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Margaret Miller oral history interview by Andrew Huse, January 22, 2004

Margaret A. Miller (Interviewee)

Andrew T. Huse (Interviewer)

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USF Florida Studies Center
Oral History Program
USF 50th History Anniversary Project

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Research in Art – Contemporary Art
Museum and Graphic Studio
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TRANSCRIPTION

H: Today is January 22, 2004. My name is Andrew Huse, program assistant for the Florida Studies Center. Today we continue a series of interviews in our studio here at the Tampa campus library with USF faculty, students, staff, and alumni in order to order to commemorate fifty years of university history. Today we'll be interviewing Margaret Miller, who came to USF in 1965 as a student. She's worn several hats since then: alumni, professor, director. Good morning, Dr. Miller.

M: Good morning, except I'm not a doctor.

H: Okay.

M: I don't have a Ph.D. I've actually gone through this whole system and become a full professor, remarkably, and tenured, and I only have a master's degree. That probably couldn't happen now.

H: We should give you an honorary degree. At least by the thick qualifications I see here in the resume. First, we're going to get started with what brought you, originally, to USF in 1965.

M: I came up here as a student. I had been at the University of Miami. I was then married to a man that was coming up here to work with Dr. Drost, who is a really

distinguished researcher in marine biology. My then husband was working in that field, and we came up here to interview. I, of course, wanted to continue my education, so I interviewed over in the art department. [I] was interested in both art history and studio practice at the time. That's what brought us here.

H: You went straight to the art department. Tell us about some of your early impressions.

M: I can remember walking into the art department. It was quite intimidating. It was really one of the best facilities for art in the country at that time. It was relatively new. The first president of this university, John Allen, as I'm sure others have told you, is very keen on the arts. [He] really even talked about the arts possibly even being like a football team in terms of being a catalyst for community interest in the university and for getting the prestige and the program and the university out in the community. It was very early that they built the first theater on campus, which is still an excellent proscenium theater. They built the studio building, which is this three-wing building. Two wings of it were occupied by the art department. The art department, from the very beginning, was very studio-oriented. That means that they were teaching classes for young emerging artists. The art history program, which I had an affinity for, even at that point, was really in support of the studio program. I was a pretty good B-plus artist. I wanted to be an artist, but it was always more interesting to me to be on the theoretical and critical side of things than it was to studio practice. I really had to work hard at the classes where we had to render the figure of the model. I can remember, Lauren Hutton was here as a model in the art department. All the models had to

wear swimming suits. They could get away with bikinis, but that was about it. We didn't have nude models at that time. The critiques were very vigorous from faculty. We would all get very nervous. The faculty would come in as a group into a class and review our project and ask us questions and people would burst into tears. I can remember some of the faculty smashing artwork, particularly ceramic artwork to make us understand that we shouldn't get so wedded to our particular projects; that we were artists that our works were in progress and not something that should be regarded as too precious. I can remember when Donald J. Saff, who was really a mentor for me, arrived at the university. He ultimately founded Graphic Studio. Now I'm part of his legacy in that I'm currently directing Graphic Studio. I can remember him dreaming that up. This actually, I may get my timing off, because Don Saff may have just started Graphic Studio before I returned to the university after I received my master's degree at the University of Hawaii. He arrived when I was a student. I was a student assistant. I pulled all the slides for his lectures. He was a very powerful man [and] very charismatic. We worked very hard to please him as students. I can remember we read Merleau-Ponté. We learned about Wittgenstein. [He was] very into aesthetics at the time. There was a professor in the theater departments who's now deceased, Peter O'Sullivan, and Donald Saff and Peter O'Sullivan were great friends. The students became very competitive between theater and art. We would both be engaged in these very rigorous aesthetics classes and reading this material, not secondary, but first hand. It was challenging. I remember we'd tape the lectures, and we had a slide library in lab, which was really the first

humanities lounge when the humanities department was actually in the art building. Reel to reel, we would put these earphones on and listen to these lectures, stop them, take the notes, go over them. It was that difficult to really absorb this material, but [it was] very challenging and exciting. My first trip to New York by train was with a group of students to participate in some sort of conference, I can't even remember quite what it was, that Peter O'Sullivan and Don Saff were involved with. We, as their students, went up to participate. I can remember that was really quite an extraordinary experience for me. That was the atmosphere. The art students were very interested in what was going on in theater. We would go over and watch the auditions for various theater productions. Peter, at that time, was doing Edward Alby, and Tom Stoppard, really cutting-edge material at that point. The faculty in the art department were young, obviously. It was a pretty young department, so the age gap wasn't that great. They were very involved in what was going on in New York. We were very connected, we felt, with New York. I can remember Nicholas Krushenick was the first New York artist I ever met. He came down from New York. We were all like, this great New York artist is coming. What will he be like? He was utterly disappointing. [It] turns out he's actually a pretty good artist and ultimately did publish a graphic studio, but he wasn't very articulate. After this rigor of this aesthetics, then we were looking forward to having our one-two with a New York artist, and he was one of those post-abstract expressionist artists that wasn't very verbal. I can remember how disappointing that was, but I must say my contact with artists over these years certainly has made up for that. It's been really an

extraordinary career here. That sums up the atmosphere. The other thing I can tell you is that we really lived in the studios. Many a night we would sleep on the clay bin. We were very interested in what our colleague artists were doing. We would help each other. It was a very free environment. There were dogs running around, there were people sleeping up in the studios. Some people didn't even have any other place; that's where they lived. The custodians would come in at night and we would know them all. We would spend time looking at what our fellow students were doing and critiquing it. In some senses, as important as key faculty were for me, it was also the peer group. Many of those students have gone off to get graduate degrees at other institutions and go on to teaching careers, and I do follow the alumni. I have a big file of alumni and keep cards for their shows in other places from that era. Some alumni preceded me, but their reputation was very much in our minds, like Robert Stackhouse. Robert Stackhouse was the favorite student of Harrison Covington, who was the founder of the department. To this day, they still remain great friends. David Hackston; I can remember some were really wild and kept us all stirred up and others were very studious and were loners and worked in their studios in a very confined kind of way. There wasn't one kind of student. There was a lot of differentiation between students that were here. [It was] really a vigorous, wonderful studio program. Everybody in the state thought we were the best. Later on, the Board of Regents review teams noted that the art department at the University of South Florida was really the best in the state. While the facilities are no longer state of the art because it's eleven years later, there still is a good reputation for the visual arts, the studio

program in general. Of course, that's a very outstanding innovate program. It was really exciting to be here during that period of time. Then I followed another husband who was an artist in the studio program in photography. He had to go into the military service. He went into the submarine service and he was located in Hawaii, at Pearl Harbor... [Interrupted by Andrew Huse]

H: I just want to stop you real quick. Before we move on from your experiences as a student, I want to stay in that exciting place for just a little while longer. It sounds like the professors really set the bar high. When you met your first artist, you were underwhelmed. Here you had been listening and re-listening to these lectures and all of this stuff and absorbing all this material and somehow the reality of some of these artists just couldn't keep up with your experiences.

