Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Ian McKibbin White, 1987 January 8-12

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

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Ian McKibbin White on January 8, 1987. The interview was conducted at the AAA West Coast Regional Center by Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

IW: IAN MCKIBBIN WHITE
PK: PAUL J. KARLSTROM

[Tape 1, side A—30-minute tape sides]

PK: . . . [Archives of] American Art, the Smithsonian Institution, a taped interview with Ian McKibbin White, the Director of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. The interviewer is Paul Karlstrom, the date January 8, 1987, and the place is the West Coast Regional Center of the Archives of American Art, that just happens to be also the deYoung Museum.

IW: Bravo.

PK: Bravo. (chuckles) Ian, I really mean it when I say that this is a pleasure for me. We've had an association now for almost fourteen years—it may be hard for you to believe that—and it's been for me a very pleasant association. I've enjoyed being an outsider inside the Fine Arts Museums, watching the really impressive, remarkable growth—changes in these institutions—things about which we'll talk very soon. Really, I think, the theme of the interview. You were the subject of an earlier interview for the Archives of American Art. It was six years ago, and in looking at the date I see it was just about exactly six years ago. At least the second part of it, because that was on January 9, 1981. Today is the eighth.

IW: _____ _____.

PK: In '87.

IW: Yeah.

PK: That interview was most interestingly, or appropriately, conducted by your predecessor, the Director Emeritus of the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, Thomas Carr Howe. And in rereading that particular interview, I realized that that took place at the time preparations were being made for Don Stover's Tiffany exhibition, which turned out to be I think more of success than anybody realized. We might be able to touch on that a bit. Well, much has happened during the past seven years, and I suppose it's possible that some of the views you expressed in the earlier interview have been modified a bit with the passing of time. I may ask some questions, naturally enough, that you've already answered in the earlier interview, so if you'll bear with me on that. . . . But it's possible that you answered then from a different perspective, and that perspective—or your current perspective—is above all, I think, your impending retirement, coming up, I think, this spring.

IW: Um hmm.

PK: What month is the official _____?

IW: As some friend of mine said, "Oh! You're retiring on April Fool's Day!" It's the end of March, is the way it looks now.

PK: Okay, I suppose there's some possibility for a last-minute change of mind?

IW: No, I mean, that's just a matter of modifying it by a matter of days, as we see now. But essentially that's the period that we're aiming for.

PK: Well obviously, with that decision comes the recognition that your career at the museums is in fact coming to an end, as all good things must. So this afternoon, I would like to deal with three or four themes which may be viewed as highlights of your directorship, among them, some of the things that I can think of, might be the merger of the museums, and the dedication of the Legion to French art—the only museum—I think, still—of French art, exclusively French art in the country.

IW: Um hmm.

PK: Another topic, the continuing series of major traveling exhibitions—blockbusters, as they've been called. Something that at one point we thought, "Gee, this can't go on," indeed to a certain extent seems to go on. Also the development—of special interest to us—the American program and the collection, of the Rockefeller collection at the DeYoung. And I would think a very important part of this, the increase of museum-originated exhibitions, locally originated exhibitions, with publications, and in some cases I think very impressive, distinguished publications. All of these [now] of course seem to indicate very impressive growth of the institutions which you've directed over the past twenty years. And this I think would be the underlying theme of this interview, basically the growth—the reasons for, and people involved, and this kind of thing—of the museums.
But let me start out now with a first question for you—and I think an important way to start out. Specifically, what will you point to as your most notable achievements during the last twenty years? What things come to mind in this respect for you?

IW: Fine, Paul. Let me just preface by saying that, referring back to your remarks about the earlier interview, that I can't recall from day to day what happens because we move at such a mad pace that I couldn't possibly recall what was actually in that interview. I've not reviewed it, I think, since then, even though a transcript of it sits on my shelf at home.

PK: Not on your coffee table? [smiling]

IW: Not on my coffee table. But if it's repetitious, it may in itself be answering your question as to some of the most important things. But let me get down to your question of what I think some of the achievements of the last two decades are—or have been. Let me put this in the context of something that's right on us now, and the time between now and when I do turn over the reins in the next, just a little over two-and-a-half months. We're planning, as you're aware, sort of a celebration to review what's happened at this museum during this period, and I've come up, after groping for several weeks, with a sort of a catchy title for it, what I think summarizes the whole period, and I'm calling it Looking Back to the Future. Because if you put that in the larger context, what really we have done is melded two smaller museums into a comprehensive regional art museum, that really is, I think, worthy of San Francisco. And in a number of respects, this has been a really pioneering effort. For instance, just for two examples—or let's make it three. There's the whole concept of docenting, that if it wasn't really invented at these museums before I got here, I hasten to say, it was certainly developed and spread by example from the leadership at the DeYoung Museum primarily. And then again, also another aspect of that is volunteers and volunteerism, and not every museum across the country treats volunteers in the way we have, and we've been very cordial to them and I'd like to think a good deal more cordial than we started off. I was talking with the volunteers recently, and pointed out that when I first came here, we had what we called Balloon Girls.

PK: Balloon Girls?

IW: Balloon Girls. That terrible. . . .

PK: I'm not sure I want to hear.

IW: You may not want to hear. (chuckles) I do go back to Sally Rand and the Treasure Island in 1939, but this is not that far back. But these were really how you began the volunteer here at a certain level, sort of a Junior League group of people would come in and pass script at openings, which you would purchase drinks with.

PK: Right.

IW: And there was a balloon attached to their basket, so that was the, this became very insulting to people. Especially I remember one young collector who wanted to start volunteering in the Achenbach, and that was what we told him he could do.

PK: (chuckles) That's pretty _____.

IW: It was a bad scene. Now we have volunteers, and I don't want to get off on that, but we have volunteers working at all levels, from the most, the simplest task to, well, of the most sophisticated, including wonderful scholars—Anna Bennett being just one example at the other end.

PK: Well, and you probably know that we even have had the benefit of using some of your volunteers through the excellent coordinator, Kathy [Mauldin, Moder].

IW: Yes, good.

PK: And we've had, have one right now, as a matter of fact, who comes in once a week and helps with our collections.

IW: This is, I think you're just a typical example of. . . . Every department in the museum, virtually, has had volunteers. Well, I think the third area is also something that should be taken into account, and that is the role that these museums have taken in the world community of museums with regard to the treatment of, patrimony of country's museums. The example of the Teotihuacan murals.

PK: Could you briefly describe I think maybe two real good examples?

IW: Okay. The Teotihuacan murals were objects that came from that site outside Mexico City, really the first great city in the Western Hemisphere. This received a bequest out of the blue from a person in San Francisco of a great many mural fragments, and this came, as I say, a complete surprise, and immediately it was the cause of alarm because they were probably exported illegally at that time, about the time that they were working around that site, at the time of the creation of the National Museum of Anthropology They had a lot of ceremony that took place out there with VIPs, and, as I recall, they excavated around them and put road in over part of the site, and things came out and were probably brought in illegally. Rather than get into a long harangue between the two governments at the diplomatic level, it was decided to negotiate it between professional organizations: this museum and [INAA], the International, Institute of National, Institute of Art and Architecture, I think is how it translates. But anyway, the bottom line was that we reached a landmark decision, which the mural fragments would be restored here in San Francisco using restorers, some restorers from Mexico from the [Cherubusca] Center who were very well versed in handling this kind of material. We raised the money to do it, and then agreed, the agreement between the Mexican government and ourselves was that half of the lot of them would stay here in San Francisco, half would be returned to Mexico, and the ones in San Francisco would be representative of that great pre-Columbian culture that extended up long before the present geographical boundaries were drawn, that kind of thing. And there are many other ramifications to this project. Publishing it. The Smithsonian received a grant from the Kellogg Foundation, Kellogg of Kellogg Cornflake fame. We were chosen as one of twelve exemplary museums in this country to do a program, each one of us to illustrate some kind of networking. And this was a perfect vehicle for this, because it not only was networking within our community locally, but also internationally with the Mexican government. I mean, that's just one example. The return of the [Moa, Loa] painting is another one, which a painting that was one of a pair, it now appears, that had been collected by Louis the [Fourteenth, XIV] that had disappeared from France after the war. The story was that it was, with the rearrangements of collections occasioned by the war—Second World War—two paintings that Louis the Fourteenth had acquired by Pierre Francesca Moa were put on view at the [Elysses] Palace. One of them disappeared mysteriously. We now believe that it had been stolen by a guard and gotten out onto the market, and it was acquired by the Samuel Kress Foundation in the early fifties. And then when those collections that were the property of the Kress Foundation were distributed among American museums, that was one of I think 43 or 46 paintings that came in a large collection here. And over a long period of time, there had been some question raised about the French. . . . Officials at the Louvre had never been totally sure it was theirs. They thought it might have been another version, and the confusion all hinged on whether it was a painting that was circular—or oval or square, or whether it had been framed in a, a square painting framed with an oval opening, that sort. And only recently, the last few years, a young curator has been working on the Louis Fourteenth collection of the seventeenth century, and presented really conclusive evidence that it was the actual one that had disappeared from Paris. And this museum agreed to return it. And that culminated in its return last October 24, in a ceremony at the Louvre.

PK: That followed the arrangement with Mexico, on the Teotihuacan murals.

IW: Um hmm, yes.

PK: How did this come about? I mean, whose, how did you and presumably the board here at the museum decide to do this, to repatriate these works of art? Was it upon request?

IW: No! Absolutely [not, nothing]. I think we have come to realize in the last few years, I mean, the last ten years, that museums have a higher responsibility than to just try and hold on to everything that has come their way, if there is evidence presented that conclusively indicates that it's not something that we have legitimate title to. We have, we hammered out over a number of years a collection management policy and an acquisition policy even before that that incorporated this kind of thing, this kind of attitude. And in the. . . . I think this has been a part of conscience-raising by museums in this country. I was particularly, I think, conscious of this because of the periods that I have played active roles in [ICOM]. There have been two distinct periods in which I have served on the American committee: many years ago for several years, of ICOM, and then more recently, again on the American committee, including last—a year ago—I was chairman of it for a year. And then the international aspect of that, serving as an officer of the international committee on fine arts of ICOM. And it's very difficult to sit on those forums and not understand these higher responsibilities that museums have.

PK: Right.

IW: I mean, they're, there's a great deal more than just Melina Mercouri screaming about the [freeze, frieze] on

the Parthenon. There are some fairly clear-cut principles involved here.

PK: So obviously take pride in the role the Fine Arts [Museum has, Museum's, museum's] taken in this issue.

IW: Yes, and these are, you know, this is the cutting edge. The murals were mentioned in the International Forum of the International ICOM triennial meeting in London in 1983. And it was one of the landmark decisions, is an easy way to say it.

PK: Well, you mentioned three different things which you feel represent, well, high points during your tenure here. And I'm sure there are many more. Are there any at this time that you would like to point to, in terms of achievements?

IW: Well, those are just three that might not be normally thought of. . . .

PK: Yes, right, that's what I [thought].

IW: . . . as ones, yeah. No, I think the main thrust of most of this was first, the merger—most of this period—was the merger. And the creating of the institution that exists today. You could say that in a very technical, precise sense that was a three-year period at that beginning, but it really wasn't. I mean, beyond setting up the machinery, there is building an operation that then fits the machinery. That sounds backwards, but. . . . For instance, building a new staff literally from scratch was key to that and was not something that happened within the first three years. It began. The first step in terms of the curatorial staff was to, for instance, just combine existing departments, curatorial departments. Excuse me.
[Interruption in taping]

PK: Excuse the interruption, Ian, if you would pick up on that?

