IMPLEMENTING BEST PRACTICES OF MUSEUM EXHIBITION PLANNING:
CASE STUDIES FROM THE DENVER, COLORADO ART MUSEUM COMMUNITY

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Institutions in the Denver art museum community continually challenge themselves to offer unique, world-class exhibitions to their audiences, but often they must struggle against pre-conceived notions that they are not up to the task. This paper examines three exhibitions, chosen for their variety in scale, objectives, presentation, and the background of the curators and presenting institutions.

Exhibitions are at the core of museums’ public functions and successful exhibition planning is necessary for museums to thrive. There are over twenty nonprofit museums and art centers in the greater Denver metropolitan area, which has a population of 2.4 million (Denver’s Population & Demographics). This represents a large potential audience in a region of the country that has few similar clusters of arts organizations.

The interviews with three curators in this paper identify the methods they undertake to tap into the potential museum-going audience and how they distinguish themselves and their institutions to create a nationally recognized presence.
CHAPTER II
EXHIBITION PROFILES

The first exhibition studied in this paper is *Masterpieces of Colorado: A Rich Legacy of Landscape Painting*, presented by Foothills Art Center in Golden, Colorado and the Colorado Council on the Arts, and curated by Rose Fredrick. The exhibition featured over forty landscape painters, combining contemporary works with the work of late 19th and early 20th century artists, all of who lived or worked in Colorado. The exhibition traveled to six museums and art centers across the state for approximately one and a half years, beginning February 24, 2007 and ending May 31, 2008.

The second case study is based on *Christo and Jeanne-Claude: Prints and Objects*, presented by the Metro State College Center for Visual Art (CVA) in Denver, Colorado, and curated by Jennifer Garner. The exhibition included 130 works by the artists, representing their work over the past four decades and was on view at CVA from August 29, 2008 to November 1, 2008.

The third exhibition examined is Clyfford Still Unveiled: Selections from the Estate, presented by the Clyfford Still Museum, and curated by Dean Sobel. Because the museum was not yet constructed at the time of the exhibit, it was mounted at the Denver Art Museum, and was on view from July 14, 2007 to January 18, 2009.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: WHY WRITE CASE STUDIES?

I have approached this project with the goal of learning how curators and institutions prepare for exhibition planning in a medium-sized urban area with a minor national profile as an arts community. Although there is a thriving and vibrant art and museum community throughout Denver and Colorado, its impact nationally is less than that of larger, coastal areas such as New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Los Angeles, or San Francisco.

Denver does have a distinct perspective, though, and the best way to understand that point of view is to find out how people working in art museums plan for exhibitions. Because I had little practical experience conducting research interviews, I turned to *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* by Steiner Kvale and Svend Brinkman. Kvale and Brinkman list seven stages of an interview inquiry: “(1.) Thematizing, (2.) Designing, (3.) Interviewing, (4.) Transcribing, (5.) Analyzing, (6.) Verifying, and (7.) Reporting” (102).

The thematic goal of my interviews was to gain an understanding of the ways different people undertake exhibition planning in different circumstances of education, experience, resources, and subject matter. To narrow the scope of the project, I limited the subjects to Contemporary Art in or near Denver, Colorado. Further, I chose exhibitions that had run their courses. It would be difficult to evaluate an exhibition that
was still in progress or had not yet been presented to the public. Plus, completed exhibitions provide more opportunities for external evaluation through critical reviews and public reactions.

I also limited my choices by only considering exhibitions that I had personally viewed. This was not done to include any of my personal opinions on the artists or exhibition designs, but rather to have a context with which I could approach each curator. I would be much less prepared if I attempted to discuss work that I had never seen.

In determining the number of interviews to conduct, I again turned to Kvale and Brinkman. Their answer to the question of ‘how many?’ is cryptic: “Interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know.” They explain, “perhaps as a defensive overreaction, some qualitative interview studies appear to be designed on a misunderstood quantitative presupposition – the more interviews, the more scientific” (113). I consulted with my thesis advisor, and together we determined that three interviews would suffice if they included enough variety of representation in the exhibitions.

One of the main points made by Kvale and Brinkman is that even a small sample of interview subjects can be enough if one learns to transfer knowledge from one situation to the next. “The number of subjects necessary depends on the purpose of the study…the goal of global generalization is replaced by a transferability of knowledge from one situation to another, taking into account the heterogeneity of social knowledge” (171). There is no set of rules that will address every concern of exhibition planning in every situation. If the interview project leads to an understanding of how to approach the process in some context, a local context, then it will be successful. There are many
solutions to any problem, and building variety into the research brings more details to light.

My goal was to find a combination of exhibitions that included high-profile museums and small institutions, internationally known and local artists, living and deceased artists, and both stationary and traveling exhibitions. I was fortunate in that I was accommodated by all three of my initial choices of interview candidates. I first spoke with Rose Fredrick, an independent curator who organized an exhibition of both living and deceased Colorado artists that traveled to six small and medium-sized institutions, *Masterpieces of Colorado: A Rich Legacy of Landscape Painting*. My second interview was with Jennifer Garner, director and curator for Metro State College’s Center for Visual Art, a medium-sized gallery space located in downtown Denver. Her exhibition, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude: Prints and Objects*, placed the work of living, internationally known artists in a space associated with an institution of higher education. Initially it was to be a one-off show, but the collaborative planning process led to preparations for a future travelling component. The final interview I conducted was with Dean Sobel, director of the Clyfford Still Museum which was still under construction. The exhibition *Clyfford Still Unveiled*, featured the work of a deceased, internationally known artist who had no real association with Denver, but who is now inextricably connected to the city because of the Clyfford Still Museum. The show was stationary, but consisted entirely of a loan to a large museum, the Denver Art Museum, which was the only space with adequate facilities to produce the exhibition.

In designing the interviews, I began with a series of questions based around the idea that exhibition planning has three basic components: research, execution, and
evaluation. Each interview had the same core of questions, with additional case-specific questions that were based on pre-interview research I carried out, such as reading critical reviews and studying the individual artists. The interviews were all built to be responsive to the interviewees’ individual experiences. As the transcripts reveal, each curator has his or her own voice and opinions about the most crucial parts of their stories. Dean Sobel wanted to share who Clyfford Still was and how his work fits into the greater subject of art history through the museum. Jennifer Garner focused on collaborating with artists, while Rose Fredrick dealt with finding a context for Colorado art through a collective experience.

The interview process itself was straightforward with everyone involved. I sat down one-on-one with the curators in their respective offices. I began the interviews with a brief summary of my goals and what I hoped to learn. To simplify the note-taking process and make the meetings more personal I used a tape recorder to capture the conversations.

The transcriptions appear in question/answer form. There are natural differences between oral and written language, but the conversations did swing back and forth between interviewer and interviewee. I wanted to ensure that the information that was shared would be easy for the reader to peruse and for me to analyze, and so the transcripts appear as an ongoing dialogue. Kvale and Brinkman state that “transcribing interviews from an oral to a written mode…is in itself an initial analytic process” (180).

The core of my analysis came from transcribing the interviews. Afterwards, I reread the transcripts and took notes on the main points that each curator stressed,
enabling me to compare the interviews to each other and to published work on exhibition planning.

The reporting stage of the interview project takes form in this thesis, with specific findings reported in the three case studies and interview transcripts.
CHAPTER IV
BEST PRACTICES OF MUSEUM EXHIBITION PLANNING

Museum exhibition planning is a wide field. It encompasses many disciplines and areas of expertise, all of which are vital to healthy museums. While this paper focuses on the work of curators in art exhibitions, this chapter focuses on the essential activities that go into all exhibitions and some of the accepted Best Practices for executing those activities. Houtgraaf and Vitali explain that “for virtually every museum, the display of its collection, or the creation of a temporary exhibit related to it, is a central, ongoing activity” (11). The American Association of Museums agrees, stating that “exhibitions are the public face of museums” and “effective presentation of collections and information in exhibitions” is the way that “the vast majority of people know museums” (NAME). Knowing this, all museums and their staff should attempt to stand out from the rest and strive to meet the highest standards possible in their work.

When planning an exhibition, one must thoroughly consider the relative difficulty of analyzing the subject. One of the overall themes that Dean Sobel stressed in his interview with the author was that one needs to deeply understand the subject of an exhibition and the setting in which it is presented. Complications can arise from deceased subjects (no new first-hand information can be created or found), reclusive subjects, and critical as well as scholarly research that are contrary to the goals of the
exhibition. These circumstances can present exciting challenges, though, when new insights or discoveries disprove commonly held notions and opinions.

In the best circumstances, an exhibition can be a multi-layered expression of ideas that allows visitors to understand the individual elements (each object) as well as “the underlying rationale of a particular discipline” (Houtgraaf and Vitali16). A well thought out exhibition works on many levels. Viewers have the chance to examine particularly interesting objects for their values of beauty, cultural significance, history, scientific importance, or rarity as individual objects. Every piece has its own merits, but when combined in a successful exhibition the total meaning is greater than the sum of the parts. Every piece has a story to tell, but when many pieces are put together in a carefully planned scheme, wider stories are told. These stories can direct viewers to certain intended conclusions or they can be intentionally open-ended to let viewers make their own inferences. Houtgraaf and Vitali continue these points:

Today most museums appreciate that they are no longer just object- or specimen-based organizations. It has become apparent that they must be idea-, experience-, and narrative-based institutions. Now, to a considerable extent, items in a collection are vehicles to help provide a context that allows a museum to share information and ideas in its field of activity, which may be historical or contemporary, artistic or scientific, eclectic or focused. At the same time, a collection can be used to provide relevant and meaningful visitor experiences: be they social, aesthetic, intellectual, contemplative, or entertaining, among other things. A story is an essential vehicle for effective communication. (20)
An exhibition should consist of a core concept that resonates thematically throughout.

But how does a basic idea grow into a full exhibition? Different authors put forth their own versions of the process, each with different levels of complexity; but they are essentially the same for any size of the undertaking: planning, execution, and evaluation. Houtgraaf and Vitali suggest that “concept…story line…design” and “production” are the four stages of an exhibit (30).

However one labels the process, the physical execution of an exhibit is “in general, …established museum practice” (Houtgraaf and Vitali 35). The actual tasks of selecting, describing, and installing objects are done routinely. “What has not been a routine part of museum practice,” say Houtgraaf and Vitali, “is the systematic organization of a museum’s intellectual and material resources so as to facilitate their ‘translation’ into three-dimensional stories” (35). They seem to suggest that many exhibits are not fully realized because the planners do not go far enough. A curator may select a phenomenal group of paintings for an exhibition, but if the sequence or installation is poor it will fall short of its potential. This idea is supported by Newhouse as she describes the “remarkable indifference to presentation” that affected a traveling exhibition of Jackson Pollock paintings through a “lack of interest in exhibition design” by local curators responsible for installing the show at each stop (175). While it is true that traveling exhibitions present different challenges than those of permanent installations, any person performing mediocre work at any stage of the planning process can undermine the success of an exhibition.
Houtgraaf and Vitali concentrate on six elements that they consider crucial in the exhibit development process:

(1) the knowledge and information that the museum wishes to transmit, referred to as the content;
(2) the translation of the content into two- and three-dimensional designs;
(3) the exhibit development team;
(4) the stakeholders;
(5) the timeline; and
(6) the budget needed to accomplish the project (35).

Each of these items should be addressed, but simply writing these out these ideas is not a complete enough plan. Houtgraaf and Vitali point out that “a schematic, figurative structure is more rigorous and unforgiving in its logic than a text-based format” (39). This idea is logical for content and design progress, but it really applies to all six parts of development. Schematic plans can assist planners in clearly identifying the roles and relationships of everyone on the development team as well as outside stakeholders. They can also clarify timeline goals and keep everyone accountable to budget requirements.

Once an idea for an exhibition is established, there are generally two methods for proceeding through the planning process. The first is a strict, linear process where decisions are made at each phase that cannot be undone. The second is a “‘spiral’” process where latter stages can affect initial choices and allow for more “creative input” (Houtgraaf and Vitali 57).

Beyond curators, collection managers, registrars, art handlers, graphic and lighting designers, educators, marketing and fundraising staff Houtgraaf and Vitali
maintain that there are six key members of an exhibit development team: “the project manager/director, the content director, the art/design director, the production manager, the technology director/designer, and the administrative/finance coordinator” (59). In reality, only the most well staffed institutions can have separate personnel fulfilling all these roles. In many small museums and galleries the curator or director is involved in all of these functions, if not solely responsible, and will take the lead as the project manager.

In large institutions, especially when planning is done for more than one exhibition at a time, a steering committee “decides on all matters regarding the museum’s exhibitions” (Houtgraaf and Vitali 64). The steering committee represents all the stakeholders and therefore should include board members with a special connection to exhibits, the museum director, representatives from the exhibit teams, and chairs of external advisor committees (education, academic, peers, community consultation, marketing and fundraising).

The timeline “should list each of the phases of work, indicate all their subphases, give duration for each of those elements, list the players for each phase, possibly indicate cash flow, and highlight the milestones” (Houtgraaf and Vitali 66). The timeline is a graphic representation of the work that must be completed, by whom, and by what deadline. As such, “a well-constructed timeline act as a communication tool for the exhibit team and for the stakeholders” (Houtgraaf and Vitali 66).

Once the concept has been established, roles defined, and a timeline put in place, the budget needs to be set. Houtgraaf and Vitali elaborate on this point, saying that “a dedicated financial system needs to be put in place, guided by an experienced finance
coordinator who is a member of the exhibit team” because “it is highly unlikely that a museum’s general finance administration has the necessary time and capacity to master a large capital project such as a gallery renovation” (69).

Flexibility of approaches should be built into any exhibition planning process. Not only for unexpected situations that may arise but for all of the standard questions that must be answered, having a variety of solutions and an inherent adaptability will increase the chances of success.

Beyond the key elements of exhibition planning, there are factors for determining the effectiveness of an exhibition. The American Association of Museums list six categories of exhibition standards:

(1) Audience awareness;
(2) Content;
(3) Collections;
(4) Interpretation/Communication;
(5) Design and production; and
(6) Ergonomics: Human comfort, safety and accessibility (NAME)

These standards are diverse in scope. They address the needs of visitors as well as objects within displays, and they stress accountability of planners.

Audience awareness refers to the public response to an exhibition. The point is that the exhibition reaches the intended audience and creates a positive experience. One way this standard is achieved is through a simultaneous variety of presentations that “accommodate those who wish to skim as well as those who wish to take more time” (NAME). Jennifer Garner achieved this in Christo and Jeanne-Claude: Prints and
Objects by offering handouts that quickly pointed out highlights of the artists’ career as well as having library lists and books on reserve through the libraries of Metropolitan State College. She also achieved audience awareness by giving tours to individuals and groups visiting the exhibition, and by offering a public lecture by the artists.

The standard of content is measured in the handling of the subject. An exhibition should “respect the integrity of its content” while “creating interest in a subject of importance” (NAME). Dean Sobel was sensitive to his subject in curating Clyfford Still Unveiled by striving to consider the context in which the artwork was created; and, thus, the intentions of the artist. Clyfford Still is an artist whose profile diminished somewhat in the past three decades, but will likely regain international prominence with the opening of the Clyfford Still Museum and the first public showings of the majority of his oeuvre. Clearly this circumstance creates interest in a subject of importance.

Sobel also addressed the third standard of exhibitions: collections. This standard focuses on conservation and security matters. There were limited venues that could host Clyfford Still Unveiled, and Sobel made his curatorial and exhibition design choices based on the safety needs of the artwork.

The fourth standard is interpretation/communication. Is the message of an exhibition clear and coherent, and are clear ideas expressed? It is not necessary for a successful exhibition to show only one absolute point of view. “If appropriate to the subject matter, the exhibition need not provide definitive answers. Raising questions and providing a forum for ideas may suffice” (NAME). This point is further stressed by Levy-Alema:
A museology display, when designed as an ensemble of relations between objects is not meant to provide answers or to achieve consensus. The display is meant to raise questions; hopefully, questions that need asking, which, for a variety of reasons, have yet to be asked and considered. (535)

Rose Fredrick created an environment for discussions through *Masterpieces of Colorado: A Rich Legacy of Landscape Painting*. Her exhibition raised questions regarding the history of the state, the environment, and Colorado’s place in contemporary art.

Design and production criteria make up the fifth standard. The exhibition’s theme, subject matter, and audience should guide the design choices and any supplemental material. Design choices include colors, lights, graphics, and exhibit furniture/display cases. A well-designed exhibition should aid visitors in understanding the subject and provide clear and logical traffic patterns that support the exhibition’s sequencing of information and experiences (NAME). For *Christo and Jeanne-Claude: Prints and Objects*, the design choices were made by Christo to enhance visitor’s experience of the artwork. Jennifer Garner went further by including video documentaries of many of the artists’ large-scale outdoor installations to give visitors a greater understanding of these temporary works that can no longer be viewed at the original sites.

The final standard of ergonomics addresses questions of comfort and accessibility. Clear instructions should be given when needed, and all accessibility needs of visitors should be met. Labels should be engaging, informative, legible, and easily understood. If an exhibition contains potentially troubling material, visitors should be alerted ahead of time so they can decide whether or not to view that material (NAME).
Exhibition planning is a process that takes years even in a small museum. It requires collaboration from dozens of people with their own priorities, interests, and skill sets.
CHAPTER V

CASE STUDY NUMBER ONE: MASTERPIECES OF COLORADO

Rose Fredrick, curator of *Masterpieces of Colorado: A Rich Legacy of Landscape Painting*, is best known as curator for the annual *Coors Western Art Exhibit* and Sale at the National Western Stock Show and Rodeo in Denver, Colorado. She first took on this position in 1997, after more than a decade of writing, promoting, curating, and coordinating arts events (BioRoseElaineJenny 1).

She did not set out to forge a career in curation, but rather in business marketing, with a bachelors of science degree from California Polytechnic University (Interview 1). Her arts training began in a gallery when she first moved to Denver, learning all the essential elements of installation and promotion, along with differences that occur from region to region (Interview 1). “What Denver will tolerate in art…is very different from what New York tolerates in art” (Interview 2). She quickly took on greater responsibility, finding opportunities to work independently with artists, which led to her opening a gallery of her own (Interview 2).

Fredrick’s experience in gallery management, coupled with a rural childhood led to a recommendation for curating the *Coors Western Art Exhibit* (Interview 2). With her understanding of wildlife and outdoor lifestyles and prominent place in Denver’s gallery scene she was well-prepared to direct one of Denver’s most anticipated recurring art events (Interview 2). Curating the *Coors Exhibit* is an ongoing process that lends itself to
a deep knowledge of Colorado artists (Interview 2). The work itself entails close collaboration with artists, and Fredrick approaches the process “from the artists’ perspective” (Interview 3). She tries to find what success means for an artist more than what it means for a museum or gallery (Interview 3). In choosing which artists to include, she wasn’t concerned with “how important is this artist in the grand scheme of art of the West or in a national perspective” (Interview 5). She turned her focus to artists that are “important to other artists…to advancing the art and Colorado” (Interview 5).

She had been considering curating a show of contemporary landscape painters when she was approached by then director of the Foothills Art Center in Golden, Colorado, Jennifer Ito (Interview 10). Ito explained that the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was awarding grants for “masterpiece” exhibitions (Interview 6-7). Every state was eligible for an equal allotment of resources, the only stipulations for each state’s ‘masterpiece’ exhibition were that it had to promote local artists and it had to travel (Interview 6). “Bringing art to people,” Fredrick said, “is vital” (Interview 52). In conjunction with Foothills Art Center, she applied for the grant to showcase the “tradition of landscape painting in Colorado” (Interview 5). In her words, “everybody really does like landscape,” and it is a great way to increase foot traffic into a small museum (Interview 45).

All NEA grants in Colorado are channeled through the Colorado Council on the Arts (CCA) (Interview 9). When Fredrick’s proposal was accepted by the NEA, the CCA suggested that Masterpieces of Colorado could also promote their 40th anniversary (Interview 7). This tie-in led Fredrick to expand the scope of what she originally planned (Interview 7). She combined history with the present, both in the artwork presented and
in celebrating the CCA. She created a comparison of “what was going on 100 years ago, or earlier, and what is going on today and looking forward” (Interview 11). Referring to that comparison, she said “if you’re really interested in art you want to see that” (Interview 58). She was indicating that the juxtaposition led to new ways to critique both eras of artists. But her curatorial choices were always guided by her point of view with artists in the Coors Western Art Exhibit - she brought the concerns of the artists, living and deceased, into the planning for the Masterpieces of Colorado exhibition (Interview 4). Many of the well-known early landscape painters were “very mentoring kinds of people” and it is common to find that most Colorado artists were taught by an older generation of Coloradoans (Interview 4). The exhibition was meant “to go back to its (landscape painting in Colorado) earliest roots” (Interview 5).

This was one of the numerous reasons for organizing the exhibition this way, primarily to “get people interested in art” by showing how today’s artists are influenced by, and break away from, their predecessors (Interview 11). The then-and-now format of the exhibition creates an instant relationship between contemporary and historical aspects of landscape painting. Fredrick wanted to create a sense of “pride” in the “history of our state” and show how it has changed just as landscape painting has changed (Interview 11). She felt this was achieved, “passively illustrated,” along with raising environmental concerns through the depiction of the changing landscape (Interview 17). Many of the artists are “making environmental statements” (Interview 19) about “how man impacts the landscape” (Interview 20). Ultimately, Fredrick’s objective was to “start conversations,” to “get people in to see art who may not ever see art and to get them to talk about art, environment, Colorado, history” (Interview 21). “Because as a curator I’m
always thinking about that,” she said (Interview 50). This way of considering all of the thematic elements of an exhibition combined with all of the individual paintings demonstrated Houtgraaf and Vitali’s idea of a multi-layered approach (16).

When Fredrick began researching the potential artists to include, she found herself accumulating a wealth of information that seemed like it would outgrow what could fit on labels and wall panels (Interview 13). She wanted to share the stories of the artists with everyone she spoke to and quickly realized that a catalog was necessary (Interview 14). It was not originally part of the NEA grant application but she knew she wanted to document the show with some form of permanent record (Interview 14). She asked for funding help from the CCA and also from major collectors, never giving up on her passion (Interview 14). She said that this was one of the main lessons in the process, “getting people excited about what excites you, and not letting them go until they get it” (Interview 15).

Fredrick certainly could not have completed the project if she had not been excited about it. In fact, her excitement may have been the dominant force that saw the exhibition go from idea through installation in a daunting timeline. She was first asked to participate by Jennifer Ito in May of 2006 (Interview 15). The grant was awarded in August of that year, and Fredrick then began asking lenders to participate (Interview 15). By February of 2007 she had compiled a sixty-eight page catalog and the show began its first leg of a sixteen-month journey to six locations across Colorado.

While the standard timeline for scheduling exhibitions can range from five to seven years, most of the institutions involved in Masterpieces of Colorado operate on a shorter scale of two to three years (Interview 23). But even that abbreviated timeframe
meant the short notice of the exhibition would be difficult to accommodate. Fredrick speculated that “they made room for it because it was such a pleasing show for a lot of people. It definitely was not…confrontational to their viewers” (Interview 23).

Although the exhibition was not meant to be a complete survey of Colorado painting, it required a broad range of examples of style from many different artists. The difficulty of this need is that no single museum or collector has a complete collection of the most indispensable Colorado painters, especially in a condition that is suitable for traveling (Interview 7-8). The problem of finding a single lender was further exacerbated with contemporary artists. The solution that Fredrick found was to utilize her extensive network of connections around the state to compile a worthy body of work for the exhibition. In total she borrowed work from twenty-six lenders, and all but three were personal collections (Masterpieces 66-67).

There was a difference in the selection of the artists to include from the 19th century versus the 21st century. For the former group, the choices were automatically narrowed because there is “a finite number of works” to choose from (Interview 16). For the latter group she asked, “what can landscape do for the viewer?” (Interview 18). She wanted to have images that showed people scenes they can’t normally view in their day-to-day lives, and artists that “pushed people in a more artistic way” that was not necessarily concerned with exact representation, but more with a focus on “design…light and color” (Interview 18).

Public education became a facet of the exhibition as well. To strengthen the grant proposal, Fredrick included lesson plans that could be used by teachers who wanted to include the exhibition in their curriculum (Interview 41). The lesson plans used a
creative approach to integrate language arts, history, science, geography, and social studies into art education (Dear Educator 1). By observing and describing what they saw, students could couple environmental learning with basic concepts of composition and drawing. Unfortunately the lesson plans were a victim of the tight planning schedule. “There is not a unified way to get these lesson plans out and notify teachers,” Fredrick said, and “something like this takes more time than we gave them” (Interview 42). By the time the plans were available and the exhibition was in place, school budgets and timing for field trips had already been set up (Interview 42-43).

One of the fundamental aspects of arranging a traveling exhibition is coordination of shipping. To streamline the process for all of the museums that were involved, Fredrick contracted with Shipart (Interview 25), a Denver-based company that specializes in crating and transporting artwork. Each museum contributed to an expense pool, managed by Fredrick and Jennifer Ito, which was used to cover Shipart’s fees (Interview 26). In this way, moving of the artwork between each venue was conducted by one team headed by a project leader (Interview 26). This centralized oversight also gave piece-of-mind to the lenders because it clearly showed who was responsible for the artwork at all times.

The second major concern for the traveling exhibition was insurance. Each museum had a policy to cover the on-loan objects while under their control (Interview 36). Foothills Art Center extended their insurance policy beyond the duration of their exhibition segment to cover all of the traveling portions (Interview 36). This was fairly straightforward since only one organization, Shipart, was responsible for the work in transit.
For the installations, every museum used wall panels that traveled with the show (Interview 37). Fredrick created these using information that she put into the catalog to keep consistency from venue to venue (Interview 37). The variety of venues meant that no two presentations could be exactly the same but she strove for a theme to put the works in context.

The theme for the installations was the date when the artists came to Colorado (Interview 38). Many of the works were undated, so it would have been impossible to organize the paintings by creation date on speculation (Interview 38). The arrival theme showed “the progression of styles and what they (the artists) brought when they came to Colorado” (Interview 38). This tied in well with the objective of showing the interconnectedness of the artists’ styles and lives. Also, it still kept an essentially chronological hanging (Interview 39).

