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Oral history interview with Mimi Haas, 2018
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Mimi Haas on October 26, 2018. The interview took place at Haas's home in San Francisco, and was conducted by Mija Riedel for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, and the Center for the History of Collecting in America at the Frick Art Reference Library of The Frick Collection.

Mimi Haas and Mija Riedel have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel, interviewing Mimi Haas at her home in San Francisco on October 26, 2018, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, and The Frick Collection. This is card number one.

So, thanks for making time today. I'm glad we could make this happen. Today we're going to talk about the Mimi and Peter Haas Fund, your work with the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and also your art collection. You have currently, from what I've seen from the inventory, a couple hundred pieces in that collection, right, about 225?

MIMI HAAS: I really don't know the total.

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, okay.

MIMI HAAS: I have no idea.

MIJA RIEDEL: No worries. So the main artists that I saw represented, with multiple pieces, were Joseph Beuys, Robert Ryman, Brice Marden, and Sigmar Polke. Does that sound about right?

MIMI HAAS: [And Gerhard Richter. -MH] That sounds right. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, okay. But you also had some really interesting conceptual artists, performance artists, installation artists—

MIMI HAAS: I have no performance artists.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, I'm thinking of somebody like William Kentridge, who do—

MIMI HAAS: Oh, I see.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, exactly.

MIMI HAAS: Okay.

MIJA RIEDEL: People who do that sort of work, but also photographers, German artists, and really, artists engaged in multiple forms of social commentary.

MIMI HAAS: That sounds fair.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, okay. So we'll just start with some early formative and biographical information. Where and when were you born?

MIMI HAAS: Where?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MIMI HAAS: I was born in 1946, in New Jersey, but I grew up in Maryland first, near Annapolis, Maryland, until I was eight, and then in a suburb of Washington, D.C.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MIMI HAAS: And then I got married right out of university and moved to San Francisco. So I've been here my

entire adult life.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Would you tell me your parents' names and what they did? [00:02:03]

MIMI HAAS: My father was a psychiatrist, and my mother was a homemaker and a community volunteer.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And what was your maiden name?

MIMI HAAS: Oh, hard one. Ruchwarger. R-U-C-H-W-A-R-G-E-R.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. And what was your father's name?

MIMI HAAS: Abraham.

MIJA RIEDEL: Abraham.

MIMI HAAS: Or Avram, actually.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. A-V-R-A-M?

MIMI HAAS: A-V-R-A-M.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, and your mother?

MIMI HAAS: Her name was even more difficult. They were both from Yugoslavia; my mother's still alive, actually. Z-D as in Donald-E-N as in Nancy-K-A. Zdenka.

MIJA RIEDEL: Zdenka.

MIMI HAAS: It's a Yugoslav name, Croatian.

MIJA RIEDEL: Fantastic.

MIMI HAAS: I was not one of those people who was going to keep her maiden name. [They laugh.] That was not ever a question, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. Did you—do you have siblings?

MIMI HAAS: I had one brother, who is now deceased.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. What were you interested in as a young person?

MIMI HAAS: I would say, growing up, I considered—where we were, it was right over the DC line, so I consider myself from Washington. So really, it was politics. But I give my mother credit for the fact that we went to the National Gallery all the time, and the Phillips Gallery [Collection], and she also, you know, took me to hear the National Symphony, and we went to the theater. And so she—I give her all the credit for introducing me to art and other forms of culture.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting. Does it feel to you—was that, maybe, more of a European childhood, almost, than American? [00:04:00]

MIMI HAAS: Perhaps, perhaps.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, yeah.

MIMI HAAS: I never thought of it that way. I think she's just—is interested.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: And did they grow up in Yugoslavia and Croatia, or did they—

MIMI HAAS: Yes, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —okay. So they grew up there, and then—

MIMI HAAS: They came—

MIJA RIEDEL: —migrated over here.

MIMI HAAS: They came here as refugees during World War II.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, okay. So your interest in art really did begin early then?

MIMI HAAS: Yes. Definitely.

MIJA RIEDEL: Elementary school, junior high—

MIMI HAAS: Definitely.

MIJA RIEDEL: What about philanthropy?

MIMI HAAS: That's an interesting question, because my parents were middle income. My father was a professional. But they were—they gave to local causes, to the extent that they could. So that was definite—I definitely grew up knowing that you should give, no matter what your means.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting.

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: So both of these foundations, of what has been your life, really, had very interesting early—

MIMI HAAS: Yes, definitely.

MIJA RIEDEL: —were established early.

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You went to George Washington University—

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: —and you graduated with a major in political science.

MIMI HAAS: Yes. I did my junior year, though, at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, you did?

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. So that leads to another question, which—were there trips or classes or professors that really had a lasting impact from college?

MIMI HAAS: Actually, just two nights ago, I said that my favorite class at university was Constitutional Law.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

MIMI HAAS: I still remember the professor's name. So I did take some art history at George Washington, not in Jerusalem. But then I must say that—so I said I spent my entire adult life in San Francisco. It's not quite true, because my first husband and I and a five-month-old son were in New York, in Manhattan, for 16 months. [00:06:14] And I literally—we did art and theater. And so, I would push Ari—is his name, A-R-I—I would push him [in his carriage] and go to all the galleries, all the museum shows. So he actually has some interest in art, and he's the only person in the family who has an artistic—any artistic and design talent. But I spent—we didn't have that many friends, so I had a lot of time, and we went—I went to every gallery show and every museum show, and I took some of—I went to some of those lectures at the—that the Metropolitan has on a weekly basis. So I immersed myself in art and the theater during those 16 months that we were there. I mean, we went to Broadway shows. I wasn't [laughs]—I wasn't drawing and I wasn't acting. Then, when we moved back here—

MIJA RIEDEL: What year was that, Mimi, do you recall?

MIMI HAAS: So that was 1972 to '74.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. And you have two sons, right? Ari and Daniel?

MIMI HAAS: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. And the last name is Lurie?

MIMI HAAS: L-U-R-I-E, right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, okay. So, 16 months, and there were a lot of things you could have done in New York.

MIMI HAAS: Well, I always loved going to the theater. I love live theater. And I was interested in art, and there I was in Manhattan. That was the very beginning, when some galleries were opening in SoHo, so I did that also. [00:08:00]

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you remember any in particular, or work, that you were interested in?

MIMI HAAS: No. I honestly don't. I was just interested in absorbing as much as I possibly could.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So by then it sounds like your interests had really shifted, from anything that had been sort of related to politics or political science, more to arts?

MIMI HAAS: That would be fair to say, but over the years, I have been involved in some political campaigns.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. So did that year abroad in Jerusalem have an impact, as well?

MIMI HAAS: On my interest in art?

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes.

MIMI HAAS: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: Not at all?

MIMI HAAS: Not at all.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. And so some—

MIMI HAAS: I mean, we went to the Israel Museum, but that was just beginning.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did the arts become a more prominent part of your life after you married Peter? You married him in 1981, right?

MIMI HAAS: Yes, but first, actually, and I was going to say, when we moved back to—we moved back to San Francisco in February of 1974—and I would go to visit the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and one day—I have no idea what month it was—but I was going through, and I saw a group of children doing an art project in front of a Roy De Forest painting. And I decided right then and there that I wanted to be a children's docent at the museum. So I think it was all of 1975, if I'm not mistaken. The course to be a docent was very intense. It was a year-long—as I can recall—a year-long course, and I loved it. And then I became a children's docent at the museum, which I enjoyed terrifically. So the interesting thing is, I was involved in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art before I met Peter, or married Peter.

And I have—I was just telling—I was sitting next to someone the other day who was the chair—in New York, at the Bruce Nauman opening, sitting next to a man who's the chair, the lay chair of the Rauschenberg Foundation. [00:10:38] And I was telling him that one of the first exhibitions that I did—or at least that remains in my memory—was a Rauschenberg exhibition, and Rauschenberg came and gave a tour to the docents, children and adult docents. So I remember that very well.

