San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
75th Anniversary
Oral History Project

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SFMOMA 75th Anniversary

INGE-LISE ECKMANN LANE

SFMOMA Staff, 1975-1996

Chief Conservator, Paper, 1975-1983
Co-Director, Conservation, 1983-1986
Chief Conservator, 1986-1991
Elise S. Haas Deputy Director For Curatorial Affairs,1989-1991
Deputy Director For Administration, 1991-1992
Deputy Director, 1992-1995
Director Of Curatorial Affairs, 1995-1996

[NOTE: This transcript has been substantially edited by the narrator and does not closely match the original recording]

Interviews conducted by
Lisa Rubens and Richard Cándida Smith, ROHO; Jill Sterrett and Peter Samis, SFMOMA
in 2007

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Interview #1: February 20, 2007
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01-00:00:00
Rubens: Well, it's so nice to finally meet you.

01-00:00:09
Eckmann Lane: Well, thank you, Lisa. I really think it's great that you came out to Dallas to spend the time with us here, and not just catching us on the run in San Francisco some afternoon.

Rubens: Were you a little shocked when you came to Texas. I mean, did you ever expect you would be in Texas?

01-00:01:50
Eckmann Lane: Over the course of my life, I've had a quite a few expatriate Texan friends. I've always had a real soft spot for Texans. So I was basically optimistic. But did I ever think I'd be living in Dallas, Texas? No. I'm a New Yorker. It was a surprise to me that I ended up in San Francisco. So it was an even greater surprise that I ended up in Dallas, Texas.

Rubens: Well, let's hear the story. I don't know where you were born.

01-00:02:25
Eckmann Lane: I grew up on Long Island. I went to school in New England, at Bennington College. I went to graduate school at the Cooperstown Graduate Program in Cooperstown, New York, which was one of the very first conservation graduate programs in the United States, founded by Sheldon and Caroline Keck and a number of other highly respected conservators. That graduate program started in 1970. I was in the second class of students, starting in 1971, directly after I graduated from Bennington. After two years in the graduate program, one had an internship with a conservator. After Cooperstown I had a summer internship in New York at the Museum of Modern Art. Then I was off to San Francisco, in September of '73.

Rubens: That was your second internship?

01-00:03:43
Eckmann Lane: That was really my formal internship year, from the Cooperstown Graduate Program. It was set up for me primarily by Caroline Keck, who was a friend and professionally associated with Elise Haas. Sheldon and Caroline had taken care of a number of the Haas's paintings. I think the fact that there was a conservation center established at the SFMA was very much because of Caroline Keck and her friendship with Elise Haas. The Kecks inspired Mrs. Haas's interest in conservation. I think Mrs. Haas believed that it was important; but the Kecks encouraged her to establish one of the first professional conservation centers in the West. There was very little art conservation west of Chicago, except at the L.A. County Museum at that time, the late sixties and early seventies. Sheldon and Caroline encouraged Elise to

invest in that the conservation department at SFMA, and she did. She set up the beginnings of what has now become, really, one of the finest conservation centers in the country.

Rubens: At the San Francisco—

01-00:05:17
Eckmann Lane: At the Veterans War Memorial; the SFMA offices were on the third floor. The conservation department was exclusively for paintings conservation at that point. It was in the northwest corner of the third floor of the Veterans War Memorial Building. There were other museum offices and there was also the art school that was a part of the museum program. There weren't galleries yet on the third floor of the museum, only staff offices and the school and the conservation department.

Rubens: Well, a pretty auspicious start. Let me back you up just a little bit, in terms of just your family background. You're in Long Island. Did you come to museums very much?

01-00:06:15
Eckmann Lane: All the time. My father was a commercial artist and illustrator, working in medical publishing. I was a regular visitor to the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan. I think from the time that I was about twelve or thirteen, my parents would permit me to go to Manhattan on my own and visit museums on a Saturday or Sunday. So yes, I was destined to be a museum girl. Before getting involved with conservation, I had my first internship at the Museum of Modern Art in the winter of 1970, where I worked in the Department of Public Information, the more passive precursor to Public Relations and Marketing. If you called the Museum with a question, the Public Information Department would try to answer it for you. [laughter] That's where I served my first volunteer tour at a museum.

Rubens: What do you mean by passive, in this case?

01-00:07:24
Eckmann Lane: Well, the idea of public information, that information was available if the public sought it out.

Rubens: You were spinning.

01-00:07:30
Eckmann Lane: Well, museums weren't really reaching out to the public at that time.

Rubens: They were coming to you.

01-00:07:36
Eckmann Lane: I think the other curious coincidence for me was, in that year, the winter of 1970, the MoMA mounted a special exhibition of the Four Americans in Paris, which was the Stein Collection. One of my duties at MoMA was

sending out press packages to the other venues, one of which was SFMA. The exhibition included the great Matisse painting that had become a part of the Elise Haas collection and later the SFMOMA collection. So in my first museum gig, I was introduced to collections that changed my life. Yes, I think I was destined to be a museum girl, from the time I was a teenager.

01-00:08:29
Rubens: And Bennington?

01-00:08:32
Eckmann Lane: I went to Bennington and studied painting, literature, and art history.

Rubens: Did you aspire, in part, to be a painter?

01-00:08:42
Eckmann Lane: I loved it. I spent my junior year abroad in Florence, Italy, and was inspired by art and conservation. Not involved in conservation in any hands-on way, but by visiting conservation studios. I already had the idea then that conservation would be for me. Then the following year, when I served the internship at the MoMA in the Public Information Department, I used to visit the conservators. Jean Volkmer and Tosca Zagni, who were the conservators at the MoMA. They convinced me that I should go to graduate school if I was serious about conservation. I applied to graduate school and continued on, directly from Bennington to the Cooperstown graduate school, and studied with Sheldon and Caroline Keck.

Rubens: What attracted you to conservation? What was it about it?

01-00:09:37
Eckmann Lane: I thought it was the perfect combination of science and art. Both those things interested me. I suppose it was about getting close to the art and really getting to know it. When I saw people engaged in conservation work, I thought, they get to spend time with these paintings or sculptures or drawings, and they get to know them more intimately than anyone has since the artist. Then they get to touch them, and they understand how they are made and have the opportunity to save them. It has many attractive attributes, you know, for a person who loves art too much.

Rubens: Did your mother work, by the way?

01-00:10:30
Eckmann Lane: My mother actually still practices tax preparation and accounting.

Rubens: So a detail person.

01-00:10:41
Eckmann Lane: Yes, she works at a high level with the other side of the brain.

Rubens: Anything more to say about Bennington?

01-00:10:49
Eckmann Lane: It was a great opportunity to be close to contemporary art. I think that that's where I really established my interest and dedication to that, rather than art-historical, earlier paintings. The painting faculty were all practicing artists. Among other things, we had a show in 1970, in the gallery at Bennington, which is called the Carriage Barn. It was an exhibition of Sol LeWitt. We students executed his wall drawings. We also had a show of Frank Stella's *Protractor* paintings in the late sixties. Bennington was connected to artists and art and that's why I became dedicated to modern and contemporary art.

Rubens: So from the beginning, you were. That is interesting to me.

01-00:11:49
Eckmann Lane: Yes, right. Then having that opportunity at the MoMA, I became more involved with contemporary art, and it just seemed like a fit for me. I like working with artists. Sometimes it can be difficult, as a conservator, to resolve questions with the artist; but for the most part, we speak the same language as the artist, in terms of materials and fabrication and what the artist is trying to achieve visually. So our work bridges that world between art history and the physical object.

Rubens: Right. I was going to say the practice of art making. In those early days, did you continue to paint?

01-00:12:42
Eckmann Lane: I've always played around with it. But I'm not an artist, in that sense; I'm a conservator.

Rubens: Now, you're saying—forgive me—the second class, you were in the second?

01-00:12:56
Eckmann Lane: Of the graduate program. The second year, yes.

Rubens: How many students were there?

01-00:13:00
Eckmann Lane: It is a three-year program and there were ten students in each class. There were twenty at the graduate program, and ten more in internships. So the first year I went, there were only twenty students total. There was no class out in the internship practice yet; it was really the very beginnings.

Rubens: And did those early classes constitute a cohort, in some of the same way that {John?} had the Williams school for—If you look back now. Well, let me put it this way.

01-00:13:40
Eckmann Lane: I think the graduates of each of the graduate programs have a certain connection, because it's such a small field. There are so few graduate programs in the country, and the entire field is small. Today there are

thousands of people; but thirty years ago, there were only a couple hundred conservators. It's still a very small field, when you think about it.

Rubens: And in that class, was it more men than women?

01-00:14:17
Eckmann Lane: Considerably more women than men. The field has always been attractive to women.

Rubens: Was the profession a woman's—

01-00:14:27
Eckmann Lane: Well, the profession has always had both men and women. But I think it's been attractive to women. And it hasn't been ever closed to women.

Rubens: This is about you. Should we just take just the quickest detail and say who the Kecks are? I think it would be—

01-00:14:50
Eckmann Lane: Well, I certainly owe them a huge debt. I think everybody in the field owes them a debt.

Rubens: How old were they, about, when you met them?

01-00:14:59
Eckmann Lane: It was in 1971, and Caroline Keck is ninety-nine right now. [Caroline Keck passed away in December 2007.] As she said to me in a letter this last year, "I'll be ninety-nine this year, damn it." [laughs] Sheldon and Caroline were in their sixties when I was in school.

[material deleted]

Rubens: Did they seem old to you at the time?

01-00:16:01
Eckmann Lane: Well, I suppose they did; I was only twenty years old at the time. Caroline had these long gray braids that she tied up, like an old-fashioned German girl, but she had so much vigor throughout her life.

Rubens: What was their background?

01-00:16:30
Eckmann Lane: Sheldon had gone to Harvard, and Caroline had gone to Vassar. They had both been involved with the early days of art history and conservation at the Fogg Art Museum. Sheldon had served in the war, and had served as a monuments man—to help retrieve art, after the war. Then they went to the Brooklyn Museum and started the conservation department. Caroline was also instrumental in starting the conservation department at the Museum of Modern Art. They were both great educators and practitioners, for their entire

careers. When I met them and worked with them, they had really just retired from museum practice—and were dedicating themselves full time to the Cooperstown graduate training program.

Rubens: At the Cooper?

01-00:17:33
Eckmann Lane: In Cooperstown, New York, where there is still a graduate program for museology, focused on history museums. The New York State Historical Association is based there; I believe the Rockefeller Foundation and the New York State Historical Association helped to fund the graduate programs. The Kecks moved up there as their "retirement home." Cooperstown was and still is a beautiful town.

Rubens: It's the Baseball Hall of Fame.

01-00:18:09
Eckmann Lane: It is that, and also just on the shore of Lake Otesaga. It's a beautiful town, with very historic houses, and just charming. So they'd moved up there to realize their dream of a proper training program for conservators. Sheldon had been involved in getting the graduate program started at NYU. But I think that the way it developed wasn't exactly what he had envisioned; it became more of an art historical program, with some conservation. The NYU program has since become a fine conservation graduate program, but this was back in the sixties. Sheldon wanted something that was more hands-on, where faculty could really teach not just art history and conservation science, but the actual practice of conservation. The Kecks established Cooperstown graduate program with the New York State University system. It was affiliated with the state college at Oneonta, and has since moved to Buffalo where it is part of the New York State University at Buffalo. Sheldon and Caroline Keck were significant forces in establishing conservation as a profession not only in the United States but internationally. They helped bring conservation science and art history into the practice of conservation.

Rubens: I actually am shocked that it's so late.

01-00:19:48
Eckmann Lane: Conservation had been seen more as a craft, something that an artist or a craftsman would just teach themselves to do, or possibly learn by apprenticeship.

Rubens: Not part of the antique world, or restoration, or—

01-00:20:14
Eckmann Lane: Well, that's where the difference lies, that the traditions of restoration have been more about improving the appearance of something, rather than stabilizing it. Cleaning it, possibly, and retouching it, and trying to conceal the effects of age. Conservation's emphasis is preservation of the original.

Preserving the original, first and foremost, and repairing damages and stabilizing instabilities. There is a cosmetic element, of course, bringing it back, hopefully, closer to the original intent of the artist. But restoration was always first and foremost about improving the appearance, and much of that in a subjective way. When working with visual art appearance is primary, but the traditions of restoration have a different emphasis. The Kecks were among the early group of professionals in this country who wanted to integrate an understanding of the properties of materials, how they age and why they deteriorate. Understanding the structure of an artwork and its history, in order to stabilize and preserve it, and also doing what is in the best interest of the artwork, in terms of cleaning and to bring it closer to its original appearance. In our country, many treatments have come from the European traditions. They were a little more invested in a culture of preservation in Europe, having recognized the value of cultural heritage. Also, some conservation practices have come from Asia, especially in paper conservation. The traditions of paintings on paper, scroll paintings, screens, have a long tradition of preservation. I think professional conservation wasn't established until the postwar era in the United States, because at that moment we began to think, "We have a cultural heritage worth preserving."

Rubens: When you were trained, were you working on pieces that were—My image would be pre-1900. I mean, I couldn't think that they would be—

01-00:23:11
Eckmann Lane: Primarily. At Cooperstown, we had the opportunity to work on historical objects. Most objects dated from the nineteenth century. That's where the greater body of work is. Most works came from smaller historical associations and were things that weren't necessarily very high value but [presented] interesting problems. I did have one extraordinary experience when a family friend brought a William Glackens painting for me to treat while I was still in school. Now I look back and I am amazed that he entrusted this painting to my care, because it was in very poor condition. It was really quite a challenge. The treatment was a success, with Caroline's close guidance.

Rubens: He brought it to you at school, as a student of—

01-00:23:57
Eckmann Lane: He did, yes. So that was a twentieth-century painting. But as students we did work more on nineteenth-century objects.

Rubens: Had something changed in both the technical/scientific/chemical capacity to restore art? And at the same time, were the paints that painters were using less stable materials than what had been used?

01-00:24:33
Eckmann Lane: There was change in materials, certainly. We didn't have much information on contemporary artist's material in the 1970s. People are only now researching twentieth-century art materials. Paints that came into use in the

postwar era, the acrylics and the commercial paints, they were new as art materials. Artists have always experimented, but in earlier centuries painters typically used more traditional materials. Until recently people hadn't even imagined that conservation of twentieth-century art would be needed until well into the future. Most people don't realize that paintings—and I say paintings just as a general term—but that most artworks that are a hundred years old have been treated. It's usually not apparent when you go to a museum and look at old master paintings, that they've often had many treatments over the years. But most of them have. It's a rare thing if they haven't. So conservation of modern and contemporary art was a brand new field, and that interested me.

Rubens: Now, I was going to look through my materials, but I remember distinctly that some of the letters that were written to San Francisco were on the New York Historical Society's—

01-00:26:19
Eckmann Lane: Right.

Rubens: So now you explained it. You explained that in your—

01-00:26:22
Eckmann Lane: That was the connection with Cooperstown.

Rubens: Right. So here, "The conservation of historic and artistic works, Cooperstown graduate programs." That's one thing. Oh, but it says at the bottom, "New York State Historical Association."

01-00:26:43
Eckmann Lane: Right. They were a supporter, funder, and our neighbor.

Rubens: I don't mean this as personally as this sounds. I may have confused the program. Did you have to pay to go to graduate school? There's a couple of programs where if you get in, they pay you. Or you don't pay.

01-00:27:06
Eckmann Lane: There was a modest tuition, but in those early days, the school was fortunate enough to secure a number of grants. A number of us had tuition grants, some from the Rockefeller Foundation, some from the NEA. And so it was really—

Rubens: Nominal?

01-00:27:30
Eckmann Lane: It was modest. I think for the students today, that's less of a possibility, and they are required to cover their tuition.

Rubens: Let me just be clear. Was it called Cooper-Hewitt?

01-00:27:42
Eckmann Lane: No. Cooperstown Graduate Program.

Rubens: Cooperstown. I conflated it with another program. There's a program in New York City.

01-00:27:50
Eckmann Lane: Yes, there's the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, which is the Smithsonian Museum of Design. The Conservation Graduate Program was named for its home in Cooperstown, New York.

Rubens: Before we get you to San Francisco, you said you worked in the public information, public affairs at MoMA. Did you work in conservation, also?

01-00:28:17
Eckmann Lane: I had a short internship at MoMA painting conservation department in '73.

Rubens: The works that you were working on had to have been pretty modern, right?

01-00:28:34
Eckmann Lane: It was a nice opportunity, after two years of hands-on work in graduate school, to work with the conservators and with the collection at MoMA. It was a new body of work for me. I hadn't really seen the problems MoMA faced. I got to help out with exhibitions, as well as collection problems, and I was introduced to new questions.

Rubens: What would be an exhibition problem? What's an example of something like that?

01-00:29:09
Eckmann Lane: Well, just the fact that artists were making installations with living things, plants and animals. There was one that had a live mouse in it. This idea of art being made of something completely unexpected changed my perspective.

Rubens: Can you remember what that was?

01-00:29:33
Eckmann Lane: I can't recall.

Rubens: Yes. Now, it seemed to me—I just was thumbing through this to get my dates straight—that in fact, the Kecks were communicating with the San Francisco Museum of Art, and then it became the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, once Hopkins was here.

01-00:30:03
Eckmann Lane: It was later, yes.