Evaluation for the exhibition was mostly based on the stated goal of increasing foot traffic (Interview 45). Fredrick did not have exact numbers she could provide, but stated that “all the museums (experienced) increased attendance on the show” (Interview 47). The El Pomar Carriage Museum in Colorado Springs “had the same amount of traffic during the show that they had the whole previous year” (Interview 47-48). That is impressive, considering the exhibition was on view at the Carriage Museum for only six weeks (Masterpieces 1). Fredrick’s evaluation was that “the show for me personally achieved my goal of being a discussion about art, about movements in art, about the landscape, about environmental topics” and allowed viewers to make their own interpretations about the artwork (Interview 51).
The success of the exhibition generated interest from Exhibits USA, who were interested in continuing the show and having it travel regionally if not nationally (Interview 54). The author speculated that if a national tour had taken place, it would have raised the profile of Colorado art and artists. It would have elevated the status of Colorado art in the context of American art at large. While Fredrick did not fully weigh in on this question, she did emphasize the need to “represent Western art in a new light” to put it in “a more favorable position in the art world” (Interview 56). She said “we have to realize that if we want to be taken seriously in the art world, we have to show what is art. And really make the delineation between art and illustration” (Interview 57). She feels that can be done, and that contemporary Western art is now on par with what is being produced in New York or anywhere else, even if it did not compete in the 19th century (Interview 58).

There was some criticism for not including the intermediary period of 20th century painting. Mary Voelz Chandler pointed out the gap in her review of the show, but failed to hypothesize on why the gap existed, much less give any indication that she was concerned about the reason (Second Effort Improves). But Fredrick did not feel that arbitrarily including every artist in the history of the state would have “all that much continuity” (Interview 11). Her clear curatorial goal was to start at the very beginning of landscape painting and jump to “what is going on today and looking forward” (Interview 11). The gap in time was also noted by Michael Paglia. He described it as “a conceptual wall” but did acknowledge that it was an intentional opportunity to compare and contrast the different time periods (Vista Cruisers).
When looking back on the planning process for the exhibition, Fredrick stressed two points. The first was that everyone involved must fully understand what they are expected to do. “If I were to go back on this Masterpieces show, I think I would have done things differently in that okay these are my defined (jobs)” (Interview 29). She said that she would never try to put together an exhibition of this scale on such a short timeframe again (Interview 52). “I think timing is, time is the biggest factor in all of this. Because the money, you know, you can scale things back or add on, or go begging for money…and the money's a big part, but time just marches on, and it's gonna cream you if you're not on top of it” (Interview 59).
CHAPTER VI

CASE STUDY NUMBER TWO: CHRISTO AND JEANNE-CLAUDE

Jennifer Garner became the director and curator of Metropolitan State College’s Center for Visual Art (CVA) in Denver in 2005 (Metropolitan). With a background in visual art, she began following the path towards arts administration through internships and assistantships as a student (Interview 1). This led her to work as a program coordinator for arts projects in the city of Lubbock, Texas (Interview 1). During that time, she also taught fine art and eventually found her way back to Metropolitan State College, where she had done her undergraduate work (Interview 2).

While she realized that personal interests could not always be the driving force behind curatorial choices, she admitted “when you’re in a position as a curator you can’t help but be influenced, still, by the artists that have touched you in some sort of personal way” (Interview 3). The work of Christo and Jeanne-Claude had influenced Garner since she first began studying art, especially Christo’s prints (Interview 3). When she began working at the CVA, she essentially had complete control over planning exhibitions, and wanted to bring in “high-caliber, world renowned artists” (Interview 10). Christo and Jeanne-Claude had been planning a public art feature for Colorado since the early 1990s (Volz 343). While the possibility of working directly with these internationally renowned artists seemed unlikely at best, Garner took a chance.
It was the simplest way to start a relationship. Through the artists’ website, Garner contacted their staff with a vague idea of what she was seeking and got a quick response instructing her to fax a proposal directly to the artists (Interview 3). She responded immediately and Christo and Jeanne-Claude called her the next morning to begin discussing ideas (Interview 4). That initial contact, though, may have been the only simple part of what would become Christo and Jeanne-Claude: Prints and Objects.

There were two choices for the content of what the CVA could present: either a poster exhibition or a full retrospective (Interview 5). It was decided that a retrospective exhibition would be put together that would include over 130 works spanning the artists’ career from 1962 to 2008 (MacMillan, “A Look Behind The Curtains”). The artwork was all stored in Switzerland; so even the prospect of bringing it to Denver was daunting (Interview 5). The budget that was needed and the scale of the whole project were larger than anything the CVA had done in the past (Interview 5). Fortunately, the CVA’s affiliation with the college meant that they had far more resources to turn to, both in budgeting and in personnel, than if they were a stand-alone museum or gallery. Those resources were fully utilized, to the extent that “it literally got so big that I had to start delegating out to major departments over on the campus,” said Garner (Interview 7). “I was working with the marketing department, the development office, and the alumni association” (Interview 7).

Being associated with an educational institution also made Christo and Jeanne-Claude more enthusiastic about the exhibition. “I think they tend to want to associate and affiliate themselves with institutions that, their mission and their vision is sort of closely matched to,” said Garner, “So, I think we sort of fit their bill, which was great”
(Interview 4). While there is no doubt that any artists could benefit from the exposure of having a retrospective, Christo and Jeanne-Claude made sure that the relationship was mutually beneficial (Interview 6-9). Knowing that there would be high monetary costs to realize the exhibition, the artists donated many works from throughout their career that the CVA could use for fundraising.

They were very heavily involved in the execution of the exhibition. In fact, Christo himself took charge of designing the layout (Interview 8). Because of this, Garner had to step back from what she called “home-baked-cookie curat(ion),” with all the work being done by the small staff at the CVA (Interview 15), and take on the role of what Houtgraaf and Vitali would call a “project manager” (59). Instead of directly executing all of the minute details, she was able to oversee the overall process, guiding the direction of publicity, fundraising, and lectures (Interview 7-8).

Despite relinquishing some curatorial duties to the artists, Garner still found many opportunities to learn through research in planning this exhibition. “In the past, I was researching them for different reasons,” she said, and that changed “as far as the gallery is concerned” (Interview 22). She had to shift her focus from a personal interest and learning as an artist to considering the impacts of Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s work on the general public. Different visitors could have vastly different opinions on the work they see, as well as different levels of knowledge about the artists. Garner strove to make sure that didactic labels and available literature could answer the basic questions that visitors would have, but also guide the curious to more in-depth resources (Interview 23). She also took it upon herself personally to be open with visitors that were resistant to accept the work as art, giving insights the artists’ motivations and reasons behind their
work (Interview 23-25). Her efforts to educate were not limited to speaking with general visitors that came into the galleries. There were many administrators at the college that had no idea who the artists were, and she had to explain Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s place in contemporary art history in her efforts to coordinate the project with so many different offices on campus (Interview 29-30).

The same way the exhibition outgrew Garner’s original concept at the CVA was paralleled when Christo and Jeanne-Claude proposed that the show should travel. The CVA had already arranged to bring the artwork to the United States, and Garner had formulated it into the retrospective it became, so Christo and Jeanne-Claude extended the loan of their artwork for the indefinite duration of a traveling show, with all the proceeds going back to the CVA (Interview 14). But just as the massive scale of the exhibition was larger than anything Garner had been involved with before, the realm of organizing traveling exhibitions was also new territory (Interview 14).

Unfortunately, traveling exhibitions can be quite competitive, with many exhibitions vying for attention and limited resources from museums and galleries. It is a particularly difficult situation when the artists being featured are as prominent and prolific as Christo and Jeanne-Claude. They were already in the process of setting up an exhibition specifically to promote their Over The River project, still in progress, when Garner began offering Prints and Object nationally. These exhibitions had separate focuses, one a retrospective and the other specific to one project, so there was no inherent conflict. However, at this exact same time, Landau Traveling Exhibitions had organized a retrospective using works from a private collection donated to the Sonoma County Museum in California. The Landau show includes editions of many of the same prints
and objects selected for the CVA show. “It was just like planets aligning,” said Garner of the incredible coincidence (Interview 16). Garner can distinguish her exhibition from the other retrospective though, by pointing out that the works were personally chosen by the artists and that Christo volunteered to design the floor plan for every institution that hosts the exhibition, signaling a much greater involvement (Interview 16).

Since the CVA is part of a larger educational institution, it was important to Garner to have that involvement from the artists to “create an experience where students are able to work with the artists themselves” (Interview 26). She wanted her students and the surrounding community to experience firsthand what they see in art history books. She summed up her guiding principles: “I think in art, whether you’re an artist, or a curator, or a director, or docent, or whatever you are, I just feel like, that’s you’re overall mission and responsibility, is to help people understand. ‘Cause it’s a foreign language. Art is a foreign language to many people” (Interview 25).
CHAPTER VII

CASE STUDY NUMBER THREE: CLYFFORD STILL UNVEILED

Dean Sobel, curator of *Clyfford Still Unveiled* at the Denver Art Museum, is best known as the director of the Clyfford Still Museum. In his interview with the author, both the museum and the exhibition were discussed. The museum will be the permanent home of the Clyfford Still Estate, which includes nearly 2,400 works of art by Still that were bequeathed to the City of Denver in 2004 (Dean Sobel Director). Sobel is a specialist in 20th century art who began his curatorial career at the Milwaukee Art Museum where he was both Chief Curator and Curator of Contemporary Art from 1995-2000 (Dean Sobel Director). He came to Colorado in 2000 to serve as Director of the Aspen Art Museum, which he led through the accreditation process (Dean Sobel Director). In 2005 he accepted the director position at the Clyfford Still Museum and has overseen the institution’s development, focusing on fundraising, construction, and public lectures to enhance awareness of Clyfford Still’s work and place in art history (Dean Sobel Director). The museum is expected to open in 2011.

Clyfford Still was a central figure in the development of Abstract Expressionism (Clyfford Still Museum 13). Abstract forms, expressive brushwork, and monumental scale, all of which were used to convey universal themes such as creation, life, struggle, and death characterize Abstract Expressionism. It is considered to be the first significant American movement to break free from European precursors (Clyfford Still Museum 13).
When Still died in 1980, he willed nearly all of his life’s work, approximately 2,400 painting and drawings “to an American city that will agree to build or assign and maintain permanent quarters exclusively for the collection” (Clyfford Still Museum 6). Sobel explained that the city of Denver had been trying since 1999 to acquire the Still collection and was finally successful in 2004 with the proposal of the Clyfford Still Museum (Lecture).

In Sobel’s own words, the project is “really all quite novel. The collection has never been seen…it’s never been publicly shown” (Interview 1). While several major museums have Still works in their collections, and exhibitions have been mounted during and after his lifetime, the fact that so much of his work has never been shown leaves many questions unanswered with regard to how best to display the work. Sobel labels the process as a “discovery” (Interview 1). To find answers and solutions, Sobel organized the Clyfford Still Unveiled exhibition at the Denver Art Museum. The exhibition incorporated thirteen drawings and paintings that span most of Still’s career and were chosen as much to give audiences an idea of what would be on view at the new museum as to allow Sobel to experiment. “We tested some things, and we did present them and learn certain things from an exhibition, and I guess interpretive and other standpoints” (Interview 1).

The purpose of the exhibition was to expose local audiences to Clyfford Still’s work in person. As Sobel put it, “an attempt to…counter the issue of ‘who is Clyfford Still?’ in Denver?” (Interview 11). This was essential for fundraising efforts. It gave Sobel the ability to show people Still’s artwork in person and help them envision what the full museum might look like (Interview 23). He also wanted to dispel the myth of
abstract art being created randomly (Interview 14). “There’s nothing spontaneous about what these guys did,” Sobel says of Still and his contemporaries, “they were carefully deliberate compositions, just like all great art” (Interview 14). Any artwork, for better or worse, is different when viewed in person than when viewed as a reproduction in print or digital form. The author can attest to this, especially with the paintings of Clyfford Still.

The main reasons behind Sobel’s curatorial choices were based on practicality, though. Most of the collection will not be unlocked from storage until the physical building is complete, but a small selection was made available to the museum for conservation testing (Ramsay). The scale of Still’s paintings increased over the time of his career so Sobel made the cut-off date for the exhibition 1957, eliminating all work from the 1960s and 70s for space concerns (Interview 13). Sobel wanted to emphasize “iconic development” and showcase Still’s “kind-of classic image” while reserving a piece of Still’s career for the namesake museum.

The lessons from this exhibition would prove very useful in designing the gallery spaces at the Clyfford Still Museum. Sobel was tested by presenting Still’s work, simply because most Contemporary Artists he has worked with are still living, which gave him “the ability to stand there in the room and say, ‘should we try this?’ or…’how should we deal with that?’” (Interview 2). Victoria Newhouse stated that “whether viewing conditions resemble those of the past or herald something entirely new, they always affect our perception of art” (37). Ever-present questions for Sobel are “how did they (Abstract Expressionists) understand or expect their work to be seen? What are the ideal conditions to look at these pictures under?” (Interview 3). His answer is to consider the spaces where the works were created. Sobel points out that artists’ studios “in the thirties
and forties when their work was getting formulated was easel painting” and “domestic-scaled” (Interview 3). So too were the spaces that first exhibited Abstract Expressionism. “The Art of the Century Gallery…and then the Betty Parsons Gallery…were these walk-up spaces, that…have eight- or nine-foot ceiling heights…not vast gallery spaces” (Interview 3). When artists began expanding the size of paintings in the 1940s and 1950s, it was done intentionally to completely fill the spaces in which the paintings hung. Sobel sums it up saying they were “very large canvases, that they were putting in, by today’s standards, relatively small rooms,” but “there was some understanding that these paintings would be an environment, they would surround the viewer, and they would be what you see in the experience of looking at art” (Interview 4-5).

This is in contrast to the interior spaces of recent architecture that “change your whole understanding of how art relates to its place,” said Sobel (Interview 5). He describes the evolution of museum spaces as “almost like kicking a ball down the field. Artists kept making their paintings bigger, and so architects kept making the spaces bigger” (Interview 6). This issue came into play when Sobel was working with staff at the Denver Art Museum to design the layout for Clyfford Still Unveiled. The designers were surprised that Sobel would want to fill an entire wall with one painting. But that was his point, to create “a dramatic moment” for audiences to see the work in the context in which it was created (Interview 5). He didn’t want things to feel “lost” (Interview 6).

It is true that new museums must be flexible. They must be able to adapt to any work, of any size, that will be brought in – the “least common denominator” as Sobel puts it (Interview 6). The Clyfford Still Museum will be an exception. “Unlike most art museums,” Sobel continues, “where you have to anticipate sooner or later something else
will be in these rooms,” the Clyfford Still Museum can only exhibit Still’s work (Interview 7). This means there will not be a need to accommodate new works of different scales by future artists.

Some would consider the prospect of presenting just one artist in a museum as an insurmountable challenge. Sobel recognizes this as a something that other museums have struggled with. He says, “other single-artist museums have just become general art museums” (Interview 20). Budget concerns cause this for one thing, but mostly it is the lack of an oeuvre. Because the Clyfford Still Museum will own almost all of the artist’s work, Sobel believes that the museum can present interesting exhibitions and lists many of the ways:

“One would be the biography and the story of Clyfford Still is compelling. And so, some people who are not predisposed to art, or modern art, or abstract art… do seem to connect with his belief in himself, his independence, his sticking to his guns, and his intense belief in the power of art. And that… does have relevance to people’s lives and what they do and care about… Still’s art mirrors the broader history of 20th century art. So we’ll tell the story of American art, and while we’re telling that story you obviously have to understand what was going on elsewhere in the world, so we’ll be talking about the broader, mostly European, but global perspective. You can then start to use Clyfford Still’s work as hopefully a greater understanding and explanation of what we mean by Abstract Art, and what is Abstract Art, and what are we seeing in those paintings… There (are) lots of socio-cultural connections, thankfully, with Still, the
Depression, the second World War, the relevance against that background is significant. The Cold War and how his colleagues got packaged up as part of the Cold War in the fifties. Still’s work, particularly in opposition to… the rising consumerist superficiality of the sixties and seventies…

Those are the things we’re thinking about.” (Interview 18-19)

Sobel clearly has little worry about the programming at the Clyfford Still Museum.

Returning to the topic of budgeting, though, he recognizes that the museum’s uniqueness does pose problems in fundraising. “We’re a very focused, boutique-like institution,” he says, “we’re not a museum that is about the general populace of Denver…as much as we’d like to position that way” (Interview 25).

He stresses that art museums need to find creative approaches to become attractive to funders, and have stay relentless in their efforts. “Just because… (you have) a good idea doesn’t mean funding pours in” (Interview 25).

All other considerations aside, Sobel’s main objective in presenting artwork, especially in the case of Clyfford Still, is to let the artwork speak for itself. He believes that text-heavy exhibitions distract from the work too much, and limit viewers. Unless every possible aspect is addressed, there is always the chance that viewers’ questions will go unanswered. Sobel’s solution is to provide a separate educational space for people who want to dig deeper, which allows others to “opt out” of the barrage of information that some museums present and simply enjoy the artwork. People “don’t want to be lectured to and told what to think or see, they just want to have an experience” (Interview 27).
CHAPTER VIII
CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to examine the exhibition planning process in a variety of museums and to compare different curators’ approaches to the process. Despite a minor national profile, curators and institutions in Denver are able to plan and present significant exhibitions that are of as high quality as those in more well-known art museum communities. Though each art museum in Denver has different resources to plan exhibitions, and each curator comes from a different background, the curators take a decidedly artist-centered approach to planning that generates interest beyond the Rocky Mountain region.

Research interviews yielded the insights necessary to understand the perspectives of each curator and the contexts in which they work. Dean Sobel pays particular attention to how Clyfford Still envisioned his work. This goes beyond exhibition planning and enters the realm of architectural design as the Clyfford Still Museum enters the construction phase in 2010.

Rose Fredrick takes her experience of working with contemporary artists and having sensitivity to their needs and applies it to all of her exhibition planning. She works to the best of her ability to showcase the relationships between artists and the messages they try to convey, even from a century past.
Jennifer Garner worked directly with Christo and Jeanne-Claude to select and arrange works for their retrospective exhibition. This could have resulted in the artists creating a self-promoting homage, but instead created a lasting relationship between artists and curator that raised public awareness of the artists’ intent behind their large-scale environmental installations. Hopefully it will result in the successful installation of their Over The River piece planned for the Arkansas River in Colorado, which would be a fitting tribute to Jeanne-Claude’s final project before her death.

These curators represent the growing arts community in Denver and demonstrate how this community offers world-class exhibitions while keeping a practical perspective. The natural conversation tones of the interviews lead mostly to discussions on planning the specific exhibitions, rather than on exhibition planning in general. This was successful in that it reinforced the idea of Denver’s impressive art museum community, but it was a divergence from the secondary goal of understanding the Best Practices of exhibition planning.

For that goal I had to rely on published work on the topic. Chapter IV provides an introduction to the essential considerations of the topic and the bibliographic references indicate where deeper explanations can be found. The aim of the chapter was to give context to the interview discussions and demonstrate that I have an understanding of these concepts. To create a comprehensive guide to planning exhibitions would take decades, if not lifetimes.

This research gave me the opportunity to conduct in-depth consideration of one of the most essential museum functions and to interact with professional individuals who are engaged in exhibition planning every day. It gives the reader the opportunity to learn
about a growing art museum region and to consider the ongoing role that art museums play in our culture.
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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW WITH ROSE FREDRICK

This interview was conducted on November 14, 2009. Each speaker’s name appears once, and is then substituted by initials.

Alan Hollis (AH): To officially begin I'll just say today is November 14, 2009 I'm Alan Hollis interviewing Rose Fredrick about Masterpieces of Colorado. To introduce you to what I'm doing, I'm trying to learn about all the facets of exhibition planning and I want to know about your experiences in the process in general, and of course, more specifically, with Masterpieces of Colorado. I want to understand best practices, how you try to implement them, and what steps you take, what other solutions are necessary. Of course, I sent you the questions ahead of time, I have added a few more…

Rose Fredrick (RF): Okay.

(AH): But basically, I've tried to compile a comprehensive list of questions to understand your perspective. And there may be point I failed to consider and some questions may seem redundant. I see the planning process as having three separate components out of try to organize my questions accordingly. And those components are research, execution, and evaluation. So to begin, if you would please just tell me a little bit about your background and what led you to start into the curatorial field.

(RF): Probably by accident, really. I have a bachelors of science degree from Cal Poly
(Ed.: California Polytechnic University in San Luis Obispo) in business marketing. But I was always an artistic kid so it kind of makes sense that I would do something in the arts. But I got a job in a gallery when I moved to Denver. And I worked there for several years and the gallery owner really taught me everything about installation, how to have show…

(AH): All the practical stuff?

(RF): Right. Seeing shows and selling art, you know, the, what's pleasing to the public versus, you know, a show that is maybe more for show, you know, to get under people's skin, or to put something out that's really kind of brand-new and things like that, and also what Denver will tolerate in art, which is very different from what New York tolerates in art. So, that was kind of my background, and then that gallery owner decided to retire, and so then I started working independently with artists. Promotion, and how to get them into shows and magazine articles and things like that. So doing, a lot of the background work for artists. And then opened my own gallery and at that time the woman I had worked for was asked if she would consider curating the Coors’ Western Art exhibit. So this was 13 years ago, and she said no, happily retired but they should call me. So they did, and that was just sort of a happy accident too, because I come from very rural background, we always had horses when I was growing up and lots of dogs and cats and a menagerie kind of thing. And so, I just kind of made a few comments about when I was in the interview about actually how this place reminded me of home, and smelled like, you know, when I was growing up. And so, I think they…

(AH): This place being the stock show?

(RF): The stock show, yeah. So I think they kinda thought that curatorially I would be if it because I understood the Western way of life. Having not grown up on a farm or a
ranch, certainly, but surrounded by, you know, and in the rural setting. So, that's my background, and I think it all kind of builds on, or contributes to, my ability to curate the Coors’ show, in a weird way.

(AH): That, it kind of makes a lot of sense, actually. And that leads right into my next question, which was wondering if there were other experiences after you began working at the Western Art exhibit that led to more in-depth knowledge of Colorado artists?

(RF): Yes, yeah.

(AH): It sounds like your gallery experience, obviously, built into that.

(RF): Right. So from gallery experience leading up to that and working with Colorado artists. It really, learning from them what they needed and what they expected from a good show, and a good experience. Because the art world is such a funny thing. We ask artists to produce the work on spec, I mean, how many people do that, that you sort of hope it's going to sell and you frame it and…

(AH): By spec, you mean, speculation?

(RF): On speculation, you know, so… and then you supply this work and to gallery takes, you know, 50% a lot of times. So, you know, that's a huge commission rate. And that's how the business works. But, what I did, was sort of go at it from the artists’ perspective, and again, accidentally so. But really learned, okay, what do they need to make a show successful? What does success mean for an artist? So, it's not, I think a lot of people look at what's a successful show for a museum? I come at it from a different approach. And I generally work with living artists. So, it's been quite an education, asking them what, you know, is important for them in a show.
(AH): Which of course makes perfect sense when you are working with living artists. In the case of Colorado Masterpieces there are obviously a lot of deceased artists, did you take that approach into account at all? I mean, trying to imagine what would have been favorable for those artists that were no longer living?

(RF): Yeah, actually, I really kind of did. It was sort of funny, because there were artists in the show that I thought, ‘Gosh, these artists are very mentoring kinds of people’ and, you know, Thomas Moran was one of those artists who came to Colorado and never hesitated to have shows with local artists here. I mean, you know, we think of Thomas Moran as the pinnacle of, you know, that era in landscape art, and, you know, my gosh we have national parks because of Thomas Moran essentially. And so he came out here, he had shows with Denver artists. He went out painting with Helen Henderson Chain, and Hamilton Hamilton, and Harvey Otis Young, and the photographers and stuff. So he wasn't above it all. And so, yeah, I really took a lot of that into consideration.

(AH): I really like how you said, you know, you described a lot of those artists as being mentoring artists, which makes complete sense because so many of them were also involved in teaching.

(RF): Right, right.

(AH): So that…

(RF): Yeah, and exactly. A Helen Henderson Chain person, for instance, was such an amazing artist. Died at 42, way too young, but she taught the more well-known artist Charles Partridge Adams that everybody knows here. Very prolific Colorado artist, and did these landscapes, and in my opinion never really quite achieved the ability that his teacher had. But, you know, they’re a scatter to the wind now, because it was that time.
And when Helen Chain died, she in her will stipulated that all the remaining paintings of hers that weren't sold were to be sold off and the funds given to the Indians. So it was really a fascinating thing. I think she died in the 1870s in a typhoon in the China Sea. You know, it's just, yeah. When I started researching it, I couldn't help but think of these deceased artists not on a level of how important is this artist in the grand scheme of, you know, art of the West or in a national perspective. But how is this artist important to other artists? And how is this artist important to advancing the art and Colorado? So, and then within that of course I tried to find the best things that I could find. And there were some artists I just really didn't think were, hit that level, but maybe they had an importance for other reasons. But we had some really fabulous artists at that time.

(AH): It's just, hearing you talk more and more about it, it all, the whole theme, it seems like it keeps re-tying in with itself on so many levels. About how the artists are all connected to each other. I think that's really fantastic.

(RF): Yes. And the idea of the masterpieces show was this tradition of landscape painting in Colorado. And so to go back to its earliest roots, when people came on wagon train over here, you know, I mean, the audacity to paint. You know, I mean, we had Indian wars going on, the Civil War is going on, you know so many things, Colorado was only a territory where a lot of these artists came. And there was a point when there wasn't enough work for everybody, so he couldn't find work, so he teamed up with a guy who was a fiddle player and he danced.

(AH): Yeah, he became a dancer.
(RF): Yeah, I mean, it was like my gosh, to be an artist at that time it's pretty amazing when you think about it.

(AH): Definitely have to supplement that was a lot of other things. It probably wouldn't have even been easy or convenient just painting in the first place, because you're not going to have what many people today would think of as a regular studio space.

(RF): No, right. Or even if you see the pictures of Helen Chain out painting, I mean, she's got a full-length skirt on, and she's got lace up boots on, and you know the hat, and all this kind of stuff. And her husband’s there sort of chaperoning, and you know, it just, I’m like how did she hike up the top of, as she climbed 14ers, and most of the highest peaks. So how was she able to do that? It's just unbelievable to me that she just, she's an amazing hero to me as far as art in Colorado.

(AH): I kind of wanted to go a little bit more in the direction of planning for the exhibition. So, we know that it was the primary celebration for the 40th anniversary of the Colorado Council on the Arts. How did that come to be and were there other ideas being considered? Other exhibition types, or something other than an exhibition altogether?