IW: Well, it was my interruption. But the, I think what I was talking about was building the staff, and our method of doing this initially was simply to put the curators. . . . If we had one department, the same department in one of the museums we had in the other, we simply joined forces, and whoever was the senior person was put in charge of that department. And that way we melded everybody who was then there without making radical moves at the beginning.

PK: In other words, eliminating staff at one institution if it was duplicating. . . .

IW: That's right. Yeah.

PK: Of course the staff, still as was certainly then, never was all that large. It would seem that the, that if the people were good or useful that there would be a place for them.

IW: That's right. But we grew from. . . . I think we would have had just, in those days we would have had a paintings department, a works-on-paper department—the Ochenbach, existed at the Legion—and we had decorative arts and sculpture. And it's now proliferated and elaborated into seven departments, so that we have two departments of paintings (one European paintings, one American paintings), we have two departments of decorative arts and sculpture (one European, one American), we have the Ochenbach works on paper, and then textiles (which is the newest department), and the one that we simply AOA—America-Oceania. . . . Africa, Oceania, and the Americas. And this was all part of the growth and the expansion of the collections. The American department, of course, I think was the most spectacular, but when we put the collections together, we did this first by simply saying that works that belonged to one museum or the other could be put on loan to whichever it seemed more appropriate to, and what we did was changed it from two small museums that duplicated each other, to organize them according to national schools, really for the first time. And this is when we came up with two things that have certainly been hallmarks of this period. One was putting the American collections that existed together, [correcting himself:] that existed in each building separately together for the first time. We did it as an exhibition, and did a little, there's a checklist catalogue of it. And that indeed was what attracted Mr. Rockefeller when we made a major purchase of American painting, the. . . .

PK: Was that the [Frederick Edwin?—Ed.] Church?

IW: That was the Church, _____ _____ and the Prophets. And the second aspect was to build on the strength of the French collections, and because of the whole flavor of the Legion of Honor—being very French in its architecture and through the. . . .

PK: Rodin?

IW: . . . through the Spreckles collections, yes, the Rodin and the French furniture that had come in through the Huntingtons and others—to make that, as you said, still a unique, virtually unique museum of French art in this country.

PK: Well, let me ask you straight out, who were the key players in these decisions? There was a series of decisions. It seems to me once the decision was made to merge, to bring the institutions, these other things followed, but obviously somebody was masterminding all this, and I assume that you were the one, or would you describe in a sort of a more committee way? Whose idea?

IW: Well, I think certain elements fell into place from contributions from one source or another. One aspect of the Legion, for instance, was that part of the merging process was that the trustees were adamant, the trustees of the Legion were adamant that it should not become a static collection. There was a lot of talk in those days of, "Well, we'll make this sort of the Frick of San Francisco, and the active museum would be the deYoung for the special exhibitions." Even though there was never any specific space set aside for special exhibitions at the Legion, they had always had certain galleries that they used for special exhibitions, even though the permanent collection went back into those galleries between shows. The trustees were adamant that it should still have an active program, at both buildings, of special exhibitions, and that's still the mode today.

PK: What was. . . . Part of the reason for that thinking, did it have something to do with the Norton Simon collection on display, or did that predate. . . .

IW: No that predated, in fact. That followed out of that _____ thinking.

PK: Because that certainly would encourage one to think of that possibility of Frick West, the Simon works being an exhibition of [_____]. . . .

IW: No, it was before that. I think it really came out of some of those little rivalries that had existed, characterized the history between the museums. They did not want to become, to have one become sort of a dead center, but both keep a very active program, and. . . .

PK: Acquisitions, exhibitions. . . .

IW: That's right. And in moving the staff departments around, we very consciously kept. . . . I always wanted to keep my office at the Legion though it was a decision to move practically all of the curatorial departments logically close to the library, and that's why most of them ended up at the DeYoung, but the Achenbach had been located at the Legion, and we had the good fortune of the [Fagen] bequest, which enabled those galleries to expand substantially, so that we've always had the one curatorial. . . .

[Tape 1, side B]

PK: An interview with Ian White, this is tape one, side two, and do you want to pick up on the last. . . .

IW: Yeah. I think the question was who were the decision makers.

PK: Um hmm.

IW: Well, I can't say I'm going to take credit for everything on my own. I do think I was masterminding it, getting very good advice. The decision of organizing the collections according to national schools and moving the French collection to the Legion was something that I worked out very much with my curator of paintings at that time, Lanier Graham. And we set about this on a program that he devised, that initially did not involve architectural change to any substantial extent, so that it was not a costly program. It was simply moving the pictures and the art objects into groupings so that you had this special school at the Legion—with only one exception that was immovable at the time, and that's the Louis [Fifteenth, XV] room, which would make great sense to have at the Legion [along] cheek by jowl with the Louis [Sixteenth, XVI] one, which is so great. But then leaving it at the DeYoung the possibility of having sort of a walk through history clockwise around [Hearst, Hirsch] Court, so that you begin with antiquities and then move ahead in time through the Renaissance and the Dutch seventeenth century and up until you've been, eventually get to the late nineteenth century and then the American galleries beyond that, and the AOA galleries alongside.

PK: I'm interested that you mention Lanier, because of course Lanier was very much in place when I first came here, and I had always assumed that he played with you a very important role in something that we may have time to talk about, and that is establishing the Archives here at the museums and an interest in building, or focusing on an American program, building an American research center. But at rate what strikes me, what I remember from those times, and I always thought of you two, I think I called you the Dynamic Duo. All these ideas and all these changes going on, and I know, I always felt that Lanier, both in a positive and then perhaps in a less positive way towards the end of his time here, played a very important role in these various things that were going on. Would you say. . . . Is that how you remember?

IW: Oh, certainly. He was the first of the new curators that I brought aboard. I mean, a footnote on the situation that I inherited at the Legion, basically it was a group of people who were reaching the end of their active

careers, getting near retirement age, _____. . . .

PK: _____ like Bill Elsner, for instance.

IW: That's correct. And Jim Rambo, who retired ahead of him—who was French decorative arts—and Graham Keith, on the other side from the DeYoung.

PK: Yes. Whom we still see, on a regular basis around here. Looks better than ever!

IW: Well, he's a [good] curator emeritas.

PK: Yes.

IW: Yes. But, no, you're right, that Lanier [paid, played] a very important role. And that was a very significant breakthrough for San Francisco. Let me just illustrate what I'm thinking of. An attractive feature, apparently, to the trustees in hiring me was that I was sort of the hometown kid who had made good by going east and working in an east-coast museum. And they thought, "Well, that'll be wonderful, because if he comes back to San Francisco, he'll know a certain aspect of the territory." And indeed of course I did. Lanier Graham, on the other hand, I think as a product of that period of confusion that developed in New York when the various New York museums began changing their points of view. The Metropolitan…Hoving was director and opened a museum—I mean, a wing or a branch of modern art at the Met. The Whitney had sold off its American. . . .

PK: Its [earlier] American experience. (chuckles)

IW: Yes. And gone uptown to its present location on Madison Avenue. There was a great deal of movement and confusion and so forth, and I was able to encourage Lanier, who had been at the Museum of Modern Art [San Francisco??—Ed.], which I think was groping around for definition, where it was as, you know, the original collection, the contemporary art at the time it was founded—Picasso and Braque and all were rapidly becoming sort of old masters in the world scene, as you got into the third quarter of, the end of the third quarter of the twentieth century. Anyway, I always remember in our guest book, when Lanier came, he signed it "ex Coll. MOMA."

PK: (chuckles)

IW: But this was a breakthrough, and it was. . . .

PK: Provenance. (chuckles)

IW: Provenance, right. And it wasn't for a while that we were able to get other curators from the east, but that's where a lot of the new younger staff that's in place. . . . Bob Johnson came from Baltimore and, most recently, Charlie Moffett, who came from the Metropolitan. Laura Camans, who came from the Metropolitan. (coughs)

PK: I have two, three questions. Staff, of course, is very interesting to me, because I've known these people, and then _____ _____ I'm good friends with some of them right now. And I have two questions in connection with this. Obviously, you feel that one of your contributions was to make this breakthrough, to begin to be able to draw from this larger reservoir of talent in the east [in those _____ _____, and those _____ _____], and Lanier was one of those that started it. My question about Lanier, and this is something that we can if necessary remove from this tape, but what do feel went wrong there? That seemed to be a real misstep around that [Rainbow, rainbow] show exhibition. And that must have caused you a certain amount of grief.

IW: Well, I. . . .

PK: As I say, you can answer as candid as you want.

IW: Well, I, yeah, the Rainbow exhibition, which was a fascinating idea, did not pan out and turn out to be a good exhibition, perhaps because Lanier had this vision of it. It came out into a publication, which at least was trendy and successful, and sold for years.

PK: Oh, that's a great place.

IW: But the exhibition had advanced technology in it, with laser and holograms and a lot of technical things that his, he was trying to orchestrate this, and his supporting cast just didn't come through particularly well.

PK: You mean, like sunshine? (chuckles)

IW: That's one of them, I guess. And whether they got disenchanted with Lanier as a sort of an orchestrator of this effort, or what, I don't think it's particularly something to dwell on at great length, but the show was

technically and in other ways less than a success. And perhaps one of the reasons, one of the things that would have strengthened it, but there just wasn't time or energy or budget for it, [would have been—Ed.] to have more emphasis on the historical aspect of rainbow in art. It was all. . . . And it was also somewhat ahead of its time. But it's interesting and sort of prophetic in the sort of growing out of the hippie atmosphere that had prevailed in San Francisco in the sixties, but it was interesting how much rainbow imagery did appear in the seventies after that show.

PK: Well, I remember this: that. . . . And I'm assuming that I would be correct in saying that that event, that exhibition, that experience, had certainly something to do with Lanier's leaving the institution.

IW: Oh, yes it. . . . Sure.

PK: That's my [gut feeling, _____ view], anyway.

IW: But that was, you know, I think Lanier was changing, too. He was somebody who was deeply interested in publication.

PK: Um hmm.

IW: But he was charged with the responsibility also of being the curator of paintings, and he was spending more and more time on publication aspects and leaving the collection to sort of fend for itself. And naturally that wasn't desirable.

PK: Well, is it possible that if it weren't for the. . . . Some of this is speculation, but it interests me, frankly. If it weren't for that misadventure—and I agree with you; I think that was a horrible show, if you'll excuse me. It must have been extremely difficult for you. I remember talking with you as the preparations were winding up [for, from] the show, and we were walking across from the academy, and you just were sort of shaking your head as if you didn't know what was going to happen with this thing. You really just, you didn't get it. And I agree with you, but it seems that by that time it had. . . . So I presume if it hadn't been for that, Lanier possibly would have been here, but then maybe not. That's true.
What about some of the other of your staff that go back to that time? I'm thinking of. . . . Which other ones would you point to as playing on-going important roles in changes here at the museum [for, or] developing the program?

IW: Well, I think that the immediate period right after that was characterized by Tom Garver's appearance on the scene. He was. . . .

