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Oral history interview with Nan Rosenthal, 2010 June 28-July 12

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Nan Rosenthal on 2010 June 28-July 12. The interview took place in New York, New York, and was conducted by Judith Richards for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Elizabeth Murray Oral History of Women in the Visual Arts Project.

Nan Rosenthal reviewed the first half of the transcript before her death and made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Nan Rosenthal on June 28 , 2010 in New York City for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc one. So Nan, I'd like to start by asking you about your family background, certainly back to your grandparents and especially if you knew them and anything else you'd want to say.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Let's see. They're quite different. They were all nonreligious, ethnic Jews. On my father's side, my great-grandfather came here in the 1880s or so.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What was his name?

NAN ROSENTHAL: [Laughs.] His name was Herman Rosenthal and he was a poet and a scholar of Slavic literature. He was from a suburb of Riga and his family was German-speaking. And then he moved to [New York]. First, he moved to [Kremenchuk, Ukraine?] I'll dredge it up. And then he moved to the United States with the Baron de Hirsch Fund.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What does that mean?

NAN ROSENTHAL: It was—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Baron de Hirsch?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. He was—I can look him up in *A History of the Jews*. He funded immigration from Eastern Europe to the United States in, I think—the 1880s, '90s and so on. And my great-grandfather, the poet—the Slavic literature scholar—went to several communities that the Baron de Hirsch had funded.

And after a few years, moved to New York. They were agricultural communities and he was not set up for that. And he worked in various places in New York. I mean I have a lot of material on that, but—including, I think, what was the equivalent of Con Edison in those days. And then he—when the Lenox Library—and when the New York Public Library became the New York Public Library, it was the Astor Library and the Lenox Library.

And they merged. And when they merged, they founded a Slavic literature department, of which he became the director. And indeed, his photograph hangs in their reading room. And I'm told that it's the finest Slavic literature library outside of Russia. And so that's where he spent his later years.

And there, he did things like print railroad timetables when I said it was like the Chicago of the Ukraine. It was a place from which wheat was sent all over that area. And quite a different place from Riga in Latvia. Anyway, one of his sons—a son called Max—became a doctor. He got his medical training in Germany—he went back from New York, where the family lived, by then.

JUDITH RICHARDS: In Manhattan?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. I think, in Manhattan. I'm pretty sure. And he had a lot of friends—I mean my great-grandfather, the poet, Slavic literature person. And he had a number of daughters who had to be married off. But anyway, Max, who became an obstetrician, did his medical training in Germany, partly because it wasn't very easy for Jews to get into medical school in those—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Compared to Germany? [They laugh.]

NAN ROSENTHAL: Oh, well, compared to Germany, then, yes, let's say, turn of the century. And so then my grandfather, Max, whom I never met but heard a lot about, he had three sons, of which my father was the youngest. And my father and the middle brother—right before—the middle brother was about 10 years older than my father.

He had become a stockbroker and my uncle went in the Navy. My father went into the air corps during World War II. They had great confidence in the ability of the United States to win. [And] be on the winning side in World War II and the two of them together bought a seat on the New York Stock Exchange. And so when the war was over, they went back into that business and that's what my father did for a living.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Tell me his name and your uncle's?

NAN ROSENTHAL: My uncle's name was Harold—I forget his middle initial. And my father's name was Alan. Herman was his middle initial. A-L-A-N.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So Max, your grandfather, lived in Manhattan as well—[inaudible]—just obstetrician?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, he did for most of his career. When he started practicing, I think that—I think I've been told that most of his patients lived in the Bronx and gradually—not even so gradually—they came to live in Manhattan. And most of my father's life, they lived in a—they lived in a brownstone on 89th Street, between Central Park West and Columbus. And the doctor's part was on the first floor and the wife and—she was a housewife—and three sons lived upstairs.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did your—what was your grandmother's name and did she do—

NAN ROSENTHAL: Her name was Henrietta and she came, I think, from a more prosperous family than Max. But my great-grandfather—I think my sense of him is he got around and knew a lot of people, which may be how he ended up doing this Slavic literature department position.

For example, he was quite frankly with the banker, Jacob Schiff, which was interesting to me later because I didn't really know much about it until much later, when one of my cousins noticed his photograph hanging in the reading room.

We would take the 5th Avenue bus from our apartment on 87th Street between Madison and 5th and we would go on a bus ride down to 42nd Street and look at the lions. And my father explained to me that this was my great-grandfather's office. And so—and I was five or six years old and I believed this.

Well, it was, in a sense. [Laughs.] Much, much later, some people from the library sort of found us because one of my cousins was wandering around there and the present head of the department found us and gave us a great deal of information, actually, about my great-grandfather.

You know, for me, in museum work, it was a clear development opportunity. [Laughs.] One of my first cousins started donating money and gradually, we all started donating money to this language. [Laughs.] We weren't terribly interested, but—

JUDITH RICHARDS: In his honor.

NAN ROSENTHAL: It was. When I turned 70, several of my cousins made donations to the Slavic literature department in my honor. This is really not terribly relevant to anything to do with my career, but anyway, I never knew the doctor, Dr. Max, but he was obviously a very interesting man.

He founded Sydenham Hospital, which is now, I think, part of Harlem Hospital. And I had my tonsils taken out there. That I remember when I was seven or eight. In those days, everyone had tonsils removed. His wife, Henrietta, was a serious Ethical Culturist.

They were very open about acknowledging the fact that they were ethnically Jewish. But they weren't, at all, religious in their practice of Judaism. But Henrietta was an Ethical Culturist, quite serious about it and both of my parents, as it happens, went to Ethical Culture school, as did I. And then I went to Fieldston for high school and I loved it. I loved them both.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What—when—tell me about your mother's family background. And what was her name?

NAN ROSENTHAL: My mother's name was Lenore Fry, F-R-Y. And her mother's name was Florence. And her father's name was Samuel. And he was a ribbon salesman and then a playing card salesman.

And I think my grandmother was a much more capable person than my maternal grandfather. And she was very anxious for my mother to marry well. My mother started college and dropped out very quickly. I think she had the depression as an excuse and went into, I think, a training program at Macy's.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Where did your mother grow up? In the city?

NAN ROSENTHAL: In Manhattan. And she met my mother, I think, at a country club. In New York and in a suburb

—somewhere in Westchester. [Laughs.] And she was very charming and very attractive, but I would not say that she was particularly skilled at anything besides being charming and shopping and she had a lot of friends. She was very popular.

She couldn't boil an egg, but when World War II came around and we were following my father around the United States to different places he was stationed, my mother's adventures with cooking are not worth retelling.

I have a vivid memory of her dropping a tray of ketchup, mayonnaise and god-knows-what on the kitchen floor. [Laughs.] Anyway, whereas my grandmother—her mother—taught me a good deal about cooking and sewing and things like that. But my mother, again, I mean—hemming a dress was not the sort of thing that she did. But she was very good at shopping. [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So your parents met at the country club. And after they were married, they lived in Manhattan?

NAN ROSENTHAL: They lived in Manhattan. They lived—I think I was brought from Lenox Hill Hospital to this apartment at 21 East 87th Street and among their good friends, which is, I think, relevant in a distant way to my career, Roy and Marie Neuberger, who were both active Ethical Culturists and of course, active art collectors.

My father and Roy were very close and they lived [in] the building [with] two halves. And the Neubergers lived in the 22 East 88th Street half and we lived in the 21 East 87th Street half. And they shared a cab to Wall Street every morning.

JUDITH RICHARDS: He didn't work in the same firm?

NAN ROSENTHAL: In the same firm? No, no, though Roy started one of the first, if not the first mutual funds. And my father was on the board.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did your father study business? Did he?

NAN ROSENTHAL: No, he went to Dartmouth, where he majored in German. He was a Phi Beta Kappa, but I don't think he put a lot of energy into either his studies or his skiing. [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Skiing?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, everybody at Dartmouth skied, but I think he skied a little bit. I don't know why he majored in German. And during World War II, it made everybody kind of nervous because there was the assumption that he would be sent to Europe.

He was an officer, given his academic training and his age. He wouldn't have been drafted. He was in his mid-30s. He went, as did my uncle who went in the Navy, out of patriotism. And the oldest brother worked for OPA—the Office of Price Administration in Washington—during the war. He was really too old for the military I think. And I was very close to my cousins, whom I liked very much, because I was an only child and so I liked that. I had about seven or eight cousins.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When were you born?

NAN ROSENTHAL: August 27th, 1937.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And so even when you were as young as first [starting] kindergarten you started to have to move with your mother and father when he was posted in different locations.

NAN ROSENTHAL: That's right. The first year we were in Champaign-Urbana and I went to kindergarten. And the second year and a bit more than that we were in Sacramento.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You knew you'd return? Or your parents knew you'd return to the same apartment in New York City?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I think we gave up the apartment, which was a six-room apartment. It had two bedrooms and a living room and a dining room and a kitchen and a maid's room. And the maid actually came with us, which was complicated because she was German and we had to get papers every time we changed cities for her. She was quite wonderful. So she, at that point—she was a cook, really, but she started functioning as a—

MS. RICHARD: Oh, a cook. That makes sense with what you said. [Laughs.]

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, actually started functioning as not just a cook but a kind of [nanny] and just household help. Marge [ph] was a wonderful woman we saw later. But after a while it just got to be too much and she went

back to New York and got married. So that's when my mother started—[they laugh]—dropping trays [of] condiments on the floor. There was a lot of eating at the officer's club and so—[laughs].

But living in Sacramento was wonderful for me, after New York. We lived in a little house and there were millions of children on the block. And it was totally unlike living in Manhattan where just to go across the street to the park you had to be accompanied by an adult of some sort and this was different. You know, I had a pet duck and some chickens for a while and they died, which explains why I raised chickens much later in California. But we'll get to that.

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

NAN ROSENTHAL: And in those days my parents collected some American furniture—18th century American furniture at a place that still functions. A quite distinguished place called Ginsburg & Levy [in New York]. And they collected—they put together a really beautiful collection of English Staffordshire of American scenes which was quite interesting.

And it was not until, I would say, around 1950, '51 my parents were at some bookstore or other looking at reproductions of John Marin paintings and taking a very long time to decide which reproduction to buy. And a rather snotty bookstore salesman said, look, you know, if you're so fussy about this why don't you go to the downtown gallery? This was Edith Halpert's gallery.

And so my parents said, well, where is it? And they got the address. And he said, then you can look at the originals and decide which reproduction you want to buy. Well, they ended up buying a Marin watercolor, which they had, oh, until my mother died. And because of the IRS I had to sell.

I mean, I was a college professor. I didn't have any money. I had to sell basically almost all of their collection in order to pay taxes on it. After the war we went to Sacramento, Dayton, Detroit and so on. But Sacramento was the fun place for me. And I went to first grade and I had, by that time, definitely taught myself to read. I was alone a lot and I was very good at reading, which also affected my school schedule and so on.

And then when we knew we were returning to New York. Towards the end of the war, my father picked up the phone and called the director of admissions at Ethical and said, Nan—I mean, it's so different from nowadays with watching people try to get their kids into school.

Nan, we'll be coming—[laughs]—in September. And this woman had been his Latin teacher when he was at Ethical and she flunked him, which made it quite funny that he majored in a language that had all those declensions and endings in it. He was a Phi Beta Kappa.

But anyway, when she gave him trouble about—well, we don't have any room in the class, he said, "Nan, some of us, you know—[laughs]—went into the military during the war and some of others stayed home and made money. I'm one of the ones that—[laughs]—went into the military. Nan will be starting in September." And I guess there wasn't too much arguing about it and so I did.

And I still see a number of people from that class and one of my close friends is also called Nan—Nan Askin.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How do you spell her last name?

NAN ROSENTHAL: A-S-K-I-N. And she also became a professor. Oh, there were a lot of professors in the class. It happened to be a particularly wonderful special group of kids. And another person who was in my class was a woman who's the trustee of the school, Adele Logan Alexander, whose father had been in my father's class at Ethical and was a doctor and they were what in those days we called Negro—and Adele, a remarkable girl. Anyway, she's now a college professor and writes books on the history of her family—very interesting.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So going through Ethical Culture, that goes to the seventh grade?

NAN ROSENTHAL: It went through sixth grade.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Sixth grade. What were your best subjects or what were you most interested in?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Almost anything but math—[laughs]—and history and literature and even then, journalism. We put out a newspaper magazine of which I was the editor and I don't remember what it was called. I'm sure I have a copy somewhere. And I liked taking painting—you know, art classes but it wasn't a big deal.

And at some point in there, as I say, my parents, first, they got the Marin watercolor and the Neuberger's were collecting American art. And I think my parents learned a good deal from that. My father would probably be revolving in his grave if he—up in his grave. [Laughs.] But he—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And why would he be—

[Cross talk.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Because he wouldn't even like to say that he learned—

NAN ROSENTHAL: That he learned a lot of things about art from Roy. What he did learn a lot from was Edith Halpert, who was a very distinguished, well-known dealer. And the other dealer they learned a great deal from was a man called Curt, with a C, Valentine and he became a very good friend. And my guess is that he was probably my father's broker. I can't swear to that but I'm—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Your father's broker?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Stock broker.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I thought your father was in—

NAN ROSENTHAL: My father was a stock broker. He had clients.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, but he—oh, so Curt was a client of your father's?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I think so.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I see.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Just as my father was a client of Curt's. And he bought—things I remember they're buying from Curt, who was a good friend and a very funny man—and then Curt died in, like, 1956. We were in Europe that summer and we were going to meet up with him and his lady friend who was wonderful. She took my mother and me all over Paris and showed us how to shop and the way of shopping. And [she] showed me what an existentialist looked like and—[laughs]. Anyway, it was fun.

And then my father got interested in collecting tribal art, of which I have a few things left.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Roy was interested in that as well.

NAN ROSENTHAL: He was. But that's where my father—[laughs]—introduced him to the tribal dealers and so it was a kind of rivalry. And also Roy was getting to be really quite a famous person on Wall Street, having started the Neuberger and Berman company and so on. And Marie, his wife, was a very intelligent woman and very active in various, philanthropically. This has so little to do with my career—[laughs]—but still, they were an interesting example.

And my parents traveled together a good deal in Europe and gradually my parents got more and more interested in art. And they kept that collection of English Staffordshire of American scenes. They were very proud of it. But the real interest was in American art, mostly of the postwar era but—

JUDITH RICHARDS: So their generation?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, but not let's say, like, Ben Heller. They didn't collect abstract expressionism. In retrospect, the things they could have collected in those days, it's interesting to think about. I mean, they didn't ever buy Stuart Davis—it was not what you'd call a distinguished collection but it wasn't bad either. My mother had basically been a housewife but she started to work part time for the Borgenicht Gallery. She wanted to do something and Grace Borgenicht was a friend of sorts.

And she got quite friendly with the artists who were in the stable of the gallery. And my father finally didn't like this. My mother wasn't the type that could both run a household and have a job and so after a while she stopped working. But she also later worked for the Seidenberg's, for their gallery, part time. Sometimes Mrs. Seidenberg got sick and she would work there.

And then they started going to galleries every Saturday and I often went with them. And in those days there was no downtown to speak of. To go to Greenwich Village was an incredibly exciting adventure.

JUDITH RICHARDS: They never went to 10th Street? The 10th Street galleries?

NAN ROSENTHAL: No. And they weren't particularly familiar with abstract-expressionist art—but a little bit. And they knew some of the artists and that, to me, was very exciting. I got very interested in artists. I remember they bought things from *André Emmerich—pre-Columbian things. And André and Dore Ashton, the critic, were working on a book together so we met Dore.*

JUDITH RICHARDS: I didn't realize that Emmerich had the gallery in the '50s. [Because you were talking about] before you went to college?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, we are. Yes, it was out of his apartment I believe. There were green velvet chairs. I think it was that he was a sort of private dealer then. And Dore was married to an artist whose name I can fill in later. And that was very exciting to meet and talk to artists. Openings in those days were on Tuesday evenings on Madison Avenue and I used to go to those openings. I don't know why my mother didn't particularly like them.

But I used to go to them with my father and so I became familiar—and we would go to museum exhibitions but not all that frequently. You know, and frequently, papers that I wrote for school were on art subjects.

JUDITH RICHARDS: In high school?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. And I think that was because it was something that was discussed around the house a great deal.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you were approaching graduation from high school, did you already think that you'd be majoring in journalism in college?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I knew that I wanted to be a journalist, specifically a newspaper reporter. And so I assumed I wanted to major in political science or economics or something like that that would help my career. The undergraduate majors in journalism didn't come up much.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Were you aware of the difficulties that women were having in the newspaper business reporting on anything but the home section?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I was aware of that but I decided that I would just pursue the matter anyway. And I started by —I remember I asked an uncle of mine—an uncle of mine knew James Wechsler. James Wechsler was, at that time, the editor-in-chief of the New York Post.

It was my senior year and I was editor of the Fieldston News, which was a very useful experience because we had a print shop at Fieldston. You know, with a Linotype machine and it was like a miniature news room. And I started working there when I was in ninth grade or 10th grade and it meant you had to stay after school and [my mother] would drive up and pick us up. She was very good about that.

I wasn't sure how to pursue the career immediately, but I learned. There was a woman called Judith Crist who ultimately became the film critic for the Herald Tribune. She was a reporter for the Herald Tribune and I was on some committee at Fieldston that invited people to talk on ethics in various professions and I invited her because she was a newspaper reporter and a woman.

And I went to interview her at the Herald Tribune and I just totally, completely riveted by the "city room" and the whole thing—where I spent many, many hours because she got sent out on an assignment. And then I wrote this up for the Fieldston News, and she thought my write-up was terrific and so she gave me a lot of advice—she said either go work for a suburban newspaper and you can do a lot of writing or go and be a copyboy for a New York newspaper.

And my father knew that his oldest brother knew James Wechsler. I think partly because Wechsler and my uncle were quite politically left. And he knew him. He had been the Washington correspondent of The New York Post and The New York Post, then, was about as opposite, as it is now, as it could be. It was very left—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was that the one that was owned by the Schiff's?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, exactly. And Mrs. Schiff—I have to say is probably the last time I've been interviewed was —[laughs]—for a book on Mrs. Schiff. She was a very eccentric woman but she was very hospitable to the women on the paper. The Post had more women—I mean, there were three or four women reporters—[laughs]— and they were very nice to me. These older women reporters that mentored me.

And so with the exception of one summer when I went to Africa with a Smith professor, I was, every summer, between graduating from Fieldston and graduating from college; I was at The Post as a copyboy, which is what the union called us—copyboy, parentheses "girl." And Mrs. Schiff was very amusing and when she had people to lunch in the penthouse of The Post building, she'd like to have women. There [were] one or two women copyboys and she came—she liked to have the women serve the sandwiches. [They laugh.]

But then it was discovered that I knew how to make a Bloody Mary and this caused my reputation to rise and so —whenever she knew she was having someone to lunch that wanted a Bloody Mary, I was the waitress.

JUDITH RICHARDS: This wasn't frustrating or—

NAN ROSENTHAL: At the time?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

NAN ROSENTHAL: No, I was delighted to have this special talent that most of the copyboys didn't have. Had it been five years, six years later, it might have been irritating but I would say, in those days it was more—I didn't care. I wanted to be a newspaper reporter—[laughs]—so I then was a reporter at The Post for about a year and then—

JUDITH RICHARDS: How did you decide what college to go to when you graduated Fieldston?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I think I decided badly. I mean, a cousin of mine, whom I was very close to and fond of, had gone to Smith as her mother before her had, and I went up there when I was a sophomore in high school or something and it was all very fun. And you couldn't go to Yale and Princeton and it was very hard to get into Radcliffe. I mean, you couldn't go to a first-rate coed school, which is what I would have liked to have done.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Why not?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, because they didn't admit women in those days.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, okay. But you said Radcliffe?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Radcliffe did, but not very many. And Fieldston had a sort of quota on the number of girls who could apply to—I actually did apply to Radcliffe. But I ended up going to Smith and I disliked it—not academically, I liked it academically a lot and I went for two years. And for various reasons a lot of them—The Post—I had been getting to know New York very well in a way that I hadn't as a rather privileged young woman growing up.

And I really wanted to get back to New York so I applied to Barnard and Sarah Lawrence and told my parents—and that was the summer I went off to Africa—and I told my parents just send a deposit to whichever one accepts me first and I will transfer.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Where did you apply? Sarah Lawrence and where else?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Barnard. The idea was to get back to New York. And so I ended up at Sarah Lawrence which I disliked even more than I disliked Smith.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What was it basically that?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I think it was a silly place.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Not serious academically? Or the social scene was—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Certainly not serious in the sense that Smith was. No. And I didn't spend all that much time there. I spent a lot of time at—[laughs]—Yale Law School. In the spring and fall I had the use of my parent's rental car and I spent a lot of time really at Yale Law School.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Because you had friends there?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. I had boyfriends, but I also would go to class.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you were auditing classes?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was this an official policy that Sarah Lawrence had?

NAN ROSENTHAL: No, not at all. My classes were from midday Monday to midday Wednesday and I had a lot of time and I had a various succession of boyfriends there and the—[laughs]—combination was—

JUDITH RICHARDS: You mentioned law. Is that because the boyfriend was there or because you actually started thinking about an interest in law?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I didn't think that seriously about going to law school. I was interested in the courses,it was kind of a mixture of law and journalism. One student there was a man called Victor Navasky. And Victor, who was very interested in politics and also very interested in journalism, later became editor of The Nation. But he

was at Yale Law School in those days and running a satirical journal called Monocle. At that moment we were all very interested in the Joseph McCarthy situation which was a little earlier.

But anyway, there was a large group of us that were interested in both politics and journalism, I would say, and we knew one another and at some point when I was at The Post, having this tryout as a reporter, Mrs. Schiff demoted Jimmy Wechsler from being editor-in-chief of the paper; where for at least a year I had been his editorial assistant, which was very interesting to sort of look at the whole working of the paper from the top, and she made him into a columnist and he was sort of my major mentor. And I decided I would take a leave of absence and go to London where I had some friends.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Now, we're talking about after you graduated Sarah Lawrence?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And you ended up majoring in what at Sarah Lawrence?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Economics. I did take a course in modern art—a yearlong course. So I guess two years had gone by.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So as soon as you graduated you're working as the editorial assistant to—

NAN ROSENTHAL: The week after I graduated I went to work for The Post fulltime.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Were you still living at home?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I moved out pretty quickly with a friend of mine from Sarah Lawrence. We took an apartment about three blocks from my parent's apartment. I wanted to move to the Village and my parents weren't having it.

And so we got an apartment across the street from New York hospital and it was about a four- or five-story building and a friend of mine and I rented a one-bedroom apartment there. And she had a boyfriend and lived at her boyfriend's so I basically had this apartment. [Laughs.] So I took a leave of absence from The Post after I had been there about two, two-and-a-half years.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you continue to go to galleries on your own after you started working at the newspaper?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I think that I must have but not so much. But my parents moved twice in that sort of period of the late '50s, early '60s and got involved with a decorator and got more involved with art, themselves, I would say. And through them, for one reason or another, I would meet people.

I mean, my mother was working occasionally for the Seidenberg gallery and then I remember there was a very famous man named Kahnweiler, who was coming and he was Picasso's dealer and [had] written about Picasso and my father thought I should meet this man and so we went and had dinner with the Seidenbergs and Kahnweiler. So that kind of person would sort of drop into my life even though it was not the main part of my life, the main part of my life was The Post in those days.

And then when I moved to London—when I was at Sarah Lawrence, as a job to earn money, I worked for the public relations department at the college. The school newspaper was so execrable that I wouldn't lower myself to work it. This was true at Smith, too, actually, after my experiences at The Post.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How to get to London, I think.

NAN ROSENTHAL: It happened that the woman I worked for in the public relations department married a British man who was the editor of The Spectator, in London, and moved to London. And so when I decided to move to London—his name was Brian Inglis and more or less instantly I brought my scrapbook with me

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you decided to move to London before you had a job?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: And what was the cause of your deciding that?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, I had been there with my parents for several weeks—in London and in Paris—and I just thought it would be fun and that I would get a job.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You never did a year abroad or a semester abroad in college?