(RF): I think, well this grant was a National Endowment for the Arts grant. So every presidential change there is a new head of the NEA, and this, the director under the Bush administration, his, the way he decided to divide up the money with each state was not for individual artists, but for these masterpieces grants. So all 50 states got a lump sum of money to spend. And there were stipulations with the grants. And they were all really kind of interesting cool things. But the masterpieces, so I think, I want to say like in New Mexico they did a quilting. Kind of the Masterpieces of Quilting in New Mexico through
the years kind of thing. So all the shows had to have some strong tie to Colorado, but it
didn't have to necessarily be historical. But a strong tie the Colorado, and it needed to
travel. It had to travel.

(AH): So it could be seen…

(RF): Yes.

(AH): All around the state, be more accessible.

(RF): Exactly. So how it got tied in with the Colorado Council on the Arts 40th
anniversary is really that the show picked up momentum. When I was awarded, with the
people at Foothills, the NEA grant then they started getting excited by what this was, and
they…

(AH): After finding out the stipulations that were involved?

(RF): No, no, no. We met those. So then when they started hearing about the artists who
could be in the show, and that I didn't just go to… like Denver Public Library has a huge
collection. And it's not all good, but what is good is really nice. And the Denver Art
Museum won't loan, just forget it, don't even bother asking. And you know, so I started
going around the institutions, and then I started thinking, ‘Geez, I know all these private
collectors. Why don't I just go to private collectors and get the real cream of the crop?’
And that's what I did, so a lot of the show came out of homes. So people got really
excited about that, because that was artwork that they had one chance to see unless you
were personal friends with some of these big time collectors.

(AH): Right, because it was never, in any other situation, going to be in a museum or
gallery.
(RF): That's right, that's right. So the only institutions that were very helpful in loaning, the Pioneer Museum loaned two pieces, very nice pieces, and Hugh at the Kirkland loaned several pieces, and the library. But other than that they were all personal collections.

(AH): Do you remember, ballpark figure, how many separate collections that entailed?

(RF): It's listed in that catalog.

(AH): All the lenders.

(RF): Uh huh. In the back of the catalog. In fact, do you want to hold on a second, and I'll get a catalog for you. You can have it and then…

(AH): Thank you.

(RF): In the back, you can have this is the collections. So there's Pioneer, library, but then, Kathy and Dusty Loo, Buzz Rieger, Doug Erion, I think Jamie, what's his last name?

(AH): I think you know you're talking about, but I can't remember his name either.

(RF): Yeah, what's his last name? Anyway, and then the artists all, you know, borrowed from all the artists.

(AH): Right, for the contemporary pieces.

(RF): Okay, so the Colorado Council on the arts, I think when they started to get more excited about the concept of the show, and the artists, and the lenders, then they said, you know we're looking for something to really broadcast our 40th. And it was like, why not do this? It wasn't part of the beginning of it, it was sort of piggybacking on when they got excited.
(AH): I just like to understand a little bit more about how the NEA grant first got into it. Obviously, as you said every state was doing something. Not every state’s arts council would be celebrating a significant anniversary, so that is something that is particular to Colorado. I just don't really understand the connection yet.

(RF): They are mutually exclusive. Now, the Colorado Council on the Arts is the conduit for the NEA grant. So they get them every year. And basically what they do is, this money is going to go to each state and each state has an organization that follows the money. So it just all kind of, I won the grant, and they said, ‘Hey, we've got our 40th, we're trying to come up with this celebration.’ And it was just, kind of all worked out that well why not when we do the grand opening at Foothills Art Center for this show let’s do a celebration for Colorado Council. They, we planned the opening for the Masterpieces show like any other opening and then they said, ‘Okay, we would like to add these things on.’ So you know, we had this opening, we had their celebration, and we just wove ‘em together. And it just, you know, like the governor came and talked and things like that. So that's basically how it happened. But the grants come every year, but the 40th anniversary just hit right then.

(AH): Right so that was just kind of good luck.

(RF): Fortuitous, right.

(AH): So when you first came on board that was after you knew that the NEA grant, that was available. Is that correct?

(RF): It's, the director at Foothills Art Center called me and said, ‘Would you have any interest in going after this NEA grant?’ It was $50,000 I think. And she said, ‘We just need to come up with a concept and an idea.’ And she said, ‘I don't know if we'll even
get it, but…’ So we went and had lunch and I said, ‘You know this is a show I've been wanting to do.’

(AH): So how did that idea first come about?

(RF): My idea for the Masterpieces, this particular show? Initially I wanted to do a landscape show, of contemporary landscape artists. But then, when it was the, this big grant, I started thinking, ‘Wouldn't it be fun…’ You know, how you always say it before you dig into the work? (laughter)

(AH): Before you find out what's really going to be involved.

(RF): Yeah, ‘Wouldn’t it be fun to do a show that looked back at…’ And initially I really wanted to do like a comparison 100 years ago and today. Or basically stop at Vance Kirkland's birth. That was my cutoff point. But then, as the show progressed, as it started getting out there, it was like well why wouldn't you have all these artists in the middle? I'm like, well you’ve got to cut it off somewhere.

(AH): So was that, so that you could include more contemporary artists as well as 19th-century artists?

(RF): Well, it was more to just take 100 year, just take 100 year stop. Otherwise, it was like, it was sort of an all or nothing. So I just said what was going on 100 years ago, or earlier, and what is going on today and looking forward. And part of the reason why stopped there, is, I mean, a big part of the reason is it would just be ridiculously huge.

(AH): Right, and to… you would've either had to have cut out people that were in the show or you would've had to make the show so much bigger. And then how would you have found an exhibition space for it?
(RF): Right, and that's a show, if you were to span landscape art in Colorado from the first people who came on wagon trains to today, I mean, that's just an unwieldy show. And I don't know that it has all that much continuity either to it. So just sort of liked the historical aspect of, you know, just like what I was saying with Helen Henderson Chain in her full-length dress going up to Pike's Peak to paint, you know. I mean, God, I don't even consider a hike without my GORE-TEX and my boots…

(AH): Much less canvas…

(RF): Yeah! Bloomers?! Are you kidding me? So I just, I mean, I thought it was a really good way on a number of levels to get people interested in art. In that, the historic aspect of it, and the pride of our state, the history of our state, and it's so dramatically different from the history of, say, Maine, or something. So, you know, exploring the history of the state and what was happening at the time, and then looking at today, what's happening right now today in landscape painting? And how has it changed? And how do these artists look back on the artists that came before them? That kind of stuff. The final stop of the show was the Denver Public Library and there I filled in all the gaps.

(AH): Was that due to the space that was available there, or was that because some of the loans that you'd been working with earlier had come to an end and so you needed to supplement with other pieces?

(RF): No, most of the loans stayed on, except the Pioneer Museum. They wanted their…

(AH): But that was only two pieces?

(RF): Right. It was two pieces, but they were really important pieces. No they let there’s actually stay on, that's right. They did, I was allowed to use theirs. But, it was because there was more space and because I had. Okay, so the show was up and running and then
the question kept coming up, ‘What about the artists in the middle?’ And I'm like, ‘Well, if you had read the catalog… you would know why.’ But it was, you know, an interesting question. And so I kind of got back to living my life and working on other things, but still kind of I kept thinking, ‘Well, why not?’ Then I just kind of went in and I talked to Rob Lewis, and I talked to Hugh some more, and I dug into the library collection some more, and I just filled it in. And it was really fun, it was kind of a cool thing to do, and it became more the survey of landscape painting throughout Colorado to today.

(AH): But at the same time after almost a year and a half of the show being out there, traveling around, it might almost be strange if it stayed exactly the same.

(RF): Right, it's not easy to keep it exactly the same because people want their stuff back. I was amazed, people were very generous in letting their collections out. And I think, what I heard from the collectors, too, was that they had such positive feedback about the show that it was kind of enjoyable for them to put it out there so other people could see it.

(AH): Do you think that initially they were so willing to share because of the relationship that you'd built up with them already, as opposed to, if it was someone that you didn't already know well. They may have been more reluctant.

(RF): Right, I think so. Well in some cases the relationship, I didn't know Kathy Loo but she knows my dear friend Doug Erion and I go way back. And so I called her and I said I was talking to Doug, or let's see, did she even bring up Doug? And I said well Doug’s a good friend of mine. ‘Oh, okay well yeah, let's talk about this.’ So it was, it definitely is a relationship based kind of thing. And being able to say that, well I won the NEA grant to do this, that's a big deal too. But in Kathy Loo's case, their collection is so deep that
she’s got it spread out all over Colorado Springs, so for her to, I think I grabbed four or five pieces out of her collection and she didn't even have to move any art in her house. It's a relationship thing for sure.

(AH): So we've been kind of talking about the catalog a little bit, was that always part of the plan? Did you include that when you applied for the grant?

(RF): No it wasn't. It wasn't part of the plan. It came about as I started researching the artists. When we won the grant the folks at Foothills and I won the grant, then I just went into heavy research mode. And just read everything I could and just started picking through collections and talking to collectors and dealers and everybody. And saying, all right, what do I have to have? You know, like for instance, do I have to have a Bierstadt in this show? You know, because he was a seminal painter of that time, but how do I get one, you know? And he didn't live here. So then I started thinking, they need to live here. They need to have lived here, or even spent summers here, and winters in New York, or vice versa, whatever they did, they needed to live here. And that was like well maybe I shouldn't have Thomas Moran, because he never lived here. But a dealer said, you have to have Thomas Moran because he inspired so many artists, and he had shows here. I started digging into that, I'm like yeah, he's probably right. So the catalog then, I have piles of research and was like, sheesh I wanna share this with people. Instead of like one person at a time, I'm like oh, you will never believe what happened to this artist. You know, and I'm telling these stories, and I’m like we need a catalog. So that's when I went back to the Colorado Council on the Arts and said can you help me come up with money for a catalog? And that's when I talked to Hugh Grant, and said, I really really
really want to do a catalog. Would you help me with that? And he's big on documenting
stuff, and so that was not in grant, but it just needed to be documented I thought.

(AH): Would you say that it was part of the learning process, obviously, doing all that
research on the artists is a huge part of the learning process, but something else
unexpected that you ended up learning about, was just that, ‘Wow, I've got all the stuff in
my head, I need to share it.’

(RF): Well, yes, and it also, I guess I always knew I wanted to do some kind of
documentation, because these shows are so ephemeral. You know, as people get to see
them or they didn't. But a catalog you can hang onto. And I have stacks and stacks of
them from shows, or people send me. And so I knew I wanted the documentation, but I
also knew that it's just, it's a major undertaking and it's a lot of money. And it's such a
short run, if you do 1000 of ‘em, it's just an incredible run. So it was more, I just, I guess
it was kind of something that as I got into it, I just, I wanted it but then I’m like no it has
to happen! So let's just keep bugging people, until I can make it happen.

(AH): it's lucky that you were able to, again, since you had connections to people that
must have helped in making the catalog happen.

(RF): Well, and you know, I think so much of this stuff, too, is just getting people excited
about what excites you, and not letting them go until they get it. And you know,
fortunately I'm, you sit down and talk to Hugh Grant, and he's just so excited about
Colorado art, he's one of the biggest collectors of it and puts it out there for people and
what he's doing. So he's totally onboard with anything like this. There's a learning curve
to it, but I think it's, you know, you move through it. Would I do things differently in this
exhibit? Yeah, I would. But you know, I apply that to the next show that I’m gonna do.
(AH): It's a continual learning process.

(RF): Right.

(AH): I'd like to talk a little bit more about some of the real behind the scenes of the planning. You know, detailed stuff about the timeline. So of course, the exhibition first opened in February 2007, and we talked a little bit about, before that. Knowing the NEA grant was out there, coming up with an idea, what kind of timeline was there? Did you…?

(RF): You're gonna think I'm insane. This was the timeline. I got a call in, so that was February 2007. I got a call in May of 2006 from the director at Foothills Art Center. We applied for the grant, and I kind of, we wrote everything up. And then I tepidly started to research it. But I didn't know if I was going to get the grant. They decided on the grant in August.

(AH): You mean the NEA?

(RF): They awarded it, yeah, the NEA grant, 2006. So from August… yeah I started making initial asks and started looking at the art and sort of compiling this, I talked to all the contemporary artists… so from August. I think it was a total of eight months, basically. If you count May.

(AH): And meanwhile…

(RF): With this! (holds up catalog)

(AH): Right, because this was ready for when it first opened. And in the meantime, you are also curating the Coors’ show.

(RF): Yeah, curated the Coors’ show, it was insane. It was really just. All I can say is, I got very lucky, people were very generous. Because there's just no way that the show
should have happened when I think about it. I’m like, what was I possibly thinking? That was just, it was insanity. You know, I guess the good thing about doing a historic survey is that there's a finite number of works. And if you know the right collectors, you can get some really nice things. And if I can't find something by so and so artist, well, you know, only like Hugh Grant is going to know that I left out that person. You know, the thousands of other people who walk through aren't going to question it. They're just going to see some things and read the catalog on the artists who are in there.

(AH): Which is still going, obviously it's going to present a fantastic group and an amazing range of artists. There might be something missing, but there are not many experts on Colorado art.

(RF): Exactly. And it, you know, it really was a show on several levels in that I love history. So it was the history of the state to me was sort of illustrated passively through the show. So there was that. The environmental issues were passively illustrated in the show. You know, the Mount of the Holy Cross is no longer there. And that's not because of pollution or anything, it's just evolution, you know, the rocks have fallen down and things like that. But you know, it's illustrated time and it did number of different things. And then the choices were, there were objective choices as far as who should be in the show. But there were many subjective choices on my part. I left out, contemporary artists that I didn't think were important to contemporary art. Yet they’re painting landscape, but what does it say? What does it mean? What does it do?

(AH): It sounds to me like that would be a lot more difficult of a decision-making process, deciding how to edit the contemporary works of artists that are still living. I mean as you said with the historic works there's a finite number that exists so it's easier,
and also, time has past so you can see what the influence has been by those artists on other artists, or even on national policy. Like you said, that's why we have the national parks.

(RF): Right.

(AH): So, can you tell me a little bit more about how you made choices with the contemporary artists? Was any of it based on the existing relationships that you had with people?

(RF): Yeah it was. There were a lot of existing relationships, and I can tell you if we flip through the book, Joe Arnold is a Wyoming artist, but he paints down here all the time. And I picked him because he hikes to the top and paints these peaks. And it was, I thought if I'm going to do a landscape show, what can landscape do for the viewer? And in his case he can take the viewer to tops of peaks.

(AH): Right, so you don't have to go there yourself but you can still see it.

(RF): Right, right. In a beautiful artistic way. And I mean, how many people are gonna hike to the top? I'm in great shape, but I have no interest in hiking to the top of any of these peaks. So that's what Joe Arnold. Clyde Aspevig is such a well-known landscape painter, and kind of the Western art realm, and lived in Colorado for a long time. So just on notoriety and technique and style. Gordon Brown, I like what he's doing. This very, you know, he's taking landscape, but he's got this very old masters look to it. So his is all about mushing the paint around, and the feeling of it. It's not about depicting a faithful rendition of the day. So, you know, when I put a Gordon Brown painting in next to someone who's faithfully depicting the landscape, it's like, oh I have to think differently about what I'm looking at. So that sort of pushed people in a more artistic way. And Len
Chmiel is another one of those people, too, that they look very faithful, but they're not faithful to the landscape. They are more about design and light and color and things like that. And then Mark Daily also, he had a great little urban scene, which is landscape painting in my opinion. And then this wonderful scene of the apple blossoms, or the budding apples in the snow. I just love the impressionistic quality of his work, and the painterly quality of it. And Joellyn Dueyeberry. You know, the big monumental pieces. And Joellyn is just such a well-known Western-area landscape painter, and then paints these East Coast pieces, so to have her perspective. So a lot of it was perspectives. And then you've got like a Tracy Felix.

(AH): Yeah, I love his work.

(RF): Yeah. That's just very, you know, almost childlike and exciting and interesting, and you gotta stop. You have to stop and look at Tracy's work, and wonder what inspired him. Chuck Forsman, you know, was just an obvious yes. I've gotta have Chuck in the show. And Don Stinson, for the same reason. And Karen Kitchel. Because these artists are making environmental statements. So, Chuck was just a really important artist to have in the show. And Karen Kitchel for the same reason, this whole series of weeds was just fabulous. And then some more traditional painters. Someone who does wildlife. I put Dan Sprick in the show, who's a still life painter. But I knew from many years ago, working with him, that Dan does these just ethereal landscapes that are, that really are so much like his kind of still lifes…

(AH): With incredible detail.

(RF): Yeah, but also just trippy, you know? They just kind of are, you know people would even say that. This one painting he did, the two that I have here are the 26 x 24
and 22 x 28 in the catalog. But he brought for the library show, I don't know if you saw it, but it was the size of this wall, it was like 8' x 8' or 7 feet 7 feet. It was huge. And you felt like you could just walk into it. People were mesmerized by it. So to have somebody who's not known as a landscape painter, and in fact, this painting I believe was bought for the Denver Art Museum. And it's now the Denver Art Museum, this *Independence Pass* painting.

(AH): After the show, you mean?

(RF): From the library. They bought it out of when it was hanging at the library show, and it's in the art Museum. Because it was so interesting. The collectors at the Denver Art Museum know his still life painting, and they came into the show, and they are like, ‘I didn't realize!’ Well, we have to have a landscape painting to round out our Dan Sprick collection.

(AH): He's got that huge, well that whole room in the Denver Art Museum…

(RF): Yes.

(AH): Which gives you so much insight into what he's thinking.

(RF): Exactly. So like the Don Stinson, painting. This painting, this *Ice Park at Ouray*, this is man-made. This is totally a man-made ice park out at Ouray for ice climbing. So the fascinating thing about it is, here's this landscape. In this natural world and its man-made. So, if you, when you start reading about this and why he painted this, I had the artists write statements. So when you kind of read about, ‘Why is this in the show?’ You know, and you're like, ‘God, that's really pretty. Where is that?’ And you see that its man-made, and oh that's a trip. So his, what Don is working on, Karen Kitchel, and Chuck Forsman, a number of artists are, is how man impacts the landscape. And I
thought that was a discussion that needed to be had. So anyway, they're just these wonderful, and I just love these Skip Whitcomb paintings, just so painterly and artistic with this little, you know, burning the leaves and this painting just makes me feel like fall. I really strove to hit people on many. Environmental impact, gut level, what does art do for us? And landscape is such an easy in for everybody. You can walk into this show and you can go to Skip Whitcomb’s paintings, and just go, oh yeah, we used to burn leaves when I was a kid. That was really, I can smell this painting.

(AH): Yeah, as soon as you see it.

(RF): Or you can stand in front of this huge Chuck Forsman painting of the traffic running by, and ’Where is that? I've never seen that mountain’ and it's totally made up. But you can stand in front of that and say yeah, that's what's happening to my state.

(AH): It’s totally changing, even from 20 years ago.

(RF): Yeah, exactly. So I think what the show did, hit one of my big goals, was to start conversations. And I think it did. I think it succeeded at that. So, where I fell down, maybe not getting the best historic works. Or maybe not filling in all the gaps. To do, it would take five, six, seven years, to really do a hugely comprehensive show with the very best and scour every collection in the United States to pull these paintings in. So in eight months time. I feel like I met one of my biggest goals, is to get people in to see art who may not ever see art and to get them to talk about art, environment, Colorado, history, whatever.

(AH): And I was going to say that all those different levels tie into something you mentioned earlier just about your love of history. Before you even see the exhibition, or have any thoughts about it, all you do know is it's a lot of paintings. But there's so much
more to it, it's not, they don't exist in a vacuum. It's part of the world, and there are so many other things going on, these artists are influencing each other, as well as the other people that are around them that don't have anything to do with art and the world around them is affecting the artists.

(RF): Yeah.

(AH): It's just like when you were talking about the show coming together in the first place, all the reasons for it, it just spirals and gets bigger and bigger, and everything keeps reconnecting and it just makes it really natural.

(RF): Yeah. It's one of those things that just sort of happens in the art community too. It's a lively community. Did I answer all your questions on the timeline? 'Cause as it was, it was definitely not an ideal timeline. And I talked to the people at Colorado Council. And I said, I think this works, giving out the grant this way, you know, in August when you want it to start basically the beginning of the next year. Works for other disciplines, but not really for visual art.

(AH): Was that, obviously, going back to the 40th anniversary, so the council starting in 1967, that's why the show began in 2007. I'm sure with the stock show, that probably made things nearly impossible for you to say that it could start in January. So was it February just to make it as early in the year as possible?

(RF): Yes. We needed a stipulation of the grant was that it hit four locations in a year. So just to give each venue time to set up and have the show run, and take down, repack everything and get it to the next venue was, so it really was more the Center for Southwest Studies couldn't take it until, they couldn't have an opening to February. Because they really could have had the show in January, but they couldn't do it until then.
So then it got it until April 22. And then they get it to Foothills, so there's what's two weeks between the shows for transportation and all that kind of… but you can kind of see the gap between shows. That is just…

(AH): Right, that's just a natural part of getting things from A to B.

(RF): Exactly, just purely moving a show around.

(AH): When it came to selecting the sequence for where would start… the whole show, the idea of it started with Foothills but they weren't the first institution…

(RF): They didn't have an opening until May. And when we talked about it we really wanted it to be a spring show there, just whether.

(AH): With the other places was if a similar situation of trying to find programming gaps when they could put it on?

(RF): Yup, absolutely.

(AH): Of course, each place is gonna have different standard operating procedures about how far out they plan exhibitions.

(RF): You know, again, that was luck. Usually museums are two years out, the smaller ones. The bigger ones are 10 years out. The level of, the size of museum that these shows went to a more of a two-year out kind of gap. So that they could take this was…and I think it was, I think they made room for it because it was such a, such a pleasing show for a lot of people. It definitely was not gonna be confrontational to their viewers and that kind of thing. So that was sort of a part of how got circulated pretty easily.
(AH): It’s something that you said, landscape paintings are easy for people to get into. And so a show like that, adding that to a museum’s schedule wasn't going to hurt their numbers, and possibly it would even bring the numbers up as far as attendance goes.

(RF): Yeah, I mean, I heard from some places that, one place said that they got as many people for the landscape show as they had for the entire previous year. So, it was a show that people really enjoyed. I think they could bring their kids, you know, a number of things like that.

(AH): When they were giving you those kind of numbers, generally talking about how many people came, did they say anything about repeat visitors?

(RF): No, I didn't hear that.

(AH): I'd be curious also because you're saying people could bring their families so I could see maybe if somebody went and enjoyed it, they say, ‘Oh, you got to come!’ And not just say go and see it, but I'm gonna take you to this because it's important enough to make sure that you see that.

(RF): No. I don't think museums were very good about keeping those numbers, but just a click at the door kind of who came in thing.

(AH): So, I was wondering then, kind of moving a little bit further into the execution, as opposed to just doing the research, you mentioned that the director of the Foothills art center, Jennifer Ito?

(RF): Uh huh.

(AH): That she approached you with the idea. How much, was there much collaboration in the planning process? Obviously there's some collaboration from the lenders, saying
this is the time when you can come visit and select works. Other than that it sounds like this was pretty much, you were almost doing the whole thing on your own.

(RF): Yeah, I really kind of did. We initially had divided up the workload and what she would do. And I think it didn't quite happen that way. Part of it is that she was running Foothills at the same time, but it wasn't always amicable. Let's just probably leave it at that. But I just kind of took on, I just took it on. And finally just said, you need to get these parts. Like she was supposed to get the museums lined up. And each Museum was supposed to pay $2500, which would help defray the costs of shipping the work to them, which was pretty expensive. And I think two of the museums she got on board didn't even pay. But I got one Museum, I got the Grand Junction Museum to take it, and they paid $5000 because it was such a long drive over there.

(AH): So with that idea of having each Museum make a contribution, was that so that you could then make all the arrangements yourself? And of course you’d have the funding for it, rather than having each Museum say, okay, here's the person that's next in line after me, I'll figure out how to get it to them.

(RF): Yeah, no, we didn't want them to do that. We had Shipart do everything. So Alan made these crates, and his crew made these with the foam. And you just drop stuff in there. And everything was numbered and everything. So their task was to put everything back in, and then Shipart came and picked them up and then took them. Because to get the loans from people I needed to guarantee them a level of… it's very unlikely something is going to happen when the painting is on the wall. It's gonna happen when they take it off the wall. So I just really, you know, if somebody didn't have the staff or didn't have the time or the expertise to take something off the wall, I said well it will cost
you this much to have Alan and his crew come down. And they found people to take paintings off the wall. We definitely kept control of, or I should say I kept control of all of that. Because I felt like I promised these people that their work would come back to them in good condition.

(AH): So with that in mind then, before the first exhibition was mounted, did you, did Shipart have control of all the works? As far as getting measurements and being able to make the crates?

(RF): I had everything go to Shipart. So they gathered up all the work. They give me a window of when things needed to come in. Let's see. I brought over the library's work. Which is sort of surprising that they let me do that. But I did. If they were going to let me. I was going to do that. So number of things happened like that. Galleries or artists had their work dropped off right to Shipart, and then Shipart configured all the crates and things like that. And it was kind of nice, because some of the museums couldn't accommodate all the work. So, I had to tailor a show to go to certain museums and places.

(AH): So, when there was a place that didn't have enough space for everything did they still get all of the art and just leave some of it in the crate during the show?

(RF): No. I had Shipart hold it back. Because all the work basically came back to Shipart. It didn't go straight to the next place. So it came back because there was enough time, lag time, that we could do that. So I would just say okay pull out these things and send the rest on. But most places took everything. And where I held work back was on the contemporary side of things. I would only send one of an artist’s work instead of both pieces that came with the show. If I had to tailor it.
(AH): When a Museum didn't have enough space, so that way, that's an easier way to still include as much of the shows possible.

(RF): Right. So every artist was represented.

(AH): Right, just a little bit, with a little bit less depth. What kind of other support did you have from, I mean, you talked about Jennifer Ito’s involvement, and I can completely empathize with wanting to control everything. Especially if you were… it would be really hard if you were splitting the research on artists between two people, because unless you are constantly meeting and discussing what you've discovered, you have a first knowledge set and a second knowledge set and there's really no way to combine that. Did you have any support from Elaine Mariner from the CCA?