PK: Of course he was here, overlapping _____ _____.

IW: Oh yes, because he was technically hired as, sort of had the exhibition program, but in many cases, you know, you have these situations where people wear a special hat along with, in addition to what they're actually hired for. Sometimes this is good; sometimes this is bad. I remember we had a registrar who did a sort of a woman's rights show, which was a pretty good show but had disastrous effects on the registration department.

PK: Can't imagine who that might be.

IW: But anyway, Tom Garver's specialty was in contemporary art, and he was, he had a real flair for organizing and installing exhibitions of contemporary art, and there had been a great feeling that there was not enough hanging space in San Francisco. Museum of Modern Art couldn't possibly accomodate this area [contemporary or San Francisco??—Ed.], which is very rich in creative activity, particularly this period. So we were fortunate in being able to have Garver aboard, who ran the exhibition program but at the same time did his own shows and covered that contemporary area, which we don't now. . . . We haven't been able to fill that. We would love to do that if we could afford it, but we can't, except in the one department that really covers the full spectrum of, from the earliest to contemporary [breaking, breakup] tomorrow, whatever—that's the Ochenbach. . . .

PK: Right.

IW: . . . _____, [prints, prince] _____ _____.

PK: Yeah, exactly. And besides, it seems to me that with the Museum of Modern Art and the [University Art Museum, university art museum] at Berkeley, and Oakland's program, that. . . .

IW: Remember Oakland had not moved into its bigger museum at this time when we began.

PK: Um hmm.
[Interruption in taping]

PK: . . . ____ing about staff, about some of the, shall we say, key players, your lieutenants in building the programs, making the changes here at the museum and perhaps I should. . . . But I wanted to go back to Lanier on just one more point, because it's something that might get overlooked. You mentioned his interest in publications. He became very interested in publications, and he seemed to be working with Rosemary Gilbert almost all the time on books, and ideas for books.

IW: And remember, this was a big void in these museums. The deYoung Museum had started a little periodic publication. I don't remember now whether it was supposed to be a monthly or a quarterly, but it died on the vine very early on. When I came to the Legion, they did a little bulletin, several page bulletin, and, other than exhibition publications and a catalogue, a sort of a highlights of the collection at the Legion, and also at the deYoung—there were two, one for each museum—almost nothing existed. And there were no collections that had been published.

PK: Um hmm.

IW: And Lanier, as head of publications, got the Rodin collection, the Spreckles Rodin collection got underway . As I say, he did a sort of a survey of the American collections. . . . which set the stage rather nicely. And probably I'm forgetting something perfectly obvious, but it was really the beginning of. . . .

PK: Maybe Tonalism. I don't know if he had worked with Wanda on the Tonalism.

IW: Oh, he did. Yes. Yeah. But that. . . .

PK: So that was actually an important contribution.

IW: That was, but that's not permanent collection. I'm talking about permanent collection.

PK: I understand. [Go ahead], right.

IW: No exhibition catalogues had certainly existed. But I'm talking about publishing the, the responsibility of publishing the collections. The AOA collections got under way, with a small publication, initially when we opened that gallery around 1973, '74. So anyway, we have now gone a long ways down the road to carry out this responsibility, at least setting it up. Oh, very important, the French paintings catalogue. . . .

PK: Which is still. . . .

IW: Well, it's just hopefully going to appear this spring . . . . .began in those days, and it was Lanier and myself persuading Pierre Rosenburg to become editor of that. . . .

PK: He is one of the slowest. . . .

IW: Yeah, this is a very slow train.

PK: _____ _____.

IW: Even going slower than the Rodin and the French drawings under Phyllis [Hadess, House]. But these were all projects that. . . .

PK: That's a whole 'nother topic, isn't it?

IW: That's another topic. But these are all publications that started and. . . .

PK: Yeah.

IW: Well, slow or fast or whatever, it was setting the course in a responsible direction.

PK: And what I would like to mention, and save you the trouble is doing so, is that some of these publications have now come out through the Fine Arts Museums have been awarded, winning for design and _____ content, and I think it's worth mentioning that, as you say, there was no publications department, per se, at these institutions until the arrival of Ned Engle, and I can't remember if Lanier hired Ned or Al ...

IW: Yes, he did [hire Ned.—Ed.].

PK: But what a difference that is, and as far as I know, the Fine Arts Museums, _____. . . . Let's put it this way, seems to be me, and I would like to know if you agree, that that is one of the changes of the Fine Arts Museums that moved the institutions onto a higher level of activity. It's, as far as I know, one of only perhaps three institutions in California museums in California, art museums in California, that have actual staff or departments

devoted to publications. In most cases the curators have to put something together if they're having a show, and they bring others often. They may a designer or something, but. . . .

IW: I don't know. I certainly agree, and I couldn't have said it as well. It is one of the major developments of these museums in the last twenty years.

PK: What are some of the. . . . Well, before we move on to that. . . . Excuse me. Go ahead.

IW: Well, I was describing mostly the growth in the curatorial departments.

PK: Right.

IW: Remember that there's a great deal more than that, and we may all be supporting cast to the curators, but the education department was a sort of a one-man band, and not a very good one at that, when I came. And that has developed into a very large undertaking of outreach and various specialized programs that have developed with a staff, and just very recently has really sort of been blessed by the trustees, as a result of their retreat last year, of asking that that be a fully funded department of the museum in the future, rather than sort of put together from grant to grant in a fly-by-night way, as it has been for so many years. I think the key player there was Tom [Seligman], who really brought great judgment and energy to developing that.

PK: What about, since we're still talking about staff—and believe me I don't think we need to run down the cast of characters and give [the, them] little kudos here and there, and so I really hope that you're respond candidly in terms of which ones you really feel have assisted you to change things—but what about Tom's contribution? I mean, he's been here. . . . I don't know when you hired him, but he's been here probably fifteen, sixteen. . . .

IW: About '73. Yeah. . . .

PK: I mean, how did he fit into this scheme or yours, shall we say?

IW: He walked into my life, blessedly, when we were just trying to get the ethnic collections that, when I arrived at the deYoung Museum, they were in the basement. This was a result of the development of the Asian Art Museum, and the shifts architecturally in building that west wing of the deYoung Museum forced those collections into the basement. And that was one of the first that I was able to do was to get those out and get a gallery established. The person who was my initial help on that was Jane Powell Rosenthal, and she was one of my first curatorial friends, a colleague from the Brooklyn [Museum, museum] who was in residence in the Bay area finishing up on a Ph.D. at Berkeley in those days. And she was one of these phenomena. I think she was versed in the 33 major cultures worldwide in ethnic art. . . .

PK: (chuckles)

IW: . . . and could lecture on them and so forth, and so her speciality was [Guerrera], but, anyway, I was able to get her to come and start cataloguing, sorting out the collection. It was through her that I heard about Tom Seligman. And when she got her appointment from. . . . When she finished at Berkeley, she was invited to establish—or become director, I guess—of the [Haffenreffer] Museum at Rhode Island. And I said, "Well, Jane, how am I going to replace you? Thirty-three different people?" And she said, "No, I think you ought to take a look at this young guy who's just back from the Peace Corps in Africa and see, because he wandered into the other day with some things that he'd brought back from Africa and said he would like to give them to museums, some textiles or some such, and certainly he'd be happy to volunteer doing some help cataloguing." And, anyway, that was how I met Tom Seligman. And I realized within a matter of weeks, if not days or minutes, that here was an ideal kind of person who could sort of bridge the two worlds that seemed to be very much part of the scene at those days of the early part of the seventies. He came from a well-established Pacific Heights family, sort of a rebel teenager, who came. . . . He obviously could speak the hippie language, even though he had not been on the scene here; he had been out of the country through a large part of the sixties. And I thought he would be a perfect spokesman to head up an education department. We had a very strong school under [Elsa, Als] Camera at that time.

PK: Um hmm.

IW: But it needed direction, and it needed control, and he proved just ideal in doing this. And, as it became apparent, he was also a specialist in African art, so he headed up the, what we created as this AOA department and got that established. He also then became more and more involved with exhibitions and, after Tom Garver left, he took on that whole responsibility too, as we were getting deeper into these big international exhibitions that you were talking about: King Tut and the others.

PK: It's interesting. It seems to me, by just the nature of the circumstances here, the changes that were going on, that the museums provided an opportunity for—I don't want to say "youngsters"—but for local people to get

a start. There weren't. . . . You were beginning, it's true, to bring in, like Lanier, some people from outside, from the east, but there were others, and I can think of a few anyway, who came into the museums, perhaps even as interns, and then proved themselves and actually had an opportunity to move up a bit. Now, in the case of Tom, you just mentioned he came in offering to volunteer. He would have then probably settled for that in the beginning, and look at where he is now. I mean, your deputy director and clearly one of the main ingredients in the administration.

IW: We damn near lost him to Seattle, too!

PK: Well, you'll be happy to know that Ann and I encouraged them to stay, because them as neighbors, but. . . .

IW: Good.

PK: Yeah, and I think of. . . .

IW: He's not only a major force at this museum, in the Bay area, he's a major force in the country. And internationally, of course.

PK: Right, and my point is that he grew up right within these institutions and, although I don't want to put words in your mouth, it would seem to me this has to be viewed as something of an achievement or a contribution of the _____.

IW: This is a lesson I learned from working Tom [Beakner] at the Brooklyn Museum, that perhaps it's not true in many other more codified fields, but certainly in the museum world you can find people who are talented and can be trained into very productive people in all different areas of museum work. Because an art museum has so many different areas that it's a. . . . People think of it as essentially a gallery. Well, you and I have been talking _____ it's a publishing house, it's a store, it's a very big design pool for both graphic design and three-dimensional design. I guess the way I. . . . The way I came into it in Brooklyn, myself, is an example, but I think perhaps the one that I remember most was that at the Brooklyn Museum, Tom Beakner found a fellow who was simply working as a volunteer in the library who happened to be a crack enamelist. Did I say that correctly?

PK: A cracked enamelist?

IW: A cracked enamelist? There we are. [

PK: Ian, could we [change tape sides—Ed.]?

[Tape 2, side A]

PK: . . . American Art, Smithsonian Institution, an interview with Ian McKibbin White conducted by Paul Karlstrom. This is the second cassette, tape two, side one.

IW: I was talking about Miles [Libbard, Lippard], who was a talented craftsman, who was simply a mouse in the library, registering books as a volunteer, and was discovered there and started the graphic design office at the Brooklyn Museum, and then went on to work, I think, for the National Park Service as, in charge of the Native American arts coming out of the reservations. And just, it's not a codified field, where you go to college and take study. . . .

PK: Study to become.

IW: . . . a museum director, whatever.

PK: Well, I think that's a good point, and I gather that you would describe that then as your philosophy of hiring. You had this very much in mind as you began to—we started much earlier talking about—building the staff. With the merger this became the next step.

IW: Sure.

PK: And that it was an opportunity to look for certain qualities. What were those qualities, briefly? And I assume that this would apply then as each position opened up. What qualities did you look for, would you look for in hiring?