NAN ROSENTHAL: No, I was going to go, in my junior year, abroad to Geneva.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you had a yearning to go abroad like any person that age?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, exactly. And my parents, by that time, had quite a few friends in London and maybe a few even in Paris. So I went—and I knew The Post people in both places and I knew Brian and Ruth Inglis.

Within almost no time, Brian got me a job on the Evening Standard—the Beaverbrook afternoon paper. And I think one reason I was hired there was that I knew Norman Mailer and Norman Mailer was having a romance with Beaverbrook's granddaughter.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How did you meet Norman Mailer?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I met Norman Mailer at the Democratic National Convention in 1960, which I went to with The Post contingent. And it was a piece of very good fortune because normally Jimmy's main secretary went. But she had just gotten married and so I got to go with the special permission of Mrs. Schiff because they needed a girl around literally to pour their bourbon. It was the same story—[laughs]—as the Bloody Mary story only—

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

NAN ROSENTHAL:—on a wider scale. And I had a marvelous time and met all sorts of people and by that time I had become very friendly with a Post columnist named Murray Kempton and I believe Murray introduced me to Norman Mailer. They were chatting one day and Norman Mailer and I started chatting and he said have you ever been to Los Angeles before? And I said no. He said, well, let me drive you around. I have a rented red convertible. So he did—[laughs]—and he was interested that I knew a lot about South Africa because his father was South African.

And anyway, Norman Mailer being Norman Mailer, he started calling me and taking me out for drinks and it was at the time that he and Jimmy Breslin were hatching this scheme for Norman to run for mayor. Little did I know then, that I would get very interested in an artist called Barnett Newman who had had the idea of running for mayor of New York many, many years before but, of course, I didn't know that then.

And I got quite friendly with Mailer and I mean, he would take me to a bar and we'd have a couple of drinks and he was really interested in in putting together some way of getting publicity for running for mayor. That was why he pursued me.

JUDITH RICHARDS: As a reporter?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. And then I was at that party where he stabbed his wife. Though, I had gone home before. And then The Post found out that I'd been there. I wasn't going to tell anyone. And so they immediately assigned me to the story—[laughs]—and anyway—but when I was living in London, not that much later, I think the person that hired me who—

[End of SD card 1, track 1.]

*NAN ROSENTHAL:—was a marvelous man, h*e ran a column that was a little bit like "Talk of the Town" in *The New Yorker*, and there were about—eight or so young Oxbridge types who wrote things for this column. And it was a fantastic way to be a tourist, because it would be like the bishop of London's birthday, and so you would go to the St. Paul's Cathedral—[laughs]—and interview the bishop of London on his birthday and that kind of thing.

And you know, you asked about the women thing, and—in some ways, it was an advantage. It was really—I mean, the great feminist thing didn't start till '69, '70, and this was more like '61, '62 and very much Swinging London, and I had a marvelous time and spent about a year there. And then my parents kind of reeled me in—[laughs]—unfortunately.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What part of London did you live in?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, different parts. I lived in Marylebone, in a bedsitter that was part of a—like a 20-room apartment that was half a business and half the family's apartment.

And then my landlady discovered that I was dating Tom Mboya. This all has to do with the summer I went to Africa.

I got very interested and involved in African studies. It was one thing that happened at Smith. And Tom Mboya was in London with Jomo Kenyatta. They were Kenyans, and Mboya was really destined to be the prime minister. They were writing a Kenya constitution. And anyway, Mboya several years later was assassinated. It was very

much a Kennedy—[knocks on wood]—kind of thing.

But my landlady didn't like having a black man come to my bedsitter.

But I had another very close friend called Helen Suzman, who was a very distinguished, independent MP in the South African Parliament.

As years went on, she was very close to Mandela. She just died a year ago.

She introduced me to her daughter. I had a letter of introduction to her, and the Smith professor I was with of course knew her. She was a very famous woman. And she said, "Oh, you've got to meet my daughter. I want my daughter to know some intelligent American young women."

And this woman and I became very close friends. I went and lived with them for several weeks.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What was her name?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Frances Jowell, J-O-W-E-L-L. That's her married name.

And we ended up living in the same city at the same time over a number of years. I mean, she came to New York and lived with me for a while. I introduced her to a lot of people and—men, especially, and one of them was Calvin Trillin, The New Yorker writer, and—Bud was crazy about her. And later he and his wife and Francie and her became very close.

And then she and I, who had not been at all particularly interested in art history, though I do remember that we went to the museum in Johannesburg when I was living with them—

JUDITH RICHARDS: So after London, you went to Johannesburg?

NAN ROSENTHAL: No. The summer between sophomore and junior year in college I went to Africa for the entire summer with the Smith professor and a couple of other Smith girls.

And then Francie [and] I went and stayed with the Suzmans after the Smith part of the trip was over, and she and I became very close friends. And then we kept ending up in the same city at the same time. Maybe eight years later we both found ourselves getting Ph.D.s in the history of art at Harvard and—[laughs]—which was something we had not been particularly interested in when we were in Johannesburg together or New York together, for that matter.

But in London, I have to say the main people my parents knew were art people, art dealers and so on. And through them—there was one family in particular—through them I met a lot of quite distinguished artists in London and got more involved with art.

JUDITH RICHARDS: For example?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Oh, well, Alan Davies, Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore. These are all people I went to visit. And because of these dealers, the Gimpel brothers were French, and their father had been a distinguished dealer in Paris. And so through the Gimpels, especially Mrs. Gimpel, Kay Gimpel, who was a lovely woman, I was sent off to visit these various artists. The art world was so much smaller then. We're talking about 1963 or something like that, '2.

And also, since I knew something about art, I would tend to write up those things for the *Evening Standard* column that I was working for.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Actual reviews or more "Talk of the Town"?

NAN ROSENTHAL: More "Talk of the Town" type things. And that whole experience in London—I met a very wide circle of people, not just journalists but some art critics. I think it was either then or a year or two later I met David Sylvester, the critic, who was always fond of attractive young women, and he became someone that was a friend, you know, until he died not long ago.

And—so it was a very broadening thing going to London, and being a journalist. And then, as I say, my parents reeled me in, partly there was a job I wanted to take, and they thought it was time to come back to the States—which was kind of too bad, in some ways. My life would have been very, very different. And I went to work first briefly for the *Herald Tribune*, and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: *Show* magazine?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, *Show* especially. Victor Navasky got me that job. And I learned a lot there. I learned a lot about how a magazine works.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you came back you didn't have the apartment, did you? You found a new apartment?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, I had given up the apartment.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Same neighborhood or somewhere else?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, and very similar [arrangement]. [Laughs.] A friend of mine—in this case, a friend from Smith who had a boyfriend she was living with but had to have an apartment as a cover story for her mother. So her mother would call her every morning at 7:30, and I would answer the phone and say, "Judy [sp] is in the shower." And then I would call Judy [sp] at her boyfriend's apartment—because this was before you really went and stayed with boyfriends.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And then at some point you switched to *Art in America* for a good number of years.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. Well, *Show* in effect folded. It then opened again for a while, but yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But when you were at *Show*, you had made the transition to focusing as a reporter on art.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, sort of.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And was that because you had an ambition to do that, or that was the job?

NAN ROSENTHAL: It was probably a little of each. Victor knew that *Show* needed some staff writers, and so I was interviewed by Frank Gibney. He said, "Which of our arts do you know the most about, Miss Rosenthal?" And I said, "Well, I would know the most about one you don't cover, which is visual art." And that was the case. I mean, I certainly didn't know anything about music, though I ended up writing about music and stuff like that.

And he said, "Oh, well, that's very good. We're just starting an art section. Why don't you be our art editor?" [Laughs.]

[Laughs.] So that was how I became art editor of *Show* magazine. It really is! [Laughs.] I learned a great deal because most of the people on the staff were people who had previously worked for *Time* or *Newsweek* or something like that, and they knew a lot about magazine editing.

And then *Show* basically folded or closed its tent for a while, and I needed a job, and then someone who had been an art director, as in designer, at *Show* had gone to work on a freelance basis for *Art in America*, which needed a designer. And he saw the way *Art in America* was being run and told the editor that she ought to hire me. And she did.

As it happens, she and her husband were friends of my parents. Her husband actually worked for Neuberger and Berman. Jean and Howard [Lipman].

And Jean knew a lot. And they were old friends of my parents. I mean, my mother used to call me on the phone every day at the office, and I would try and explain to my mother she couldn't do that. [Laughs.] It drove Jean Lipman nuts.

On the other hand, Jean didn't know much about how to run a magazine. She knew a great deal about folk art and art.

And then there was also a managing editor whose main job was to entertain the owner, the publisher.

And so really I began to professionalize the magazine. It changed from a hardcover six-times-a-year thing to, I guess, 10 issues a year. And I did that partly together with this man, Sam Antupit, who was the art director. A-N-T-U-P-I-T. And he was very able. He designed the *New York Review of Books*. He opened a freelance design firm. He, alas, died a couple of years ago.

But really at *Show*, before I went to *Art in America*, I wrote a column, a monthly column, and I hired people who were well-known to write an art article every month. So I met a lot more people in the art world just doing that, being an editor.

And then in a way working for *Show* was more interesting than working for *Art in America*. But I also wrote a monthly column when I was working at *Art in America*. I had a book on museums in the United States, and I had a secretary, which was sort of amazing. And I sent a letter to all of the museums asking them if they would please send me their press releases. And they did.

So I began to learn about the various institutions all over the country and would write up what they were showing the following month and so on.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You were there from about '64 to '70. Who was the main person who determined what the magazine would be covering?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Initially, I would say, it was Jean Lipman, and then more and more I did.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Because they certainly didn't focus on folk art in any particular way.

NAN ROSENTHAL: No. No, they didn't.

But you know, I had all these press releases coming in, this system I'd started at *Show*, and if something sounded like it was an interesting exhibition I would say, "Well, we ought to cover it," and Dominique de Menil was doing a show on monsters in the history of art, I would say, "I think we ought to cover this, and the Schlumberger company plane is going to fly a few people down. Could I please go and write this up?"

And so I'd go, and I'd see Houston—which I think I'd been to once before, for some reason—and so I'd see the Houston museum and the Menil Collection. And it was a lot of that kind of thing.

Jean would get ideas, and Howard had a very good eye, especially for sculpture, and I learned a lot about sculpture at that point.

My father had a lot of sculpture too.

JUDITH RICHARDS: At some point during those years there, you decided to go back to graduate school.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, the reason that happened is, to make a really long story short, I got married to a German artist in the fall of '65, I guess. Otto Piene, P-I-E-N-E. And he and two colleagues who had started Group Zero in Dusseldorf—really, one colleague in particular, Heinz Mack—they had a show at Howard Wise. And they had a dealer in London, whose name I don't think I can summon up at this point. But the dealer in London was a friend of a very close friend of my mother's, and my mother made me go to this opening at Howard Wise to be nice to her friend, and that's where I met Otto Piene.

And he was married and had three children, and he had to get divorced—

JUDITH RICHARDS: What year did you meet him?

NAN ROSENTHAL: In the fall of '64, and then we got married fairly quickly. I wonder in retrospect how he got divorced so quickly. But he and his wife had been married forever, I mean, since World War II.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was he older than you?

NAN ROSENTHAL: He was about 10 years older than I was, yes. And for visa reasons, there was a complication. He had been teaching at the University of Pennsylvania and had come to the States on a visa that required you, when you finished your teaching, your cultural exchange-type visa, you had to go back to your country for two years. So we went to live in Dusseldorf, where he was from, for two years. It was '66 we probably went. And I think at that point I did keep my apartment in New York and sublet it to somebody in the art world.

And Otto and I went to Dusseldorf for two years.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How did your parents feel about marrying an artist?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, my father had died by then. I suspect if he'd been alive, the whole thing might not have happened. I'm not sure. It's hard to say. I had had some artist boyfriends—one of them was Ed Koren, the cartoonist, whom my father was nuts about.

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

NAN ROSENTHAL: I still have a drawing Ed made when my father was dying. It was a "Get well soon" drawing. I'll have to show it to you.

Anyway, and I learned a lot in those two years in Europe. We traveled a great deal. Otto was interested in light as a medium. And I kept doing things for *Art in America*, and I also wrote a bit for the *Herald Tribune*, reviewing shows and we traveled, and I saw a great many museums in Europe that Otto was doing performance art pieces [at] that I was helping with and so on.

We were completely broke, between child support [et cetera]—

JUDITH RICHARDS: His wife and three children still lived in New York?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Not at all. They lived in Dusseldorf. They were German. And I actually didn't meet them the wife until much later, when I was myself divorced from Otto.

And he's now on his fourth wife, and his fourth wife is extremely nice. She's a lovely woman.

And once we got divorced, we sort of remained civilized friends.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you were there in Europe for two years, you must have met a lot of other artists.

NAN ROSENTHAL: I did. That wasn't as simple as you might think, in the sense that Otto wasn't that anxious for me to get close to other artists. I mean, he was—and there are people you might have thought you would get to—he was very—he was quite put off by that, depending on who it was. And if they were younger than he, it was one thing. If they were much older, it was another thing. But if they were his generation, he didn't want to get too close.

He was very well-known there. I mean, he was almost [like] the Rauschenberg-Jones type situation and he didn't particularly want to relinquish his status, whereas I was looking for friends. [Laughs.] I obviously didn't know people very well in Dusseldorf. And I also at the time didn't speak German.

Just to get back to how did I come to get a Ph.D. in art history, I started getting very serious about art history, especially when I was in Europe and going to all these museums. And Otto himself was very knowledgeable about art history and taught at the fashion school in Dusseldorf. And he taught me a lot about art history. And I read a lot of European history when I was there.

And in any case, Otto was invited by Gyorgy Kepes, K-E-P-E-S. A Hungarian man who was a professor at MIT and what passed for a sort of art department there. And Kepes wanted to start this thing called the Center for Advanced—because it was the Center for Advanced Studies in the Visual Arts, something like that. And so he invited Otto and perhaps three other artists to be fellows at this center that he started at MIT.

And so I knew we were going to be spending the year in Cambridge, Mass., and so I applied to the Radcliffe Institute for a fellowship, and I got it. And so that was very nice.

And so we moved to Cambridge basically in January, I think, of '68. And Otto fairly rapidly became head of this thing that Kepes started.

I wonder if that's not [near ?] Radcliffe Institute. Anyway, after about a semester there—I must have had the idea pretty early on, because, among other things, I was auditing a course in intensive German, which I knew I would need for graduate school, and I knew a number of the professors. I was older. I mean, I wasn't your enter-graduate school age; I was older than that. I was what, 29 or 30.

And so I somehow persuaded the institute—because it was something they didn't approve of doing—to let me transfer to the doctoral program at Harvard, at the Fogg. So I did. It was very nice of them. There was one other person they once let do that, whom I happened to know.

For about five semesters, which is to say for two years and a semester, I did the course work for the doctorate at Harvard and they gave me an M.A. And then they gave me a Ph.D. But in those days you could get an academic job for several reasons. Because of my age and my experience in the world, I became a teaching fellow there at Harvard quickly. And then Otto and I separated somewhere in there, and I needed a job, as usual. [Laughs.] And I also wanted to get as far away from Europe as I possibly could and from him and so on. And so there were several jobs at the University of California that were available, and I got one of them, the one at Santa Cruz.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Were there any issues you confronted in that Ph.D. program in terms of being a woman or in terms of the selection of what you would focus on for your thesis or dissertation?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I think there were requirements that you take courses in a range of subjects. Whether it was Byzantine art or medieval, I took both. I was very interested—in those days in architecture, and I was seriously considering the possibility of becoming an architectural historian. And I finally decided not to do that, that I was too old, that I would have had too much to learn. I felt strongly that you needed to know a lot of things I didn't know about structure, but I did take a lot of courses in architectural history while I was at Harvard.

And when I was a teaching fellow, I did what was needed. Originally I was teaching just the introductory survey, like most people. But in fact the head tutor needed someone. Students were complaining because they weren't getting any art courses. It was complicated. The Carpenter Center, where the visual arts courses were taught,

were very neo-Bauhaus, and this was not what the students wanted. So the students would major in art history but they wanted to do seminars on art and so the head tutor decided that I would invent art courses that I would teach [laughs]. And it was really criticism. We read criticism, and we would meet in different students' rooms every week and review their work. And in a way that was really the first teaching I did. And I just sort of [laughs] made it up as I went along.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You said you met in different students' rooms?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: In their dorm room? In their apartment?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Mm. [Affirmative.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did the school not have a classroom?

NAN ROSENTHAL: No. No, I mean, the art history department didn't have a classroom for teaching art, because the art was supposed to be taught at Carpenter Center, the Corbu building. But that place was very rigidly Bauhaus, and some of these kids wanted to do figurative art. That was strictly forbidden over there.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you're teaching studio art classes. Not art history but art-making?

NAN ROSENTHAL: The students were making the art. I wasn't teaching them things like how to draw, but we read contemporary criticism—Greenberg, Rosenberg, et cetera. And then we would discuss the reading. And then we would also discuss their work, and one of them would present their work each week.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And did you discover that you enjoyed teaching?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, I did. And I hadn't even taken my Ph.D. exams, but there were these several jobs open. One was at the University of California at Santa Cruz. One was at UC-San Diego. I was so kind of intimidated by the whole idea, [but] I somehow thought it would be more comfortable to teach at Santa Cruz. And I'd heard a lot about it.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Because it was a newer campus?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I just thought it would be less intimidating and I'd be able to—I don't know.

And the man who was head of the department, [a] wonderful man called Douglas McClellan, who remains a very good friend, he and I hit it off.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Before you left Harvard to go to teach in Santa Cruz had you decided that you'd focus on Yves Klein for your dissertation?

NAN ROSENTHAL: No, but I thought I would focus on postwar European art. It was a subject that Americans knew. Or California architecture [laughs]—one of those two things.

When I applied to get into the doctoral program, I talked about writing about postwar European art, because it was something that was very understudied and not very well known about in this country. And I think that's still the case. In fact, I taught a seminar for the institute on it a few years ago, when I was still with the Met.

And it was a subject by that time, because of Otto and the several years in Dusseldorf, I knew a good deal about.

I hadn't really decided—I really was thinking about doing California architecture, because I thought it was a very interesting subject, and also relatively little written about. And I remember the chancellor at Santa Cruz was fascinated by that idea.

And then I went out there to Santa Cruz and taught normal modern art.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was it a big culture shock to move to not only California but Santa Cruz from New York and London and Dusseldorf?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Not exactly. [Laughs.] There was that year in Sacramento. [Laughs.] By that time I was pretty good at adapting to new places. And I think adapting to Dusseldorf was harder than adapting to Santa Cruz. [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Especially since you didn't speak German. [Laughs.]

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, I learned enough to go shopping for food daily. And also when I was at Harvard I studied

German. I had to.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you envision, when you went out to UC-Santa Cruz, a life in academia?

NAN ROSENTHAL: At that point, probably.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you hope to eventually get tenure somewhere?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. I think I did. At that point, there was hardly an art history department there. It was part of the art department—and some of the things that I was particularly interested in, some of my colleagues were not at all interested in. I mean, I had several colleagues who thought Marcel Duchamp was the Antichrist and, you know, things like that.

And you taught some courses for your college and some for your department. And the more traditional classes were for the department, like survey courses or seminars for older students, and the college courses were more experimental.

And I don't know what exactly made me invent this, but I started teaching the second year I was there, a seminar in museum work, and partly it was because I was interested in museums as institutions, and part of it was because there was basically no art in Santa Cruz and it was a way of dragging a group of students up to San Francisco to look at art.

JUDITH RICHARDS: The transition from thinking that you were a journalist and then gradually thinking you needed to be an art historian, and then an academic or art historian academic. Were any of these transitions difficult? Were they just a long, thoughtful process toward coming to a better idea of what you wanted to do? If you had thought for years that you'd be a journalist and were excited about the field, and there might have been some stress about leaving it.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, there was stress about getting a good job in the field.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Which could connect, again, with being a woman.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, exactly. One reason I wanted to stay in London was I think it was easier to get a job as a journalist. It was very difficult in New York. I mean, this is something I would not like to particularly go in [to], but I don't know if you want to turn this off for a minute.

Well, I think in those days it was difficult for a woman to get a job as a reporter. There were very few. I remember going, for example, to be interviewed at *The Times* by Abe Rosenthal. It was probably something else that Victor Navasky arranged. And he told me point-blank, "Miss Rosenthal, we don't hire women as reporters. It's extremely rare, an accident of some kind." And, you know, I remember many years later being in a position where I saw him socially frequently, and it was funny to me.

JUDITH RICHARDS: This was painful? To kind of see this?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, it was the reality—and then I went to work for *Show*, which did hire women, but it wasn't *The New York Times*, and it wasn't the original fantasy of being a newspaper reporter.

And, you know, it's funny. I mean, Gloria Steinem was a good friend when I was at *Show*. And it was just that absolute cusp—I mean, that moment, 1970, 1969, that this was, you know, the Radcliffe Institute and transferring to Harvard. I think I also just got increasingly serious about studying art history, about the project of being an intellectual, which a journalist is not necessarily at all, I would say.

And certainly when I then moved into academia, the people who were my main friends, apart from a couple of people in the art department, were people there in the humanities.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So it was very exciting. It wasn't disappointing that you didn't pursue a career in journalism. It was exciting that you were going [in] this other direction.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, yes, very much so.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How soon after you got to Santa Cruz did you become responsible for creating exhibitions in the gallery there?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, that really grew out of my thing of doing this course in museum work. And the course was two quarters long. And there was this fictional museum. I was the director of the museum, and the students were assigned different positions in the museum. A couple of them were curators. A couple of them were designers of the exhibitions.

JUDITH RICHARDS: They chose their area.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, I appointed whom I thought was appropriate. It was not easy to get into this seminar. I pretty much had to know them from some previous class. We took a number of field trips to institutions in the Bay area. We met people like real directors and registrars and curators, and looked at storage.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You didn't have any models to form this. You invented the whole thing yourself?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, I did. At that time, I'd been behind the scenes at a number of museums for one reason or another. I just had been in England for one and in New York, too. Somebody who was a friend of my parents—not a close friend, but around Christmas time he would come and have a meal—was Bill Lieberman, whom I kept in touch with over the years.

And Bill was at the Modern. And he had a rather fascinating circle of gay friends. And I was often invited to dinner with these people. And, in fact, when I was first at *Show*, I often called Bill and said, "My god, it's about to be Picasso's—whatever it was—60th birthday. Whom do I call about this?"

He said, "Oh, for that, you'll have to make a call to London. And you'll call a man called Johnny [sp] Richardson. And he will give you anecdotes about Picasso."

So there was my Picasso story. And then I got to know John Richardson. And we became friends. And John moved to New York and called me and said, "Now I want to know who are the three most famous young artists in New York."

And I said, "Well, there's Frank Stella, there's—[laughs].

MS. RICHARDSON: Okay. We're talking about the museum course that you taught, that you created and taught.

NAN ROSENTHAL: And I learned a lot myself doing it. I mean, I had a couple of books on museum work. I mean, not how to do museum work—

MS. RICHARDSON: Was this something you were paid to do that course, and it was part of your—

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, it was part of my teaching. And it was very popular with the faculty too because we were encouraged to do these rather experimental courses. And this was certainly that. And eventually a number of students who'd taken the course ended up in museum work, which was kind of funny.

MS. RICHARDSON: Well, gratifying, I would say.

NAN ROSENTHAL: It was. And it was also a useful way to get to know these Bay area institutions and how things actually worked. I mean, a young woman who's working as my assistant right now—which is to say she works a few hours a week for me on the weekends—is trying to get a job as a registrar at a Bay area institution. And that I knew a fair amount [about this particular institution's methods] had really [grown] out of this course. That's just funny.

[End of SD card 1, track 2.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Nan Rosenthal on June 28 , 2010 in New York City for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc 2.

NAN ROSENTHAL: You were asking about, well, women. And I think I discussed how that in some ways led me away from the idea of being a newspaper reporter, because it was unusual. But around the time the feminist movement was sort of bursting out all over, say around 1969, '70, was also around the time that I was going into academia.