I was just saying, actually, another thing I think that is interesting in my life is I have had dinners in this house and the house in the country for all of these artists. So I think I had Robert Rauschenberg at this house twice, once at our house in Woodside. I've had Sigmar Polke; I've had Brice Marden, Robert Ryman, Sol LeWitt. So lots and lots of—even Jasper Johns, when—

MIJA RIEDEL: I was going to ask about that because I read that was a tradition that you'd started, of having people to dinner, but then also having them sign a guest book—

MIMI HAAS: Yes, I have—

MIJA RIEDEL: —is that right?

MIMI HAAS: Well, I have many guest books, yes. What's fun is that—where did you read that?

MIJA RIEDEL: I read everything I could online. [Laughs.] [00:12:01]

MIMI HAAS: Yes. So I have several, because I started the guest book in 1982. So I have many of them, and yes, because I have a lot of artists' drawings in there. So I have a—Well, I've had Ellsworth Kelly. So he's—I have a drawing of his. Sigmar Polke, it was his first show—he's been here; he was here more than once. He had done this exhibition at the old SFMOMA on Van Ness—with gold foil that they had to get specially from somewhere in the East Bay. So he had some in his pocket. So he had—he put that in my guest book. The sad thing is that he never made it to our house in Woodside, and that's where—we have no Sigmar Polke, no, I have a sketchbook of Sigmar Polke here, but all the other—and we have a lot of his work—is all in the country, and he never made it there, so—

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, that's too bad.

MIMI HAAS: —it was sad. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: And that—we'll just jump around, I was going to ask about this later, but I'll just ask you now. That tradition of having guests sign in to a guest book, did that—is that a family tradition?

MIMI HAAS: That was—so, it is a good story, is that the second summer after Peter and I were married, we—his mother, Elise Haas, was no longer going to her house in Atherton, so we started going there in the summer, because at that time, we didn't have our own summer house. And in a closet underneath the main staircase, I found this guest book that she had in Atherton. It was so fascinating to see who had been to their home for dinner, how many times some people came. So, who their closest friends were, who the, you know, international visitors were. And I decided—happily, I saw [the guest book] at the beginning of the summer, and that was it. From then on, and I have it everywhere.

We have a house in Martha's Vineyard, and I have one there. So, and everybody who comes thinks, Oh, that's such a nice tradition. They'll do it in their homes, too. But it's fun, especially when you have artists [00:14:35] leaving a mark in there.

Doug Aitken has become a friend, so he has signed a lot of guest books and—has he been to the Woodside house? I don't know. I'm not sure. So it—usually, the dinners were in conjunction with SFMOMA.

You know, an artist would be in town, and everybody knew that I was always happy to entertain. I think it was all on my own, except maybe Brice Marden, who was—his 80th birthday was the day of the Bruce Nauman opening, and he was there. So that was fun.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: And what—do you have plans for those books? Will they go to a museum or—

MIMI HAAS: Well, most—

MIJA RIEDEL: —an archive?

MIMI HAAS: —most of the family—the papers all go to the Bancroft Library.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right, right.

MIMI HAAS: So I assume we'll continue that.

MIJA RIEDEL: I think that's where I read about that book—

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: —was in, probably, Peter Haas's oral history—

MIMI HAAS: Oh, probably. Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —at the Bancroft.

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right. That's probably right.

MIJA RIEDEL: You're currently vice chair at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art?

MIMI HAAS: Yes. And New York.

MIJA RIEDEL: Both of them.

MIMI HAAS: Both meaningless.

[They laugh.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Why do you say that?

MIMI HAAS: Well, it's a nice title to have, but there's not really work involved or anything. [00:16:00]

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

MIMI HAAS: I don't—I'm not on very many boards, because I don't want to be on a board if I won't get deeply involved.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MIMI HAAS: So, I don't know. Anyway, yes, but there's no work associated with it, for better or for worse.

MIJA RIEDEL: But you have chaired multiple committees, yes?

MIMI HAAS: Yes. In San Francisco, I chaired—I think first it was the development committee, or maybe first it was—I chaired the development committee for a very long time. And Don Fisher was the first chair of the accessions committee, and then I was the chair for a very long time. And in New York, I chaired the painting and sculpture acquisitions committee, I think, for eight years, and the audit committee for six years.

MIJA RIEDEL: And what did that entail? What did those positions entail?

MIMI HAAS: So in San Francisco—it was when Jack Lane came to the museum, in '86, that he only agreed to come if we had an accessions committee, which we did not have before. Henry Hopkins, who was the previous director, if you wanted to purchase something, you had to go around asking trustees or friends of the museum for funds. There was no accessions fund. So the accessions committee was formed in 1986. And then, after a few years, there were sort of spin-offs for photography and spin-offs for architecture and design. And as chair, well, you chaired the meetings. You worked with the curators on what the agenda was going to be.

And here in San Francisco, I know for—I was always worried that the meetings were too pro forma, where the curators, in an interesting way, would present the list of works that they wanted us to acquire, and they would give us good background of how these new pieces would fit into the collection. The same in New York. But the meetings could be a little boring, so—I was just speaking about this with Neal Benezra, actually, the other day, because he said he actually came once as a guest lecturer. For two or three years, I would underwrite having a museum director or curator come to the accessions committee—I think they might have been three hours long at that point in time—and giving a talk on something. [00:19:05] So actually, Ann Temkin came and spoke about Joseph Beuys—and sometimes we had artists. So that was—I thought I added a little with that. That came and went, though, and then the meetings became shorter. And in New York, it was always working with Ann Temkin a few weeks before the meetings, which were four or five times a year, on the agenda, talking about what art was going to be presented for acquisition, talking about de-accessioning and gifts and so on. It was fun. I enjoyed it a lot, both—in both places.

MIJA RIEDEL: And did you do that fairly consistently, in one place or another, throughout the '80s and '90s, would you say? [00:20:02]

MIMI HAAS: Well, the—MoMA in New York is much more recently than that. I think this is only my second or third school year, fiscal year, not being chair of painting and sculpture acquisitions in MoMA. And, yeah, so it was way into the teens of the 2000s. So I would have been chair in New York. I could get the information of acquisitions through 2015, 2016, and audit—so painting and sculpture I did for eight years, which—you're not supposed to do it that long. You're supposed to have two three-year terms, and audit was six or seven years. So, no, this was all into the—

MIJA RIEDEL: Into just quite recently—

MIMI HAAS: —into now, or into two or three years ago, and—

MIJA RIEDEL: And that's both—

MIMI HAAS: —and I don't think either one started—the only thing that could have started in the '80s might have been development committee here at SFMOMA. We could find out. But I don't know that it's that important. But I've been on the board of SFMOMA since 1986, and I've been on the board of MoMA in New York almost 20 years.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's helpful. I read a quote in that oral history we were talking about, in 2002, that you did for

the Bancroft. And I just want to read it now, because it's short, but I think it really encapsulates a lot of the spirit of the Mimi and Peter Haas Fund over the years, and I want your opinion on it. This is the quote: "In the visual arts, it has never occurred to us not to back the most avant-garde work." [00:22:06]

MIMI HAAS: Oh, I know one of the reasons that that's said, I'm sure, is, while we were in the capital campaign for the Mario Botta building of SFMOMA, and Peter was on the capital campaign committee—I had been on both—I'm lucky—both for the Botta building and the Snøhetta building, I was on the architect selection committee. Then Peter was on, with me and a lot of other people, on the capital campaign for the Botta building. And during that time, John Caldwell was going to be doing this Jeff Koons exhibition. And that was when he [Jeff Koons] was married to that Italian pornographic film star. And there was—oh, I don't know whether it was six or eight paintings that were more than very sexy. And there was a discussion at the capital campaign committee of whether that was going to put—having those paintings in the exhibition was going to put off some prospective donors. And Peter spoke up at the committee meeting, saying that, you know, he disapproved of censorship in all walks of life and all manners. So he swayed everyone. [00:24:00]

But what happened is—it is a good story. What happened was, they were put in one room, and there was a little sign that said, "You may not want to see"—I don't know—"this room." But it was—I guess Herb Caen was still alive at that point and writing his column. There was a quote that was hysterical from Phyllis Wattis, which was, she went in there and she came out and said, "Nothing new here."