M: New York still has that romance as the art center of the world. Remember, these faculty were following the movements at the time. Bob Gelinas had been an abstract expressionist, and he did move on to figurative work. Ernie Cox was doing welded steel. We would go to junkyards as a group of students and pick out different metal pieces. I can remember learning to weld and how scary that was. As a matter of fact, I created an explosion and had a reputation for that because, I forgot exactly what I did wrong, but I did something wrong. We were firing up kilns. We had a foundry. We were pouring bronze. That was all these things with new materials and also with the ideas that were part of what was going on in New York. Then, of course, minimalism came in and everything got very reductive. I can remember making a sculpture myself out of Plexiglas and making minimalist boxes. I actually got that piece into the Florida State Fair

exhibition, which was the forerunner of the Tampa Museum, which is now very important in this community. The original gallery director here, there was actually somebody that preceded me, and his name was Jim Camp, he got that show going in the community. I can remember as students, we were actually submitting to that show. We would get in. I can remember the show that I was in was with an artist named Duane Hanson, who did these very large, very realistic figurative sculptures. At that time, he was doing almost amputative figures of parts of figures that were very realistic, based on the war theme. As a student, getting into that show was a real highlight of my career. I still have that little catalogue. The Florida State Fair show was beautifully staged, because the first gallery director at the University of South Florida went down and staged it for the city. There was always that rapport between the city and the university, even in those very early years. At that point, we were it. There wasn't a Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center. There wasn't a Tampa Museum. Who was coming to perform? That's the other thing I should tell you. Pilobolus, one of the most advanced in avant-garde dance companies was here. We commissioned them to do a piece. I remember some of the dancers danced nude. This was very, very controversial at the moment. The Quinary String Quartet came here every year. There was a film festival that Dale Rose put together. That was the first time that I saw a foreign film: Japanese films, French films. They were staged in various parts of the campus, and they were full. That was what we all did. There was a life at the university that was really almost residential. Even though we were really more of a commuter school, and everyone talks about now as the era of

finally building some dormitories, but at that point, people lived in the neighborhood. Particularly the art area was very much like being on a campus with people living on the campus. Well they were, they were living in the studios. We were here, and we did stuff all day. [We] went to class and then went to the films and went to the auditions for the theater and worked in our studios at night. We were together all the time. I remember I had a meal plan, even though I was living in an apartment off campus. I came in for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. It was a meal ticket that we all used. We'd go out to the University Center as it was called then. The University Center itself has been through so many transformations. Food brought us all together. It was the only place that there was food on campus. Of course, the enrollment was much less. It was a great era. Those of us who'd been around all that time remember that. We keep reminding everybody that there was the Florida Center for the Arts. It was committed to bringing in the most avant-garde and exciting dance companies, theater performances, actors and visiting groups. Dance theater and music were all coming here. Visual artists from New York were coming in. There was always that enlivenment. The faculty would be evaluating with coffee the next morning what that visiting artist's lecture was like. We'd tear these poor people to shreds. We felt armed and able to understand what they were talking about and contribute to the conversation because we were so well prepared by Ernie Cox and Don Saff. I can remember when Mernet Larsen, another faculty member who is a tremendous model and brilliant artist, [a] great painter, but more than that, able to connect with students and push them beyond even their own expectations

about themselves. She became a real model for me. I remember we were all stirred up because she was a representational artist. She wasn't doing abstract work, which was in vogue at the time, or minimalism. She was actually painting the figure. That was the kind of revolutions and new energy that came into the department.

H: Those are two great angles that you just brought up, two great perspectives. One, being USF germinating the Tampa Bay area for more art and things like that, and the second, challenging that community too by bringing in all these avant all these forward progressive artists and being cutting-edge and right up to the moment. Anyone that looks through the *Oracles* of the time can see this foreshadowing as the 1960s are rolling on, starting about when you arrived, in about 1965. You can see the arts and theater challenging things more as the political situation is getting more tense and the cultural horizons are broadening.

M: I just thought of one more thing to tell you. The Ringling Museum in Sarasota, and Sarasota was also a hot bed of writers and artists. They would go to the Hamptons one part of the year and they'd be in Sarasota. I can remember traveling with a group of students to hear Joseph Alpert speak in the Sarasota area. I can remember Andy Warhol coming to the University of Florida, and we all went up to hear Andy Warhol. Andy Warhol showed that film, *Sleep*, that goes eight hours. We sat there and watched all of *Sleep* for eight hours. He was an hour late. What was the woman that was in Andy Warhol's..., Violet, was that her name?

H: I'm not sure.

M: Well, she was there. We waited. We paid a dollar to go see this film and to hear him talk. He didn't come out for almost an hour. We sat there, and we were all getting restless. Whoever this really famous, I'll think of the name in a second, came out and she says, 'Andy says, if you want your money back, to come up and get it.' She just held out a stack of dollar bills. Those people who left went back and got their dollar and the rest of us who were die-hard fans of Andy Warhol sat there through the whole eight hours of *Sleep*. [It was] a projection of two figures sleeping. The projectors were turned on at different times. This was the kind of environment, and since then, we've had Rauschenberg here, and Jim Rosenquist, and Robert Mapplethorpe, and now, I think we're involved with the contemporary artists of this era.

H: [Is there] anything else you want to mention before we move on? You lived off-campus the whole time? Did you spend a semester in the dorms?