And in some ways, that made it easier, because people at that moment felt somewhat compelled to hire women. And then once you were hired as a woman, you got put on too many committees. There was too much to do. But it also meant that you saw, again, often from virtually the top, how a university functioned. And in some ways it was much as I've been able to see how a newspaper functioned, when I was working for Jimmy Wechsler.

So sometimes it drove you nuts, because you had to be on so many committees. I felt at Santa Cruz, women faculty were quite communal, collegial with one another. And then there were other women in Cambridge—for example, Rosalind Krauss, the critic, was teaching then at MIT, and was herself pretty much in a state of getting a divorce, moved into the MIT faculty building that I was living in. We became—well, actually, her ex-husband and the four of them and Otto and I—the four of us had been—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Who was her ex-husband?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Hers? An architect named Richard Krauss. But Roz and I became very close friends. And she taught me a lot, I would say.

And that was interesting. She was very distressed that I moved to California, because we were very close. And she was at that point moving to New York. She went to work first for Princeton, briefly, and then for Hunter—or CUNY.

She became, actually, quite close to my mother. Linda Nochlin and I became quite friendly in those days, and Linda's actually much funnier about feminism than one would think.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you were at Santa Cruz, did you know about what was going on at CalArts and Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, for several reasons. One summer, Otto and I went to Los Angeles, because Otto was going to the Tamarind lithography workshop, and I was writing an article called "L.A. Trip," partly because everybody was taking[drugs for the] trip.

JUDITH RICHARDS: For *Art in America*, you said?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, for *Art in America*. And it's still a pretty good article. I give it to people as a kind of joke.

I knew Allan Kaprow, and Otto knew Allan Kaprow, and we were living at the Chateau Marmont, which was really traditional in those days and had a kitchen. And one evening Allan Kaprow and Paul Brach, who were just going to CalArts, or had just started being at CalArts, came for dinner. I was completely entranced with the California crab [and it] turned out that Paul Brach couldn't eat crab. It wasn't that he was really kosher; the concept of eating crab made him—I remember defrosting a steak. That took about three hours.

But I took a tremendous liking to Paul, who was a wonderful raconteur. And he introduced me to Miriam, and we became good friends. I would go down there and visit them, or they would come to Santa Cruz and visit me. I had a wonderful house in the mountains, very near the campus, a 19th century schoolhouse. And it had a little guest houselet in the garage and it was a great place to have visitors. And I used to invite a lot of people, especially East Coast people, whom I missed a lot.

Through Allan Kaprow and Paul Brach I met Mimi, who said I had to meet Judy Chicago. And so I did. And I'll never forget her saying, "Well, you're either with us or you're against us." And I took an instant dislike to her—[laughs]—which I've never changed my mind about.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That was down at CalArts? Or in L.A.?

NAN ROSENTHAL: It was at Mimi and Paul's house. I think we were just having lunch there.

And so I thought I'd rather take my feminism from Mimi than from Judy Chicago—whose work I didn't particularly like, as it happens. But—[laughs]—she was—not my favorite.

And it was a considerable responsibility at the university. The female students really approached one about their problems, of all kinds.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You mean being taken seriously as an artist in the department? Or other kinds of issues—as a woman, I mean?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, a little bit of that. I think there was pressure on a number of them to be lesbians, pressure from graduate students, things like that, that was something one had to deal with frequently, that I found something I didn't have any—[laughs]—training whatsoever to deal with.

And in that respect, being friendly with other female faculty was a help, whether they were straight or gay, because I just didn't think 18-year-olds or 19-year-olds were in a position to make major decisions about their gender preferences at that age. I thought a little more experimentation was probably a good idea. [Laughs.]

And there were also related problems of male faculty wanting to get involved with young women. One of the male faculty I was closest to was constantly getting involved with young women.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Were there repercussions for that?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Early on, no. But increasingly there were. And it often depended on the age and level of distinguished-ness of the male faculty member. [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you were teaching this museum class and programming the gallery, did the issue of

why weren't there more shows of women's work in the art world, in your gallery, in the history at Santa Cruz come up? And did that cause you to make different curatorial decisions or encourage artists to look at women?

NAN ROSENTHAL: You know, I don't think that came up much when I was doing this. How long was I really there? On and off for something like 14 years.

There were a lot of practical problems. I mean, there was no security in the gallery. I mean, there was this room, which was called the Sesnon Art Gallery, but the idea that you would borrow a Picasso[…]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Maybe that would make it easier to have a show of women's art, because it was less valuable.

NAN ROSENTHAL: [Laughs.] I think with the museum course, I was really pushing doing the whole thing in as professional a way as possible, [including] making sure that there was serious security wired to the campus police station, things that nobody had dreamt of before.

That was more the approach of that course that I was teaching. My recollection is that the female studio art students, which gradually became less—well, yes, they had to take modern art, but less what I was teaching than art history students—but the female studio art students were pretty self-assured, pretty—I mean, that changed, and—of course, with my being there.

And they were pretty secure, actually, the female students. But that's probably partly because Santa Cruz was sort of a special place, and I doubt that it was the same way at Stanford or Berkeley.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you were there, you curated, starting with the show of Ed Ruscha's work.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, that was one I actually did myself. That summer I was there with Otto Piene, I met Ed. And I liked his work enormously. And I think when I was in Los Angeles, I had to go down to Los Angeles a couple of times because Sibyl Moholy-Nagy's daughter, one of her two daughters, died just as I was leaving New York. And she was dying in New York, at a New York hospital. And I used to go and see her every day. Sibyl was already dead, if I'm not mistaken.

And she didn't know what to do with her mother's slide collection. Her mother had been teaching at Columbia. And I said, "Well"—[laughs]—"you can give them to the University of California at Santa Cruz, because their architectural slides are just almost nonexistent, and it's something I want to teach a lot." So she did. And so I had to go down several times to Los Angeles to arrange this. It was a remarkable gift, actually, Sibyl's slides. And I saw Ed a few times and thought it would be inexpensive and very easy to do a show of his books, which were not so famous in those days, and prints. And he was agreeable. And so I did. That I did without the Stevens [sp]. And then the rest of those shows.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It looks like those shows were focused on giving the students a very good, well-rounded look at [the twentieth century.]

NAN ROSENTHAL: They were. The only one I did alone, really, was the Ruscha one.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And the Haacke you did with students?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I did. That was slightly different.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You did a show of Hans Haacke, four recent works since '97.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You had met him when you were married to Otto.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. In fact, we got him his gallery in New York. His wife is a good friend of mine.

Hans was at—I guess it was either UC San Diego or CalArts. He went out for a period of time.

JUDITH RICHARDS: CalArts.

NAN ROSENTHAL: We arranged an exchange. We did this partly with Allan. It was Allan Kaprow who invited Hans out, I think. And we arranged an exchange of, like, 10 of our students going down there and 10 of theirs coming up, in connection with this show. And the whole thing was very amusing. Hans was terrific.

And the sculpture show was a big hit, and the photography show.

JUDITH RICHARDS: European-American works and West Coast collections?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, because we certainly didn't have money to ship. We had very little money.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And then the photography, that looks like a wonderful survey for students, 19th and early 20th century.

NAN ROSENTHAL: And that was not part of the museum course, but I did it with Philip Brookman who had been in the previous museum course who knew a great deal about the history of photography and, I have to say, more than I did. And we did it together.

And Philip went on to become a curator mostly at the Corcoran, but he also was part of a show the Met did, which had nothing to do with me, but it was our photography department. Because he was very close to Robert Frank. Still is very close to Robert Frank. And the Met did a Robert Frank show, and Philip wrote one of the essays. And he was a very good friend for a long time.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You also curated a show at UC Berkeley. I mean, it says you were a guest curator. I don't know which—

NAN ROSENTHAL: That was—yes, that—

JUDITH RICHARDS: UC Berkeley Art Museum.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Right. Well, that's how my thesis happened. I didn't—where does it say I did a show for them?

JUDITH RICHARDS: It doesn't. It says you were a guest curator, though.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, I was. Because Peter Selz, the then-director, hired me to do an Yves Klein show for Berkeley. Because he was interested in Klein and in postwar European art for various reasons. And I knew Selz from New York. And so I had money from him, and I had money from Harvard, and put together the two piles, [which] enabled me to spend a year in Europe researching the Klein dissertation. And I knew Klein's widow—her first name was Rotraut, R-O-T-R-A-U-T, Klein. And then her second husband's last name was Moquay, M-O-Q-U-A-Y.

And I knew her through Otto, and she had Klein's papers. And it took me at least six months to get access to his papers in the course of the year that I was in Europe. I was actually living in London, not Paris.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was this a leave from UC Santa Cruz?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. I'd been there two years, and in order to stay there I had to do my dissertation within a certain period of time. As a "consultant to Dominique de Menil, curator"—she wanted to do a Klein show. And I knew some people at Rice, a couple of rather remarkable people. And a colleague of mine who had read my dissertation, who was a professor at UC San Diego, thought the dissertation was brilliant. And he's a man who still teaches there called Sheldon Nodelman. And he sent my thesis to somebody who was sort of in charge of publications for Dominique, whom I actually knew for some reason.

[Audio break.]

NAN ROSENTHAL: The man I was then living with, who was from Santa Cruz, and it was his first sabbatical, and he was a Chaucer scholar. And he wanted me in London, and I had all these friends in London. And it was a little ridiculous. I should have been in Paris, but when I had something to do in Paris, I got on a plane and went.

And then we spent the summer, some friends of ours had an apartment, and we rented it. But it took a long time to get access to the papers.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You got your Ph.D. in 1976, and you became a professor, you received some kind of promotion in '76 at UC Santa Cruz. So was that related? Did they say, okay, now you have your Ph.D.? Or you applied for a promotion and[…]

NAN ROSENTHAL: What happened was, I got early tenure. That was the most relevant thing.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It says you're a professor or associate professor. I mean, obviously in the reverse order. From '76 is on your bio to '87 at UC Santa Cruz, and '76 is just the year you got your Ph.D.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You went back to Santa Cruz after doing the research, working on the Ph.D.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Almost as soon as I had the doctorate, which I had to have by a certain date or I would have been fired, I then was given tenure. And it was very early tenure.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Were you very happy about that?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, I was very pleased about that.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You were happy living in Santa Cruz?

NAN ROSENTHAL: In many ways I was. And then various things happened. One thing that happened is my mother got Alzheimer's. And as I mentioned before, I was an only child, and it was really difficult to manage that from Santa Cruz. I think if I'd been in a different situation—if I'd gotten married or had children, I might conceivably have moved her out there. But she would have had no friends, would have known nobody.

So sometime around 1980, I had bought a house out there—not the wonderful one I'd mentioned before, but I'd bought a house, because the real estate market was rising, and it was either buy one then or never. And I bought a house in Santa Cruz. And then at some point I bought a studio apartment in New York, in The Brevoort.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You mean The Brevoort in the Village?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Fifth Avenue between 8th and 9th, yes. And I think I borrowed money from my mother to do it. I mean, by that time, you know, her lawyer and I and a cousin of mine who was managing her money sort of were a committee to organize how to take care of her. And around that same time, we got her a full-time companion. And we had to. And I got this apartment partly so I could come to New York whenever classes weren't in session in Santa Cruz, and I could work and have a life, which would have been impossible to do in her apartment, because the only place to work there would have been where the companion was living, you know?

And she, as people with Alzheimer's do, got worse and worse and worse. And so, I don't know, I began to feel that I should move back east, and was also separating from the man that I'd been living with most of the time I was out there, the Chaucer scholar. And I moved, I guess, for a year or two, I moved into some faculty housing there—that was very pleasant, actually—and sold the house.

And then I guess friends, people at Harvard, knew that I wanted to move back east, to a great extent because of my mother, and I missed New York also. And one day, out of the blue, I got a phone call from Sydney Freedberg, who had retired from Harvard and became chief curator of the National Gallery.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Before we get to that, you [were an] instructor at the museum-studies program at the Whitney. So that was the time when you were back in New York. [Were you] back in New York just when UC classes weren't in session? Or you actually were full-time in New York?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I took a leave from Santa Cruz.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And you also then did that consulting project with Dominique de Menil, right?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, yes, doing the Klein show, basically.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And I wanted to ask you about doing that Klein show because that's a major project, an important exhibition that traveled, [and the] publication of your dissertation was the culmination of a lot of work.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Right. It was.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So I wanted to ask you to talk about the process of thinking about Yves Klein and coming to terms with what your point of view would be, and that it would be published.

NAN ROSENTHAL: I was still at Santa Cruz. And what happened [was] the show that Peter Selz wanted me to do never happened. Peter got fired from being director of the museum.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What caused that?

NAN ROSENTHAL: The faculty didn't like him. There were a lot of things I would say that caused it. And so there I am, in Europe, doing this show for him, and he got fired. And so there was a great deal of correspondence that went back and forth between me and the university art museum at Berkeley, the Asian art person, [who] became the acting director of the

JUDITH RICHARDS: Cahill?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I think it was Jim Cahill, yes. And there was a lot of back and forth, correspondence. And it was very awkward for me, because my access to the Klein material was partly based on doing this show for Berkeley and the other institutions.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, they already knew that there was a collaboration?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. Peter was arranging where else would the show travel and so on and so forth. So it was very awkward for me; by that time, I [had] gotten sufficiently friendly with Rotraut. The Klein market wasn't where it is has been for at least the last ten, dozen years.

It was something like April or so when she gave me access to his papers. And not only access; remarkably enough, they were friends with somebody who ran a Xerox place, and so I spent about two weeks Xeroxing this material at their friend's Xerox place, in the basement, where the Xerox machines were. And then I would come home at night to this apartment in Paris and file stuff chronologically and so on and so forth. And so I had basically a locker trunk full of Klein material, I think a good deal of which is fairly faded by now.

But I had the material to work with. And so my friend the Chaucer scholar and I went back to the States by boat. It was like the second-to-last sailing of the France. We had a very good time. [Laughs.] And he had a car that he bought, a Volkswagen, and it was big enough to hold this locker trunk plus some suitcases full of clothes—[laughs]—and so on. And I remember my Chaucer friend, who'd never driven in New York, I don't think, and so I had to drive—[laughs]—off the pier, and we came and stayed with my mother for a couple of days, and I guess it must have been '81 or so. Because—when did I get my dissertation done?

JUDITH RICHARDS: '76. After you got the Ph.D. and you finished this dissertation, were you yearning to create an exhibition? Was this something that was a goal that you were trying to fulfill?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, it was sort of in the works.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I mean, once it got canceled at Berkeley, were you looking for another opportunity to do it?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, I think, if I remember this correctly, Peter's show, the Berkeley show, was already going to Rice, to Dominique's. So basically she took it over. But when she took it over, she wanted to do it—boy, it was complicated. She wanted to do it, if you will, her way. And I remember she had my thesis for a while. I wish I could remember the name of this remarkable man who was—I could—I can find it out through Sheldon Nodelman.

And so she wanted to research Yves Klein. And, you know, I remember talking to her on the phone and said, Dominique, I've done it. Just read my dissertation.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Seeing herself as somehow the co-curator? What was her motivation to want to research?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, because she wanted to be the co-curator. She'd curated a great many shows. But she didn't think the material on Klein that existed was very good, which it wasn't. It was terrible. And it took quite a while to get her to read my thesis. I remember having one conversation with her in which she said, " you can't offer us anything." And I remember telling her that she was wrong. [Laughs.] You know, she wasn't an easy person to tell that to.

And anyway, this man whose name I can't remember, who was just wonderful, who was in charge of her publications, read it and thought it was fabulous and so on and so forth. And he pretty much persuaded her.

And then, of all people, Walter Hopps came on board.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Why do you say "of all people"?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, because the Menil Museum didn't exist in those days, so Walter wasn't director of it. It may have been the first project that he did with her, though they certainly knew one another well. And Walter's a brilliant guy. I mean, he was completely crazy, but[…]so he read it, and he thought it was fantastic. And so then I became part of that project.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It took five years, from '76 to '81, to have the show take place.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Maybe the show didn't even happen till '82. I'm not sure.

Did they make arrangements for it to travel to the MCA Chicago and the Guggenheim and the Pompidou? Did Rice do that? Were you involved in those negotiations?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I think the Guggenheim was on board.

JUDITH RICHARDS: From Peter Selz?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Certainly negotiations back to that, yes. And the Pompidou was probably something that Dominique arranged.

I don't remember the MCA in Chicago business. I don't think I saw it, even. I'm pretty positive I didn't see it. I certainly saw the Pompidou one, and gave a lecture there. That whole thing was fun.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So it was published February 1982.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. At Rice.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That's when it opened there. How was it received in the museum art world, museum field, critically?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I don't think people read it much[…]

JUDITH RICHARDS: And the exhibition?

NAN ROSENTHAL:—for several reasons: Because people weren't very interested in Yves Klein in those days. As far as I'm concerned, the first really interesting response was something that was published in Paris that Yve-Alain Bois did. And then I think it got republished in *October*.

The reason it was complicated is that my interpretation of Klein was so completely against what the widow and her husband would have wanted.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Which issue of *October* is that?

NAN ROSENTHAL: One-one-nine. Winter 2007. I think this is it.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you were saying that it was complicated and one of the reasons was the expectations of the family.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. Well, in brief, [the] central hypothesis of what I wrote was that a key to Klein's work was conspicuous fraudulence, because my research had revealed to me that a great deal of what he was doing was conspicuous fraudulence. And I guess the most obvious example is the business of his appearing to fly, which obviously he didn't do, and he didn't break a limb or anything else [*Dimanche*].

And there were other things.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So basically, how did that approach differ? What was the standard approach in those days that you were rewriting?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I would say the standard approach—and judging from Schjeldahl—I haven't seen this current catalogue, but judging from Schjeldahl's recent review in *The New Yorker*, the ongoing interpretation of Klein is based on the notion that he was a mystic, or even a gnostic, and there's this mythology about him, that, yes, he could fly, for example. And, I mean, that, again, would be an obvious example. But there are many, many others. I mean, for example, in his papers, there were an enormous number of curriculum vitae. But they varied. The facts varied. And so this was clearly an artist who remodeled his CV a number of times. And that's not the kind of thing that would be attractive for the Klein family to enjoy.

And there's the whole book on Klein that—even though this woman had access to the material.

But there are many, many things which I can't reel off the top of my head, but[…]well, also, this e-mail, this Bois thing would be very interesting for you to read. I think it's fascinating. I mean, there was this book that Klein did called *Yves Peintures*. And there are various copies of the book. The book consisted of, among other things, an essay written by a friend of Klein's who traveled with him back in 1953, '4, Claude Pascal, who wrote a text which consisted just of horizontal lines, no type, but imitating the typographical layout of an essay: it had indented lines, it had paragraphs, and so on.

And things like this had been done by other people, but Klein very deliberately meant this to be something real. And they were pasted papers of different sizes in this book, indicating, "signed, Yves," and then "London, 1950," and then it would say "195 by 97." And they—well, these were supposed to be reproductions of monochromes that Klein had done at these weird dates. And he was trying, with this book, to establish that he'd been doing this monochrome painting since—I mean, to this day, people—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Think they were real?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. And the thing is, I am a ferocious researcher, and there were many, many copies of this book in Klein's papers. But they varied a lot. And the papers were, generally speaking, in a bit of a mess. And I thought this book was really intriguing. So I went to Klein's mother, and she had a copy of the book. And she had gotten her copy in '54 or '54—in other words, not at a time when either Klein's wife Rotraut or her second husband could possibly have changed around. So it seemed to me it was very much what I thought was, in some sense, an authentic [copy] of this book. I Xeroxed the book; I returned it to the mother. And it was certainly not the book that was in the exhibition and so forth.

But what was very funny—so I had this Xerox back in Santa Cruz, and I started examining the Xerox very carefully and measuring it. And "195 by 97," which would have indicated centimeters in a normal art book, turned out to be millimeters. That was the size of the pieces of paper in Klein's mother's book. And he had sent it to his mother from Madrid, where he made it—or maybe gave it to her as soon as he got back. But that was the real book.

As Rosenthal has clearly established, the work supposedly reproduced in *Yves Peintures* did not yet exist and would, in fact, never exist unless—and this is most likely the interpretation that Klein would have gone by if someone had pressed him on the point—we were to consider their simple conception a necessary and sufficient condition for their existence. The date range from '50 to '54 essentially meant to affirm that the artist had the idea of monochromatic painting as early as 1950.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How did you convey your ideas through the exhibition, in addition to in the book? You said that not too many people read the book, but more people saw the exhibition. And were you happy with the exhibition? Did you feel that you had succeeded in opening up Klein scholarship, if not the art world, to your perceptions of him and his work?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, it took quite a while. I mean, this essay of Bois's from winter 2007, which was first published in a French catalog is really the—

JUDITH RICHARDS: So it didn't happen when this show was on view in many of those core museums.

NAN ROSENTHAL: If someone read the catalog.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But I mean, it wasn't represented in the exhibition itself?

NAN ROSENTHAL: No, it was in the catalog.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And was that because you didn't want to have material available to the museum visitor that would have complicated—

NAN ROSENTHAL: No, I would have been delighted. But, I wasn't in charge of installing the exhibition. Dominique was. The reproductions of the book—now, I'm sure that I told Walter Hopps—Walter Hopps knew. I don't think we'd have to measure these. I don't remember anymore.

So here are the pages, not the front cover, but here are the pasted papers. And I guess we'd have to see if this is the mother's copy.

JUDITH RICHARDS: If you weren't able to convey these ideas in the exhibition—and not too many people read the book—were there other ways or interviews or articles? Or was it rather frustrating that you did this groundbreaking piece of scholarship and an exhibition that traveled to distinguished institutions, and yet there was a gap in understanding?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, I don't even remember my review. It's filed somewhere. But I reviewed it for *Artforum*.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You were able to review the show that you had worked on for *Artforum*?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And, you know, I mean, it was no secret that I'd worked on it. I had an essay in the catalog.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But you weren't considered the curator? Dominique was the curator Was that a difficult situation?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, it was clear to me that there was no way without Dominique.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You said that not too many people read the book; the exhibition didn't convey the groundbreaking propositions that you proposed in the book. Did you feel overall satisfied or frustrated with the

exhibition and the whole experience as it ended up being? Were there reviews or interviews in which you would have the opportunity to discuss your thoughts? And you were saying you did write a review in *Artforum*.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, that's one thing, yes. Another thing—I mean, a group of us who wrote for the catalog, including someone who completely rewrote his essay for the catalog after reading mine—because they were completely opposite. He was of the mystical—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, that was good.

NAN ROSENTHAL: It was. A man called Thomas McEvilley, whom Dominique was very fond of. And, of course, Pierre Restany. McEvilley and [I and] some other people, two other people, spoke at the Guggenheim. And I said what I said, and McEvilley talked about Klein and Rosicrucianism. I mean, most of Klein's papers on Rosicrucianism aren't even cut.

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JUDITH RICHARDS: You mean, he never read the books?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Is this Walter Hopps—no, that's Dominique. It's quite interesting, the introduction. But I could check whether this was—it would be a lot of work, but I could check whether this was just by—well, we couldn't —

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you—did you play a part in deciding what works would be in the exhibition?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Not much. It's fairly obvious.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you weren't—you weren't even permitted to be the curator of the exhibition? You were an essayist, or a primary essayist?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: I see. So it started out being your exhibition that Peter Selz invited you to curate?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And in order for it to be realized, you had to give up that role as the curator.

NAN ROSENTHAL: I would say so. Yes, because I don't think the loans or the reproduction rights or any of that would have been agreed to by Rotraut Klein-Moquay—or more to the point, her husband—who were controlling the rights, the money.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But Dominique had the—

NAN ROSENTHAL: Clout. Exactly. And I was completely aware that she had the clout. And therefore, being published under her aegis, so to speak, was not something that they—I mean, once she was persuaded—and there was this man who's name I can't remember—[laughs]—plus Walter Hopps. Once she—once Dominique was persuaded, the issue of—I mean, Klein's oeuvre is not so enormous that it wouldn't be fairly obvious what you would include.