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MIMI HAAS: I know; it's funny. So that must be it. And I think maybe other—maybe also—I don't think I was chair. I think SFMOMA was the first museum to buy art of Matthew Barney, and it was very controversial, so I'm sure I supported that. And then I think I was chair when we bought—maybe not, though; it was 1988 when we bought Jeff Koons's *Michael Jackson and his Monkey* [*Michael Jackson and Bubbles*]*—*which was another controversial piece.

MIJA RIEDEL: I think it was also perhaps around the time of the Eva Hesse exhibition, too.

MIMI HAAS: Oh, that's much more recently, though.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, yeah. Well, in the same interview, you said, "I'm so completely involved with SFMOMA, which was so important to Peter's mother."

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you think that also, that your and Peter's commitment to the avant-garde in art—do you think of it as a family tradition at all, in some ways?

MIMI HAAS: Yes, I think, because she was buying art that was difficult or, at that point in time, or not that well understood still. And she was one of the founders of the museum. And what's nice now is, my daughter-in-law, Becca Prowda, who's married to Daniel—she's been on the board for a number of years, and I think when she was asked to be on the board, she might have been the youngest person ever to be asked. When I was asked on the board, I had just turned 40. And that point, that seemed to be very young. But now, SFMOMA's done a much better job of getting young people on the board.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, I read, too, that Elise Haas was—

MIMI HAAS: Elise.

MIJA RIEDEL: Elise Haas, yes—

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: —was the first female president of SFMOMA? Is that right?

MIMI HAAS: Yes, probably. That's probably right. She was the first female president there, I believe. For sure, she was the first female president, or chair of the board—I don't know which—at Mount Zion Hospital, too.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. I wanted to talk about the New Work series, and you had mentioned Matthew Barney—

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: —and he was one of the first artists, I think, that was included in that series. The Mimi and Peter Haas Fund funds the New Work series, yes?

MIMI HAAS: Oh, we did, but we don't, not anymore, no.

MIJA RIEDEL: But that's—

MIMI HAAS: That was right; I'd forgotten, to be honest. I'd forgotten about that.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. That started in '87, and I think the mission of that series was to really exhibit new art forms—

MIMI HAAS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —and the most cutting-edge—

MIMI HAAS: The young and—

MIJA RIEDEL: —innovative—

MIMI HAAS: Yes. And that's still going on right now.

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. I think it stopped briefly, from—it'd be 2000 to 2004—but it's been ongoing.

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. And then most museums have something like that, where they exhibit either younger artists or artists that are just emerging, no matter what their age. You know, New York MoMA has—it's been a long time already—has something called the Fund for the 21st Century, where we just buy art that's been created in the last evolving five years. [00:28:02]

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So Elise Haas bequeathed a significant number of pieces to SFMOMA, I think, in 1990, the year she died.

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, basically. More, even, than the bulk of her collection.

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

MIMI HAAS: Very few pieces did not go to SFMOMA, and that was always the plan.

MIJA RIEDEL: Interesting. And I know that that was, first and foremost, a piece that everyone talks about, is Matisse's *Woman with a Hat*—

MIMI HAAS: *La Femme au chapeau*, yes, mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, and there was also a Picasso, I think, *Head in Three-Quarter View*. Did she talk with you about that collection?

MIMI HAAS: So by the time I married Peter, she was quite old and not 100-percent there. So she—I do remember one thing, is that we would visit her every Sunday, late afternoon, and she would sit in the study, where she was across from this Georgia O'Keeffe painting of white flowers, and she would always repeat how difficult it is to paint white, and how many different shades of white. That might be in another oral history. No, most of what I know about her collecting would be more from Peter or Evie Haas or the oral histories.

MIJA RIEDEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I think she was on the museum—the women's board— from '51 to '63, and the board of trustees from '56 to '90. She was really a huge part of that museum.

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, by '90, she would have been trustee emeritus or something, because she wasn't going to meetings at that point. [00:30:12]

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you know what inspired that long-term interest in her? Do you think it had a lot to do with her friendship with Sarah Stein? I know she was also an artist, to some degree, in her own right, yes?

MIMI HAAS: That's right. I have—I think there are various reasons, and you'd have to look at her oral history. So, she had friends who collected art. I think the best source would be her oral history. She had friends who collected art, and there are some paintings in SFMOMA's collection that she co-supported, with other people. There—she also, you know—Eugene Meyer, who, first on the *Washington Post*, Kate Graham's father, was actually her cousin, because Elise Haas's mother—why am I—was Rosalie Meyer. So Eugene Meyer was Elise's uncle. And he and his wife were collecting in Washington. So I'm sure all those different connections were what initiated her with collecting art, being part of the museum. So it was sort of in the dynamics of her relationships with friends and family. I think she probably—you know, there was a great commitment to the community, so I'm sure that that was all part of it, part of the being supportive of the culture in San Francisco. I don't really know—I

haven't read her oral history for years, you know—whether her mother, Rosalie Meyer, was interested or not. [00:32:45]

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. That's another good place to look.

MIMI HAAS: Rosalie Meyer Stern.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, I just wondered if she'd had any conversations with you, but it sounds like it was—

MIMI HAAS: No, it was too late.

MIJA RIEDEL: —past that time, yeah.

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: I also wanted to talk about a show at San Francisco MOMA—it was called *Focus on Artists*. I don't know if you remember that, in 2010, at all, but it really talked—examined the museum's long-term relationships with modern and contemporary artists. The Mimi and Peter Haas Fund helped to fund the exhibition—I'm sure there are more than you can remember at this point. [Laughs.] Are relationships with artists an important part of your own collection or your work with the museum?

MIMI HAAS: Oh, yes. For sure. I always say that one of the wonderful benefits of collecting contemporary art is that you get to meet the artists, and then they can talk to you about their work. I'm actually good friends with Richard Serra and his wife, Clara. I mean, they've come, stayed with me in Martha's Vineyard. I have stayed with them in their place in Nova Scotia, which they can't go to anymore because of his health. [00:33:58]

But so, you have them—like, Brice Marden could come and tell me about these sketchbook drawings that I purchased from him, and he can tell me, you know, where he was doing them, which was on the island of Hydra, and what they were—you know, when you can speak about many things, including the art, and including the art in your collection, with the creator of that art, that has a lot to do with it.

One of my regrets is that I never met Joseph Beuys. We have some nice pieces of his, and some important—one really important piece—but I never met him. So I would say that I—and Cy Twombly would be another artist. Like William Kentridge, I had a dinner for him, and he had never been to San Francisco at that point in time. And I ended up taking him on a tour of San Francisco and Belvedere. So, you know, of course, it's a wonderful side benefit of collecting art of your own time. There—you know, I'm pretty fortunate there are not that many artists, definitely, that are in our collection that I haven't met. And actually, more than that, I've spent time with. There was a time—I must have sat next to Gerhard Richter at least two or three times at dinner. He's never been to my house. I'm trying to think as I go through. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: That was a beautiful big abstract, right as you walk in the front door.

MIMI HAAS: Right. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: It's a lovely way to arrive.