Rubens: But then they had been communicating with them before you were—

01-00:30:11
Eckmann Lane: Yes. Tony Rockwell, who was the conservator who started the department at S. F. was not a Cooperstown student. He had been a student of Sheldon and Caroline, in their practice in Brooklyn. The Kecks worked with Elise Haas and with the museum, which was very much her baby at that time.

Rubens: Her, meaning Haas?

01-00:30:44
Eckmann Lane: Yes. They helped her and the museum establish the conservation center, and set it up with Tony Rockwell as the first conservator. Tony was the conservation person I came to work with. One student from the first Cooperstown class, Anne Waser, had been there prior to my coming there during the year of 1972, ’73. She had no intention of staying on. Her family was living in Cooperstown and loved it there. So she, I think, very much had it in her mind to be there for one year. I think Sheldon and Caroline had hoped that it might be a fit for me, and that I might stay on and help develop that conservation department. Although I’d never been to California and I really had no idea, it was a fit. So, they were right. They figured I would be a good candidate and that San Francisco would suit me, and it did.

Rubens: ’72 is the earliest I see actual correspondence and then I have a letter of ’73. “I wish to know,” says Keck, “what is your disposition regarding Inge-Lise’s internship next year?” And I love, she said, “I’d rather discuss this in person. But we have to make replies to pressures from other institutions.”

01-00:32:57
Eckmann Lane: Caroline thought of her students like her little chicks.

Rubens: So it worked out. Why don’t you describe what it was like for you when you came. Were your parents okay about this, too? I mean, I would think this would—

01-00:33:14
Eckmann Lane: Yes, they were. They were. I don’t think that my parents imagined that I would stay there for twenty-five years. [laughs] They were okay with it as an idea, as a concept. But year after year, it just suited my little hippie heart. I liked it.

Rubens: Where’d you live? How did you even find a place to live?

01-00:33:51
Eckmann Lane: In 1973 I had an apartment in Bernal Heights. It cost $125 a month. It had a great view of the entire downtown of San Francisco, which looked nothing like San Francisco today. I used to ride my bicycle up through the Mission to the Civic Center; carry my bicycle up three flights of stairs, lock it to the stairwell outside the conservation lab, and go to work. [laughs]

Rubens: What was Rockwell like as a—

01-00:34:30
Eckmann Lane: Tony, he was terrific. He's *such* a wonderful painting conservator. And he still works at the Fine Arts Museums. You might want to talk with him. He lives up in Sonoma, but he does work at the Fine Arts Museums, along with Carl Grimm, who was also an intern conservator with us at SFMOMA in the late 1970s.

Rubens: At the de Young.

01-00:34:57
Eckmann Lane: Out at the de Young, yes. At any rate, Tony was, *is*, a terrific practitioner. He was a great mentor. He had a natural affinity for contemporary art. I think that he really set a wonderful standard there that was a very, very sound beginning for the conservation department. I don't think it was his desire to manage a staff and run a department in the museum. I think his gifts are conservation treatment, taking care of a collection, and working with artists. In all those things, he's extraordinary. I think when Caroline was looking for other conservators to populate the Elise S. Haas Conservation Department, she was looking for someone who might be willing to take on, to shoulder the responsibility of managing the effort.

Rubens: And how old was he, about?

01-00:36:15
Eckmann Lane: I'd say Tony would've probably been in his thirties then.

Rubens: Now, was he full-time then?

01-00:36:36
Eckmann Lane: Not in the traditional sense.

Rubens: Were you?

01-00:36:39
Eckmann Lane: The first year I was. [pause] I don't know exactly what Tony's arrangement was. But he had some flexibility. He's an independent spirit, and I think that's important to him.

Rubens: So you are there September '73.

01-00:37:03
Eckmann Lane: I was there, yes, for a year, under an internship. The arrangement with the museum was for the conservation department to be self-sufficient and self-supporting. The museum had the idea that through providing services to other museums and private clients, that there'd be enough revenue to support the conservation department. So we had a fairly brisk outside practice going on. And it actually functioned. But there's a cost to that, which is that the museum's work had to be scheduled around the business. I think that that may have been how the Kecks persuaded Elise Haas to establish the department, as

a self-sufficient enterprise. At that time several conservation departments were set up as regional centers, and there was this notion that the museum would be taken care of, because the business would flourish and that a conservation department could take care of the museum's needs. Of course, if you don't have many exhibitions or collection growth, that may be realistic. But it's not realistic if you have an active program and a growing collection.

Rubens: And Hopkins is going to come in within a year of you being there?

01-00:38:40

Eckmann Lane: Yes, he came in in '74, in the first year when I was there. The museum always had an active program, so the conservation department was a little bit of trying to rob Peter to pay Paul, in order to juggle our obligations. So we brought in more conservators to do more work. But there were still questions; if you only have so much space, you have responsibilities to your collection and responsibilities to your trustees, and then there are the growing collections. It's not an easy balance and it's not an easy mix, but it took a long time for the museum to sort that out. The SFMOMA, like most every museum, suffered from financial limitations. Having a conservation center with several conservators was not something that the museum could afford as a part of its operating budget. I always understood that. It never bothered me that we had an obligation to earn income through outside work. It was just a question of "How do you accomplish everything?" And "How do you do the highest quality work?" And "How do you take care of your collections?" And "How do you take care of your exhibitions?" And "How do you manage a successful conservation center?"

But somehow, we managed. We had a terrific staff. We had interns coming from the graduate school almost every year. We gave them, I think, a good opportunity, because they would see a lot of different problems, they'd get to work on a number of objects. There were some traditional works coming in to the studio from the outside business; there were art works coming from the exhibitions. It was an invigorating hands-on learning experience. So these young conservators, some still in graduate school, had an experience similar to working in a hospital as a resident and working with many different types of objects, many different types of treatments, and several colleagues, rather than just one conservator. Most museums would have had just one conservator. And in that situation—you have one individual who may be very good, but they won't have as much breadth of experience, because they will be working on their own. We had a team of people and when we'd be faced with some modern problem that no one had ever dealt with before, we'd have several of us brainstorming together. That's what made it exciting and productive. I think that the conservation department at SFMOMA has been, for nearly forty years now, one of the great places for conservation treatments of modern and contemporary works.

Rubens: I think that's a little-known story. I don't think that's a story that's promoted about this.

01-00:42:00
Eckmann Lane: Yes, and I think a lot of that came about because it was set up as a place that had several people working there. It was the obligation of having this outside enterprise that led to a bigger conservation center than SFMOMA would have had if it had just hired a conservator to care for its program. That has then over the years, evolved into what it is now, which is extraordinary.

Rubens: How many {were in there?}? I should know, but I don't.

01-00:42:36
Eckmann Lane: I don't know the exact staff size. But there's paper, paintings, photography, and sculpture conservation. There's a lot of depth there. Most museums this size have one or two conservators.

Rubens: So let me just verify these dates then. So '75 becomes an actual job, not an internship?

01-00:42:56
Eckmann Lane: Right.

Rubens: And you're there, this says, to '82, you are a conservator. Would that have been your title?

01-00:43:07
Eckmann Lane: I can't remember. There were a few title changes.

Rubens: They say, "Verify the dates," because there's a '91 hiatus. You become chief conservator in '86.

01-00:43:17
Eckmann Lane: In '86, Yes, I become chief conservator. In '89, I become deputy director for curatorial affairs. And chief conservator. The difficulty of balancing both of those, you know, became clear fairly quickly.

I was conservator and then chief conservator of contemporary painting and paper in the late seventies. For a period of time, my colleague Jim Bernstein and I co-directed the conservation department as a team, because the administration of the department, and the staff, which was several people, was an obligation we thought we might share. That is a complicated and not very workable situation. But yes, in '86 I became chief conservator and head of the conservation department. Then in '89, when Graham Beal stepped down as chief curator, I became the Elise S. Haas deputy director for curatorial affairs and retained my responsibility as chief conservator until 1991.

Rubens: Right. So I want to go back and ask you a little bit about the business end. Did that arrangement come to an end, where you were not bringing in—

01-00:45:10
Eckmann Lane: No, it didn't come to an end until more recently.

Rubens: I'm sorry, now I am turning these pages.

01-00:45:16
Eckmann Lane: Jill Sterrett can give you the exact date. The outside practice didn't really come to an end until the early nineties.

Rubens: So all the time—

01-00:45:34
Eckmann Lane: At the time that I was in charge of the conservation department and working actively in the department, we had both an obligation to an earned-income component, through providing services to other museums and private collectors, and our commitment to the museum. In the late eighties—after Jack came and the program really grew—we had more curatorial program. Prior to that, we didn't have departments of architecture and design, we didn't have the media arts department, and, aside from photography, we didn't have very large collections. With this growth it gradually became apparent that it wasn't realistic for the conservation department to operate an outside enterprise.

Rubens: I was just trying to find something here, where I had not quite understood that. Well, firstly, they had a $7,000 stipend. Not too high a price for the salary. I don't think we need to really go—

01-00:46:43
Eckmann Lane: It looked good.

Rubens: I bet it did. Sure.

01-00:46:45
Rubens: Here are a couple of the names. This is May '75. {Pauline Moore?}.

01-00:46:52
Eckmann Lane: She served SFMOMA for many, many years, mostly in a part-time capacity.

Rubens: Then there was Maurice?

01-00:47:03
Eckmann Lane: Yes, Mauritz Shauer. He was not a conservator, but a technician, who worked under Tony Rockwell from the very first days of the conservation department, primarily preparing material, stretching canvases and framing.

Rubens: And then there's {Nancy Morrison?}.

01-00:47:21
Eckmann Lane: Nancy was the conservation department administrative assistant for many years. That was essential, because we were dealing with outside clients and

other museums, as well as the museum. Of course, in those days, we didn't have computers. Written reports and photographic documentation of the conservation process is essential. So there was a fair amount of documentation.

Rubens: Here's what I was looking for. This is a letter from Caroline Keck that says, in '75, "In the past few years, no one who has worked here—" Frankly, I'm not sure—

01-00:48:36
Eckmann Lane: This is a letter to Caroline?

Rubens: Must be. Yes. There it is. That's right. That's right. "Has cared for the commission system, since it places the conservator in a feast or famine situation, completely dependent—"

01-00:48:50
Eckmann Lane: Initially that was the pay arrangement. We weren't on regular salary. This was another way the museum could manage the expense of conservation. We were not on regular salary, nor did we receive benefits. We were paid on commission, for the outside work we accomplished.

Rubens: It wasn't the ideal, yes.

01-00:49:31
Eckmann Lane: The conservation staff was trying to integrate the department into the museum program. Our ambition was that conservation should become a regular part of a museum's program, and the staff should be an integral part of the museum staff.

Rubens: Was Henry pushing that, as well?

01-00:50:00
Eckmann Lane: Henry, I think, was happy that we had a good group of conservators. We provided good services. We were independent. And we weren't costing the museum a lot.

Rubens: This was not where he was going to draw his line and—

01-00:50:22
Eckmann Lane: I think Henry inherited this. I mean, this was not set up under Henry's directorship. This was set up by Elise Haas, prior to Henry's arrival, and it had already been in place for a couple of years. Tony had come on when Jerry Nordland was director. It was not a unique situation that the museum was sold on this idea that conservation could be a self-sufficient enterprise. The benefit to the museum would be that for the overhead expense they would have a conservation effort. Much of the equipment was, I think, established with funding from grants, as well as Elise Haas's generosity—

Rubens: And then outright gifts from Haas?

Eckmann Lane: —outright gifts. The museum would have the benefit of conservation work on their collection and the salary of the employees would be covered by income. So it allowed for something to happen that wouldn't have happened otherwise.

Rubens: But are you saying you did do work for the de Young, even though there were—

01-00:51:59

Eckmann Lane: Well, we did provide services to the de Young Museum for a certain period of time, because there was actually a hiatus when there was not a conservator at the de Young. They had a modest painting conservation effort at the de Young for many years. Now, that's changed completely. When they had larger difficult paintings, they would bring them to the SFMOMA because we had more conservators. There was discussion, in the sixties, of a regional center. The idea as I understood it was that the San Francisco museum would have the painting regional center, and that the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, specifically the Legion of Honor, would have a paper conservation center. The Legion of Honor would take care of paper for the SFMOMA, because the SFMOMA didn't collect much in the way of prints, and the Legion had a significant print collection. SFMOMA would take care of some of the FAMSF painting needs, and we'd collaborate.

But in truth, it's not one museum, it's different museums with different funding. The regional conservation center was an idea that took hold in a number of places in the country. There still are a few regional centers. There's one down in San Diego, the Balboa Art Conservation Center. But to have them operate within a museum and also care for that museum is complicated. Conservation centers can work well with member museums that pay an annual fee for services. I think museums all over the country have looked for different ways to shoulder the responsibility of caring for their collections. It can be very expensive for a museum with extensive collections. For a period of time at SFMOMA, I think the balance of outside service and museum services worked. Until the museum outgrew it.

Rubens: Can you point to a time? Is that when it started to really—

01-00:54:20

Eckmann Lane: I think it began to really burst at the seams in the late eighties. The program was growing, the collection was growing. Then with Jack's directorship and the addition of more curatorial departments, I think that was really the moment when conservation had to become integrated into the program. Also, in my view, conservators should work together with their curatorial colleagues on program as well as damaged artwork. They need to be a part of planning for the care of the collections; they need to be a part of planning exhibitions.

And that's what has evolved at the SFMOMA. Certainly, forty years ago when the conservation center was established, the museum was very different.

Rubens: Were you working on photographs, as well?

01-00:55:32
Eckmann Lane: Only very little. The museum had a large photo collection; we did care for the collections. I wouldn't say we treated photography, other than its care. We were conservators of works on paper, and paintings. I'd always worked in the world between those two disciplines. I had studied both areas and had worked with a number of paper conservators, including {Roy Perkinson?} at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. I think conservators of contemporary art are well served to have to have a foot in a few different camps. It's difficult to work with one specific media because artists don't work that way. Contemporary artists don't put these limitation on their work.

[Begin Audio File 2 02-20-2007.mp3]

02-00:00:00
Rubens: I was saying, "Boy, you had so many duties". You were saying maybe if you'd had someone who was the point person, who you would have to supervise, but for the move, maybe that would've made it—

02-00:00:31
Eckmann Lane: Yes. Well, you know, hindsight is always more clear.

Rubens: But it must've been a very exciting time.

02-00:00:37
Eckmann Lane: It was a thrilling time. I worked very closely with our curators. I enjoyed that so much because I got into the museum field and into conservation because of my love for art. To work with John Caldwell, to work with Bob Riley, to work with Sandy Phillips—they were the curators with whom I worked very closely—and to work on our publications program, that was invigorating. I was learning new things all the time.

And working for Jack was a joy. He is a great museum director. He worked closely with the curators and with me on the program. He never wanted to lose his connection to the collections and program. I think the curators all felt that they had his ear, which was very, very important. The other thing that we did together, which I feel proud of, was develop the education curatorial department. Before Jack came, the education department was, like most museums at that time, a department that took the exhibition and collections, after they were planned, and developed interpretive programs around those things. Jack really had the vision to make the curatorial department include education. One of the curators hired under my direction was John Weber. John came on shortly before we opened the new museum, when we were still in the old museum building. He came to SFMOMA having been a contemporary art

curator. He looked at art as an artist, curator, and educator. He looked at curatorial programming and collection as his language. He created a new model for education at SFMOMA. He had the respect of his colleagues in curatorial. He was a great contributor.

Rubens: You found him in Portland?

02-00:03:11
Eckmann Lane: Bob Riley, I have to say, was the person who said to me, "Take a look at John Weber." So we sort of had a one-two punch. John Caldwell and Bob Riley and I worked together to recruit John. I think a lot of collection curators or exhibition curators would shy away from the idea of being the education curator, thinking they're going to get farther away from the art. But in this case, John embraced it and it really worked. So that was a great moment.

Rubens: Didn't you take a little heat for not getting the position filled just immediately?

02-00:03:52
Eckmann Lane: [laughs] Who told you that? [laughs] I did. I reported to our chairman, who was probably getting the same heat from the board about filling the position. And it did take a while, because I resisted hiring until we found the right person.

Rubens: Your chairman?

02-00:04:02
Eckmann Lane: Our chairman, Brooks Walker.

Rubens: Of the board.

02-00:04:06
Eckmann Lane: Of the board, yes. After I married Jack, in 1992, I reported to Brooks Walker.

Rubens: Because of?

02-00:04:18
Eckmann Lane: So it wouldn't be a conflict.

Rubens: Conflict of interest.

02-00:04:22
Eckmann Lane: As deputy director, I reported to—Obviously, I worked closely with the staff and with Jack, but I was responsible to Brooks Walker. He did give me a little grief about taking some time to find the right hire for education curator. We had some interesting candidates. Believe me, it would've been easier to hire sooner. There were people who had possibilities, but they just didn't seem like the right fit. I was afraid that the collection curators would eat them alive, and that we'd end up with the same situation, where the education department was

on one side and the collection curators on another. I was hoping for something better, and I was lucky enough to find that with John. So that was a terrific outcome.

Rubens: Why would Brooks care? Just, "Let's have a program complete"?

02-00:05:13
Eckmann Lane: Well, because I think that during that interim period—and I can't even recall now how long that was, between {Roseanne Stringer's?} departure and John's hire—but I had to manage the education staff and program. Clearly, I didn't have the time to do it as well as I would wish. We had some wonderful staff in the education department, doing a good job. It was a vacancy in an important area. So it was missed.