M: [I spent] \$45 a month for a little house. I never lived in the dormitories. I lived in a little apartment or house with other students. Remember, when I first came, I was married. It was on a lake, Lake Ellen. We had a \$45 a month little shotgun house that's been leveled since then. [We] came in, and my husband was involved in the graduate program in marine sciences and I was doing what I just described to you in the arts. I also got involved with the students in the marine science area because they take trips down to the Keys, and my husband was doing a algae project so we wired in onto a network of underwater algae plants and cultivated and worked with them. That was also a broadening experience for me to be involved with John Lawrence and Clinton Dawes. They were very interested in

the arts. They came to all the theater and arts things. That social engagement broadened outside of the art department. Faculty came to theater and came to music and came to dance. Not just art faculty, but all the faculty. Now we're so big and sometimes I say to myself, gee, it's been about five years since I walked into a building over in the science side of campus because we get more isolated into our own departments. It's true in that area.

H: One of the other impressions that you get talking to a lot of people that have been at USF in the early years is just by virtue of their not being much around and by virtue of being a new university and building things from the ground up, you're able to do much more innovative things. The lines would blur more as far as between the... [interrupted]

M: It's true. The philosophy department was a big part of those discussions. He was considered to be very left [and] very Marxist, and that certainly influenced our discussions. Jack Moore, who's recently deceased, in the English department. John Hatcher, these were all people that were all part of the fabric of that time. It was English, for me the sciences, particularly the biological sciences. John Lawrence working with the sea urchins, which I think he still does to this day. That was great to see these big tanks of sea urchins and hear about that research. It's just a really wonderful time to be in this new university. I came from California. This was my first time out of the state of California. I got married and got in a Volkswagen and drove all the way across [the country] and arrived in Miami and then came up to Tampa. My whole family just had disdain for Florida. You're a Californian, you're the only one in our family in four

generations that's left. What are you doing in that backwards state? The environment here, even though the reputation of the university might not be anywhere in the top tier, in certain pocket areas, there are really distinguished things happening and wonderful, exciting programs. I think I was in one of them.

H: That's what it really sounds like. It sounds like besides getting a great education, you were really immersed in all of the stuff that was going on at the time and being exposed to so many other things. It's great to hear about the first installment. Your then-husband was in the military? Did you want to move on to Hawaii?

M: Yes, but let me just make this one comment, because I think it influences what I do here. There, the program was focused on Oriental art. There was one survey class in Western art history. I was the TA for that. I also was the TA for introduction to art, which I ultimately taught for eighteen years here at the university. In Hawaii, every student had to take introduction to art. We had it in a local movie theater. We had 800 students in two sections, and we had eight graduate assistants for that class. In that environment, we would put on performances. If we were talking about Dada [art] to the students, we would do a Dada performance. My interest in the avant-garde and the contemporary continued while I was in Hawaii. I actually have my degree in Oriental art history. [I had] no background in that area, so you walked up and down the library trying to remember all the names of the Japanese periods and Chinese dynasties and the history of Indian art. That actually provoked me to think about art practice from an entirely different perspective. Here, I'd been immersed in

what was happening in New York. There, I got that Pacific Rim experience and historically, really thinking about how the Chinese and Japanese organized space differently and had a whole different impulse. Alan Watts was a big thing at the time. We used to get into what he was saying. Then, I ultimately went, after I graduated with my master's degree, for a six-week stay in Japan and study Japanese Zen gardens as my topic. I went with a group of architecture students and art students at that time. All of that, when I came back to Tampa, really influenced me to look at contemporary art armed with not only my history here, but with that perspective of that Oriental art history degree. Don Saff, who I told you before was a great mentor for me as a student, called me up upon graduation and he said, if you come back to Tampa, I'll hire you, and you can be the slide librarian. I came back to the University of South Florida as the slide librarian. I'd been here a bit and Don said, why don't you teach Oriental art history? I taught that, which was a real jump to try to, now, all of a sudden, teach that. Then, he said, maybe you could teach a design class, too. That was really no easy trick. I really was nervous about that. I would work with those old faculty of mine to help me teach. Then they moved me into teaching introduction to art. Mernet Larsen, who I'd mentioned to you earlier, was another mentor for me. I sat through her whole class. Combined with my introduction to art experience as a TA [teaching assistant] in Hawaii with Duane Preble, who wrote one of the key textbooks that I later used, it brought together an approach for me for teaching that class. I taught that class, as I said, for eighteen years. It was an era then in the early 1970s when I'd catch students smoking marijuana in the back of the

classroom, when every student wanted to take everything pass-fail, when the students would say, you know, if you don't give me a good grade, then I might be drafted. The pace of students and their attitude about education was very different in the 1960s to the 1970s. Then it shifted again and they all became Republicans. It was really interesting teaching that class. It was a huge class. Sometimes [there were] more than 100 students. It was a little like you were on stage. I love to be on stage. I love to talk into a microphone. At first, it made me very nervous. Later on, I took huge risks in teaching that class. I tried all different ways: thematically, chronologically. Ultimately I decided that some form of chronology helped the students get through the material. I would try out ideas I had about work. I tried to give them back, at least in the secondary form, some of the understanding of aesthetics and theory that I'd received as a student myself. Remember, all this faculty that I'd been working with, they were still here. Then, I was really at an opposition because I'd been away, but I was still their student. Now I was a colleague. Honestly, I just crept on to the faculty from being the slide librarian. I never really applied to be a faculty member. I was a lecturer. I remember I made \$8,100 a year when I started. Then eventually, they put me on the tenure-earning track. Finally, I went through and managed to get tenure and even became a full professor. How do they do that? I had decided at one point, well, I wasn't really an artist. And I wasn't really a scholar. So where can I make my mark? Where could I publish and where could I bring all these interests together? I decided I would try curating exhibitions. I think it was about 1975 [that] I curated my first show, the Figure is Form. It was under the influence of

