Mr. Korony that he was one of the wonderful, wonderful people, he was very good, very knowledgeable in his profession, his metier. He understood conservation technique thoroughly as one who has come up in the trade. He was extremely sensitive, very skilled, full of wonderful stories. He is East European. I guess he's Czechoslovakian probably.

DB: Could be with the name of Korony.

FC: And always very helpful to me, always anxious to give me good counsel on handling people and handling situations. I spent a lot of time with him both in Detroit and at his apartment in New York and in Florida. He was the pipe line to Mr. Seuer. Mr. Seuer would get the great works always whereas Mr. Korony would take care of the more routine things. And if there were a major problem Korony would say, "Well, I think we'd better send this to Mr. Seuer." So the Poussin for example, would go to Seuer. But Korony cleaned pictures like the Ruisdael Jewish Cemetery. That was one of the exciting moments when we cleaned that picture which was one of our greatest masterworks, I suppose. Korony was very nervous about approaching the problem and I think he was unsure as to whether he should do it himself. But he wanted to do it terribly so we didn't send that to Seuer. But he cleaned it. It had darkened very much from the varnishes and nobody dared touch it. It came out just beautifully. He did a very sensitive

DB: It must have obscured most of the detail in the painting.

FC: It's such a dark picture anyway. You can imagine that when the light in the sky came out incredibly after the cleaning he was so excited he was shaking, literally shaking. So we had some exciting moments like that. I think that was cleaned just before we installed the Dutch gallery and before the opening of the Ford Wing. I guess 1966 was the date of the opening of the Ford Wing. Let me look here for just a second. Now throughout the period of the curatorship, well, let's see. Let's talk about exhibitions for just a moment.

DB: Okay.

FC: One of the key things that Bill Woods wanted me to do when I came was to do an exhibition. The education curator, Virginia Harriman Stern, had developed an idea for a series of exhibition programs that she felt would be important for the people who were using the museum and for the docents. It was called the "Great Ages of Art." It was a wonderful idea, a marvelous series. The year before I came I think Paul Grigaut had helped with an exhibition of Elizabethan Renaissance art. So they wanted an exhibition that would be focused on the seventeenth century in Italy. Well, this was absolutely my cup of tea.

DB: Sure, it would be wonderful.

FC: Before I left Missouri I had worked during the summer to plan that exhibition of Cinquecento art which was to be shown, I think, in the spring of 1965. I didn't have a lot of time to do it, it was less than twelve months. But I said I was going to do it and I did get a group of scholars together. We made the selection of pictures. I made the list of paintings before I left Columbia. I got the scholars together and we organized the show and prepared the catalog, edited the catalog, published it by whatever date it was in the spring of the following year. But that exhibition just as a comparison talking with some of the young scholars there and they said they thought that was the beginning, that was a very key moment and that show was a very key show in the interest in later Italian art that developed in the sixties and seventies and up to the present time.

DB: Yes, quite heavily.

FC: Vit Kobar worked on the show. And Donald Posner worked, Bertina Suida Manning worked on it, a whole series of scholars. Altogether there were about six scholars. It was very exciting. We had wonderful Orazio Gentileschi, we had important paintings by Caravaggio, and wonderful things from Denis Mahon's collection in London, he gave us Carraccis, Geurcinos, he gave us some of his greatest things. I think he gave eight pictures or so to the exhibition including the Aldobrandini The Coronation of the Virgin which is by Annibale Carracci which is today in the Metropolitan Museum. He sold it to the Met after his mother's death to pay estate taxes. But that was in that exhibition. It was a survey really of Italian art from the Carracci to the end of the century right up through Carlo Maratti and a little bit beyond. So it was the first major survey of its type in our country, and as it turned out, a very important exhibition. Well, we presented that show in the old galleries, that is the galleries which are now in the Tannahill Wing which were right in the middle of the, which was the old exhibition space. The new building, the Ford Wing, wasn't completed yet. We didn't have the new exhibition galleries. So the show as held in there with those very, very high ceilings. I did a very theatrical presentation of the material which had a certain amount of drama. And we had a tremendous amount of fun with that. Lydia Malbin came to the opening. She hadn't been to, well, we hadn't had become very familiar with the each other, but she came to the opening. It was the first painting show which the museum had had for a very long time and everyone was very interested to know what would be done and what sort of thing might appear. Lydia was so thrilled. She said, "Fred, it's so beautiful, and the paintings are so beautiful, and the presentation is so beautiful." It was a wonderful experience for me. I had no idea that it was so important to them. As it turned out it was terribly important that it be a success. And it was very successful.