Rubens: But then on he came.

02-00:05:51
Eckmann Lane: Then he was hired, and he did a fantastic job right from the beginning. So that was a big step. I think also, the nature of education in museums was changing at that time. We were doing programs with the broader community. We hosted an exhibition program, "Against Nature," contemporary Japanese art. We worked with the Asian community in San Francisco. We also hosted an exhibition of Chicano art, and established ties to the Chicano community. We had a much bigger expectation for the audience, and we were working with the limitations of the old museum. The idea of museum education was in transition. It was growing and changing. We were involving our collection curators directly in the education program planning, and also involving our education curator in the publications and in the exhibition planning, not just in the education component of the exhibition. It was a new world, and we had a great team to expand these horizons. I think for me, again, maybe the most gratifying thing was working with that team of curators.

Rubens: Did you also work with—There was a marketing company person that was brought in for the rollout.

02-00:07:36
Eckmann Lane: Gene {deVideo?}? Yes. I worked—

Rubens: Is that a man or a woman?

02-00:07:43
Eckmann Lane: A gentleman. This was the beginnings of marketing at the SFMOMA. It was not my area of responsibility. It came under the public relations marketing department, but I learned something about marketing. I also had to act as coach to encourage the curator to accept that this was going to be an integral part of their thinking about the community and the audience, and that reaching out to the audience was essential to them and to the success of their programs.

I tried to persuade them that marketing was not a bad concept, and that it was actually in their interest. We were learning together.

Rubens: And you're saying the person who was in charge of that was Gene {deVideo?}?

02-00:08:50
Eckmann Lane: Well, he was consultant to the museum, working with Chelsea Brown, director of marketing and public relations, and the marketing committee of the board. This was all new to museums. And that was only about fifteen years ago. Museums might have public relations, press relations. and back to my days—ancient history—in the MoMA public information department, staff to answer the phone and say, "I'll see if I can find out for you." By the time we opened the new SFMOMA it became much more proactive.

Rubens: Jack and I were talking today about the museum store and how that whole store transformed, and what a trendsetter, what a vanguard—

02-00:09:46
Eckmann Lane: Well, that was really a genius of—

Rubens: Don Fisher appointing, or making available—

02-00:09:52
Eckmann Lane: Irma Zigas, who had worked with the Banana Republic stores. A terrific buyer and retail genius. She really had a deep understanding of the retail world. Irma was great, and I loved working with her. The museum store, when I was deputy director for administration, was under my management. I worked with Irma towards developing the SFMOMA product line for the opening of the new museum.

Rubens: Now, did you experience any significant, in the point of just sort of institutional stumbling blocks as you started to make this rapid rise in your profile in the museum? Number one, the museum is changing dramatically. It's just a wholesale change that's taking place. I know that Jack speaks about Barbara Phillips having to take a lot of the—

02-00:10:51
Eckmann Lane: Barbara came on to be the deputy director at a time of significant transition and restructuring of the organization. Barbara took a lot of heat. Jack needed to change the staff structure. It had been a different, smaller organization and the staff structure had been loose. Barbara helped realize these changes. I'd say that's a tough job.

Rubens: So she is under the line of fire.

02-00:11:21
Eckmann Lane: Yes, she was. [pause] When I stepped in as deputy director for curatorial affairs, I already had the trust of my curatorial colleagues. They knew that I

had a dedication to the institution. I also didn't have my own particular curatorial priority, since I had not been responsible for a specific collection. It was easier for me to be evenhanded, because I wasn't promoting my own program. I think I worked well with my curatorial colleagues. In the areas of registration, conservation, and the research library, I was very experienced and managing acquisitions, exhibitions, and collections went pretty smoothly. I think when I took on the deputy director for administration in 1991, that was a bigger leap. Although I'd worked closely with staff in operations and finance and the museum store rental gallery, we were all growing and learning so much. That was at the time that Jack and I got personally involved, and we were married in the autumn of '92. It was a complicated scenario. It was not an easy situation. But [pause] we fell in love. And we're [chuckles] still in love today. Jack went to the board leadership and told them that we were personally involved and that we were both willing to leave the museum if that was the board's wish.

Rubens: Wow. That gives me chills.

02-00:13:15
Eckmann Lane: But the board didn't ask us to leave—although they needed to work out a more comfortable organizational structure. How my colleagues on the staff felt about it, I think it was all over the place. People had known me for many years. They knew me personally and professionally They might've wished that things were otherwise, but for the most part, I think we all made it work. The board asked me to take on additional responsibilities subsequent to my marriage to Jack. That's when I became the deputy director, rolling together major components of curatorial and quite a few of the responsibilities of administration. So the board must've come to terms with it somehow.

Rubens: Including getting a salary raise?

02-00:14:16
Eckmann Lane: I did receive a modest salary raise. I would say the bottom line was a savings to the museum. It was my wish and my desire to carry on and to open that new museum. And that's what I did. That's what I set out to do, and that's what I did. I learned a lot. But there were times when it was tough. I worked hard.

Rubens: I bet. And stayed one year after the opening.

02-00:14:51
Eckmann Lane: After we'd opened the museum. Opening the museum was a complete thrill. We got through the moving of the museum, the collections—

Rubens: Everything moved pretty well? Was there any—

02-00:15:01
Eckmann Lane: Really well, without mishap. Kent Roberts, Tina Garfinkel and the installation, registration, and curatorial staff all worked very, very hard. I

think we just wore ourselves out. But the collection didn't suffer. As a team we moved the office and collections and installed them.

Rubens: It's pretty impressive. Nothing stolen.

02-00:15:11
Eckmann Lane: Nothing lost or damaged in any significant way. *Everybody* worked so hard. Everybody worked harder than I think we imagined we could. We got that museum open, we got all those galleries installed. We had a major exhibition at the time of the opening, including works we had borrowed, as well as works from the collection and special installations in media arts. It was quite complex. We had hugely successful opening events, which I know you've heard about from others. Elaine McKeon was the mastermind behind the opening events. We had many wonderful parties and a *huge* response on our first public day. My staff in operations, they did a terrific job managing those crowds.

Rubens: That was your staff, that was your—

02-00:16:00
Eckmann Lane: General operations was under my responsibility. They did a terrific job. We had record-breaking crowds. Then I think we all sort of just about fell over after the opening events, because we had made it to the finish line. But of course, everyone knows, that's the starting line of the next thing.

Rubens: Did you think about that at all? Were you thinking about what you wanted to do next?

02-00:16:39
Eckmann Lane: You know, I had so many things I wanted to see come out right about that museum, I wasn't thinking yet of my future plans. I was so dedicated to that institution that I don't think I could think about anything else.

Rubens: You must've been exhausted.

02-00:16:57
Eckmann Lane: I was exhausted, actually. I had worn myself out. Over the course of that year, the first year in the museum, I realized that I was not functioning at my best and that it was probably time to say goodbye. But it was hard because I loved that place so much.

Rubens: I bet. And it had been your whole career, really.

02-00:17:19
Eckmann Lane: It had been my life since I was slightly more than a youngster. I had been twenty-two when I came to SFMOMA. Twenty-three years later, I stepped down, in January of '96.

Rubens: A year after the opening.

02-00:17:44
Eckmann Lane: A year after the opening of the museum. And yes, our world at SFMOMA had changed, and it was time for me to take a break.

Rubens: How much longer—see, I haven't gotten there with Jack—how much longer before—

02-00:17:55
Eckmann Lane: Jack stayed on until '97.

Rubens: I don't know the pivotal moment. There's some—

02-00:18:06
Eckmann Lane: He leaves—you know, I should know this—but around Memorial Day, I think, of '97. I think he stays on about fifteen months after I left.

Rubens: I just wanted to acknowledge, it must've been pretty tough for you when Caldwell died.

02-00:18:34
Eckmann Lane: Oh, it was devastating.

Rubens: This was out of the blue, right? Because he had a heart attack.

02-00:18:41
Eckmann Lane: He had a heart attack, and he was only fifty-one years old.

Rubens: He just wound up all these shows.

02-00:18:47
Eckmann Lane: He was such a big figure for all of us. A personal friend of Jack's for a long time, so for Jack, it was devastating. A great colleague and friend to me. The balance of working with him was perfect because he respected my opinions about art and my responsibilities. I respected him greatly. We had a very good working relationship. He had an excellent working relationship with his curatorial colleagues, especially, I'd say, Bob Riley, Sandy Phillips, and Janet Bishop. When John died in '93, it was just a complete shock to our collective system. We were a very close-knit group, working towards a goal. So that was a very big loss for everyone on the staff, not just those of us in curatorial. When you lose a friend, it's always a big shock. John was a colleague, our contemporary, and a really critical part of the team.

Rubens: Yes, it seems his vision—

02-00:20:14
Eckmann Lane: So yes, it was a big, big loss. A very sad moment. A very sad time.

Rubens: I wanted to acknowledge that. I wanted to ask you one other question that I also have not pursued with Jack yet, and I will. But his vision is to really transform this museum into a recognizable player in the international arena of

modern art. It means looking to other centers and works and traditions than had been looked at. I wondered if that was new to you, also. Had you paid attention to some of these people that Jack really was interested in? Sigmar Polke and Richter and—

02-00:21:08
Eckmann Lane: They were new to most people in the United States. Jack and John had brought them to the Carnegie International. I think many European artists had not been widely seen in the United States previous to that. Our focus at SFMOMA was on American artists, especially California artists. So we were more regional. Jack wanted to create an institution that was national and international. That took some adjusting for the staff and for the board because the focus has been more narrow.

Rubens: For you too, this was a new—?

02-00:21:50
Eckmann Lane: Yes. For me too, personally. I had seen exhibitions in Europe and in New York. But it was certainly new to me. Absolutely new to me. A lot of the young artists that John Caldwell and Jack brought in were artists that weren't yet seen in museums in the US. So it was new territory. I'd add Bob Riley to that too, in terms of bringing in new artists, young artists, artists working in whole new disciplines. These were not part of most museums, exhibition or collections. So that was all new. We had to learn, as a staff, how to work with new art.

Going back to the conservation concerns, things like media artists working with time-based materials. Museums didn't have experience with this yet. Galleries were doing this, but galleries weren't thinking about museum collections, and long time care, and presenting exhibitions that would have to run continuously for months. These artists would be making art works with slide projectors and audiotapes and equipment that was not really of a commercial grade. Then the museum would try to operate them for six days a week, eight hours a day, and you can imagine how many things went wrong. So we had a lot of fun, and we also were tearing our hair out.

Rubens: I don't think you and I mentioned, you were also going computer in this period, right? You must not have had computers till you were at least chief curator, or chief conservator?

02-00:23:54
Eckmann Lane: In the conservation department, we had started to use computers, but we didn't have a network. We were using computers to generate our documentation and our reports, because we had so many.

Rubens: How early, about, do you think?

02-00:24:08
Eckmann Lane: I think by the mid-eighties.

Rubens: I was going to say mid-eighties, yes.

02-00:24:12
Eckmann Lane: But our photography was film-based; it wasn't digital yet. A lot of art people—museum staff trained more from the background of art and art history, who were more senior—myself included—were not very well prepared for working with computers. Today it's different, because all the young people know how to work their way around the digital world. But in the time that we were ramping up the museum, planning the new museum, it was new.

Rubens: That's when it's all coming in.

02-00:25:05
Eckmann Lane: It was new to us.

Rubens: I actually should ask Jack about that, too. Because that's one of the last little things. I just was looking through the copies of the letters that are coming out underneath your name, as acting chief curator, then as deputy director for curatorial affairs. You are just right. There are just these piles of letters. "Thank you for applying to this position." "No, we can't loan you this painting." "Thank you for your donation."

02-00:25:37
Eckmann Lane: Yes, a lot of correspondence.

Rubens: The range of details that you had to pay attention to.

02-00:25:44
Eckmann Lane: Because the collection has to be documented very, very carefully, both gifts to the collection, purchases, and then just the management of the collections, as you point out. Loans to other institutions, for example. We had to have a system for reviewing requests, which I managed. The accessions program was my responsibility, also, so there was the documentation of the collection acquisition committee meetings and the proposals for new acquisitions, and then the acquisition process. These would become a part of the registrar's office, once the works became part of the collection. But my office, which was me and one administrative assistant, managed the accessions program. Departments in my division were responsible for collections, exhibitions, publications, conservation, registration, education, curatorial, and a few other things. So we were busy.

In addition, the museum started to have more social life. We would arrange dinner parties associated with exhibition openings. We didn't have any staff to manage those parties in the late eighties and early nineties, so my administrative assistant and I had to plan the dinner parties for the openings of

exhibitions in different restaurants around town. Working with Jack we planned invitations and the seating and the dinner menus, which was not something I studied in conservation graduate school. [laughs]

Rubens: No. Earlier, I asked, “Well, did you learn a little bit about teas and social obligations at the foot of Ms. Haas?” But no, that was a joke.

02-00:27:36
Eckmann Lane: I know. I wish that I had.

Rubens: That’s what those women had the time to do.

02-00:27:41
Eckmann Lane: Eventually, of course, the museum did develop a bigger department in the development office, to manage those celebratory events. But in these years, we were just doing them as best we could.

Rubens: Winging them, almost.

02-00:27:58
Eckmann Lane: Yes. My predecessor, Graham Beal, he liked the Italian restaurant that was right next door to the old SFMOMA. And every opening would be there. Until one of our trustees said, “I won’t eat that swill anymore.” Then we had to start exploring restaurants all over San Francisco.

Rubens: Were parties not held in the—what was it called? The rotunda? Or downstairs?

02-00:28:26
Eckmann Lane: Well, we would have drinks in the museum. There was a museum café on the fourth floor of the Veterans War Memorial Building. We would serve have a little drinks party, but we really couldn’t have a dinner at the old museum.

Rubens: Not like now, where it’s rented out and—

02-00:28:46
Eckmann Lane: No, we didn’t have a restaurant. We just had a little sort of café kitchen there. There was an occasional dinner party there, but food would have to be brought in by a caterer. So there would be only for something like the Valentine’s Ball. When we’d have an opening and we’d want to have the artist and twenty-five friends, or thirty friends, or thirty guests including collectors or outside curators, Jack would say, “Let’s have a dinner party for thirty people.” It was one more part of being a real museum, and being a host to the world.

Rubens: Really, that kind of thing didn’t go on. I just assumed it did, but I just didn’t know.

02-00:29:28
Eckmann Lane: Before Jack arrived, there were opening parties. Wine and cheese parties. We used to have great parties like that in the old rotunda. They were much more casual. There were certain dinner parties. But with the advent of John Caldwell's New Works exhibitions adding five shows a year in addition to maybe ten other exhibitions totaling fifteen exhibitions a year—fifteen dinner parties a year, not three dinner parties a year. It's a different level of energy and different work load for staff.

Rubens: Right. Different scale. A whole different scale. Here's one more letter. This is about three Soviet artists coming to San Francisco.

02-00:30:25
Eckmann Lane: Yes. For the "Ten by Ten."

Rubens: "Ten by Ten: Contemporary Soviet [and American Painters]". And you're trying to arrange how they can tour. You're not able to get hold of them, and I guess '89 is just when the Soviet Union's breaking down, and it just seemed—So you have to do all that, too, I'll bet.

02-00:30:42
Eckmann Lane: Well, we tried to be good hosts to our visitors. Jack really wanted an international museum. He is such a thoughtful host. When we have people coming to town here in Dallas, or in San Francisco, Jack works with trustees to arrange for visitors to see the collections, and the artistic opportunities of other museums in the area. Somehow, busy people find time to do things.

Rubens: Yes, they do. Did you work closely with Elaine McKeon? When you're talking about all these parties and—Of course, she was—

02-00:31:30
Eckmann Lane: Elaine was the grand master of the opening celebrations.

Rubens: *The* opening. The opening of the building.

02-00:31:36
Eckmann Lane: The opening of the building, yes. They were managed by the development office under Ginny Ruben. The openings and the parties that we would arrange in the curatorial division related to special exhibitions. They were more modest in scale.

Rubens: Now that I think about, I think, "Well, why wouldn't there be a point person for that?" How could you take that on under your—

02-00:32:00
Eckmann Lane: Well, it just didn't exist, because the development office in the early years of the museum was very, very small. You have to know that in the seventies and early eighties, there were a few trustees who supported the museum, and oversaw the auxiliary volunteer efforts. That included the docents and the

Society for the Encouragement of Creative Arts, the SECA. As time went on, additional auxiliary groups were formed. Staff members who managed these programs worked part-time. So they really couldn't take on parties and celebrations around exhibition openings. There was nobody else to manage these events. I'm not sure I did it very well, but I did it.

Now, of course, the museum has a very professional development office, very big. But if you go back to the seventies and eighties, it was very small. I remember when it was one single staff position.

Rubens: Do you want to just comment on what you know of and how the conservation department goes on? Or just look at your notes and see if there's anything else that we've left off. I'm not saying about how the museum has developed, but really, rather your child. That is your child.

02-00:33:43
Eckmann Lane: The conservation department did feel like my child.

Rubens: There's no question about it. I think I have one last question, which was—and it's a throwback—were there any galleries that you worked with specifically, more so than others in San Francisco?

02-00:34:04
Eckmann Lane: Art galleries?