Mernet Larsen, who, remember, I told you was a figurative painter. We were on the quarter system at that point. We could, just like now, apply for a release grant, if you had a good idea, and they would continue your salary and you could go off and do a project. It was a form of a sabbatical, I guess. Mernet had one, and she was in New York, and she had a loft on Waverly Place. I got one, too. She was for painting, and mine was for curating this exhibition, where she helped introduce me to people. That's how I started, curating that first show, the Figure is Form. Actually, it wasn't even for the university. It was commissioned by the Museum of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg. I worked under the curators there. I had done one little show before that with another faculty member here, Bradley Nickels, in art history. We curated a show together, but he was really the lead curator on it. [The show was called] The City and the Machine. That was for the Museum of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg. I got into this figure interest. I really worked hard. I went to the Whitney Museum [of American Art] and I met the curators and I started networking through curators and artists to bring the show here. We did show it on campus. In St. Petersburg it was controversial because I had some nude figures in it. They limited the number of nudes I could have. I met those artists. I began this real connection to working artists, which I maintain to this day. I like working with artists that are living. Art historians like working with artists that are dead. That fit the studio program. I began to bring down the kind of work that interested me to campus by curating shows. I had no idea how to do it. I didn't know how to ship. I didn't anything. I had a huge Irish setter that I would bring in at night and I would work in my office and my Irish setter

would sit right in the hallway there and bark at all the custodians. Of course, they complained, but I felt safer having Riever [dog] there. I worked all the time. That's what I did. Other faculty members were out there at the time. I remember, Theo Wujcik would be in at night and eventually lived in his office for a period of time. He would leave to go to the dog track and come back. I just figured out how to do this, partly by doing it all the time. I did a second show after that about narrative painting, using some of those same artists. The figurative show was based on the idea of, what if you went back to that old-fashioned idea, aren't the artist looking for the figure? It started there. I borrowed from the Whitney Museum. I started about 1946 and brought it up to 1975, which was the latest thing. I followed that. That just started this interest in curating. Then I produced catalogs and I wrote essays and I commissioned other people to write essays. I kept doing this. Jim Camp had left at this point, after the demise of the Picasso project. He became so disheartened over that [and] he opened up a gallery up in New York. His assistant had taken over the gallery program, Jerry Bassett. Don Saff said, okay, you'll be the coordinator of research and development for the gallery program. That's how I proceeded. I broadened these shows, and it just scared the heck out of everybody. We were borrowing all this work, I didn't know about insurance. I just did it. He quit one day and went into house painting after that. They said, guess what? You're now the director of the galleries program. Once again, I never interviewed for the job. They just put me into this.

H: [They just] swept [you] to the top.

M: [I was] swept to the top of the heap. [I] loved it. Although I've continued to teach, and I kept teaching introduction to art, I had a reduction in my teaching load and ran the galleries program, which was in the original card catalog room of the first library, which was in the now Student Services building. We put shows up in there. It was a great place to put shows up because all the students had to go in and pay their fees there, so you had a built-in audience that, in a way, I lost when we got our own building. To my horror, there are students that graduate today that say, what? We have a museum on campus? Where is that? Now we have 4,000 works in the art collection. We offer a vigorous program of changing exhibitions and projects. Tonight we do a celebration of the discovery of DNA. We have artists that have submitted work from all over the world. Even at that point, in the 1970s, I began to be interested in international art. By the 1980s, the secretary of the state of Florida asked me if I would do a show about Florida art and take it to Europe. I got sent on a trip to France and Spain and Belgium and I located fellow institutions and I did a show. Of course, we had some really distinguished artists in Florida at that point: [Robert] Rauschenberg, and [James] Rosenquist, and John Chamberlain, and Richard Anuszkiewicz, and Duane Hanson. I put all those people in the show. Of course, I could sell it in Europe. The show, from here, went to Marseille, to the Cantini Museum, and it went to Belgium, and it went to Spain. From then on, I began to create these exchanges with Europe, largely. More recently, we've been doing things in Cuba and in South America. Early on, I really got interested in internationalizing the program. My focus for all these years has been to run the most impressive and vigorous

and ambitious exhibition program I could. At the expense of everything else, I put money into the program. I ran that museum for \$10,000 a year, and mostly getting grants. I'm the grant queen. Look at my resume. What I did was figure out how to get NEA grants, how to get state grants, how to get foundation grants and try to raise enough money; I think some years I got \$150,000. Now we're at about \$130,000 in grants. They couldn't stop me if I raised my own money. In a way, I could do whatever I wanted as long as I could figure out how to pay for it.

H: You did a good job here. There's so much stuff here. One of them that I was interested in, and actually, I'm probably jumping the gun, so I'll wait.

M: That's okay.

H: Well, there was the one that you went through Germany and several parts of former East Germany and talked to all these different curators.

M: That was the Goethe Institute, which has offices in Atlanta. I was invited on a multiplier grant where they invite curators and what they're trying to do is to promote a situation where their German artists come to the United States. They figured the best way to do that was to take curators and send them through Germany. They'd call you up and give you this award and somebody comes down and says, where would you like to go? I'd already been to West Germany. I'd been in Berlin. They wanted to start in Munich, because that was the center for this. I said, well, I think I'll go to Leipzig, and Dresden, and East Berlin and get a flavor of what that was about and what those artists were doing as the Berlin Wall came down.

H: This was in the early 1990s?

M: Yes, this was in the early 1990s.

H: What was that like for you?

M: It was very exciting. I took a graduate student with me, Kelly Bousman, who left the university and went on to work for Audio Visual Innovations. I thought she just had extraordinary promise as a potential curator. I was very disappointed when she went off the track. She wrote one of the best graduate thesis projects and did this inter-linking thing in the Internet with an artist that she focused on. I felt like that was another role of mine, was to mentor students that could maybe move into the art world as curators. Since then, we've even established, quite recently, a museum studies program, where students can get certificates and go into museum work. It's amazing how many studio artists and art historians don't want Ph.D.'s, and they aren't going to make it as artists. I don't mean to say that that's the kind of failed alternative, but they do find that they're very engaged with museum work, which was wonderful for me. All these years I've been trying to promote the idea, I'm engaged in research. It takes research to figure out who to show. You've got to be really in tune with the critics. You have to have a network of colleagues that are critics and curators and historians and artists all over the world in order to keep your finger on what's the most interesting thing that's going on. Then you only have three or four tries a year because of the cost. It'll cost you \$25,000 to \$30,000 to do a show. I'm raising all the money for that, so I pick really carefully what we're going to do here. I have to be sure that it's something that's going to engage students in the community and that it's the right thing. I have to figure out what's going on in order to determine that. That's one