DB: Tell me what was the critical reaction to that exhibition.

FC: Well, I've forgotten the name of the critic on the Detroit paper, the News at that time, but it was a woman.

DB: Florence Davies?

FC: No, it was after Florence Davies. It was a woman whose name should be

DB: Written down, etched in your memory, or forgotten?

FC: I've forgotten. She wrote about two paragraphs on the show in which she said, "This is not a very interesting period and it's really not something that people have to see."

DB: That's always encouraging.

FC: I just about died. But in any case it was literally just the smallest kind of notice. So that's where things began, I guess.

DB: Did the show travel?

FC: No, that show was done only in Detroit. People came from all over to see it, of course, from New York. We had a series of lectures by the scholars that had worked on the catalog. Seymour Slive came. Denis Mohan came from London. Seymour was thrilled with the show. He said tremendously positive things about it. We discussed it in great detail, individual pictures. Some he liked, some he didn't like. The show was a little bit uneven in terms of quality. There were some pictures that probably should not have been in the exhibition. It was interesting to have the Caravaggio Sleeping Eros from Indianapolis, but really questionable as to whether or not it should have

been in such a show. There was that kind of thing that happened which I wouldn't have done after I became more accustomed to handling exhibitions of that type. But people came from all over and enjoyed it immensely. It was a great success with the scholarly community. We had awfully good attendance. The public loved the drama of the presentation which was done with a lot of, oh, curtains and textiles backing it up.

DB: And this was considered a part of that "Great Ages of Art?"

FC: It was part of the "Great Ages of Art" series.

DB: So there was a lot of educational material?

FC: The Education Department did a tremendous job of back-up with tours and gallery guides. In those days we didn't do the little in the newspaper. But they had the catalog. The catalog was done under Mr. Bostick's supervision. Although the editing we did ourselves, our own staff. I was not really an editor in those days.

DB: There wasn't a Publication Department?

FC: There was no Publication Department. There was no back-up at all. We had to do everything ourselves. Bill Bostick did the design. I think for the first time we got Abrams to distribute it. The museum had never done anything like that, of course. And it wasn't terribly beneficial financially. So there were a lot of connections with that. That was the 1965 show and that really did get things established for the department and got me established in the museum. And people did feel that there was an understanding of European art in the grand tradition and that kind of thing. So that was a good launching pad. The acquisitions in those days, when I came, Bill Woods was in the process of buying Rubens painting the Saint Ives. The museum had just inherited some money from Mr. Kogut and they wanted to identify this huge altarpiece of Saint Ives receiving the poor and they were considering buying it. Well, Bill showed it to me and said, "What do you think? We're in the process of buying it. Eleanor Ford wants to give us some money and we'll have the picture." And I said, "Bill, terrific. It looks wonderful." What could you say at that point. I think it's a marvelous picture. I still think it is and I'm very happy the Museum has it. It's the kind of picture you want. It was installed in the big Baroque gallery where all the Rubens paintings were installed. And it looks extremely well in there. It looked wonderful. And everybody was very touchy about the question of any workshop participation and it was not allowed to be discussed. Especially Larry Fleischman was very touchy about that issue. But I think that was a splendid thing to have. The next year 1965, we bought the Terborch painting from the Rothchilds. What a fabulous picture and what a great painter. Eleanor Ford of course gave the money for it which was \$500,000 and created a terrific scandal in the press. Everybody said, "My God, Terborch has never brought that much money, he's a minor master. Why should we be spending this much money?" Joy Hakanson Colby, I think, wrote the articles on that, it was in the headlines. Everybody in those days and I think they still are most hypersensitive about the press.

DB: I think they always are.

FC: That created a lot of tension. Today, you know, prices of Dutch pictures have just soared and soared incredibly. To get a picture like that at that price seemed fabulous. But at that time it was a lot of money and the Museum wasn't accustomed to spending that much money for a picture. I first saw the picture in Billy Seuer's studio. That's the way these things happened in those days.

DB: In those simple days.