There have been some bad mistakes, and one of them is that I know in the English edition of this exhibition, which is the one I reviewed for *Artforum*, they definitely did not have the right book, whether the one in the catalogue is correct or not.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, I see.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, that's—

JUDITH RICHARDS: That 50—

NAN ROSENTHAL: Right. Then, I mean, they could have made the mother lend hers, but that's not something that Rotraut or her husband would have particularly wanted to show. But it's fairly obvious which; there really aren't so many red sponge reliefs. There are very few. And so picking out the works that go in this show is something that the Guggenheim did very badly. They covered the whole floor of the Guggenheim. I don't know if you saw that show, but they—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Wait, you're using—'81? I probably did, yes.

NAN ROSENTHAL: And this was all over the floor of—

JUDITH RICHARDS: We're looking at—we're looking at a piece, blue—pure blue pigment, from 1957—'61.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, and it says it's a facsimile from 1957 and '61.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. So that instead of containing it in frame, this is—

NAN ROSENTHAL: Wait—that being a certain size, yes. They did this huge pool of blue pigment.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Total reinterpretation.

NAN ROSENTHAL: It wasn't something Klein ever did. Absolutely not. And I mean, there are many, many—We could go on for hours. [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Maybe this is a good place—maybe this is a good place to stop for the day.

[End of SD card 2, track 2.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards, interviewing Nan Rosenthal on June 30th, 2010, in New York City, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. And we're in the middle of disc 2, where we stopped on the 28th.

So, Nan, I want to begin by asking you to tell me how you ended up at the National Gallery, why you made that transition from teaching into curatorial; why curatorial, and then why the National Gallery, and what that change meant to you.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, why don't we do how first, and then what it meant to me.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, I guess we can put the two of them together. There were two reasons. I think that I've discussed a little bit that I was always interested in museums as institutions and that—following up on the experimental side of the University of California at Santa Cruz—I started teaching this course in museum work for undergraduates. And it was a lot of fun. And it was one of those sort of "learn while you earn" schemes, in that I learned a great deal as I was teaching them—I mean, it seems I learned a great deal myself.

And there were people—one or two professors of mine at Harvard and some friends—who were aware that my mother had Alzheimer's disease, and it became increasingly difficult for me to manage that from the West Coast. She was living in New York, as she always had. And I had hired a full-time live-in companion for her, but it was still very difficult to manage. No, I think I mentioned that I had gotten a little apartment, a studio apartment in New York—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

NAN ROSENTHAL:—so that I was able to be here. And one day, I got a phone call from Sydney Freedberg, who had been a professor of mine at Harvard. And he had retired from Harvard and had become the chief curator of the National Gallery.

And Sydney was a great scholar of Italian Renaissance art. And in fact, when I was at Harvard, he was just starting to teach Italian Baroque art, which nobody was teaching in those days—a course that I audited. And I took a methodology seminar with Sydney, which I enjoyed very much. And I wrote a paper for him on, of all things, Moholy-Nagy—not something that Sydney would particularly be interested in. It was on Moholy's light machine. And Sydney loved it because, among other things, the light machine was a work that Harvard owned. Moholy's widow had donated it. And when Walter Gropius came around and said, "Will you give something of Moholy's to Harvard?"—Gropius was at that time head of the design school at Harvard—Sybil was delighted to get rid of the light machine, which I think she describes in her book on Moholy as "more trouble than five children." And it was difficult to keep this early work with electric light and early kinetic sculpture—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Do you remember the date of that work?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. In fact, this was a seminar in which you had to find some original work of art in the Boston area, or somewhere, that you needed to have research done on it. And in the case of the Moholy light machine, Moholy always backdated the sculpture 1922 to 1930. But among many things I established, one was that it was made in 1930. That is the date of the light machine.

And Harvard had a lot of trouble keeping it running. And my paper became a Frick talk, which was the graduate student symposium. And it was usually something you did in your third or fourth or fifth year of graduate school, but this was my first year of graduate school, and so that was fun. And it kind of established my career at

Harvard very nicely. [Laughs.]

And I think Sydney Freedberg liked the paper so much because I established all of the wrong things, terrible things, that Harvard did to the sculpture, in terms of taking care of it; and since, of course, Harvard prided itself enormously on teaching its graduate students about conservation and things like that. But all sorts of awful things were done. I mean, it belonged to the Busch-Reisinger wing of the Harvard museums, and the director of the Busch at some point in the late '50s had had the machine painted completely. It was partly chrome and partly brushed metal, and so to restore it, so to speak, it was painted all over in a sort of gray paint. That was among the no-no's. And I think Sydney was highly amused at this meticulous—it was almost a satire on art historical research, about which I knew very little at the time. And I didn't know much art history when I went to graduate school, really. And I think he was tickled by my showing Harvard up in this paper for Harvard.

And anyway, Sydney knew me pretty well, I guess—not as one of his various student girlfriends at all—[laughs]—but just really from that seminar I took and—his art historical methods. And he called me one day and said, "Nan, how would you like to be curator of 20th century art at the National Gallery?" And I said, "Oh, it never crossed my mind, Sydney, to leave academia." And he said, "Well, I think you need to think about it. So why don't you come east and talk to us?" And I said, "Well, it's funny, I happen to be giving a sort of—well, I'm doing an interview with Robert Rauschenberg. I'm working on a book—" a book I never finished, by the way "—and I'm coming to interview Rauschenberg at the Gallery in a few weeks, and so I'll be there."

And at the time, I was about to go on sabbatical for a couple of quarters. And I remember when he called me, I was in jeans—there was little else I was wearing at Santa Cruz—in the middle of my living room, packing books, because I was going to finish up this book. And I was on my way to New York in any case.

And so I went and talked to them and I became very intrigued with the idea, and decided I would do it. But it was a big change. I mean, I realized that if I left academia, where by that time I had tenure at the University of California, I was unlikely to get an equivalent job in academia unless I wrote something absolutely astonishing. So it was a big decision. And I wasn't, frankly, very delighted to be working for the National Gallery. I was not at all delighted with the idea of living in Washington. But it wasn't very far from New York, and in fact, I didn't much like living in Washington.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you started at the National Gallery in 1985?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. Actually, I started the previous summer. And I was committed to being chairman of the department in Santa Cruz that fall, so I went back.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Fall '84?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. So I went back for a quarter and then started, I think officially, in January '85, or something like that. And the National Gallery is a relatively small institution. I mean, it focuses on painting and sculpture from post-Medieval, really, to the present, though there wasn't much emphasis on the present at the time that I got there. And there was another full curator.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Who was that?

NAN ROSENTHAL: A man called Jack Cowart, who had been there about a year or two before I got there. And there was an assisting curator whom we hired when I got there, who was a former student of mine at Santa Cruz, of whom I was very fond—and with whom I had dinner the other night.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Who was that?

NAN ROSENTHAL: His name is Jeremy Strick, and he became director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, and now is director of the Nasher Museum at Dallas. And we're practically family.

And someone I hired into the department, someone I also became very close to: Marla Prather, who was doing research for the 19th century department, and she wasn't happy there. And I read her stuff and it was very well written, and she then joined the department.

And there were a lot of very interesting people there. Carter Brown was someone that I had met, I think when I was working for *Show* or *Art in America*—one or the other—when I had one of those New York editorial jobs. And he was at that time assistant to John Walker, the director of the National Gallery, and was very involved in getting publicity for the gallery. So he met a lot of journalists, and I was one of them. But I didn't know him at all well. And Sydney was really responsible for my going there, Sydney Freedberg.

And it was full of Harvard people, in the sense that the Met is full of people from the Institute of Fine Arts. And John Wilmerding was the deputy director.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Who was your immediate boss? Who did you report to or—if you had to get—I mean, I was going to ask you what was the process to propose an exhibition or project that you wanted to undertake.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, that's complicated. I think that Jack Cowart had the title of head of the department, but it was a little complicated. I was making more money than he.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Why was that?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, I wasn't going to leave for a cut in salary, and I was making more money at the University of California than the National Gallery was at that time paying its full curators. And I told them I wasn't going to reduce my salary. And I think that was a little disturbing to Jack.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How did he find out?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I really don't know. Those things are never terribly hard to find out, because especially in the federal government you have a certain rank.

JUDITH RICHARDS: A pay grade.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. But essentially, Sydney, as chief curator, one reported to. I mean, if one wanted to acquire something, for example, that would be a big issue. One certainly had to talk Sydney into it. And then John Wilmerding, as deputy director, would be the next person—it changed a little bit in the course of my being there. The de facto director was—and by no means the director by title—was the head of design. At the time, let's say from '85 to '92, I would say the de facto director was a man called Gil Ravenel, who was, as I say, the head of design. And there was a huge emphasis in those days at the Gallery on design and the way the galleries looked and especially with the major sort of blockbuster exhibitions—something like "Treasure Houses of Britain" or that kind of thing. And Gil and the next person down in the department of design, Mark Leithauser, who's now head of the department, Gil having died. And Gil's wife was head of publications at the Gallery.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What's her name?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Her name was Frannie Smyth, S-M-Y-T-H. And she was very able, Frannie. And Gil was very able, and quite a visionary about the way things should look at the Gallery. He was not particularly pro-modern art, though in fact he was a good friend of Kirk Varnedoe's, but Gil was very interested in power and was often not terribly nice to the curators on the staff. If he wanted a curator for a specific idea that he had for a show, well, he'd go and hire the expert from wherever the expert was.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And he was the head of design?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. It was an unusual situation.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And who was his boss?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Carter. And as people would say, every couple of years Carter would take him to the woodshed and tell him he had to start behaving a little nicer—well, a little more nicely to people, I should say. But he was difficult. And actually, he was not at all fond of Jack Cowart. He was very fond of me for a while. And he was very anxious to get rid of Jack Cowart and I didn't think that was very nice.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you were starting to say if there was an acquisition, there was—were there funds, in fact, that you were responsible for [raising ?]?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, one—I think almost—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Making recommendations of what—

NAN ROSENTHAL: I'll answer that question in a second, but almost anyone, I think, involved in museum work, especially at a major institution, is expected to raise money and be active with the patrons. And that was particularly true with the National Gallery, I think. We traveled a great, great deal. And in a way, raising money for the National Gallery was in some respects easier than doing it for the Met, in the sense that, as you traveled around the United States a great deal, you could take Carter's approach, which was, "Well, can you just peel one off for the nation?" And, "Fine, you know, be loyal to your home institution, whether it's the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco or the Chicago Art Institute, but just—"

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm.

NAN ROSENTHAL: And we had an organization called the collectors committee and there were people from all over the country involved in it. And there was something called the patrons permanent fund—I think that was

the name of it—in which really Carter controlled the money. It was the main fund. And when the gallery started its department of 20th century art, which was when the East Building was built—I think it opened in—was it the late '70s or the early '80s? It certainly opened before I got there, which was, as we discussed—

JUDITH RICHARDS: '84.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. And so if you wanted to acquire something, you acquired it by donation—I mean by the actual object being donated—you still had to get the chief curator and the director to agree to the acquisition.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You had never—correct me if I'm wrong—been involved in that kind of activity before you got there. But did you feel that it was just a—obvious how to do it, that there wasn't an issue of needing someone to give you a kind of a road map?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I found it—I think it had to do with growing up in New York. My parents were very minor collectors, but they had friends who were major collectors, whether it was someone like Roy Neuberger, who was a very close friend of—well, both of the Neubergers—someone who was a very close friend of my mother's, a woman called Adelaide Ross [sp], who later married someone called Adelaide Stackelberg [sp]—I mean, called—[laughs]. I forget his first name.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Stackelberg?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Stackelberg, but—and she had two daughters, one of whom was my age and was a good friend. And she had some remarkable treasures. I think her father was an art dealer, I remember. And she and my mother used to travel together a lot after my father died, which was in '63. And if she had a Kandinsky, it was a 1913 Kandinsky, and if she had a Picasso drawing, it was a 1909 drawing of Fernande. And it was a wonderful collection. She had fantastic things; which her younger daughter, the one who was my friend, died, but her older daughter still has—though she died, Kay [sp], but her husband has a number of those things still.

Growing up knowing people like that made me feel quite comfortable with collectors. And I think growing up in New York kind of set you up to be maybe a little more sophisticated than people who grew up in smaller communities. So that I felt pretty comfortable with that. And I also knew in that period in the '60s, when I was working for the *Show* magazine and *Art in America*, and then I was married to Otto Piene, a German artist, and I also got various people to write for me at these publications where part of my function was as an editor—so, whether I knew Harold Rosenberg or various other critics, or I knew—I mean, we went to parties and whether it was a party given by Barbara Rose and Frank Stella, or whether it was a party given by Barnett Newman and his wife, Annalee.

And when I looked at the Gallery's collection—Carter had had a fund when they opened the East Building, that mostly 20th century building, plus exhibition space. And they acquired a great many major things at that time, because they didn't really have a 20th century collection, except things from Chester Dale and a few people who had given things.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

NAN ROSENTHAL: But that fund was basically spent out, so that the 20th century—we didn't have funds of our own. We had to go and get them. And before I ever really went to work at the Gallery, I realized one thing that was absolutely missing from the collection was Barnett Newman, whose work I liked very much. And I thought that was a problem. But I also remember, partly even from my working on my thesis, which involved working with an artist's widow, Yves Klein's widow, that widows were one source of things. And I went to see Annalee. And for some reason, I dimly recall that she liked men better than women—as many women did in those days. And I was a little nervous about approaching her, and decided to bring a good friend with me, Richard Schiff, the art historian, and suggested to Richard that he bring her a copy of his book on Cézanne, that she would like that. And so we went to see Annalee in her apartment at River House.

And I told her I was about to take this job, and that I thought there was a great lacuna in the collection of the National Gallery. And she said, "Well, that's very interesting, because I have decided that the *Stations of the Cross* will either go to the Metropolitan Museum or the National Gallery, or I will have to build a museum for them'." And so I said, "Well, that's terrific. Why don't we put them in the National Gallery?" And I think the first week I was in Washington there was some museum was opening in Miami, or a collection. And I remember Jack didn't want to go. He wanted to be with his family. And so I went down, and instantly that first week I was there, it was a very typical week. You got off the plane, you rented a car, you drove to the hotel. And that was when I learned that the government rates for the hotel were actually not a saving at all, because if you were in a hotel where all the art dealers stayed, they would drive you around to all the places—[laughs]—and I was not one of the world's greatest drivers, despite all those years in California.

In any case, I happened to meet the dealer for the Newman estate that weekend.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And who was that?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Oh—it's terrible; he was very well known, marvelous man. I will fill that in. He died. It was very sad, actually. He died of AIDS, as did some other people that Annalee was close to. And one of them was a wonderful young lawyer, Alex Weinberg, who worked for a quite distinguished law firm which maybe in those days used to be called Greenbaum, Wolff and Ernst. And one of those people had been a great friend of Barney's from when he was a teenager, and so she was very loyal to this firm. But Alex was a young tax lawyer who was kind of assigned in those days to sort of be her walker, in essence.

And I had met him with her in the course of the '60s. He was a wonderful guy. He and I got to be very close. And he was very interested in fulfilling Annalee's goals for things, such as the *Stations of the Cross*—which was 15, really not 14, paintings—would either go to the National Gallery or the Met, or Alex was going to be stuck with building a building. [Laughs.]

And so I had found out the price—which of course, we didn't really have—and Sydney was not at all interested in the *Stations of the Cross*. And Annalee saw how serious I was about this, and how ardent I was about doing this. They cut the price in half, but we were still talking six-figure which—or I should be more precise, seven-figure amounts. And so it was a question of finding that money.

And meanwhile, that same first weekend I was at the Gallery, I think—it may well have been Irving Blum who said to me, "You know, Nan, you really ought to go see Bob and Jane Meyerhoff, because Baltimore isn't big enough for them." And so I did. And they knew the gallery, and the gallery knew them. It wasn't like I invented the Meyerhoffs, rather, but I did go and see them. And Jane Meyerhoff—well, they were both very friendly with Jasper Johns, who was an artist of great interest to me. And of course, the gallery didn't have a Johns—I mean, it had prints and things like that, but it was another project of mine.

And I got along with Meyerhoffs well and Jack—I mean, there was one girl and one boy, and we both got along with them in different ways. So Jane had sent Jack to be friendly with Jasper, and that didn't come off too well. So she sent me to go and be friendly with Jasper. [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: To what end?

NAN ROSENTHAL: She and Jasper were very close. They were great friends. And she wanted Jasper to be a fan of the gallery. In fact, Jasper was interested in the gallery; as a national thing, not in terms of promoting himself—and, suddenly we became engaged with the project of bringing the Meyerhoff collection, which was a stunning collection of postwar art, to the National Gallery.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you say "we," you mean you and Jack?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Carter wasn't involved? The others weren't involved?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, of course, we had to get them involved, very much so. And he was aware of—the Meyerhoffs are, among other things, a very philanthropic family. They have given—what was it?—the symphony hall in Baltimore. And, there are many other great postwar collectors who are not philanthropic at all, but in fact the Meyerhoffs were. And Bob Meyerhoff, in some very interesting ways—he started a foundation, or a fund, that would send—I think 10 a year—black students through college and graduate school. The idea was that they would go to medical school. I think that was, if I recall correctly—I may be getting some things fuzzy. Or that they would—if not medical school, that they would be scientists of some kind, on the theory that there were not very many black scientists. And Bob was quite liberal politically, and that was of interest. And he was very interested in international relations.

And they weren't terribly well known in those days on the New York arts scene. I remember Jane telling me wonderful stories of trying to get Leo Castelli to sell her certain things.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, they succeeded.

NAN ROSENTHAL: [Laughs.] Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: They were good friends of his, ultimately.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Ultimately, yes. But even at the time, barely. And so Jane approached it from—they were also very friendly with Jasper, they were very friendly with Bob Rauschenberg. So it was of interest to them that I was working on this book on Rauschenberg, which I think got as far as about 1962 in my text. But I managed to recycle the text, and I did a Rauschenberg show for the Met much later.

And so I suggested to Jack that in the course of this negotiation with the Meyerhoffs about giving their collection—and in that context, it was useful to me to be friendly with this Alex Weinberg, this lawyer for Annalee, who was very cooperative and not difficult and—wonderful man. And Alex and I got quite friendly, and he used to come down to openings in Washington, which he enjoyed.

And one night, I remember he came down, and he had a terrible flu. I remember going to the drug store in Dupont Circle and trying to get something for him for his flu. And that was really the beginning of his falling ill with AIDS, which was a very sad thing for Annalee, because she was very, very close to him. And it was not an easy time.

So we asked the Meyerhoffs if they would—they didn't have a Newman themselves—buy the *Stations* and give them to the National Gallery.

JUDITH RICHARDS: They could get the large discount as well?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. And this is, as you might imagine, complicated. But Annalee wanted the *Stations* to go directly to the National Gallery. And it was all right if it said the Robert and Jane Meyerhoff collection, but they weren't going to go to their farm outside of Baltimore and sit there for 10 years and then come to Washington. So that all had to be worked out, and I remember Alex was a great help with that, persuading Annalee that, "Look, we can't pick up this kind of gift every day."

And of course, now it doesn't seem like a great deal of money, but that was kind of wonderful. And I think Gil, who, even though pure abstraction of the abstract expressionist generation wasn't his major interest—and it certainly wasn't really Carter's. Carter didn't like messy pictures, so de Kooning wouldn't be his favorite. Anyway, so that all happened in this gift of theirs.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What was the rest of the story of when you were in Miami?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, that Irving Blum suggested that I look up Bob and Jane Meyerhoff.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, sorry, yes.

NAN ROSENTHAL: And that the dealer for the Newman estate said, "Well, the price is 'X', but if you can raise half that, I think we can arrange—" you know, it was that. So that—that was a lot for one weekend, especially the first weekend.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Right. During your time there, what was the most significant exhibition that you organized, do you feel?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I think the drawings of Jasper Johns.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

NAN ROSENTHAL: I wasn't really there that long.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That was '90-'91. So how did that show come about? As a curator, what was your process to define what that exhibition would comprise and why you thought that that was the right answer for his work and for that audience?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, there were several things I wanted to do. One was I thought that the permanent collection, which had sort of been installed—that 20th-century permanent collection had been installed partly by Jack and partly by Gil Ravenel—I didn't like it, and I wanted to redo it.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What didn't you like about it?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Oh, I can't remember what I didn't like about it, but I really didn't like it. I think it was chronologically incoherent. I was actually rather traditional as an art historian, and I remember the chronology bothering me a lot. And I thought there was too much emphasis on Modigliani, of which there were a great many in the collection.

The first major show I did was something called "Seven American Masters"—rooms devoted to individual artists. And that was fun. And it put me into a position of working with the artists—Rauschenberg was one, and Johns was another. And there was some convenient thing happening; I think the signed Victoria Newhouse were in the process of moving from their townhouse to an apartment. And I think David Whitney said, "You know, in the course of that process, instead of putting the art"—

JUDITH RICHARDS: David Whitney was the architect?

NAN ROSENTHAL: No, no, no. David Whitney was just David Whitney, man around town, a friend of Cy's, a friend of Jasper, et cetera.

David said, "You know, if you want to borrow the Newhouse collection for X months instead of putting it in storage, I'm sure they'll lend it to you." And so we borrowed a lot of what they had then.

JUDITH RICHARDS: There weren't issues about presenting a private collection in the National Gallery that wasn't promised?

NAN ROSENTHAL: It was just part of this show, "Seven American Masters."

JUDITH RICHARDS: I see.

NAN ROSENTHAL: And I think they lent us Johns's *According to What*, which I thought would be very nice to acquire, which we did not. I tried to acquire it for the *Map*, too, and we did not. But then I got something better for the *Map* but that's later. And then I think the Newhouses lent us several Warhols. And we had an Ellsworth Kelly room. We had an Al Held room, which everyone was shocked by, including Al Held, I think, that he was suddenly elevated to this level.

And then the next show I did there was—and then I'll get to the Johns show—but was a show of the Nasher collection. And the reason for that show was that Carter was trying to build the National Sculpture Garden, and he was very anxious to go after the Nasher collection. And so that was sort of the goal there.

[End of SD card 2, track 3.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Nan Rosenthal on June 30 , 2010, in New York City for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc three. So we're talking about the exhibitions that you worked on at the National Gallery.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, I think working on the Nasher show was interesting. And it was interesting for me that I happened to do it rather than Jack—I tended to work quite late at the Gallery, partly because I hadn't worked for a museum before, much less for the National Gallery of Art. So I tended to work long hours to sort of play catch-up in a way, learn about the institution. And I was at my desk one night around 7:00, 7:30, and the phone rang. And I picked it up, and it was Carter.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did he always work late?

NAN ROSENTHAL: It depended. He often did. He definitely showed up. He was not an absent director in any way. And that was true with Philippe de Montebello as well.

Anyway, Carter said, "Oh, Nan, tell me, who was that—those people in Dallas who have the fabulous sculpture collection?" And I said, "I'm not absolutely sure, but I'll call you back in five minutes." I can't remember whom I called, but I called somebody who I knew would know the answer.

JUDITH RICHARDS: As a good reporter.

NAN ROSENTHAL: [Laughs.] Yes, I really don't remember who I called. I wish I did. But the first person I called told me. And I called Carter, and I said, "It's Ray and Patsy Nasher." I said, "I haven't met them, but I'm sure you have." And he said, "I think I have. Can you tell me a little bit about them?"

So I told him a little bit about them, what I picked up in the four minutes before I called him back. And I had certainly figured out by that time that a museum such as the National Gallery or, for that matter, the Met, sort of the last extent, the benevolent despotism, what the director wanted. And it's true that Gil Ravenel had a lot to say about what went on at the Gallery in terms of ideas for shows and so on.

But anyway, Carter immediately decided we were going to show their collection. And it happens that Steve Nash, who was the chief curator in Dallas then, was in the process of doing a show of the Nashers, probably for the same reason: to make sure the collection stayed in Dallas. I think not so that there would be a national museum, but so that it would go to the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts.

The Nashers were not about to say no to the National Gallery. And I was put in charge of the show for the gallery and actually had a great deal to do with the structure of the catalog and so on. But Steve had basically researched the collection as a scholar and did a fine job of it, I thought. And there were a few things that I particularly thought we needed to acquire, and I started to acquire some things for the Nashers.