kind of research that we're always engaged in. I like to help people understand that that is a form of research. I managed to convince the tenure and promotion committees at one point that it was. I think the art historians in the department today would not find that very acceptable. I could submit catalogs as examples of publications, which I did. I continue to write some and lecture and curate, and curate for other institutions. Recently, I did a show for the opening of COPIA, the American center for food, wine, and the arts in Napa with Amy Cappellazzo, who's now the international art director of Christies. [She] could be my daughter, she's that much younger. [She] chose me as her partner. We did a show called Active Ingredients. We commissioned artists to do food-related projects. Some of those artists I've continued to work with here. That career as a curator has not only been here but more broadly, I've tried to be engaged. Ultimately, I met a German curator, Uli Bohnen, and he was doing the show, Transparence, Transcendence, which was about photography and sculpture. It opened the new museum in Aachen, Germany, one of Ludwig's new museums. I went over there, worked with all those artists in the installation for that. [I] stayed there for several weeks and then ultimately brought that show to USF and then traveled it nationally. That's another thing. The shows that we do, which are funded by the Warhol Foundation, by the NEA, by private contributors, etc, are of a caliber that we can get them to circulate. We send a show up to Winston Salem, or we send something to Seattle, or we send something to Houston. Sometimes I take shows from those institutions. We manage, not only to have a network in Europe, but to have a network in the United States for building exhibitions and initiating and

organizing them and then taking some of the best exhibitions that are organized by our colleagues or our peers across the country. I've kept up trying to keep our students in that same kind of network, that same kind of environment that I had as a student.

H: We'll come back to curating, but I do want to talk about Picasso. We'd be neglectful if we didn't. You were here in the 1970s when the first stirrings of this idea were taking place, right?

M: Right.

H: How much was it? Was it a half a million dollars they had to raise?

M: There you go. It was something really little, like \$250,000.

H: In 1973, just give us the background.

M: Jim Camp, who was then the gallery director, had teamed up with Don Saff. They were a great team. Don Saff now is dean. He was in a real position to make things happen. They wanted a really state-of-the-art museum and building. There were two things that happened. One, he invented Graphicstudio, because we didn't have enough money to buy art, so we'll make it here, which we can talk about in a moment. The other, was get a great architect, Rudolf, to design the building, and let's get a really landmark piece of sculpture that will put this university and this community on the map. At that time, Don probably knew that Picasso was doing, with Carl Nesjar, the Swedish man, these concrete sculptures. It was an innovative idea [and] very cheap way of constructing a sculpture where you basically had some kind of chicken wire or material like that, and you filled it with rock. Then you sprayed it like you would a swimming pool with concrete.

Then you could paint that. It was very durable, it was cheap, it was something you could do. Picasso was doing these paper cut-outs of figures, and then Carl Nesjar, this Swedish man, translated those and developed the way of creating them. It was really about the time the great Chicago Picasso was done, which of course, was corten steel. Then, in New York, at NYU, the south part of Manhattan, there is one of these sculptures that's made this way. There's several in the United States. What's interesting, is Picasso never came to Tampa. Carl Nesjar and Don Saff met him, and they had a history of the university, and they had a photograph, and they sited it as part of this building. It was in a reflecting pool. In Barcelona, there are squares with a mural with a big reflecting pool. It sort of fit what was happening in Spain with this creation of these plazas. We don't really have quite the same thing in the United States. Maybe we have it a little bit here in the middle of our campus in the Martin Luther King Plaza. Well, that's where it was going to be, this great Picasso piece. They had the building in place; they had the community all excited. I think that was when Cecil Mackey was here. I don't remember that atmosphere exactly of what happened, but somehow it fell apart. It was at the time where maybe when we had another one of these huge cutbacks, and we were really scrambling for money at the university. Even though that \$250,000 sounds like nothing to us now, that was a lot of money. Believe me, I still have the model and all the drawings from it over at the museum. It really was something with this incredible kind of ziggurat-like building that Rudolf designed. He is one of the best Florida architects. [He is a] really famous Florida architect. We would have really had something, a great

work of architecture and Picasso. Why Picasso though? What did Picasso have to do with Florida? Now you could argue it. This is what happened. It all came back. Remember, now, we got the Salvador Dali collection in St. Petersburg, because some lawyer was reading a Wall Street Journal and heard that this collection Morris Reynolds was available and looking for a home. Nobody really wanted to take it. They just wanted the paintings that were done in the 1930s. He wasn't a very accepted artist at the time. Then the Dali came to St. Petersburg. Now we have a Spanish connection. The next president comes on board, and I think it was tried to be revived by Jack Brown and then again by Frank Borkowski. I sort of always get to be the center of its revival because I was here. I even contacted at one point, I think for Frank Borkowski, I was on another one of my trips. It was when I was in Germany. I get a call from Frank Borkowski while I'm in Aachen, Germany. Margi, we want you to go to Spain, the birthplace of Picasso, whatever that little town is, we should look that up, and talk to the Picasso Foundation there. Connect with Carl Nesjar. I think I want to build the Picasso, see if we can do it. What year is that, Frank Borkowski?

H: 1988. We should mention that the original is going to be 120 feet tall.

M: I don't think the original one was quite [that tall]. Are you right about that?

H: I spoke to Vincent Ahern, and he said that they cut it by half the second time. So it was going to be sixty feet tall the second time.

M: We were going to make it the biggest Picasso. We never left that dream.

H: He said they even added a foot or two on and it was going to be sixty-one or sixty-two.

M: Vince Ahern was very involved in this point in helping with some of the research. He's been coordinator of public art. Vince researched exactly the height of the Chicago Picasso and then we were going to make ours just a wee bit bigger so it would be the biggest. Now why in Florida we have the mentality that if you made it the tallest it would somehow be exceptional, but I did call major Picasso scholars in Europe and in the United States, at the Museum of Modern Art. I did ask them what they thought of this idea. I really talked to Carl Nesjar. We had him here. Frank Borkowski got the whole Latin community engaged in this idea. We were going to be able to raise the money. I can remember the day I just knew it was the wrong thing to do. I struggled with this. I just knew that we shouldn't do it, that it wasn't right. Picasso was deceased. We were reviving something that the top scholars said, it doesn't mean anything to do it now. It isn't the right thing to do. It took everything I had to go to Frank Borkowski, who, by the way, championed me. He was the only president who has ever understood what I was trying to do and be engaged by it. I wanted to help him do this if it was the right thing. I felt it was also my responsibility to say, well, the top scholars are saying no. The foundation is saying no. I can't really get a license to do this and then Claude Picasso wrote the university a letter, a stop and desist letter, saying, you can't do this, because you're going to have to pay me a lot of money if you think you're going to go forward with it. You're in violations of licensing agreements. We worked with the attorneys here. We had our BAT from way back then. You know what that is? It's like a photograph. In this case it would be a print. If it was at graphic studio it would have been a photograph, of the sculpture model,