MIMI HAAS: But I'm just trying to think of other—yes. Basically, [I] probably know the artists of about 90 percent of our collection. [00:36:03]

MIJA RIEDEL: That's fantastic. Let's talk a bit about your work with SFMOMA and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. You've been involved with, I think, with the major expansions, right?

MIMI HAAS: Yes, mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: In both museums. I was actually looking at the dates, and I was calculating. Between 19—I think it was 1988, when SFMOMA announced it was going to move from Van Ness to Third Street—and then, 2016, when the new Snøhetta building opened, you've been involved in development and growth in museums for about 28 years. [Laughs.] And there seems to have been a lot—

MIMI HAAS: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: —going on during that time.

MIMI HAAS: Well, actually, yes. It would be more like 30 years—if you count—1988, in fact, was the—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right; that's true.

MIMI HAAS: —was the trip to Chicago and Europe to—and LA—to see the work of the few finalists for the first SFMOMA building.

MIJA RIEDEL: That's the one that Botta won?

MIMI HAAS: Yes. So that—so it's 30 years. So the other part that's interesting is—so I was only on the architect selection committee for SFMOMA, not for—and I wasn't on the board, even, when they selected the architect for—the Japanese architect [Yoshio Taniguchi] who did the first—who did New York MoMA when it opened in 2004—

MIJA RIEDEL: 2004, right.

MIMI HAAS: —but what I have been on, always—whatever board I'm on, I go on the finance committee. So I've been involved in both museums on projecting what the budgets will look like after a new building opens. And that's pretty fascinating, because you can—you know that you can't predict all the expenses or the revenue or the admissions. But it's interesting, if you've done it over a while, to see where people—where you can get it right or close to right, and where you can't predict. So that's been a fascinating experience. That has, and then, people always ask me—someone asked me the other day, you know, what are the—what I like about being on both boards, besides that I get to go to New York, is to compare and contrast. And some of the similar things are—so that, trying to predict operating budgets. And I'm really interested in numbers. [00:39:01] I think I actually absorbed that from Peter. But the other thing is always the dynamic of the admission price, the membership price, what you do for members so that they'll re-up, how much can you charge for admission. So that's been a similar theme in both museums and over the last—whatever, as long as I've been involved in museum work.

So I think I can bring something to the discussion from these various experiences. And of course, what's interesting—it's not really fun to get older or think that you've been around for that long, but you certainly see what has been discussed before. And of course, when you have younger and newer people involved, they're sort of debating the same [laughs] figures and what's the right way to say it—various viewpoints that you've seen over a few decades already—and just goes on, just like in the world. Nothing's new with— [00:40:30]

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MIMI HAAS: —wars and dictators and politics.

MIJA RIEDEL: I'm curious, what did you find that you could predict, and what did you find that you couldn't?

MIMI HAAS: Probably more that you can't predict. [They laugh.]

I think that actual operations—in the sense of actually operating the buildings, whether it be maintenance or security, whatever—[are] always more than you think that they're going to be, the wear and the tear. I think what—I don't think that MoMA ever predicted the numbers of people that would come. And I think MoMA made the mistake—maybe it's not a mistake, but they underestimated, and I think SFMOMA overestimated for this building. And now, it's just fascinating—I don't know, what is the number? I'm not good at remembering. I'm good, when I read budgets, to notice the numbers, but then ask me later, I'm not so good. We have—a huge percentage of the admissions right now at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art are young people under 30, just huge amount, which means that you really need to change the entire way that you're working with—

[Sound of telephone.] Oh, no, that's—when it rings here, it's my children. [00:42:11]

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, I can pause it.

MIMI HAAS: Let me just—I'm going to have to get it.

[Audio break.]

MIJA RIEDEL: So we had been talking about something that SFMOMA had overestimated, and something that MoMA had underestimated.

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: Was that attendance?

MIMI HAAS: Admissions. Attendance, mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, okay. And so SFMOMA has this fantastic audience of under-30—

MIMI HAAS: Yeah, it's—you could check the numbers, but it is incredible, and I don't know that any other museum is seeing that right now.

MIJA RIEDEL: What do you attribute that to? I don't know that the under-30 population here is showing up in other cultural—

MIMI HAAS: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: —institutions.

MIMI HAAS: I—you know, first of all—well, others in the Bay Area—I think it's a mixture of the special exhibitions that we're having, the fact that there's so many young people in the area [laughs] must have something to do with it.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. I don't know that they're going to—

MIMI HAAS: You know, under 18, you know, are—it's free admission. But that doesn't answer the 18 to—it's either 18 to 30, or 18 to 35, where these numbers are incredible. I'm not sure that anybody can totally answer it. The other day, Neal Benezra was speaking about the fact that we had this exhibition which just was sounds, but it—and called *Sounds*—or, a few more words to it [*Soundtracks*, SFMOMA, July 15, 2017–January 1, 2018]. And all the young people went there to see that exhibit, and which—just stayed for a very long time. It is, because I think that, well, when you're at the Modern in New York, it's—there's just so many tourists. So it seems, of all ages, but you wouldn't say, "It's just young people"—and here, it's quite something, how dramatic it is. Maybe they like the contemporary architecture. That could be part of it.

MIJA RIEDEL: And it is very dynamic.

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: I mean, there are a lot of different things going on there all the time.

MIMI HAAS: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: Parties and events and, you know, openings.

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: And so it does seem like there's a whole different way for them to be engaged.

MIMI HAAS: Definitely.

MIJA RIEDEL: I don't see them showing up, for example, though, at ACT [American Conservatory Theater] as much.

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: I'm always struck at how much older that audience looks. So it's extraordinary, that.

MIMI HAAS: Well, even it—when you go to the theater in New York, even—I must admit, I don't go here, but I go in New York—well, not as often as I used to. But you know, it's a much older audience. It is interesting. Or if you go to Lincoln Center Theater, it's really an older audience. I'm not sure what all the answers are, except that somehow all these cultural institutions keep going. So there must be some people of one generation who sort of graduate into deciding that they want to go to the symphony or the opera or the ballet. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, you're on the finance committee. What do you attribute this ongoing success to?

MIMI HAAS: No, I was thinking about it the other day. I went to—the opera had Placido Domingo in a special concert last Sunday. It was such an older audience. I guess people who remembered him—although he was still absolutely fabulous. And so I'm on the Lincoln Center board, also, where there's always a discussion about attracting young audiences. [00:46:07] I just—it feels as if, in the past at least, new generations weren't that interested, and then they did start attending. Otherwise, we would have had the end of, for sure, opera, and maybe symphony, 40 or 50 years ago.

I think that the Lincoln Center is—I think the symphony—some friends of mine took me a couple of times. The symphony is doing—I know we're not here to talk about the [San Francisco] Symphony, but they're doing these special concerts. You can only get the tickets online. They're sold out within five minutes. They're doing it in this acoustically incredible rehearsal space. It's a big, black space that the symphony rehearses in. They have a different curator for each concert, but it's not just a concert. They have video as part of it; they have different, you know, visual lighting arrangements as part of it. They—it's not a whole orchestra; the instruments are in the middle of this huge space. They serve alcohol. There are no—there's no formal seating. People stand; they sit on

cushions or at bar tables; it's brilliant. And it's packed with young people.

MIJA RIEDEL: How great.

MIMI HAAS: Packed. You know, and other cultural institutions across the world, you know, ballet or symphony or opera, offer greatly discounted tickets. [00:48:00] So I guess they are finding a way. I don't—it's still very hard, I think, with their budgets. They have to ask a certain generation of people to help underwrite everything. But I think somehow it does evolve.

MIJA RIEDEL: I wanted to talk about SFMOMA's growth, in particular, the collection. We've talked about the building a little bit, but I want to talk about the extraordinary growth of the collection. There—I think in 2000, the *New York Times* was talking about one of those initial phases of growth, and it was saying that in a couple—a two-year period, the museum had acquired more than \$130 million worth of art. In two years. Primarily contemporary—

MIMI HAAS: What year was that?