Rubens: Yes. Did they turn to you? Are there certain ones that turned to you more than others? You, meaning the San Francisco museum.

02-00:34:13
Eckmann Lane: Well, John Berggruen's gallery was certainly very connected to the museum because they represented a lot of California artists, and the museum worked closely with them. Then the Fraenkel Gallery opened, Jeffrey Fraenkel has a very dedicated interest to the museum's photography collection.

Rubens: There's one other one that I can't think of right now, that was not so popular, and now seems to be more popular. Is it Anglim?

02-00:35:07
Eckmann Lane: Yes. Paule Anglim. Paule Anglim's gallery was also very involved, and the artists that she showed, and Paule herself was always, I think, very dedicated to the museum.

But going back to the conservation department and how it's grown and how it's developed, I think it's truly extraordinary. We've got a great staff. I think it always has been a really fine staff, but I think it's truly extraordinary right now in conservation treatment and training of young conservators, as it always has been, but also delving into more research, and research and documentation of artists' technique. I think it's a great thing that the museum conservation

department is now solely dedicated to the museum programs. The conservators can dedicate their efforts to the exhibition program and the collections, and they're not torn away by other commitments. It's come of age in that way. I couldn't be happier about the success of the conservation center.

Rubens: You've continued to work as a conservator.

02-00:36:51
Eckmann Lane: I have. I have had a busier practice in conservation in the last nine years in Dallas than I've had in many years. In San Francisco I became more involved with administration and supervision of staff and the teaching of students. So, here in Dallas, I have my own private practice. I work for collectors, and I work for museums, including the Dallas Museum of Art. I have worked on many of the extraordinary artworks of the postwar era that are here in Dallas, including a very great Jackson Pollock drip painting, *Cathedral*, from 1947; a great Jasper Johns from 1962, *Device*; a terrific late Gorky; a wonderful Franz Kline, *Slate Cross*, a very big, beautiful painting from the sixties; and a whole host of other things. So it's been full circle for me. I love what I'm doing. And because I'm working for myself, and working for collectors and for the museum collection, I can dedicate my time as I see fit, researching and studying and collaborating with my colleagues around the country, which I continue to do, including the team at SFMOMA.

Rubens: I would assume it's a different era. You can email, fax, send digital photographs quickly.

02-00:38:20
Eckmann Lane: That's right. We send photographs and communicate quickly.

Rubens: And you have this network.

02-00:38:25
Eckmann Lane: Yes. Conservation is a small world. I work with my colleagues at the National Gallery, and at the MoMA, and at the SFMOMA, and—

Rubens: Where do you physically work in Dallas?

02-00:38:34
Eckmann Lane: I work sometimes here at the museum and sometimes with a colleague of mine who has a painting conservation studio. Often I just go to the art. Because with a big contemporary piece, it's easier for me to move my supplies and go to the art than it is to move the art. I'm rather like an on-call doctor, with a doctor's bag now.

Rubens: Who did you tell me earlier called me their doctor? Oh, Jay DeFeo would say "doctor."

02-00:39:04
Eckmann Lane: Jay DeFeo. She'd refer to me saying, "Oh, it's my doctor." She was so funny.

Rubens: This is a wonderful story. I think this is just a terrific story.

02-00:39:14
Eckmann Lane: Thank you, Lisa.

Rubens: Do we have pictures of you with any of your patients? I don't know, I mean in general.

02-00:39:30
Eckmann Lane: Yes. There's the picture of me from the annual report of 1989 working in the conservation lab at SFMOMA, and they certainly have some pictures of me here at the DMA treating the Jackson Pollock. There's a great abstract expressionist collection here in Dallas. I've worked on Gorkys from the SFMOMA collection; the Pollock from the SFMOMA collection; and Gorky and Pollocks in the DMA collection. Our collectors here in Dallas have terrific Ellsworth Kelly paintings and much more contemporary eccentric objects, too, that I continue to challenge myself to work with. It's been a wonderful circle, to come back to my hands-on practice, with the experience of many years and other responsibilities behind me. I work closely with the curators here at the Dallas Museum. I feel completely in my element with them. It's been very nice. They have accepted me as an individual professional here, although I am also wife of museum director. It took a little time for people to come to know me in Dallas as a professional, separate from my role as wife of the director. I work comfortably behind the scenes here with the staff now. The DMA just mounted a major exhibition, "Fast Forward," of the gifts coming to the collection from several great Dallas collectors. I've been working on that exhibition, really, for the last couple of years. I work behind the scenes with the preparators and the registrars and the conservator here.

Interview #2: February 21, 2007
[Begin Audio File 3 02-21-2007.mp3]

03-00:00:00
Rubens: Hi, Inge-Lise. Nice to see you. We're here at the Dallas Museum today.

03-00:00:04
Eckmann Lane: Nice to see you, Lisa.

Rubens: I so enjoyed speaking with you yesterday, and I learned so much.

03-00:00:48
Eckmann Lane: Well, the pleasure was mine. Although I have to say, it stirred up a lot of memories, kept my mind going through most of the night last night. It represents a big portion of my life.

Except for the first years of the SFMOMA conservation department, all of the conservators were working part-time. Some of us were working for other institutions, some of us also had private practices in conservation. Although it sounds disorganized, it did serve the museum to have more conservators on staff and for us to work together in a larger group. Something we touched on yesterday was the beginnings of the conservation field in relation to contemporary art. You have to remember, in the early seventies, it was the first time anyone was thinking about postwar art, contemporary art requiring conservation. Outside of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, there was no other conservation department in the US dedicated to modern and contemporary art. There were other museum collections that included modern art; but really, there was no other conservation center dedicated to that. So we were pioneers. We were learning as we went along. We were learning from one another.

We had a group of several conservators, young conservators, and students, and interns coming from the graduate programs, to work with us. We really learned from one another, and we experimented, and we kept in touch with our colleagues around the country and abroad, and we had something new developing. Reflecting back to our discussion yesterday and my thoughts about the early days, in the seventies, of the Elise Haas Conservation Department, I think I feel that the greatest contribution was that innovation, experimentation, and learning, as well as the training of the young conservators who were coming to us from graduate schools. We also took on students who wanted to apply to graduate school. They would get their feet wet with their first opportunity to work in a conservation studio. I had had that opportunity several years before in New York, at the MoMA, and I knew how important that is. We really enjoyed working with students.

There are quite a few of our colleagues now in the field who have worked at the SFMOMA at one point or another early on in their careers. I mentioned to you yesterday Jay Krueger, who's the conservator of contemporary art at the

National Gallery in Washington. His wife, Holly Houston Krueger, who also worked with us, is a conservator of paper at the Library of Congress. Our colleague Jim Wright, who until just recently was the head conservator at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, was intern and conservator at SFMOMA. Lee Ann Daffner is conservator of photography for the Museum of Modern Art. Christine Lister, conservator at the Art Institute of Chicago. Jane Bassett at the Getty, Carl Grimm is chief painting conservator out at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. So we have a whole extended family of conservators who were part of the SFMOMA in those early days, seventies and eighties, and are now out there in the field. That, I think, is a real contribution that the Elise Haas Conservation Center has made. In addition, working with professional organizations, the American Institute for Conservation, the Western Association for Art Conservation, and Heritage Preservation, the National Institute for Conservation. I actually served as president of WAAC in ’76, an organization that now extends far beyond California; it’s all the western states, including here in Texas. During the nineties, I also served as chairman of Heritage Preservation, an organization dedicated to expanding public awareness for preservation throughout the country.

03-00:05:34

In the seventies there were two organizations started, a Bay Area guild, that was a local group, and the organization for the conservators in the West WAAC included conservators from Los Angeles and San Francisco and up and down the West Coast. Art conservators were few and far between then. Now it’s a much larger community. But by being a part of that and working with our colleagues, we learned from one another, and we made progress in developing professionals in the field. Integrating the scientific and technical aspects into the craft of conservation, through the graduate training programs; through the conservation centers at various museums, and through individuals in conservation studying particular artists’ works, collaborating with colleagues to determine solutions to new problems. It was a really inventive and challenging time. SFMOMA was a center for that activity. The museum today, the SFMOMA, contributes in this same way and has expanded beyond paper and painting conservation to include sculpture and photography, and all of the diverse media that artists incorporate in one object today. [laughs] And you know, we had, of course, the beginnings of that happening in the art of the sixties and seventies.

Rubens: Meaning the multidimensional, multi-surfaces. I can’t think of the word. Multimedia.

03-00:07:24

Eckmann Lane: Yes, it was described loosely as “mixed media.” Now, it can incorporate electronic media along with sculptural materials, in the grand scale of work like Matthew Barney’s. If you look back to that terrific work by Rauschenberg, *Collection,* that came to SFMOMA from Hunk and Moo Anderson in 1972, that also presented new challenges for conservators.

Collection is a painting, it has collage and attached sculptural elements. Some of those elements were deteriorating early on and I had the pleasure of working with "Collection." There was one component in *Collection* which we really didn't know how to address. It was a deteriorating piece of fabric, a veil that hung in front of a small mirror on the painting. It had completely disintegrated. We didn't quite know what to do with it. So we saved the piece that had fallen away, we documented it, and we stored it in the archive. Then, just relatively recently, the conservation staff returned to the problem and recreated this element. In collaboration with the artist, using new materials, new adhesives and kind of greater knowledge that conservators have today, they've reconstructed it. So that would be, I think, an example of conservation over time, where documentation and treatment come together in the interest of preservation. Sometimes you don't have the answer, and it's better to wait. The answer becomes clear over time, and then you haven't imposed something on the artwork that is, let's say, less than ideal, and ultimately the problem is corrected properly.

Rubens: And does that mean that particular piece was not exhibited, because it was not—?

03-00:09:33
Eckmann Lane: It was exhibited. But it was somewhat compromised, because there was this missing element. It's a relatively small element in the piece. I think one of the problems with conservation is that sometimes in our desire to remedy a problem, we take steps that maybe over time are not in the best interest of the piece because we don't have the right solution to the problem yet.

Rubens: Did you have an example of that? Did that happen to you?

03-00:10:10
Eckmann Lane: I think there were problems that we didn't know how to address then, and some that we still don't know how to address. Maybe they can't be corrected. One of the things that comes to mind is the cleaning of unpainted canvas.

Rubens: You mentioned that with the Clyfford Still.

03-00:10:25
Eckmann Lane: The Clyfford Stills were a terrific challenge because they had been stored in a poor environment and they were very dirty. But we chose a path that was conservative in our treatment of them. We removed a lot of dirt, grime, dust from the surface; but we accepted the fact that the canvas that was unpainted was yellowing a bit, and that that was the nature of the canvas. In the seventies, there were a number of people washing canvases with water. Now, looking at those canvases that have been washed, in comparison to canvases that have not been washed—and I'm talking about color field paintings. Kenneth Nolan or Clyfford Still or Morris Louis—that there may be something gained but there's definitely something lost by washing. The canvas may be whiter, but is often roughed up; the nap is raised. It has a

different surface sheen. With the benefit of time—after thirty years, you can compare paintings that have been washed and paintings that have not been washed. I prefer the appearance of those that have not been washed. Although they're somewhat yellowed, they have still the sizing on the canvas, and I believe unwashed canvas is closer to the original appearance. In most cases, I'd say it's preferable. Unless you had significant, disfiguring damage. Experimentation's a good thing up to a point, but it has a down side. So I think we were conscientious, cautious. I'm sure if I really thought about it, I could remember problems that we couldn't find good solutions for. But I think in most cases, when you're working with a group of people, you'll be able to find a well-considered solution or just say, "You know, we just don't think it's a good idea." If you're one person alone, a collector or an art dealer may say, "Get that stain out," and you'll want to try. There has always been pressure on conservators to treat problems, especially to clean.

Rubens: Are there any other pieces that you remember, up till about '87, '88, that you remember working on that you did want to comment on? We talked a little about Judy Chicago and—

03-00:13:02

Eckmann Lane: Of course, conservators love the memory of working on great individual works. I had the opportunity to work with Jackson Pollock's *Guardians of the Secret*, and then take it on to Paris for the Pollock exhibition in '82. That was exciting. I think in the big picture, the overall care of collections matter more. Things like the Anderson Collection. We worked with the Anderson collection and Elise Haas collection from the first moment that I came to San Francisco. Not only the works that had already been given to the museum, but pieces still in their collections. There's a feeling of greater accomplishment or greater contribution with bodies of work. Also the Still collection, and the Gustons in preparation for the Guston show in 1980. Paintings and drawings that I had the pleasure of treating.

Of course, the Elise S. Haas Collection was the reason we have the museum's conservation department. Year ago there was a mishap, a small damage to the Matisse *Femme au Chapeau*, which was on tour. Mrs. Haas contacted Sheldon and Caroline Keck, who treated it. That was really the genesis of the conservation department. But later, in '91, when the Haas Collection came to the museum, I had the opportunity to make a thorough technical exam of the *Femme au Chapeau*. That was a pleasure, and the Kecks' treatment was still in good condition. Another picture that I had the opportunity to work on was the Albert Bender gift, Diego Rivera's *The Flower Carrier*. That is, of course, not only a beautiful classical painting, but a wonderful image for California. It was painted in '35, after Albert Bender and William Gerstle had brought Rivera to the Bay Area to paint the frescoes at the San Francisco Art Institute, the Stock Exchange, and SF State University. Working on *The Flower Carrier* was a real treat.

Rubens: Where the woman is bent over and she has the calla lilies?

03-00:15:46
Eckmann Lane: It's called *The Flower Carrier*. It's a man kneeling down. He has a big basket of flowers, and he's being assisted by a woman. They're working together, lifting this wonderful big basket of flowers.

Rubens: And that was painted in California?

03-00:16:02
Eckmann Lane: I don't believe so, but Bender did buy it for SFMOMA. As an aside, more recently, actually, in the years since I left the SFMOMA, I had the opportunity to clean and treat the Diego Rivera fresco at the San Francisco Art Institute, which is, you may know, a big trompe l'œil of Diego sitting on a scaffold, painting a fresco of the building and the city and artists making art.

Rubens: Huge wall size.

03-00:16:52
Eckmann Lane: The fresco also has portraits of Albert Bender and William Gerstle who were the patrons of the project. It's closely related to SFMOMA history.

Rubens: And Tim Pflueger.

03-00:17:07
Eckmann Lane: Timothy Pflueger, and Brown, the architect of the Civic Center.

Rubens: Yes, Arthur, Brown, Yes.

03-00:17:14
Eckmann Lane: But the real great portrait is Diego, from the back.

Rubens: His lump.

03-00:17:19
Eckmann Lane: His massive self, his monumental self.

Rubens: And you worked on Rivera frescos as well?

03-00:17:24
Eckmann Lane: Yes, I worked on the fresco at the SFAI with a colleague of mine, Anne Rosenthal, who had also worked with us a bit at SFMOMA.

Rubens: When was that?

03-00:17:37
Eckmann Lane: That was in the late nineties.

Rubens: You had left the museum at that point.

03-00:17:43
Eckmann Lane: Yes. After I'd left the museum.

Rubens: I just wanted to finish with—because I didn't know that—probably other people do—about *The Flower Carrier*. What did you literally do?

03-00:17:54
Eckmann Lane: It was primarily a surface cleaning. That's an easel painting on masonite.

Rubens: I can understand. Historic.

03-00:17:59
Eckmann Lane: Diego Rivera's works are a part of San Francisco and a part of the SFMOMA's history.

Rubens: I'm thinking that if something comes, we can do a little on the phone, too, just to include. I know that you have written a piece on conservation that is in the fiftieth-anniversary volume that was done. Is there anything to say about the writing of that, by the way?

03-00:18:40
Eckmann Lane: I haven't re-read it in some time, but it was a collaboration with my colleague Jim Bernstein. We were thinking about just giving people a little insight into the conservation center and into the idea of why conservation of contemporary art? It's interesting, Lisa, that was more than twenty years ago. Recently we've seen articles in the *New York Times*, asking that same question. I think, the general public has started to catch on to the fact that something that's only fifty years old actually may need conservation work.

Rubens: Sure. I wanted to get the title. That's in the '85 anniversary—

03-00:19:20
Eckmann Lane: It's in the catalogue that we published at that time, of the collection.

Rubens: The other thing I thought, just for the record, that's important, that I had not seen much—I'm not a specialist, but—on the Kecks. I think you said to me that there have been some oral histories done.

03-00:19:51
Eckmann Lane: Yes, through the American Institute for Conservation, oral interviews with Caroline, certainly, and I believe earlier on with Sheldon before he passed away in '92. Those are available, through the AIC.

Rubens: I wanted to know also if, during that thirteen years or so before you become chief conservator and then acting chief curator and then go on to be deputy director, if you ever took any time off for special training? Or did you travel to Europe for any extended period of time?

03-00:20:36

Eckmann Lane: Well, I took two very rewarding opportunities to work with colleagues at the Tate Gallery in London. This was before there was a Tate Modern. But in the early and mid-eighties, I went out there twice, for a few weeks each time, to work with my colleagues. The Tate has always been similar to the SFMOMA, in terms of its dedication to modern art and the conservation of modern art. There was innovation there, treatments being developed, and it was a sharing of ideas. I was given the opportunity to examine their great Jackson Pollock *Summertime*, because I had a little bit of experience with unpainted canvas and modern materials. In the eighties we would try to create those learning opportunities. Now there are some more structured avenues for conservators, and recently conservators at SFMOMA have had some excellent opportunities to work abroad under fellowships.