signed permission to construct or BAT or whatever it is. This thing had been locked in the safe and belongs to Carl Nesjar. He brought it to the university and shows it to the attorneys. We could, at that point, have gotten into some sort of legal situation and debated whether we really still had permission or not. It wasn't all that clear, well it doesn't do things, the iron clad contracts. We did get the cease and desist letter. That wasn't when I recommended that he not do it. I just didn't think this late, it was right to go back to that late work of Picasso's, which was already not looked at by scholars as being that important. Maybe I called it wrong because we should have gone ahead and do it. It would have brought a lot of attention to the university. I was afraid it would be negative attention to the university. I felt that I was probably the only one that could convince Frank of that. He was literally very annoyed with me. Meanwhile, we spent weeks [and] months trying to put this thing into place again. He couldn't believe that it took me that long to make that recommendation, but it did. It wasn't clear to me for quite a long time. I just didn't think it was the right thing. Believe me, subsequent presidents bring it up to me. I don't want to hear about it again. I do not want to revive it again. I try to say, let's go on. There are other very important artists that are more connected with what we've done throughout our history here. Yes, there was some rationale for reviving it because of the Dali in our St. Petersburg campus. I made an argument for that. But really, why not do Rauschenberg or Rosenquist or artists that have given us so much and that have been here and part of the fabric of this university, than this leftover dream that should have been realized the first time when it was right to do it, when

Picasso was alive, but failed then. It can't go back always.

H: You can see, there's some of these pictures of a projection of what it would look like. It would be this huge towering concrete sculpture that you'd be able to see from [Interstate] 275 as you drove by.

M: [It would be] like a water tower.

H: That's how massive it would have been.

M: Then when the president's house was built they thought, maybe we'll do it on a corner, that we had a site for it. Carl Nesjar agreed to that. Carl Nesjar agreed to come here and do it. It was now, I think, a half a million.

H: It doubled in price.

M: We could have done it, but I just didn't think it was the right thing to do. Then this Claude Picasso thing probably scared them a little bit.

H: What you said, you would have pursued it despite the cease and desist [letter] or despite what all the top scholars were telling you. You're isolating the audience that the built-in people that would have given it respect.

M: That's precisely it. I said, you're not going to get the respect from the scholarly community. You may get popular excitement from this local community, and I think that's what Frank Borkowski understood. It's always difficult to be in a decision and getting that advice, and more of a difficult decision for him to make the decision.

H: It's kind of interesting looking at just what some of the average students thought about it back in the 1970s. Some people said, it's big, it's ugly, it's going to sink into the ground. Some people said it was going to be so heavy it was going to

sink into the ground and all this. Let's move on to Lifsey House. Let's talk about that really briefly. I know that you do tours and you do talks. I saw that, that you had done that in your resume. You weren't involved in... [interrupted]

M: I knew Gene Leedy. When we had the competition, the models were actually in the museum when the architect was chosen. Who was president? The first president to move in there was Betty Castor. It was at the very end of Frank Borkowski's tenure here. Of course, Frank was going to have great art in there. That was just what Frank knew was right. We curated that first installation of work, which is only slightly changed even at this point. What year was the Lifsey House built?

H: It was finished [in] 1992 [or] 1993.

M: Yes, it was just the other day. I remember Kristin Soderquist, who now works at the Graphicstudio studio as their marketing director, was a student at the time. She went off and had another job but has come back. That was her job, to help organize the installation of art in the Lifsey House. I decided it should really represent the university. It should represent all the best things about what we're doing in visual arts. So, it should be works from our collection. Remember, we have a collection of 4,000 works, lots of them works on paper, things that have been given to us way back when we actually had a budget to buy art. It hasn't been two or three years. [We had] works published at Graphicstudio, which is this very wonderful atelier that's been here since 1968, producing work by the world's top artists. We had a few of those that we selected. Then I thought, well, we've had some distinguished alumni. Let's go seek those alumni out and ask them if

they'd loan something to the house, and faculty [too]. Those were the ingredients: graduates, alums, collection work, Graphicstudio publications, and faculty. I think I've more or less kept it. I've dropped out things that didn't really connect, that just happened to be in the collection, and focused on the other three groups. That's what's still up. When Betty Castor lived there, I had the difficulty that maybe she wanted to have her own things, because it was her house, after all. She had some favorite artists and she'd bought work. That sort of defies me, because it doesn't go through the acquisition policy that we have. I could always convince Frank that, yes, you could buy that, but let's do it properly. Presidents never quite understand protocol and acquisitions. She was very interested in what went up and bought some things by faculty. She was pretty responsive, too. She was very proud of putting artwork up in Tallahassee, and the same kind of theme that we had done in Lifsey House. Kristin did it for the speaker of the house, and I remember, we all went up in an airplane with Betty Castor to show off what USF's strengths in art were. Kristin Soderquist, as a student, went on that trip and got lots of credit for curating that. That's what the Lifsey House is to this day. We should rotate it more often, but half the time we don't have the money to do that. That's what's over there. Now, of course, it's used more broadly because Judy Genshaft doesn't live there. [There] actually are some offices in there now. It's used for a lot of public events. Along with the museum, the Lifsey House is another way of showing off what we do in visual arts, our strengths, plural.

H: I think we'd better switch tapes before we continue.

M: How long are we going to do this?

H: That's up to you.

M: Don't you think we're about done?