MIJA RIEDEL: In 2000, was the article.

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: So they were talking about primarily contemporary masters. And at that point in time, it was the most aggressive acquisitions effort of any museum in the world. So I'm curious if you could elaborate on the thinking behind those acquisitions.

MIMI HAAS: Well, I think it was a few different things. David Ross, who was the director around 2000—I forgot when Neal came. He loved doing deals, so we did these deals with certain collections across the world, including one in Japan where, you know, he got donors from the museum to chip in to acquire a certain amount of art—I can't recall now the name of that Japanese collection. And then—I would think it's about the same time—the Fishers and the Schwabs and the museum itself, and Peter and I, went in to acquire a lot of Ellsworth Kelly's work. [00:50:14] Then there was a different time, when we bought a lot of Rauschenberg's work, and we all—that was Phyllis Wattis, was involved in that, also. So it was—I'm not sure it was all David, and part of it was Gary Garrels and his relationships with different artists. So what we were doing was, it wasn't just the individual collecting; it was doing these sort of entire collections—I forget how many Rauschenbergs we acquired at that time. You could find out and—or how many Ellsworth Kellys. I forget how many pieces came in with the—with that Japanese collection. Then Phyllis Wattis—but that wasn't for 2004—well, wait. We opened—no, we opened in 1995, right? That—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right.

MIMI HAAS: So after we opened it, she thought that we had to really build up the collection. So with Gary Garrels working with Phyllis, she was funding a lot of acquisitions of very major pieces. So it was a combination of forces, but she was an important part of that.

MIJA RIEDEL: And were you on the acquisitions committee in SF—

MIMI HAAS: Yes, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, and so how would that work? Would a curator recognize that there was an opportunity with a certain artist—

MIMI HAAS: Yes. [00:52:02]

MIJA RIEDEL: —to acquire a certain number of pieces.

MIMI HAAS: Definitely.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay.

MIMI HAAS: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: So it became apparent that something could be acquired—

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: —through Rauschenberg, or something could be acquired through Kelly.

MIMI HAAS: Right. But you know, none of that—those were relationships that evolved over a certain amount of time. And then, really, with the gifts from Phyllis Wattis, it was—I would have to give Gary Garrels and Phyllis, working together, the credit. They would sort of search out, you know—like we bought this incredible Rothko and other major—I think we had Magritte also—but major, major pieces that were very expensive, that you could never acquire without someone willing to give, you know, millions and millions and millions of dollars for one piece to acquire. So it was a number of various reasons, but the new building was an impetus. You want to have a—you have a great building; you better have a great collection also.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah. I read a quote from her and she'd said something about, "This building is so terrific, and we realized that we had to step up the collection." ["I was aware our paintings did not justify the building," recalled Phyllis Wattis, 94, the museum's biggest benefactor. "After it opened, I was almost embarrassed by our collection." In "Arts in America; Big Names, Big Bucks: A Museum Shopping Spree," by Carol Vogel, *The New York Times*, Feb 8, 2000. -MF]

MIMI HAAS: Yeah, right. She used the—what's the saying from the red Michelin guides, you know, that you must stop here; it's not anything that could be bypassed.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes [laughs]. Okay.

MIMI HAAS: So, I don't remember the exact quote. [The quote reads: "I was aware our paintings did not justify the building," recalled Phyllis Wattis, 94, the museum's biggest benefactor. "After it opened, I was almost embarrassed by our collection." "Arts in America; Big Names, Big Bucks: A Museum's Shopping Spree," *The New York Times*, February 28, 2000. -MR] You could talk to Gary Garrels if you wanted to fill some of this in.

MIJA RIEDEL: You know, I actually wanted to ask you about that, because I think, in the late '90s, you helped the museum acquire eight paintings by Robert Ryman.

MIMI HAAS: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: And that—

MIMI HAAS: Peter and I—

MIJA RIEDEL: —also had to do with Gary Garrels.

MIMI HAAS: —did that. Yes, it did; definitely it did.

MIJA RIEDEL: Could you explain how that came about? I think he had a show up at the old space—

MIMI HAAS: Right. [00:54:00]

MIJA RIEDEL: —didn't he? Yeah.

MIMI HAAS: Was it—yeah, so it was the old space, because then when the new space opened, we had one room with all those paintings. Well, what's interesting is, when Jack Lane was hired, he'd been at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, and he had—John Caldwell was his curator. And he brought John Caldwell here to be the chief curator. John didn't come full-time until after the 1988 Carnegie International. But I think even before Jack was here officially as a director, he had me meet John Caldwell in New York, and John came to the hotel I was staying at and immediately took me to Bob Ryman's studio. So I don't know whether it was '86 or '87. So that's a—definitely a way to fall in love with art and the artist, and I was overwhelmed with those paintings. And then, we—I guess friends would—Bob Ryman was here, like, two or three times for dinner, and I really loved his work. So it wasn't that difficult, when Gary wanted to acquire this series of paintings, for Peter and I to say that, of course, we'd be happy to underwrite the acquisition. [00:55:59]

I'll tell you a funny side story is, especially since that was Ari that just phoned. All but one of the Robert Ryman's that we have are in the house in Woodside. But one of them that was—that is at Woodside now—was hanging outside the dining room door in this house. And Ari's seat at dinner would look at the painting. And every so often, he would say, "I have to go close the door; I can't look at that all-white painting. I could do that." And now he loves those Robert Ryman paintings.

I always tell that story to people whose children, you know, might not be interested when they're little, in certain art or artists. I think that switch of his is really interesting, but it was funny. There was an article in the last week—did you see that?—where some scientist at some institution actually did research into the fact of, could, when people say, "Oh, my child could have done that"—they did a series of experiments where people would look at art that was made by true artists next to a piece of art that was made either by a child or even a monkey—

MIJA RIEDEL: Right. [Laughs.]

MIMI HAAS: —something like that. And still, you can believe how much you want of scientific experiments, but still, no matter how they did it, people did react more positively to paintings done by actual artists as opposed to children or animals. [Laughs.] It was interesting. [00:58:00]

MIJA RIEDEL: I did see that someplace.

MIMI HAAS: Yes. It's in—just in the last week, yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: I can't remember where it was, but—mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh, and the Rymans—I had read—I had heard—I had listened to, I guess, a brief interview with Gary Garrels, talking about that. And he had said that one of the things that Ryman was excited about was a specific room that these paintings might be shown in. Is that the room where the Agnes Martins are, currently?

MIMI HAAS: No, because this would have been—the Agnes Martins are in the extension, and the Rymans were in the original—

MIJA RIEDEL: In the original building, okay.

MIMI HAAS: —building. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: That little room with the Martins is just exquisite, too.

MIMI HAAS: It is something, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Absolutely exquisite. And are the Rymans up now in the—

MIMI HAAS: Well, not as a sequence. Not that I know of, no.

MIJA RIEDEL: Because I don't recall seeing them.

MIMI HAAS: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay, okay. So in 2009 then, there was the second major expansion of SFMOMA. The museum announced plans to almost triple the gallery space. I think it was announced then that the Fisher collection was going to come to SFMOMA. I think there was a multi-year campaign for—a multi-year campaign for art was launched, and the museum closed for three years—

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: —2013 to 2016. So I wanted to ask you how—for that time in particular, but also just in general—how you've seen the spirit or the strategies behind art philanthropy change over time.

MIMI HAAS: Do you mind if I stand up? I can't sit for that long.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, sure. Sure.

MIMI HAAS: I have a bad back.