(RF): Elaine, yes. And it was really, with the grant you need to check in with Elaine and give her progress reports and things like that. So the part that I absolutely insisted that Jennifer Ito do was they needed to keep track of the money, the grants had to funnel through them. It can't funnel through me, I'm not a nonprofit. So the money had to funnel through them, they had to keep track of the money, she had to do the budgets. And to this day, I don't think anybody can make heads or tails of the budget. But I insisted she do that. I insisted that she keep track of all the numbers from the museum, that kind of stuff. So, Elaine needed budget updates regularly. And so I kind of kept a basic tally on my computer. Like how much this was gonna cost. So I, you'll see that there's a bunch of in-kind stuff. So I got, like the people at Reed Photo did scans for me. So I got in-kind stuff. But otherwise, that part, but with Elaine, Elaine was very helpful in keeping things on target. And she was also really helpful, like when I came to her and said I would love to have a catalog, and there's a lot of information, and I’d love each
artist to have their own spread, and blah blah blah, which means a perfect bound. And it just gets more and more expensive. And she was very helpful in finding more money. She showed up at the openings, she’s just very supportive. Colorado Council is just very supportive. So Elaine didn't do any ‘work’ work on it except, you know, just really making sure the funds were used properly. And I definitely used her name when they needed to. The Colorado Council is obviously behind the show.

(AH): And what I was, the whole point, and you pretty much addressed this, that I was getting at was, you know, following what would be the best practices if it was a large museum set up with, not unlimited resources, but let's say well-funded, you would have one person who is kind of in charge of overseeing the whole process, who can make sure that all the people they're dealing with budgeting are on the same page as the people that are dealing with making crates and shipping things and with the curator who is selecting all the work with the legal department that's making sure all the contracts are all arranged properly…

(RF): Right, exactly, the money has come in…

(AH): Right, and that if it's going out it's the right amount to the right people.

(RF): Well, and to compare Masterpieces with the Coors’ show, which is really a well-oiled machine at this point, there's a person who is the show coordinator, and she's on top of it. We sit down and she has her yellow legal pad, she's like have you talked to so-and-so on that. And then I'm taking my notes, I'm like yeah they said this and that or whatever. And so…

(AH): On that show do the artists apply to be in the show?
(RF): Artists apply, but it's more, it's a curated show. So I, of the artists who apply, I get a couple hundred, 250, I think we've been close to 300 at times. And I'll take like two out of there.

(AH): You mean, you said two, you don't mean 200, you mean two?

(RF): Two.

(AH): Wow!

(RF): Yeah, it's because I have a rotating group of artists and there are artists that I want to get in the show. And then like some artists will need to be out of the show for a few years and I'll get them back in the show. So to get into the show at this point has gotten pretty difficult. But I think the standard of the show, the level of the quality of art has gone up at this point. So out of those 250 submissions I will pretty easily whittle it down to 20 that are interesting. And then I'll get down to one or two I can't live without. And then I keep a file of, you know, keep looking at this person as they grow.

(AH): Right, which is just part of continually staying aware of what's happening. How new people are coming into this seemed and what the established artists are doing.

(RF): Exactly. But in the logistics of the show, one person really can't do it all. If I were to go back on this Masterpieces show, although it's kind of Jenny's personality, but I think I would have done things differently in that okay these are my defined, and I thought we had 'em defined, but... you know, I guess doing a show is a bit like a marriage.

(AH): Have what defined? The ideas?

(RF): Jobs. So, you know, it's such a huge task finding the art and writing the catalog and researching everything, and really having to defend your choices. Which it kind of
comes down to, defending your curatorial choices. For better or worse, it's kind of what you have to do once the show is out there.

(AH): Well, I think you're seeing that you have to defend those choices at two times. One during the process, and of course afterwards when the show is up. You've already spent so much time putting it together, I think you'd theoretically, you'd already know a lot about why you made those choices. So it would be easier I would think to defend it at that point, but I didn't consider when you're just planning it was the people that you're working with.

(RF): Right. And I don't think that's a bad thing. I mean, when I'm curating the Coors’ show I'm constantly defending choices. And I can't always. And if I can't, then they don't make it in the show. But I'll go to bat for somebody to a larger group, said this is why think this artist should be in. And they mostly trust me to do that at this point, and the show has grown, and they continue to make more and more sales. But with a show like this, yeah, it is kind of defending your choices all the way through. But, you know, just sort of defining tasks I think is a really important thing from day one. Don't say yes to doing anything until you're completely confident that these are your things. Because I'm working independently, my office is here, and she's working at her office. It's not like I can knock on her door and say did you get these things done? And then when you're researching something, like me. I just get tunnel vision, and I don't think that all museums haven't signed on and paid. Until all of a sudden, okay where are we sending the first show? We don't have it? Are you kidding me? So yeah, I think it gets almost to be a little closer to marriage with the people you're working with. And it can be contentious at times.
(AH): I'd like to ask more about, you said, don't get involved or don't sign onto something until you're totally confident in what you're doing. Do you think that you could ever be 100% confident before you really completed it?

(RF): Well, no, but I guess what I mean is not so much on your choices as a curator, but I think more as your choices of who you're going to work with.

(AH): But, unless you had…

(RF): No, you don't know. You don't know.

(AH): It seems like to get anything done ever you're always going to have to take a chance.

(RF): Right. And I think you need to arm yourself. I think the show would have failed miserably if I hadn't done the Coors’ show for so many years and knew what… I had my own timelines to work from, and I stuck to my timelines of, I knew how long it would take to do this catalog, for instance. Because I've already done numerous catalogs in the past, I could back out, and I had a great relationship with the graphic designer. So, you know, I could sit down with him and give him all the specs. I knew what paper I wanted, I knew what weight I to wanted it to be, I knew I wanted perfect bound, I knew the size. Because I already had that. But if you don't walk into a project of this size already having done a lot of stuff, I just don't know how you can do it.

(AH): I was curious, a little bit more, if you could tell me a little bit more about the budgeting process. Obviously there are some things you mentioned. The NEA grant was for $50,000.

(RF): And it ended up being $55,000. It started out at 50, and then the project kept growing in scope.
(AH): So did you then go back and request more?

(RF): I just said can we of the whole 55? And then I went back for Westaff funds. So all of these grants have a matching dollar component to them. So like this one had a half cash match. And that was supposed to be Jenny's task. So $55,000 grant was $27,500 for the cash match. Which meant, like I got the El Pomar Foundation.

(AH): To donate X amount? And then the NEA says okay, they do that much so, we'll meet that?

(RF): No. They agreed to the grant with the stipulation that you had to raise $27,500 in cash. So I got the El Pomar came up with…

(AH): So is that adding those two together. So then it's actually 77 plus the five?

(RF): Oh yeah, yeah, yeah right. Then it keeps growing. Westaff did not stipulate a match on their grant, they stipulated that it had to be for communications, the catalog. Outreach communications, is their stipulation on their grant. The El Pomar stipulated that the show needed to reach rural communities or small communities. So it was fine if it went to Denver, but it needed to be like in Cañon City, it really needed to be in the small communities.

(AH): But you already knew that you had to go to at least four places anyway.

(RF): Right

(AH): So that probably wasn't terribly difficult.

(RF): Exactly. And part of the El Pomar Foundation, they have a museum, the Carriage Museum. So part of their stipulation was they wanted the show to land at the Carriage Museum at some point. So, you know, everybody has stipulations for their grant. But the half cash match is an important part of it. And I think that's to ensure that the show is
gonna have enough money to reach its goals. So it's not a bad thing, but it can stress you out pretty good.

(AH): It seems like that's another huge task to take on. So once you had some idea of what kind of budget you'd be working with, how did you determine some of the other costs, like dealing with Shipart? Said each museum, you were hoping that they would contribute $2500, which was to pay for Shipart.

(RF): $2500 to $5000. Right, and the actual logistics of getting the show there. You know, I just kind of broke down all the things that needed to happen, and fixed a dollar amount to them. Like I called around to a number of places for shipping the show, and Shipart is not cheap, but they're the most trustworthy. Or the place that people trust the most, I should say. And they are trustworthy. So I…

(AH): With so many lenders, you need to have a really solid name that everyone can...

(RF): Exactly. So, I gave Alan the scope of things. I had a spreadsheet of every piece of artwork in the show, the image size, and the frame size, and the depth of the frame. So I got all of that to Alan so that he could work up a quote. And then he worked up a quote, just to get everything packed and ready to go. And then there were individual quotes on how much it would cost to get it to its destination, and then to pick up. And if they didn't have it put together how much it would cost to send his crew in there in advance to Cañon City, put it back together that kind of stuff. So it was a lot of tight turnaround some things. But basically I just took every step of the way logically. Okay, what happens next, okay then I've got to get Shipart, how much do they cost? And they did it out, and I gave them to the centimeter what things were going to be. Because I really couldn't have them surprise me with $500, the budget didn't allow for that kind of thing.
So just all a long way, was just breaking down how it needed to happen and who need to be paid.

(AH): Was everything already framed up, or did you have to budget in certain things getting reframed? Or were there conservation concerns?

(RF): There were some conservation concerns. There was a Worthington Whittredge painting that I really wanted to borrow, but it had some chipped paint on it, and the collector thought it was too fragile and I agreed. So that didn't even come out of her collection. But then there was a Alan Tupper True painting at the library had that was in the god-awful frame.

(AH): (laughter ) But that's a matter of opinion. Or was it…?

(RF): No, it was just, I have no idea what happened to this frame, but it was just awful. And so I got Joan Loughridge at Dry Creek Gold Leaf to…

(AH): That was an in-kind donation?

(RF): In-kind donation. So, she did the frame on that. Let me see if there was another frame. But I tried to get in-kind donations on that. There were kind of things like that, but no framing costs. Everything really needed to be framed or just couldn't take it.

(AH): Plus then, if you were borrow something from a lender, you would have then had to have lined up the framing for that, and you have to… do they get to keep that frame? If they don't get to keep that frame, it's a useless frame to you, because it's for that specific artwork.

(RF): Right, exactly. No, no, no. That was just a huge expense, but it needed to be framed. And the frame protects it, so I can't, you know, I really couldn't take something unframed. The etchings, the Burr etchings, came out of their frames and a glass moved
separately just in case of broke. But that was the only thing. Everything else stayed intact.

(AH): Were there other major budget issues to consider?

(RF): You know, we really, part of the grant they wanted each venue to have an opening. But that was something, that wasn't for us to worry about. As far as them getting the show, we needed to warn them in advance that you've got to plan an opening.

(AH): But that could have been a wide range of scales, the opening?

(RF): Sure, yeah. It didn't have to be…

(AH): Whatever is normal for that museum.

(RF): That's exactly right. But that was a stipulation, and budget wise, something they had to consider when accepting the show. But other than that, budget, it was really just a big things. The shipping and insurance. Each museum had to have insurance, and then the show had to be insured, because as soon as it left the premises, our insurance had to cover it. So the show was double covered, which was probably a good thing. I think I did have a little frame damage on one piece, but that was the only thing, so…(knocks on wooden table) (laughter)

(AH): (laughter) So then for the insurance, each museum, they probably arranged their own for that time, and then were you in charge of selecting the rest of the coverage, or did Shipart work with you on that?

(RF): Foothills did. Foothills selected that. They had a rider on their museum.

(AH): So it was their museum's insurance went out to cover all the other gaps.
(RF): Yeah. It was mostly the travel part of it. And that would be something to ask them how that worked. But the insurance thing is pretty sticky with art, and you just have to really make sure you have it there.

(AH): I'm just looking at some of my other questions here, and what's really nice is there are a lot of things I've got here that you answered without me asking.

(RF): Oh good! I'm trying to think of things that I would do differently with the show, because I have thought of that over the years. And I've actually started working on a new show. I started working on this new show was a photographer, and I want to apply for this NEA grant again. Or, we definitely need to apply for grant money because we would love it to travel. But the show is gonna be about the dairies in Greeley.

(AH): All photography?

(RF): Photography. With one photographer, so it'll take her good year and a half to shoot everything and go every through everything. And it'll end up being about 40 photographs. But then I will go out and interview a number of the people, and I want video to be playing in the loop with stuff, plus have sound. So if you dial in, you know, they have the cell phone…

(AH): Tours?

(RF): Yeah, that they can listen to people talk about all kinds of stuff. So it's a really involved project and I'm very excited about it, but you know, every display costs money. It's just, curating something, I think it's about trying not to bite off more than you can chew.

(AH): But you'll never really know unless you try.
(RF): No, that's really true. Another expense, I was just thinking of this, is the wall to information. And who does it? And how do you get that to travel without being destroyed, along the way?

(AH): Just putting things up and then taking them down puts a lot of wear and tear.

(RF): Exactly. So we had everything mounted on foam core. Which lasted pretty well, I have to say. The museums were all pretty good about it. But then, you know, we should be tailored, cards to be taken out. By the end of the show things were looking a little ragged, but it made it. It made it. So that was another expense that came up. And to really have something that’s gonna last.

(AH): Did you create the content for those labels?

(RF): Mmm hmm, yeah. Well, and I had the content from here too (catalog), so.

(AH): I didn't know if everything would be exactly the same as in the catalog. I was curious also, some of the installation choices that were made. Of course, no two museums are exactly the same, and of course some museums couldn't take all the work so you had to edit things out that way.

(RF): You know, the installation, when Mary Chandler wrote her review of the show, she knocked it because it wasn't in chronological order of the artists’ birthdates. I put in order of the year the artists came to Colorado.

(AH): I thought she was saying, what her criticism was about, was that the date of the creation of the artwork itself…

(RF): Oh, the artwork. No, however, she put it, well maybe it was about the date of the creation of the artwork. But I didn't know those all the time. Some of it was like a 10 year span that that painting could've been created. And so it would've been speculating
on. But it wasn't. My overriding concept of the show. And I think Mary afterwards got it. But she'd already rewritten that. It's like she had written it before... so, she had made up her mind. But the way the show was hung, was when the artists came to Colorado. And then you can see the progression of styles and what they brought when they came to Colorado. Like a Birger Sandzén guy came to Colorado, much later than Helen Henderson Chain did. And he brought this really vibrant palette, and different ways of looking at things, and just a number of different things that he brought with him. So, you see this progression from this Thomas Moran influence to what's happening in the larger world of art.

(AH): Right, so there's all the stylistic changes that happened across the board…

(RF): Exactly.

(AH): That would pertain to anybody from possibly geographically anywhere. But then at the same time you also have, since all these people, while for the most part, especially with the older pieces everyone is coming from someplace else to Colorado. You've got all the influences, everything that goes into just a person's life, regardless of what it is they do, along with the influences of Colorado had on them. Which of course on a lot of these people is going to be very significant, both in the way of life, but also in the sceneries, it's landscape painting.

(RF): You know, I just thought, you can see most shows are done chronologically. And I love that, it makes sense, it's easy to get in and see the progression. But that works best when it's one artist in the retrospective. But when it's something like this, why not turn it on its ear?
(AH): And there are different ways of doing chronology. Could be creation date, could be when people arrived, when they were born, when they died.

(RF): Exactly. And it's still, and it really did, as I kind of argued with Mary after the fact, it really did kind of follow with when the painting was created. Because it was really kind of when they got here. And some of those artists didn't stay the whole time.

(AH): I think, weren't there even some pieces that were Colorado scenes but painted after people had left Colorado?

(RF): Studio paintings, yeah. That Smillie painting was a New York studio painting. He only came here for two weeks. So, I really broke my own rules with him, but I just love that painting so much. You know, that was a fun painting to have in the show, and people really reacted to it. They loved it. You know, here's some guy who totally reflected my love for being out in the mountains in Colorado. He's got this hiker and he's got the rainbow. And I mean all he didn't put in there was a pot of gold or something. I mean, it was just, you could tell he had a great time on his little two-week journey to Colorado. There was stuff like that...

(AH): And there's probably a lot of people who can relate to that. People who don't live here, but, here for tours, especially with the scenery, and the mountains, and that's an experience that thousands of people have back then and now.

(RF): Exactly. Well, and then as far as hanging the show, Foothills is a difficult hang because of all the little vestibule kind of galleries. So, even trying to stick with a plan you just have to kind of toss up your hands sometimes and say I don't know what to do with that wall. I just don't know. So things got kind of switched around, and things I
think got a little bit clustered in more of an era, style of, painting kind of thing and then progressed as you sort of went in to more contemporary looks of things.

(AH): Even dividing things by eras sort of makes sense because you've got the 19th century paintings and then the contemporary paintings, so that automatically is dividing into eras. Why wouldn't those have subdivisions?

(RF): Exactly.

(AH): One thing that I thought was really incredible about the show at large, as a whole, when you take in all the different elements, were the supplemental lesson plans.

(RF): Yeah!

(AH): How did that come together?

(RF): We, Colorado Council on the Arts has a former teacher/administrator, and we hired her, I can't remember the cost of that. That was a budgetary thing too, that added in the. But it was part of the grant, lesson plans.

(AH): Part of the grant, was a requirement?

(RF): Well, they wanted it. It strengthened the grant proposal to say that we would have lesson plans, or some sort of teacher outlet kind of thing. And so we hired Sheila Sears. And now she's employed by the Colorado Council on the Arts, and she wrote the lesson plans. So it was really kind of cool, because she came up with lesson plans on science. I mean, I thought she was just to do like, art lesson plans. But that was science and math and, you know all these really cool things.

(AH): Which that, again I always, what I wrote down in my notes, making the show work on so many different levels. It's easy to think, you know, in art education of having students write about their feelings about a work, and make observations, and try to create
their own work based on what they see. But the science, you know, studying how water
flows and things like that.

(RF): Right, yeah!

(AH): Just amazing!

(RF): She came up with really cool things! I'm like, golly, this is fun! Atmospheric
research and stuff?

(AH): It goes from like first grade through 12th grade. There's really something for
everyone.

(RF): Yeah, so that was really neat. I would say, the frustration for me came from the
school system. This was such a surprise for me, but there is not a unified way to get
these lesson plans out and notify teachers. The museums, and I put this on the backs of
the museums because I don't live there, I don't know the school superintendents are. So
the museums were to contact the superintendent of schools, tell them what this was. The
lesson plans were online, so they could get them and I want them. And then each
superintendent needed to call the principles, there's this whole level. The principles
needed to talk to the teachers and the teachers needed to decide if it was in their budget to
get the bus and take their kids.

(AH): To go see the show.

(RF): Right, add it to the lesson plan. So, that was kind of a thing, that probably each
place, should have notified the schools when we applied for the grant. Because
otherwise, the lesson plans are made up and it's too late.

(AH): Slightly in their defense, this seems like as large of a project for lesson plans were,
so comprehensive, that's probably something that people weren't used to, so...
(RF): It could be, I don't know. I don't really know. I think, and I'm not saying that the schools failed. I'm saying that something like this takes more time than what we gave them. So I think they didn't get used, basically. Because by August when schools are in, most of the money is already planned out for field trips. And the buses cost money, the insurance to take the kids out there, the planning of it, each teacher to fit this lesson plan into their overall lesson plan. I think if we could have, when we got the grants, known about it and had the lesson plans before school started in August. Whereas we had the lesson plans by January. And it was just really, it was just kind of too late, you know, to really fit it in. And that was unfortunate because I thought those lesson plans were just unbelievable. So it was really a timing thing. To get teachers to be able to use them. And I think teachers would have loved to have had that opportunity.

(AH): I haven't completely read through all of them, but it seems like they are usable for other exhibitions, it's not something that's static and dead. I would take children to the museum and have them do this homework outside of school just because there's so much you could learn from it.

(RF): You know, actually that's a good idea. I should tell the folks at Colorado Council that maybe they should put it out, just tweak it and have it available. I don't know, it might still be up.

(AH): It is still up. I mean, I download those just a few weeks ago, so it's still up there.

(RF): I thought they were just great. And it's not, you know, I really just want to emphasize this, it's nobody's fault. I mean, they were there and available. But they were very passively there. Because Colorado school system doesn't have a way to just notify everybody. I mean, it would have been great if we, through the Colorado Council on the
Arts, could have sent out an e-mail with the link. And the superintendents could have just said, bing, sent out an e-mail with the link, can you use this? But that's not the way. I mean, it was, pick up the phone, call the superintendent of each school district and have them call and them call. And you know, if one person doesn't call…

(AH): Then the whole chain is totally broken.

(RF): It’s totally broken. And that to me. I think is a failing of the school system, but they don't have this. You know, I mean, how many more things like that are out there for teachers as a resource. But if the teachers…

(AH): People don't know.

(RF): Well, and how much time does a teacher have to research all that? Honestly. I mean, they have a life. They're just trying to get kids to learn and move on to the next thing. I mean, I don't. You know, there's got to be a better way to get the information out in the school system. And I don't know what that is.

(AH): So, that's why I just wrote down that in my notes, about what Best Practices would be. And the perfect situation is to include that, you know, have a component on education. Not just for children, but for adults too, for everybody. Because part of the definition of museum is that it's an educational facility. So when it's something that is so…museums, by definition are educational. And it's not easy to create those things, but once it's there, there are endless possibilities of what you can do with it.

(RF): Well, and that's what we're trying to do is enrich people's visit. And really, you know, I'll tell you something. In the planning of this show with Jenny, one of the things we really talked about, kind of go way back to your first questions, was how do we increase foot traffic at Foothills? At Foothills is always, I just love that museum. I don't
know why, just maybe Carol Dickinson, I have a soft spot in my heart. She was one of the first directors, or earlier directors. And I just love Foothills. And so, how do you increase foot traffic into a small museum that's kind of out of the way? And it was like, well, landscape. Everybody really does like landscape. That was kind of one of those things, and with kids lesson plans, it was like, oh yeah, how do you get kids excited about art? And get them thinking about art? And what art can do for you and add to your life? I mean isn't that what we are all sort of struggling to do? I was just reading something in the opera program Opera Colorado is, they are doing so much outreach for kids. And they just came right out and said, how do we get kids to understand opera and actually like it? So they’re kind of trying to farm viewers of the future, because they realize that this is a dying art form.

(AH): And people when they’re young, and maybe more open-minded or haven't learned to dismiss something that they can appreciate it for a long time.

(RF): Precisely. So yeah, we're trying to farm our little worlds here and make them grow.

(AH): Yeah, and so that's the same thing, even with getting people in based on landscape. Once people have been in to a place like Foothills, then they enjoyed it, then they’re may be willing to come back and see something else that point in a different direction. And it builds and builds and builds.

(RF): Exactly. And once they have a trust of your museum then they're going to have a trust of the shows that you do. And you can do something that is more challenging or leaves them scratching their heads. But they trust you now. I think that's a big part of it.

(AH): I was curious, kind of on the third stage of evaluation, if you had any predetermined evaluation plan for the exhibitions, and what was that like?
(RF): Yeah. The predetermined plan was really numbers of people who came through. And reactions to the show. How was received. But a lot of that was really predicated on numbers. So the museums all had to keep track of attendance during the show, and if they had some comments, those were good to have. And then certainly… whatever visitor said. And any press that they got on the show, we asked them to get cut that out and send us a copy so that we could keep it was the files of the show.

(AH): Press of any kind? Regardless of reviews?

(RF): Or just listings, just so we know that that they sent it out. And we provided them with a basic press release. So I put quotes in there, and I gave them all the artists, where the living artists were from, my curatorial statement, just a lot of information. And I just wrote up in a press release. So all they needed to do was change the contact information basically.

(AH): Yeah, just put their name on the top.

(RF): Yeah, you e-mail it or send it out or whatever. And we got some really nice press, the museums got nice press on it. So that worked out very well, I think, for everybody. So basically, it was numbers was evaluation for the show. With the Colorado Council it was again, you know, the grant had stipulations. But there evaluation really was on the numbers. And then we wanted the museums to say did that increase, or your months of February through April, did that increase your foot traffic kind of thing. And I didn't see all those final numbers. But from what I heard, yes it did increase foot traffic, and people could keep track of those numbers. So, I couldn't tell you how many people saw the show.
(AH): Do you have the impression that within each museum, and in the context of altering it enough to make a common denominator, that the success was different for each segment of the tour? Obviously, more people live in Denver than live in Durango, so you would expect more people to come. But as a percentage of the potential viewing population.

(RF): From what I heard, I mean, I think Durango probably had the least, like I don't think they sent out the press release, for example. I don't think they got any, I don't remember if they got any press, but I don't think they did. Somebody called me, and I did an interview. They did some stuff like that. But I think the show gained momentum as it went. But I think overall, so the second stop was Foothills, and they to this day, I just was in a meeting a couple weeks ago, and they were saying, so how do we repeat a blockbuster show like the Masterpieces show? So for them it was a blockbuster show. So, I think all the museums increased attendance on the show. And like Grand Junction had artist talks, they had some guy who really had done a lot of research on early Colorado artists, and he did a slideshow. A lot of shows had added-on discussions.

(AH): So there was that flexibility built into the show all along. There’s your basics that everybody gets, but they can run with it if they have ideas of how they could add to it.

(RF): Exactly. And even a small venue like the Carriage Museum in Colorado Springs, was, I mean, they had the same amount of traffic during that show that they had the whole previous year. I heard a really positive things. And you know, I think it just is an easy access show for a lot of people.

(AH): Did you find anything out about the outcome of people's perceptions about art in general, Colorado art, or specific artists?
(RF): I heard comments of people who said they didn't know certain historic aspects of Colorado. Or they loved the, a lot of people were either historically minded so they loved the art introduced to the history of the state, so I heard a lot of that kind of thing. I think a lot of people, there were comments like people just loved the opportunity to see the mix of contemporary artists in the different thoughts on art. So if your comments like that. So the Denver Art Museum, ended up with two of the paintings from the show. They ended up with this Len Chmiel painting, and then they ended up with the Dan Sprick painting. So to me, that was like, wow, what a stamp of approval in a way on that. But it was kind of, as far as those comments went. And then an unfortunate thing happened, the library, Kay Wisnia kept a guestbook. And people from, she said all over the world, came in, and they saw the show, and they make comments on it, and somebody stole the guestbook. So unfortunately I don't have that.

(AH): Just took it right out of the library?

(RF): Right, just stole it. So, which, who does that? Isn't that just terrible?

(AH): What are you gonna do with that?

(RF): I know. She kind of suspected it might have been somebody at the museums, or at the library. So I don't have those comments.

(AH): That's unfortunate. Do you hear of any negative comments? Maybe some reviews.

(RF): You know, I think it was, every so often somebody said, why didn't you have this artist in the show? But other than that it wasn't, I don't remember negative comments. It was more…

(AH): Were there people that were confused at all?
(RF): No, I don't think so. Because you could buy the catalog too. I mean in what way, I don't really…?