[End of Side A]

M: The idea of having a museum on campus isn't that it's closed. It's like a library. Instead of having books, it has images. It has works of art that are to be studied by students in classroom situations and we do get classes in anthropology and English. Students are assigned to write on works of art that are up. Other students come to look at work that's in storage. We loan it all over campus. We have this thing called the art bank program. The Lifsey House, which you were asking about, has work as part of that program. So do almost every dean's office, including the president and the provost office. I charge them a little bit, because I have to hire the students, remember, I'm underfunded, to actually be part of work pool and to actually keep the collection up. We're not funded to do that. By the way, I should say at this point, between my role as director of Graphicstudio and the Contemporary Art Museum, which fits under the umbrella of the Institute for Research in Art, that's now what we're stretching, which was Graphicstudio. We're saying, the Institute for Research and Art has these components: Graphicstudio, the Contemporary Art Museum, and under the Contemporary Art Museum is the public art program on campus. Vincent Ahern works as part of building the collection of the university, only it's the collection that's out of doors or in all of the buildings across campus. That's been a way that we've been able to buy work and commission artists to do work, to develop the university's collection, through the public art program.

H: That's probably worth mentioning, too, that the Picasso didn't come through, but all these other artists you were talking about, Rauschenberg and Rosenquist...

[interrupted]

M: Rosenquist has done a large public art project for the All Children's Hospital in St. Petersburg, which had some public dollars, matched with private dollars from Raymond James Financial. Then, Jim Rosenquist donated the design. Vincent Ahern coordinated that project. He's done the Alice Aycock Sculpture that's part of the new psychology complex. He's done the Doug Hollis project, which is this periodic table and fountain that's out near the biosciences. He's done the Nancy Holt project. These are the sole projects that collaborating with faculty across campus. We still do that. We're just now doing a project with an artist named Keith Edmire, and we're pouring lava. We're taking basalt that we brought from Oregon. it's very cheap, nine dollars a ton, what it costs you is bringing it here. We're working with geologists on campus to figure out a way that we could create molten lava and that we could pour it as a medium for sculpture and put these metal flecks in it, which we developed so it doesn't become too glassy and fall apart. All these, the public art program, the Graphicstudio, the museum, whenever we're working with contemporary artists we're very engaged with whatever resources are on campus, everything from mathematicians to physicists to thinkers, scientists, engineers. We used whatever our route takes us. We'll work with the Special Collections in the library, if somebody wants a specific text we'll work with the library in terms of finding that text. We've had one artist Vito Acconci who spent all sorts of hours over here looking through Special

Collections. That's the value of having a vital arts programs that are slightly apart from the central academic program, but become an enhancement to the academic program, a laboratory, if you will, of ideas and artists and people. Then the manifestation of that is the collection, exhibitions, the loaning of these works as we were just talking about through the art bank program, all over campus. I know one researcher, Richard Carl, who was once the director of the Moffitt Cancer Institute, who said to me one time that he came here because he went into the president's office for his interview, and by golly, they had Rosenquist and Rauschenbergs on the wall. How bad of a place could this be? It can't be that backward if they're that in touch with contemporary art practice. A lot of physicians to this day are very engaged with our programs. Lois Nixon, who is somebody you should interview if you haven't, teaches the ethics and humanities program for the med students. She brings them all over to the museum and has a whole component of engaging them with theater and the arts. [She's] taking a group off to London and makes that connection between medicine and the body and the arts as often as she possibly can. [She's] thinking of trying to train the whole physician and how important the arts are to understanding how to deal with patients. The arts aren't just something isolated. I want them to be part of the fabric of everybody's academic program. That's one of the reasons we are so vigorous about this art bank loan program and Vince is so ambitious about the public art program. We don't always get huge fans. We did the Tim Rollins KOS project for the rotunda in the College of Education. We commissioned this artist to work with Hillsborough County schoolchildren that were nominated to read

Kafka and America and the frogs and make drawings related to those two books of literature and create murals based on those, which are now installed over in the rotunda. The faculty were not very excited about it. This new dean, what's the dean of the College of Education's name?

H: I'm not sure.

M: Oh gosh, this is going to be embarrassing. She just saw me the other day. She wanted me to come over and give a talk to her about that. She thinks they're wonderful. Sometimes you put something down and you immerse it in the culture of a particular area of campus and they come to have a great affinity for it and love of it and they've been introduced to it even though they aren't engaged with it self-consciously. I don't know how many students know that that's called Solar Rotary and it's by Nancy Holt, but they've probably observed that there are shadows around plaques at particular times of the day [and] benches for them to sit and places for people to come together. The Doug Hollis is a periodic table and they can sit on one of the elements. There's a bench over there. Trying to create an engagement with the faculty and the whole community of the campus. We try really hard, but it's hard. This is a big place these days. It's hard to keep up your community relations, keep up your art world connections, engage the whole campus, but we keep working at it, trying to develop new audiences.

H: You've done a great job so far.

M: I just was happily going along as the director of the museum, and then Hank Hine, who was the last director of Graphicstudio, this wonderful atelier, which is truly unique to this campus, founded by Don Saff in 1968, cause he was bored. He

went out to the airport just to feel like he could get a little taste of New York. With the then-director of the galleries program, Jim Camp, they came up with this idea of creating a residency program and bringing in these major world-class artists to make art right here on the campus. Don had been a printmaker. It was in the area of graphics. At that point, there were two or three top atelier in the country, actually run by women. One [was] in New Mexico, one in upper-state New York. Don came on and developed a program that now all our works are archived at the National Gallery in Washington D.C. If there's two or three things people know about this university, one of them is we have Graphicstudio, maybe outside the area. I just had a leadership Tampa class up yesterday. [There were] sixty people [and] now I've introduced them to the research we do. Don really got involved in not just inviting artists to come in and make traditional graphics, but make the biggest graphics or engage Deli Sacilotto, who is here and has been engaged with the university since the 1960s. He is a genius at inventing new applications of traditional methods. For example, he developed ways to do this nineteenth century process photogravure and apply it to contemporary art practice. He would have clubs come here and do that. Robert Mapplethorpe coming in. They developed a way of screening wax in a caustic technique, which we go back to the Romans to look at the use of encaustics. Now, elevate it to a contemporary art medium, and we get Roy Lichtenstein to come here and create prints using this screen method of wax type. Right now, I'm working with the Los Carpinteros, which are collected from Cuba of young artists. We just produced this major 148-page catalog and produced their piece at Graphicstudio,