MIJA RIEDEL: And this will stretch, if you'd like to—the cord's—

MIMI HAAS: Okay, so—First of all, before Jack Lane and John Caldwell came here, this really wasn't a community that was collecting contemporary or modern art. And I used to say that I thought that one of the reasons—and this is a good place to say it—was that you have these beautiful views. [01:00:06] So you didn't need art on the walls to give you aesthetic pleasure. I said this for a very long time. But you know, I really only knew San Francisco and New York and Washington. But you know, in New York, you're not usually looking at something nice, so people wanted to have good art on their walls. Well, I give Jack Lane and John Caldwell, the combination of the two of them, who spirited a number of families into starting to collect contemporary art—they started with that, with Jack insisting that we have an accessions committee. Then they took a bunch of us to the Carnegie International in 1988. My husband, Peter, used to say that John Caldwell could convince you of anything. So, you know, John brought the early Richter show here. He brought the Polke show here. So they were looking at the artists, whether they would be German or American, that were painting or creating art at that time. And they would convince all of us that [laughs] that not only the museum had to have those artists, but we, personally, had to have those artists. And I honestly give the two of them the credit for changing the dynamic here. And then John Caldwell died suddenly of a heart attack, which was just a horrible tragedy. But then we hired Gary Garrels, who—

[END OF TRACK haas18_1of1_sd_track01.]

MIMI HAAS: —continued to do the same thing with Jack. And honestly, without them, I'm not sure where we would be right now. Obviously, collecting contemporary art has become sort of the thing to do in the last few decades. But certainly, the beginning, I would give them the credit for stimulating that interest. Probably, without them, when the global art world, you know, became exciting or the thing to do, I assume we would have —San Franciscans would have started collecting. But I think we did it a lot earlier than—before it became the hot thing to do—because of Jack and John, and then Gary.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, okay. Has the museum surprised you in any way?

MIMI HAAS: [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Exceeded your expectations, or disappointed you?

MIMI HAAS: No. I—no. I would say it's met my expectations, which were high, because I always thought that we could be a, you know, one of the best museums of modern art in the world. And I think now, we are. We've been—even before the new building, we were having internationally recognized exhibitions that we initiated. So I think we were known—no, I think we were known internationally for that. Well, now we have the larger building and not only the Fisher collection, which obviously changed the collection as a whole, but again, I don't really remember the numbers. But at the same time that we did that capital campaign, we did a collections campaign. So now there are an endless number of great works of art pledged to the museum, mainly when we're all no longer here. [00:02:26] But it's still going to—and those pieces were in the opening exhibition in the Botta—sorry, in the Snøhetta building.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes. That was such a happy time.

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: I remember seeing the looks on people's faces during those opening days, and there was—everybody looked euphoric. [Laughs.] You don't normally see that—

MIMI HAAS: No, it was—yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: --at a museum—

MIMI HAAS: Well—

MIJA RIEDEL: It was unforgettable.

MIMI HAAS: Also, because—I think that the reviews by both architecture critics and art critics, and the art world were, 99.9-percent positive about the new building and the collection. In fact, I had some friends that I know from Martha's Vineyard in New York, had dinner with them, I guess, last Friday night, and they'd just been to the museum for the first time that—the new building—that day. And they just couldn't stop raving about it. And that's—I've only met a couple of people all over the world who don't think that it's fabulous. So that—in that way, it certainly exceeded my expectations, the building and the response to it. But as far as ours being one of the greatest museums on the planet, I always thought we could do that, to be honest. [00:04:02]

MIJA RIEDEL: Really?

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I did. It used to be one of my refrains at executive committee meetings.

MIJA RIEDEL: When did that start? I mean, how far back does that go? Because when you were first in that building on Van Ness as a [children's -MH] docent, I—you wouldn't have necessarily—have thought that, back at that—

MIMI HAAS: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: —looking at that building or that collection.

MIMI HAAS: Well, I always give Gerson Bakar the credit for convincing people and doing the first fundraising for the—what would be the Botta building. He convinced us that we could move south of Market. First, he wanted us to go into a high-rise south of Market. And then it evolved into something better, of our having our own space. But he was the impetus behind that, for sure. And so some people thought that we didn't need to be grand or great, but I don't know—partially, I think it's because I only want to be involved in something that's outstanding. [Laughs.] I don't want to just be involved with a little, local museum. But I do believe that we, honestly—and so, I just said that, and actually—so we had this dinner in New York with—that the new president, Diana Nelson, of SFMOMA and Neal Benezra and I were at—I don't even know, was it last—a week and a half ago. I've moved around so much. And Neal was talking to some possible New York donors about our museum. I've lost my train

of thought. Oh, he was speaking about the first director—was it Sarah McCann Morley [Grace McCann Morley] who—she brought the Pollock show here, the Gorky show here. [00:06:27]

MIJA RIEDEL: Which show, sorry?

MIMI HAAS: Gorky. I forget the third one. So we have a history, from the very beginning, of having exhibitions of, you know, then sort of emerging artists [laughs] who become great artists in the history—in art history. So with that in our DNA and then with the collecting that was going on within the community and with the—in the museum, it just didn't seem like there was any reason that the combination of our exhibitions that we've created, and the collecting, and then a new building, that we shouldn't be one of the great museums.

MIJA RIEDEL: And there's been such a history of phenomenal art coming out of the Bay Area, too—

MIMI HAAS: Yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: —and really wonderful universities.

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: UC Berkeley and Davis—

MIMI HAAS: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: —and CCA, and the Art Institute.

MIMI HAAS: Right.

MIJA RIEDEL: So, yeah, there's just—you're right.

MIMI HAAS: I mean, Bruce Nauman was at Davis, and had a studio not far from where the museum is now. Sure, that's right. A lot of great artists came from here. I'm sure there's a lot of good art being done now, maybe more conceptual or—performance or video.

MIJA RIEDEL: So I wanted to talk, briefly, about the Mimi and Peter Haas Fund—we're still good on time, right?

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: We have until 4:00. So we've got half an hour. So you've been president of the fund since 1981. And the fund prioritizes early childhood education and services—

MIMI HAAS: —for children at risk, yes.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, in San Francisco. It also funds the symphony. It funds museums, exhibitions. Do you see connections or unifying threads between those funding areas?

MIMI HAAS: The story is that, when Peter's mother passed away, that her estate went into the philanthropic funds of her three children. So what was relatively a small fund that Peter and I had became very large, and I said to Peter that I wanted us to find an area to focus on. Of course—so, of course, we were giving to all the San Francisco institutions, whether they were cultural or universities. But I thought that with this infusion of funds, we really should find an area of focus, and we hired someone to do a study for us. We focused in on early childhood—quality early childhood education for children at risk. We had someone go around the country to see what was being done in that area, and we decided—part of it was, we wanted to do work to make peoples' lives a lot better. [00:10:03]

And then—so we could have concentrated on teenage pregnancy or juvenile delinquency, drugs—so we thought—and the timing was just when a lot of beginning—tons of research on the brain and how infants learn from birth, if not before, was being initiated. We decided that we could, if we invested in these children before they ever entered kindergarten, that we could make a difference. And it's a proven fact in their lives, in their later lives, too—so that all the consequences of not having a good education could be overcome. So that's been where the fund has focused.

Which doesn't mean, of course, that we aren't giving large gifts to art institutions or to Stanford or Berkeley or so on. Is there a—some kind of integration? Yes, and no, because we do concentrate—it started out being ages two to five, but then people started needing—I don't want to say childcare, but places to put, even, their infants while they were working. And even—obviously, we've just said that the brain starts developing immediately. So now, in a lot of the early childhood centers that we're involved in, there are infants there. And then you want to make sure that they're getting the stimulation that they need.