(AH): It’s not anything that I actually expected, but just wondering if there were people that didn't understand the show.

(RF): No, I don't think so. Well, you know what else we had besides just the tags that had the titles and size and all that kind of stuff, artist’s name. Then, we had panels of discussion topic kind of things. Like one was on the environment, one was on… so we kind of had…

(AH): Suggestions for discussion?

(RF): Yeah, but more, it went beyond a curatorial statement. So I put my statement up there and so, if there was any confusion as to why did she put living artists with dead artists, well it's in my statement. And so the people at the museum would refer people back to that. And when I could I went to the openings for the shows, and I would do a curatorial talk. So, there were, like I gave two talks in Colorado Springs, and then I gave a talk at Foothills, a couple talks at Foothills, I did a panel discussion at Foothills, and a talk on a separate day. So they were just, you know, there were things like that happened so that it was, it gave me the opportunity for people to ask questions, and me to explain, why did certain things…? But I think the panels that we did also gave people more things to think about as to why this show came into being.

(AH): Did that, was there any influence in either direction was the lesson plans? Or do those two things happen completely separate?

(RF): You know, separately. Because I had these thoughts in my head about why the show would hit people on different levels. Because as a curator I'm always kind of
thinking about that. But the lesson plans, like I said, we're just such a happy surprise. I'm like, oh my gosh, I can't believe you came up with all those things to think about. And she hadn't even seen the original art. She just saw both going to the catalog, the galley proofs, and so it was like wow, she came up with all these thoughts. So, no, those were independent, but they certainly work together.

(AH): I was just thinking, you know, going back to an educational focus, I could see how those could easily tie into each other. Just because different individuals will not only take different things from a show, but they'll also put in a different amount of energy. Some people will read every detail of every label, some people won't read labels at all, some people will ignore certain paintings based on the style. Rather than… you might come across a painting that's of a style that you don't enjoy, but if you do take the time to examine it, find out more about it, it could be this incredible learning opportunity.

(RF): Well, and I think that's when you, like with the Coors’ show, the painting or drawing or sculpture that, we have a people's choice award, and what always wins is the most photorealistic thing in the show. And that's picked by, we get almost 40,000 people walking through that show, that's picked by the mass of people seeing the show. And they're mesmerized. They're just amazed by photorealism. But as you know, the more you look at art, the more your amazed by somebody who can come up with some totally conceptual thing that's not just a direct rendering of something. And that's mind boggling as you really understand art and artists, and how they do what they do, and the pressures on them and things like that. So there is definitely an evolution of viewership, I think that happens. So with the show like this, I thought it was kind of fun to see when I was talking to people, sort of available of understanding and love what is the more
representational, the more kind of gut feeling paintings, versus the ones that were a little harder to understand. The more in-your-face about some aspect of landscape. Yeah, it was really kind of interesting for me. I just kind of stood back knowing that I liked all of it for different reasons, so it was fun.

(AH): But, you have that inside track of making the choices.

(RF): Exactly.

(AH): I was curious if you have any more thoughts about significant achievements or shortcomings of the exhibition. Obviously those are two different things.

(RF): Well I think really just to kind of restate, what I said earlier, I think the show for me personally achieved my goal of being a discussion about art, about movements in art, about the landscape, about environmental topics, about a lot of things like that. I'm not the kind of person, I'm not a flag waver, you know, I don't really know that I believe all the environmental ‘Whhaaaaa! We’re gonna die!’ I think the planet is a little tougher than we give it credit. Though I’m fully on board with we need to cut down emissions, and recycling and things like that. That's my personal view. But I'm not a hit you over the head with something. I just want to present something and let you bring your bags with you, and your knowledge. And you walk in the door, you're going to have a different experience than that person or me or whoever. So to me, I think it was, I felt it was a success in that people enjoyed it on many levels. I mean, I heard people, just purely say, I think it's just a lovely show. I heard people say, I've been there before. You know, I’ve heard people say things like that. And that's valid, that's absolutely valid. And then I heard other people say, that really, the Chuck Forsman painting in particular,
that really gave me a lot to think about. So that to me was successful. One thing that I wouldn't, in hindsight, I wouldn't take the show on again.

(AH): Do you mean, this specific one or this scale?

(RF): This scale, with the timeframe. I would take it on again, if I had two years, or three years even. It was ludicrous to even think I could do a show…

(AH): Was this the first time you put a show together that was traveling?

(RF): Yes. And it was the first traveling show I’d ever done. Now I have the bug to do traveling shows.

(AH): Because it was a success?

(RF): Yeah. Because I like that. You know, shows are up and gone. And I love the opportunity to send the show out into smaller communities. Absolutely loved it. Bringing art to people, I think is vital. But where I thought it was, when I look back, it was probably just pure hubris on my part to think that I could do this show. In that amount of time. And I would have made different choices if I had more time. And I think that's where, if I heard negative comments, it was from my peers. In that, well, you probably should have had such and such artists in the show. Well yeah, I should've had Worthington Whittridge in the show, but I couldn't find one.

(AH): Right, especially with such little time.

(RF): With such a little time. And that, you know, like a Worthington Whittridge kind of guy is, I can think of like two museums, and the Denver art Museum I don't even know if they have one. So it's like, yeah that would have been fabulous, that would have been important, and I certainly… But see, by not having a Worthington Whittridge in the show that cast doubt on me. Like did I not know who he was? You know what I mean? So as
a curator just among my peers it was a matter of saying, no, I know who he is, I just
couldn't find it. It just was an impossibility. So I would say that the timing of the whole
thing was a definite detriment. And it was probably a foolish thing on my part. But, you
know what, I learned a lot, it was a baptism by fire, and I got it done. And my husband is
still married to me!

(AH): On the topic of traveling shows, earlier you mentioned a photography show that's
coming up, that’s still fairly early in the planning process it sounds like?

(RF): Oh yeah.

(AH): Do you have any kind of idea of how far that will travel? Will it be just within
Colorado?

(RF): Well, initially I’ve got a lot of interest within Colorado for it. Especially using
some video aspects of it. And not any kind of fancy video. Just really talking head kind
of interviews. Initially Colorado. But I do, I have talked with the people at Exhibits
USA, they are out of Kansas City I think. And they moved exhibits around the country.
And I would definitely, once we get the better established, who the funders are gonna be,
and that we can actually do it, I'll contact them and try to get them to come on board.
And that would be, so if it takes a year and a half to two years, and then say it travels for
to two or three places that could be another year, so now we're three years out. So it’d be
down the road. But when I initially contacted Exhibits USA about a different
photography show I did at Arvada Center (Arvada Center for the Arts), they had a similar
show, they said, can we have your Masterpieces of Colorado Show? (laughter)

(AH): (laughter)
(RF): I'm like, no absolutely not. So they said, we kind of left it as, they said whenever you're doing a show just do let us know, because there’ll be something that you do that we’d want. So, they would love to see that show move outside of the state.

(AH): I think it's really interesting that you said that they wanted the Masterpieces show, because one of the questions I had was talking about, you know, it's been said that the quality of Colorado artists can rival that of any other region’s artists, but there's a lack of promotion. And that's definitely the opinion of Hugh Grant.

(RF): Right.

(AH): There's fantastic art happening here but people are more aware of regions like New Mexico, which is not that far away. It's just, for whatever reason…

(RF): It’s the Santa Fe. The Taos little enclave, and the Santa Fe. Santa Fe were smart, they promoted the hell out of their art and what was going on there. And it wasn't any better or different than what’s here. But now, they've got a huge movement of things happening down there, and very contemporary art. I mean, they realize that the, it really boosted the real estate. But yeah, I agree with Hugh, I agree with him on that. And certainly, I have heard a number of artists say they had to move to New York, or move to the coast to establish their career. And then they came back home. Karen Kitchel actually moved back to Los Angeles to support her career better. And Joellyn Duesberry keeps a studio in Vermont. So it's, a lot of artists, you… It’s just this New York insular snobbery that we don't have out here. And it's, if it didn't happen in New York it's probably crap. It's just this provincialism, that's just the way they are. And New York was the pinnacle of art for so many years, at the turn of the 19th century, and it became
the center of art in the world. And so, it's a snobbery. It's a level of snobbery. And I don't know if promotion would help. I don't know.

(AH): What I was thinking with that is, you know, promotion equals exposure. The more people find out about it, the more they can see, wow there are great things happening here now, great things have happened here in the past. Maybe it deserves more respect.

(RF): Yeah, yeah. Well, and that's a… my own personal bias, there's a lot of stuff at the Denver Art Museum, now they're really kind of picking up the pace of Western art, and Russell and Remington and all that kind of stuff. And you know, that's all good and well, but I don't think that's the best art that came out of that era. I'm just kind of a snob about it. I don't think it is. But you know, they're kind of hanging their hat on that. And that's good and well. Somebody should. And we’re here in the West, and we should be doing that. But, you know, like with the Coors’ show, and I get knocked for this all the time, is that I don't have enough of the cowboy artists. Well, to me, those are, they’re illustrators. And there's a difference between illustrators and fine art. And illustrators are commercial artists, and Charlie Russell was an illustrator and Remington was an illustrative kind of artist. And that's all good and well. But if you're doing a show of contemporary artists it better be about what's contemporary today. And to paint, some woman in a prairie dress with the wind blowing her little bonnet back… that's not happening! What street corner does that happen on?!

(AH): To paint a portrait of Helen Chain.

(RF): Yeah, right! She didn't even dress like that! You know, but see that's, that's to me. When we are talking about art of this region, and Western art is looked down upon, and I’ve sort of taken it as a big part of my job in the Coors’ show is to represent Western art
in a new light. These illustrators are all good and well. They are very talented people, but there is a difference between illustration and fine art. It's kind of an uphill fight, and the other big Western art shows out there love the illustrators, and they sell the hell out of them. But, is that going to make Western art, have a more favorable position in the art world? Or is that going to keep what's happening in art in Colorado and the Rocky Mountain region still looked down upon? And I think it keeps it still looked down upon. It makes it second-class. Because a lot of it is illustration.

(AH): And it also keeps it stagnant to a certain degree…

(RF): Huge degree!

(AH): If the artists, you know, they need to eat, so the need to sell things. If they say well this is the only thing that's going to sell, I'll Just keep doing the same thing and never challenge myself.

(RF): Yeah, and that's a problem. So, we have to kind of, we in this region have that issue to deal with all the time. I mean, and I have read reviews of Western art auctions and Western art shows and things like that. If someone from New York, actually comes out this week to review it, you know, it's kind of done almost tongue-in-cheek. It isn't given the weight that maybe it deserves. We have to realize that if we want to be taken seriously in the art world, we have to show what is art. And really make the delineation between art and illustration. Great craft, great craftsmanship, and fine art. And where is that line? Yeah, it's a moving target. But we need to look for fine art. The Denver Art Museum should be leading the way in that. And I think they’ve taken great strides. But you know they spend a lot of time defending Remington and Russell and things like that.
with the historic summit things. And that's fine, you know, they are sort of keepers of the history of stuff.

(AH): And also, once you’re so invested with so much time and emotion, to say nothing of other resources, in pushing things in a certain direction, it's almost like you, there is a certain momentum you can't stop. And even, if deep down inside maybe your opinion has changed, you have to go with it because you don't want to discredit yourself.

(RF): And you know what, kind of to circle back to the Masterpieces show, to me as a curator. I love the comparison. I think historic work should be right there with the contemporary work so we can see. And there are just lovely comparisons to be made. Good and bad. And that's, if you're really interested in art you want to see that. Because any artist working today, who doesn't admit to inspiration from the past is lying. Even a writer, musicians, everything. I have an interview I did with Wayne Tebo that I'll send you, but he one of the things I asked him was, you talk about how you not only borrow, but just flat out plagiarize other artists in kind of a funny way. But he's like, absolutely. These are the people that I learned from. And so we kind of had this wonderful discussion about that. But it's not, you know, don't reject that this artist happened before. And so in Western art, and what's happening in this region, yeah, let's embrace what came before. But don't stop there. And let's not make it out to be better than it was. It's not. And it doesn't, and in some ways it really doesn't compete with what was happening in New York. Now we do. Now, we absolutely do. But back then, when you're counting on telegraphs, and you're counting on hopefully some artist to come out from New York to do a summer workshop. It's very different. But not anymore. I think we have to
outgrow some of that in a way. How you outgrow and change opinions in New York and Los Angeles, I don't know.

(AH): Just keep being willing, I guess, to challenge yourself and challenge the people that are coming in to see things.

(RF): Yeah, challenge your viewers.

(AH): This has been fantastic, and you pretty much answered all the questions I've got. I just wonder if there's anything else that you'd like to address or other points in the planning process in general, do you think I should be aware of.

(RF): No. I think they really cover everything. I think you covered it. It's just a big undertaking, but it's fun. You know it is really fun, and getting to work with the artists and look at some great old paintings and other people's collections. I'm just snoopy, so it's fun to have people take me in to the back room and stuff like that, I love that. I think timing is, time is the biggest factor in all of this. Because the money, you know, you can scale things back or add on, or go begging for money places. And the money's a big part, but time just marches on, and it's gonna cream you if you're not on top of it. Well, feel free to call me or e-mail if something comes up or you Need clarification.

(AH): Thank you again.

(RF): Yeah, you're welcome.
This interview was conducted on November 17, 2009. Each speaker’s name appears once, and is then substituted by initials.

Jennifer Garner (JG): That’s not our normal angle, but, you know, we sort of seized the moment with that one. So it’ll be interesting to talk about that.

Alan Hollis (AH): So we weren’t recording yet, but I basically told you what the goals are of my project here. So I’m curious to find out about all your experiences in the exhibition planning process in general, but most specifically with the ‘Christo and Jeanne-Clause: Prints and Objects’ exhibition. If anything else comes to mind while we’re talking, absolutely, I’d love to find out about it. I’ve basically organized my questions into three different sections that I see as the most basic, least complicated breakdown of the exhibition planning process, which would be: research, execution, and evaluation. So beginning with questions about research, well actually before we even get into the research, if you wouldn’t mind just telling me a little bit about your background, how you came into curation, I know you’re also directing the CVA.

(JG): I think, you know, for me, my entire background started, you know, I’m formally trained both at the bachelor’s and master’s level as a studio artist, but I’ve always had an interest in arts administration and gallery. So basically from the undergraduate level I
was either interning or working for galleries, and at the master’s level, assistantships in galleries and then actually, you know, sort of pursued arts administration outside of that too. So I really don’t know how I found the time or energy to do that, but I worked for the city. I was in Lubbock, Texas, at Texas Tech University. I had a full time job. Well, part time sometimes, full time other times, as an arts administrator with the city of Lubbock as an arts coordinator for all of their programs. So I really started getting, delving heavily into arts admin, working for galleries, starting to curate and get all of that. And so, from that point on, I sort of piecemealed my career together, always teaching, always working in galleries. And then at one point, there’s a gallery on campus, called Emanuel Gallery…

(AH): That used to be a church.

(JG): Right. And I actually was the director/curator there for three years, juggling the teaching as well. And then low and behold Metro was able to create a tenure track position for me, that basically combined my gallery and teaching experience. So that’s sort of the how and why I’ve been here so, I essentially have twenty years of gallery experience, and fifteen years of teaching experience, so I feel like I’m in this beautiful sort of marriage.

(AH): Right, the perfect intersection.

(JG): Absolutely. So, I don’t really come from the perspective of, you know, the museum science or from the museum side, you know, I think a fair amount of it has been more from the art center and commercial gallery side.

(AH): Learning by doing.
(JG): Yes, absolutely. So research may not be as traditional as some other institutions, so that’s kind-of where it’s at.

(AH): Can you tell me how the idea for this particular exhibition started? I’ve read that you faxed a proposal to Christo and Jeanne-Claude. Was it as simple as that?

(JG): Mmm hmmm.

(AH): Where did the idea first come from to approach them that way?

(JG): Well because I have a, I have, my own background is in art. And having done a lot of own personal research within my own artwork and writing a few theses, you know, specifically my master’s thesis. A lot of my work was influenced by, obviously, multiple artists but Christo was definitely in there, specifically apart from Jeanne-Claude because it was more his prints. I was looking at, as a printmaking background, I was looking at a lot of his lithos and things like that. But I think conceptually with the two of them they were always of great influence to me, personally. And so, low and behold, you know, years later, I think when you’re in a position as a curator you can’t help but be influenced, still, by the artists that have touched you in some sort of personal way. And I think many times when you have to sever and step away from those very personal interests, because when you’re in a position to be curating and educating and doing things, there have been shows where, you know, when I’m sort of working in a collective with other people, that there’s art or ideas within an exhibition that I may not completely favor, but other times…so I, you know, you have those mental lists of your favorite artists and they’ve always been right in there. And so when I came here, I literally had an empty slate. I had to very much hurry and curate and pull together some exhibitions for the short term, but looking at long term, it literally was just sort of keeping up with Over
the River and what’s going on, and always having this immense fondness for their work, and it started out as just me researching when that was gonna happen, and at that time it was supposed to happen in 2009. And that’s literally when I sent out some buzz words to whoever it is that manages their website on the ‘contact us’ and they said this sounds fantastic. You should contact the artists directly, here’s their fax number, that’s how they communicate. So, that same day I just constructed a quick proposal, pretty down and dirty and I was here at nine o’clock at night, I’ll never forget it, I hit the send button and went home and thought, ‘What the hell did I just do?’ (laughter) You know, seriously, thinking, ‘I’m out of my mind to think that I’ll even get a response from them.’ And I still have the message. They called the next morning. And that was it. It started from there. And so, I mean, I came in and I listened to that message, and I, I just, I couldn’t believe it, that it was that easy. But I’m finding out that, on some levels it is that easy. On many levels it’s not. I think they tend to want to associate and affiliate themselves with institutions that, their mission and their vision is sort of closely matched to. So, I think we sort of fit their bill, which was great. So three weeks after that phone call they were here. They happened to be in Denver doing some business with Over the River, and they came into the space with, they pulled up, with, you know, two giant, black SUVs. Pulled up, and out they popped, with this, you know, staff, huge staff, and they come in, and they start asking questions. Jeanne-Claude is smoking a cigarette.

(AH): Inside?

(JG): Inside, and I was, my eyes got huge, but I’m not gonna say a word to her, and I knew I didn’t have an ashtray so I just. I can’t remember what we grabbed; I think we grabbed a glass. But, her staff ran around and were knocking on our walls (knocks on
desk rapidly) trying to figure out how sturdy and stable. Asking for floor plans, and kind of getting their approval. So it was all very overwhelming, but from that point on, it basically turned into a three-year relationship. A process to get it to where we wanted it to be. And my initial proposal was to do an Over the River exhibition. And at that time, they do have an exhibition put together now. And they may actually be exhibiting at MCA. I just found out that they are working to propose that, because Christo is just enamored with the space, the building. ‘Cause they come to Denver quite a bit. At the time they didn’t have it, and so we had two choices: we could either have a poster exhibition, which I knew everybody would be taking on, and their posters are extremely high-quality printed posters, or this true-out retrospective that they put together, that’s housed in Switzerland with a curator that they have on staff. And those were the two choices. But they said, you have to ship it, you have to do all these things. So that’s really what took the three years.

(AH): I was gonna ask you about the whole timeline, from when you first sent in the proposal, to everything else, all the major steps, if you could just, go into more detail about that.

(JG): Well, I think for us, ultimately deciding on this massive collection of artwork, realizing immediately that shipping from Switzerland, ten to fifteen crates, was not gonna be anything inexpensive. They did offer to donate a lecture. And at first I’m still thinking small scale. I’m still thinking here at the CVA, intimate, lecture, whatever it may be. But when I started doing the math and realizing how expensive it was gonna cost just to ship the work and ultimately ship it back, I was looking at, you know, a good $60-70,000.
(AH): Just in shipping costs.

(JG): Just in shipping. And then, to start thinking about, oh, you know, we should market this, we should do this. All these ideas started surfacing, and I ultimately sort of put a pretty down and dirty, crude budget together that I was estimating between $130-150,000. Obviously that’s not in my budget. So the first thing I need to do is to go over to the college and start talking to the administration. I talked to my chair, but I immediately said I wanna sit down with the president of the college, the vice-president of development. We need to figure out a way to raise money to do this. Because this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, we need to seize it, take it, enjoy it, love it, learn from it, go, run, run, run! So, we did these things, and we had a different president and vice-president at that time, we knew they were leaving and we knew there was a new administration coming in. So, I think part of that three years was lost with an administration changeover. But really it was, just a lot of planning and organizing. And every time we would do that, something would come up, where, here’s a better way, or a bigger way, or here’s a way to raise money, can we go back to the artists and ask if they’ll do this. If they do this for us, we can do this for them. So, essentially it turned into this partnership between us, where Metro, the president, all these vice-presidents, you know, they’re very well connected with the mayor, the governor, and some major movers and shakers in the city, and so we started realizing that if we can garner some of the support that you need to get your project off the ground, you can help us by helping us raise money to bring you here, and to do some fantastic, you know, just marketing about who you are, some awareness about the project and you as artists, and so, they saw the benefit, we saw the benefit. And so at that point, I would say, probably about a year
into it, is when we started approaching this more like, sort of like a business, but also like a very strong partnership. So we were working very closely with these artists about everything. And the agreement on the table was nothing goes out, not a speck, nothing on this size piece of paper (holds up a post-it note) or a brochure that doesn’t get approved by the artists. So we start realizing that the potential for a lecture is much bigger than what we can do here. And so the city donated the Boettcher, we started to look into the Boettcher, and then we looked into the Buell, so that was donated.

Hickenlooper secured that donation himself for us. So we’re working very closely with the city, working very closely with the college. This thing is just starting to grow and grow and grow, and is starting to get, almost beyond even what I can handle. Because I’m still trying to manage things here, I’m still trying to teach…

(AH): Meanwhile you have other shows…

(JG): Yeah! Still curating other shows, directing the space, and it was turning into on average, two to three to four meetings a week, for two years.

(AH): With all the different people.

(JG): All the different people. Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s staff, you know, I’m on the phone with them, constantly, I’m constantly working with my people here, just trying to figure out, just orchestrating the lecture alone. Luckily, the alumni association from the college very graciously took that chunk over, because they plan massive events like this. So they said we’ll do this for you. So they kind-of, it literally got so big that I had to start delegating out to major departments over on the campus. So I was working with the marketing department, the development office, and the alumni association, predominantly. Those three departments, to make this happen, because we were doing
mass mailings, massive marketing to the point of arranging for, we had flags put along Speer, Auraria Parkway, all up and down 16th St. We flagged the entire 16th St. Mall. We blanketed the city with rave cards, we were doing fundraising events like crazy, VIP events. And then in and around the lecture, that started getting closer, we had them fully booked for the day. We had press conferences throughout the day, we had a dinner for ‘em, and then the lecture, and then we had a VIP event here, and then a V.V.V.I.I.I.P.P.P event, you know, at a loft down the street. So, it was just, you know, looking at it, the overall programming is really no different than any other exhibition I have. I always do receptions, I always do VIP events, I do lectures, I do gallery talks, you know, it really didn’t change from the typical structure, but everything was elevated to such massive levels that it just, it just entailed planning beyond my belief. Nothing that, you know, to me it started getting into sort of that big, huge museum kind of stuff. These are things we don’t normally do. So that’s where we were all sort of walking blind a little bit, and sometimes feeling quite foolish. We’ll openly admit like, ‘what are we doing?! This is not what we normally do!’ But at the same time it was really exciting to know that we’re doing this, we’re pulling this off and we’re able to manage it. I had the entire campus working on this thing. We had yard signs made, and we were all over campus and all along Auraria and Speer, and out in front of the DCPA because we got permission to do that since the Buell is in there and, you know, it was just amazing. So, and then, orchestrating just the exhibition itself. Who is going to install it? They have a staff member that flies around the world, what a fantastic job, flies around the world and does nothing but install their artwork.
(AH): ‘Cause they have on average about a dozen different exhibitions every year, different sizes?

(JG): Yeah, let me show you a few fun things. This is very precious to me. (unfolds architectural floor plan) These are our floor plans that Christo, he designed the exhibition. And he does that with every, I shouldn’t say every, ‘cause they don’t do big retrospectives, usually they just send their work. But, they’re just…

(AH): So these numbers are for each piece?

(JG): Yeah, he took, our, this is one. One of ‘em he… just the Christo and Jeanne-Claude: Prints and Objects, August, you know it’s got the date, Center for Visual Art, Metropolitan…you know, I just love, I’m gonna frame this, you know at some point. And then we have a few more of these, where…I’m keeping it just like he sent it… but we have more of these where it’s our exact floor plan, you know, this is just more of the inventory, and then we have the exact floor plan of exactly, and he numbered all the walls, and you know, it’s just fun to have.

(AH): The kind of thing that you have to do for any show before you install it, but this is done by Christo!

(JG): Exactly. And, you know, we just have tons of little fun things. You know, they are, they donated, I think all my cards are at home, but they gave us just tons of stuff for fundraising purposes. Posters, lithos, signed lithographs, postcards of every single major work they’ve done, signed.

(AH): Things that they donate to you that you could then use to raise funds?

(JG): That we could sell or auction or bid. I’m sure you saw those, here’s the original from their own collection. (shows portrait of the artists) Aren’t her pants fantastic? This
bag actually smells like their home. She’s a big eucalyptus fan, and so everything in their house, everything that came from their house smells like that. And so for a couple of years my office always smelled of Christo and Jeanne-Claude. So anyway, those are just fun little…we did so many of those, there were VIP ones that went out, I think we had six different mailing lists, six different groups, identified groups, and six different invitations for each one, and you know, like I said, it was just massive.

(AH): Was that because of all of the different levels of events?

(JG): Uh huh.

(AH): So you just had to make sure that the right people were at the right places.

(JG): Exactly, and that’s the kind of stuff that’s above, way above me, you know, those are those kinds of events that those folks go to all the time, and so we, the college hired advisors, consultants, more graphic designers, this was a major, major deal for the college.

(AH): I was gonna ask what you about what kind of support you had from different people, obviously this is a lot more elaborate than I even imagined.