IW: That's a hard one to answer in terms of anything that's really interesting or original. Somebody who's imaginative and who can, obviously, be a self-starter—and I think that's particularly true. We've elaborated into a fairly sizeable staff, but it's still understaffed for the tasks that we take on, and really requires people doing things a lot on their own. I suppose it's also been part of my philosophy to let talented people do their thing as much as possible without trying to run the museum as a sort of an old fashioned autocratic director, who is the

one person, the one image, for the museum. And I think that one of the expressions, most recent expressions of this, is that I suggested to the public relations department that we do this series of ads on the curators. So that you have curators and other people who are doing key jobs at the museum and highlight them as part of our image, rather than to try and make it a, you know, a one-person job.

PK: Of course what has happened is that the—as far as I can tell—the Fine Arts Museums as they've grown—departments have expanded, new ones have been added—becomes really more specialized. You know, the larger the staff, the larger the responsibilities and areas of responsibility, the more specialized staff members may become, need to become. And doesn't this then mean that. . . . It's almost like a loss of innocence, [there's] a moving beyond that period which you've described early on where you could say, "This person has certain qualities. I can use him or her on the staff." Don't you find now that you would be looking much more for a track record, proven specialist. What about Charlie Moffett, for instance? There was somebody who had already established a reputation, at the Metropolitan. Do you—or need I ask?—do you see this as one of the changes as the museums mature?

IW: Sure. I think you always try to get the best that you can encourage to work here. And Charlie Moffett—what? I think thirteen years at the Metropolitan—was a, well, it was a great coup for the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, because at that particular time, when we had an opening, I think we, as John Walsh told me, got the best available at that time, and I think might very easily say that he's, at any time he would be a great asset to any museum.

PK: In terms of staff members then would you view Charlie as one of your major acquisitions?

IW: Of course. Of course.

PK: Maybe your major acquisition?

IW: I wouldn't say that. But certainly a major acquisition. I think one of the key roles that Charlie Moffett is playing, behind the scenes—and in this instance he's exemplary—and that is to encourage collecting in San Francisco and in the Bay area. This is more subtle, less obvious, but it's not just what's hanging on your [a museum's— Ed.] walls now, but what might be hanging on your walls ten years or a generation later. The fact that there are some people who are now collecting—there's one collector of Dutch seventeenth-century still lives. San Francisco has been—I may say it—a desert in terms of collecting—compared to places like Minneapolis or New York certainly, Chicago, even Los Angeles.

PK: [Now what's it doing?]

IW: And this is all part of our program here.

PK: And you feel this. . . . You see signs of this changing and you would say that perhaps Charlie is, in terms of museum staff, contributing to this change?

IW: That's right. And it's. . . . It has to be supported by a cast. It can't be just one person. I think the failure, for instance, in European decorative arts of the previous generation, is that you have a person here who was never given anything. One would almost think not even much encouragement. Certainly. . . .

PK: Graham?

IW: Oh, Graham Keith. Certainly no budget, no staff, and the man was run ragged through a whole curatorial career. You know, the phone rings, he's sitting there, and he is asked by somebody to come look at a teacup and see if it's, to authenticate it. And there was no advantage taken of what he could have done if he had had a supporting team at the time that he was working. There was a, it's not that there wasn't a lot of good decorative arts material in San Francisco—there was. I mean, this is one of the other things that has characterized the Bay area: of things that were here drifting away for lack of proper attention from the museums.

PK: These are, you're talking European and American decorative arts, or are you. . . .

IW: I'm probably talking across the whole spectrum.

PK: Gosh, yeah.

IW: Yeah. But I was thinking of European decorative arts then, but I know an example in American decorative arts of a woman that was known to me indirectly over a period of ten years, who was very reclusive, and instead of coming to this museum, what she had was American decorative arts furniture that went to Williamsburg.

PK: Well, but. . . .

IW: That somewhat predated the establishment of the American decorative arts department, which I'd like to talk about, but. . . .

PK: Well, you know of course, Ian, this has been—I don't know—[had] been a situation in California seems to be a great problem that's been faced, or been present, the moving away of collections that are formed locally. Not so much that could necessarily bring things in from outside, but those things which had been and certainly have. . . .

IW: That's what I meant, that those things drifted away.

PK: Yeah. That certainly has happened, say, with the modern art collections in L.A., like the Aaronsberg. I mean, there's just some very famous examples of things escaping, and I'm interested to hear you say that in your perception the same thing, to a certain extent, was going on here.

IW: Yeah. I think it's not just that a curator needs an associate and assistant curator and a secretary. Behind all of this is what we're just beginning to get a handle on and momentum on in terms of development. That it takes a very active team of people—and in this instance I'm referring mostly to the trustees—who are out there developing very competitively with the other cultural institutions—or whomeever—the education institutions, for the funds. But, in addition to the funds, I made myself very obnoxious, over the three years, in saying every time as we got our development office under way, in form after form, that, in addition to funds to survive on, what you need are the works of art—which is what a museum is all about anyway. Ultimately it's to build the collections. And if somebody had a $500,000 painting, that was perhaps worth more than a $500,000 gift of cash or other properties. And it took, I think it's taken a long time to have the collector-trustee mentality accept this—with rare exceptions of a few trustees who understand.

PK: Do you feel. . . . We may have opportunity in another session to talk about the trustees. I don't want to put you on the spot, of course, and I won't, but in general do you feel that your board has become more actively involved, more supportive of museums over recent years? I mean, it's no secret that. . . .

IW: Fabulous growth in this direction. But one thing that has characterized, I think, the board in the last, in all this time that I'm talking about, a period of twenty years, is that it has, for the most part, from I hear of life on other boards, been a harmonious forum... Really has. With only basically minor scuffles, and. . . . There's a lot of inertia in the beginning, but they are I think just crackerjack now.

PK: Ian, in the few minutes that we have left—I know you need to run—but we really haven't moved beyond question number, which has to do with achievements and so forth, and I think it's very revealing, and maybe most appropriate, that we've spent most of the time talking about your staff. I think that that's rather nice. Would you want to sort of wrap up this section, perhaps point to a few other things. This grew out of discussion of the merging, I believe, basically this topic.

IW: Um hmm.

PK: It shows how long this could go on. (chuckles) Were there a few other things that you would just like quickly point to. . . .

IW: Paul, before I do that, just because we'll inevitably move on to another area. . . .

PK: Yeah.

IW: I would like to. . . . It's not a matter of just passing down kudos, but American decorative arts I think is a terribly important ,[and its] growth in these museums and the way that came about should be understood. I don't know how much of this was in the previous interview, but when it became apparent that the Rockefeller collection was coming here, even though it hadn't been announced, and when it became apparent that that was primarily paintings—some sculpture—but John Rockefeller pointed out that he did not collect furniture and that that was an area that was therefore wide open to us and to do something else about, we were talking, remember, not about just having an American collection, but creating an American center, the study of American art in its fullest sense. And this meant that something had to be done about the decorative arts, and this is where Don Stover came into the situation. He had. . . .

PK: That was a good acquisition, I thought.

IW: He is an excellent acquisition, and somebody who has grown in stature, I think, significantly. He had been working in Texas.

PK: Yeah. San Antonio.

IW: In San Antonio. And by the time I was casting about, trying to create another branch in American decorative

arts and looking for a curator, he had gone back to school to finish at Wintethur], and that's where we got him from. And I know the game plan that we discussed that interested him in coming here was that we would start to try to build a collection [it, that] was almost from zero. I mean, there were a few odd pieces and some of them were odder than than others. And it meant that after they had been reviewed, there was very little here.

PK: Um hmm. Maybe a couple of pieces that would be museum quality, shall we. . . .

IW: Sure. I mean, very little more than that, basically. Because the emphasis had been in French and English furniture, basically. But Don. . . . I think the charge to Don was to try to build the collection, build an interest, and what we thought—if you recall, moving ahead in time, that at the time of the second installation of the American galleries—the present configuration—we expanded those galleries, I thought primarily to make ready for what we would receive from Mrs. Rockefeller, on her death, in paintings. Because there was another significant group of pictures that were to come to us as described as a hope in his, John Rockefeller's, will. But when we opened those galleries, there had been so much energy built up and that had apparently had no particular outlet prior to that that we had put together in a mass, from local sources primarily, so much American decorative arts that the space was full and now there's not going to room for those pictures until we expand yet again. That's not to say that my original plan of square footage—I think it was roughly something like 20,000 square feet for those galleries—if that were realized I think we would now have enough room for those pictures. But. . . .

PK: What is there now? What's the square footage existing?

IW: I would say that it's something around 12,000. Something like that.

PK: Shy about 8,000.

IW: Yeah, somewhere in there. But anyway, that has been a remarkable growth. And one of the vehicles of doing this, that we had talked about, was to have a show of Bay area collectors, as we have done in other areas, such as the AOA.

PK: Oh, yes.

IW: And after those galleries opened, Stover said, "You know, basically it's not all here, but it's significantly here, and I wouldn't be able to put together a comprehensive show. The show is here."

PK: And in a very short. . . . I think it's worth emphasizing, this happened in a very short period of time. A relatively short period of time.

IW: Yes! Well, it's really in the last. . . .

PK: Ten years.

IW: . . . ten, twelve years.

PK: So from almost zero. . . .

IW: Yeah.

PK: . . . _____ _____.

IW: I think he came '76.

PK: That sounds about. . . .

IW: Somewhere in there.

PK: That sounds about right.

IW: Just about ten, twelve years.

PK: He also, of course, played a special role as Alfred Frankenstein's successor. Is that right?

IW: Um hmm.

PK: In the [Edgar Roup] curatorial chair.

IW: Yeah.

PK: Which, these things, some of these things, of course, are covered in your other interview.

IW: Sure.

PK: And I would imagine that the whole. . . . Well, we can get into that as part of the American program, the American curatorship, when we talk a little bit about the role of the Archives within the. . . .

IW: Fine, fine.

PK: But before. . . .

IW: Winding it up, now.

PK: Yeah, I guess. . . . Do you have about five more minutes, or do you want to. . . .

IW: I think I'm already five late, and _____ _____.

PK: You're five late.

IW: Yeah.

PK: Okay, well, now, remember you promised to have another session soon, right.

IW: We've got to set up an appointment for next week.

PK: Thank you.

[Tape 2, side B, is blank]
JANUARY 12, 1987
[Tape 3, side A]

PK: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, an interview with Ian McKibbin White, second session, conducted by Paul Karlstrom. The date is January 12, 1987. And the second session is being conducted again in the offices of the Archives at the M. H. deYoung Memorial Museum—on a very, very cold day, by the way.

IW: (chuckles) It's not cold in here.

PK: It's not cold in here.

IW: No, it's much nicer.

PK: And that's why we are here rather than sort of splitting it and doing the second session at the Legion. Ian, I appreciate your taking the time, during this busy period for you, to talk with me once again, and I would like to move through a few questions that we weren't able to get to last time. We were talking, as you remember, about what you viewed as special achievements during your tenure at the museum—the museums. And we spent a lot of time talking about your staff and key contributions that were made by certain individuals. Before we leave that question, I think there may be a few more points you wanted to make. You mentioned a few moments ago that there was a certain episode that had to do with staff activity or some individual making a special contribution.