FC: Larry Fleischman, I imagine that this was purchased, I've forgotten but probably through Rosenberg and Stiebel who had the pipe line to the Rothchilds, had good relations with various parts of the Rothchild family and often got things from the collection and then would sell them. And then either Larry saw it at Rosenberg and Stiebel or, I still do not know how that happened. But the first time I saw it, it was in Billy Seuer's studio and I was, well I was thrilled with the picture. Eleanor Ford loved the painting, she always, always loved that picture. Even before her death when she would go through the museum, one day I took her through the Dutch gallery and she saw the Terborch and this was many, many years after, maybe ten or twelve years after, she saw the picture across the room and she said, "What a wonderful painting." She still loved it. I said, "But Mrs. Ford, you gave that picture to the museum." She said, "I did? One of my better choices." But she loved the picture and

[INTERRUPTION]

FC: I was saying while the tape was off that I think it was rather incredible to come to the museum at a point when the museum was expanding, building the South and in essence being faced with the reinstallation of the collection that had been established, installed for, well, at that point not quite fifty years.

DB: Would you comment on that, comment on the difficulties involved in that?

FC: Well, as we were saying, it was a very different world in those days. The whole way of working was quite

different. The European department had always been one of the key departments in the museum and the collection of European art was much larger. Of course Bill Peck was here in the ancient field. And Francis Robinson was on the staff taking care of ancient and that material from the Western Hemisphere. We had a much smaller staff to install things. We did not, we were not thinking of scientific approaches to things. It was much more of a gentleman's situation. A gentleman's situation especially with Francis around.

DB: Sure, the old school.

FC: He was of the old school. And of course, I deferred to him deeply and always wanted to get his ideas about who people were and what they had done. And yet we were faced with a new building, a new situation, new lighting conditions, there was a new air conditioning situation, a lot of which, all of which had been established before I came along. I'm not sure I would have been able to handle or change it if I had come along any earlier. It was all set up. So we had basically the task of installing the collections. And it was very clear that everything was a mishmash, that is, everything had, all the European things were put together generally by period. Which in itself is not such a bad idea, but it was a lot of material, and it was very hard to rationalize it to come up with any coherent sense of what different periods or countries. So it seemed to me that what we should try to do, there were some distinct collections, the Dutch seventeenth century collection which Valentiner had built and which is still today Valentiner's collection and which really hasn't been changed very much. And then the Flemish collection was a distinct collection. There was a group of early German sculptures, all of which were installed in the Gothic hall with the early Italian sculptures. And the Gothic room was truly Gothic, I mean truly Gothic. It was just crammed full of objects and there was hardly any light at all, and they were dusty and they were just sitting there, and there were not vitrines to cover the objects to protect them. And there was stained glass. And you really had to work very hard in reading labels that were present to find out what all the material was about. And there were German things in there as well. I may have mentioned that, I've mentioned the German. So I thought, well, let's try to get the Flemish things set up in a developmental pattern, and then let's have a room for the German art. And then I thought, well, there are so many British paintings that this forms a distinct group in its own right. The Detroit families had been able somehow to have a kind of predilection for British portraits in their homes. The Fishers had a lot of them. Everybody seemed to have some British portraits. As a result of that over the years we had been given a lot of British things. And we had acquired some. Larry Fleishman had acquired the great Fuseli painting. I've forgotten, I think that was in 1955 that that was bought. That was *The Nightmare*. Larry bought it for very little. He bought it with a man named Bert Smokler, a very interesting businessman in the area. No longer living now, I think.

DB: I don't think so.

FC: And then they gave it to the museum. They didn't pay much for it and didn't quite realize how important it was historically. In fact, had no idea of its historical importance, but knew that it was an unusual, dramatic and very interesting picture. That was the talent that Larry Fleishmann had to appreciate this talent. He gave the picture, as I say, and thank God, so we have that great masterwork in the collections today. So we put that in one room and there were some really marvelous things. Of course, Richardson had a certain kind of feeling for British painting because of his interest in American art. And I'm sure it was Richardson who bought the Francis Feke picture of a *Conversation Group of a Family Sitting in an Open Landscape*. It is one of the most perfect paintings in that collection of British art. So very selectively works had been purchased to add to the things that had been given by the families in the area. And the British collection it seems that that should have its own section in the Museum. So by doing that we got North European art more or less all together on one floor of the building. And then we put the Italian paintings in the other section. Now I guess I've gotten this a little bit mixed up because I said that we established the three French galleries at the time we opened the Ford Wing, but in fact it seems to me that we put the French thing in the el of the Ford Wing and put them in place at the time we opened the South Wing, so we must have established those three French galleries just a little bit before the opening, maybe in 1965 and 1966, something like that.