(JG): It was. And like I said, it was just, there wasn’t a day, literally every meeting, it was like this little seed that I brought to this table, and we all watered and nurtured it, and gave it sunlight and love, and all of a sudden it just, it ‘Boom!’ You know, and the branches just kept growing and growing and growing and it turned into this, ‘Roar!’ You know, one of those trees in the Wizard of Oz, and once in a while it would throw apples at us, and, you know, it was. ‘Cause sometimes it did, sometimes it really got out of control, and it’s partly because we didn’t see how big it was gonna get. And I don’t want to make it to sound like we were completely out of control the whole the time, but there
were a few touchy parts where, it’s like, you know, having to really admit to ourselves that this is not our area of expertise. This is not what we do. But I think in the big picture we pulled it off. We really did, and I feel very confident with setting a personal goal of bringing in a high-caliber, world-renowned artist like that on an average of every three years. You know, knowing that it’s gonna take, that we can be working on it for the two-to-three year period and then turn it around each time.

(AH): Who are some of the people that you, do you have anybody confirmed?

(JG): You know I don’t, you know we’re already a little bit ways out so I’ve already missed my three year goal after that happened. But one of the things I realized with working with these artists was that that was a once in a lifetime. Meaning that most artists, not to criticize artists, but most artists are not that generous. With themselves and with their time and with their overall, sort of artistic mission. They’re very hands on, to a certain extent. In a scenario that they want to be hands on, they’re very accessible and extremely generous. And again, because I think they realize the value of the partnership between it going both ways. That they really stepped up to the plate. But they were very accessible, I mean, for instance, there was a day where it was a Friday, it was here, it was just meant for press conferences. And we had two back-to-back. And one of the larger ones that was here, I think there were six or seven people from the media. So it was pretty small, but larger meaning the length of time that it was supposed to be. And I teach on Fridays, and it just worked out best for them to do it on a Friday, and I was a little out of sorts, ‘cause I thought ‘Crap, I teach on Fridays, I’m supposed to be teaching at the gallery doing something and blah blah blah.’ So they went out of their way and said, ‘Move the time, teach your class in the morning’, and then I said ‘Can I bring my
class to the press conference?’ And they said absolutely. So here, this room is full of thirty students, the press is at the front, they’ve got this full audience, and they’re talking. And then after that they offered to pose individually with each of my students. So I set up a tripod and just click click. I felt like a little class photographer at the, you know, school picture photographer and took pictures of every single one of them, and they were thrilled to do it. They’re just so amazing, they really are.

(AH): It’s an incredible combination of finding the right people and, you know, time and place, obviously they’ve got sort of a vested interest in Colorado.

(JG): They do, I mean, I think about other artists that I would love to bring in, and I know right off the bat that I’m probably going to have to work with their agent or their gallery, and it may not be very hands on at all, and if I can manage to bring them in here, they may have a fee of $50-$100,000 just to make an appearance. And they may not want to work with students, you know, I mean, it could be a very very different experience. May not be…but you never know.

(AH): Right, Christo and Jeanne-Claude represent themselves so you’re going right to the source.

(JG): Yeah, you’ve got people you go through to work with them, but yeah, they’re pretty much, you know, doing it themselves. You know, I’m on the phone at 10:30 at night with Jeanne-Claude, ironing out, you know, editing. Because it’s the best time for her. Sure as hell wasn’t the best time for me, but, I’m not going to say no. So it’s a trip when somebody like that is calling you at home. So, you know, very exciting for me, and it was sometimes, for the most part it was all business for me. But there were times when I’m going ‘I cannot believe this’ you know.
(AH): It’s all business but you can definitely enjoy it.

(JG): Yeah, and even after the fact, it’s all over, when they come to Denver, a lot of times they’ll call me and we’ll, I’ll connect with them, and go do things with them. There’s been a few times when I had my son, and they were like, ‘Bring you son!’ And so Jeanne-Claude and my son are now, they just love each other. He said to her, ‘You’re hair is really cool, it looks like hot lava.’ And I was like, ‘Oh, God!’ but she loved it. They did a lecture at the botanic gardens, and my son Ben is seven and he was sitting next to her. And during the lecture Christo would be talking, and she was having a little conversation with Ben and I didn’t really know what it was, but three weeks later a UPS truck showed up at my house, and out come all these boxes. She apparently had asked him what his favorite piece was, and he said the Gates. So she sent every Gates material they had. Books signed to him, posters, lithos, original lithos, signed, and they just gave ‘em to him. You know, so I have this little Christo and Jeanne-Claude museum going on in my basement, and it’s like, it’s his little treasure. Right now he doesn’t realize. You know, and I don’t know quite what I’m going to do with it yet…so anyway, I don’t mean to go off on this tangent…

(AH): That’s fine!

(JG): Because it’s really, I think this just basically illustrates how this experience went above and beyond the normal day to day, you know, exhibition planning and everything. This became very personal for everybody, because it was such a long time, and it continues to be very personal because we are actually traveling their exhibition, we have it until 2012. So it’s currently in storage at the Bemis, in Nebraska. Omaha, Nebraska. And so we are still in day-to-day business with them, so it continues. Unfortunately,
Jeanne-Claude is very ill right now, so we’re kind of struggling with that, trying to figure out how we’re maneuvering everything, but, we are still, we’re just starting to get some bookings for the show.

(AH): I couldn’t remember where I read that, but I had read that there was going to be some traveling component to it. And I was really curious how that ties in, or maybe does the opposite of tying, I guess avoiding the Over The River show that’s traveling to a few different places, and I think that you said earlier that when you first envisioned this show that you were thinking just about that, rather than the whole retrospective. Can you tell me more about how it turned out that this show was going to travel?

(JG): Well they actually, they came to us, and again this is sort of looking at it as more of a partnership and knowing that we’re trying to raise money. And they basically said, ‘Hell, you shipped it over here, you can ship it right back, we don’t care. But it hasn’t been in the country for fifteen years, and if you want, you can travel it. You have to do all the marketing and do everything, but you have our permission to travel the exhibition. You know us, we know you, you know our expectations, we know yours. Travel it if you want, and charge whatever you want. Just make sure that it’s clear that we don’t benefit from that travel. That we don’t make any money off of it.’ So we did. And we created a, Bemis actually wanted it immediately and it was really tough, and we weren’t ready. We had never traveled exhibitions before, and we were working with the college to get a contract put together. And they wanted it so fast, and I know the people out there, so I just said, ‘You know, this is on the honor system folks, but I’ll send it to you, but you better damn well get me that contract!’ And we gave it to them for a pretty hefty discounted fee because we knew right after theirs, that we wouldn’t have any bookings
for quite a while. Because most museums and galleries are planned out a couple years, and then the economy went so sour, that we didn’t know what we were gonna have happen. But the good thing is they have ample storage, so they’re not charging us to store it. So they’re just storing it for us. It’s not costing us anything right now except to market it, and so, we’ve been doing mailings, you know, buying mailing lists and trying to market it, but, it’s been tough. It’s been really tough to do, and this again, is the whole side of business that we’re not really sure of, but we’re really interested in doing it because, you know, kind of going back to the CVA in general, that’s what we normally do. We don’t host traveling exhibitions very often, maybe one every two years, but we kind of pride ourselves in curating…

(AH): Putting things together yourself.

(JG): Yeah, we sort of home-baked-cookie curate everything, and it’s a shame, and we’re realizing that there’s a lot of opportunities out there. There’s a lot of traveling organizations out there that can either take your show on, or we’re realizing that we can even do it ourselves. We’ve got the contracts drawn; we know what we’re doing. We haven’t done it wholeheartedly, this Native American show that we just finished, if we were to travel it more so we’d have to get crates built and all that stuff. But anyway, now that Christo and Jeanne-Claude have put the Over The River part together, you know, I know what they’re doing, but also, it’s hard because we know that the interest in that is predominantly gonna be in Colorado, but we’re trying to travel this show on a national basis. But I still kinda look back and think, ‘That’s the show I wanted!’ you know? But it’s okay. And then, you know, a major wrench got thrown into it because there’s a traveling exhibition organization called Landau. And I kid you not, about two or three
months after we got our contracts drawn, and the show was at Bemis, I’m just perusing through their website because I was getting emails and I saw a Christo and Jeanne-Claude retrospective, and my, you know, I couldn’t believe it. And I look, and it’s very similar to the show we had.

(AH): But it’s all different pieces?

(JG): No. It’s a lot of the same pieces. Different editions, a lot of the same titled pieces, you know, they look the same. Some different. But, so it was shocking, and sort of hurtful. I obviously felt comfortable enough to pick up the phone and say, ‘Jeanne-Claude, what the heck is this? My God, I’m shocked, and if you knew about this why didn’t you tell us, because this sort of counters everything we’re doing?’ It turns out that somebody that worked for them years ago, he decided that he would rather have art in exchange for salary, on many levels. So he just acquired this massive Christo and Jeanne-Claude collection of his own. And then he passed away, and his estate, the artwork was all donated to a museum, and the museum went through Landau to travel the exhibition. And it was just like planets aligning, that it just happened to be at the same exact time that we were doing ours. And we thought, ‘Oh my God, what are we gonna do?’ So we quickly sort of pulled our marketing boots on, and decided that we needed to angle this so that it was marketed that they would get hands-on experience with the artists. That this is just a collection. We didn’t mention that collection. But we made sure that when we talked about ours that we made mention that Christo will do a floor plan, and, you know, you work very closely with the artists.

(AH): They said you can go ahead and travel it, which was gonna be completely up to you to organize, but they were still gonna be involved?
(JG): Yes, yeah. So when I did the show I talked to them and said I would love to have the collection, but, because we’re in Colorado I want a section of this exhibition dedicated purely to Over The River. They agreed to that. They’ve never done that, they never added to it, but they were open to, and they said sure, we’ll do that. And then I said, ‘Oh, and I also want videos.’ I want some educational pieces, and I knew that they had this (pulls a box of DVDs from a shelf).

(AH): There were a few…

(JG): Yeah, there’s quite a few. So Jeanne-Claude sent me these, and they let us do these. And these are fantastic. And so we basically…

(AH): Are these commercially available?

(JG): No. These are theirs. They’re amazing. So we basically created a schedule. So the Islands was every Tuesday from nine, you know, we would play, we just had a schedule and people would come in and watch some.

(AH): I remember that, it was like you could even just go and sit and watch the videos all day and not even see the huge exhibition!

(JG): Yeah, and so, you know sometimes with, somebody came in, and we did night viewings and sometimes people would come in and I’d be like, ‘Oh hell, no one’s here I’ll put in something else for you.’ And so, it was a lot of fun. And so basically what the agreement on the table was that, we’re making these available to an institution if they want, but they have to request this. And if they want Over The River they have to request that separately. We had to make that really, really clear in the contract, that what they’re getting is just the retrospective.

(AH): As opposed to, Over The River being a work that is still in progress.
(JG): A work in progress, yeah.

(AH): I first heard about that piece at a lecture they did in Cleveland, I think it was in 2006. And they said here’s what we’re working on. My wife and I said, ‘We’re moving to Colorado, this is amazing! We have to see this!’

(JG): And now it’s like 2013. And with Jeanne-Claude being ill, I don’t even think that’s hit the, it just happened, so I don’t think it’s hit the news. I mean it might by now, but last week it hadn’t yet. But the agreement between them, it’s like the show must go on. For the last thirty years, anywhere and everywhere they go they fly separately, just so if a plane goes down they don’t lose the team. So she’s hospitalized, but he’s still moving forward. Hitting all the meetings and doing everything they need to do to keep going. ‘Cause, you know, going from 2009 to now 2013, my guess is that it could still be another couple years. But it seems to be going.

(AH): Yeah, it’s not, things are still moving forward, it’s just slower.

(JG): I know we’ve totally sidetracked off your questions here, I’m so sorry! (laughter)

(AH): Oh no, no it’s okay, ‘cause everything that you’re saying it’s all the collateral, everything that goes into any exhibition. In this case it’s a huge one, so there’s a lot more.

(JG): And you know, I keep referring to the whole museum this, and ‘Oh, this is something that a museum would do.’ But, in all reality they won’t work with a museum. I mean they would, if it means a couple pieces or if a museum was gonna buy, but they would never put this retrospective in just a regular museum. They just won’t do it. They specifically sort of seek, I mean they would, depending on the circumstances, but they really are seeking out educational type, not just colleges, and I know museums are
educational, but you know what I’m saying. We were told that with their retrospective
we were to pursue other museums that are affiliated with universities and colleges, so
that’s what they would prefer for this particular show to go.

(AH): Yeah, more of a natural opportunity for learning…

(JG): You’re running out of space! (laughter) I’m talking!

(AH): No no, I just hope that we’re okay on time.

(JG): Yeah we are, fine. Just trying to see if there’s anything else fun I can show you…

(AH): You talked earlier about, you know, when it was, when you were deciding what
the show would be, in the very early stages, you said you could have these actual pieces
or it could be a poster show, and obviously you went with this huge collection, how much
of that, did they say, these are the pieces that are available, and did you have any choice
in selecting what would be included?

(JG): Now, and that’s, you know when I first thought of this that was something I was
interested in doing. And as soon as they said that they didn’t have an Over The River, I
immediately looked at Christo and said, ‘Is there something that we can put together?
How exciting would this be?’ And in all, looking back, I’m not saying that this is what
triggered it, but I’m wondering in a way if it somewhat did. Because those were some
very very beginning discussions that we had. Was there a way to put together an Over
The River exhibition? That’s why I’m just like, ‘Awww!’ (laughter) But, and that I
think truly could have been a situation where I could have had some, you know, a little
bit more curatorial piecework in there, but, in all reality this did feel very, very different.
Because it was like here’s the show, here’s where it’s gonna go on the walls, and thank
you very much. So for me I felt like there really wasn’t any curating going on here, it
was just a hell of a lot of planning in dealing with artists at this level that I’ve never done before. You know, hiring security. And, you know, things like that was something that I don’t normally deal with so much.

(AH): I’m just wondering, you know, considering that, there were so many other things, that, you know, this show became, so many other aspects to it that maybe you weren’t thinking of originally, I wonder if that was somewhat of a relief that you didn’t have to make editing choices?

(JG): I definitely do, and I think seeing, again I keep whipping out these floor plans, but seeing the way they think, and looking at our space, with that other floor plan, and now everything’s numbered, and Christo very carefully looking at our space and figuring out, you know he even drew in where the chairs would go for the video projection.

(AH): Right, ‘cause it wasn’t a bunch of straight lines.

(JG): Right, and, you know I mean but, just sort of appreciating and respecting this vision, and seeing that these artists, nothing goes unnoticed. They have such amazing attention to detail, and everything and anything is about their work. Whether it’s the retrospective on my walls, or some massive thing with the landscape. So it did feel strange. And then to have their staff come and coordinate my staff to work, sort of under their wing, was really fun. Again, it was kind of a learning experience, but also, you know, they laughed at us because we white glove everything, we never touch artwork, and we’re handling artwork more like a museum would. And they’re laughing at us. And they’re just grabbing and flinging things all over the place. And we’re like, ‘What are you doing?! No!’ So it was sort of trying to strike this balance with ‘Okay you’re in our house, and this is our insurance, and please don’t juggle that Christo piece, please,
you know, you’re freakin’ me out!’ So we very much were a part of it because I don’t think Christo can see everything on paper. And so, they actually were back in town, and we did a walk-through and we talked about some things, and I actually did have the opportunity to say, ‘Hey, what do you feel about changing this, moving that?’ And we did change out some pieces and do some things. It’s not that they weren’t open to it, I think that’s just the way they do things. They are 100% in control of everything they do.

(AH): And it’s not to be malicious in any way…

(JG): It’s just their practice.

(AH): They’ve been doing this for a long time, they have a formula.

(JG): Yup, it’s their practice. And it has to be something that you’re able and willing to do. I think being able to step back and just look at it this way. At first I was like, ‘What? We don’t even get to install the work? You’ve got to be kidding me!’ You know, but, and then to have to pay their staff to come out here and install a show, but I just looked at it again as an opportunity. So I invite a bunch of art students to come over here and watch. Like take it in, soak it in. Touch this artwork that you’d normally, would much less never see, much less be able to touch and work with. And so, we recruited a lot of students to work hand in hand with the staff, so that was pretty great.

(AH): Um…

(JG): We’re so out of your categories! (laughter)

(AH): No, I don’t mind, I just wanted there to be a little bit of natural transition from things. And you know, you’re answering some of the questions that I haven’t even asked, so I don’t want to be redundant.
(JG): Let me jump in to, I know you had a thing in there about research, and you know, the one thing that’s something I can never say enough about with exhibition planning. I think even being a huge fan of theirs, I can’t tell you how much I realized I didn’t know about them. And I think that I was sort of pleasantly surprised on many levels, you know, having been sent this (videos) and watching some of these, and just doing more extensive research. Because I think in the past, I was researching them for different reasons, writing my own thesis. So, you know, looking at this from a curatorial perspective, as far as just the gallery is concerned, and what am I giving to the public here? I had to research very different things, and how is this going to be looked upon? And sort of looking at how Christo is laying out the show and knowing that I can’t really change that, but I can control the marketing pieces that I put out, and the didactics

(AH): Although you still had to get their approval…

(JG): Yeah, yeah, all of those things, so that people truly understand what it is that’s going on here. Because there’s gonna be people that are walking in the door that have never heard of these artists. And then people who have known their career for forever and a day. So there’s a full huge crossover there, that I knew that, so researching it from that perspective was unique, and very eye opening for me. Because I did, I found out things that I didn’t know about their partnership, and the way they work as artists, and why it was just Christo for so long, and not Christo and Jeanne-Claude. You know, little tidbits like that.

(AH): I’m curious about, in general terms, you pointed out a simple fact that not everybody’s going to think about, you’ll have people walking in the door that have never
heard of them and people that are very well aware of what they’ve done, which is an
issue that you’ll probably face in any exhibition…

(JG): Absolutely.

(AH): How do you try to tackle that? Making sure, especially considering the
educational mission, how do you treat everybody equally?

(JG): I think, you know, didactics are huge, gallery guides are huge. We make a huge
point to talk, you know, you get your individuals in here, but any group that we get, you
know, we make a huge point to try to talk to them about that. And I think, coming from
the fact that we’re part of the college. I mean, any docent, or anybody’s gonna do that at
a museum, but I think, for us, making sure that people really truly understand what
they’re looking at, and appreciating it. So any sort of visual or reference that we can
always have. We’ll always say, ‘Oh, this, this, this, but there’s all these great things at
the front desk that you can pick up.’ So we have multiple versions, you know, we’ve got
the quick reads, you know the quick, ‘Oh, okay, I get it.’ versus books, and tons of
research that people can be referencing. Or library lists and books on reserve through the
Denver Public Library and our own library and things like that, you know, just to sort of
put it out there, it’s like, ‘Here you can have this tiny little bit, or you can go do…’

(AH): It’s up to the individual to take it, take as much as they want.

(JG): Yeah, you know, and of course we just try to talk to people as much as possible.

But yeah, it is tough, because you can say, ‘Oh, it’s this great contemporary artist and
they’re important for these reasons’ but it may not resonate with them. They may be like,
‘Who cares? This looks like crap. I hate it. What is this any good for?’ And we get
that. We even got the people in for Christo and Jeanne-Claude just saying, ‘This is
bullshit. You know, this is ugly and stupid, a waste of time, a waste of money.’ You know, how do you turn somebody like that around and…? So you do, you smile and say, ‘Let me walk you through the gallery a little bit. Let me show you a few things. Let me give you a little information about the artist. You might change your mind. You may not. But, got a minute?!’ (laughter) You know what I mean?

(AH): I think just being, staying positive and being open-minded when you’re dealing with people that are a little more critical, I think, a lot of times that’s all they really want. They maybe didn’t really feel such a negative opinion of what they’re seeing, they just want to be, not have their hand held, but, you know, be treated with an open mind and…I don’t know if you know where I’m going with this…

(JG): Yeah, I do. No, it’s hard, I mean the, you know, an artist that comes to mind, you know, we exhibited some of Sally Mann’s work, you know, some of the decomposing body works. And that was some of the scariest art I’ve ever exhibited. You know, not knowing if I was gonna have a lawsuit on my hands, or somebody completely freaking out in the gallery, telling me, ‘This isn’t art, and what are you doing? How dare you? You’re part of the state, and you need to be fired!’ and you know what I mean? But it didn’t happen, and I’m actually somewhat shocked that it didn’t, you know. So there’s times when I feel like the capacity that we’re in here as an educational institution, part of the college, teaching art, our own artists, how to think and research and be a certain way, and make art, and articulate themselves in a certain way, and I feel like I need to do that too. And there are risks that I need to take. I feel like that’s the one edge that we have, is that I feel like we can do that more than a commercial gallery or even a well-established museum, is we can be pretty risky. We’ve had all kinds of very risqué sort of art, things
that really push the boundaries. So, it’s exciting, and I think to some levels, Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s work is a pretty safe place to be, but you’d be surprised at how many people were out against these two.

(AH): I wonder if some of that relates to less about a gallery show and more about some of the outdoor projects…

(JG): Yeah, but they put it all together they sew it into that thing, and this becomes a platform for somebody to be sort of outspoken and opinionated about it, and, again when you can sometimes reel them in and give them information or just have a conversation with them and say, ‘Well did you know that they raise all the money themselves? Every dime? That Christo makes 400 prints a year by himself with no assistants in his little studio in New York and sells them all himself?’ That’s where they raise the money. There’s no gifts, there’s nothing here. You know, when you start talking in that way, they’re like, ‘Really?! Really?’ You know, they just don’t know. And so then you see those glimmers of being able to turn people around. I think in art, whether you’re an artist, or a curator, or a director, or docent, or whatever you are, I just feel like, that’s your overall mission and responsibility, is to help people understand. ‘Cause it’s a foreign language. Art is a foreign language to many people.

(AH): I was curious if you had, you were talking about people’s reactions, if you, going into it, or before it opened to the public, if you had any predetermined ideas about how you would evaluate people’s reactions, or evaluate the success of the show?

(JG): You mean very literally, huh?

(AH): Well, maybe, you know, other than…

(JG): Tracking numbers?
(AH): Other than tracking numbers, but also other than, obviously, there’s a multitude of different reasons that you could have for putting on a show, a particular show or any show, doing shows in general, and, kind of, even internally, deciding, or knowing that you met your goals. What was the purpose of putting the show on? Was it educational? Obviously yes it was. The students obviously had a lot of learning opportunities, a lot of hands on. Getting to see things that people don’t see. So that’s a success.

(JG): I mean, so from sort of an evaluation perspective, we really didn’t do anything special. We didn’t really, I mean, it was really sheer numbers and sheer success that sort of equated it all for us. I mean I hate to sound so simple about it, but you know, I think in and for other exhibitions knowing that we really couldn’t evaluate or sort of come back and assess that show like we do others. In others we have guest books, and you know, blogs and feedback this and that and whatever. Those are usually what we’re using to sort of gauge our success or lack of.

(AH): And this is a show on a whole ‘nother level, but you said also that you were trying to get well known major artists in here every few years, ideally. This being the first time, I kinda wonder, will this be a standard to which future exhibitions are measured?

(JG): Yes and no. So I should probably go back and correct myself. I think over the nineteen years that the CVA has been in existence we have brought in major works, Warhol, Picasso, Basquiat, Gregory Crewdson, Sally Mann, we’ve brought in some pretty big name artists, but it’s always been, three pieces, or a few pieces, not an exclusive one-person show. So this was unique in that sense, is that it was just literally a retrospective or a solo exhibition, and I think, you know, ‘cause part of our own mission, and it’s not written in the words necessarily, but part of it is to put the artwork in the
faces, literally, to our students and the surrounding community of art that they’re seeing in art history books. That may or may not be in a museum collection, or somehow build that bridge between, and even more so if we can create an experience where students are able to work with the artists themselves. Which we’ve been able to create, you know, Sandy Skoglund was here, you know, that was a big deal, she worked very closely with students. But bringing in artists that are household names, that’s different. That’s different. Because, you know, I can venture, I can walk out on the street and I’d be hard pressed to find someone who knows who Sandy Skoglund is, or Sally Mann, and understands their work. But you say Christo and Jeanne-Claude and they kind of turn their head, and if you say the Gates, they’re like, ‘Oh yeah!’ you know? That’s…

(AH): That’s the exact same experience I had in talking to my dad about my thesis project, and who I was going to be talking to, and what the exhibitions were. And he didn’t know, and I said ‘Gates; and ‘New York’ and he said, ‘Oh, yeah, yeah!’

(JG): Yeah, you know that’s, it, you know, and kind of going back to even the planning thing, you know, I hope I didn’t make it sound like we were flying on the seat of our pants the whole time, because I do think that we’re well equipped with, you know, planning and taking on these things, this was just so much bigger. Like I said, it grew a million legs, and it just, it kinda turned into something quite different, which was to everybody’s benefit. But we had no idea that it would get like that. And we actually were planning on doing it a year prior. We bounced between 2007, 2008, 2009, you know, we were kinda all over the place. But anyway, I kinda jumped off of what we were finishing talking about there…
(AH): Just about how you judge if something has met your expectations. I mean, were there any parts of it that, obviously on a lot of things it exceeded your expectations, but were there any parts where it fell short, or were there any roadblocks or things that you would do differently?

(JG): Yeah, I think I would probably, you know, I think it was hard, well…obviously doing things different now because we just went through them. If I were actually back in the heat of it all, you know, back in that three-year period, looking back, you know, I definitely might look at doing some things different as to how the fundraising was coordinated and put together. And then, you know, possibly, trying to even bolster or enrich that educational experience even more. Yeah, so there’s some things that it’s like we kind of missed the boat on that. Seeing and learning how accessible the artists were. It’s like I bet I could have done this, this, and this.

(AH): You never could have predicted that.

(JG): Mmm mmm. So, but I think if I had just thought of those things, you know, while I had these artists, you know, right in front of me, it’s like, ‘Why didn’t you think of these things? Why didn’t you? Because they’re right here in your face.’ But it’s hindsight. I don’t know if we answered questions, I mean, as far as your thesis is concerned, is there anything that we didn’t touch on? I know I’m kind of approaching this very informally on you.