Another thing that I'm thinking about and I want to mention is related particularly to the art of the Bay Area. Because the conservation center at SFMOMA took care of other museum collections, we had a long history of caring for the University Art Museum collections at Berkeley, now called the Berkeley Art Museum. The Hans Hofmann collection, which is an extraordinary part of the Bay Area's cultural legacy, was cared for by the SFMOMA conservators. Throughout the seventies and early eighties, we treated almost that entire collection. That was a wonderful challenge, in terms of contemporary art, postwar art. The paintings are very heavily painted, and Hoffman used artists' and commercial paints. These painting have many inherent problems, because they are fragile and the paint somewhat less stable than artists paints. Because the pain is laid on so heavily, some of the paints will never dry completely; very thick oil paints don't oxidize properly and therefore don't dry completely. So we made, I think, a contribution there, as to the documentation and preservation of that collection, and the knowledge of Hans Hofmann and his technique. Because he was a great teacher in the Bay Area, as was Clyfford Still, his influence on all the Bay Area artists was immense.

At SFMOMA, we also had the opportunity to work with Bay Area artists and their work. Dick Diebenkorn's work, Elmer Bischoff, David Park, Roy DeForest, Wayne Thiebaud, Joan Brown, Jay DeFeo, William Wiley, Bruce Conner. SFMOMA is a center of knowledge about the California artists and their technique and materials. In particular the painting technique leaned from Hofmann. That very heavily applied, very luxurious, luscious impasto paint. You see that in many Bay Area painters.

Rubens: What was the word you said? Impasto?

03-00:24:34

Eckmann Lane: Heavily applied paint, impasto, with a pronounced texture. Yes, impasto paint.

Rubens: Did the University of California pay the—

03-00:24:43
Eckmann Lane: Yes, they paid the museum for conservation services, and we took care of their collections. It was a part of our external operation. Thinking of that, the Hofmann paintings, what comes to my mind is Jay DeFeo because she used heavily applied paint, and—

Rubens: Well, isn't that one a thousand pounds?

03-00:25:15
Eckmann Lane: That's right, *The Rose*. The first year I came out to California, it was the summer of '74, Tony Rockwell and I spent a good part of the summer trying to protect that painting, *The Rose*, by applying a facing. We created a layered structure to support the painting, from the face. It's literally a one-ton painting. And it has very thick paint; up to eight inches thick, with undercut areas. Jay had painted it, and it was mounted to a wall at the San Francisco Art Institute, and the weight of the paint had deformed the canvas. The paint and canvas were buckling. *The Rose* really couldn't be moved safely. We created a support system from the face, so that the painting could be moved out of the Art Institute and stored. Then, you may know this story. It was stored for many years, and finally, resources were found to treat it. Tony Rockwell and our colleague Anne Rosenthal went back to it in the early nineties, and finished that treatment. The painting now belongs to the Whitney Museum of American Art. There's also a Jay DeFeo in the SFMOMA collection called *Incision*, a beautiful painting, heavily painted paint, but fortunately not as heavy as *The Rose.* In the late eighties, Jay had a fire in her studio in the East Bay. I must've worked on a dozen pictures for her, at the SFMOMA. These paintings with large areas of white paint that were fire-damaged, badly smoke-stained. It was a challenge to clean these but a wonderful experience working with Jay, and learning more about her.

Rubens: In L.A. I saw—I believe it's called *The Jewel*. I'm not quite sure. But I hadn't seen one of hers in a while, and it was so glorious, just how thick.

03-00:27:23
Eckmann Lane: Yes. Well, she was a wonderful, enthusiastic force.

Rubens: Did you enjoy being around her?

03-00:27:28
Eckmann Lane: Oh, yes. I liked her very much. She was a spirited person.

Rubens: Did she smoke?

03-00:27:35
Eckmann Lane: Oh, I think they all smoked back then. But she would call me on the phone. She had a very distinctive voice and she'd call me her doctor, and she would have questions all over the place. She was a great part of the art world in the Bay Area.

Rubens: Yes. What great stories you have.

03-00:27:56
Eckmann Lane: It was fun to work with her but that was terrible, that fire. A lot of her paintings were white. She was painting white-field paintings, and they were covered with smoke and soot. They were tough to clean, I can tell you.

Rubens: Were you pretty successful?

03-00:28:11
Eckmann Lane: Pretty successful. A lot of those paintings weren't oil paint. They had exposed areas of white acrylic ground. It was very porous, almost like a plaster. So the smoke had really penetrated the white ground. We had to do some experimental cleaning with poultices, to try to draw out the staining. It was relatively successful.

Rubens: You had talked about bread with the Still.

03-00:28:40
Eckmann Lane: Bread. That was back in the seventies. On Jay's paintings, we'd make poultices using the same idea of absorbing things out of the surface. Sometimes use paper pulps, sometimes use sponges. Now there are wonderful synthetic sponges that are really effective in drawing out impurities.

Rubens: So this must have been a very—

03-00:29:06
Eckmann Lane: Yes. It was a lively time.

Rubens: Lively time, yes, really working with important work. We were saying that it's really not till Jack comes that the board comes to be organized, in terms of really functional and specific committees. That there certainly, of course, was the acquisition committee, but otherwise—When we talked yesterday about an advisory board for the Elise Haas Conservation Center, really, there was not a formal board that existed.

03-00:29:49
Eckmann Lane: No, we were really under the patronage of Elise Haas. Her legacy was her grandson, Robert Haas. She'd asked Bob to take on her involvement in the conservation department as she got older and was no longer at the museum on any regular basis. So we worked with Bob. And of course, we were responsible to the museum for both the care of exhibitions and collections, as well as the earned income. That was our commitment.

When Jack came in '87, he worked with the board to reorganize the staff and establish board committees. He set up a conservation committee of the board. There were individuals on the board who had some interest in conservation including Byron Meyer, Shirley Davis, Hendy Henderson, and Binney Quist.

But I'd love to tell you about Shirley Davis because she's been a great friend. She actually worked as a volunteer in the conservation department, in the seventies. Shirley, as a trustee, came in several days a week to organize our documentary slides. We photographed everything before and after treatment, and sometimes during the course of treatment. We kept a detailed record of examination and treatment, both the SFMOMA collection and the work treated for other clients. Shirley, bless her heart, she would come in and just work away as a volunteer, helping with this clerical effort. And she was so much fun. What a great thing she did for us. Unbelievable, really, her dedication to this detailed effort.

Rubens: Absolutely, yes. Just interested, really wanted to contributed.

03-00:32:09
Eckmann Lane: She was interested and generous, yes. Board members visited conservation; sometimes they'd bring their own collections to us to examine and treat. The museum would provide conservation for a fee. Board members were clients. They were certainly interested. But there wasn't a direct trustee relationship with the department until the late eighties.

Rubens: Now, how is it that you become chief conservator in '86? I know we talked about your splitting this and then—This was before Jack.

03-00:32:45
Eckmann Lane: Yes. Earlier I had been chief conservator of works on paper. Then when Tony Rockwell stepped down, Jim Bernstein and I shared the management of the conservation department. We were both working part-time, as was everyone else there. In '86, the Deputy Director under Henry Hopkins—Bill Mellis, to whom we reported—asked me if I would consider working full-time and supervising the department, and become chief conservator. Which I accepted. The staff in conservation although many were part time, were all on regular salaries by this time.

Rubens: The idea of having a board committee for conservation, was that something that you were interested in when they were looking around for—?

03-00:33:47
Eckmann Lane: We liked the idea of having some communication with the board.

Rubens: I guess I'm trying to say, was it your idea? Was that put on the table?

03-00:33:55
Eckmann Lane: No, no, I think it was really Jack's idea to engage the board in aspects of the museum. But I welcomed it because we wanted to have a communication with the board. We felt that we were a little bit separated from the program of the museum. We wanted to be more integrated into the curatorial program. We didn't want to just be a service. Conservation is not just about fixing things that are broken. It's about caring for a collection; it's about understanding the

needs of a collection; and in the best circumstance, it's about anticipating needs even before works come into the collection; knowing what the responsibilities of ownership will be. So, we welcomed the board involvement. It helped us have a little bit more of a profile in the board. We would give tours of the conservation studio to interested board members. We loved to have them come in and visit the conservation department. We gave educational tours to docents and to members as well. We couldn't do this all the time, but certainly, the trustees were always welcome. We were always happy to show off the Elise Haas Conservation Center.

Rubens: You were able to eke out a little more room on the third floor, before Jack came.

03-00:35:24
Eckmann Lane: We did add the paper conservation department. Actually, that was in the late seventies, when the art school was reduced in scale

Rubens: The painting school, art school

03-00:35:37
Eckmann Lane: The art school, right, was phased out. Evening and weekend art classes were held at SFMOMA in the sixties and seventies similar to other museums. The Boston Museum of Fine Arts has a big art school, and the Chicago Art Institute. Those are really major educational institutions. SFMOMA was a much smaller operation. When that school program was reduced the museum offices expanded into classroom spaces on the third floor. Conservation was given a space that had been the cloakroom for the classrooms adjacent to the painting studio on the north side of the third floor. In 1975-76 I developed the plan for a paper conservation studio with David Robinson Architects, who had designed the original plan for the painting conservation studio. We built a lovely little paper conservation studio. It was really a nice addition. So we had those two spaces. When Jack came in 1987 and reorganized the staff, the conservation department became part of the curatorial division. Previous to that the conservation department was a part of the earned-income operation of the museum, with the art rental gallery and the museum store. When Jack reorganized we became part of the curatorial department, which is where I think conservation belongs.

Rubens: Had you tried that before? Had you argued for that before? Or it just was not going to happen?

03-00:37:26
Eckmann Lane: I encouraged it, but—

Rubens: Certainly, how you thought things should be.

03-00:37:33
Eckmann Lane: It's how we thought things should be, because we thought we should be working in collaboration with the curators and that we should have a voice, together with the curators, on program needs and collection. Being a part of the admin division was budgetary.

Rubens: Sure. But then comes a new director with new promises and new vision. What topic do you think we should move to then? I'm wondering how early you are thinking about what the conservation department will look like in the new building. From the beginning.

03-00:38:12
Eckmann Lane: Right from the first the new building is a major priority, and I began planning conservation facilities. That was my contribution to the new building. From '86 to '89, I was working in the conservation department full-time. We were writing the program for the new building, and I reported to Graham Beal, our chief curator. We designed our wish list for the dream conservation studio, which was great fun. In conservation we also were involved in planning aspects of behind-the-scenes operations for the new museum: environmental controls, the art storage areas, the pathway to move the art and the loading dock. All the things that are so important and can either make a museum building workable or unworkable. I worked very closely with my colleague Tina Garfinkel, who was head of the registration department, and still is today, and with Kent Roberts, who was head of art installation, to solve those practical problems. We had an ally in Graham Beale. And we had a great ally in Mario Botta, because being a European, an Italian-Swiss, he was familiar with conservation. He cared about it. So although my husband took a little ribbing for the beauty of the conservation department, in fact, it was Mario, who I think, made it beautiful. That space for conservation at the new SFMOMA has beautiful light and beautiful space and, you know, it's a terrific facility.

Rubens: When had Graham Beal come? When had he come? I don't remember.

03-00:40:34
Eckmann Lane: What year did he start at the museum? You know, I'm not sure I remember.

Rubens: It doesn't matter. I guess I'm just wondering if there's anything I should ask particularly about working with him. But it's really not till '86 or '87 that you start to work more closely with him.

03-00:40:49
Eckmann Lane: Yes. He came in the eighties. I didn't start working directly with him until '87—after Jack came and changed the structure.

Rubens: Do you want to say something more about your vision of the building, or the role of the building? I do want to get to how you became acting chief curator.

03-00:41:39
Eckmann Lane: That came about when Graham stepped down to go to Omaha, to become the director of the Joslyn Museum. He commended me to Jack, suggested that I would be a good person to manage the curatorial division in an acting capacity until they found a chief curator. Our colleague, John Caldwell, had just come on as curator of painting and sculpture. John was a tremendous curator who had zero interest in being an administrative manager of people. So John was the voice of the artistic program but I don't think he ever wished for the title or the responsibilities of chief curator.

After about three months of my having served as the acting chief curator, Jack asked me if I would consider taking the position of deputy director for curatorial affairs, and making it a regular position. That's so often, Lisa, how museums work; the structure of the organization is adjusted around the talents of individuals. This worked, I think, quite well, because John had a real leadership role as the curator of painting and sculpture. But in terms of responsibilities for staffing, he really just had an administrative assistant working with him, and he'd work closely with curatorial assistants and his colleagues, the curators of photography and media arts and architecture and design. John and I worked together very well. I had the responsibility for managing the programs and all of those curatorial departments I just mentioned, as well as exhibitions, conservation, registration, the research library, and of course the education program. So those were my duties.

Rubens: What made you want to take on that much responsibility?

03-00:44:05
Eckmann Lane: What made me want to take on that much? Well, I had served the museum, at this point, for more than thirteen years, including my internship time. I loved what I did. But I thought it would be exciting to be a part of the new museum. I thought it would be a challenge, and it was.

Rubens: But you already had, really, about three years of now seeing what it was to be chief conservator, plugged into the—

03-00:44:40
Eckmann Lane: I like working with teams. I liked the idea of making that new museum, and from the program side, I liked the challenge of management. I liked working with creative people in collaboration. So working with the curators, it was kind of a natural step from working with conservators. I'd always been interested in the content of the program, not just in the conservation. So it just seemed like an opportunity I couldn't pass up.

Rubens: So he asked you, and you said yes. It's a private organization, so there's no issue about having to advertise nationwide, et cetera.

03-00:45:29
Eckmann Lane: Jack did advertising for the position, but had not found a suitable candidate.

Rubens: Now you're called, as of '89, deputy director of curatorial affairs. You're still chief conservator.

03-00:45:52
Eckmann Lane: I was still chief conservator. One of our colleagues, Will Shank, became senior conservator, to manage the day-to-day operations. I still had responsibility for the conservation effort. That was a little difficult to manage. I would occasionally get to work on things, which was terrific. When the beautiful Georges Braque cubist painting came form the Schreiber, I actually had the opportunity to examine and treat the painting. But it was difficult for me to find the time to work in conservation, because conservation requires such focused attention and concentrated time. You can't be hopping up to go to a meeting in the middle of treatment.

Rubens: Now, how many are in the conservation at this point, basically?

03-00:46:45
Eckmann Lane: I think there were maybe half a dozen conservators. Something like that. Will Shank took on the senior conservator role and Pauline Moore, who had been at SFMOMA many years.

Rubens: Now was Jill there yet?

03-00:47:13
Eckmann Lane: Jill Sterrett just came on around that time as paper conservator, which had been the area that I'd set up.

Rubens: Right. Bernstein is gone at this point.

03-00:47:28
Eckmann Lane: Jim Bernstein stepped down at that time, Yes. Jim had been working at SFMOMA part time and also had a private practice Jim went on to expand his private practice. The museum at this point wanted full-time conservators on staff.

Rubens: And is the department still doing—

03-00:47:40
Eckmann Lane: Outside work? Yes. But this is the time when it starts to diminish, because the program starts to ramp up. We now have a very active photography curator, Sandra Phillips. We've got the Department of Media Arts, a whole new discipline of collecting, with Bob Riley. Paolo Polledri is on board as curator of architecture and design. We've got John Caldwell doing a very active new works program that added about five new exhibitions a year. This is where it starts to break down, for conservation to manage outside services in addition to all of these new programs. Jack is a very prudent fiscal manager. He would've liked to have seen that income continue, and it did for a while. But it started to be clear that it was no longer realistic.

Rubens: Certainly, by the time you're in the new building, by '95, that's—

03-00:48:49
Eckmann Lane: Yes. That's a whole new universe.

Rubens: Yes. Now, so there's one more step. Then in '91, you become deputy director of administration.

03-00:49:01
Eckmann Lane: Yes. I took a short hiatus, stepped down from my position as deputy director for curatorial affairs, for personal reasons.

Rubens: I see. So verify dates. Would it be around June to November?

03-00:49:17
Eckmann Lane: Yes. It was Fourth of July through Thanksgiving. I'd been offered a leave of absence, but I wasn't certain that I'd come back. I thought it wouldn't be correct to ask the museum to hold my position for four months, if I wasn't certain. At any rate, within a couple of months, the then deputy director for administration, Dick Catalano, left. Jack asked me if I would consider coming back on board in that capacity. So I morphed into deputy director for administration, taking on museum operations, art installation, security, and finance, publication and graphic design, the bookstore, and the art rental gallery.

Rubens: And then all the preparations for the move.

03-00:50:37
Eckmann Lane: I was responsible for planning and executing the move of the collections, staff, and offices, Yes. So that was a real big learning curve for me.

Rubens: I bet. So at that point, you are not in the conservator department.

03-00:50:57
Eckmann Lane: No.

Rubens: You're not there.

03-00:50:58
Eckmann Lane: I wasn't that crazy.

Rubens: Dick Catalano, one more time, was what?

03-00:51:08
Eckmann Lane: Dick Catalano had served as the deputy director for administration between '89, when {Barbara Phillips?} left the museum, and '91. Jack had hired Dick Sigesmund to fill the position of deputy director for curatorial affairs after I stepped down in '91.

Rubens: Did he remain?