I would say that we're—because these are young children, they're not necessarily going to the museums yet. We are looking across at the Bay Area Discovery Museum. We do have a relationship there, and some of the early childhood centers go there. Yeah, I think you can see it from here. And also Matilda Kunin's children's workshop [Young Performers Theatre]. We have a program with the Academy of Sciences that we've been funding, where they really weren't doing much before kindergarten. So I actually just asked to—if we'd approve paying for the buses so some of our early childcare centers could take some of these pre-kindergardeners to this program at the Academy of Sciences.

But as far as the art, the museums—no. In New York, we gave a grant, with a lot of other trustees, to the education department at New York MoMA so that—to help with the education programs. Here, we've never specifically, at SFMOMA, targeted that, because there's so many other grant-makers who are sort of only interested in education that we don't focus on that, because corporations will—if they'll do anything anymore with museums, they'll do the education programs. [00:14:00]

So I can't say that there's that much. We try, with the early childcare centers, to—early childhood education centers—to have them take part in what's going on in the community, but I don't think it would be a museum to that extent.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. I wanted to talk briefly about MoMA. You've provided major funding for exhibitions there—I think retrospectives—almost since it reopened. Brice Marden in 2006, Olafur Eliasson—

MIMI HAAS: Eliasson, yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: In 2008.

MIMI HAAS: Well, but those—both shows were at both museums.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. Sigmar Polke, too, right?

MIMI HAAS: So we did for—yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah, in 2010. So just looking back at the dozens or more exhibitions and projects that you've funded over the years, and I'm thinking of, you know, Kentridge, as well—

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: —and I'm thinking of going as far as Ai Weiwei at Alcatraz and how you helped fund that.

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: Are there projects that you're particularly pleased with? Are there ones that were very hard-won that were worth it in the end? What I mean is that you funded so many different projects over the years. Anything that stands out?

MIMI HAAS: I think the Brice Marden stands out because we—now I don't really see him, but we were pretty close friends, even. I just saw—his daughter came to the Bruce Nauman opening with him, and I've known them since they were, you know, much younger girls so that was important. The Sigmar Polke show in New York was really the first show of his work there, and so that was important. I did like the Ai Weiwei show. [00:16:05] I don't think that—I'm not sure what stands out, if you— I just was happy to be able to do—be able to help underwrite those exhibitions.

MIJA RIEDEL: You were also involved—you were on the board of trustees at the Dia Center for the Arts in the mid-'90s—

MIMI HAAS: For a few years.

MIJA RIEDEL: —is that right? For the—

MIMI HAAS: The early '90s, so.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. Were you involved in the expansion to Dia:Beacon?

MIMI HAAS: No. That was after. But that's—I think I'm going to see Michael Govan tonight. So that was where I—that was when he just started. It was Frances Bowes who got me on the Dia board. That was only for about three or four years.

MIJA RIEDEL: And why was that? Just not enough time to do it all, or did you shift from that to MoMA then, or

were you already doing MoMA?

MIMI HAAS: Sort of shifted to MoMA, and then—Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. I know we have about 20 minutes left, so I do want to shift and talk about the collection. You know, some collectors set out to build very specific collections. I talked to Virginia Wright last year, Ginny Wright, and she wanted to build a specific collection for the Seattle Art Museum. Barney Ebsworth wanted to build an A-list of American modernism.

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: Is there a philosophy or a focus that has guided your collection?

MIMI HAAS: No, and that—you know, what's so sad is that—Edmund de Waal was here, I think earlier—he was here again a few weeks ago, but he was at my house earlier this year. And he had the perfect—he had a two-word description for my collection that was absolutely perfect, and I forgot it.

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.] [00:18:00]

MIMI HAAS: When he was here recently, I asked him if he could remember it, but he couldn't, either. And it was two words. Because in some ways, it's Minimalist.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yes, absolutely.

MIMI HAAS: But I'd like to think there's something intellectual about it. But no, there is not a philosophy behind it. It is what—and when Peter was alive, he was part of the process. And you know, the one or two things that we bought, especially early on, that he wasn't excited about, he was always right. I say that he got a good eye from his mother. But—I don't know, I think there's a quietness and a calmness to a lot of the art that we acquire. A lot of it is—I mean, we have the Beuys—a lot of it is difficult, and nobody would probably say it's beautiful. There's definitely no philosophy, and yet Gary Garrels or Edmund de Waal or Neal Benezra or Glenn Lowry would tell you that somehow it does hold together and does appear as if there's a point of view. There's—we certainly didn't feel that we had to go with certain artists. It just is really what appealed. And then, of course, when you show, I guess, gallerists that you're interested in a certain artist, they'll come back to you when they have more. It's really all I can say, is maybe because life is so—my life is so intense and crazy that I look to the art to sort of be more calming. We have one red de Kooning downstairs from the '70s that has a lot of color, and that was where—there's a Baselitz in New York. My husband liked a lot of—he liked a lot of color. But I would say that most of the other art is pretty muted. Not the Richter when you walk in, but if you're thinking of Ryman, or even Brice Marden—even the Sigmar Polkes that we have are pretty muted colors.

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you think that there's a thread of social commentary that runs through the collection?

MIMI HAAS: No.

MIJA RIEDEL: No, okay.

MIMI HAAS: I don't.

MIJA RIEDEL: You don't.

MIMI HAAS: I really don't.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. Do you think of Beuys as being a foundation for the collection?

MIMI HAAS: No. Beuys was introduced to us—it was interesting. It was Anthony d'Offay's gallery in London. That was another—Jack Lane introduced us to Anthony d'Offay. So that had to be, probably, sometime in '86. So I think Beuys died in '88 [1986]. And Matthew Marks was a young [laughs] I don't know, intern or whatever, working at Anthony d'Offay's in London. And I remember the two of them—we sat down and looked at Joseph Beuys's watercolors. And I just fell in love with them, and I wanted to have some badly. I can't remember how long it took before we actually acquired the series of seven or nine watercolors by Beuys that actually—I'm blocking on his name. The Condé Nast family, what's the—he just died recently. It'll come to me [S.I. Newhouse]. [00:22:45]

MIJA RIEDEL: That's what we can add when we get the transcript.

MIMI HAAS: He was selling these Beuys drawings as—or watercolors—as a collection. So we bought all of them. And then we were introduced to—I have to—I'm interrupting for a minute.

MIJA RIEDEL: Yeah.

MIMI HAAS: At four o'clock, I have to start working with my assistant, Ginger. If you want, although—I think, actually, we have this series of Joseph Beuys. It's one piece of art, but it's many framed pieces. It's called the *Greta Garbo* series.

MIJA RIEDEL: Oh, yes, yes.

MIMI HAAS: And that is probably not a difficult piece of work, but it—we have to keep it—it's Cecil Beaton photographs of Greta Garbo, but most of them are Xerox copies of the Cecil Beaton photographs. Two of them—one when she's young and one when she's old—are actual photographs, but it's so delicate that we actually keep it covered, because this—the shades in the dining room don't keep enough light off of it. So it's probably covered right now. But—is he the foundation of the collection? No, it's much more that I was enamored of his watercolors, and then we were shown the *Greta Garbo* series and fell in love with it.

The truth is that Jack Lane and Gary Garrels and Peter and I did do a Joseph Beuys pilgrimage in Germany one year after an SFMOMA—it must have been a Director's Circle trip. We went to every place that he had: where he was born, where he had lived, where he had worked, where there were collections of his work. So we did go intensively into him, and yet I definitely would not say that he's the foundation of the—I don't think there is a foundation of the collection, to be honest.

MIJA RIEDEL: Except, perhaps, maybe Minimalism? The Rymans, the Mardens.

MIMI HAAS: There is—there's definitely—Gary Garrels nicely says that there is an intellectual aspect of it, because most of the art is not straightforward. It wouldn't be—the person off the street would not come in and say, "Oh, this is beautiful." They'd come in and say they really aren't sure that—what—

MIJA RIEDEL: —what they're looking at, yes.