(AH): That’s, I think that’s okay. I know there’s only a certain amount of detail you can go into about, you know, certain things like the budgeting process. Obviously, for my purposes I don’t really need to know, you know, how much invitations cost to print…

(JG): But, you know, basically, yeah, I mean…
(AH): The whole idea is more about seeing, learning what you had in mind, how you thought things would go, seeing how often things went the way you were expecting, and then what happened when it deviated, what caused unexpected changes, and how you dealt with it, ideally how you learned from it, and were able to turn difficulties into a positive situation…

(JG): Right. I think because it got so big, that was probably, you know we were trying to be so strategic about everything, in that, you know, the exhibition, the events, the fundraising, the marketing, the budget, you know, all of these things. And I just feel that for the most part everything was business as usual, it was just like, it’s a little bit bigger than normal, but, and then other things were just monumental. Like, I said, with the Buell Theater, you know dealing with, I can’t even tell you, you know, having to go over there for, you know, two or three days a week for three months straight just to deal with the stage people, to figure out lighting, and taking pictures and sending them to Christo and Jeanne-Claude. You know what I mean? To try to figure out exactly where they will stand. You know what I mean? And the exact lighting, and the exact right headpiece and microphone and, you know, I mean, just…and coordinating and realizing that we had our own ticketing system, and who’s gonna sit in will call? And, you know, just these, these things that, again, I’m used to having lectures you just walk in the door.

(AH): And it would normally be right here in the space.

(JG): Yeah, you know, it’s free, you walk in, you sit down, and you enjoy and listen, get a cup of tea, and you’re outta here in an hour and a half. And this was something very different. So, I think strength in numbers for us was, and having an institution as big as ours behind us, and literally having to go over there and educate a lot of people, a lot of
administrators who have zero interest in art, and have no idea who these artists are, and creating PowerPoints. And going in and saying, ‘This is who they are. This is what they do. This is how you say their name.’ And you know, I mean literally that bottom line. But kind of knowing the value here, and being passionate enough about it to know that the only way this is gonna work is how well you go in there and convince them that this is gonna work. And knowing that, you know, I’m gonna ask you for $150,000 above and beyond my own budget, that I’ve never asked you for before, and how can we raise the money to do this. And so a lot of the work was put back on me to work with the artists exclusively to start asking for, can you help us? Can you donate some things to us so that we can do some fundraisers and things like that? And I realized, that was a different part for me.

(AH): Do you think that your background as an educator was a major asset for you, as far as when you’re, not just when you’re doing the presentation and telling people…

(JG): Actually I think it hurt me more because I’ve been in arts administration a long time, but not in this, I’ve never been in that sort of position or that sort of capacity to be doing these sort of things, you know, it was always somebody else doing those kinds of things. So I think for me it was nerve racking at times, just, and sort of having to come over here and build my confidence to go ask Jeanne-Claude can you give us things? Can you do this for us? You know, but it was tough. It’s hard to admit, even to you right now. Yeah, I mean, I was definitely not equipped to be doing these things.

(AH): I was thinking, you know, at the college, when you’re asking for things, as far as…it’s a very rare, probably once in a lifetime opportunity to have this kind of involvement with the show, and expressing that to them, and convincing them of the
importance of it, I was likening that to, you know, if you’re in a lecture in one of your classes, explaining to your students the significance…

(JG): Oh, I see, I’m sorry. (laughter)

(AH): No, it’s okay, it’s another part of the whole process, it’s just something that…I hadn’t, my mind hadn’t gotten that far yet!

(JG): Actually, that was the best approach that I could have taken. To basically walk in and not be afraid. And knowing my material well enough to be able to field any question that they might have. And feel confident, yeah, to walk in there and say, ‘This is why it’s important. This is why it’s important to me…it that the CVA…but let me tell you why or how I think it’s important to the college, and once you kind of digest this, you know, think about it, and then let’s make a decision and see if you feel like it will be beneficial to you too.’ And I think once everybody went home, and most likely googled them, and started really looking, and you know I gave them some lists of some books to look at, and say, you know, this goes back quite a ways and these are pretty important people, I think they came back just jazzed, and very, very excited, and definitely understanding the opportunity. But, I needed to say, ‘Okay, that’s fine that you’re excited, but do you understand the work that we need to do? And I need your commitment to say that we’re gonna do this.’ And, you know, they did it. It happened, so…and the good thing is that we can actually talk to other institutions who don’t have any of a bigger budget than we do or don’t have much more means of anything than we do and we can say, ‘Look, this is what we did. This is how we did it. You can do it to!’
(AH): And then that ties in so well with Christo and Jeanne-Claude saying we want to be, not just in museums, but in places that are associated with universities which then gives you that extra large structure and people who potentially are there to help.

(JG): Yeah, yeah. So that’s been, you know, it’s been a good thing for us, and we’ve had a couple of institutions they just want it, want it, want it, and we tell ‘em what we did to fundraise, and I think they see it as just too, too much.

(AH): It’s unfortunate.

(JG): Yeah, but it is. We tell ‘em that it took us three years. We say it won’t take you that long. Because we’ve done a lot of the…you can use a lot of our verbage, and everything that we’ve created. The artists would actually prefer that because it’s all been, sort of pre-approved at this point. But I think economy, budgets are in such a bad place.

(AH): So, did you guys, did they already show it?

(JG): They did already show it. They showed it at the beginning January 2009, very beginning of the year. ‘Cause we did it in 2008, fall of 2008, they did it in January, February, March of 2009. Christo and Jeanne Claude actually sit on their board. So they were interested in…

(AH): That was before the show, or did they join?

(JG): No, they’ve been on their board for a long time. And for some reason we weren’t marketing the fact that we had this exhibition. They actually had a board meeting and Christo and Jeanne-Claude happened to mention that we had the show, and that we had brought it over, and, you know, their director, like, I could the feel the flames through the phone, and he was like, ‘Oh my God, I can't believe you have this and we want, it we
want it, we want it.’ So, that's when we started negotiating with them. But what was so hard is that they wanted it so fast. I don't know why he wanted so fast, but he did. We made it happen, so, we got a good deal out of it, ‘cause, you know them sitting on the board it's a perfect safe place for us to say the artwork is being stored, ‘cause they're on their board, and they know it is safe, it's okay, and then wherever we travel, it will just go from that point.

(AH): I wonder if there's anything else…

(JG): Well, you can always call too, or you can send me a quick e-mail if there's anything that we didn't go over. I know this was so conversational it might be hard to get out the more factual stuff that you need for your thesis.

(AH): That's why I have a tape recorder.

(JG): But I think, you know, what's good overall is just, you know, ‘cause I can sit here and talk to you so very structurally about how we curate, all the research, everything we do for our other shows, but this is such a unique experience, you know that, there's so much that we weren't planning for. But we, you know, we kind of did things like we normally do, just on a much grander scale.

(AH): And it's experiencing real life and that's part of my point in actually going and talking to people.

(JG): Well, and it’s you know, it's also kind of looking at ourselves saying that we bite off more than we could chew and we got really lucky because we made it through the process, but do we dare ever do that again? Because it is, you know, we are not a museum and this is might be more than we could typically do. And I am sort of holding off on one of those bigger exhibitions, because we just bought a new space, and I know
they would absolutely have my hide if I came to them asking for a couple hundred thousand dollars to bring in big-name artists. Even though there could be more fund-raising possibilities around it, it's that you've got to spend it to make it and you don't know if you're going to make it back. So I don't think that's a risk that they are probably willing to take quite yet. I'll give them another year or so in the space and I might start thinking…

(AH): When is the new space scheduled to open?

(JG): March.


(JG): Mmm hmmm.

(AH): That's kind of soon.

(JG): Yeah it's a little too soon. I'm a little worried about it to be quite honest.

(AH): But it's in square feet, it's, I'm guessing that it's bigger?

(JG): Mmm hmm, it's double the size of this space, so you know, we’re going to have to be working on getting our facility report put together rather quickly so that we can secure some of these loans, and some of these shows. And that's something that I'm sort of battling with the college with right now, because those things are not in place yet and I'm trying to have help. They're getting it now, you know, about climate control, and having them helping them understand that we do function more like a museum when it comes to how art is hung, handled, and the type of art that we're seeking that these things need to be in place. And so that's, they're getting it. You know, like, we have to take the fluorescent lighting out. Yes, yes we really do. You know, things like that. And climate controlled does not just mean closing the door. You know?
(AH): Is there anything else that, that you'd like to address specifically or anything else that I should be aware of?

(JG): No, I mean, I guess the categories of your thesis, I guess what I'm not seeing fully is the overall flavor. What's going to be the heaviest hitting component to this thesis?

(AH): That's a learning process, I couldn't say right now. I can say I just interviewed Rose Fredrick about her, the show she curated, which was ‘Masterpieces of Colorado’. That was a landscape show that was celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Colorado Council on the Arts. I've already spoken to her, and I'm in the process of, juggling schedules, getting an interview time with Dean Sobel at the Clyfford Still Museum to talk about the preview show they did at the Denver Art Museum.

(JG): Mmm hmmm, the inaugural, the kickoff.

(AH): They're breaking ground next month, but actually doing exhibitions there is some way off, so. At this point. I'm telling you that to give you an idea of who I'm talking to and what kind of information that would provide me.

(JG): It's almost kind of like the landmark above and beyond a sort of, yeah, hmmm. I'm trying to think. But it's almost like, you know, I feel like if I knew that sort of centerpiece part, you know, the sort of, the rock in the pool that's going to ripple out and, you know, all the other information sort of fills that in, but what's the big, what's the rock? I understand what it is, obviously, the planning and of all that. But I'm just wondering if there's a piece that I can just hand you can say, ‘Here talk about this!’ You know, because, I'm sitting here and thinking about, you know, you bring up landscapes and our experience partnering with a publisher, yet another experience that we’ve not normally done, and partnering with the art critics in the city, which are normally sort of
that, you know, you want them so badly to review your shows. But now, you're partnering with them, so, now our friends. So okay. But, publishing books that we don't normally do, you know, we did Colorado Abstract, and then we did Landscapes of Colorado, and you know, that was kind of a unique experience in how those artists were curated in, and things like that. But yeah, and then down to the most basic of us you know, the shows that we just think about, dream about, and think of a concept and what artists are going to fit into that concept and kind of go from there. I sort of feel like we do so many things so many different ways that there's not a lot of rhyme and reason to us.

(AH): There is no exact formula.

(JG): Where other spaces, that's, you know, everything's pretty structured, it stays that way. And I think Christo and Jeanne-Claude really pushed us…

(AH): In that direction?

(JG): Absolutely. And it definitely taught us that nothing's impossible.

(AH): That's a good lesson to learn.

(JG): Yeah, I mean, I think that was so refreshing. In so many ways, to just be like, to have that sort of reiterated throughout the entire planning. When people would say, ‘Well, how did you do this? Jennifer just asked!’ That was always the joke, the ongoing joke, ‘Jennifer just picked up the phone and asked!’ And that was a huge lesson to me as a curator. It's definitely empowered me, made me realize that I should not, and that's what I was saying a little bit earlier. When you were saying, being an educator, when I sort of misinterpreted what you are saying, because being, having taught for so many years and being an artist, you know, I sort of immediately equated, how did I get here to be doing these things where not formally trained to do that? But just by virtue of
experience, I definitely feel like that show empowered me and made me realize that you can talk to anybody, you can ask anybody anything. Even if you are this little peon in this small space in Denver.

(AH): I can actually take that in a slightly different direction, I can take that myself. That's why with just getting to interview people, that's why we're here now, because I asked.

(JG): Exactly, and I just feel like there are people that do these kind of things, and this is all they do, and they are very successful at what they do, and then there's things that are sort of above and beyond, these just wonderful things that happen. And it's like wow, it's sort of off-the-wall, beyond the border, or the confines, beyond the boundaries of what you sort of have set for yourself. I think that that's really great. And so it's interesting to hear who you're talking to, you know, you might even consider talking to MCA, talking about their programming and their approach.

(AH): I was thinking about that, you know, the first thing that popped into my head and looking at a specific exhibition was the Damien Hirst show. I didn't pursue that just because of their staff changes.

(JG): Yeah, understandably. But a very impactful show, because of the content of the work, and again, the rousing of the masses, and the reaction, the public reaction to what is art and what isn't art, and a very very well known name. It’d be interesting to hear, you know, the planning and how that controlling the reaction and all of that. You know, similar to what I was talking about with Sally Mann, you've got some pretty grotesque decomposing bodies in front of you, where even a framer is like. One of our framers was like I was disturbed for two weeks after framing that piece, thank you very much. Well, if
I can be of any help to sort of filling any gaps that I may have created it for you, I'd be more than happy to do that.

(AH): Well, thank you. I have to kind of go through it all, internalize it. Of course I'm doing these interviews, and at the same time trying to read as much as I possibly can about that deal with doing things.

(JG): And that I'm not providing you obviously. You know, I think for the CVA in your little notes, you'd be saying, going from the day today and beyond.

(AH): This is very helpful to me, I don't think that you're sending me in the wrong direction, because obviously I would get more different takes on things if I could talk to 10 different people, but because this is one specific project, I have to put a limit on it.

(JG): Right, exactly.

(AH): And kind of just try to get as much as I can from each person I can talk to.

(JG): And I definitely think, you know, without the help of the institution and the connections that they have, I don't know if it would have been as successful as it was. I think the exhibition would have been successful, but all the fundraising, the lecture, all of those things. Knowing that Hickenlooper and Ritter and all those guys are out there, it's like, ‘Cool!’ And they’re buzzing it all around their people. So, I hate to say it, but a large part of those components were the networking, and the who’s who, and the who you know kind of a thing, ‘cause that really make it happen. It was amazing, I mean, I couldn't have arranged the VIP dinners that were arranged, I mean, these are people. I've never even heard of, you know, multimillionaires that apparently live four doors down that I don't even know. You know what I mean?

(AH): I think they operate that way for a reason.
(JG): Yeah they do, but suddenly we're at their house hosting Christo and Jeanne-Claude for a 50-person dinner. You know, it's like, ‘What? Okay!’

(AH): Just trying to do that, even for your 50 best friends…

(JG): Yeah, it's exciting. Well, if you go ahead and take my card here. Just let me know if there's anything I can do to round it back out.

(AH): And thank you once again for meeting with me opening, up about all this.

(JG): Yeah, it's a fun story to retell. It's so personal to me, to literally think back to when I was 18 years old and looking at about, and looking at some of the earlier works to working with him personally.
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW WITH DEAN SOBEL

This interview was conducted on November 19, 2009. Each speaker’s name appears once, and is then substituted by initials.

Dean Sobel (DS): I may be more useful in the non-Clyfford Still side of things. But at the same time with the Clyfford Still project, you know, it’s really all quite novel. The collection has never been seen, literally, by myself included, all of it. It’s never been publicly shown. It’s the vast majority of all the art he made, so just in terms of ‘how do we show Clyfford Still?’ is a different question because it’s all a discovery, basically, in that regard. But, we did do an exhibition of twelve paintings, which was pretty big. You know, twelve paintings, with you know both, half of them were murals, er, not murals – the large scale works…Where we tested some things, and we did present them and learn certain things from an exhibition, and I guess interpretive and other standpoints. And then I modeled works from the collection to sort of see how it fits in our spaces, and some architectural decisions were based on that. But that maybe, with one exception of something else I can mention, that’s sort of the total extent of the Clyfford Still Museum. And then we can go back, and we can talk about any number of those things in a little more detail, or we can talk about, you know, my career as a curator (laughter) and a director, yeah. Which is, you know
Alan Hollis (AH): Can we do all of the above?

(DS): Yeah, So however I might, yeah. The Still Museum is just so strange because, you
know, we’re not even open. We don’t even have a building. We don’t even own the art
yet, so it’s a little weird.

(AH): That’s why I’m looking at different people in completely different situations.
Other people I’ve talked to so far are Rose Frederick, who did the Masterpieces of
Colorado show, the traveling exhibition. And then I just talked to Jennifer Garner at the
CVA (Center for Visual Art) about the Christo and Jeanne-Claude show. I’m probably
going to try to talk to more people yet. I’m not 100 per cent sure who, and what. But,
the idea is, while I can’t talk to 100 people, I probably can’t even talk to ten, try to get as
much variety in where people are coming from to get to exhibition planning.

(DS): And what do you mean by exhibition planning? Like, the germ of an
idea…through the opening of the exhibition sort of?

(AH): And then also afterwards, evaluation. You know, whether it’s something that you
included in the planning of it, or, you know, things, something that might have just
occurred to you after. What did you learn from the exhibitions, things like that.

(DS): Yeah, yeah, so should we talk just from the Clyfford Still Museum perspective?

(AH): That’s in particular what I’m interested in, and of course the ‘Clyfford Still
Unveiled’ show.

(DS): Yeah, ‘cause I think there were some things that may… and again not, you know
it’s interesting for exhibitions there are like thirty different disciplines, you know, from
packing and crating, and budgeting, and, you know, lighting. And I mean there’s, so I’m
not entirely sure what perspectives you want. But, I mean, one of the things that
immediately come to mind, or two things actually, but with the art of Clyfford Still it, I
don’t want to say forced me, but it started to raise questions more so then, and I was a
Contemporary Art curator, some Modern Art, but mostly Contemporary Art, and again in
that respect mostly the artist is alive. So you have the ability to stand there in the room
and say, ‘should we try this?’ or, you know, talk on the phone and ‘how should we deal
with that?’ and. But in the terms of the Clyfford Still exhibition, it started to become, and
even (taps on a museum floor plan posted on the wall) with the planning…you know this
is basically a permanent exhibition of Clyfford Still. I mean it’s almost the Clyfford Still
Museum has some relevance because it’s basically like a permanent exhibition. You
know, although we’ll change it around it’s always going to be like this, more or less.
And at first the question of, what was, how did they understand or expect their work to be
seen, the painters, mostly painters. What are the ideal conditions to look at these pictures
under? And I think for the Abstract Expressionists, Still included, you know, this would
be the forties and the fifties, that the galleries, the studios they showed in…they made the
paintings in were rather domestic-scaled. Eventually they got to barns and, you know,
bigger studios and then…

(AH): Right, but when they’re just starting off they don’t have resources to… a large
studio…

(DS): Like artists’ studios to an artist working in the thirties and forties when their work
was getting formulated was easel painting. So, you know, you just had to have a space to
paint paintings that big (raises arms in the air) and have places to stack ‘em up. Where
obviously when they wanted to start expanding their scale. So where they made it, and
then their, interestingly, their art galleries, the two exhibition spaces that launched
Abstract Expressionism would have been the Art of the Century Gallery, run by Peggy Guggenheim, and then the Betty Parsons Gallery, both of which were on, I think 57th St. in New York, they’re still there. And they’re these walk-up spaces that, you know, have eight- or nine-foot ceiling heights. And, you know, not vast gallery spaces. And even if you look at the early incarnations of the Museum of Modern Art or the Museum of Nonobjective Art, which became the Guggenheim, they were all in like penthouses. You know, domestic-like spaces. And so for better or worse, that’s…and there are images…I think I may have some here…I don’t know if this is relevant to you… but there’s a very interesting chapter on Pollack (opens Art and the Power of Placement)

(AH): I’ve got that book.

(DS): Do you know this book?

(AH): One of my committee members suggested it to me.

(DS): That when Still and Pollack and Rothko and these others began showing their work…and taking the dripping paintings by Pollack as an example, when he first developed them and then showed them publicly, is, they were cheek-to-jowl. They were literally floor-to-ceiling, wall-to-wall. This is a view of the Betty Parsons Gallery. So, you know, look at for example how tight this painting is in terms of today’s standards.

(AH): Yeah, you don’t even hang it on the wall, you just lean it against the wall.

(DS): Yeah, yeah. But, you know, Pollack knew he was showing these paintings in this space. And so, here’s another one, another view. But this one, literally is, you know, the entire wall surface. And oftentimes in paintings, when I was giving, you know, the shorthand version of installing paintings, you want…to estimate how much space you to need to hang a painting, you take the width of the painting, double it, and assume fifty
percent on each side. And it sort of gives you a good sense of what you need to have a painting sort of float nicely on a wall. This goes very much against that. And so in thinking about, and the reason I’m bringing all this up, is that these were very very very large canvases, that they were putting in, by today’s standards, relatively small rooms, publicly, even museums. The Museum of Modern Art was, the first building wasn’t that much bigger either. That there was some understanding that these paintings would be an environment, they would surround the viewer, and they would be what you see in the experience of looking at art. Fast-forward now to places like the Hamilton Building and Frank Gehry and all that. Well that’s even more kind-of iconic architecture, but the vast spaces that we kind-of put these big paintings in now, many times, because they’re for Contemporary Art which does require, you know, scales bigger than this, it changes your whole understanding of how art relates to its place. That’s what this whole book is about. And I think that’s one of the things we, I learned, and even had some trouble. It was at the (Denver) Art Museum, our little show, and the designers there, you know, were sort of saying, ‘why are you putting that big painting in this little room?’ (laughter). I was like, ‘this is why!’ There was actually a kind of, hopefully, a dramatic moment when the…in Still’s work the paintings get larger and our spaces actually get larger to accommodate that…

(AH): Chronologically?

(DS): Generally, yeah, generally. In fact almost entirely. And that would be the same for this generation. But, even more dramatically, the scale of the forties was quite, is large, but not the big murals like these of the fifties in Still’s work and in Pollack’s work too. So, there was this kind of moment of turning a corner, and the largest painting in the
exhibition is nine by thirteen feet. Kind of, you know, almost surprised you, that you’d been conditioned under a certain kind of, not only imagery, but then, the scale was sort of crescendo-ing and then there was this very dramatic scale shift that you didn’t expect as you turned the corner. And that was all kind of intentional and made me realize… and Rothko and others have talked about this. Rothko has remarked about, you know, he wants you to know what its like to be in the picture, like what it was like when I made, you know, being that close. And so that kind of compression and moving you in closer in ways that. And that’s what this story of Pollack’s work starts to get into is, he had a retrospective at the Pompidou and these things were literally lost. But you know, I mean, like, look at all the air around these things, and the sense of the work almost starts to…as Still actually described it, it sort of dots the walls…not quite the intention, I think. (AH): That’s funny because what, I think, most people, I know myself, are used to. That’s the way I’m used to experiencing even gigantic canvases, is on walls that are proportionately even more gigantic. (DS): It’s almost like kicking a ball down the field. Like, the artists kept making their paintings bigger, and so architects kept making the spaces bigger, and you almost get a sense from the grave, this generation would be saying, ‘No, no! Don’t keep making the spaces bigger, that’s the whole point!’ (laughter). You know, it’s almost like at a certain moment now there’s no ideal place to see these pictures…not actually true. And because I think, museums are also now meant to be so flexible. So, you know, we’re putting in exhibition spaces, little objects in spaces that were really meant for big paintings. Because you have to, it’s the least common denominator. You have to design to the biggest thing. The freight elevator has to be in for the biggest thing, the spaces you put
for exhibition have to be accommodating for the biggest and brightest things, and if you want to put small dark things, you’re kind of screwed. Or it’s the exhibition designer’s challenge. You gotta, you know, figure out how do we make that space run into where that space. Start putting in walls and lowering ceilings. If you can afford drop ceilings or scrims, you know to make it, you know. Because the Hamilton Building and a lot of museums I’ve been in - thirty-foot ceiling heights. It’s ridiculous.

(AH): So is this, is that a factor in the design of the Clyfford Still Museum?

(DS): Yes, and so, and so the relevance here is that since the Clyffrod Still Museum can only show the art of Clyfford Still, and we know everything about the scale and more or less the imagery of those, and we know that he doesn’t have a video projection he made in 1972 (laughter) lurking in the closet! Or a…he did make three small sculptures, but you know, we know what those objects are, so let’s design spaces that are for those objects. Unlike most art museums, where you have to anticipate sooner or later something else will be in these rooms. And particularly, you know, I think with technologies now, too, or you know, artists are always doing different things. I know a contemporary artist, really interesting important one, you know, who makes really diminutive, anti-monumental we call it, you know, very small things. And he loves the notion of it getting lost in spaces. But, you know, generally, art got bigger after the second World War. I can only speak to visual art, mostly.

(AH): You were talking about the small paintings it make me think of, I don’t know if you’re familiar with Gene Davis?

(DS): Oh yeah, sure.
(AH): You know, he had gigantic canvases, he also made, I don’t remember what he called them, but they were like, one by two inch tiny, tiny paintings.

(DS): Yeah.

(AH): He put the whole, you know, he could put thirty of them in a suitcase, take it on an airplane and carry a whole exhibition with him.

(DS): Yeah, Barnett Newman would make these paintings that were, you know, very typical for that generation. Vertically like six feet, but then the canvas was stretched only to like, three inches, so there were these little… but the sense of putting those on large walls was part of the point too, is that there was this kind of compression of the imagery that is part of the interest there too, but. This is the Pompidou that I think drives this author’s point home. Yeah, this was the Pompidou. You know, in my world you drop walls. It’s like an airplane hanger, you know? You drop walls to make those spaces more intimate. This basically, you walk into a room and everything is before you (still discussing the Pompidou photos). There’s like no reveal or discovery. It’s…not the way I’d want to experience his, Pollack’s art. Sort of my… And there’s a little bit of floating walls here, but it’s, I think the point you see in this photograph quite clearly. And so, yes, you know, the materials, the day lighting, or the way we light, which in our case would be a lot of daylight, the proportions of the room which would be the ceiling heights, and the, you know, other lineal proportions…

(AH): Is that daylight, is that going to, cause conservations issues?

(DS): Not really. Things have gotten so sophisticated, that the lighting engineers, because they’re really, you know, engineers, have many many many good ways to reduce the quantity of the daylight that actually comes in. By oftentimes just bouncing it, and
then filtering it, you know. You take it and then you sculpt it, basically. And then the quality of that light, removing the ultraviolet and other things. So generally speaking it would be like having, although incandescent lights are not the best for artworks either, but over the years they’ve gotten pretty…and our building certainly it’s gotten pretty sophisticated. And it’s never direct, you know, you’re always bouncing it. In fact our building, I don’t have any elevations nearby, but a lot of, above the gallery realm there’s another realm that’s really about bouncing that light around and letting it filter down. And so above the hanging realm there’s this almost kind of like celestial-lit sky if you will. But never, you know, that much light coming in. And even other things we’re doing, which are kind of novel, is, if we know that in day lighting there’s really really bright days and sort of days and sort of seasons and really dark days, we’re actually banking our daylight. So in other words, museums, it’s interesting museums are a funny, funny bunch. But, you know, they turn the lights on for the cleaning crew, and all the art is illuminated now, which is, you know, taking some toll on those paintings, microscopically, very little. But for example what we will do, not that we don’t use a cleaning crew, but we actually will have black-out shades that are automated that will open, like just before the museum or whatever time we set it at. So in other words the paintings are actually in dark longer because we don’t let the light in. And so we’re banking those hours if you will. And then in certain cases we might be bringing more light in than what is traditional, but in other cases these paintings will be in dark more than what they’re used to. So we’re being a little more creative, I think, and certainly taking this concept and being more flexible with it. You know, the fact that a painting…the other problem, if you go into a lot of museums, the painting, all the works
are lit under the same conditions, the same intensity every day. Twenty foot-candles, you know, and every painting is that way. And with day lighting, we have day lighting (taps floor plan posted on wall) in every, well the early spaces and there’s a work on paper space we don’t, but we’ve got it coming from different angles, and on different days of the year the paintings will look different. And that’s great, I mean that’s the whole nature of art like this, is that subtle changes in, you know, like Warhols wouldn’t benefit from changing light conditions, Clyfford Stills will, definitely.