IW: Well, we got into the staffing situation in such detail last session I've forgot if we ever got to the bottom line, but I think that in terms of achievement, building the curatorial staff basically from scratch again, because the one [head] at the Legion was near retirement and was being phased out, and the one at the deYoung was virtually in disarray and going down the tubes fast. I mean, that's sort of part of why I was brought in, to try to arrest that situation. And so it was this whole rebuilding of the staff, and that was essentially a curatorial effort, though there were other areas as well. It's always unfair to just focus on the curatorial and there a number of other key people who came into this. We were able to get Ron Eggerman, who was strictly an administrator, and this was during a period that was, there was a lot of renovation, physical renovation. He had an architectural background, indeed came out of an architectural with which we had been working. And he became the sort of a [fiscal, physical] person for the museum. We talked a little bit about some of his contribution at that time. But. . . . One that's completely isolated from this, but one that I'm in fact quite proud of in retrospect, came out of one of those [worse, worst] situations that happened. It was in the non-success area, and that was when the theft occurred of the paintings from the deYoung on Christmas eve 1978, as I recall. And there was a fellow who had been basically a, was a guard on the staff that night, and later, in retrospect, when that whole episode was investigated, he was being positioned to become sort of the scapegoat for the piece. And I had a judgment call on whether to go along with that or not, and I didn't.

PK: Um hmm.

IW: And instead of supporting that, I did not go along with the idea, and he since has sort of worked his way up through the ranks, is now. . . . He's the chief guard.

PK: Right.

IW: And that to me is just a very nice sort of a human episode that took place. _____ _____.

PK: Then also out of that experience, if I have my chronology right, there was a whole new effort at the museums—and I think that this was something that was taking place elsewhere as well—but a whole new look at the security and protection systems. Is this right?

IW: Yeah, sure. I mean, I think that the fallacy in that was that the trustees had, through the city, put in something like a quarter of a million dollars into a security system that, "Therefore, we are secure." And this in no case was the situation, and it meant that the whole thing had to be reexamined, and they got Standford Research Institute in to do a study and the police department did a study, and out of that grew not only a whole new program with new surveillance systems, electronic protection systems installed, but a changed attitude about security and the creation of a post of deputy for operations, which included security per se. In other words, taking into account that it was something that was a serious problem that had to be at least adequately addressed. You never feel that you're secure enough.

PK: Of course not. I mean, that's asking too much. And so that really was when Gus Teller was hired.

IW: Um hmm, that's right.

PK: Well, what. . . . I think there are many examples of this phenomena, but what I see happening over these years, these years that we've been discussing, is the creation of, in some cases, whole departments, to deal with needs that become recognized, all part of growth, of becoming a big museum—or two museums put together as a big museum. . . .

IW: Um hmm.

PK: . . . rather than a smaller local institution. And this is the theme that we started out with: the fact that during your time at the museums, your directorship, the museums, for a number of reasons, probably, moved rather dramatically from [a _____ where they were spendable] to perfectly respectable institutions, but hardly the kind of institution, museum that would participate in international exhibitions, and so forth. Just a whole different level of activity.

IW: Well, that's a very interesting theme to pursue, but what always bothers me about that is that that might be true, but on the other hand, in the old museums you had some notable landmark exhibitions—such as after the war you had the Berlin Treasures and you had the Vienna Treasures. Both came to the deYoung Museum, and those were blockbusters if ever there were blockbusters. That was the kind of, the quality of the art, the size of the audience, and so forth. And we don't have the figures on it necessarily today, but. . . .

PK: But they are available _____, because I've seen them.

IW: Yeah. Uh huh. And then, though it's in a slightly different context, it involved the museum people, and in 1939 when the World's Fair took place on Treasure Island, the big old masters exhibition that took place was curated by Walter Heil, who was the director then at the deYoung Museum, and it was Tom Howe, who was director of the Legion, who put together the Mexican muralist component of that exposition, exhibition. And so those. . . . I mean, there is that phenomena long before Hoving and blockbuster was described and these big exhibits were there. I think, you know, that somewhere in here we were talking about national trends, and how much were we following national trends.

PK: Right.

IW: After all, it is Hoving who took the museum and the museum people out of the ivory tower and out of the periphery and brought it right into sort of the central experience of contemporary American society, vying with attending concerts, or going to the theater, or whatever. It was. . . . And in that sense, we were lucky, certainly by virtue of our geography and our position on the west coast, which has fewer cities. . . . And what, there are really two, possibly three, maybe stretching it now, there are four who would compete in this area. There was San Francisco and Los Angeles, primarily, and then north and south there might be Seattle and there might be San Diego which you would take into consideration, but certainly nothing like the string of important museum cities as you have on the eastern seaboard. So that this made an important statement in terms of international exhibitions coming to this country, and I think with foreign governments. The Soviets wanted to see them here on the west coast. Certainly the DDR did when they had the Dresden exhibition, and the Irish and others. And the other side of the equation was (chuckling) that the people came from all over the eleven western states to

come see those exhibitions, racking up attendances which were as high—or not higher—than they were in the east coast museums. And many of these, like the Asian Museum's Chinese Treasure exhibition, set world records. _____ _____ other times when I first heard about the phenomenal attendance at the Chinese exhibition when I was there in Moscow, from when, I heard it first from the Ministry of the, Soviet Ministry of Culture, the time I was there with Hoving and the Metropolitan people.

PK: And in anticipation of still another, working for still another big exhibition.

IW: Um hmm, that's right. Yeah.

PK: Do you see your job, then—and I don't want to oversimplify or seem flippant—but in one respect do you see your job here at the museums as an international exhibition broker?

IW: Well. . . .

PK: I mean, playing a key role in negotiations for, arrangements for.

IW: Well, sure, but why isolate it just with exhibitions? Because you, you know, all of my peers and colleagues in museums of this size, no matter where they're located in the country, play these roles, whether it's for exhibitions or collections or patronage or whatever. You know, we were all gathered—many of us were gathered recently—to see the opening of the D'Orsay Museum in December in Paris, and there was Harry Parker from the Dallas Museum, director of the Dallas Museum, with Mrs. Reeves, his great patroness, who was a Texan who married a European and moved to the south of France. Parallels with the whole story of the Florence Gould collection are existent. In fact there was a time when I thought that the Dallas Museum was competing with us for the Gould collection, because of the Gould Texas money. But in other words, I don't think it's just exhibitions, but the answer is yes. But it's. . . .

PK: It's in the job description, is what you're saying.

IW: Yeah! Yeah!

PK: You just have to cultivate in any number of ways. It sounds like, let's say, without sounding disrespectful, it sounds like running a circus, three-ring circus at least, where you're juggling, at the same time, you have to try and keep track, to pursue all promising possibilities, whether it's more collections or exhibitions, and try to weigh your own resources at the same time and try to estimate what the long-term results will be as well as the short-term. Is that a. . . . Of course what I'm leading into is a description of a museum director's job, but is that anywhere close to how you view it?

IW: Sure. And it's, well, it's sort of an impossible job in many ways, to try and do it systematically. I think there was a time when this wonderful sort of operating, gentlemanly way of operating, was that you sort of stayed in your turf, and you cultivated local patronage people with money, who had collected art, and they were going to be your patrons. I think that situation has changed. I don't think that's unique to the way I've conducted the business of the Fine Arts Museums in San Francisco. But anything is fair game, anywhere. If there's any kind of connection that could be argued successfully or logically for bringing art to San Francisco from out of town, even if it's taking it out of somebody else's backyard. You know, the National Gallery does this, because they say their charge is national, but a lot of other museums do this as well, and, you know, we were talking about art leaving San Francisco.

PK: Yeah, right.

IW: Well, who took it? Where did it go? It wasn't just happenstance; it was actively being sought by dealers or collectors or museums or whomever. So I think this is all a part of the way that museums operate in this country now.

PK: Do you feel that during your tenure the museums have looked more actively outside the community? Would you describe this as perhaps one of the changes: more attention paid to patrons, collectors, outside of the San Francisco area? A reaching out?

IW: Yeah, well, I think that's what I've been describing. And I think the clearest example of this now, as a statement by this museum, is the creation of a national council, which in fact could be called an international council, with members outside of the country on its council. These people acting as ambassadors for the museum out of this immediate San Francisco or California area. On the other hand it's very hard to know quantitatively if, how efforts were. . . . I mean, if you wanted to compare what's going on now—in a much more organized, systematic way—than before, you do have to at least take into account that somebody like Mrs. Spreckles had only a limited collection, and she asked her friends, encouraged her friends, and some of the key collections, like the Huntington collections, came to this museum from outside of the San Francisco area. The

Mildred Anna Williams and Henry Williams collection, the same: they were New Yorkers. But, I mean, the fact remains that most. . . . I would think that you could statistically say, accurately, that most of the collections in these museums come from areas outside of immediate city, or immediate Bay area. That's because, you know, it's not been an area that's terribly rich with collectors.

PK: One of the things that seems to distinguish your administration has been. . . . Well, you move around a lot. You've made it your business to get out, to travel, to, first of all, be involved in activities and organizations outside, rather than just staying here at home and running the museum without perhaps then a broader perspective. And I wonder if there's anything. . . . Well, a couple parts to this question. I suppose first of all would you agree with that? Would you think, would you describe your administration as being a peripatetic one, where you have made a point of moving around a great deal. And then, in addition to that. . . .

IW: But. . . .

PK: Go ahead.

IW: Paul, quantitatively I don't know. I mean, certainly I have. I've always been conscious of being way out here sort of the end of the line logistically, with the only thing that, where there's any collections or activity west of us, before the Orient is Honolulu. They have a [damn] nice little collection. But, you know, when I pick up the phone and try to talk to my colleagues around the country, frequently I find that they are. . . .

PK: Yeah.

IW: They're in Europe or they're out of town or somewhere, and they're moving around too. I don't know that it's more acute here, or it's been more my style, or this just goes with the turf in terms of the way American museum directors operate now.

PK: Well, yeah, this is I'm getting at. I guess I was asking more, "Do you feel that this represents a change from earlier directorships here? The way these museums here, locally, were run?" Or is there any way for you to tell that? In other words, more of a participating in a broader museum community. A moving out of perhaps a more conventional, more local arrangement.

IW: Yeah, I suppose so. Though it's very difficult, I think, to really tell until. . . . Maybe you'll have a student who will sit down and analyze. . . .

PK: _____ the figures then.

IW: Yes.

PK: The travel vouchers.

IW: Yeah. But. . . . Because, you know, certainly Walter Heil, on the one hand, sleuthed around and found things constantly and built up quite a wonderful old master European collection, here, from virtually scratch. And Tom Howe was very involved with an international network, on the other hand, through that hiatus that comes right in the middle of his administration with the war in his work. That may have been a fluke, but it gave him a lot of interaction and contacts with the then museum directors who were the movers and shakers of his period.

PK: Would you say then that certain patterns and directions for the museums in a sense were already established when you took over, and that isn't, doesn't represent such a dramatic break with the past as, I don't know, as maybe some of us sitting here looking back now think. That there's a continuity.

IW: No, I would still relate it more to what I think that was going on around the country at the time. I think that there is, the people underestimate the importance of, certainly of Walter Heil's relationship. He was a well-known international scholar and director and had an enormous reputation. I remember being cornered, I think it was in Chicago, by a group of people who looked as if they were about the generation of Sigmund Freud, and they all came up to me and they all said, "Well, how is Walter Heil?"

PK: (chuckles)

IW: Well, you know, I think he'd died a couple of years before, but these were certainly elder statesmen of the European art world—men who I hardly knew anything about, who knew of his reputation and career.

PK: Um hmm.