03-00:51:43
Eckmann Lane: Dick was in place when I came back on board in November. I can't remember exactly when he left, but when he left, I was asked to roll most aspects of those two jobs together, as deputy director.

Rubens: That's what I'm asking.

03-00:52:02
Eckmann Lane: That was, I think, in '92. But in truth, Lisa, I sometimes can't remember dates exactly. That was when we were building the new museum, and I became deputy director. The areas of earned income for the bookstore, the rental gallery, and the financial offices were broken out under Ikuko Satoda as CFO. I took on what had been the deputy director for curatorial affairs, all of the curatorial departments including education, and conservation, registration, publications, research library, as well as art installation, security, information systems, and general operations.

Rubens: Did you have a secretary under you, and administrative assistant?

03-00:52:57
Eckmann Lane: Yes, I did. Yes, I did. I had a terrific administrative assistant, Jill Davis.

Rubens: Did you ever leave the building? These were the intense years. I mean, '91 is then just gearing up for that move.

03-00:53:18
Eckmann Lane: We kept the museum open and operating in the old building until six months before we opened the new museum.

Rubens: Is that all?

03-00:53:26
Eckmann Lane: So we kept the museum operating through the summer of '94, and that was the summer that we moved the collection and the offices over to the new SFMOMA. We were closed for six months, up until the opening, in January of '95. So it was a very busy time. I had a terrific staff. All of the support staff that helped with the move, the art handlers, conservators operations and the registration staff did a fantastic job. Looking back, I'd probably say it would've been wise to hire addition staff to manage the move and not to handle it myself, because I think it put too much of a responsibility on all of us, my office, the registrar's office, and the art handlers. We did hire additional art handlers to execute the moving, but I felt we knew the collection and we could do it best. I think we did. But there was a cost attached to that, a physical cost.

Rubens: Was this sort of a high time? I mean, in the sense of, "Boy, things are changing, are moving".

03-00:54:56
Eckmann Lane: Yes. [Narrator added in editing: "I would like to say that during the years we were planning, building and then opening the new building we not only had remarkable growth in the program at SFMOMA but we has a staff that worked remarkably well as a *team.*

"We were five curators each with ambitious exhibition, collection and publication programs. Together with Jack we brought those programs into a cohesive vision for the museum.

"The curatorial departments including those that supported the collection curators; registration, conservatory exhibitions, publications, art installation, and research library, all pulled together to realize the programs working with tight schedules and budgets. Senior managers were like air traffic controllers and all the department heads and senior managers contributed to the vision of the institution."]

Begin [File 4 02-21-2007.mp3]

04-00:00:15
Eckmann Lane: The real story of the conservation department at the SFMOMA has been a place for expanding the field and training young conservators.

Rubens: So tell me about that.

04-00:00:29
Eckmann Lane: We've had student conservators both prior to their graduate studies, and then in their post-graduate internship, working in that conservation department for the last forty years. The conservation department at the SFMOMA has, in a lot of ways, populated the conservation centers all over the country. It's been an integral part of the training of young conservators all over the country. I think it would be interesting to go through the records of the conservation department—

Rubens: To have a list.

04-00:01:26
Eckmann Lane: —the lists of the conservation interns who have worked there, and who are now serving in important conservation centers and private practices all over the country. It's a significant part of what museums do, develop young professionals. Not just in conservation, but in curatorial and other disciplines. I think from the staff point of view. Of course, my focus was more internal to the museum than external. [pause] It's a remarkable group of people, when you start looking around the country and see museums professionals who came through the SFMOMA as young professionals.

Rubens: Do you want to just say a few names? It doesn't mean that you've excluded others, it may be just what has come to your mind.

04-00:02:44
Eckmann Lane: Well, I mentioned several conservators. There's Kara Kirk, who's in publications at the MoMA, who was with us, and there are those who have stayed on at SFMOMA, like Janet Bishop and Peter Samis and—

Rubens: You're not talking just about conservation now.

04-00:03:16
Eckmann Lane: No. I'm talking about curators, designers, museum publication staff, exhibition staff and conservators.

[Paragraph deleted by narrator]

We could make a list.

Rubens: Sure. Well, we should.

04-00:04:03
Eckmann Lane: I think that's a big part of what a museum does. There's always a lot of turnover, there's always new young people coming in. I think that the SFMOMA has always offered an extraordinary opportunity because the program's been diverse, it's been lively, it's been a place where, for the most part, people worked together in teams exceptionally well.

Rubens: I was going to ask you. You're chief curator as of '86. You're conservator, I mean, chief conservator. But you're conservator, basically, '75 to '86. Did you take a break at some point? Did you leave the museum? Is that significant or—

04-00:05:03
Eckmann Lane: No.

Rubens: I mean, maybe you took trips or whatever, but you did not work elsewhere.

04-00:05:09
Eckmann Lane: No.

Rubens: You know, there's one little set of correspondence. It's with Keck, who says, "We're concerned that you're going to go to Davis."

04-00:05:16
Eckmann Lane: Well, I did. I did, right after my first internship year. That was before '75. In '74-'75 I worked up there. There was a conservation center established at UC Davis, and it was part of the graduate school. It also served museum and California State Collection I did go there for a little while. I really didn't intend to stay, although I enjoyed the opportunity. They offered a very good salary, and I think that was the moment when the discussion developed at SFMOMA about paying a regular salary, rather than simply commission to conservators. Commission was unreliable. We needed regular salaries. I think

that was what we were trying to communicate to the museum. Shortly after that we went on salary. We had an obligation, as a department, to earn a budgeted income. In the early eighties, we were on salary, but I think everyone working there was part-time employees. I don't think any of us were full-time, because the salaries were so modest. Many of us had either another job—for instance, working part-time at another museum, or working in private conservation practice. There were several different arrangements. With everybody working part-time, somehow we managed to take care of the museum's needs, and earn enough money. But as I said, the salary schedule was pretty modest.

Rubens: How long does Rockwell stay there, roughly?

04-00:07:59
Eckmann Lane: You should really speak to Tony and ask him. He moved out of the Bay Area. My guess would be that that was something like early, mid-eighties. He left the Bay Area, and later returned.

Rubens: Did anyone replace him, or is that when you moved?

04-00:08:32
Eckmann Lane: That was when my colleague Jim Bernstein and I shared the management of the department. I was chief conservator of contemporary art and works on paper, and he was chief conservator of traditional art. We were both working part-time, so it was a little bit crazy. But the museum really hadn't offered us regular full-time employment at a level that was attractive enough—or I should say at any level—so we were trying to cobble together this operation. It was an unusual situation. There were always one or two conservators at the museum. But we weren't, any of us, there full-time.

Rubens: So are you caught up in when there's the unionization movement? Are your positions—

04-00:10:02
Eckmann Lane: In our department, only the administration and the technicians were part of the union.

Rubens: The technicians. I was going to ask you.

04-00:10:07
Eckmann Lane: And the administrative assistant. They were in the union pay scale.

Rubens: Because you were at a higher level.

04-00:10:12
Eckmann Lane: We were exempt employees.

Rubens: Right, no benefits, right.

04-00:10:20
Eckmann Lane: The conservators were always seen as the curatorial level and not included in the union. The union would've liked to have incorporated this level of staff and did incorporate the curatorial assistants. But we had a different relationship to the museum budget.

Rubens: Who did you report to?

04-00:10:52
Eckmann Lane: Well, that's an interesting story, too. We reported to the administrative side, not the curatorial side. In the early days, we reported to Sheldon St. John, who was the controller of the museum. Then subsequent to that, we reported to the deputy director, Mike McCone. We reported to George Neubert, deputy director, and then to Bill Mellis. We did not report to the curatorial side until Jack arrived.

Rubens: McCone was later?

04-00:11:36
Eckmann Lane: No, he was earlier. He was the administrative deputy director. He was the acting director when I came on to the museum in '73. Mike supervised general operations, and I think the curators reported directly to Henry Hopkins. But in conservation we reported to Sheldon St. John, who was the controller, just like the bookshop and the rental gallery.

Rubens: Yes, you're the commercial.

04-00:12:17
Eckmann Lane: Right. We were alongside the other earned-income departments.

Rubens: Who literally kept your books?

04-00:12:27
Eckmann Lane: Sheldon St. John; everyone called him Saint.

Rubens: You had to keep records.

04-00:12:33
Eckmann Lane: Well, we had to keep our accounting. Our administrative assistant, Nancy Morrison and later Pamela Lucido managed the accounting. But the responsibility, the overall responsibility for that was with the controller. After Saint retired, we reported to George Neubert and then Bill Mellis. Again, conservation was seen as a part of operations. When Henry left and Jack came in, Jack reorganized and linked conservation with curatorial, seeing it in a different light.

Rubens: Had you become full-time prior to that?

04-00:13:31
Eckmann Lane: I became full-time just before Jack came on.

Rubens: Wow! Not till then.

04-00:13:38
Eckmann Lane: When conservation reported to Bill Mellis, it was becoming clear that the department needed one person to manage it. It needed to be a proper part of the organization, the program and staffing.

Rubens: During the Hopkins years, did you give tours to the docents or lectures to—?

04-00:14:21
Eckmann Lane: Oh, yes, of course. We always did that. And training for the guards to provide expertise that conservators offer.

Rubens: Really? As a conservator, I mean.

04-00:14:35
Eckmann Lane: Yes. We worked together with the registrars. That was also something that I'm sure you've heard a lot about, that part of the organization called research collections, which was a combination of registration and collection research that Kathy Holland oversaw. Have you spoken to her? Research that would be a part, normally, of the curatorial program was in the research collections division.

Rubens: Ok, I've never quite understood that.

04-00:15:21
Eckmann Lane: I'm not sure I ever did, either. It was the confluence of registration and research. SFMOMA's never had the luxury of being a major research institution. It's always been program-driven. It's always been exhibitions, collections, with some publications. Most of the research that contributed to collection buildup, publications exhibitions and conservation was accomplished by the curators and conservators with very little support. There was not much staff dedicated to research.

Rubens: Didn't the library fulfill that function?

04-00:16:18
Eckmann Lane: Well, the library was always a wonderful resource, and it's a terrific collection. But it was never generously staffed or in a position to really do much research. There are few museums in the country that have staff depth for research. Museums have to be endowed pretty generously for that. The SFMOMA's not enjoyed that luxury. So the research that curators did toward their programs or towards collection, or conservation research for the most part, has been generated by staff on their own time. Sometimes we'd have interns working on projects who provided research support. But I think if you

look around the country, you don't find that many museums that have that luxury.

Rubens: By the way, did you belong to a professional organization?

04-00:17:25

Eckmann Lane: Yes, several. One organization, the American Institute for Conservation, is the professional membership organization. Our conservators at SFMOMA have always been pretty active in AIC as contributors, giving talks and serving as leaders of the organization. Then there's another organization, Heritage Preservation, the National Institute for Conservation. That is the national organization that reaches out to the greater public, to try to promote conservation awareness for the broader public. I've been deeply involved with both of those organizations. I've served both organizations for many years, as the head of the fellowship review committee for the American Institute for Conservation and for nearly a decade, I served on the board of Heritage Preservation as vice-chairman and chairman. Among the staff of SFMOMA we've been good citizens in the conservation world. Other organizations include the International Institute for Conservation, and as I've mentioned, the Western Assocation for Art Conservation.

Rubens: So this was rewarding to you, these organizations?

04-00:18:50

Eckmann Lane: Yes. Oh, absolutely. We're a small profession. It's through these organizations that the field moves ahead. There are few conservation centers, like the Getty or the National Gallery or the Metropolitan Museum, where they provide research and education for the field. But for the most part, advancement comes through these professional organizations and individual conservators themselves.

Rubens: So there would be national conventions and—

04-00:19:37

Eckmann Lane: Annual meetings for the conservators and training seminars and programs around the country. That's how we continue to learn and to know our colleagues. We teach each other. We call each other on the phone or email. And that's how we work together.

Rubens: Maybe the segue is, you said there's always been a scramble for support. And there was great portion that [came from Elise Haas].

04-00:20:51

Eckmann Lane: She was very, I think, taken by this idea of conservation, when one of her paintings was damaged, and she had it treated by the Kecks. They developed a friendship. Caroline and Elise actually had family friends in common through the Stein family.

Rubens: Had you met Elise before you came out to San Francisco?

04-00:21:17
Eckmann Lane: No. I didn't meet her until I came out. She was still very much present in the museum when I arrived in 1973. She would come to the museum, and she would come to visit us in the conservation department. To see what we were doing, and we would visit her at her home, of course.

Rubens: Why do you say of course?

04-00:21:44
Eckmann Lane: Well, we would visit her to care for her collection. She was very proud of her collection, which has since come to the museum. She would have us come out and take a look at is, as conservators, but also because she was proud of her conservation center. We'd have little tea parties for her when she visited the conservation department. Usually around her birthday, and at other times of the year, she'd come in. Sometimes her husband, Walter, Sr., would come in, too. It was really quite a treat. We realized they were very special. And we felt like part of her museum family.

Rubens: Did you like them?

04-00:22:23
Eckmann Lane: We were kids in our early twenties, and Elise and Walter Haas were such great benefactors to the museum, and civic leaders, so we admired them greatly.

Rubens: Well, I'm asking if—You know, sometimes people have to roll their eyes, and these are the things you do.

04-00:22:44
Eckmann Lane: No, we did it because it was fun. I think they must've been amused by us. We would set up and have little parties. [laughs] And we would show them our work we were proud of. They were certainly gracious about it.

Rubens: So I'm trying to get at, sometimes was there, you know, a feeling of class differential or, "We need to mind our Ps and Qs" or anything?

04-00:23:15
Eckmann Lane: Oh, we knew that they were the great benefactors, of course. Mrs. Haas was quite senior by then and a grand lady. So it was something quite special. It wasn't as if she'd pop by the conservation department every day.

Rubens: But she wasn't also a pain in the rear? Or somebody you all had to—

04-00:23:37
Eckmann Lane: No, not to us. I think we were like her grandchildren, since the conservation department was her dedication, she kind of had a soft spot for us. As long as

we were doing a good job and we were something that would make her proud. I think she was pleased to have the conservation center.

Rubens: How well did you know her, would you say?

04-00:24:08
Eckmann Lane: Oh, I couldn't say I knew her. I knew her to visit her and to chat with her, and to see her a couple times of year. [pause] I admired her considerable contributions.

Rubens: She has that wonderful oral history. She talks about meeting Matisse. But I don't know if she told those stories or—

04-00:24:31
Eckmann Lane: Oh, she loved to tell those stories. She loved to have you try to pick out which was the fake Matisse of her drawings, you know? Because she had bought one of the famous fakes. She would *love* to ask people, "Well, which one of these drawings do you think is not real?" So she'd have fun with that.

Rubens: Could you tell?

04-00:25:00
Eckmann Lane: I'm sure if you were a Matisse scholar, you could. The line was not quite as free, and it was a little more guarded, you know? But she wouldn't want you to be able to tell, of course. [laughs]

Rubens: That's funny.

04-00:25:22
Eckmann Lane: She'd enjoy playing stump the stars. And we were hardly the stars. But yes, I was at her apartment a number of times during her lifetime. The Haas family was very generous to us.

Rubens: Do you think there's anything more particularly?

04-00:25:53
Eckmann Lane: Well, I think by the time I got on there—You might ask Tony Rockwell because he comes on a few years earlier, in the real setting-up process.

Rubens: Anything specifically though, about the *Femme au Chapeau*? Did you literally work on it?

04-00:26:37
Eckmann Lane: I did an examination on it. It didn't really come into the collection until the end of my time as a practicing conservator there. I'd moved on to being in the museum administration. I think it was the last year that I was overlapping both the chief conservation and deputy director for curatorial affairs, so I did a technical examination on it.

Rubens: Did you supervise any of the conservation on it?

04-00:27:45
Eckmann Lane: Well, there wasn't a lot of conservation of it that went on. It had been treated earlier and remains in good condition.

Rubens: That's an example. That's an example of what you're saying.

04-00:27:52
Eckmann Lane: My colleague Will Shank carried out a minor treatment, I believe

Rubens: I just really had one other question specifically, they wanted me to specifically ask you about Still paintings.

04-00:29:07
Eckmann Lane: Clyfford Still?

Rubens: Yes. Did you install the show? Do you have any particular memories about working with him? And was there specific conservation?

04-00:29:17
Eckmann Lane: I don't really remember working with him. I do remember when that group of paintings came to conservation. I remember very clearly the conservation of those works. They'd been rolled and stored, and they had a lot of debris on the surface. They'd been stashed for years. They had to be cleaned, new stretchers made, and the paintings stretched onto stretchers. Some of them are huge. They're really monumental pictures, and he mixed his own paints, some of which remain tacky. Because they'd been rolled up and stored for so long, a lot of that debris was trapped in the surface of the paintings. We had quite a lot of work to do to put that show together and get the paintings back into exhibitable condition. It was mostly surface cleaning. At that point, people hadn't had much experience in cleaning canvas paintings that had raw, exposed canvas, so we had to experiment with using different types of erasers, powdered erasers. There's an old tradition of cleaning paintings with bread, if you will. Using bread as an eraser. We even cooked up bread, using no oils or salts. Not a bread you'd want to eat, but useful as a kind of eraser. Now today, thirty years later, there are some wonderful erasers made that are of synthetic materials, that are good for cleaning those surfaces. We had to make our own back then. It seems like the dark ages; it's only thirty years ago.