JUDITH RICHARDS: While you were working at the National Gallery?

NAN ROSENTHAL: For their private collection, yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And that was permissible?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, the idea was to be as helpful as possible to the potential donor. At that point, I would say Carter and I were working on getting them to donate their collection.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So it's part of the cultivation—

NAN ROSENTHAL: It was part of the cultivation.

JUDITH RICHARDS:—that you could give your time to help him give your expertise—

NAN ROSENTHAL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS:—to help Nasher make the right acquisitions—

NAN ROSENTHAL: Correct.

JUDITH RICHARDS:—that you ultimately hoped would go to the gallery.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. And there was something that I had my eye on in particular. Well, I guess one way or another, I think it was made clear that the Nashers had to donate something, and also, if I recall correctly, pay for some of the expenses involved in doing the exhibition, whether it was transportation—because it had went from their house in Dallas to the Dallas Museum, it wasn't going to be very expensive, but to move all these huge things to Washington was another matter. And I think transportation and things like that were harder—and acquiring at least a major work.

And a major work that I wanted—somehow it became available—was a surrealist Giacometti sculpture called *No More Play*. And it had belonged to Julian Levy, the great surrealist dealer. And there was an auction of his collection after he died that his, I think, second wife gave. And the *No More Play* was, of all things, bought in at that auction.

But I would say it was certainly before Giacometti became as incredibly valuable, fashionable, whatever, as he is today. But also surrealist Giacometti was not a hot topic in those days. I was always very interested in sculpture and in some ways more knowledgeable about it, especially when I started working at the Gallery.

And so it was a fortuitous thing that I got to do this show. And there were things, I figured, surprised Gil Ravenel and Mark that I was as knowledgeable, because the three of us would go down there together and measure things and plan the bases and things like that. And I had a very specific idea of how to install the show. I mean, I was assigned to certain spaces, but I also had a notion of how it would be good to display the work.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was that knowledge, skill, a kind of intuitive sense you had, do you think? Or was it trained through years at Santa Cruz? I mean, installation for a curator is a major area that some curators are better at than others. And it's, of course, very important.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, when I was growing up, I think—especially when I was a teenager—my father used to get a kick out of moving things around the house. I think teaching the museum work course at Santa Cruz, the students had to put a lot of effort into planning their installations.

And I picked up a lot then, but I think a lot of it was art historical. Installing a group show is not an easy thing to do. And that's what I was stuck with, basically, with the Nasher collection, which is the second show I really did for the gallery.

And so the question that came to my mind at the time was, "How do you make something coherent out of a group show that goes from the beginning of the century to the present, essentially?"

JUDITH RICHARDS: And visually work, one piece to the next.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, visually and intellectually work one piece to the next. I probably was interested in chronology, as I usually am, but also dividing it into work that was in the constructivist tradition somehow and work that was figurative. And so that was how I was going to make it cohere. And that is, as I recall, what I did, and also the way I organized the catalog up to a point.

And then another major show was this business of reorganizing the permanent collection. And then the next

most major or most important show I did, in a way, for them was—well, let me bounce back for a moment just to the Nasher collection.

With some considerable effort, I persuaded Julian Levy's widow that she wanted *No More Play* to go to a museum. And I said, "Well, you know, this will come to the National Gallery if Mr. Nasher buys it, and it's a promised gift." And so I got her to lower their price considerably because it was coming to the gallery.

And so we got *No More Play*. And there were various complications. For years, it sat in Dallas. But anyway, something rather remarkable happened, which is after Ray died, a young curator there was going through all the papers and all the works and found the correspondence in which this was promised, because we used to have a lot of trouble borrowing it back, so to speak, from Ray Nasher. Anyway, it is now in Washington, and that's very nice.

The Johns show came about because I had become rather friendly with Jasper. And I asked him what he thought should be the next major show of his work. And he said, "I think it would be nice to have a major show of drawings." So I proposed that. And at the time, there had never been a show of work by living artists at the National Gallery.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is that a policy?

NAN ROSENTHAL: It was a policy. And Jack was in the process of working on a Rauschenberg exhibition, which involved—it was called *Rauschenberg Overseas Cultural Interchange*, ROCI.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So that would be the first—

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, that was scheduled as the first, but it took a long time for that to get off the ground. And so meanwhile—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mainly because of Rauschenberg's activities, being so busy?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, yes, and organizing this ROCI, which was really—I can't remember his name, a guy that Bob was very friendly with. It was Don Saff who was organizing the ROCI thing. And Don was very involved in that. And anyway, as it turned out, I proposed that it would be a good idea to do this drawings of Jasper Johns exhibition on the occasion, partly because the reason I proposed this was because Gil Ravenel used to change the schedule all the time. How did he have that much power? He did. It was a question of personality.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But he wasn't a curator; he was a designer.

NAN ROSENTHAL: No, he was an uber curator in a certain way.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was this a point of contention for the whole staff?

NAN ROSENTHAL: To a degree, yes, but Gil did these blockbusters for Carter, and he had a great deal of power. Carter loved these big, flashy shows. And he and Mark and a man who was nominally head of exhibitions, still is —

JUDITH RICHARDS: Which Mark?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Mark Leithauser, who is the number two in design.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I'm sorry, yes. Okay.

NAN ROSENTHAL: And Dodge Thompson, who was the head of exhibitions. And Dodge had a staff of mostly women with multiple languages who worried about things like insurance and dealing with other institutions and so on. They didn't play a really curatorial role. And in this respect, the National Gallery and the Metropolitan Museum are completely different. At the Met, the curators do everything, whereas in Washington, the curators curated. And there were functionaries to do these other things.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Anyway, so you were going to propose the Jasper Johns drawing show—

NAN ROSENTHAL: Because Gil had a way of changing the calendar all the time. And I thought, well, if I've fixed it to something that was not easy to change, like we're going to celebrate Jasper Johns' 60th birthday, it would be very difficult for Gil to mess around with that. And that is what I did. And then this was not a show that was difficult to book in terms of traveling.

And in any case, Jasper very much wanted it to go to Basel. He was very close to the director of the Basel Museum, Christian Geelhaar. And I also was chief curator of the show. But in fact, the 20th century department

at the Gallery was devoted to painting and sculpture.

And Ruth Fine was the curator of 20th century prints and drawings. And Ruth and I were quite friendly. And so I asked her if she had any objection to my doing this. And she didn't, and we did it together.

And Jasper was pleased. And David Sylvester, was a good friend of mine in those days, and he was very close to the Hayward Gallery people in London. And so it went there. And it was at the very last minute—when Leo Castelli saw the show, Leo thought it would be a tragedy if the show didn't come to New York.

So he persuaded the Whitney, which at that time had no director—Jennifer Russell was the acting director—and they were looking for a director then. And so there was no problem about it going to the Whitney, which it did. It ended up coming to New York after all.

And it was wonderful. I went running around to the United States and to a degree Europe. It was the year that Jasper was the artist who represented the United States at the Venice Biennale, which was another reason that doing a drawing show was a good idea, because at that time, Mark Rosenthal was organizing a show of Jasper's work since 1974 or something like that. So that was not an appropriate thing. And so this went from John's 1955, the beginning of his showing—[inaudible]—publicly, and the present, as it was then.

JUDITH RICHARDS: During the time you were working on that, you got married, I think.

NAN ROSENTHAL: I did.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So why don't we talk about how you met your future husband.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, I forget if when we were talking about the *New York Post*, I mentioned that when I was a teenager I used to go to these gallery openings with my father. And from that time, I think I knew Wynn Kramarsky. I remember meeting him, I think, for the first time at some opening at André Emmerich's.

And I also knew, but not well, Dorothy Schiff's daughter, Sally Backer. And when I was in Washington, I think the Kramarskys—I think it was possibly the Gauguin exhibition, which was a stunning show at the National Gallery—lent something to that show.

And I saw Wynn Kramarsky for the first time in 25, 30 years. And we became quite friendly and I would come up to New York all the time and we would do a lot of gallery-ing together. And Wynn would say, you really have to come out for the weekend to our house in East Hampton.

And so I was delighted to that. I kept waiting and waiting for an invitation. And finally I was invited—I remember it was for Labor Day weekend, I believe, of the summer of '88. And so I flew from Washington to—what's the airport in the middle of Long Island? And took an extremely expensive taxi from there to the Kramarskys. In those days, it seemed expensive. [Laughs.]

And so I arrived there and by that time, Wynn and I used to go gallery-ing together when I came up for the weekend and I would always try to see as many exhibitions as possible. And I remember we went to a Barnett Newman show that I had helped with that was at Pace. And then we went and met a guy who was a great friend of Wynn's called Sandy Cortesi—or Alexander Cortesi.

And at the time, Annalee Newman was having some problems with a collection of Newman's writings that was being published by Knopf. And at this lunch, which was somewhere in Little Italy, was an editor from Knopf—a wonderful woman, Elizabeth Sifton was her name. She's the mother of the present culture editor/food critic for *The New York Times*. And she was somehow in charge of this somewhat faltering project at that point. And I had read the manuscript and there were a number of problems with it. And this woman asked me about it because we met at this Newman show with Alexander Cortesi and Wynn and we all had lunch.

And so I filled her in what needed to be done to this book and without going into all those details. That sort of doesn't really matter. And then next, I went to East Hampton for the weekend to the Kramarskys' house. And there, in addition to Alexander Cortesi and his then-girlfriend, now, wife, was Alexander Cortesi's brother and that was Henry Cortesi.

And I thought, oh, isn't this nice because not only was I not seeing anyone, I hadn't seen anyone in a long time and I was incredibly busy at work and Washington was not a great place for finding gentlemen callers. And the Kramarskys had not done this on purpose at all. They thought Henry was eccentric. Henry, at that point, was 53 and had never been married and was clearly not gay. But they weren't trying to fix us up. It was an easy way, I suppose, for Sally to do seating and there was one major dinner party.

Anyway, I kept being seated next to Henry and that was fun because he's a very good dinner partner, very witty. And somehow, we drove back to New York together in his car, which I remember was a—I think it was actually a

VW bug? I think it may have been a bug of extraordinary age and nonfunctioning air conditioning.

He lived in Carnegie Hill and he was nice enough to drive me to the Brevoort. And I invited him to come up and have some dinner. And he turned me down and I found out later he turned me down because he wanted to watch Monday Night Football. [They laugh.] But he did get out and help me out of the car. The Brevoort has a circular driveway and he kissed me. I thought, oh, well, that's a good a sign. And I found out later he did that to embarrass the doorman. [They laugh.] Anyway, and then nothing happened and I checked out his law firm. I did all sorts of things.

But there was nothing I could do. I didn't think it was a good idea to call him without some sign of interest on his part. But then, Michael Kimmelman, who was a friend of Jeremy Strick, my former student who was by that time an assistant curator at the National Gallery, was writing up the reinstallation of the 20th century collection on the 10th anniversary of the East Building.

And so a photographer was sent from *The Times* or somebody they used in Washington to photograph Jack and me and Jeremy. And this photograph became the top half of the arts and leisure section of *The Times* and then a long article about Kimmelman. And that was very nice. The publicity was just fine.

And I suddenly got a letter from Henry that was very amusing. And you know, if he hadn't met me at the Kramarskys', he would have thought that the such-and-such a sculpture in the background of the photograph was the Nan Rosenthal and—[they laugh]—anyway, it went on and on. I still have the letter.

And so I thought okay, that was the signal I needed and I called up Henry and asked him if he wanted to go to—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Knowing that he was shy?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. Well, also figuring something—[laughs]—it was something slightly strange about his being 53, straight and never married. And I think I may have had lunch with his brother and done some further detective work or something. [Laughs.] I think Wynn Kramarsky said, "oh, he's very eccentric, don't even bother."

And so I called him and invited him to come with me to the dinner for Frank Stella at the Modern. And he said no, that he hated those things—those art dinners. But if he wanted to have dinner, he would take me to dinner. So—[laughs]—two years later, we got married.

JUDITH RICHARDS: He knew his own mind.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, yes. It took a very long time to get him to come and see me in Washington even though he had a brother in Washington. [Laughs.]

[Break.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So after you got married, then you're in Washington and he's in New York.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And was that, then part of the thinking of making the transition, leaving the National Gallery, and what that was like.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, yes. Well, at that point, I definitely wanted a job in New York. Henry offered to move to Washington, but I think I've already told you, I like the gallery very much, but I didn't like Washington and I thought if he moved to Washington, we'd never move to New York. So for a while, I thought I was going to be the curator of drawings at the Modern.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You were looking for a new position or they pushed you?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. I was looking for a new position and I think Dick Oldenburg was crazy about the Johns' drawing show and he suggested to—not Dick Oldenburg, the curator who was head of—

JUDITH RICHARDS: William Rubin?

NAN ROSENTHAL: No, no. It was a man who was in Washington—it doesn't really matter—a man who was in Los Angeles. He came to the opening of the Johns' show and he loved it and he suggested to Dick Oldenburg, but he knew they were looking for a drawings curator.

So that was talked about for a while and I think Bill Rubin actually didn't particularly want me there. I think he wanted a way to get Marty Raul [ph] to New York at the time.

JUDITH RICHARDS: She wasn't at the Guggenheim then?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Oh, no. She was at the Pompidou, I think. And she was a friend. So that left the three other major institutions and I really didn't want to go, for various reasons, to the Whitney. And I didn't particularly want to go to the Guggenheim either. So that left the Met.

And as I may have mentioned, I had known Bill Lieberman since I was a teenager, I think.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You mentioned him briefly once, but I don't recall.

NAN ROSENTHAL: He would come to dinner at my parents' house once a year. And I—occasionally, if I had a museum question, I would ask Bill. And I used to go to dinner at his house occasionally and I don't know. He was one of the few museum people I knew.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And so at that point, he had already gone to the Met from the Modern?

NAN ROSENTHAL: He had. But it was not—with the exception of Bill and I, it wasn't a terribly distinguished department. And Sabina [ph] was there, yes?

[Break.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you were saying that—what the Metropolitan's—other than Bill Lieberman, you were trying to characterize the Met as a potential place to work.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. But really, I wanted a job in New York. [Laughs.] And I remember going to see Bob Rosenblum about the possibility of working at the Institute as a professor. And he said, well, I may have a better idea. And apparently, unbeknownst to me until later, he sent a note to Phillipe de Montebello, saying there's this very interesting curator you ought to hire.

And as I say, I didn't know that then. Bob Rosenblum didn't tell me that till later. Anyway, I went to see Bill Lieberman and said Uncle Bill—as we used to call him—I need a job—[laughs]—in New York, why don't you hire me? And he thought that was a delightful idea. And he said this is going to take some time, you know. And I said I could imagine that it would.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What were the complications and why did it end up that your title was senior consultant?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, it started out being consultant.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Why?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I started out working three days a week and that was the title. And I have never known because I know Bill worked on it. I have never known why Phillipe—more or less my successor—is also called consultant and then I complained about it so much that they made me senior consultant. [Laughs.] Well, by that time, I only worked there for about, I don't know, six or 10 months when I became full time. But I think Phillipe didn't want to take on a senior person that it's very hard to get rid of people at the Met.

JUDITH RICHARDS: They seem to be there for decades.

NAN ROSENTHAL: They are—as they used to call it in Washington. And of course in Washington, it was partly because of federal, once you hired somebody at a certain rank, it was almost impossible to get rid of them in the federal government. And I was fairly familiar with all of that from the University of California, which is a highly bureaucratic institution.

But it's very hard to get rid of people at the Met and I think Phillipe didn't—I'm hard put to think of a full curator who was hired and I was there almost 19—18 years. George Goldner was hired to be head of the drawings department.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But how could such a fundamental position at the museum—

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, Bill was there for a reason. Phillipe hired Bill for a reason and the reason was to bring in all those collections and that's what he did. Phillipe wanted major collections to come in, but as you know, Phillipe was not particularly interested in [postwar art.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you went there knowing that—

NAN ROSENTHAL: No, after I was hired, Bill said, "by the way, Phillipe does not like American art and he does not like postwar art. You should know that, Nan." Well, there I was, my new job in New York at the most

distinguished institution in the country. There wasn't a hell of a lot I could do about it—except to attempt to change it and acquire certain things that were missing in a big way.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So up until that point, if there were an exhibition, whether it's of acquisitions or of works borrowed, it was difficult to get it on the schedule if it was an idea that you wanted to do of postwar art because—was it difficult to get it on the schedule?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Abstract expressionism was easier.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, Geldzahler did that.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, well, it wasn't just that show. I'm comforted by the fact that NBC will run this later. [Laughs.] Anyway, so it was actually great how Henry Geldzahler, with whom I went to dancing school—[laughs]—that was a big—that was a terrific precedent and the quality of the abstract expressionist pictures in the Met were very good.

And again, it took several years, but I reinstalled the 20 -century collection, especially the postwar collection, which was kind of a mess. It wasn't really Bill's strong suit. And Bill decided that my field was abstract expressionism. I mean he just decided that I was a great expert on abstract expressionism and I was going write a book for the museum on the abstract expressionist works in the collection and so on and so forth. It was quite amusing. So meanwhile, I thought the fact that there was no Johns and no Rauschenberg was appalling and—I mean, I was especially appalled.

I thought the Rauschenberg thing would be easier to deal with because of the tremendous numbers of works and—though I didn't think it was going to be easy to get a major early work.

Meanwhile, I had borrowed Johns's *White Flag* for Washington, where it hung for many years. It had been in Dusseldorf on loan. First time I ever saw it was at Yale on loan from Jasper. And it curiously turned up in a book that Geldzahler wrote or maybe Barbara Rose wrote it, but Geldzahler signed on the Met's 20 -century collection.

And in the book was the *White Flag*, which never belonged to the Met and Jasper continued to own it. And the longer he owned it, the more valuable it became. And I knew just how valuable because of borrowing it for Washington. I knew what the insurance was. But I had seen the picture in Dusseldorf on one of these trips with Gil Ravenel and someone.

And it was installed extremely badly in Dusseldorf and I sent a drawing to Jasper that I didn't do—Mark Leithauser did it. I did a sketch and he made a lovely drawing and said I was really upset because it was so poorly installed in Dusseldorf and why didn't we move it to Washington?

And he said that he understood, that the director in Dusseldorf was about to retire and that as soon as he retired, I could borrow it for Washington. So I was thrilled and there it was, at the National Gallery for many years. I also borrowed the Warhol—the 16 Warhol soup cans, which Kirk thought was a lovely idea—[laughs]—and proceeded to acquire for the modern and so on and so forth.

Anyway, I set out to persuade Jasper—this was after the drawing show and all that—that really the *White Flag* should come to the Met. And by that time, Phillipe had turned down a couple of Johns acquisitions that I'd come up with. One was *According to What*, which I think is a wonderful work and summarized in some ways, the first decade, certainly, of his—

JUDITH RICHARDS: What was the date of that?

NAN ROSENTHAL: 1964, approximately. And Phillipe said, "no, Nan, I don't want that. It's too didactic a picture." And I wondered, who is telling him—somebody is informing Phillipe. So I said, "all right. I'll work on something else."

JUDITH RICHARDS: That must have been difficult.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, it was a very reasonable price at the time. And it was disappointing. But there were other—so I thought, well, okay. Leo was very old at this point. And to go and try to organize something with him was pretty much, I thought, something of a fool's errand.

So I made a book of everything that Jasper owned belonging to Jasper. And I wrote a little something on each of these things.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You mean a presentation book?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, a presentation book to Bill and Phillipe, and said the obvious thing to go after is—and

then wrote up all these other things that were very possible and wonderful and presented it and suggested that the three of us go see Jasper in Connecticut. And to make a long story short, we did.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So Phillipe wasn't opposed to acquiring a Johns—

NAN ROSENTHAL: A major Johns.

JUDITH RICHARDS: He just didn't like that particular—

NAN ROSENTHAL: That particular—[inaudible, cross talk].

NAN ROSENTHAL: By that time, Jennifer Russell was working for Phillipe as one of his two deputies. I've never discussed it with her in detail—I mean, she certainly knew that I was going for one—I think she probably encouraged Phillipe and that he liked her very much.

So Phillipe was very happy with the idea of the *White Flag*. And I said, "well, now here's what it's insured for in Washington. So you think about what you want to spend."

And he said, "what do you mean we're going there for lunch, I don't have time for that." I said, "Jasper is the most famous living American artist and he likes to cook. We're going to go there for lunch, please."

"Well, if you can arrange for me to go from there to Bridgehampton, and we can do this on a Friday"—anyway, so we went. And I also think I was still smoking myself. It was in that second period of stopping smoking, whatever. And Bill, of course, smoked four or five packs a day, as you may recall. That's how I started smoking again. I was in his office and I just couldn't stand it. And I said, "okay, Bill, give me a cigarette." [Laughs.]

And Phillipe was smoking as long as he could bum cigarettes. He didn't buy them. And so here we are, three of us puffing away, driving to northwestern Connecticut.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Who drove?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Phillipe. And like a Frenchman he drove.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Why wasn't there a driver?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Because he was taking his car to Bridgehampton from—

JUDITH RICHARDS: So when he said, you need to arrange for me to get there he meant just the directions?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. And of course they had directions to and from New York, but they didn't have directions from Sharon, Connecticut, to Bridgehampton. [Laughs.]

Anyway, we went up and we had lunch with [Jasper Johns] and his wonderful assistant Sarah Taggart and his studio assistant James Meyer. And then we went up to the living room. He hadn't moved into the main house in those days.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is "Meyer" M-E-Y-E-R?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. There are two James Meyers. One is a famous art historian who happens to be a dear friend of mine. And he's wonderful. And he wrote that fabulous book on minimalism. And James is going to the National Gallery very soon and has talked to me about transitioning from academia to museum work. And I warned him, you don't have much time to write. [Laughs.]

And the other James Meyer is Jasper's studio assistant who's been with him for many, many years and is a person of great discretion. And he's a sweet guy.

And also at Jasper's in Sharon, Connecticut, is his printer whom he knew from ULAE because Jasper owns one-third of ULAE. And Rauschenberg owns a third—or owned a third—and Bill, who runs ULAE—Bill Goldston owns a third. That was the way she left it.

Anyway, the next step—Phillipe came up with some incredibly low-ball figure, ridiculous offer for the *White Flag*. And I was amazed at Phillipe. He was very straightforward. He said we've come to buy the *White Flag*. Who knew if Jasper was willing to sell the *White Flag*.

So I then spent two or three months persuading Jasper that he wanted to sell the *White Flag* to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. And that was not easy.

JUDITH RICHARDS: He didn't want to sell it, period, or he wasn't then, that was the right place?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I think a little of each. He wasn't sure the Met was in the right place because there were already two very major flags in New York City. And he thought maybe that was silly. It wasn't that he objected to the Met. He used to come to the Met all the time for temporary exhibitions. And he was well aware that the Met—on the one hand was very interested in his work and on the other hand hadn't bought anything yet except for prints and so on.

And I explained to him that Phillipe had always assumed that we would get something as a gift, which he had. And it was like we were running out of very major things to get as gifts and so on. Not exactly, but I said somehow I would fix it up about the money. And Jasper was actually very generous with the museum in terms of bringing the price down. Number one, his lawyer Joe Ernkrantz [ph] whom I knew, thought it was a very good thing for the Met and was actually very encouraging about it all and about spacing out how we were possibly going to pay for this over time.

And Kay Bearman, who's the administrator of the department at the Met, was very helpful about it. And Bill was alive then. And Bill was very enthusiastic about it. And, quite remarkably, I thought, Bill had this *White Flag* drawing which he bought for his mother from the rental department. Actually, I don't know. According to Jasper, he never paid for it. And that sounds like Bill—[they laugh].

And his mother didn't like it, so it was never hung. And so it was in fantastic condition, this beautiful drawing. And Bill said, "oh, I'll throw in the drawing if the trustees will go along with this," which was an extremely generous thing to do. And you can imagine what a *White Flag* drawing—it was oil on paper, mounted on board. I mean, it was a virtual painting. It was extremely generous of him.