IW: But. . . . Well, you know what's interesting, though, that I've never had any light particularly shed on it, is that the generation just before I came, say, the decade before I came, in San Francisco, in the mid-fifties, early fifties to the early sixties, didn't seem to be able to do anything with the cultural institution. It seems to be true

of the Museum of Modern Art, and San Francisco Museum. After all, remember—what's her name?

PK: Grace.

IW: Grace Morley had establish that museum, let's say curatorially, with a great flourish and then had left the scene and left a void. And, though Tom Howe was still here, he was, you know, he was sort of coasting on a reputation and activities that had been established, patterns had been established earlier on. And Walter Heil was essentially, by then, retired, and then there was this interim period. And, you know, you could say that the symphony as well, and I think [Enrice, Enrico] [Hordum, Jordam] was here at that time, who I remember only sort of peripherally, as spoken of—the parallel might by Pierre Monteaux—who was a great conductor, with a great towering reputation, and then came this other interim where it's sort of mediocre and nobody, regardless of who was brought in or what talent, the cultural institutions didn't seem to move very much. Why didn't it happen then and why this phenomenal growth in the arts following that decade? Was it just sort of a catching up period after the war? Was there a lot of wealth being amassed in that decade then, and a new spurt of energy. . . .

PK: I guess we don't know.

IW: This is at least, you know, there seemed to be a willingness to put—back here, at these museums—there was a willingness to put these museums together and the Asian museum was developing on its course with the Avery Brundage collection in town, and there seemed a new impetus getting under way. And there had been nothing but sort of backing and filling and wrangling prior to that, across the scene. This was, in other words, I walked into a climate that was. . . .

PK: Right.

IW: . . . conducive for growth. And I never felt even with things that could be thought of as a sort of a temporary setback, like the Proposition13 [_____—Ed.]. . . .

PK: Um hmm.

IW: . . . and _____. . . . Last week I mentioned I didn't think that was all a setback. You know, I didn't mentioned that.

PK: No, you didn't mention that!

IW: No, I didn't mention that to you! I mentioned it to another in another kind of interview.

PK: All right.

IW: Now, I think the good side of the Proposition13 was that we had enormously increased and fattened up the staff to be able to put on that first big blockbuster of all blockbusters, the King Tut exhibition, and the Dresden at the same time. And after that, the staff needed to go to a fat farm and trim up. (chuckles) Economically, the pressures from the results of Proposition13 forced that, and that was healthy. That should have come anyway. You know, there was a whole group of technicians that we had at that time who were cleared out. . . .

PK: _____ this provided an opportunity, an occasion. . . .

IW: Yeah! That's right.

PK: . . . to trim up.

IW: Yeah, it was a good kind of catharsis to go through, to do that. You know, we got largely onto the private—or at least on the road to the increasingly private funded institution, from a city institution at that time.

[Tape 3, side B]

PK: . . . McKibbin White, second session, tape 1, side 2 [marked tape 3, side B—Ed.]. I thought it was interesting, Ian, what you were saying about Proposition13.

IW: I think you should repeat what you said to me, that I wasn't exactly fond of it. No, I wasn't fond of it, but, you know, I think I always try to find some good, in even these things that look like setbacks or disasters, or whatever. And I really do; I think that any number of these things that happened in the course of the time I've been here that were not successes, they usually had their good side to them in setting us off on a better course in some way. And we became largely, out of that process, a private institution.

PK: Does that not entail, though, perhaps an over-dependence upon the private membership organization: the museum society? Or how do you feel about that? Because that, I think, is a controversial aspect. _____, at this

point we can do it off the record.

IW: No, it. . . . It is something that has made life very complicated in terms of the day to day environment of the museum. I think one of the hallmarks of this museum has been its receptiveness to volunteers. . . .

PK: Yeah, you mentioned _____.

IW: . . . and their contribution. But the price that we've paid with that is that this, structurally this institution has grown sort of lopsided. At the time that I came, and right after the merger, the first years were characterized by the museum society, which was sort of the fun, upbeat, young-people organization that did all the activities and saw that. . . .

PK: The descendents of the balloon girls?

IW: The descendents of the balloon girls, yes.

PK: _____, well, not really the. . . .

IW: That's volunteers with a capital-[V, P, T], but the museum society itself did. I mean, they were sort of the brokers for the exhibitions, and a lot of their people helped us put on the shows before we had a formal exhibition department per se. And this. . . . But, you know, we've grown up since then, and there's been this whole shift—picking up the thread from the Proposition13—that was the big, set the stage for the realization that we needed to create an endowment and get a really good development office underway and staffed and with a campaign to go. And so that is another area that became professional. And the museum society now. . . . Well, it's not the museum society immediately, but then out of this came a kind of a new brand of trustees, and new trustee insights to where we were headed if we didn't. And new kinds of trustees were brought onto the board, and the development of the endowment drive is now fast becoming history. I mean, we went from about zero or a million or so that we were. . . . Well, we were sort, it seems to me that ten years ago we were raising by one way or another about a million dollars a year. But now I think our drive has been on three years and we have $22 million out of $35 [million—Ed.]. So there's been a phenomenal acceleration of activity, with a whole different kind of board of trustees. Plus, now leaving the museum society sort of in a vacuum as to what its real role is, and what its real need is.

PK: Maybe a useful vacuum, looking ahead to the future.

IW: Could be.

PK: Could be.

IW: Could be.

PK: Don't you think that part of the success of the endowment drive, certainly over the last month or so, or the last few months, been the change in the tax law, the fact that it was sort of _____ rush up, hurry up, and with appreciated property and so forth, and now is the moment to get. . . .

IW: Oh, sure. I mean, I think that certainly characterizes the sort of avalanche of good things that were under the Christmas tree this December—for a mixed metaphor. But anyhow, I think that that's not particularly a. . . . I don't think people were planning for years past building up to this period, because after all the tax was just determined in '86, _____ it did pass. And I don't know, I think there was a lot of crepe-hanging about what's going to happen in the future as a result of that, sure. I would imagine there'll be some kind of setback. But there are other still areas.

PK: _____ that's one thing you've _____.

IW: Oh, I don't feel as gloomy about it as some people. I think that life goes on and there are still tax advantages and that this will become apparent in the next several years, even though it may be an immediate setback.

PK: What I hear you saying is that you recognize a fairly important change in attitude on the part of certain members—or maybe the entire board itself—towards the museums and towards their own responsibility, the realities of the circumstances in which the museum has to operate, _____ _____, and therefore as trustees their personal responsibilities. Am I overstating that? Do I understand you correctly?

IW: Yeah, very much so. Yeah. I think it must have been very frustrating, you know, five years ago, when this was perceived by people with vision, that the museum is not on good footing, that it is no longer a municipal museum or a municipally funded museum—though it never was wholly a municipally funded museum. Acquisitions were never part of the city's responsibility—perceived or real. And there was a period there where it got said again and again by those people with vision that we were, if we didn't get going with an endownment

drive, we would be in very serious trouble in a very few years—at the rate that we were growing and increasing in size and scope, activities that we were taking on. And there was a, there seemed to be on the board sort of a mentality that, when these things were said, they were being said for somebody else's benefit, not them. And this persisted for a long time, until. . . .

PK: I seen that before.

IW: (laughs) Yes. Well, until, yeah, suddenly it, you know, that the, there was a breakthrough, and two trustees each put up pledges of a million dollars, and then others began to, there was a. . . . Even after that, there was a certain complacency, and then only really recently, and perhaps aided by the change in the tax this past year, there's been an enormous shift, and I think that basically this is a healthy one. I remember just a few years ago. . . . Remember when [Tommy, Tom E.] Lee was here, and came from Houston, and the shock with which he discovered in San Francisco that it wasn't just an absolute that practically everybody, every patron of the museum didn't put up $50,000 apiece for the survival of the institution. When he discovered that that was either zero or $1,000 or maybe $5,000, this was a terrible shock, from the. . . .

PK: From which he never recovered. (laughter)

IW: He never recovered, and went back to Texas. But that this was a perception from another part of the country. (laughing) Of course that changed in Houston suddenly too.

PK: Yeah, it did indeed. You know, this is very interesting.

IW: [sotto voce:] Shifting eddies.

PK: You said the. . . . Huh?

IW: Shifting eddies. _____ shifting eddies. (chuckles)

PK: Eddying shifties. The perception of this community, as a cultural center—of San Francisco itself as a cultural center—is. . . . I think we know pretty well what it is. Or let's say it takes two forms. One we [will, won't] count [as, is] the New York version, which of course anyplace outside of New York is wanting, even if attractive like San Francisco, can't match up.

IW: Um hmm.

PK: But it seems to me, in talking with people from different parts of the country, that as you've said Tommy Lee expected, San Francisco has a reputation as a very sophisticated international, cosmopolitan center, which naturally supports a very high level of the arts. And this must be one of the. . . . I [happen, have] to believe that there's a slight gap between that perception and reality, and this must have been one of the things that you've had to think about, wrestle about the whole time—or wrestle with—the whole time of your administration, the expectations, maybe even, say, self-conception on the part of San Francisco, that it's munificent in terms of support of culture, and than those _____ have actually been.

IW: I suppose that, yeah, it was all rushing along so fast that I didn't have, spend an awful lot of time reflecting on it. And, as I have been describing, it was shifting during this period anyway. But I'll tell you one area that I very consciously have tried to enhance the mythology was in the pool of the arts in San Francisco. I think one way you might describe San Francisco is it has a little of all these so-called parts, that there's the museums and the visual arts, but there's the resident. . . . There's the opera company, there's the symphony, there's the ballet, there's theater, and there are dance, other dance groups and all. It has a sort of a full spectrum, and it doesn't, it may not excel in all of these, but at least it's trying all of these, which is different than cities x, y, and z elsewhere in the country, outside of New York. But I certainly tried to, in the course of this time. . . . I spoke of it as enhanced the mythology of keeping the visual arts as one of the players in this mix, trying to defeat the old cliche about San Francisco being just a performing arts town. Or this is a city that is a music town—forget everything else. Consciously trying to do things with the performing arts. Now, you know, they are largely aloof, for the most part, but they have had to take note of what the museums' contributions have been, especially in the international exhibitions. . . .

PK: Right, exactly.

IW: . . . where we have drawn more crowds than all of the performing arts together, in one particular instance. I think it's very nice that. . . . I think one of the great conductors in this country today is Herbert [Bonstadt, Bonistat] who has a genuine deep interest in visual arts as well. He's a museum-goer in his off hours, which are not many, and he doesn't have many other pastimes or diversions, one believes, but he does come to the museums when he's coming here. He's coming here this week, incidentally, to. . . . We believe that he will be part of our campaign to pick a favorite work of art.

PK: Oh, _____. Yeah.

IW: Yeah.

PK: Well, it seems that for some reason the visual arts in the Bay area have been given short shrift. This is not. . . .

IW: That's. . . .

PK: Anyway this is the [wisdom, whiz _____].

IW: That's right.

PK: Yeah, and I'm wondering. . . . Nobody has the final answer to that, but I wonder if you have any thoughts why that is so. That certainly affects the museums and would affect your job and, you know, what. . . .