Rubens: It's a great story.

04-00:31:29
Eckmann Lane: But that was what most of that was about. The shows that I remember, I remember that as a big conservation effort. I remember working with Philip Guston, in his last exhibition before he died, in 1980. He brought us a number of his early paintings that hadn't been on view in a long time. Of course, that was an exciting exhibition, because it was showing his late work, which was

very controversial at the time. I'm sure you and Henry have talked about that, but it was quite a treat to meet and work with Philip Guston.

Rubens: Say one more sentence. I don't know his personality at all or—

04-00:32:21
Eckmann Lane: I remember him as a big personality. He was determined to emphasize the recent works, and have them be the headliner in his show. Those were new paintings, so from a conservation point of view, they didn't require much, other than careful handling because they were big. But he also brought in to conservation some of his very early paintings, which were also figurative, these early paintings had been rolled for a long, long time. They were cracked, and they'd been just stashed away for years and years. He wanted to exhibit them, show the early figurative paintings and then the late figurative work, and the abstract expressionist pictures in between. It's always interesting to work with a senior artist. It doesn't always work out that an artist's late work is as strong as Philip Guston's has proven to be. He was right; the late work was great and very influential work. But at that moment, it was not necessarily accepted in 1980. How many artists are painting figuratively again, and painting in a style similar to Guston that was then perceived to be cartoonish?

Rubens: Were you pleased with how the show was hung and the restoration that occurred?

04-00:34:21
Eckmann Lane: I thought it was exciting painting and I loved working with the artist, but my focus was conservation at that moment.

Rubens: You were able to get the early pieces the way you wanted them?

04-00:34:35
Eckmann Lane: I believe that the artist was pleased; the working environment in the seventies and the early eighties was a little more relaxed. I remember working with Fuston and also Nasuch, Ed Ruscha and Robert Rauschenberg in the mid-seventies. Bob was a character. He's still a character. He was drinking a lot at that time and he was fun and difficult to work with.

Rubens: What was the difficult part?

04-00:35:18
Eckmann Lane: Well, he could be temperamental. Especially if he'd been drinking. But he had a lot of fun working with the crew. And our installation crew was made up of artists.

Rubens: That's the one I was trying to—

04-00:35:33
Eckmann Lane: Kent Roberts. Have you talked to Kent?

Rubens: There's someone who's been there a long time, they want to interview.

04-00:35:36

Eckmann Lane: Conservation and installation staff had close work relationships with the artists. The installation crew enjoys the opportunity to work closely with artists. Often, the curatorial staff or conservation staff doesn't get to know the artists and work as closely with them today because the staff is larger and the artists have staff. Back in the seventies, it was a little more intimate and relaxed. The museum world was more casual, and smaller. The nice part of that was that was working more intimately with artists. We had a lot of fun working with artists back in the old museum, and still today, especially with younger emerging artists.

Interviewed by Lisa Rubens and Richard Cándida Smith, ROHO; Jill Sterrett and Peter Samis, SFMOMA

Interview #3: September 6, 2007

[Begin Audio File 5 09-06-2007.mp3]

05-00:00:37

Eckmann Lane: The story of the *Femme au chapeau* and how it came to the museum has been told before: it was first recognized by Leo Stein at the 1905 Salon; he immediately saw it as something powerful and brilliant, bought it within a few days, and then it ultimately came to the Bay Area through his brother and sister-in-law, Michael and Sally Stein. But there's a later story, a more recent story of the friendship that developed around this painting between Elise Haas and Caroline Keck, the very great conservation educator. It's also the story of how the SFMOMA came to have such an outstanding conservation center.

[Narrator deleted sentence in editing]

There was a mishap, and a damage occurred. Mrs. Haas got acquainted with Sheldon and Caroline Keck through that. That's the story of how most people meet conservators. Something terrible happens, and then they learn about conservation.

In 1966, there was a Matisse retrospective in the United States, to which Mrs. Haas had lent the *Femme au chapeau*. While it was in Boston, the registrar from the MoMA recognized some cracking and flaking in this lower left section and contacted the Kecks. Mrs. Haas wanted the painting to go to Sheldon and Caroline; she had it taken there by private car to their home in Cooperstown. They had just retired from Brooklyn, where Sheldon had developed the conservation center in the Brooklyn Museum. Caroline had had a conservation studio on State Street. She had been the consulting conservator to the MoMA and to the Guggenheim. The painting arrives at Bayberry Cottage in Cooperstown, and Caroline writes to Elise Haas that she's delighted to have the painting and that it's arrived safely, and that in fact, her family had been great friends with the Steins, and that when Caroline and Sheldon were first married, in the thirties, they actually spent three months in Settignano with Leo Stein, and that it was, therefore, really a particular joy for her to have this painting. And they strike up a friendship, Elise Haas and Caroline Keck, these two rather grand ladies. Elise Haas writes to Caroline that she had actually never met Leo and Gertrude, but had become great friends with Sarah, with Sally, after Michael's death. They correspond about extended family and get to know one another. So in that time, in that late sixties, they become acquaintances and then friends.

Later in the sixties, Mrs. Keck starts to convince Elise Haas that what the museum needs is a conservation center. One of Mrs. Keck's students, [one of

her] protégés, Tony Rockwell, is coming to California. He had personal reasons to want to be out here. Mrs. Keck encourages Mrs. Haas to develop conservation here at the museum. The thing that's so groundbreaking about this is there's really very, very little art conservation west of Chicago at this point. There's a new conservation center in LA County, with Ben Johnson. There are conservators in Kansas City and St. Louis and Chicago, but west of that, there's almost nothing. Mrs. Keck encourages Mrs. Haas to establish the department at the museum, which she does, and dedicates it in honor of Sheldon and Caroline. The idea of the conservation center in the Van Ness building was, at that point, to be a regional center that would provide services to other museums for a fee. For many, many years, the conservation center did that. This structure helped to build the conservation center, and allowed us, in those years, in the seventies and eighties especially, to have many more conservators than the museum would've had in any other circumstance. So we were dedicated to the museum collection, but also to other museums and outside clients. We had a team of trained young conservators working here. That was the beginning of what is one of the very few, and one of the very extraordinary centers for contemporary conservation. This painting *Femme au Chapeau* came to the museum with the Elise [Haas] bequest in '91, and I had the great pleasure of examining it and doing some minor conservation work with it at that time.

Rubens: Why don't you just say what the minor—

05-00:06:39
Eckmann Lane: It has some inherent fragilities because it was very spontaneously painted. You can see clearly that the charcoal drawing is visible through the paint, that the paint has been laid on really quite freely. He lays some quite thick impasto in some areas, over what appeared to be some dry earlier paint. There appears to have been some earlier painting that he later painted over. The adhesion of those later paint layers to the earlier paint layers are somewhat fragile. But all in all, it's a very sound painting. Examining it in 1991, I was happy to see that the treatment that the Kecks had done in 1966, which was a very traditional lining of the painting with a wax-type adhesive, and consolidation and repair of these small losses, was still in very good shape. And although it's had a little bit of work since then to remedy small damages, it's still in very fine condition. It's an incredibly beautiful painting.

Sterrett: Inge-Lise, can I ask you if you knew Elise Haas? Did you know her well?

Rubens: Yes, please, do talk about [her] and talk about going to her house.

05-00:08:10
Eckmann Lane: When I came to the SFMOMA, or the SFMA, it was in 1973. Elise was very much active in the museum at that time, and she was still very dedicated to her conservation studio. She came in to visit us. We had these little tea parties. We would set up in the conservation lab on Van Ness Avenue, a little party

and Elise and Walter would come in and visit and see the work we were doing. And of course, we were invited to her home to look at her collection. Not only the beautiful paintings, but her great collection of Matisse drawings, which she would take great pleasure in asking guests and visitors if they could distinguish the fake Matisse drawing. This was her greatest pleasure. Many collectors are embarrassed that they may have bought a fake, and they try to brush it under the rug, but Elise would always make a sort of parlor game out of it by saying, “Well, tell me, which one do you think is the fake?” Because she had bought one from the charming [Elmyr] de Hory and she just took pleasure in stumping the scholars. So yes, she was still very, very active in the museum, and still, I think, hoping that the original optimistic business plan that the conservation studio could be a real income generator was going to be the goal. But as the museum grew and we became more and more dedicated to the collection, of course, it became not a regional center, but the museum’s conservation center.

Sterrett: One of her major marks was conservation. Were there other sorts of marks that she made on the museum?

05-00:10:17
Sterrett: Really, what did she stand for in the museum?

05-00:10:28
Eckmann Lane: In my view, obviously, her dedication to the conservation center was tremendous, because it’s about collection and collection building. Many other museums around the country tried to woo Elise Haas, and to say to her that paintings as great as the *Femme au chapeau* should really come to a greater museum collection, should come to the MoMA, or the National Gallery. Other museums attempted to win Elise Haas’s affection away from the SFMOMA. But she really believed in this region and the heritage of the Stein collection. She wanted to build the Michael and Sarah Stein collection here. It was through her efforts that the double portraits of Sally and Michael came here. She bought the portrait of Sally, and she encouraged a friend to buy the portrait of Michael and give it to the museum. She had certainly hoped that more paintings from the Stein collection would come to the museum, and worked towards that. I think her dedication to her town and to building her museum was really a landmark. I think along with Albert Bender and several collectors since then, right up to Phyllis Wattis, that dedication is remarkable—to believe in your town, to not think that once you have acquired something important in the history of art, that it should go to New York or Washington or abroad.

Rubens: Who framed this? Do you know?

05-00:12:24
Eckmann Lane: I don’t know the framing history.

Sterrett: So Inge-Lise, here you are in 1971, in Cooperstown, New York, right?

05-00:12:38
Eckmann Lane: Yes.

Woman: And you're one of the selected young conservators to move west.

05-00:12:45
Eckmann Lane: It was totally serendipitous that I came to the SFMOMA, in my view. But in fact, I've learned later that it was a cunning scheme on the part of Caroline Keck. (I should say Caroline would have celebrated her centennial birthday this year.) And Tony Rockwell, who, let me say, is one of the truly outstanding painting conservators. He is a person who has the creativity and the intuition and the knowledge to really speak to paintings. And they speak to him. But his wish was not to run a conservation center; it's to be in an intimate relationship with the paintings. So I think pretty early on, Tony knew that that wasn't what he wished to do. So they were looking for someone who might have the combined skills of conservation and developing a conservation center for the education and training of young conservators and the care of the museum collection, as well as treatment. I suppose those were the attributes that I brought to it.

So I came on in '73 as in intern conservator, and then spent a year working in Davis and teaching at Davis, because the museum, at that point, wasn't quite ready to hire on additional people. They wanted some conservators to come and work on a commission basis, but they weren't ready to offer any security, in terms of a job position. So it took a little while for things to sort of sort themselves out. Then in the mid-seventies, the conservation center here expanded greatly, with the addition of—I was here, my colleague Jim Bernstein, and Pauline Moore, and then a host of wonderful young conservators coming from the graduate training programs. We grew to be, at times, six or possibly more conservators, which was actually an extraordinarily large staff at that time. So we had a quite a lot of creative collaboration there. It was important because almost no one was working on contemporary art elsewhere. The Museum of Modern Art was dedicated to modern, but more early modernist painting and some contemporary. There were a few individual conservators in the east doing conservation treatments on contemporary art, but this was an absolutely brand new field.

Sterrett: I wonder if this is a nice moment to move to the Stills.

[interruption]

Sterrett: Gerald Nordland was here and told an incredible story about his effort to get Still paintings for the collection. He described how he failed. Henry Hopkins then told a story about how he actually [got them] here at the museum. This coincides with, I think, a very fertile time that you were just referring to, in the seventies. I wonder if you would tell us, from your perspective, about the acquisition of the Still paintings.

05-00:16:29
Eckmann Lane: Well, I come into the story of the acquisition of the Still paintings once all the negotiations and the initial conversations with Still have gone on. The paintings are coming to the museum in 1975. The decision has been made by the museum to make a major commitment to Still, to give a gallery to his paintings, and to take twenty-eight paintings and put them in good order for the museum.

[interruption]

[Narrator deleted paragraph in editing]

05-00:18:47
Eckmann Lane: When Still was painting the paintings, they were on stretchers. And he painted them vigorously and quickly, using his own paints that he mixed with linseed oil and pigments. He brush painted them, he palette knife painted them. And then shortly after he had painted them, he would take them off the stretchers, roll them and store them, because they were extremely large and that was the only practical way for him to care for them. He'd roll them sometimes two and three thick on a tube, and they were left stored that way for many years. And they came to the museum that way, in 1975. And we, the conservation lab staff, were faced with this group of twenty-eight paintings that looked like rolled carpets. And they were really quite dusty and had fragments of wood on them. And they were undulated, because they'd been rolled. And because they're painted with some areas of exposed canvas, they had also distorted a bit unevenly as they dried.

We really had a major project for putting them back in the format of paintings. We had new stretchers made, we worked at cleaning them. The traditional methods for cleaning paintings were just not applicable, because we had basically, raw, sized canvas with no paint on it, that was very grimy and dirty; we had soft paint films with lots of grime in the surface. So we went about devising some new techniques. This was the mid-seventies. Conservators were working more on traditional oil paintings that were very dense films of oil with varnish coatings on them. They'd become dusty over years and years. But the cleaning of those paintings was a completely different animal. There were a few courageous conservators in New York working on color-field paintings, some quite aggressively. We were looking for a way to put these paintings in order without, let me say, imposing ourselves too much on the painting. We developed some cleaning techniques, dry cleaning techniques that have to do more with textile cleaning or with paper cleaning. We had a team of conservators—Jim Bernstein, Pauline Moore and myself, primarily, but other young conservators working here. Because we were trained, Pauline and I were trained both in paper conservation and painting conservation, we felt that we were prepared somewhat to do this. Jim, who is a great chef, had the idea of baking some bread with no oil, no salt, no nothing, to use as a kind of a sponge eraser. That revival of an old cleaning technique was one of the

techniques we used. We used other dry cleaning methods. Today, thirty years later, this seems quite familiar to us. But in 1977, it was brand new territory. So what was exciting was the collaboration—the collaboration with the museum, with Henry, with our conservation colleagues, talking about this and trying to come to terms with new materials, new scale, paint films that were, in some cases, not entirely dry, a bit tacky. Because only in some small areas, did Still use artist's oil paints. Primarily he made his own paints. They've held up beautifully, but they're lean. It's almost like working on a pastel in some areas. It was a time of experimentation and innovation and collaboration in conservation, which I think has been the hallmark of the conservation studio here at SFMOMA.

Sterrett: Did you have the opportunity to meet Mr. Still?

05-00:23:26
Eckmann Lane: Briefly, yes. But—Still did come at that time, in the mid-seventies, but I can't say that I really had a connection with him. Not in the way, for instance, that I did with Philip Guston when he came for his exhibition in 1980. Guston brought many of his early paintings that he had owned throughout his lifetime. In the conservation studio, we cared for and conserved some of his earliest work. And he was very pleased with that, and we had a wonderful rapport.

Rubens: I just wanted to ask you one thing, too. Is there any reason to say anything about this? To an uneducated painter, patron, would they think this is a mistake?

05-00:24:38
[Narrator deleted paragraph in editing]

[material deleted]

Eckmann Lane: Actually, Lisa, that is a good question. Let me say something about that.

One of the interesting things that you see in this painting is some unevenness in the unpainted areas of the canvas. And I don't know how well you can see it, but there is some darkness that's evident. And Still primed—he didn't actually prime his canvases, he sized them with a rabbit-skin glue that he cooked up and rubbed into the surface of the canvas to create a barrier ground between the canvas and the paint layer. It's not entirely even overall. And therefore, the canvas discolored in an uneven way. In the seventies, and today still, many people look at this and say, "It looks a bit dirty." But in the seventies, when these paintings were only twenty-some years old, people were uncomfortable with any signs of aging. This is one of the things we had to face in the seventies, when working with post-war paintings. People's expectation was that the painting is "brand new." Why should it have stains on it? And if it has things that look like stains or look like damages, you must get rid of them. We didn't understand, collectively, how they were aging yet.

There were people in conservation who took a very aggressive stance on staining. They actually washed the canvases, and even bleached things that looked like stains. There's been a lot of criticism of conservators for this. But in their defense, I would say that if an artist or a curator or an owner is adamant in wishing something to be cleaned, they will find a conservator who will try and intervene. At this moment, it was very experimental. Here at SFMOMA, when we addressed these Still paintings, we didn't use any wet treatment or washing of the canvas. That is something that's done with textiles, and some paintings have been washed, where they've been terribly stained. At times, it may have been a good thing. But overall, thirty years later, looking at the Morris Louis paintings, the Ken Noland paintings that have been washed, in my view, they have aged differently from the paintings that have not been washed. It hasn't been a salutary effect because the quality of the canvas is different, the sizing is washed out, the canvas surface has a rough texture, the nap is roughed up. I think the paintings look different. They've changed in a way that isn't necessarily to their advantage. But it's hard to know what the future will bring. People in 1975 thought that these paintings should look exactly as fresh as the day they were painted, and they wanted washing or cleaning or stain removal. Now I think we can look at something with a bit of perspective and say, "It looks good. It has a bit of age, but that's a part of it."

Samis: When you were conserving paintings of this scale, were you working on them vertically or horizontally?