that was in the *Havana Biennial* that just occurred in November. In this case, they wanted to do inflatable sculptures. We figured out a way to connect with the people that make the Macy's Day balloons and we did these sculptures that looked like drops of oil. They called it *Fluido*. It's the title of the piece, as inflatables. They sit on the ground and one of them is fifteen-feet long and they're different shapes of drops. We collapsed them and took them down to Havana as baggage and inflated them in the national museum down there. We made a really extraordinary installation for this young group of artists, the Collective, they call themselves. The lost *Carpinteros*, which are the carpenters. Now they're coming up in February and they'll be working on designing sets for an opera that we're producing about a Cuban composer who is one of our current long-time music faculty, Jim Lewis. Graphicstudio continues to be engaged with all kinds of projects. We've been pouring resin, we've been bringing in artists to continue to do photogravures, we still do lithographs. We have an artist right now that's a resident in the art department, Alan McCollum, and he's doing a digital project with us. Now we just teamed up with engineering and we're hoping to get a rapid prototyping machine on campus that will be used by engineering and medicine and architecture and the Graphicstudio to produce multiples. Graphicstudio has had this long history of bringing in the best, most prestigious artists. How many universities have Jim Rosenquist as a friend who now has a huge retrospective up at the Guggenheim, done seventy-five prints at Graphicstudio. We've done more than 450 editions in this period of time. We've archived at the national gallery, and we just continue to bring in artists. I started

to say, between the whole Institute for Research and Art is funded about \$1,000,000 these days in salaries by the university. We have to raise, each year, \$1.2 million to keep the operation going. Of course, I don't have to do things quite this ambitious, but that's what I like to do. I keep trying to stay on that cutting edge so we can raise the money to do a catalog that costs you \$80,000 to publish. You can commission curators at the Museum of Modern Art and at the Carnegie Museum to write your essays for you. You can bring them in to speak to the students. You can bring the artists that are on the cutting-edge in Havana appear to the university to do workshops and to talk to the students and to produce exhibitions and to design opera sets. That's the Graphicstudio tradition. It's always been an experiment in education. It's different from a commercial atelier, because you have a little support. Not a lot, but a little support from the university, enough to leverage. We have to rent our building now. That is allowing us to keep up and get grants and to have a subscription program and to produce work that will be successful in the marketplace. It's that combination in taking undergraduate interns to participate in this research and to understand and work with these major artists coming in and see how these processes are researched and developed and apply and hire grad students, about \$60,000 worth of graduate student fellowships we offer a year. We have lectures by these artists and the students come over for those. It's really an experiment in education. It really draws students to the campus because they have a chance to be part of this mix. Which you see, I inherited from the faculty and the energy as a student here in the 1960s. I'm just trying to perpetuate that and keep it lively, and keep it

engaged, and keep myself, as I age, connected with the youngest and most productive artists of our time and work with them as colleagues and help get other students interested in various aspects of working in atelier or working in a museum, curating exhibitions, commissioning projects. How does that all work, which is another aspect of what we try to deliver to our students. I think I've said enough.

H: Actually, [I have] two closing questions.

M: Yes.

H: I think you've already answered this first one, but you might want to add something. What are you most proud of out of all your accomplishments and experiences here at USF?

M: The truth of the matter is, I think what's underestimated by everybody, is how important that exhibition program has been historically. The energy of putting together cutting-edge exhibitions, as they're called, or being engaged with what I like to call the most advanced art that's being produced today, is what now, I'm carrying back to Graphicstudio. It's the exhibition program at the university, and feeling the students. It's a form of teaching. I'm still in the classroom, but every day, it's working with the students and seeing if you can transfer some of that excitement [and seeing] if you can keep everybody motivated and excited. People beg me for jobs. I don't have a hard time hiring people. Therefore, the whole team that I work with are all just as engaged as I am. That's what makes us really successful. One person can't do it. It's being able to get a group of people around you that also have vision and ideas of how this can happen. One of my

greatest strengths is actually being able to network. [I] always hire people that are smarter than I am, that are more networked than I am, that are engaged and are passionate about what they want to do.

H: The final question is if you had a student or group of students who were just starting out, maybe they're interested in art, maybe something else, what advice would you give to them?

M: As artists?

H: It's up to you. [People that are] just interested in the arts. What would you tell them? [Students who] are just getting started.

M: I address that in a very specific way. Every year, for fifteen years, in November [during] Veteran's Day weekend, I take twenty-five students to New York. I try to say how to look at it from that perspective. I take them around to the leading galleries and I introduce them to the people who work in those galleries who are giving the talk. We visit artist's studios. We go to the Met [Metropolitan Museum], the Modern [Museum of Modern Art], the Guggenheim, the Whitney, and I try to show them how exciting this world is from the inside out. It's very hard to be successful as just producing art. Even the ones that have hit it huge have slides and go into teaching or museum work. It's trying to draw that creative energy out of somebody and find a way for them to express it. It may be as art practitioners, it may be as curators, it may be as museum educators, it may be doing the PR, it may be doing the web page, wherever it might be, there's so many aspects of museum work that can find a way for you to exhibit and engage your creative energy and build on it. That's what I'm always trying to do, is to

find what it is that might get them excited. Sometimes you can't have ambitions to be something if you don't know that exists. I remember a student that had a physics background and an art background and was caught [thinking], I don't know which self to be. My parents don't really want me to go into art, but I really am drawn to that. She came to New York. We went into the basement of the Met, where they do conservation. The woman showed them how she determines whether certain Egyptian artifacts are fakes or not and they were restoring a chariot. It never occurred to her that her science background could be welded or melded with her art interest. She knew she wanted to be a conservator. It just never hit her that that was something she might be engaged by. Nor do most of the students who I take to the Met. I always take them to object restoration. They don't know. You think there's the Met, the public space. You have no idea what the Met does behind the scenes. That, I think, is what I try to do with the students that come to me is help them figure out what it is that they really are excited about. I do that for the people that work for me, too. Oh, you're interested in that? Or you have that hat? You can do that? I let them run with it. Sometimes that really is a way of people finding a direction that's very fulfilling for them.

H: Once again, you've conveyed that excitement from the mid 1960s up until the present. I want to thank you for being with us. One last thing I might mention is you said you were sorry that you got out of the space that's in the Student Services building when you got that museum. My first contact with the contact with the campus was for a photograph exhibit there at the Contemporary. For some of us, it's an entry point for USF. It was the first time I was ever here.

M: That's really wonderful to hear. I'm glad to hear that. Thank you so much. I'm sorry I didn't give you much time to talk. I just rambled on.

H: That's for you to talk.

End of Interview