IW: Well, I think it probably gets back to the business of collecting and collections. You know, if most of the major collections have come to San Francisco from outside, that means that the. . . . Say it the other way: There are no great Armand Hammers or Norton Simons or, you know, Rockefellers or Brundages or any of these other great collectors here in San Francisco. If you look, by comparison, to a city that's not so different than ours in scale and size, look at Minneapolis. I mean, there are lots of collectors and lots of industry there that support the arts. And it's. . . . I think you have to personify these endeavors so that. . . . When you have everybody going to the opera, you don't collect operas, but if you have it, then that's it, and that's where the action is, but the action has to be around the collections, I think, and, in lieu of that, around the exhibitions. So I think. . . . Then you have to ask the question behind that one: why are there not, why have there not been? Because I suppose, my theory has always been that there have been all these other. . . .

PK: Things to _____.

IW: Yeah, you know, distractions for the people who support these things; it's their preference in this part of California to be—or California in general—to be out of doors, either to have yachts or ranches or vineyards or places at Tahoe, or whatever—all these other ways where you. . . .

PK: Can spend your money.

IW: Yes. Your disposable income, or invested income, or whatever.

PK: That's like the Gettys, very prominent name here, and I believe she. . . .

IW: Now that's a rare exception.

PK: Yeah, that's an interesting example though. Now she is a member of your board, is that right?

IW: No, she is a member of our national council.

PK: National council.

IW: The chairman of it.

PK: Yeah. But Gordon's interest—just sort of giving a specific example, from what we were saying—has been of course very, very much in terms of support of the opera. And I don't know how they spend their money, and I know that they have enough to be helpful here, there, and everywhere. But it seems to me there is a case: very prominent, very wealthy San Francisco family, now, where I would imagine the major support goes to the opera.

IW: Well, yeah, I mean, you have certainly put your finger on the rare exception. Though they are not collectors, yet, of any great significance, but if you stop and think about the Gettys, first of all we know that Gordon Getty's personal love is music.

PK: Yeah.

IW: It is opera, so that is indeed where his interest is primarily. I think they're also interested natural history and archaeology and that area of activity, and they do support that, so they support the California Academy. But when it comes to museums, after all they do have their own museum in southern California, with a whole, you know, it's like, it's if they were the president of a small country down there. (chuckling) And he has business interests, which is marvelously ironic, that he's becoming apparently as astute a businessman as he is.

PK: That's what I hear.

IW: Yeah. And what Ann's role, Ann's museum seems to be related to her base in New York as a center of social activity.

PK: And publishing. Now she's all involved, I guess, with publishing activities.

IW: Well, but I mean, the forum or the locus of that is the Metropolitan Museum. And whether it's. . . . You know, I think it first of all centered around the Temple of [Dendar] and that huge court, which is a wonderful setting for parties, and. . . . But also, I think on their board, but. . . .

PK: Oh.

IW: But if the Getty's were strictly collectors and collecting in San Francisco—which they certainly could be if they chose to be—it would reposition these museums immediately. But that is more complicated at this time.

PK: Well, it seems to me that they would represent the increasingly more common—bad word, I suppose—but international or certainly national patrons. It seems that many folk have homes in several places. They move around a lot more. And no longer can you expect that because somebody has, oh, made a fortune in one community, and lived there for a period of time, that that would be the. . . .

IW: Sure.

PK: It's very interesting. It's the global village, I suppose, in the arts.

IW: Yeah, yeah. But I do think it's particularly nice in this instance that one gets the sense that Gordon Getty thinks of himself as a San Franciscan. After all, you know, he grew up sort of as a sort of a nice middle class underdog, [from Lowell High, the low high] and so forth, here in San Francisco. You know, he led a very modest life. And Ann came from the valley up in Wheatland, and, you know, both of those things I think are very [significant].

PK: _____ wouldn't _____. It isn't true that she was a waitress at a truckstop, was it?

IW: I don't know anything about that. (both chuckle) I've never heard that.

PK: I'll bet you Tommy Howe knows.

IW: Umm, no, I think that. . . .

PK: That makes a good story. I have no idea.

IW: She's a very nice person. Nice qualities.

PK: Very much so, and also they've been generous to the Archives. I think. . . . They're involved with a number of different things, and if you can get their attention, and they like what they see, they will be helpful, so there'll be no complaints about that kind of a patron. It's the. . . .

IW: Sure.

PK: And perhaps they represent. . . . Well, I was going to say they represent a new generation of patronage in that sense, but I'm not so sure that's different from some of the better patrons in any time. I mean, some of the older ones. I think of Phyllis [Wantes, Wanless, Juantes]. Her generosity seems to go any number of directions.

IW: Yeah, yeah, sure. Well, people have different, you know, a collection, a cluster of interests. Yeah.

PK: Um hmm, but also a sense of responsibility, I guess is what I'm saying. The classic, maybe the best example being the Rockefellers—a story we don't particularly need to go into here, because you talked about it with Tommy Howe in earlier interview at some length. But the thinking behind, the careful thinking, what to do with the resources and the collections, how best to place so they do the most good. For instance, this was the case with the American collection; I believe that was certainly a factor.
Well, we may as well touch briefly on this topic. Because we can't leave it entirely alone. From our point of view, meaning that of the Archives of American Art, one of your best moves and decisions was to invite us to come here and set up shop about 13 years ago, almost 14 years ago. And we've been very well treated guests here ever since. So we, of course, I would say that that ranks as one of your achievements. But I would like to ask you very directly, from the museum's perspective—and in the pragmatic way—how do you personally view the Archives as fitting within, with a broader program, here at the museums? Or with some very important goals and a direction. Because you took some orphans from the outside, this little Smithsonian outpost, and gave it a home. There had to be a number of reasons why, and I'd be curious to know how, from this point. You knew why you did it then—I mean, we've talked about it—but from this point, how does it seem to have worked out, given

the changes and the growths of the museums.

IW: Well, Paul, I think only you can answer that.

PK: (chuckles)

IW: And I will play Edgar P. Richardson at this point and. . . . I'll never forget when he came—I've told you this before—but he came to the office upstairs there. The first thing he. . . . You know, I was so proud because I was showing him what had happened and where it was located, and you were our guests, and you were there up in the tower, and so forth and so on, and he sort of cut through my palaver and said, "May I see the registration book, please?" to see who was using the Archives. And, you know, following the raison d'etre of why the Archives is part of our interest, we are simply trying at this point to fulfill the charge and the challenge that was offered by John Rockefeller to us, to not just take the collection and hang it on the walls, but to build this as a great center for American art, and I'm particularly proud of what's happened, of what's happened at Berkeley, and I don't necessarily want to repeat that story, but I take particular pride in thinking that being a sort of a. . . .

PK: Catalyst?

IW: Well, [it looks so, what's so] callous as being a burr under their saddle for a while, forced them to think about American art seriously, and now they have a good scholar and students coming out, and [it, then] also had something to do with Stanford and Wanda Corn, at Stanford. So you have, you know, you have key scholars, you have two great universities, you have sort of the library of American paintings in the collection here, and in addition to that you have the Archives office as a research center, so that this is a very—I was going to say useful, but I think a very necessary complement to this other activity, if indeed that's the way it works. I mean, do those students come in and use the Archives? Is every student that's being matriculated out of those two institutions using this as a. . . .

PK: They spend their time, yeah. I'll answer that for you.

IW: I think that's where the answer's going to lie.

[Tape 4, side A]

PK: Ian McKibbin White, second session, tape 2 [marked Tape 4, side A]. All right. We were talking about one of our mutual favorite subjects, I'm sure, the Archives. [said with a smile—Ed.] You were raising some questions about the test of the wisdom or the usefulness of the Archives being here within the museum to a certain extent has to do with how many students are actually coming and using the resources, because a very nice well-placed space here, well-located space at the museums has been devoted to us for these years. And I of course would, could respond by saying that it's a growing thing. That if you look at, let's say, statistics of _____'s registration and all that, scholar students that came in when we were up in the tower, and compare them to now, you'd say, "Yes, they have managed to make some good progress."

IW: But what if this were, supposing this were, an equivalent amount and quality of space were available at the university art museum, and it was the Archives of American Art, would your incidence of use go zooming up with Berkeley and fall off from Stanford, or what do you suppose it would be?

PK: I don't think it makes as much difference as maybe I once thought it would. I think that location. . . . Oh, there's a certain convenience, of course, just being able to drop in, yeah.

IW: The _____, yeah.

PK: But the whole idea of this place is that it's not casual use. [That is], the collections are very, very specialized, as you know, being the world's largest collection of such things, such research material, and that if the students are serious and have the needs from _____ of their projects, they have to find their way here. I think what we see happening, what you and I have watched over the last thirteen years, is a change in the whole climate in the Bay area. It's—I want to say it's dramatic—I don't know if we really can use that word—it's significant, that's for sure. The fact that we have, however this all came about, a situation where now doctorates are being offered at Berkeley and at Stanford is important and makes a difference, but it's growing still very slowly. There's still, in this area. . . .

IW: Well, certainly, from my perspective—I haven't been working in this recently—but when we were trying to work out that dual position of a curator who was part time here and part time at Berkeley, I sat in on the selection committee, and I heard the debate in Berkeley, and it was very evident that if an open-end amount of money, more than enough money, came in and was put on the table at the University of California at Berkeley, and the staff, the art history staff, were given the choice, they would come up with many other disciplines in priority, higher priority, than American art. American art would be down at the bottom.

PK: Yeah.

IW: But it was only because—there wasn't that kind of money—there was half of the position being thrown at them free by us that we were forced, we forced them to deal with this in an up-front way, and they had to come to grips with it—and eventually they did.

PK: They did indeed, and the, I guess, third Edna Root curator, Margaretta Lovell, after—well, what was it? Two, three years in the split position, when it was that?

IW: Um hmm.

PK: Then finally, for whatever reasons, is now full time at Berkeley, which is a. . . .

IW: And her protege the full time here.

PK: Right.

IW: I don't look on that as a stepping back from that position.

PK: No, no.

IW: I look on it as a plus, because. . . .

PK: I was going to ask you, did you have this in mind in the beginning, that ultimately the split position would indeed split, and the two parts would then become full time?

IW: No, I had in mind that we would try it and see what would happen, and it at the very beginning looked like a very difficult job to perform [in]. And it would need somebody who was really energetic, and the fact that Margaretta, on one of her survey trips, covered most of two counties to see where she'd like to live—in one afternoon—I don't know how many tickets she got—to _____ made me realize she was a very energetic person, but the fact that it worked out this way I think is just fine. Because I feel that we have good friends with real intimate, inside perspectives about the museum and the collections, both in Margaretta Lovell and in Wanda Corn at Stanford, and you have what appears to be a good energetic, young, respected curator working here, with various interns and assistants as we can provide for.

PK: Oh, there's a lot of activity, and, I mean, we get most of our youths, I think, here at the Archives now from Mark Simpson and his department, which is. . . . I mean, I'm sure if we ask, if I ask them, "Was it a good idea for Ian White to invite the Archives to set up shop at the museum?" of course they'd say, "Yeah. All we have to do is go downstairs." On the other hand, I'm not sure that that's—looking at it in a very objective way—if that is enough justification for basically an outside organization—that has been treated very much as an insider, one of the family—to take up space in the museum. [And, But] I think what will be interesting in terms of testing the philosophy of the museum, in terms of service to the community, and everything else, is what your successor decides about that, and neither of us, of course, can know at this point.