DB: But in that transitional period when you were indeed reinstalling them in the new wing.

FC: So then apparently we took the French things that we put together and put them over in the Ford Wing on the main level and ultimately then the Dodge Collection was given so then we were able to open that up and ultimately we got the Kanzler Room open there in time and that increasingly developed as a collection of French art. And later we should just give some attention to the French thing and the way that whole collection developed. So that was an exciting moment when the South Wing was opened in 1966 and people came from all over.

DB: Was it always designed? I mean intended that the South Wing would be basically a European wing with the two temporary exhibition spaces?

FC: It was really thought of as being the European wing. On the first floor we have the side galleries, which today I think are 147, 148 and 149, we had those utilized for the art of the Western Hemisphere, pre-Colombian

art, Caribbean, Aztec, Mexican. And then in the center, in Gallery 150, the large gallery, that was used for various things. At one point we had Eskimo material in on part of that gallery with the Williams Collection of African Art in the other section so we had an African art gallery there focusing on the William Collection. Bill Woods was very sensitive to the community and to the interest of the black community in having representation in the museum. He worked from an early stage with the African Art Gallery committee, encouraged them. He worked with G. Mennem Williams, encouraged him. The Williams things were all placed on loan, many of them were given later to the museum. So that the first level was really like ethnographic art, let's say.

DB: Right.

FC: And with the South Court being utilized for modern sculpture as it still is today. But the upper two levels were European. That's the way it was set up.

DB: Including the big gallery, 250 is it? That is still

FC: That was temporary exhibitions.

DB: Temporary at that point?

FC: Yes, temporary exhibitions at that point with the side galleries so those were conceived as temporary exhibition galleries. And the Gresge reception hall and the el of the Ford Wing were all for French art.

DB: Aha. With the reinstallation in the South Wing and in the old Paul Cret Building, would you pretty much have most of what was in storage then up on the walls?

FC: Yes, I think it's fair to say that everything of quality was on view at that point. And in fact, we were stretching ourselves a bit thin, you know, really. I had a little talk with Sherman Lee about that. We talked about the Dutch Gallery and I said something about having so many different artists introduced into the gallery. He said, "Well, at times there is some questionable art because the quality falls off a bit." And I said, "Yes, that's fine but it really is extremely interesting to see those artists and to see those pictures which have been in storage for so many years." So it was pretty clear that we were stretching ourselves a little thing in terms of quality. There was a lot of new space and we hadn't acquired a lot of works of art so we had to use what we had. Sometimes the quality fell off a bit. Sherman was certainly aware of that. I'm sure the other people were.

DB: Well, what direction did you want to take the collection in at that point as curator?

FC: Okay, the thing that I felt was very important to do was to enhance the later collection of Italian art. Valentiner had built the Early Italian things so well, so in depth, that that was his contribution. I thought, but later things were more or less totally neglected.

DB: After 1600?

FC: That's right. And I felt, my goodness, some of the greatest possible things come after 1600. And so I wanted to enhance the collection of greater Italian art. Which we did. We did talk about that. The seventeenth century Dutch Collection was Valentiner's collection. I thought, well, that's very complete and I'm not going to focus on that field. We really haven't done very much there at all. We bought the Terborch. We were given perhaps things over the years but pretty fairly minor things. The Wilson family gave the Rembrandt The Man with the Plumed Hat. I was thrilled to be asked to go to New York and to realize that it was a Rembrandt and to seek the scholarly back up and to add that to the collection. But that was one of those wonderful things that happen, unplanned things. It's a wonderful picture. And the early Flemish collection was Valentiner's too. Although if I found a marvelous Flemish painting that I felt should be added I would certainly have done that. We have added a few things in that field. Snyders Still Life and Rubens sketch and the Rubens Portrait of Charles V. That's about it. So those were things that seemed rather complete. But the areas that were not complete were later Italian art. French art was more or less totally neglected which was

DB: Of all periods?

FC: Of all periods from the sixteenth century to the twentieth century. Now that isn't entirely accurate because in the twenties they had purchased the Van Goh Self-Portrait, in 1922 or thereabouts the Matisse The Window. I think partly Valentiner's presence was felt here on these. He became adviser in 1921 and these were purchased in 1922, in that area. Albert Kahn I always thing had a lot to do with those decisions. He was on the Arts Commission at that time and whose taste was very advanced.