MIMI HAAS: —what this is. So it's definitely not self-evident. But somehow, it is art that appealed to Peter and me, and now appeals to me. It's much more of a—even though I say [laughs] hopefully, it's intellectual—there is something that speaks to me. And I wouldn't even say emotionally, but something that appeals to me, to make me pleased to look at those works of art. [00:26:41]

MIJA RIEDEL: Would you say they invite—

MIMI HAAS: —contemplation?

MIJA RIEDEL: --reflection? Contemplation. Yeah.

MIMI HAAS: I would laugh and say, "I don't have time to contemplate."

MIJA RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MIMI HAAS: Which is really true. But I would say that somehow, they still do speak to me.

And I wouldn't say that they move my heart or that they bring out certain emotions, but I think I would honestly use the fact of sort of calming, which I always need desperately. [Laughs.]

MIJA RIEDEL: Did you commission—have you commissioned any works?

MIMI HAAS: We have a Richard Long sculpture piece in Woodside that we commissioned. We have a Sol LeWitt wall drawing in the cabana in Woodside that he had done, I think it was—oh, my God, no—it was either in Naples or Turin, that had been up in an exhibition, but nowhere else that he did. We were commissioning him, and he did a lot of sample drawings for us. [00:28:02]

We have a curved, circular entryway in the house there, and we wanted him to do a piece there, but we never could agree. So in the end, we had this beautiful piece installed. And again, the cabana has curved [walls. -MH]

Did we ever commission anything? So the Richard Serra at Woodside was commissioned. Although, you know, with Richard, he says, "This is what"—you know, we wanted him to do something, but he said—that's how our friendship started, so that was a long time ago. Have we commissioned other pieces? Those are the two that come to mind.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. Do you have plans for particular pieces that you're able to discuss?

MIMI HAAS: I'd rather not.

MIJA RIEDEL: Fair enough.

MIMI HAAS: I mean, most—as you know, I'd say most are going to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art because they've been pledged by—either when they were fractional pieces, when you could do fractional and promised [gifts]—now, there are many, many—there are pieces that we purchased with the understanding that they would go to the museum. There are a few pieces in my New York apartment that are pledged to the Museum of Modern Art because they were purchased that way. So—but I would say that mostly, they're going to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

MIJA RIEDEL: I know we're coming up on four, so just a few final questions. Have you seen any unexpected connections emerge among the pieces in your collection over time?

MIMI HAAS: Yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Is that—they just—I can show you one, on the way out. [00:30:01]

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. Anything you'd like to mention?

MIMI HAAS: Much more visual—There is a—there are two examples that I can show you.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. Maybe we can mention them, and add the artists later when we get the transcript. [One example: Luc Tuymans *Fortune*, Joseph Beuys *Tierfrau*, and Bruce Nauman *Untitled -MR*] What would you say have been the most significant influences on the collection? Has it been the relationships with the artists or something else?

MIMI HAAS: I think the most—yes. The friendships with the artists were—having the acquaintance of the artist. And then, for sure, my friendship with either the museum directors at New York or San Francisco, or the curators at those—I've—we've never had an [advisor] or anyone doing anything for us. But people who—even friends who know our collection might say they saw something, and that would be an influence. But I think that actually knowing Sigmar Polke—I sat next to him many times, and we visited his studio—having him here, that made us want to collect more of his art. The same with Bob Ryman and Brice Marden. [00:32:00]

Sol LeWitt, I've had dinner with—I mean, we only have that piece, although I have one of the sample drawings, but we used to compare books. I think knowing the artists and just, as I said, the directors, the curators, gallerists. Basically, it's—to be honest, it may not look like it here [laughs], but I'm not really an acquisitive person. I'm not; I'm not. I don't have a mania or a sickness of—someone I sat next to the other night said, you know, it's a sickness, that he collects and collects and collects. That's not what—I need to have a connection with a piece of art. I need to, sometimes, have a connection with the artist. It needs to appeal to me in a certain way. But I'm not—I never was—I do a lot of gallery visits but not, oh, because today, I want to buy one piece or two pieces or three pieces. I can't bear, anymore, to go to the art fairs, because that's just not me. So I think I'm a little—there's certain—it's like I have this beautiful little [Michaël] Borremans in New York, and I did push hard that I wanted one of his—[laughs] a work of art by him. And so that happens sometimes. The Brice Marden calligraphy piece that we have downstairs in the hall, we did push for that. But often, it's more people coming to us. I say "us," but to me, now, with a work of art. I have bought pieces at the FOG art fair. [00:34:15] I've even bought pieces at Basel, but usually I knew about them beforehand. And now I haven't been to Basel for years. Basel—Basel, Switzerland. I haven't gone to Miami Basel since—13 years.

MIJA RIEDEL: It actually doesn't surprise me to hear you say that, because I've, you know, looked at the inventory of your collection, and I've looked at the different projects that you've funded with the museums, and you have funded *so many* events and retrospectives and performances. And I think that, given, you know, the—there's an amazing balance, I think, there. I think there could have been a much huger collection, but you do seem to have—there seems to be a real commitment to the philanthropic side of the art.

MIMI HAAS: Well, I think that would be very fair. Peter and I and—now, I have a hard time with collectors who are only adding to their collection and aren't as generous as they could be.

MIJA RIEDEL: Do you find that—

MIMI HAAS: Just leave it at that, yeah.

MIJA RIEDEL: Okay. [Laughs.] Do you find that is an increasing trend, or a decreasing trend, or it's stayed about the same?

MIMI HAAS: Probably it's stayed the same. You don't know why certain collectors don't understand that—even if they're promising their art to an institution and not their own private institution, you still would hope or wish that they would understand that you want the public to have the education and the chance to look at art or exhibitions or so on, and that you wish that they would be more philanthropic. [00:36:17]

MIJA RIEDEL: That point that you said, about education, made me think that is a unifying thread that I saw in the Mimi and Peter Haas Fund, this commitment to education—

MIMI HAAS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MIJA RIEDEL: —either through early childhood education or through art.

MIMI HAAS: Or public service, also. We're really committed to that, also. I think that would be another thread. [Assistant enters.] Hi.

MIJA RIEDEL: Three fifty-nine. Can I have one more minute?

[They laugh.] [Side conversation.]

Okay. So we've talked about the Beuys, in particular the watercolors. We've talked about the Rymans. The Mardens, to be sure, the Polkes. Anything else that is significant about the collection to you that has really either held up over time or become more significant recently? Any—or any final thoughts? [00:38:00]

MIMI HAAS: So we're doing some redecorating in the house at Woodside. God, I'm not going to remember his name. There is a photograph—oh, you have the—I have the list. What is the connection with the Frick Collection?

MIJA RIEDEL: It's a jointly funded project.

MIMI HAAS: That's interesting. So people ask me a lot, do I have a favorite piece? And the answer is definitely no. But I—okay. It's Jim Goldberg. I don't know what you can see from this.

MIJA RIEDEL: I saw his show at SFMOMA awhile ago, but yeah.

MIMI HAAS: It is—

MIJA RIEDEL: *Destiny's Shiny Bracelet.*

MIMI HAAS: Yeah. So he did this series of homeless youth in Los Angeles. And there's this—it's a huge photograph, but it's collaged pieces of this young couple in an embrace. It is so moving, and I have it at the top of the—actually, the back stairs in Woodside. And every time I walk up there, I just think, Oh, my gosh. It's so moving, because the girl's eyes—she's just completely lost. [00:40:03] Completely lost, and she—here she is in this embrace. This is really interesting. So I have lots more stories, but I'm afraid I don't have time.

MIJA RIEDEL: Well, thank you for this time. I'm glad we could make it work.

MIMI HAAS: Well, thank you.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]