And I presented it to the trustees, not in the usual boardroom but in a secret place. Phillipe had it all set up before we actually met about it. But we were all in agreement that if for some reason it didn't happen, it would not be a good thing if word got out that the acquisitions committee at the Met did not buy this painting.

So we had this secret place where I presented it. And I was so touched by Bill's having offered this extremely valuable thing. Bill was not really a rich man to have offered this to the Met. But I started crying—[laughs]—as I was presenting it.

Anyway, so the acquisitions committee met that evening and bought a little bit of this and a little bit of that. And the trustee curators would always wait in the patrons' lounge where there was a bar and wait to hear what the acquisitions—

JUDITH RICHARDS: The verdict.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, exactly. And I have no idea how many scotches I had. And I was sitting there and a couple of people kept me company. And finally I had to go to the bathroom—[laughs]. And I told the guard, look, if anyone comes out of that room, I'll be right back.

So of course that was when Phillipe came out looking for me. And luckily the guard told me, so I went and knocked on the door. And Phillipe said, "well, come in." And he said, "Nan, we've decided to table this." And I couldn't believe it. And I looked around, and all the trustees were grinning from ear to ear. And Philip said, "just kidding. The museum has acquired a masterpiece. Congratulations." [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was this typical of him to do this?

NAN ROSENTHAL: No, it was pretty mean. There was a—30 seconds there when I was not a happy camper. Anyway, so that was exciting. And I went to my office and called Jasper.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was that the most secretive acquisition—

NAN ROSENTHAL: Acquisition that I made? Yes, I would say so.

JUDITH RICHARDS: As I'm looking over the list of exhibitions you did, one of the most interesting—you organized the roof, the exhibition—

NAN ROSENTHAL: I did.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you initiate the installations on the roof?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Before that there had always been group shows.

JUDITH RICHARDS: On the roof?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. From the collection. They weren't ever one-person shows. And I would say it was as much

Bill's idea as mine in that for some reason or other he was very fond of Ellsworth. And that was the first one that we did. And Ellsworth used to come to the museum all the time. He had an apartment around the corner.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That was 1998.

NAN ROSENTHAL: He was there one day and Bill just offered him a show. And the "Spectrum" had not been hanging. And Bill always told me—because Phillipe didn't really like Kelly's work. He didn't see what these big, wide things were. [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So Phillipe had a lot of control over what was going to be shown?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Not necessarily. I mean, he may have said something to Bill one day, and Bill decided he wouldn't irritate him by taking 60 feet to put up—

In fact, on the contrary, when I was re-hanging the collection, the postwar collection especially that we were hanging in the second floor, Bill wanted to put that dolly on which Drue Heinz had given the museum this rather weird—

[End of SD card 3, track 1.]

NAN ROSENTHAL: It's rather a weird painting. It's a late Dali with a Raphael inside it.

And it was tricky, because Mrs. Heinz is the mother of Alexander Cortesi. My sister-in-law, Wendy—they decided it was such a good idea for—we got married, then they got married after living together for 20 years or something like that. [Laughs.] But at least in Sandy's case, it was his third wife. Anyway, she's a wonderful sister-in-law.

But to take down Mrs. Heinz's painting was a little awkward, but it wasn't an American painting, and everything else I was hanging was American.

And I remember when I showed the plan to Philippe, which I did because I didn't want Bill to mess with it—and you learn, in an institution of that size, sort of what to do. And I knew Philippe wouldn't really be very interested in the whole thing. And he looked at it and he said, "What is that Dali doing there?!" And I said, "Well, you know, Bill likes it, and Mrs. Heinz is so nice to us," I said, "but it doesn't belong there." He said, "Of course of doesn't! It's a European painting. Get rid of it!"

I said, "Terrific." I said, "When Bill complains, will you back me up?" And Philippe said yes, he would. He said, "But really, Nan, if I had to"—I mean, to answer your question, Judith—"if I had to worry about what every department wanted to put up in every gallery, I wouldn't get any work done." So that partly answers your question. So Bill had a fit that the Dali was coming down.

And I said, "Well, let me put it in one of those corridors, and it doesn't really go with"—"I'm calling the director." So Philippe did back me up on it. It was very funny.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It sounds like a rather tense working relationship.

NAN ROSENTHAL: With Bill? Not really. I got along very well with Bill. I really did. I've always had the suspicion that one of the reasons Bill hired me—I think I went to work there the week of his 70th birthday—was he wasn't sure how long he was going to stay.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Just going back to this title for a second, when you're a consultant curator, are you a permanent staff member? Do you get benefits?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And after you proved yourself for a number of months, or years, so they knew that it wasn't a mistake, so they wouldn't worry that they'd want to get rid of you—

NAN ROSENTHAL: Why didn't they change the title? All I can imagine is that Philippe wanted the freedom to get rid of a senior person if he wanted to do it.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was that the case in all the departments, or just in the 20th century?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, you just look at those departments. They don't get rid of people.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But do they have—so they have consultant curators in other departments?

NAN ROSENTHAL: [Pause.] Also bear in mind that this was an area that Philippe didn't care about.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, that's what I was assuming.

NAN ROSENTHAL: And it wasn't helpful from a development point of view. Not everyone loved Uncle Bill. Many people did; other people didn't. He was very close to an older generation of collectors, but if you look around New York City, it seemed to me there was a great to be scooped up. The Guggenheim had all sorts of trustees that weren't very involved in the institution. I mean, there was a lot you could have done, but if you weren't the head of the department or if you didn't like Bill, but he was there—and there were such people. I actually got along with him very well. Remember, I'd known him since I was 15 or 16. Not that I was particularly close to him, but I certainly didn't make trouble for Bill.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you both came up with the idea of doing these commissions for the roof?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you collaborate each time, or did you—

NAN ROSENTHAL: No, no. Bill simply offered Ellsworth this show, and it was kind of a hit. And so we started doing these one-person shows. And I would come up with the person, and it wasn't hard, I think.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I see that Ellsworth was '98. Was it not every year? Because I see David Smith was 2000.

NAN ROSENTHAL: It was every year.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So there was someone else did the '99.

NAN ROSENTHAL: I don't know about that. It may be the way I did the vita.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, okay. And then Joel Shapiro.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Maybe I'm wrong.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oldenburg. That's '02, and then LeWitt is '05. I don't know who was '03 and '04.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, Lichtenstein was '03. That was a wonderful show.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

NAN ROSENTHAL: And then—I don't know. The dates may have gotten a little screwed up here.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you proposed—

NAN ROSENTHAL: No, I did them all.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You proposed who you'd want to do to him, for formality's sake.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: He agreed.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, and he would mention it to the director.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And then how did you determine the budget? Did he tell you the budget? Did some other department? Did you just make it and get it approved yourself?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, for a long time—the budget's much bigger now. Gary, generally speaking, does whatever he pleases. In those days, one of our trustees and her husband—it was really foundations that she controlled of her parents' money—funded the roof show, and if it went over a little bit—

JUDITH RICHARDS: So it wasn't out of the regular budget, museum budget. It was a special grant.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, all temporary exhibitions have to get funded somehow. They don't have a regular—they all have to get funded. I'm just so embarrassed I can't—I forgot the name.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Of the donor?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Embarrassed?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, embarrassed that I can't think of her name. She was—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Now, was she the Annenberg who was on the board?

NAN ROSENTHAL: No. [Pause.] She was not. There were a number of Annenberg people floating around. [Pause.] But it will come to me. I could go look it up.

But then there were other shows that one way and another—acquisitions came up in different ways. I wanted us to acquire a Terry Winters painting, and in this case I got a car and took Bill down to see this show before it opened, and I think I set it up in advance with Matthew Marks and said, "Matthew, look. I don't know if Bill's going to like these paintings or not, but what I recommend is that you have various portfolios of Terry's prints around." I said, "Bill always likes prints, and in case he doesn't like the paintings, I don't want it to be embarrassing, we'll get a portfolio of prints." And actually Bill liked the prints very much and we got a whole bunch of prints. So I did a print show.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And you did a big print show.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. And Joel was very generous to us and basically arranged with Arne Glimcher that somebody would donate a work, a big sculpture. So that's how we got that wonderful big red sculpture. And then David Smith was just so easy to do—a show of 60 Smiths. And the Lichtenstein show was a lot of fun to do, and that was very easy. By that time Jack Cowart was at the Lichtenstein Foundation, and Dorothy and I were friends, and it just—[snaps fingers]—came together very quickly. And Dorothy was very helpful to us with that, and turned around and gave us a sculpture.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. Was it an issue to you, either at the National Gallery or the Metropolitan, that you were organizing a string of shows by male artists? There was a lot of talk in those years about women artists getting exhibitions, not getting exhibitions. How did that issue play out at those institutions and for you?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I guess what I would say—one thing that comes to mind immediately is that was the least of my problems. I didn't think it was. I thought a more important problem was for the Metropolitan Museum of Art to present—since I sort of fell into being this postwar curator—that's not what I did in Washington; I did everything. I mean, the whole century. I thought it was important, especially given what became clear about Philippe's interests, to show postwar art as well as possible.

And I also had a slight feeling that to do a show of a woman just because [I] was a woman—to some extent ran the wrong way with me. We did have that Judith Rothschild thing, but that, to me, was kind of a bit of an embarrassment, and was done, I think, for development reasons. I don't know how that's played out, actually, if it's played out properly or not. I'm not sure. But there were other things that just seemed to me more interesting.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It is the same applied in acquisitions, that you were trying to get the Met to be involved in showing 20th century postwar art, and that was the war that you had to fight.

NAN ROSENTHAL: I would say, especially because the abstract expressionist collection was so good, the next priority after the *White Flag* was to get a major early Rauschenberg. And I was very lucky with that.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I don't recall when Bill was no longer at the museum, what year that was.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Oh, gosh.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was he there until he passed away, or had he left earlier?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, he was physically there. Philippe gave him a very nice office up on the—where—what we used to call the mezzanine, but it wasn't the mezzanine, it was where Philippe's office was, and the deputy director's. And so when he was no longer ill, but he was no longer head of the department, that's where he was.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So how did that transition work? Did you think you had a chance to become head of the department? Would you have wanted to?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, I thought—by that time—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And what year was that?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Oh, god. Let me think. [Pause.] At that time—I mean, the last two shows that I did were the *Jasper Johns: Gray* show with Chicago, and the *Rauschenberg:* Combines.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It was '05.

NAN ROSENTHAL: For me that was a wonderful way to conclude.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So by that time, though, Bill wasn't there. Who were you working for then? Who was the head of the department, was that Gary already?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, but there was a period when I think nobody was. I don't remember to tell you the truth. I can't remember exactly when Gary came into being head of the department, but it was complicated.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But at least there were several years you were there when he was the head?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And I was just wondering about the changes at the Metropolitan in your department, and the whole attitude of the museum, starting with Philippe, to contemporary art.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, I think on the one hand, there was no question that Gary was going to try to demonstrate that we were much more in the contemporary business. On the other hand, I suppose, it depends what part of the public you think about—it wasn't really Gary's field.

And I let him know pretty soon after he came that I thought these two shows were a nice way—that I was going to go. Some of it was a question of health issues. I had some health issues to take care of, a number of them, some of which I've told you about, a few others, to boot. And I didn't really think I could go on, and suggested—actually, to Gary, I suggested Marla would be a very appropriate person.

And I think he really did want to hire someone who was very competent in the area of postwar art. And Marla is really very knowledgeable about contemporary art. I mean—really contemporary art. She's also a very good historian. Her original field was—she was writing her dissertation on Gauguin. I don't know, I've always enjoyed Gary. I have no idea if it would be fun to work for him for a long period or not, because I didn't. And, I'm older than he is, and I don't know if I would have liked it or not. I really don't. But he has certain gifts that I think are very useful for the museum.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you were there, did you have responsibility for supervising any junior curators on their projects, assigning projects to other curators?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I would say that that's not the way a department at the Met works. A department at the Met usually, there are a couple of exceptions to this, but almost always has a male chairman. You just look around. I mean, it's a history issue. Julie Jones is head of AAOA.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What's AAOA?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Oh. African, Oceanic, et cetera. And I would think her logical successor would be Alisa LaGamma, the African curator, who is a brilliant woman. She's quite amazing. But again, that's an area that Philippe wasn't terribly interested in, so—[laughs]—having a woman is—I'm trying to think of another department that has a woman chair.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But tell me about the way the department works—you said you wouldn't be assigning anyone anything.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Okay. No, because it wasn't hierarchical—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, there weren't junior curators?

NAN ROSENTHAL: No. I mean, there were assistant curators, associate curators, and I guess—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And who supervised them?

NAN ROSENTHAL: The head of the department.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So it was Bill.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. And basically everybody did what Bill wanted them to do. It was very simple. Including Sabine. And she and Bill didn't get on at all.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Sabine Rewald?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. He hired her originally because he wanted someone to write the catalogue on the artist

who was her dissertation topic. Anyway, they didn't get on well.

And I'm trying to think of anybody who was hired in the course of my being there. Magdalena Dabrowski, who is a part-time person, and I don't know what her title is. It was something really disastrous. It may have changed, but it was something like associate curator or something that—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Disastrous because it didn't match her?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, if she left the modernist curator and became an associate curator, that's not fun. And anyway, she's a part-time employee.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What about the divisions—you did a number of exhibitions that were prints and/or drawings. What about the divisions between what you were doing and—wasn't there a print department?

NAN ROSENTHAL: There was a drawings and prints department.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Drawings and prints department. So how was that?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, that was to some degree whatever Bill wants, Bill gets.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Maybe they didn't focus at all on 20th century.

NAN ROSENTHAL: No, they did. And Gary doesn't want to mess with prints, really. But Bill adored prints, as I'm sure you know, and knows a great deal about them. So they made him feel comfortable. And it just so happens that I'm very interested in prints. So—I just happened to be over the years. And that was fine with Bill.

And occasionally we would tussle about things. I know there were a couple of things I wanted to buy that he didn't like, that the minute Gary became head of the department, I bought. [Laughs.] Gary doesn't really, I don't think, want to deal with worrying about prints and is happy to have George Goldner. And the woman who's there, whom I was quite friendly with, who's head of 20th century prints, is delightful and extremely competent. She's the one who did the show of—this is so terrible—she did a wonderful show of a female artist.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Of prints?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. It was a terrific show, too.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I should remember that.

NAN ROSENTHAL: I love her. I love her work. I just saw a wonderful exhibition she just had. She shows at—oh, anyway, I'll fill that one in. You can edit this junk up.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You did the *Kiefer: Works on Paper*?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, that was an interesting thing. I didn't exactly curate it. Anthony d'Offay approached me with this collection—all belonging to Kiefer—of 55 or so Kiefer drawings, and a lot of them early ones, a real spread. I would say Kiefer curated it, maybe with some help from d'Offay. And d'Offay, whom I was quite friendly with in those days, said, "Okay, Nan. You talk Bill into this."

JUDITH RICHARDS: He knew you'd be enthusiastic.

NAN ROSENTHAL: He thought I would be. Or he thought that—well, d'Offay often told Bill what to do. Not often, but from time to time. For example, he didn't want Bill to install Howard Hodgkin's show. He wanted me to install it. And I don't know how he arranged that, but he did. And I was interested in Hodgkin's work, and it was fine with me. It was one of the first shows I installed at the museum.

But anyway, d'Offay said, you know, "You talk Bill into this." So I showed him the works, or showed him a slide show and told him what the work was about. And he said, "Well, that sounds very interesting. Now let me see where I can find the money for this," and he found it. And it wasn't cheap, about 55 Kiefer drawings.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, it was proposed as a purchase, and then an exhibition?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Oh, yes. It was obvious that once it was purchased, it was going to be in effect a free exhibition, except that I insisted—Bill's frames were deeply hideous, and I was not about to put these things up, and I had them completely reframed, and I guess that cost somebody something. But we bought them, and it was a question of persuading the trustees to buy them.

And there were different approaches. With something like Kiefer—well, he was fairly hot at that particular

moment. But you see, the acquisitions committee at the Met is a committee that covers all periods and all cultures, so that you can't walk in and present something the way you do at MoMA, and say, "This is this," and expect that all the trustees and heavy donors in the room are going to know what you're talking about, because they might be a curator of Japanese art.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Why did they keep it that way? Why did they while you were there?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, that's the way the museum is organized. It's just the way it is. If the new director wants to change it, he can, but think of all the—then there would be another 20 meetings to go to. There's already about 18.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Meetings for the director.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Eighteen curator of departments or something. So, 18 more meetings, 17 more meetings. I don't think that's why it's not done, but I think—because I think the Met prides itself on its breadth, and certainly Philippe did for 30-odd years.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So it functioned well enough having one group who would have to sign on works from 18 different departments.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. I think most things that were major and expensive, I think, were, for the most part, prearranged before there was an actual meeting, which didn't meant that the curator didn't have to present, and present well. And Philippe, who was a great public speaker himself, did not approve of notes. You just did it; no notes. "Look, Ma, no hands."

JUDITH RICHARDS: And he disallowed any curator from using notes during a—

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, you were more or less informed, not by him or anyone from his department, but you sort of found out how do people present things. And the Met was also very good at—by contrast to Washington, was a completely different system. In Washington, Carter Brown met with the trustees, of which there weren't very many of anyway, certainly not trustees that counted—somebody from the Treasury Department or something.

And so the curators prepared what we used to refer to as blurbs. We prepared one-page, double-spaced, typewritten blurbs for Carter, who had fabulous mnemonic skills, and the night before the trustees meeting, he would read the blurb, commit it totally to memory, and present. No curators were anywhere near the place, except possibly the deputy director and the chief curator. But basically, it was Carter and the trustees.

I don't know if that's the system today, because I don't think Rusty Powell, who was in my class at Harvard as it happened, has those same skills, so it must be done differently somewhat, whereas at the Met, each curator presented something from his or her own department according to his or her specialty even within the department. Or if Bill was away or sick or something, then it would get a little bit hierarchical. And generally speaking, if it was postwar, I would do it; if it was prewar European, Sabine would do it, so in that sense it was a little—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm.

Moving to a little different topic. How was it determined, what was your role in determining whether there would be a publication that the Met would do to accompany an exhibition and, if there would be, what kind of publication it would be—what the contents would be, who the authors would be?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I think that that fell into place in a fairly just natural way, in the sense that under Bill—Bill was, frankly, concerned about having too much work to do. And so our department did not originate a lot of shows, as you may have noticed over the years. So the more major shows that I did, like Johns' *Gray* or Rauschenberg's *Combines*—and I had a really lot to do with the *Combines* show—were, technically speaking, organized by other institutions, or we co-organized them.

Or the Guston show was really Fort Worth. And I had a wonderful time with it and I loved installing Guston, but I cut the show in half. It was much too big in Fort Worth. And, the roof was an opportunity to do what you wanted. And something like Kiefer, we had bought the collection, and since it was a collection-based thing, I did the catalogue.

JUDITH RICHARDS: While you were working at the National Gallery and the Met, were you involved in the ideas of evolving curatorial practice and the whole rise of curatorial studies programs? I mean, you had run the classes at Santa Cruz, but after that were you engaged in those kinds of ideas, part of the A.M. curatorial committee or in any way involved in the professional development area?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I would say not much. I didn't think that most of the curatorial studies programs that were

flourishing were any good. And I had done my thing on that, so—[laughs].

JUDITH RICHARDS: So if a graduate in art history, perhaps, B.A., asked you what you thought the best route would be to become a curator, what advice would you give them?

NAN ROSENTHAL: That's a good question. It reminds me of if you want to be a newspaper reporter, what would you do? Would you go work for a suburban paper and do a lot of writing, or would you go work for *The New York Times* and be a copy boy? In a way, it's a very similar—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Or what kind of graduate program would you pursue, an art history Ph.D.? Or curatorial studies, I guess it's a master's?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I would absolutely not recommend a curatorial studies program. First of all, the major museums in New York all have really very good summer programs. And the kind of experience somebody could get in one of those would be just as good as—

JUDITH RICHARDS: You're talking about internships.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, the summer internships. At the Met, I think they're fantastic. And I think they're very good at the Modern. And I would strongly recommend that somebody apply—and I do frequently recommend that, and I've slithered some people into the Met program—well, just I think they're very good.

I think if someone has a connection that would enable them to work for a fairly major institution someplace, it's very good experience. And it depends, in a number of cases, on people's geographical interests and that kind of thing, or also within museum work, what do they want to do? I'm working with someone right now who is really fantastic at being a registrar. And that's not so easy. And not everybody has to go into curatorial work. And not everyone's particularly suited for it.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What would you say was the most fulfilling part of your work as a curator? Or your favorite part, whichever.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Because of Bill's reluctance—I mean, if I were working on a major show, that meant I couldn't be doing whatever it was he wanted me to do that morning. I'm exaggerating when I say "that morning," but, if I happened to be in the library checking out a book—I mean, the modern art library right in our department—and Bill was at a table in there and wanted something Xeroxed, the fact was, he wouldn't put it past—he wouldn't wait for his secretary to come by.

And because of his reluctance to get involved in our department's organizing a lot of major shows—and he did a little more of it when he first came; it's a chunk of his work at the Met that I—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is that because he put so much effort into acquiring collections, cultivating and—collectors?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I don't think really, because I think that was just about done before he ever got to the museum. Well, let's take the Perls collection, when we were having the 50th anniversary of the National Gallery, and I said to myself, "Where am I going to get some major works," I immediately thought of going to the Perls because I knew the quality of their collection and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: What were their first names, the Perls?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Klaus, K-L, and Dolly was his wife. And P-E-R-L-S. And they were very distinguished and very honest major dealers of classic modern art. And I went to see them, and Klaus Perls said, "Oh, I'm giving it all to Bill because he needs it." This is when I was in Washington.

And I think that before he came to the Met, practically, all those things were done deals. He had to keep them going—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And the Gelmans as well?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, Gelman, definitely.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So going back to your experience and most fulfilling part of your job, you're talking about the frustrating part of your job, actually.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, to a considerable extent.

Well, I loved installing shows. I really enjoyed that tremendously. That was a fulfilling part in both institutions. But, in Washington, I would say doing the Johns drawings show was—as Ruth Fine once said, doing a show of

Jasper's drawings is like shooting fish in a barrel. [Laughs.] It's true. And it was a hard show to criticize.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Have you had the experience of dealing with critics? Have there been reviews of exhibitions you've curated that have not been altogether positive? And how has that impacted you, and what happens when that occurs, if it has?

NAN ROSENTHAL: It hasn't much. And I remember one wonderful thing. I was criticized in the Met with the Kiefer show, especially since I'd already written this catalog. Doing the wall text was not a major strain because—[laughs]—it was already written. And I remember having some arguments. There's this marvelous woman, Linda Sylling, who the public doesn't know of very much who's really the person that makes sure shows get up and hung. She's not involved especially curatorially, but she's in a position to say, "Oh, Nan, you can't have wall text this long or this taking up this much space." And I would say, "But you're telling me I can't do that, and Philippe is saying it's too expensive to do a brochure. I mean, what's going on here?"

And I remember we argued a lot about this, but she was a buddy of mine, so I did what I wanted. And then Peter Schjeldahl reviewed this show in *The New Yorker* and started off with this diatribe against wall text. I thought, "Oh my god, now it's really going to come down on my head." And then he said, "But there's an exception that proves the rule." And then he went on and on about how wonderful—so I got this apology from—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And obviously, the most fulfilling part is the flip side of the most frustrating, I guess. And it sounds like it was a challenge working with Bill to have the opportunity to develop exhibitions of your own. He brought traveling exhibitions that you worked on as the Met's curator. Did you have a say in which those might be?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, up to a point. I remember saying to Bill that we absolutely had to do the *Rauschenberg: Combines* show, that it was going to be in the nature of the work just a fantastic exhibition. And Bill didn't want to do it. And I thought this was really fairly shocking business.

So I went to the woman who was the associate director for exhibitions, Mahrukh Tarapor. And I said, "Mahrukh, we've got to do this show." And she said, "Well, I think you're perfectly right. I don't know much about it all, but I think you're perfectly right. I think you should go immediately to the director and tell him what you think," which one didn't quite normally do there, because she was between you and the director.