DB: That's very interesting.

FC: He was extremely strong. I would say, and who had in his own personal collection his great Pissarro and Degas and things of that sort. So they had a few things in the French field. Then who is the great collector, I've

forgotten his name. We had one person who was deeply interested in French art. I've forgotten the name now. I'll have to go back, there is a catalog of that collection.

DB: We'll think of it.

FC: We'll think of it, but I've forgotten just now. But basically the French things had been neglected pretty badly and the things that had been acquired were of varying quality. The La Tour painting should not have been acquired. On the other hand, the Poussin, of course, was one of the great, great acquisitions of the entire history of the museum. So it was this sort of thing. Then there were some minor portraits some that should never have gotten there, some that just happened in one way or another. There was no consistency and no focus. The eighteenth century had been neglected particularly, the nineteenth century more or less. That was to develop, the French collection was to develop over a period of many, many years. I wanted to add in a field of British art as well. It happens to be of special interest to me. Actually I feel today that I should have been much more aggressive about that, but Bob Tannahill was not very interested in pre-Raphaelite painting.

DB: As we know.

FC: I would have to tell him about Burne-Jones. Well, I mean just about. He was not interested in discussing Burne-Jones. Too bad because in those days we could have purchased Burne-Jones for nothing. And today Burne-Jones is a very expensive item. I felt perhaps we could buy one great nineteenth-century British picture every few years, but as it turned out it wasn't an easy thing to do. They were not enthusiastic about those pictures. I guess I always felt I should have been a little more careful when probably I should have been much less careful. We have purchased some nice British things, but not enough. Over the years I've purchased some distinctive pictures. Well, let's see, where else? I felt that in decorative arts we should add fabulous objects when possible. And that in European sculpture we had very little sculpture throughout. I don't think that Richardson had a strong feeling for sculpture.

DB: I think you may be right.

FC: I don't know that. Bob Tannahill certainly understood sculpture, but there was no sense that we should have really grand sculptures in the museum. The paintings were always given priority. So I felt that sculpture generally should be added to the collections.

DB: From all periods?

FC: From all periods, all European periods wherever one could get marvelous sculptures, twentieth century or earlier periods, great bronzes, eighteenth century, nineteenth century, whatever you could get together because sculpture would enhance the galleries. And then great furniture and French furniture I wanted to add but didn't have a tremendous opportunity to do so until we got the Dodge things. But I think those are some of the main areas, speaking only of European now. Later I suppose we'll get to the rest of the countries.

DB: Later we'll deal with other galleries in other areas. We'll watch our time. We'll stop for a minute. We thought at this point we'd deal with some of the specifics as far as additions to purchases for the collection. Where would you like to start?

FC: All right. Well, in 1965 we bought the Terborch. Also in 1965 we purchased the Niccolo dell'Abbate painting, the sixteenth century French artist, School of Fontainebleau, he came from Northern Italy. A painting that is called Eros and Psyche, a picture that is really very important French Renaissance painting. I learned about the picture through a scholar who had in fact been a student of mine at the University of Missouri who was working on the School of Fontainebleau. He was in Paris at the time. The picture was owned in New York by Knoedlers. I went to see the painting, very beautiful, very rare, a marvelous, interesting thing. The picture was \$13,000 and absolutely so inexpensive and cheap. I had it brought out and everybody said, "Oh, what an odd painting, what an unusual, what a strange picture, not a very interesting picture, why do you want that, why does this lady have this strange coloration, pink on her hands and pink on her face? Anne Woods gave me a little bit of trouble about the cosmetic and these two nude people in bed. There were all kinds of But Bob Tannahill supported the picture and gave the money from his fund, which wasn't that much money. I always think of it as a very key, marvelous picture to add to the collection. But the next painting of course was the Orazio Gentileschi of the Young Woman with Violin, of Santa Cecilia in 1967 and this began the sequence of later European masterworks that we added. Eleanor Ford gave the money anonymously in the beginning. It wasn't till many years later that we were able to place her name on the painting. I think it was after her death actually that we added her name. She gave anonymously during her lifetime. Again there was a tremendous scandal. The picture was \$300,000. The price was in the papers. The picture was purchased from Wildenstein's, the only picture we bought from Wildenstein's. I have to say it was the only picture that we got from Wildensteins over all the years I've been working. Which may or may not be a mistake, I don't know. But pictures were always very expensive there. But this particular painting was so beautiful that I was bowled over by it. And I thought, my goodness, we must have it. I got Bill Woods to come and look at it with Lee Hills, who was then president of the Art Commission just