05-00:29:44

Eckmann Lane: It was a combination, Peter. We worked on them horizontally at first. We had to take them off their rolled tubes, and we did surface cleaning on them horizontally. Then we stretched them, and we worked on them vertically in the galleries. You'll recall we built a conservation storage space that was a gallery space in the old Van Ness building that had moveable walls, and the paintings could all be hung, some of them on the front walls and some of them stored behind the wall. We did work on them both horizontally and vertically. They were astoundingly large paintings for the fifties, and for conservators in the seventies. Today, they're dwarfed by the Anselm Kiefer, but it's all a matter of perspective.

Rubens: Does this mean that it wasn't shown? He does it in '59, and then just rolls it up with other things?

05-00:30:51

Eckmann Lane: Because he was amazingly prolific.

Sterrett: And he was very, very particular about where he would place his paintings.

Samis: And this really does raise the whole question of intentionality and whether, when it left his studio, that space was entirely pristine, or whether—

05-00:31:12
Eckmann Lane: That we'll never know.

Samis: And whether that came up entirely from the sizing irregularities.

05-00:32:25
[material deleted]

Eckmann Lane: When I came to the museum in '73, Hunk and Moo [Harry W. and Mary Margaret Anderson] were really very involved with the museum, and interested in conservation, and they were here quite a lot. It was a pleasure to know them and to have some association with their collection. The collaboration with conservators and working with artists is the real joy of working on contemporary collections. And this painting, *Collection*, by Rauschenberg had a long history of repair. It's hard to distinguish what is the construction of the painting from what is later intervention and repair. But shortly after it came to the museum, actually, Tony Rockwell did some care on this painting and some repair. This was new turf for conservators, the layering of all these materials. Of course, the forgiving thing about this painting is that it's actually difficult to see areas of damage, because there's so much action on the surface. When Rauschenberg was here for his retrospective—in '77, I believe, or '78; Peter, you probably remember better than I—he was certainly not disturbed by any of the changes that had happened in the painting's life. But there was one aspect of the painting that we knew had changed, and we didn't actually have an answer for. And that is the fabric that veils the mirror. And this is a story about collaboration over time. Because what we did at that time, in the late seventies, early eighties, is document the fact that there was a sort of shredded, deteriorated piece of silken fabric that we really didn't have a way to conserve. We preserved the bits that had fallen from the painting, and documented the fact that this had changed. One of the responsibilities in conservation is the documentation of the work and the documentation of the painting. That's something that SFMOMA's always been truly dedicated to.

Not to digress, but in the seventies, George Stout was still a presence here in the Bay Area, one of the true pioneers of conservation. His big contribution, I would say, is the development of a language to describe painting condition. He often came to the museum as a visitor and looked at our reports and documentation in the lab. That was an exciting part of those early days, too.

But back to Rauschenberg. We documented the fact that this piece of fabric was disintegrating and that there was very, very little left. But we really didn't have a way to [fix the problem]. In recent years, it's been addressed by the conservation staff and been made whole. I just love the fact that although we didn't have an answer for it thirty years ago, we documented the fact that it had changed. We saved bits of it, and recently a solution was fund, and now it's been restored, if you will, and made whole.

Sterrett: If I remember correctly, that was done with Rauschenberg's input.

Samis: I believe that Rauschenberg had recommended, or either had himself dyed or dipped some fabric in wine, if I'm not mistaken.

05-00:36:43

Eckmann Lane: This is the interesting thing, that in 1977, when Rauschenberg saw the painting, he was not distressed by the change in it, or the deterioration of this piece, or these elements. I find this is often the case, that artists, early in their career or mid-career, are less concerned with changes in their artwork. As they age, as we all do, they look at the works a little more critically, and they want the preservation to be of a higher level. Rauschenberg did consult and work with the conservation studio here and with Will Shank to recreate this element. That is the ideal situation, when the artist himself can be brought in and actually has a good feeling and recollection for what it was and what it should look like, and helps to make that possible.

[Begin Audio File 6 09-06-2007.mp3]

Sterrett: Earlier this morning, Inge-Lise, you gave us a wonderful glimpse into conservation in the museum in the seventies. By the middle of the eighties, with Jack Lane's arrival, there was a real distinct sea change in the museum. Certainly, he told us about the Polke and the acquisition of works like the Polke. I'm wondering if you could tell us about that transition.

06-00:00:27

Eckmann Lane: I love sitting before the Polke, because not only is he an amazingly inventive artist, but he has such respect for all the traditions of art materials. He plays games with those. He looks forward, he looks back. He's so knowledgeable about history, so inventive and creative. These paintings and the great Anselm Kiefer herald, for me, the new beginning of the museum in the late eighties, when Jack came on to be the director. I was among the staff that had been here since the early seventies, through Henry's tenure and through all the wonderful exhibitions that we had with Rauschenberg and Guston and Noguchi and many others. But definitely, things were changing when Jack came in. There was a new energy, there was a new ambition, a new level of activity. Because I am so close to Jack Lane and know him so well, I share a recollection of his first staff meeting. He came to the museum on Van Ness Avenue, and he told a story to the full staff about a dream he had had of a sermon he was to give, or a teaching; that he had taken on a new parish and was going to give his first sermon, and he really didn't know what to say. He didn't know what the answers would be, but he had taken on this new charge. I think that many of us were just floored that he told this story so candidly, that he didn't know what the answers were, but he was here to carry forward. That was right before he turned up the pain amplifier and accelerated the pace of activity exponentially. I think so many of us decided this was the new possibility, that we could do so much more. He brought in new curators,

additional curators, increased the acquisitions, the programs. For many of us, we just saw this was a whole new museum. Even before we started thinking about building the new museum on Third Street.

Sterrett: And your role expanded. That's something else that happened during this period of time, as well. Can you tell us how you became interested in playing a larger role in the museum?

06-00:03:35

Eckmann Lane: It was serendipity. I had been responsible for the conservation effort. Our then chief curator Graham Beal left the museum, stepped down to become the director of the museum in Omaha. Graham suggested to Jack that I might take on, in an interim capacity, the responsibility of directing and managing the curatorial effort. So I did that for a number of months. After about three months, Jack asked me if I would take the job on a regular basis, to be deputy director for curatorial affairs. So I kind of just learned in the doing of it. I took on the management of the programs and collection part of the museum.

Sterrett: Do you remember how your own vision for the departments that you were managing changed under Jack? Maybe you two had different aspirations for these departments or areas of the museum?

06-00:04:44

Eckmann Lane: Coming from a conservation point of view and a collection point of view, my ambition was really to try to put some order to things like the accessions process and the documentation of that. I'd inherited something that was a little more ad hoc. So that was something that mattered to me. I think I was just trying to learn as fast as I could how all of the different aspects of a museum were integrated. Jack was a mentor to me. I worked well with the curators and had always worked with them as a peer. But because I didn't have a particular curatorial directive of my own, I could, I feel, contribute something to a balance of the programming. The education program became a more integral part of the overall curatorial program then, rather than a sort of distinct parallel responsibility. From there, I gradually learned about publications and exhibitions management, and not just the collection care aspect of it.

Sterrett: I have always understood that you played a significant role in hiring John Weber, as well, too. And that was tied to revamping education, perhaps.

06-00:06:14

Eckmann Lane: We'd gone through a few different iterations of the education department. We were fortunate enough to find in John Weber a curator who was also an educator, and really married the two. So yes, I am very appreciative for the day that John Weber agreed to come to the SFMOMA. He made a tremendous, tremendous contribution here, and I think integrated the education program with the collection curators, in a way that was—it was a collaboration and such an equal footing that the dialogue just—it expanded and grew so beautifully, under his direction. But yes, that was one of the areas

that I helped to shepherd. Then I took a brief hiatus from the museum and Jack actually asked me back to take on the role of deputy director for administration. I don't know how on earth I thought I could possibility do this, but I did take that on, and took on the management of general operations and the bookstore, and learned a little bit more about the earned-income side of the museum, and helped integrate that into the curatorial program. Then through a number of iterations, that became the deputy director position, which I held through the opening of the new museum. It was a very thrilling and exciting ride, for those of us who were here, to build this new museum. It was a heady experience.

Cándida Smith: In your positions, were you involved with expanding the staff?

06-00:08:27

Eckmann Lane: We were trying to control the expansion of the staff and the budget. We did. We were very conservative about that. But certainly, we did have growth in the staff; but far more in the parts of the museum that were not under my management, the parts of the development and the public relations/marketing side, the things that needed to grow more than the curatorial program. The curatorial program had grown considerably with Jack's hiring of Bob Riley in the media arts department, and Paolo Polledri, and then Aaron Betsky in the architecture and design department. So there, the staff expanded quite a bit. But in a lot of the other areas of the staff, we really relied on people to just work smarter. They performed magnificently, in my view. I think the staff did an amazing job building this museum, and concurrently running a program that continued until six months before we opened the new museum, in January of '95. We kept that museum open and running as we were planning and building, and then moving to this museum. We had a six-month hiatus, while we got the new museum open.

Cándida Smith: Some of the interviews that we've done indicate that I guess in the sixties, maybe in the seventies—you can probably confirm or challenge, based on your own personal experience—that maybe the—not the work standards, the work standards were high. But there was a certain casualness about number of hours worked. Deadlines were not as intense as they became.

06-00:10:28

Eckmann Lane: San Francisco in the seventies was a different place. There was, I'd say, more of a flexible nature to people's hours that they kept. But I think people were, in general, productive. We had, in the conservation area, our own obligation to be an earned-income component of the museum. Actually, for years, the conservation department reported to the deputy director for administration because we were really seen as an earned-income component that then provided a service to the museum. So we were like a little business. So yes, it's true that each of the departments was a bit more separate, and they weren't as integrated as they became after Jack took on the directorship. But each one had its own responsibility. But there was a kind of style, a management style,

a sort of lifestyle that was the seventies in San Francisco. A little more causal. And Jack introduced an organizational structure that was more meaningful and more integrated. It required people to communicate with one another, which was a very good thing for the museum. It also accelerated the pace of activity. So there were a number of people who self-selected to leave the museum, when it became a new generation there. Some of us were very happy to start fresh.

Cándida Smith: And of course, if one has, say, a casual work environment, sometimes one of the balancing aspects of that is maybe the wages aren't as high as they might be in comparable situa—

06-00:12:21
Eckmann Lane: Oh, I think they were very modest. The wages were very modest, yeah. I think that was true in the museum world, in general.

Cándida Smith: And then as one professionalizes, presumably, there's increasing demand for the wages to reflect that they were doing professional-level work.

06-00:12:44
Eckmann Lane: I think there was an enhancement in the wage scale.

Cándida Smith: In your capacity as deputy director, did you have to worry about what we in the university call "equity issues"? Which is that somebody with the institution is making approximately the same that they would make if they were doing the same work in another institution.

06-00:13:07
Eckmann Lane: That was formalized, and many things were corrected through a program that really took those things into account. Previous to that, it had been much more, I think, ad hoc and casual, it's true. So I think those changes were all good things for the museum. I think that they come with a little tension, that people feel a little uncomfortable to have things formalized and—there's something gained, something lost. The salary scale improved, and the work environment became more organized, and therefore more structured. I think it was all for the best, and something that needed to happen. But it was, I think, a change in museums across the nation at that point. But we, the SFMOMA, became a player on a more national level, instead of being quite so remote. In the years when I first came out to San Francisco, it seemed like a bit of an outpost out here, in the early seventies. It was a wonderful place, and it had a lot of creativity, but it wasn't as integrated into the museum world nationally. Certainly, not internationally.

Cándida Smith: One of the things that would interest me is the process by which the standard of evaluating candidates for jobs starts to inch towards more academic preparation, maybe more job experience. As I recall from the first part of your interview, you came here pretty much straight out of college, right?

06-00:14:59
Eckmann Lane: I'd finished my graduate work, and I had done a brief internship at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. A lot of our conservators had come right from graduate school, but all of them had a graduate degree. I really can't speak to the history of the curators, previous to that time.

Cándida Smith: But what about in the departments that you were in charge of? I mean in terms of conservation. Has conservation moved from perhaps something that one learns as a craft to something that requires—

06-00:15:33
Eckmann Lane: Well, that had happened; at that time, it was changing. The apprenticeship training still exists, but it's less prevalent. So now—most conservators have graduate level training in education, in art history, and conservation specifically.

Cándida Smith: When did that transition hit this institution?

06-00:16:12
Eckmann Lane: Well, the founding conservator, Tony Rockwell, had been apprenticeship trained by Sheldon and Caroline Keck. Subsequent to that—that was in 1971, that he started the studio in Van Ness. So it's really been consistent since that time that we've had a very high level of conservation practitioner working here.

Sterrett: But it leads to something that comes up in our archives quite a bit. As Caroline Keck is writing to Elise Hass, she refers to you all, her students, as being fine professionals who've been "Keck washed." Do you know that—

06-00:17:02
Eckmann Lane: Well, she looked at us all as her children. She took pride in that. So that was—

Sterrett: But what did it mean? Do you know what it means?

06-00:17:12
Eckmann Lane: I don't actually—No, I don't, because actually—

Sterrett: It seems to be sort of a reflection of the professionalization that she felt she was a part of. I have a related question, which is that in the seventies, when the conservation department was established, there was no doubt that it was a revenue-generating department. But in the eighties, there was quite a campaign to pull back from the revenue generation, and actually devote our services to the collection. And that seems also—

06-00:17:53
Eckmann Lane: Well, it was sold to Elise Haas as a not only self-sufficient department of the museum, but as a potential revenue generator. As the museum grew and the programming grew, it became an impossible proposition to take care of the collection, the programs, the exhibition programs, and do enough outside

work to generate enough income to actually offset that. It was an ideal notion of how productive and lucrative the conservation business can be. But it got the place started, and it built up a very fine staff. Now we have here one of the very great conservation centers in the nation. That happened because there were enough conservators here in the seventies to really have a think tank, to do enough work, to get things started on a professional level. That generated the training programs and many students coming to work here, bringing new ideas. There's a cross-fertilization that goes on. It's one of the first studios dedicated to modern art conservation, really, anywhere in the world. In that, it was a tremendous component of the museum. But it couldn't earn enough money by doing outside work to possibility support all the activity of the museum, so it gradually shifts to being a museum conservation center.

[interruption]

Sterrett: Paper conservator that I am, I thought it was interesting that the works that you selected were all paintings. Particularly for the really broad nature of our collection. I just wanted to ask you about that, and also your views on all the other curatorial departments and works that we collect here. Preservation writ large.

06-00:20:45

Eckmann Lane: I am dedicated and interested in all those things, but I really selected those couple of paintings because I think that inherent in the *Femme au chapeau* and the Clyfford Still gift, or the Polke and the Kiefer, there's a story there that's about the history of the museum. I also think that the story about conservation is not about the heroic conservator who saved a certain piece. That seems less interesting to me. But I think that the idea that one would talk about something that they had treated and show the before and after seems to me a less interesting story than the things that have been great about this conservation department—which is, in my view, the excellent collaboration of teams of conservators, the innovation of taking on new projects that really haven't been addressed before, and trying to wrestle with those and do the right thing by the artwork. The documentation of treatment for the future, because sometimes the treatment will change, the painting will change; but the record of what's been done, and the collaboration with the artist, the collaboration with the curator, and among conservators, that's the record. So these paintings are works that seemed to evoke those stories for me.

That's why I was also interested in taking a look at the Kiefer, which to me, heralds the beginning of Jack's time at the museum. It also heralds a new dimension for conservation concerns, because of its enormous scale, the unusual combination of materials, the fact that it's made, already falling apart from the day it's—well, *before* the day it leaves the artist's studio, in a wonderful way. And yet, it's a very forgiving thing, because all those materials somehow do hang together. When that came to the museum, people thought, it's enormous. How will we handle it? How will we care for it? But

somehow, there is a character to the art that is very lasting, is very permanent. Those are the stories that seem to me so important. The Polke and the Kiefer represent this whole new chapter after Jack came onto the museum and was such a leader to me and to others. And a mentor to me in my role from conservation through the museum administration.

So that is my personal story, of course, which became a part of the museum's history after '91, when Jack and I became personally engaged, and then married in '92. It was and is a wonderful thing in my life. It was a complicated period for the museum, not always easy. But we went to the board of trustees—or I should say Jack went to the board of trustees, and we both offered to step down at that time. They didn't wish for us to step down. So we carried on as director and deputy director, from that point through 1996, when I stepped down. We were instrumental in building the new museum and opening the new museum. I had a great staff that worked with me, and I worked with them to make that happen, during a period of tremendous excitement and tremendous challenge.

Rubens: And of course, you had to report directly to Fisher, is that right?

06-00:25:35
Eckmann Lane: I reported to our chairman, Brooks Walker.

Rubens: Oh, Brooks Walker.

Samis: I'm glad you broached this story, because I was going to ask you about the hiatus between being deputy director of curatorial affairs and then coming back in administration.

06-00:25:56
Eckmann Lane: I did take a brief hiatus from the museum, of a few months. I did step down for personal reasons, because of some matters in my life that I was trying to address. I don't know how I imagined that I could come back in the role of deputy director for administration, but somehow, Jack and our other members of senior staff at the time thought that I could. And I did. It was shortly after that time that I realized that I was in love with my director. I told him so. His response was, "Ditto." [laughter] Such an articulate man. Thus began the greatest love story of my life.

[End of Interview]

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