(AH): It will give you a different experience.

(DS): Absolutely, yeah. Both the paintings and then just the experience of the rooms. And sometimes you have to let your eyes adjust, it’ll be a little darker. Certain times of the day. You’ll see a cloud go over sometimes. And it’ll change right before you. But I don’t think that’s a bad thing. So that’s a lot of, you know, in terms of the Still, or at least from the curatorial perspective, you know, some of the interpretative and educational points that you were talking about. But that’s much of what I have to say about what we’re doing at this museum. You should compare it to what others are doing.

(AH): Well everybody’s got a different situation.

(DS): The Hamilton Building would be a good one too, you know, just the unusual nature of those spaces, and the crowds that they get, you know, which is always an issue too. I mean its never a…if you do an exhibition that is going to be hugely attended you have to accommodate for the crowds, bigger doorways, you know, bigger volumes of people. That’s maybe an argument for this (points to book) but I don’t think you need anything quite that…you know, they’re not going to stack up that far away from the painting. But
you know this is a museum that also anticipates not being, you know, 10,000 people a day. The Art Museum has had 10,000 people a day.

(AH): So if we could, I’d like to talk a little bit more in depth about the specific preview exhibition, ‘Clyfford Still Unveiled.’ That was the only preview that has happened and that will happen before the museum opens?

(DS): I think it’s pretty safe it will. It was the only one to that point, I think that’s the only one until the opening, because we’re getting so close to our opening now.

(AH): So, how did, can you tell me about how the idea of doing a preview show at the Denver Art Museum, how that began? And, did you ever consider a different space?

(DS): It began, a couple things: it was the only place in town we thought we could do it, because it had to have the security appropriate to the work, and then scale. You know, we knew we wanted to show some big paintings. In fact we couldn’t show it in, or it wouldn’t, we would have had to make adjustments to show it in the so-called ‘old’ building, the (Gio) Ponti building because the freight elevator didn’t accommodate the big paintings. We are neighbors with the Denver Art Museum and they’ve provided consulting support, and we’re good professional friends and neighbors so it seemed logical for that reason too. But I would say there’s no other venue in town that could have taken it, you know, strangely, you know, given the scale of the work and the humidity and temperature requirements and the security. That was the only place we could do it. It was an attempt to, you know, counter the issue of ‘who is Clyfford Still?’ in Denver. You know, I think it wasn’t a project that we knew would be the reason people fly in from outside of the city. But it was apparent to us, you know, midway through our project that it’s, people really need to see these paintings, because through
that brochure which we didn’t even have at that point, or me throwing out Xeroxes of these paintings saying, ‘Oh it’s gonna be so, you know, great!” And it worked. There is something about Still’s work, I mean obviously all art is better in person, but there’s something about Still’s work – the surface, the scale, the touch, that, you know, we needed to expose people to. So that was a lot of the impetus to it. And I think that worked. I think it made a big difference in Denver. Because you know, when the Art Museum’s building had just opened, we opened maybe a year after their building opened, less than a year perhaps. So a lot of people saw it. I forget the exact number, like 225,000 people went in just our show, not the Denver Art Museum. You know, it changed, I think, a lot of what people thought about our project, having been able to see those paintings.

(AH): Do you have any, or how much control did you have over the scheduling of it?

(DS): Not much, but it wasn’t a problem. The Art Museum, you know, it wasn’t a problem. We weren’t the mother ship, so they had another show scheduled. We didn’t have a lot of control but it worked fine for us. We were pretty flexible!

(AH): It was originally scheduled for, to be just a couple months, and then it actually got extended far beyond that…

(DS): A couple times, yeah. I can’t, I don’t remember, I could go back and look, but it got extended at least twice.

(AH): For a total of about eighteen months?

(DS): It was up for almost eighteen months, yeah. I wanna say July to January, yeah.

(AH): Was that, do you know, could you speak to how that ended up happening?
(DS): I am trying to think, I think the Art Museum was perfect, they didn’t have a strong, we didn’t have strong pressure to take it out of there. So it was like, ‘Sure, you wanna extend it, you know, this show we can move to another one or we’ve got nothing else going in that new space.’ So I think it was more…trying to think what the…I think also it was so successful. ‘Can we leave it up longer?’ ‘Sure!’ You know, it was about the nature of the discussion.

(AH): Which of course is also a great publicity for Clyfford Still Museum.

(DS): Yeah, I can’t remember if there were other, like project things, like if we were announcing our schematic design and we said ‘Can we keep it up that long?’ I think it was, it was just so successful for both that we just kept extending it. And then ultimately there was a show that the Art Museum had to put in there and then that was the kibosh. I think we would have left it up. We switched it around once a little bit because the works on paper had to be rotated. Then we added a painting midway through. But no, I think we’d be happy to have those paintings there right now still, frankly. Or ones like them.

(AH): I know that a lot of the work is still locked up in storage…

(DS): Yeah, all of it is.

(AH): So, would, and I know that some of them were taken out to do testing for conservation. Were the works that were in this exhibition part of that group that had the conservation work done?

(DS): Yes.

(AH): Or how did you originally come up with this group?

(DS): It had to do with what was…my memory is that we didn’t have a long lead time. And so much of the collection was rolled, although we did stretch some paintings…they
were paintings that already had stretchers because in some cases Still saved the stretchers. And you know, it was ‘How do you?’ – so we didn’t show anything after 1957. None of the work from the 60s and 70s, because we only had space to show maybe a dozen or so. So it was typical curatorial consideration. ‘How do you tell a story in this amount of space?’ There is so much art that it wasn’t a problem, you know, making those selections based on conservation. There are just so many ways we could have done it. And then when we rotated some things, that became clear too. Is what, this painting is trying to say, there’s another painting like it, that maybe looked very different that’s saying at least from a content standpoint, what…there’s so much depth in this collection. You know, we’ve got quite, what’s the baseball metaphor on the bench? The bullpen! But there was an attempt to tell a story too. In those twelve paintings there were some, and I curated, there were some very clear points I wanted to get across: an iconic development, and the breakthrough moment, and the classic kind-of, you know, Still finding his kind-of classic image. So it wasn’t hard. I didn’t think it was hard. But there was, I would like to think I gave it some deep thought. And then just living with them, you know, you learn from just living with those paintings. There was under-drawing in one of the paintings that I never realized until the painting was there, everybody looking at it…(AH): Until it was up on the wall?

(DS): Yeah, which tells us that, again, there’s nothing spontaneous about what these guys did. They were carefully deliberate compositions, just like all great art. But it was fun to have that easily seeable in gallery talks and whatnot because it then gave you the basis to talk about, and debasing the myth of, you know, like Pollack, being this kind of drunken wild man, like Van Gogh-ian, which isn’t even right about Van Gogh, you know, that
kind-of mythic, spastic artist, you know, creating these masterpieces when in fact it was under very controlled, deliberate. Nothing in those paintings is not carefully thought out. Just like it would be in a Dutch painting. The same would apply to all these artists, you know, it’s not, it’s not the myth, I think, of abstract art. You know, this creative impulse that results in, this, you know, and that’s not the way it works at all. At least not for this generation.

(AH): So, earlier you were talking about how, you know, of course there are so many disciplines that go into planning for an exhibition, and I’m kind-of going on the assumption that your role, among other things, was to oversee the whole process and make sure that everything is moving along…

(DS): Yes (laughs), yes.

(AH): Probably had other roles in there too. And so, that’s kind-of the direction that I’m going in with my whole research is, X,Y, and Z have to be accomplished and different people have those tasks, but someone might be a project manager to keep everything on task. I was just wondering if you could just kind-of go into more depth about some of the things that jump into your mind about your memories of the exhibition, the different things…

(DS): You know what, again, I don’t know if the Still project is the ideal. You might, as I’m hearing you talk there’s a couple things that do come to mind. One is the way the Denver Art Museum conceived, decided on, developed, presented, and evaluated exhibitions. And I don’t know if you know this, but they were and still are, although this may be changing because they have a new director that’s about to take the reigns, but they were at the forefront of, almost in the first 100 years of American art museums I
wanna say, it was very curatorial centered. You know, the research, the scholarly, the art historical. And the art museum, for better or worse, took a kind-of team approach, where from the outset, curatorial was part of a team that included marketing, fundraising, exhibition design, education. I think those would be the five. And all the decisions that I mentioned were sort of done with all of those perspectives in mind. And one of the things that you might be interested in, if this is relative to what you’re doing, I had access to them. We’ve done focus groups for Still Museum. But they have done some focus groups that are recorded because you wanna be able to refer back to them and understand ‘Did he really say that?!’ But there was one in particular for a Matisse exhibition that I think from, that surprised me, but from the Denver Art Museum’s perspective too, I think they had already intended to do this Matisse exhibition so that team had already done that. And then when they started focus grouping it, you know, it changed everyone’s minds in terms of what the title was going to be, the fact that no one knew who the hell Matisse is, he’s one of the great 20th century artists, and that once they showed Matisse’s art to this group they didn’t like it. It was the quintessential, you know, if you know Matisse’s work it’s, you know, blue faces and red walls, and you know, it’s like, ‘This isn’t art! It’s crazy!’ And they at the Denver Art Museum are very methodical and very strategic, and very audience-centered. Instead of cramming it down the throats of the audience, what art museums did for the first 100 years. ‘This is the way we’re gonna do it. You didn’t like it? Oh, too bad!’ or ‘Surprised us!’ But you know, it was, as you would hope, like launching a product. They tested it to death, including titles and how they exhibition design actually played out. You know, sometimes an art historical one isn’t comprehensible. You know, so sometimes thematic or other ways you install the
art. You might be well served talking to people at the Denver Art Museum. ‘Cause I think that’s where the meat of it is, the whole decentralization of the curatorial. The curator as the centerpiece has been slowly changing I think in art museums, the last ten or fifteen years.

(AH): It’s kind of like another myth that needs to be…

(DS): Well by the same point I don’t know that it’s…I mean, you know, if we let the masses determine things we have McDonald’s and bad TV shows. But that’s the danger, is, you know, what does drive what we show and how we do it. Or frankly, I don’t know if we would go to the masses and say, ‘Who are your favorite artists? And that’s who we’re gonna show.’ ‘Cause it would be Norman Rockwell and Thomas Kinkade. So museums, there is an inherent elitism in art. Probably in opera and theater and, you know, is that there is great art, and there is really really good art, and there is mediocre art, and there is marginal art, and there is bad art, and there is stuff that people may think is art that isn’t art. I’d argue that, I could point, you could too, to things that are framed and hand painted that I don’t even think are art. (laughter)

(AH): That makes me think of something that Rose Fredrick said, which was that there is a difference between great art and great illustrators.

(DS): Yes, yes, like Norman Rockwell.

(AH): You can be technically gifted and, you know, execute things that are technically perfect or beautiful, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that you’re telling a story, or you have a message to convey, or a real distinct point of view.

(DS): Yeah. But then at the same time, museums have to understand that they have to adjust their expectations accordingly. You know, that there are great, great, great artists
that appeal to a small segment of the museum-going public and the museum going public is a small segment of the general public, as hopefully you know. I mean look at Colorado…although the NEA likes to spew these statistics about more people attended cultural events than sporting events which could be true, must be true, but, you know, somehow I think culturals are still not succeeding. (laughter)

(AH): I think it’s interesting…

(DS): I don’t see 80,000 people lining up at the art museum every Sunday like they do for the Denver Broncos.

(AH): So, I think, I like the idea that you recommended going to the Denver Art Museum and seeing how they do things, more of a team perspective. But at the same time I’m really curious in your experience, so far, having done just one Still exhibition looking to the future of what’s going to be in the museum since it’s only going to be Still’s work. You, there’s obviously different things you can do, different ways you can present it, different information you can put on wall panels. But, if someone visits the museum doesn’t like his work you can’t then say ‘Oh, maybe we’ll put something else up.’ So I’m wondering if you have any thoughts about how you tackle that issue because you have just one artist to show.

(DS): Yes. And we’ve done focus groups, we have the benefit of the exhibition, you know, we talk about the project a lot. And so I think that we know already, I mean, a couple of things. One would be the biography and the story of Clyfford Still is compelling. And so, some people who are not predisposed to art, or modern art, or abstract art, or whatever you wanna call Clyfford Still’s art, do seem to connect with his belief in himself, his independence, his sticking to his guns, and his intense belief in the
power of art. And then that, we’ve been told, does have relevance to people’s lives and what they do and care about, you know. So there’s a connection there. I think Still’s art mirrors the broader history of 20th century art. So we’ll tell the story of American art, and while we’re telling that story you obviously have to understand what was going on elsewhere in the world, so we’ll be talking about the broader, mostly European, but global perspective. You can then start to use Clyfford Still’s work as hopefully a greater understanding and explanation of what we mean by Abstract Art, and what is Abstract Art, and what are we seeing in those paintings, and what is intended in an abstract painting that is not maybe capable of presenting in a realistic work. There’s lots of socio-cultural connections, thankfully, with Still, the Depression, the second World War, the relevance against that background is significant. The Cold War and how his colleagues got packaged up as part of the Cold War in the fifties. Still’s work, particularly in opposition to, you know, the rising consumerist superficiality of the sixties and seventies. He dies in 1980, thankfully, I don’t think he would have been to happy by what he see in the eighties and nineties and beyond. (laughter) So you know there’s lots of, those are the things we’re thinking about.

(AH): You said, I don’t know how strict this rule is, but you can’t show other people’s art at the museum.

(DS): In the original. Yeah, so if we wanna show a Pollack it’s gotta be in some sort of reproductive way, hand out a xerox or put it on an i-phone. But yeah, we, those walls are for Clyfford Still’s art.

(AH): I was just curious about, in thinking about future programming, maybe five years from now, showing artists that influenced him or artists that he influenced.
(DS): It would have to be done at the Denver Art Museum. Again, our close neighbor. They will always by choice, or by virtue of them being there, put Still in context with the large art history. So the Art Museum can do that and will do that. It’s why we chose that site, so that Still isn’t in this vacuum in the middle of, you know, a field in the airport. It’s always contextualized in the history of art. The library is right next door too, so there’s the ability to think of him in the larger humanities. And then there’s a lot of stories, sub-stories, sub-themes, sub-questions in that collection itself. You know, so there’ll always be, and we have spaces for it too that will break chronology and say look at this aspect of Still. Although I guess eventually we’ll start to run out of ideas, but you know, by that point I think it’ll be a new generation and you just start again. I don’t know how this will play, but there are a number of things that come to mind that we would want to look at in a more focused way in Still’s work. A number of, even if it’s six or eight paintings. Although I can see an example where we clear the whole place out and we’ll show just, you know, we’ll have an exhibition of a very focused part of Still, but I don’t think we’d do that for a while because, you know, you wanna be able to get this broad understanding of Still. So maybe that’s in the second decade. Probably we’ll always have some sort of little highlights of the chronology, but I think there’s a time where we’ll just take the whole collection down and put up just drawings. Drawing retrospective. You know, show 200 drawings in 10,000 square feet or something. I’m not so worried, I mean, worry is not the right word. I’m starting to feel more and more like other single-artist museums have just become general art museums. That they are, for good reason, forced by budget pressures and other pressures, and the fact that they don’t have that entire life’s body of work like we do, at other single-artist museums.
That, I think if you go the Andy Warhol Museum that’s really what you wanna see, or the Georgia O’Keefe Museum, or the Picasso Museum. You know, when you come to a Clyfford Still Museum I don’t know that you should be concerning yourself with seeing the whole history of 20th century art. (laughter) You’d be surprised how many single-artist museums, the Van Gogh Museum does it. They have the most marquee name, and they get 20 million, they get a lot of millions of visitors. It’s Van Gogh! And they struggle with this issue. Mostly for the local audience. The tourists come to see Van Gogh. It’s the people who live in Amsterdam, and they’ve seen those Van Goghs, ‘Why am I going to go back to the Van Gogh Museum?’ So they do all these crazy theme shows, and other 19th century artists. Weird. And retrospectives of other 19th century artists. And I know why they do it, and I would probably do it to, but we can’t so, you know.

(AH): Because that’s part of the will.

(DS): Yeah, a condition of the gift.

(AH): It seems like, while that is definitely a restriction, by definition, it almost has the opposite effect. Because you have less of those other concerns. It’s just not an option. (DS): Exactly, I think if we were able to do it, then suddenly you have all those same…you know I think the reason a lot of single-artist museums have become so big is because they’ve dropped in a whole changing exhibition department that has to be funded and supported. Where, we will show our collections is pretty much all we’ll do. I mean, ‘pretty much’ all we’ll do. We’ll do other research and…that limits us, but I say that in a positive way. I like being limited. I like that we can’t have a food service, because those
are hard to run in museums. Yeah, so I sort of like the way we have been. The fact that we’re painted in a corner in some respects is, I think, a good thing.

(AH): And if you have, in any situation in life, if you have too many choices you almost can’t make a decision.

(DS): Correct. Especially from a funding perspective. And you have to fund all that stuff. It’s hard enough funding just, you know, your core program, then you gotta fund all the other stuff. So I mean, it’s not…it may be just sour grapes, but I, and we know this from the outset. It’s not like we’re gonna discover, ‘Oh my God, it said we can’t…’ So we’re planning accordingly.

(AH): Will you ever consider doing traveling shows of his work?

(DS): That’s possible, but the, you know, the way we do that would have to be quite consistent with the terms of his bequest. You know the idea that Still believed his art should be seen without the distraction of other artists. And you know, the way he gave away bodies of his work. You may know in Buffalo at the Albright-Knox and at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The Met has a group, the Hirshhorn has a group, they’re always in rooms by themselves. So we might consider that under certain circumstances.

(AH): I was just thinking of, just to get more name recognition for him.

(DS): Well that’d be another reason, yeah, that’d be another reason. But probably, that would be…Still, you know, in the history of art, is rather well-known even though he did everything to get himself written out of history. That may be more for other global perspectives…in Soviet, former Soviet Union, or China, or…

(AH): Yeah, isn’t
(DS): The Middle East…

(AH): another part of a traveling show is so that people who couldn’t come here can still get to see the work?

(DS): Exactly. But his work is quite ensconced in museum collections in the United States. I mean not as much as others, he’s well…the 6 percent that’s not coming to Denver is pretty nicely dispersed in public collections. So Still is, I always say, hidden in plain sight. Everyone sort of says, ‘Oh yeah, whatever happened to Clyfford Still?’ You know, he’s got a room, there’s been a room of his paintings, ten paintings at the Met for 25 years.

(AH): Just wondering if you could expand a little bit more about the reasoning for doing the show at the Denver Art Museum, and if you had hopes or goals of public perception ahead of time, and how you feel, if that was successful?

(DS): Well, what we didn’t touch on is certainly fundraising. You know, if you’re trying to raise money for a museum the ability to take people over there and have them fall in love with the art, the ‘weak at the knees’ we call it here. We didn’t touch on certainly that. But I think particularly, given the biography of Still where he drops out of the art world so early, he hoards his art, he dies, the estate doesn’t do anything and just locks it all up and it just, you know, goes to a slow simmer, if that. It was vital to start to reveal that before the museum opens and it was vital that we actually bring a small number of works and show people that’s what it’s gonna be like. Now think of that in ten rooms, you know, and it was really to make up for lost time. Because his work isn’t, we probably wouldn’t have had to do that for…I think in all cases you’d want to do it but it was more compelling in our case.
(AH): Do you have a sense of people’s reactions to the show?

(DS): We did surveys. Yes, so the value...we did surveys, you know, sometimes quantitative, but even more subjective in that when I started, well let’s even take before the exhibition, just as a very personal example, you know. I meet someone, ‘Hi, what do you do?’ ‘I work for the Clyfford Still Museum’ and they go, ‘What the hell is that?’ And then after, a year and a half later, ‘I work for the Clyfford Still Museum’ ‘Oh! I saw that show at the Denver Art Museum!’ or ‘Oh, I know what that is!’ ‘Oh, is that the guy I saw at the art museum?’ That clearly something happened in that year and a half that wasn’t just the show, you know, we’ve got banners and our site has a big sign, the newspaper, local and nationally have been good. But after that year and a half, but I think a lot of it had to do with that show. You know, probably, I don’t know, it, I don’t have to explain what I do quite as much anymore, as a result of that. And thankfully because the Art Museum is so highly attended, you know, it was something a lot of people saw. Over the course of a year and a half. I think a lot of people who live in the suburbs or in Kansas who only come to Denver once a year to see a show and go the art museum and have a nice restaurant meal. And the fact that the show was up for that length of time I think we got a lot of people who just go once a year. Or people who don’t like to, you know, it’s hard for us maybe, but there are people that are afraid of downtown. We heard that in our focus groups. Afraid to come to downtown to Denver ‘cause they’re gonna get shot, they don’t know where to park. They, you know, it’s crime, you know, so people don’t like to come, to go to art museums at all. So maybe when they do it they do it on a bright, sunny day and they have a police escort. I don’t know. You know, but if you did it for twelve weeks like most shows you wouldn’t have
hit much of a, you know, you wouldn’t have had that same. And our show had, during
the show we unveiled our design, we put the model in that exhibition so it started to build
and change too. So people who were coming back twice or three times started to see a
model of the building, could have maybe heard the architect speak once or twice. Yeah,
it was nice to have it up a long time.

(AH): And then changes did occur over that time. You touched on, very briefly, talking
about fundraising. Just wondering if you have any quick thoughts about how the
budgeting process worked for this. Was it all the responsibility of Clyfford Still
Museum?

(DS): Yes.

(AH): Or did the Denver Art Museum contribute?

(DS): No, it was, maybe to your broader field, you know, fundraising is fundraising, but
so much has changed in the funding environment too that corporate sponsorship has
diminished substantially, not just because of the economy, but also changing in terms of
what corporations like to sponsor. So art museums generally don’t have the same reach,
take yourself out of New York because New York is kind of a strange exception, but
don’t have the same reach as zoos, nature and science museums, children’s museums.
The art museums, in some ways, can play up they, you know, a BMW dealership might
be more interested in sponsoring something at an art museum than a zoo. But at the same
time, art museums have gotten very good at reaching out broadly to their communities. I
think the other point is that funding now, in my experience, and why the Clyfford Still
Museum has its challenges in that we’re a very focused, boutique-like institution. You
know, we’re not a museum that is about the general populace of Denver. As much as
we’d like to position that way, I think art museums have that difficulty, let alone modern art museums, let alone Clyfford Still Museum. So, I think it’s always, you know, just because it’s a good idea doesn’t mean funding pours in. And even, oftentimes people in decision-making powers may wish they could fund it but in fact their guidelines are about something that has a broader reach in the community. With that dollar they want to reach as many people, usually if they’re giving money to support something it’s to not necessarily to support the wealthy and capable. It’s a reach, and to bring your programs to people who otherwise wouldn’t see this stuff. ‘Cause you know, the wealthy don’t need sponsorship. So those are the considerations that are relevant to the Still, but relevant to anything in need, whether it’s a zoo or children’s museum. It’s in some cases the inherent disconnect. And then in some cases, you know, how do we develop programs that will be attractive to funders? That’s what it boils down to. How do we either change what we do, or talk about what we do, or add to what we do that is attractive to funders?

(AH): It’s a big challenge.

(DS): Huge. That’s a whole semester. That’s a lifetime.

(AH): I guess we can kind of wrap things up.

(DS): You can call me too, if you have things you wanna touch on a little more, or forgot about.

(AH): Is there anything else that you’d like to address or things you think I should be aware of?

(DS): You know, we’re not too far along yet. But all the other components of exhibition design and content and delivery we didn’t touch on, but there are certain aspects of the
Clyfford Still Museum where we know we don’t want a video monitor and a painting competing with each other. I walked into a museum a year or two ago, and being familiar with contemporary art where video either playing on a screen or projected, is very commonplace. And I recently had an experience of going into a museum and wasn’t sure if it was an artwork or an education device. ‘Cause they put it right in the gallery, and it’s like, ‘I don’t know if this is art or not.’ I’m not sure what I’m looking at. And I think in a Clyfford Still Museum, and we’ve intentionally, even in our building design, have the feeling that we want to preserve the spaces for viewing, and are mostly but not entirely different from the places of other learning. Now, I think there are, and we’ve done a lot of work here in terms of concepts and guidelines, and you know, feeling that in all cases you want to be able to opt out of it. So if it’s blaring in a gallery, you can’t opt out of it because you’re hearing it whether you want to hear it or not. But you, at the entrance, may decide not to get that little wireless headset self-guided tour, you can opt out of that. ‘Nope, I don’t wanna do that, I wanna go experience these paintings on my own.’ And I think a lot of people do want to do that. They don’t want to be lectured to and told what to think or see, they just want to have an experience. So that’s maybe something that, you know, is a whole ‘nother issue of, what…and I think there’s one extreme where the paintings speak for themselves. You don’t need to say anything else. I think that’s wrong. But, you know, there’s that extreme of just the paintings, you flick on the lights, and people come in, and they’re on their own. And then there’s the absolute other extreme, where everything’s explained, disseminated, interpreted, downloaded, you know, and that’s kind of not so good because then I think people don’t think for themselves, literally. And then there’s the challenge of what do you tell people?
You know, what do they…? My favorite story is, there was a long text panel next to a painting of a Colonial American painter, so it was 17th century or something. And at that point there were certain conventions of portraiture, and I remember someone read that whole panel, and they looked at the painting and they said, ‘I still don’t understand why his head is so big.’ You know, stylistic conventions. But that’s the one thing this person wanted to know, and it didn’t even tell him that in the paragraph and a half that was put, you know. So it’s the question of, what do people really need or want? And I think there’s a lot of data, there’s many, many people you can talk to, there’s books, and there’s whole research firms that do this for art museums and other museums. But that’s something you may wanna think about in your work. It’s a whole ‘nother thesis.

(AH): Okay. Well, thank you, this has been fantastic.

(DS): Sure, again, don’t hesitate if you need anything.