taking up right after Larry Fleishman resigned. I think that was just at the end of 1966 that Larry resigned and Lee took over. A fabulous, fabulous man. He came with his wife, Tina, and saw the picture and they loved it. Everybody thought it was so fabulous. Mrs. Ford gave the money, loved doing it. But then there was the tremendous problem with the press because a violin specialist said that the violin was not really a proper kind of violin for that date and the bow especially was the wrong kind of bow. So instead of accepting the document as a document to improve our understanding of the history of violins it was treated in quite the opposite way. As based on current knowledge it must be a forgery. So I had to face that. And we had a lot of fun with it, we had a lot of traumas with it. But thank God, we got that fabulous, fabulous painting to add to the later Italian collection.

DB: Just one stop back. Why were these purchases always so focused on in the press? Was it policy in those days? I assume today that because you are a city building that a major purchase had to be announced price-wise? Or what was the situation?

FC: The price was certainly sought by the press and it was not held back. It certainly was given to the press. I think we felt that we as a public institution we couldn't withhold the price. And when it was a high price it was inevitably a matter of headlines, I mean big headlines.

DB: Particularly in that period?

FC: Yes, especially in that period. We are talking about the period of the riots aren't we? I mean 1967.

DB: Yes, very much so.

FC: It was a time of tension.

DB: That's absolutely true. That's an interesting concept.

FC: They were very alert to any kind of We had to face it every time.

DB: So what followed?

FC: probably this controversy over the violin Baroque. About that time we bought the Rembrandt that was given by the Wilson fund which was a most exciting discovery and And then shortly after, and I just forget what the date was, just one second.

DB: Go right ahead.

FC: In 1969 we bought the Guido Reni painting of St. Jerome and the Angel which I always think is one of our very, very beautiful, wonderful paintings. And it was very important in the collection because the Gentileschi gave a very complete understanding of what Roman painting was about in 1610-1612, and the Guido Reni, of course, gives a very complete presentation of Bolognese painting around 1640, really the height, in both cases, of Baroque art. And Reni is such a great genius and this particular picture had all of the elements that one associates with his greatest moments, the wonderful pale blond coloration, and fabulous brushwork, very good brushwork which was at the end of his life. The picture is a finished painting, it dates right from 1640, he died in 1642. It's a finished picture. Several of the paintings of that moment are not finished, such as the Chicago picture which is certainly equally beautiful, the great painting of Salome in Chicago. But is an unfinished work. And the picture in Cleveland is unfinished. Both of those pictures were purchased, I'm sorry, the Cleveland picture was purchased by John Maxon before we purchased our Guido Reni. But the picture, of course, has to be compared to the Vienna painting of St. Jerome and the Angel. There is a lot of, there often are very interesting discussions about which is more beautiful and many people feel the Vienna picture is more beautiful. Nevertheless, this one is so fabulous that I have no

DB: You have no qualms about having it up there.

FC: That's correct. The painting was not very expensive. It was about \$90,000 and we bought it with funds that were available from the endowment income. And it was just on one of the most exciting things that one could do. Well, the next great Baroque picture was the Guercino The Assumption of the Virgin, which we purchased in 1971, again a great altarpiece. This picture was shown to me first by Denis Mohan in London. I saw it in a warehouse there. He knew about it because he knew about every Guercino that was coming from any

DB: From any direction?

FC: Any church, any school, any whatever, and brought it to attention. That's a fabulous painting and we had it brought out and we acquired that about two years later. So we had a sequence of Roman and Bolognese pictures as a result of that.

DB: Which very much strengthened the Baroque area.

FC: That's correct. At the same time we were purchasing in other directions. We acquired the Oudry painting of the Sieur de la Bruyere's Garden in 1967.

DB: It's so colorful.

FC: A fabulous still life that we were able to add to begin to get some solidity to the French collections. I think just before that We purchased that for about \$50,000, in those days not a tremendous amount of money. And we got the De Portes Still Life of 1711 just about the

[END OF INTERVIEW]