JUDITH RICHARDS: This was about '05 when the show was at the Met?

NAN ROSENTHAL: At least that.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So Bill was still certainly in charge?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Oh, yes. And I think it was probably a little more than that. It was at the end of '05. And because I knew so much about Rauschenberg from working on that book that I never finished, it's certainly about early Rauschenberg because—[laughs]—[inaudible]. I had a lot to do with the show itself.

But I went to Philippe, and it took three minutes. He said, "You're absolutely right. We should do that show. So let's see—go figure out the schedule with Linda Sylling."

So, it was a piece of cake. And \ originally I was supposed—you know, when I first came, I was doing a Chuck Close retrospective. And then Chuck pulled out. He decided he wanted to be at the Modern. And I think he was encouraged in that by Kirk and [inaudible], which was kind of nasty, but there it was.

But it was really Bill—I started working at the Met the week of Bill's 70th birthday. And I think he wanted to keep things—the collections would come in and he—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

NAN ROSENTHAL: It was an odd situation.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you said that you you planned ahead and you were able to see—and say to Gary, "Well, look, I'm doing the Rauschenberg, and I'm going to do the Johns, and that's going to be the moment when I retire"?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, I don't know that I was absolutely that specific the minute he came in the door, but I was—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Were you thinking about what you wanted to do—

NAN ROSENTHAL: Actually, he was—Gary was very enthusiastic about the Johns, and he knew it was very much

my field and—I'm sorry, I interrupted.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And in fact you turned out to get an award—the Met got an award for that show.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, we did for the Rauschenberg too.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, both. They were two wonderful exhibitions to end with. What I was going to ask you at the end here is, when you left, or you were thinking about leaving, were you thinking, "When I leave the Met, there's a particular thing I want to do first or eventually"? Was there something in your mind that you really were planning to do?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I would say no. I think I was quite concerned about health issues. And I wanted to—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Enjoy yourself.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, one thing I wanted to do is refurbish this apartment a little bit, which I did. It was the first thing I did—as well as try and deal with the health issues. And as it happens, the two major health issues are chronic, and there's not a hell of a lot that can be done about them.

I don't want to write a book. I'm not sure I want a writing deadline, period. I've got one right now that I keep putting off. I don't know. People ask me to do things all the time, and I'm just beginning to learn to say no.

About the future of 20th century, 21st century art at the Met, I'd like to see the space for 20th century and 21st century art rather radically changed, improved. I think architecturally, it's something of a disaster. And I'd love to see that happen. I've wanted to do that almost since I got there. And about the best I could do was improve the second floor and the mezzanine. It's not too easy to deal with the first floor. The ceilings are too low, and nobody wanted to, particularly Philippe, spend the money.

But I think an entirely new space would be nice, and I think it's something that Gary's probably working on. And I think something will eventually happen. I think that development for postwar art should expand, that not enough attention has been paid. I haven't talked to Tom Campbell about this extensively, but when he's had a chance to take a deep breath, I will certainly go and talk to him about what can and should be done.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Do you have any kind of continuing relationship with the museum?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes.

[End of SD card 3, track 2.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Nan Rosenthal on July 12th, 2010, in New York City for the Archives American Art Smithsonian Institution disc four.

Nan, I wanted to start by talking to you about the work on the exhibition you did at the National Gallery of Art titled *The Drawings of Jasper Johns*. It was on view in late 1990 to early 1991. And start by asking you how you first conceived of that exhibition, and what your relationship was with Jasper Johns as you worked on it.

NAN ROSENTHAL: I actually think one of the most difficult things about curatorial work—or most challenging, I should say—is conceiving an exhibition. And I don't think that's so easy to do. And in the case of *The Drawings of Jasper Johns*, that came about—I had gotten fairly friendly with Jasper, whom I hadn't really known in the '60s when I knew a great many other artists. I didn't really know Jasper, nor then did I know Rauschenberg. And I came to know Rauschenberg because Abby Ville [ph] asked me to do a book on him. And I came to know Jasper partly because patron of the Gallery, Jane Meyerhoff, and her husband were very close to Jasper.

And Jane was quite interested in the idea that one of the curators—and Jack Cowart didn't get along with Jasper very well—become friendly with Jasper. So I was perfectly happy to be sent on this errand. I remember the first time I went to his studio, which was, in those days, in a former bank building on the Lower East Side. It was just off Essex Street and Houston. I think that's right.

And he had just finished the *Four Seasons* paintings. And I had never seen them and neither had, for the most part, anybody else. And we got to talking. And I forget how we became friendly exactly, but I asked Jasper what he thought would be the next interesting show to do of his work, and he suggested, in effect, a major show of drawings. There had been one in probably about '87. And there had been a show in the mid-'70s that Mark Lancaster, his assistant, basically did.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you first began this relationship and visited him there, did you have a conversation

about his work? Was he open to talking to you about the ideas he was working with, the evolution of his thinking at that point, the *Seasons*, other work?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, I would say, back then, we talked about his work, but I think I was quite shy with him at that point. He's not the easiest person in the world to talk to, as you've probably heard. And I would say at that point, he wasn't forthcoming about his work. He was certainly willing to answer questions about it.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So Jane Meyerhoff encouraged this relationship. I assume that the director or the senior people at the National Gallery also encouraged it. And you knew that if he would be willing, you would have a green light to do an exhibition.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, I think Jasper's reputation was such that I didn't anticipate that it would be a big problem. But I wouldn't say that, from Gardner Brown down or Sydney Freedberg or, for that matter, Gil Ravenel, the design director.

For the most part, these people didn't know the artists, whereas, for the most part, I did. And so did Jack, for that matter. And that first show I did for the gallery, *American Masters*, involved working with people like Ellsworth.

And then I used to go to St. Martin Luther with Annalee Newman. And we had gotten quite friendly in the course of our buying *Stations of the Cross* for the National Gallery. And I started going there every Christmas with Annalee. And Jasper was quite friendly with her, and we saw a lot of him down there. Ellsworth was there every Christmas also. And some other collectors stayed in the hotel we were. So these relationships developed then—some of them. There were others that had developed long before.

But in the case of working with Johns—first of all, I did it together with Ruth Fine.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you say "together," how did you divide the curatorial responsibilities?

NAN ROSENTHAL: She was, I would say, busier with other project—this was my main project at that point. Sometimes we went and saw things together, other times we went separately. But I would say we went about it a rather traditional way. By that time, Jasper probably had made about 400 drawings. And so the effort was to see them all, and decide what would go in the show. It was not difficult to get the people at the Gallery to agree to do the show of Johns's, even though, in those days, one person shows of living artists were not something the gallery did, so this and showing the work of Rauschenberg was a first for the gallery.

And then I may have mentioned to you Gil and the exhibition committee had a way of changing the Gallery's schedule's frequently. And I didn't think that would be appreciated by Jasper. He can be fairly stern and fairly dower. And so in order to make sure that this show didn't float around on the schedule, I proposed that we do it on Jasper's 60th birthday, which was May 15th of 1990. And so once that was fixed, it made it just about impossible for Gil to mess around with his schedule.

And also the corporate sponsor was Ford, who was a recent client of a woman called Muffie Brandon [Mabel "Muffie" Brandon Cabot]. And I ran into Muffie on the shuttle one day and told her what I was working on and said, "Why don't you back the show?" She said, "I'd absolutely love to," and so they did.

And once Muffie was involved, she gave extra money, including for the catalogue. It was a good corporate sponsor to have, and she would not have wanted the dates changed either. And she had a fair amount of power in Washington in her way. So that was convenient.

But the way we went around—I mean, the way you research any show—but in this case, I would say at the Gallery more than at the Met—we went around and looked at more or less everything. There were very few drawings—basically we saw all the drawings, including a number that were in Europe. And it happened that for whatever summer it was that we were working on the show—Jasper was the artist in the American Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, so Ruth and I went to Europe together to see that, and went around a number of drawings that were rare. But it wasn't that there were that many, but there were some significant ones.

And I'm not sure that answers your question about how we went about it. I would say I had more time to work on it than Ruth did, because she was working on so many things.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was it required that you co-curate it, or did you prefer that?

NAN ROSENTHAL: It wasn't required, but the way the Gallery's curatorial positions were set up, the 20th century department did painting and sculpture. And then there was a separate department of drawings and prints. And Ruth was in charge of 20th century drawings and prints, and actually some 19th century materials. She was something of a Whistler scholar and so on.

And so, technically speaking, to do such a show with her—we were friends for one thing—I asked her if she

minded if I did this and if she'd like to do it with me, and it just wasn't an issue.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did Jasper have an opportunity, and if he did, what happened to have input in the selection in any way or in the emphasis or in the interpretation?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, I would say unlike a number of other artists, Jasper believed that the curator did the curatorial work. And I think if he hadn't liked what was going on, maybe he would have spoken up, interfered. I don't know. But basically he didn't, nor did he interfere in the installation. And we asked him to come to Washington and look at the installation, maybe before the nails were on the wall but everything was laid out, and that he was welcome to make any changes that he wanted.

And I think he changed one or two things, basically I think to be polite—[laughs]—to justify the airplane fare of getting him. We also showed him the catalogue, the manuscript. And he read it, and my recollection is the only thing he had to say about it was that he was finding it interesting. And Sarah Taggart, his assistant for many years, also read it. If anybody corrected any minor mistakes, Sarah did. I don't think Jasper did.

In terms of talking to him, we did a substantial long interview with him, which is a good source on Jasper. And he said a great many things that hadn't been published before, and it was very useful.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was that something that was a new initiative in the National Gallery?

NAN ROSENTHAL: To do interviews?

JUDITH RICHARDS: With a living artist like that?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I would say so. Yes.

And I wrote an introductory essay that was really substantial in length. And Ruth wrote one that focused on his use of different media. For example, one medium that Jasper worked in, which came to be called graphite wash, was a mixture of powdered graphite. And he changed the binders from time to time. He used it a great deal. And I think he more or less invented it as far as I know. So anyway, Ruth's essay concerned a lot of those kinds of things.

It's a little bit like he also started working in about '62 or so in using ink on plastic, on clear plastic, which is something he acquired at an arts and crafts store in Charleston when he started wintering down there in the '60s. And he's continued working in ink on plastic; it was so beautiful.

And those kinds of media, as of course is well known, he worked in painting and plastic, which is an unusual medium for a contemporary artist to work in. But he was very forthcoming in the center. And we all edited a little bit. There was some small section that Jasper wanted to remove, and that was fine. Those were the terms under which he'd done in the first place. And I've since done another interview with Jasper.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What areas was he most sensitive about and ended up wanting to have removed?

NAN ROSENTHAL: We were talking about the friendship that he had with John Cage and Merce Cunningham and Bob Rauschenberg. And I remember Jasper saying—I think it was published that as the youngest, Jasper felt he had the most to gain by his friendship. I think he always felt—curiously to me—a little bit self-conscious about not having completed college. He went to the University of South Carolina for about a year-and-a-half. And he was quite friendly with his professors, and it was really one of his professors, I think, that urged him to move to New York.

But anyway, I remember there was something he was sensitive about, with that friendship that had something to do with Cage, or—anyway, some chunk he wanted us to take out.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Something that sounds like he was riding on the coattails of the others somehow, taking advantage?

NAN ROSENTHAL: No. No, I wouldn't say that at all. Maybe it was just something he thought would interfere with Cage and Cunningham's privacy.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You were talking about the importance, as a curator, of being close to artists and having relationships with artists. Around right after you did that, we started approximately this series of conversations with artists in New York for the 92nd Street Y. And you, over the course of four years, I think, four seasons, you interviewed three or four artists every year, all major artists in the art world.

How did the selection of those artists happen? What part did you play in making those selections, and your relationship with those artists?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I would say I played the entire selection. The way the Y thing came about was sort of curious. I forget. Somebody did it before me. Do you remember who?

JUDITH RICHARDS: I saw it, but I didn't note it. You were correct that the series had been going.

NAN ROSENTHAL: I know Rob Storr then did it after me, but he may have done it before me as well. I'm just looking at that list of who they were. The way it came about, strangely enough, a first cousin of mine to whom I was very close—he was very proud of my job, wonderful man—who has died. And he was just terrific, John Rosenthal. And his philanthropic focus—and it may have had to do with where his apartment was, which was on 90th and Park, and he also was someone who really wanted to go into publishing and he ended up on Wall Street. And I don't know if he was president of the board at that exact moment, but he became president of the board of the 92nd Street Y, which he enjoyed very much because he thought the Y was such an interesting organization.

And he got very friendly with the executive director, who was in charge of cultural programs. And I guess the executive director said, "Well, for heaven's sakes, why don't you have your cousin Nan do our artist interviews?" They were already doing these, but they would have one person to do them for three years. And I found this extremely convenient because not only did they pay me [laughs]—

Q: And the National Gallery had no restrictions on your earning other income?

NAN ROSENTHAL: No, you had to ask permission. Anything else, I mean, because, while at the Gallery I also taught at Princeton. You absolutely had to ask permission. But if it was something interesting and respectable, I think Carter's view in particular, and John Wilmerding's view also—he was the deputy director then—thought it was good publicity, if you will, for the Gallery.

When I was teaching at Princeton, I remember getting a letter from John: "How prestigious, fine," or something like that. And in this case, just that it was fine publicity for the Gallery. It depends what it was, I would say.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Were you personally very excited about it because it gave you more opportunity to work with living artists than you normally had at the National Gallery?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, I don't know how to put it. I knew a lot of artists. I was friendly with a lot of artists; I pretty much had been since the time I was working at the magazines in the early '60s. I remember some conversation with Jasper in which I said to him that I thought artists were more interesting than other people, and that that was why I liked to spend time with him.

And Jasper said something like—[laughs]—he thought artists were better than other people. I don't know that he'd appreciate that being repeated, but I said, "Well, it's pretty much the same thing, interesting and better." And so it wasn't so much unusual for me to do that thing at the Y.

Also, when I was teaching at Santa Cruz, there I was in this small town in central California, beautiful and lovely as well, and fine as the university was, I invited from the very beginning of the time I was there, I invited a lot of artists to come and do things, whether it was lecture or be visiting teachers or—I remember the first couple of months I was there, Barbara Rose and Moira Rothgave a symposium at the University of California-Irvine on Marcel Duchamp.

And I was friendly with Barbara in those days, and became friendly with Moira and I was invited to be one of the speakers at the symposium. And it turned out they were having Richard Hamilton from England, whom I knew back from when I was doing my dissertation—or earlier than that, even. When I spent time in London.

So they were bringing him to California, so I got the bright idea of, after that symposium was over, of bringing him to Santa Cruz, and persuaded the head of my department, who was a dear friend—Doug McClellan, marvelous man—that we absolutely had to have Hamilton come to Santa Cruz.

I had a little guest apartment in my garage, and I put him up there. That saved money. So all we had to do was get him from Irvine to Santa Cruz. And he had never been to California before. So the idea was he would give a talk on *The Large Glass*—on Duchamp's great work.

And it was quite remarkable. I mean, he gave an eight-hour talk. It was fantastic. And it was a wonderful experience for the students. And it was through that—and he stayed a few days. You would get friendly with such people. And I met Doug and his wife. Doug was a wonderful cook, had us to dinner. Richard had never been on a horse, and a neighbor of mine had a horse, and so Richard went horseback riding—[laughs]—in a manner of speaking.

That kind of experience was not uncommon to me. So doing the thing at the Y—it was fun, but one of its great

virtues was that it paid for four trips to New York—[laughs]. And that was a big help.

And I decided—how did I decide whom to do? In some cases, it was artists that I already knew—at least, knew a little bit.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And knew they would do well in this context.

NAN ROSENTHAL: And had an idea they would do well. I made very certain in each series that I had a woman artist. And some of the artists that I had never actually heard speak before, but I had so much respect for their work—Vija Celmins is an example. I didn't really know Vija that well at all. And I had no idea what kind of a speaker she'd be. But I thought her work was so wonderful.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How did that turn out? She's known to be quite shy.

NAN ROSENTHAL: As I recall, it turned out fine. And one thing that's unfortunate is I don't have tapes of all those. And getting them from the Y has been—I just finally gave up. It's too bad.

And then, there were a couple where—I mean, Eric Fischl and April Gornik I had together, as they are in effect married. They're certainly a couple. And they were terrific.

There were other artists whom—I can't entirely remember why, but I knew Terry Winters fairly well. And Terry is quite articulate. And I had heard him speak. So that was kind of obvious.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you find it a gratifying experience in terms of the opportunity to educate the public about contemporary art? Did you feel that you had a greater response?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I did.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Compared to the opportunities you might have had at the National Gallery to do that.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. I mean, people really liked those things at the Y a lot. They were quite popular. The place was always full, it seemed to me. And not all the experiences were absolute heaven, but most of them were.

There were some artists I didn't know that well. I didn't know Brice Marden that well. I went and talked to Brice before we arranged it. But that went fine.

I invited Richard Serra, whom I did know pretty well, and had for some years. I forget why I knew him well, but I did—possibly through Ros Krauss—I don't know.

And we were talking about a series of prints that he had just done based on a landscape in Iceland. And Richard said something about, "I think you got one of those." I said, "yeah, my husband and I bought one." And it was the first thing we had bought together. We were recently married. So that was fun.

And Richard said, "Which one did you get?" And I told him the title of the work. It was quite large.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is this when you're speaking to him privately before—

NAN ROSENTHAL: No. No, no, no.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, on a stage.

NAN ROSENTHAL: This was on stage. And we were chatting. He said, "oh, yeah." He said, "that wasn't a good print." This is, of course, typical Richard Serra. And you know, I've always regretted that I wasn't quick enough to say, "well, then, why did you sign it?" Which is what I should have said—[laughs]. But I didn't.

And I said something like dumb, like, "well, we like it." [Laughs.] Meanwhile, the whole audience was roaring with laughter.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did he ever apologize to you?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Oh, Richard Serra apologize? No. But anyway, we went on being friends. I can't remember that particular date at which I did this, but among other things, I was borrowing a very major Johns from Richard and Clara, his wife, for John's drawing show.

And someone that I had been sort of friendly with was Claes Oldenburg. And he and Coosje van Bruggen, his wife, were supposed to do it together. But Coosje got sick, so Claes did it alone. He was terrific. And then, we got much friendlier later when I did *The Roof.*

But it was fun. And there were artists that I didn't know as well—like Dorothea Rockburne—and others, I did. Wayne Thiebaud I knew from California. We had been on a university-wide committee together. And that was lots of fun, along with Allan Kaprow. The university would fly us so the three of us could meet together. And I don't know if we were talking about art curricula, or what we were talking about, but I do remember trays of cakes and things coming over for dessert. And I just thought it was so funny that I was sitting there with Wayne Thiebaud and these huge trays of desserts.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So eventually—let's see, even before you ended that, you came to the Met. Did you want to continue the 92nd Street Y, or when you got to the Met, you just had no time?

NAN ROSENTHAL: No, it overlapped.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you feel that after four years it was enough at that Y?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, I think I just got too busy in certain ways. And it was also the teaching at Princeton one semester a year. I would do it on a Monday, so that I would go up to New York usually on a Friday and use the opportunity. I mean, it saved the National Gallery money, too. I would use the opportunity to run around and see exhibitions.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Talking about money, it sounds like the National Gallery had—being a public institution—some strict budget requirements. And you really had to be concerned about those kinds of issues in your work.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Somewhat, but as I think I may have said last time we spoke, Carter was—I don't know if the Gallery is still that way, but Carter had a lot of interest in our going all over the country and, in a sense, promoting the National Gallery of Art.

And so it was good if you could combine things—if I was going to San Francisco, say, to look at some Johns drawings, it was also obviously a good idea to go and see Donald and Doris Fisher, Donald being the head of The Gap.

And they were very active on our collectors' committee, and very, very involved in contemporary art, so they were a big help to our department, I would say. That kind of thing was encouraged.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You said when you joined the Met, it was just at the moment when Lieberman was 70, and you felt he was not looking for challenges. So there was an emphasis on bringing exhibitions from other institutions, so you co-organized, or you organized for the Met—presentations, exhibitions other curators have organized at different institutions.

Was there also, though, an understanding that in this space, you had to do your own shows, or to propose projects? That a certain number could be living artists and a certain number not—so that you could strategize and think when you got there, okay, eventually I want to do this and this, but I'm going to have to space them out. And I have to collaborate with the other curators and their interests.

So I'm just thinking about the strategy, the department, and how that played out in terms of your flexibility—the freedom you had to really do the exhibitions you wanted to do.

NAN ROSENTHAL: As I said, I think Bill was, to an extent, pulling his horns in in terms of organizing exhibitions, and, I think, wanted us to be able to help him with whatever he was doing. And that was one reason we didn't completely independently organize so many exhibitions. And that didn't particularly apply to just me, or just Sabine Rewald.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You overlapped with Lowery Sims, as well?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Right. And actually, Larry and I were quite crafty about acquisitions. We were quite good buddies and enjoyed one another's company a great deal. And Larry had, among other things, a terrific sense of humor and knew the museum very well. Of course, she'd been there so long.

And if the two of us wanted to acquire something, and it was not something Bill knew much about or cared much about—if the two of us approached him together and said, "Look, this is a great thing to get. And we can get it for a good price," and so on and so forth, we did quite well. I would say we had more to do with making acquisitions together than doing any kinds of exhibitions together.

For example, we both wanted to get a Kiki Smith for the Met. And Bill had no particular interest. And Kiki had just moved from—I forget what gallery, but in any case to Pace, which I think was partly Chuck Close's doing. Chuck thought it was terrible, but Pace had so few women artists in those days on its roster, if any.

And I remember there was a *New York Times Magazine* story—I don't know if it was on Arne Glimcher, per se—

the owner of Pace then—but there was this huge picture on the cover of *The New York Times Magazine*, and all the artists were male.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That was a famous picture—infamous picture.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. And anyway, I think Chuck explained to Arne that it's about time. [Laughs.] And Kiki was taken on. And I had actually met Kiki in Washington. Charlie Stuckey, who was the 19 century curator there, then, knew Kiki quite well and thought we would enjoy one another and he introduced us. And I knew Jane Smith, Kiki's mother, for some reason rather well. And maybe in the same way I knew Emily Newman [ph] from way back—anyway. So Lowery and I persuaded Bill that we needed to get this.

JUDITH RICHARDS: He never asked your advice about acquisitions he had in mind to make. Did he?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, he did. Sure, I guess—or things would happen. In other words, people would approach me. I think I mentioned that Anthony d'Offay had this group of 55. It's not that he owned them. I mean, he and Kiefer worked that out, but 55 Anselm Kiefer drawings.

And d'Offay calculated that if I presented them to Bill, it would be more effective than if he went straight to Bill about the Kiefer's. Bill would just say, "oh, that's too much money," or it's too this or too that, whereas if I approached Bill it would be more effective. Things like that happened, but Bill would, depending on the area—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did he have a leaning toward a certain area of contemporary art and make acquisitions most in that area?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, I think Bill had a real taste for figurative art, though he did acquire abstraction as well.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Moving just a little bit, did he assign the curator to do the summer installation on the roof?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, there wasn't a different one every summer until I started doing these one-person shows, which were really as much Bill's idea as mine. I don't know how far back they went, but Lowery mostly did them, and they were drawn from the permanent collection.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was beginning more commissioned unique works for the roof something that happened because of an increased budget?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I don't remember. I remember that for a long time the funds came through a trustee.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, I think you mentioned that.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. And I think now more money is spent on the roof than used to be.

JUDITH RICHARDS: They're more ambitious projects for certain.

NAN ROSENTHAL: They're more expensive to do, certainly. And we had a certain limit.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You talked about Phillipe de Montebello's lack of strong enthusiasm for contemporary art and for your department. Yet those projects, which were expanding and bringing more attention, were great publicity drawers and were a strong action that the Met could do, and did, to make itself somewhat competitive with the other major institutions that had more emphasis in their exhibition program on contemporary art.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, anything competitive is something of an exaggeration. I don't think we were very competitive with the Museum of Modern Art. But actually, publicity for these exhibitions was something that I I focused on. And most of the artists that I did exhibitions of were already quite distinguished, well-known figures.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Absolutely. Starting with Ellsworth Kelly, I think.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. And so asking these artists to do an interview, say, with Carol Vogel of *The New York Times*, who was kind of an old friend of mine, was not a difficult thing. Carol enjoyed doing something like that. She didn't, back in those days, interview artists that much herself, and so she had fun doing that. And it always made a good picture for *The Times*. Phillipe liked that part and the development people up at Met liked it a lot.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And you brought your knowledge of journalism? [Laughs.]