IW: Well, of course, in the scheme of things, the amount of space. . . .

PK: Right.

IW: . . . that the Archives takes up is not very large. Maybe in terms of the library, you'd jam an awful lot more books into the library if you had this space. But beyond that, it really doesn't solve the museum's problems very much.

PK: No, right. Yeah. But at any rate, that has been a very interesting relationship. And I have one more question for you. When you started the job. . . . No, let me rephrase it. At what point did you decide that building towards an American strength would make sense at the museums? Do you remember? Was there a moment—eureka—and this is one of the things that I can do here.

IW: Of course. When John Rockefeller came on the horizon.

PK: (chuckles)

IW: Which was fairly early on. And much earlier on than he alluded to when he first talked to us—I'm sorry, when he made his announcement about how it happened, he talked about, I forget, something about three years or so we'd been talking. Well, in fact it was seven years that we talked about it. But he gave some earlier hints, and though he, in his conversations with me, and I think this is covered in my eaarlier interview. . . .

PK: Yeah.

IW: . . . that he never said that he was planning to give his collection here, [but, when] he said that we were just "talking around the subject." And we talked and talked and talked, but when he told me, fairly early on, that he had sold his version, one of the four versions, of The After the Hunt [_____—Ed.] because we had one, that was a nice way indirectly of. . . .

PK: Of indicating something.

IW: Yeah.

PK: You got all excited, I'll bet.

IW: I tried not to show it (chuckles), but I was jumping for joy. When he walked into our lives, he came out specifically to see the Rainy Season in the Tropics, the Frederick Edwin Church painting here [we'd just bought].

PK: What year was it, do you recall, when he visited?

IW: I think it was '68, '69. It was right after. . . . He was coming out to see it as a new acquisition, and he said, "Oh yes, that had been offered to me, but I thought it was a museum picture, not suitable for my home," meaning his more intimate spaces of his office or his houses—for instance, his house in the country or his apartment or something of that sort. And we began, then, thinking what can we do that will set this in a serious way to do something about American art, rather than just saying, you know, "We want the pictures. We want your collection. We need some more American paintings." We went about it, and it all seemed to fit and fall into place one step after another, of which the Archives was a very key step. So that's how it came about.

PK: Well, it certainly seemed to work.

IW: Yeah.

PK: I mean, what at coup! And what. . . . I'm sure that museum people in other parts of the country must have been fairly surprised, or not shocked, but pretty surprised by that announcement.

IW: I've been told so.

PK: _____ _____.

IW: True. And I'm, you know, I think it really is quite marvelous. Perhaps it is the most important thing that I was able to effect.

PK: [You mean for the, OR: Very impressive]. . . .

IW: A whole region suddenly came alive after really a generation of not quietly—but loudly—berating and saying how poorly we did do this, and this is of course the voice of Alfred Frankenstein, who. . . .

PK: Your first _____.

IW: . . . articulated it in so many ways, over so many years.

PK: And then, of course, Alfred, never satisfied, complained anyway.

IW: No, that's right. Right.

PK: But that's, I guess, a whole different story.

IW: Yeah.

PK: Well, it certainly seems, from our unpredujiced viewpoint, sitting here in the Archives of American Art, that all the activity in the American area here has been extremely—well, exciting! Really. And you're absolutely right, the different parts have seemed to come together in a way that I certainly. . . . Well, what did I know when I first came here, but I don't that it could have been anticipated, the different components: the departments, the collection here, the [Bothene] Library devoting, building a library of American art, our [the Archives] role here, the managing somehow through a key people that work in _____ with the museum. And I think actually especially of Wanda Corn, back in, you know, not really a staff member, I suppose, but somebody, from the time I arrived here, connected with the museums as guest curator, teaching. . . .

IW: Yeah. Several different times.

PK: All the parts under this roof seemed to come together to force, or to make possible, really quite a jump in activity in the American field, which is also a part of a national trend, it's true, that we _____ benefitted from

that. I would like to move on, if I may, to one more question, our final thing. The final question.

IW: The final question.

PK: And it's an obligatory type question, in such circumstances. You know, at this moment you're looking ahead to _____ _____ of a benchmark, a point where you will be retiring and you'll be—I don't want to say leaving this behind—but you'll be moving on to other things in your own life. But obviously you're going to. . . . You're never really going to be able to leave the museums, I think, entirely. I mean, that's twenty years of blood, sweat, and tears, and I would expect that you. . . . If were able to, in a fantasy situation, to help the museums on into the future, into the next twenty years, let's say, you must have some sort of scenario of what might happen. What would that be? What things would you hope for for the museums? Taking into consideration, if you will, a role beyond just San Francisco, but truly, you know, west coast position, vis a vis activities elsewhere. What are your thoughts about that? Or have you had time to think about that?

IW: Well, you know, using the story of the success of the American department as one kind of an indicator, I would dearly love to see each of the seven departments eventually endowed with reasonable acquisition, endowed acquisition funds, or acquisition funds available to them, so that they are in an area that they, from a position that they can compete. I guess that's one's dream for a museum. And remember that this was one of the things that characterized this period: there were very few funds. This seems to be changing, and for the better and in a very nice way. I just must say that one of the things that really pleases me is that one way to pay tribute to this period and what I have done was to name an acquisition fund. If anything, that is certainly bedrock to the future of the institution, I think.
As to the physical aspect of the museum, which is the other very important consideration, my whole career has been spent in sort of historic preservation—literally and figuratively. (chuckles) When I arrived at Brooklyn, when I worked at the Brooklyn Museum, we were down at the city hall, in our spare time, arguing that Brooklyn Heights should be preserved as an historic district. And that same mode of operating has been what has characterized the time that I spent at the Brooklyn Museum, where I was very much involved in renovating a wonderful old McKim Mead White building. That is an issue that's very a la mode today, with the new planning that's going on in that museum.

PK: Um hmm, correct.

IW: Completing the design or complementing it—anyway, expanding. And also has been out here. I think what I'm saying in a very beating-around-the-bush way is that I've never been one for advocating that you tear down the old building and put up a new one, the phenomena that's just happened in Los Angeles. Well, it's. . . .

PK: Or trying to cover up, aren't they?

IW: Yeah, yeah. But one doesn't know. Whether. . . . You're in a very tight situation in these museums, in the park here, in a let's call it historically preserved precinct virtually, in terms of Golden Gate Park. How much can you expand? There's real difficulty in expanding beyond the footprint, as we know, of the parameters of the building. And yet there are very important things. One of the dreams that I wasn't able to realize in this time, and had to weigh very carefully my feelings about it, was the reconstruction of the Chapper house in Santa Maria [de Ovala], which, you know, I had to say to myself, was I going to spend the next eight or ten years devoted primarily to getting up that Chapper house, or was I going to do other things that I wanted to do in my life. So that would, there's no doubt in my mind that that's of prime importance and must be done. But how it'll be done, where it'll be done. . . . There's a lot that this next generation is going to have to address and it goes beyond, oh, you know, all of these sort of administrative, political interactions that have to take place between this museum and the Asian Museum and the museum society and all of that. I think you have to back away from those things to think about the future physical plant. Now the new director at the Asian Museum, _____ Rand Castille, has said, "We're going to stay here, and this board's going along with it." And that stopped, at least for the moment, a sort of wishy-washiness about it, you know, the man who blows in wind. (laughs) They have been moving out one day, and staying put the next.

PK: Yeah.

IW: It's very frustrating to work. I think it would be wonderful for these museums if the new director here and Rand were entirely cooperative individuals who worked very closely together to see that the institution developed- meaning the two museums together, taken as one big overall art museum, institution—worked together to develop a physical plant, rather than vying and competing with each other. I think you could very well do it. There are some very critical. . . . There's a very critical factor that's already understood, and in terms of the rebuilding of the museum that has to take place of the seismic shortcomings in the, in a lot of the area of this museum here, the deYoung Museum.

PK: Hmm! That just has to be done?

IW: It just has to be done. It's going to be phenomenally costly. There is the terrible space shortage, and just double-hanging the paintings isn't the answer. Or selecting them so strictly that some of the good things, but less than masterpieces, are relegated to the basement.

PK: Right. _____ show postage-stamp size.

IW: (chuckles) Well. . . .

PK: Well, let's see. Obviously at this point you can't know, one can't know how things will be in the future between the Asian Arts Museum. It's always been an interesting, I suppose at times rather difficult, relationship: two different views.

IW: Yes, but in the last year, I have seen—given Rand's personality and my personality, and knowing, having known each other before—he's the one Orientalist, rather than Sherman Lee, who I really knew, or at least of our generation. Sherman Lee and Larry [Sekma, Sikma], those are retired people. [continuing first sentence of paragraph—Ed.] That you could operate together, better with two directors working side by side than one sort of super director and having an Oriental department under a curator and a whole Western art department under another curator, that you've got added richness, so long as the personalities will work together. Now, you know, that asks for a degree of idealism which may not be, you know, productive over a couple of decades of time, but it could be.

PK: Well that's, you know, it was a fantasy question. And very lastly, how would. . . .

IW: (chuckles) Should the Museum of Modern the Art join the dance?

PK: Well, no, I wasn't going to ask that, although that in a way is part of it. I was just wondering if you have—again, in this fantasy world—any thoughts about how the museums on the west coast—let's think of the super region—might better collaborate? I mean, as far as I can see from where I sit, there's really not a lot, in most cases, a lot of communication or collaboration between these institutions. I'm not talking about just within the city, but city to city. Do you see any benefit or any. . . . Is there any scenario or plan that you would envision that might enhance the museum, overall museum presence and service on the west coast through cooperation?

IW: Well, Ann Getty said it. Ann Getty said, I think it was before the, right after Paul Getty's death, but before the Getty received its money, that what might be possible would be to, what they would like to see happen was the museums of the west coast do what they're doing, but do it much better. And it would seem to me that it would be possible to do that, that you could form some sort of loose affiliation between the museums in the south and the museums up here, to some kind of benefit. No, I have to realize that that's a little cheeky to a degree, because the Getty perspective obviously should be world-wide. I mean, it's a little bit like the___. Buck money in Marin County. Of course, if the Buck money is just available for. . . .
[Interruption in taping]

IW: . . . that the, you know, if that money is going to be frittered away in Marin County by putting a new, planning a new baseball diamond in the middle of Ross Public School, that's waste of money. But you could establish a research center, let's say, that could address some of the great issues that are unresolved in this world—you know, world hunger, Aids, well, whatever. So that, you know, the Getty, at the largest commitment, might be to solving the problem of pollution in monuments worldwide, and that kind of thing. But on the other hand, there's probably enough money there that one could do something that was, you know, perhaps best—strangely—best articulated by Norton Simon. You know, when he was, I think not for genuine reasons, but at least he came up and said it. He came to San Francisco and said it in San Francisco, that one could develop some sort of federation or affiliation between the museums. That you might have collections moving back and forth. I mean, let's not get hooked on wearing out the art, because the art travels all over the place anyway, depending on what the need is and who's coming up with the next exhibition. But that you could do this within the west coast.

PK: Um hmm.

IW: I was, you know, well, it's a little exuberant and said in print, that it may still be possible to tilt the balance to the west.

PK: That's perfect.

IW: But that's down the road.

PK: Well, I think that's a good ending spot for our interview.

IW: All right. Fine.

PK: Thank you again.

IW: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

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