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, I did.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It's a tremendous asset, as well as your relationships with artists.

NAN ROSENTHAL: I did. And Harold Holzer, the head of public relations or whatever, he likedthat I was a former

journalist. He trusted me with the press.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Would you say that one of the roof installations that you did—there's Ellsworth Kelly, Joel Shapiro, Oldenburg and van Bruggen, others, LeWitt—was the most successful your favorite roof project? Was there one that you could single out as having surpassed your expectations or, for any number of reasons, been especially gratifying?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, ironically one that I thought was fairly successful—there were several really—was the Lichtenstein one and of course Roy had died. I wasn't working with him but I knew the work well and Dorothy was terrific—his widow. And there's that one wonderful sculpture of his—of which there is a version in Washington—of a house. That was very effective.

And there were some people at the Met that I worked with on this. We did the house, which was a large, almost house-sized house—flat. And then we created a big lawn around the house, and that was quite a production. And there were people at the Met who were extremely helpful with it and people who would normally be working on an Egyptian show—they were a lot of fun.

I found working with Joel Shapiro a great pleasure and he was probably more involved in his show than most of the artists, though Claes and Coosje were.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is that because he was experimenting and thinking about it and creating it as he was working on it? Not creating it, but thinking about its placement?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, the placement. The real issue on the roof was how to use the space successfully. And we had one very large piece from him that has ended up in the Nasher Museum in Dallas, which I think happened because it was on the roof and Ray Nasher saw it there and liked it.

Working with Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen was a lot of fun. In a way, Coosje was very insistent that things be done the way she wanted them done. But somehow it worked out. It worked out well.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And what about the LeWitt? You would anticipate, perhaps, that that work would be a little more challenging for the public than some of the others.

NAN ROSENTHAL: The LeWitt? Did I say that before?

JUDITH RICHARDS: No. I'm saying would you or did you anticipate that that would be more challenging, because of its abstract conceptual nature, than Oldenburg or Kelly? Well, Kelly is abstract, but a little more challenging.

NAN ROSENTHAL: I didn't think they would be difficult for the public[, especially those wiggly pieces]. I thought that they would amuse the public very much. And I think I first saw a version of one of those in the Philadelphia Museum. They had just acquired one and I had been anxious to do something of Sol's on the roof for a long time and we met mostly at the Met, not in his studio.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Why was that?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I guess I went up to see him in Connecticut. But I don't know that he was that familiar with the roof. And it was good to talk about the space and where the public tended to cluster because the development people were anxious to sell as much food as possible. You know, where there was usually a long line of people trying to buy a sandwich or buy a drink. It was not a good place to place something and things like that. And of course Sol had this crew of people who would paint the wall, like the wall drawings, and we had one of those. And that involved a fairly elaborate contract that we didn't own the wall drawing and so on.

Each exhibition brought up different issues and different problems and that was fun in a way. One got to know the institution better and better and better.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You were talking about the two final projects, the Rauschenberg and the Johns, that you did there and so I wanted to talk to you about those two. You mentioned the origins of the *Rauschenberg: Combines* project and the collaboration with LA MOCA. Did you have an opportunity to work directly with Rauschenberg on that project at all?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. By that time I knew Bob very well. I thought he was slightly annoyed with me because I hadn't finished the book on him, but he also knew that I knew the work very well. And I was very close to his curator, David White, who was immensely helpful with anything to do with Bob and immensely knowledgeable and I knew the New York studio and the resource that—the volumes and volumes' volumes—I mean, in effect, a catalogue *raisonné* exists already. And so I did have the opportunity to work on it. The catalogue was conceived by the Los Angeles curator as a catalogue *raisonné of the combines.*

JUDITH RICHARDS: Remind me. Who was the curator?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Paul Schimmel. And Paul was frankly not a very cooperative or friendly person to work with, nor was he a particularly energetic collaborator. But also, we were in New York and that's where the source material was. And I would say that basically that catalogue, that book was done by my assistant under my direction, though that's certainly not the way it's publicly credited.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And what was the name of your assistant?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Nora Burnett.

JUDITH RICHARDS: N-O-R-A?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes.

[End of SD card 4, track 1.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: B-U-R-N-E-T-T?

NAN ROSENTHAL: And Nora is now a curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Denver, where she lives because her husband is from Denver. He's a wonderful guy. I don't know that they'll end up there. But she's terrific and worked very, very hard, and she had a lot of fun on this project.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How did that exhibition that focused on the combines originate? How did it germinate?

NAN ROSENTHAL: It was Paul Schimmel's idea, and he knew for some reason that I was very knowledgeable about Bob Rauschenberg's work and he came to me about something else and brought this up. I think it was about borrowing de Kooning drawings from us. He was working on a de Kooning's drawings show. And then he brought this up and I said I thought was a wonderful idea for a show, and that I would propose it to Bill. And Bill didn't want to do it because I think he thought it was going to be a lot of work, and I thought it was very important for the Met to do the show.

Well, I went to Mahrukh Tarapor, who is the associate director for exhibitions, and she said go immediately to Philippe. And I went and in five minutes Philippe said, "fine, great idea, let's do it." And he may have had something to do with—at one point one of Philippe's sons was an art dealer, and I think Philippe knew the Combines. He understood what a combine was, it wasn't like you had to explain it to him, which was a help. And he said, "Just go set up the schedule with Linda Sylling," the woman who was in charge of such matters. And so that was great.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How did Rauschenberg feel about the show, finally, when it was installed?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Oh, I think he was pleased.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It had a tremendous response from the art world for sure.

NAN ROSENTHAL: It did, I think, and younger artists, which was interesting. And I think Bob had a lot of fun. And before this show happened, there was a show that Joachim Pissaro and I wanted to do together. Joachim had written a doctoral thesis for Richard Shiff at the University of Texas. It's not that he went to the University of Texas; he just did this sitting in New York and I think presented his dissertation to whatever committee they do in Texas.

And then we presented this idea to Bill, and it was actually going to be a show about Bob and Jasper and Bill didn't want to do it—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Focused on the period of time when Rauschenberg was making the Combines?

NAN ROSENTHAL: No. Had nothing to with the Combines. And Bill really didn't want to do it and then Bill got sick. I forget at what exact moment; this was in Bill's decline, he was in the hospital. Or maybe Gary was already appointed head of the department. Bill was still with us, but he wasn't—and Gary didn't want to do it.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Do you know why?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I don't know why. I think it had to do in some way with some competitiveness with Joachim. And he was against the idea. And meanwhile this combine idea came up and I thought it was in fact a great idea for a show and it should really, really be in New York.

The Modern at that time was very much in a mood of not wanting other institutions to inaugurate shows, and so I didn't think they would want to do it, and anyway, it worked out that we did it. And that happened before the combine thing. Or it had been raised and Bill had said no, and then when this thing didn't happen, I went—that's when I—

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you, in fact, did the *Combines* show with Paul Schimmel, how did you and he divide the curatorial work in terms of the selections of objects—of works to be included?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, one thing about being at the Met and similarly about being at the National Gallery, it was easier to borrow works because you were the Met. And there were things that I think that Paul wanted, or wanted because maybe he was having trouble getting loans of certain things, that I didn't want. I did my show. He did his show. Now, there was a lot of overlap.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you created your own separate check list, wish list?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, pretty much. But it was pretty obvious. I mean, it wasn't very difficult to—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Based on how much space you had then, perhaps.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, maybe because of all that teaching, I don't know, I tended to think somewhat chronologically that it was fairly obvious. Well, an example, I don't know if that ended up going to MOCA or not, but I wanted a red painting called *collection*, which was a very early combine, very badly in the show. And it was a work I knew very well. I used to assign papers on it at Santa Cruz, and I'd spent a lot of time with it. And Hunk and Moo Anderson, who had given the painting to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, they didn't want it lent and we were turned down. So I wrote to Hunk.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It belonged to SFMOMA.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, the Andersons who gave it to them had veto control over where it would be lent?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I think they did.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was that unusual?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. It's unusual, but I think it's worth keeping in mind that SFMOMA was interested in getting the entire Anderson collection. But I think it was actually contractually.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Why would the Andersons, as the donors, collectors, want to have that kind of veto power over the director and the curator potentially of the institution to which they entrusted this work?

NAN ROSENTHAL: It's fragile. Maybe they just wanted it to stay in good shape.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But they would feel that the registrar and the other professional institutions would care less than they did about those issues?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, they were very involved with their collection. They took very good care of it.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So they're very conservative in terms of safety of the work?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. I would think so. I don't think it was an ego thing. I knew them quite well when I was in Santa Cruz. I used to bring my students to their house. They were very generous that way. And they had also given one of the major Johns to SFMOMA.

Anyway, I forget if I told you this one. When I wanted to go to graduate school I was married to the German artist Otto Piene, who had child support to pay for three children and I guess some alimony to pay as well. And basically we were kind of broke. I mean, Otto sold work—all of a sudden now he's selling work like crazy again, it's amusing—and we were at MIT and he was at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies there. And—why did I start to tell you this?

JUDITH RICHARDS: You were talking about the fact that you couldn't borrow a collection and why and then we were talking about the Andersons.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Oh, I know why. Okay. I wanted to go to graduate school. I was at the Radcliffe Institute and I wanted to transfer from the Institute, which was essentially a post-doc outfit where you were not supposed to do something like transfer, to Harvard to get a doctorate in art history. And I applied and the Institute very

generously let me go and let me take my money with me, but it wasn't that much money. And so I turned to my mother to help me pay the Harvard tuition, which was nothing like what it is today. It was a rather minor amount of money.

And my mother then worked part time for the Saidenberg Gallery in New York sometimes when Eleanor Saidenberg would get sick. And one day my mother called me, I think this is when I was at the Radcliffe Institute, and she said, "have you ever heard of a place called Atherton, California?" And I said, "no, I haven't, but I'll look it up for you." And she asked me if I'd ever heard of some people called Hunk and Moo Anderson, and I said no, but I'd check that out, too. And I forget how I checked it out, but it wasn't very hard. It was a little bit like, who is Ray Nasher, when Carter Brown asked me, "What was the name of that man in Dallas who collects sculpture?" I can't remember whom I asked.

So I told my mother who they were and that they had an excellent collection. And she said, "well, they came into the gallery and they want to buy the Giacometti," meaning the Giacometti that she and my father had owned, which was one of the Venuses that was a couple of feet tall. And my mother had an arrangement; she wasn't paid by Mrs. Saidenberg, but if somebody bought something that she owned, they wouldn't take a commission. So she sold the Andersons this Giacometti.

And it wasn't at the time about getting some tuition money for me; it was just my mother felt she needed more money to live on. This was, I would say, '68. And so then when I decided I wanted to go into the Ph.D. program and I asked my mother and my cousin, who took care of her money, the same cousin who was a philanthropist for the Y, and my mother's lawyer who had been a very good friend of my father's. So we all discussed it and I said I thought it would be a good idea if I went to the Ph.D. program and that I expected Otto would be staying in Cambridge.

And so something was drawn up that my mother would—I don't know if it was lending me the money or pay the Harvard tuition per se, and in those days, something like $2,000 a year. It was a joke when you think of tuitions nowadays. And also I was making some money, I was writing a column for *House and Garden* on art collecting; I don't even know if that's in my CV.

Anyway, to make a long story a short one, when I moved to California to teach, and I was looking around for some art for my students to look at because there wasn't much, certainly not near Santa Cruz. I wrote to the Andersons and said, "there's no way you would be aware of this, but you sent me to graduate school to get my Ph.D. at Harvard. And here I am teaching at the University of California and I wondered if I could possibly bring my seminar to see your collection."

And so from that point on, we were kind of friends, and I used to bring students almost every year and they were very cute with the students. And there was one student of mine in particular who later became a curator. I mentioned him before, Philip Brookman, who was interested in the history of photography. And they had a little gallery at a Catholic school that the Andersons were involved with. And Philip helped as a curator-type when he was a student.

Anyway, we became friends and so when I was doing the *Combines* show and they turned this loan down, I wrote to Hunk and Moo and I talked about the show and the importance of borrowing this. And the only thing resembling it was a similarly-sized, large painting selection that was owned by the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, but that absolutely was not going to travel. Whole issues with freight had changed then, with the size of which you could get into an airplane, and that it was doubly important for—there were many reasons that I gave for wanting to borrow this. And that I thought it was very important that the New York audience saw the painting, there was nothing like it in New York, which was true. It was one of the great early red paintings. And there were smaller things—Victor and Sally Ganz owned it, an extraordinary picture. And I'm not sure—I'm very good at getting loans. [Laughs.]

I mean, this was a nice coincidence. I reminded them that they sent me to graduate school. [Laughs.] And so on and so forth.

And they were very nice, and I used to see them at the National Gallery fairly often. And so they agreed to lend it. I don't think it was in Paul's show, but I could be wrong.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So not only did you create two separate wishlists, checklists for the exhibition, but you also separately negotiated the loans.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well in a case like this, there were loans that weren't very hard to negotiate.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was the idea originally that when you—when he—proposed working on this together that you would each be thinking about how to make it the best show you could at your institution, since you assumed that many works would not be permitted to go to both? Or did you have the initial goal of creating one show that

would be in two places?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes, and it turned out also—it went to two other places, I think. I know it went to Stockholm, and that was essential in order to borrow *Monogram*, the goat with the tire around its middle. I didn't even see the show in Stockholm. I was having some health problems by then. I was working on the Johns show. I just didn't bother going.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It was at the Moderna Museet.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. And one knew from the beginning it was going to have to go there. It was a considerably smaller show. The big advantage was being at the Met, being in New York, I mean, that was an issue. And so I don't think there was anything that we wanted that we didn't end up getting. It didn't start out deliberately that it would be, you know, I make my checklist. It is so obvious to me with the combines what you were going to want.

I remember Ruth Fine saying about Jasper's drawings, it's like shooting a fish in a barrel. This was very similar in terms of selecting what you want. And there were a few things that came from Europe that came to us because I knew they were going to want Warhols from us or they already wanted Warhols from us. I think it was Heiner Bastian. He was independent, but he did a Warhol show for the National Museum of Modern Art in Berlin, the Mies van der Rohe building. And I was very helpful to him with loans from the Met and similarly he was close to collectors who owned—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Before I move to the Johns, is there anything else that you want to say about the combines show?

NAN ROSENTHAL: My recollection is that Bob enjoyed it very much. I remember the opening. And Bob at that point, I think, had had a stroke that people didn't really know about and was not well.

JUDITH RICHARDS: He wasn't in a wheelchair yet?

NAN ROSENTHAL: He was. And I remember he and Merce and Ileana Sonnabend, the three of them were in wheelchairs lined up. It was very cute. And it was this huge opening, just tons and tons and tons of people there, including—I don't know how he happened to come, but he likes to go out at night—Ray Kelly, the police commissioner. It was very funny.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you speak to him? Do you know why he came?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. I didn't ask him why he came. I told him I was very pleased that he was there. But the Met has a very close relationship with the police department, partly because of its location and partly because, obviously, even more since 9/11, it's a fairly obvious target of a kind.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. You said that you had already started working on the Johns show, I think, when you were talking about Rauschenberg, maybe not, but the Rauschenberg was—show was in 2005 and the Johns show was in 2008. But regardless, when did you conceive that the Johns show would focus on the gray paintings?

NAN ROSENTHAL: That was Chicago's idea.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, maybe you did mention that. So how did that—

NAN ROSENTHAL: And it seemed to me a good idea.

JUDITH RICHARDS:—project work, how did you divide your curatorial responsibilities?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, I would say it was more their show on the one hand, but on the other hand, I don't think that we disagreed in any way about it. Again, it seems to me in retrospect it was fairly obvious what you would want and we also had different—it was certainly acknowledged, and Gary felt that way too, that I knew a great deal. I'd already done a Rauschenberg show. I knew a great deal about his work.

And the two curators from Chicago who worked on it—one was Douglas Druick, who was really a 19th century person and was really head of European painting in a sense at the Art Institute. And the other curator was the curator of contemporary art, and I think it was really his idea.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was it kind of—some kind of institutional politics that he had to co-curate with the head of European painting?

NAN ROSENTHAL: No. I don't think it was that. I don't think that James had not done—

JUDITH RICHARDS: James Rondeau?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. James had not done a show that importance or scope. And so I think it was a help that Douglas was involved. James was really more of the main curator than Douglas. And I had known Douglas over the years. I remember once Douglas consulted me, he wanted to buy a Johns drawing and wanted to know what was my opinion and why and how and so on.

And we traveled together somewhat. In fact, James really wanted me to go to Europe with him and, again, I was having terrible trouble with this peripheral neuropathy with my health, and the idea of running around Switzerland in February or something was just—and he said, "No, no, I'll push a wheelchair. I want you to come. I want you to come." And I didn't go because, again the things to be seen in Switzerland were so obvious that we would want them; it was more a question of persuading the lenders than it was, what did you want.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Right.

NAN ROSENTHAL: And especially with Jasper's work. And they had bought a huge Catenary painting. That was one way the whole thing got started. It was a gray monochrome painting for the most part.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So do you know how Johns felt about the exhibition when he saw it? Was he consulted at all? I know you said that it was obvious which works to include. Was he involved in any way, either by Jim or you?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I don't think especially, and I don't know to what extent James consulted Jasper. But Jasper really, I think, does have a position if he trusts an institution and trusts—he didn't know James before, he certainly knew Douglas. He certainly knew me.

I think he thinks it's the curator's job to curate the show. And I told them, certainly, the way I had worked with him, that I would show him my manuscript, that I would show him the interview, and in this case, I wanted to do another interview with him because, again, my health was terrible and I didn't want to write a long essay. And so my contribution to the catalog was an interview with Jasper, and in fact, we did the interview twice because it didn't come out terribly well the first time.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What were its—

NAN ROSENTHAL: Jasper was very decent about it all. What were its flaws? I don't know. It just wasn't very—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Didn't meet your expectations?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Right. It wasn't very good, so I wanted to do more. So I think I went down to St. Maarten for two days and did it there and worked on it. And I think Jasper liked the show. It looked rather different in the two institutions, even though they were certainly both chronological hangs, it still looked different. It was interesting. And it opened there and then came to New York.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was there a show that you had always wanted to do at the Met, or maybe during the last years you conceived that you wanted to do, that you didn't get to do? Because you were leaving or didn't work out, the dream show, the project that got away.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, given my particular interests, especially in the last 20 years or something, I thought that deciding to leave on—apart from health reasons—the Rauschenberg show of what was his finest work and doing the Johns show was sort of ideal. And at that point I didn't have in mind to do—I mean, there are shows I would have enjoyed doing that other people did.

It's hard to know. If my health had been better—I don't know. It just seemed like an ideal time to leave, and going out on those two exhibitions. I would have liked to work—as I did in Washington, really—on pre-war European art. And there were things which I enjoyed doing in Washington, and I would have liked to have done more of that, maybe, at the Met.

But Bill seemed to think that I was—[laughs]—I don't know where he got this idea, maybe he didn't want to do it himself. Bill decided I was an expert, connoisseur, whatever, of abstract expressionist art, and he wanted me to work on that. That's something he asked my advice about, acquisitions—and the Met already had an excellent collection of abstract expressionist pictures, and it was about to get much more when the Muriel Newman collection came in.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

NAN ROSENTHAL: And so we knew what was coming in. But there were a couple of things that we did acquire. I'm trying to think.

JUDITH RICHARDS: One area I haven't asked you about, or we've touched on tangentially, is your relationship as a curator at the Met with the gallery world. You talked about Anthony d'Offay, but perhaps with New York galleries. And obviously they're all wishing that the Metropolitan would present an exhibition of works by artists they represent or acquire works by artists they represent.

So how was that? I imagine it was very challenging. How did you make your way in that?

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, I think in the curatorial world, I've had an unusual experience. If the two museums you've worked for were the National Gallery of Art in Washington, where, in effect, I established my reputation, and that the National Gallery suddenly began to show a lot of contemporary work—let's say postwar art—in a very attractive way, it caused some notice. And then the other institution I worked for was the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I think so many of these things, whether it's the artist you work with or the dealer you work with, the institution you're representing is very important. And if you add to it that it's in the nation's capital or it's in New York City, it becomes very useful.

I didn't think working with dealers in New York was difficult. At the time that I was doing it—I don't know. I was a grown-up. I'd written a lot. It wasn't like I was 23 years old and working for *Show* Magazine. It was a very different situation, and certain things that the Gallery did shortly after I got there, like buying *The Stations of the Cross* or something like that, the Barnett Newman group, so that someone like Leo Castelli might have been nicer then than he would have been when I was 23. [Laughs.]

Some of them were people that I'd known since I was 23. I mean, someone like Arne Glimcher, for various reasons, I knew quite well. I don't know. I knew a lot of the dealers already, and it wasn't really a problem, with rare exceptions that I'm hard-put to think of.

JUDITH RICHARDS: On the other side, you were talking about it not being difficult to get what you wanted. On the other side, you might be facing a continuous stream of requests from what the dealers wanted from you.

NAN ROSENTHAL: You mean in terms of acquisitions in particular?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Attention to their artists by the Metropolitan in whatever way they imagined could happen.

NAN ROSENTHAL: I don't recall that being a problem or an issue. There were various ways one could wiggle around that kind of issue. There were some conveniences involved in not being head of the department. If I didn't particularly want to do something, I could say, well, I think I'm very unlikely to get that past Uncle Bill. And sometimes I did that. God knows everybody knew Bill [laughs]. And I would say most major New York dealers were slick enough and shrewd enough not to be foolishly aggressive.

JUDITH RICHARDS: This brings up the question of your role as a curator and, obviously, not only relationships with galleries but all the relationships you had, and whether, looking back, you see that there were changes over the course of your career as a curator at, as you said, primarily two major institutions. In your work, the role of the curator in the field of contemporary art, if you see that that changed over the course of your career, or if it was fairly steady.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Well, I think like everything else in the art world, it grew enormously. There were more curators. There were more institutions devoted to postwar art.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you find there was—even though you were at bigger institutions—a change in your understood responsibility to the audience, to the educational role of the institution, to the artists' legacy, to any part of what you might need to think about when you were creating your program or curating a specific exhibition?

NAN ROSENTHAL: I think the two institutions I worked for differed considerably in that respect. In other words, I think it was not easy, but one could approach Carter Brown and say, look, I think when people are coming to the nation's capital, to an institution that's open seven days a week, it's really our responsibility to show art of the last 45, 50 years. And we really need to make sure that it's done well. That's not an argument you could make at the Metropolitan, for the simple reason that you can always go to 53rd Street. Or, if it's a Monday and the Met's closed, you can even go up to the Guggenheim.

So that I think so much of these issues depend on the nature of the institution you're talking about. And as the years go on, the institutions themselves change. When I was living in California, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, which it wasn't even quite called then—I don't think the word "modern" was in the title—it was kind of a mess. It was installed poorly. The space was—and it's changed hugely. I mean, that's an example, just an example. But I think it's true throughout the country. And I think these institutions just have changed enormously. The Hirshhorn has changed enormously just in the way things are installed and—not so much acquired—because it has a big collection, it doesn't do that much acquiring.

But you know, when Jim Demetrion came on board there, and Manasrah [ph], all of a sudden the place looked completely different and much, much better; just as I think in many ways, in the course of my being at the Met, the installation of the permanent collection was greatly improved.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you've really experienced a time of enormous transition in the museum world, opening up to huge audiences. When you started, the galleries were much more sparsely attended—[laughs]—than they are now.

NAN ROSENTHAL: Indeed. And I think they'll continue to change. I'm very curious how long Chelsea will continue as a phenomenon.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, thank you very much for your thoughts.

NAN ROSENTHAL: You're very welcome. That was very interesting.

[End of SD card 4, track 2.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]