STORM KING ART CENTER

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

MARK DI SUVERO
November 17, 2017

Interviewed by David Collens and Sarah Dziedzic
Storm King Oral History 002

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Interview with Mark di Suvero	**Spacetime C.C., Queens, NY**
Conducted by David Collens and Sarah Dziedzic	**1 audio file**
November 17, 2017	**Open for research use**

Audio File 1

[Side conversation]

Collens: So we thought we'd go through the five sculptures of yours in the Storm King Art Center collection, do an overview of each one, and then talk about Storm King and the relationship with Storm King, and other aspects of the five sculptures that are in the Storm King collection.

Dziedzic: Shall we begin?

Collens: Then move on to Storm King [00:02:00] Art Center and the exhibitions, and so forth.

di Suvero: Wait a minute. There is the guy that started it—

Collens: Ted Ogden.

di Suvero: Ted Ogden. He wanted to—there's that hole. It used to be a hole where now there is the [Kenneth] Snelson (*Free Ride Home*, 1974), yes. It used to be a big valley, a dip in there, and they wanted to have—was it *Mother Peace* (1969–70)?

Collens: No, it was *Are Years What? (For Marianne Moore)* (1967).

di Suvero: *Are Years What?*, right. He wanted to have it there, and I looked at it and I thought—to build a piece that's 40 feet—at that time, I was very young, and I didn't know that pieces that size were built in factories by people that didn't know anything about [00:03:00] art. Instead, I had built it, achieved something that seemed the right size, and they were going to put it in a hole. And I said no to it. [laughs] But he had a son-in-law—

Collens: And that was Peter Stern.

di Suvero: No. Who collected David Smiths?

Dziedzic: Lewis Cabot?

Collens: —Lewis Cabot and Judy Cabot.

di Suvero: Was it Lewis Cabot who? He came into New Jersey and watched me building this piece.

Collens: Really?

di Suvero: And he was interested in some computer ink that was a special ink only for computers, so he stopped by and looked at it. But he had a great [00:04:00] collection of David Smiths.

Collens: He did, at one point, yes.

di Suvero: And are they all gone?

Collens: Gone. Every time he divorced, he'd sell a David Smith.

di Suvero: But it was such a wonderful room. He had a room only for the David Smiths, and plants, and parrots, I think it was. It was some kind of birds. And it was wonderful to have it in an apartment, that kind of—[laughs] you know, like a real vision of the world. Gone.

Collens: So that was the first time you came to Storm King, then, Mark, describing the area where the Ken Snelson sculpture presently is before Bill Rutherford did the landscaping.

di Suvero: Right.

Collens: That was the summer of 1968, after the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

di Suvero: By then, I was working in Chicago. I had worked in Brooklyn and gotten told to leave. [00:05:00] Managed to get a place in New Jersey. A very gifted man that had worked on the Manhattan Project and things like that, and he didn't really believe that I was willing to buy a dead crane and, you know, take apart steel. And then when they kicked me out of there, the guy that ran it was retired Navy, or had spent time in the Navy, and he couldn't stand that I was against the war. "Make Love Not War" on the back of my truck offended him so much that he told me I had to get out, and I went to Chicago. And Chicago—[00:06:00] you have one of the pieces that came out of Chicago, right?

Collens: I don't think so.

di Suvero: No, no.

Collens: But it was in Chicago, that summer after the Democratic National Convention, that you came to Storm King, from what I understand, and you saw Ted Ogden, and looked at the site which you described before the Snelson was there before Bill Rutherford put the hillside into that location, where it was really a deep pit.

di Suvero: Just down from the Noguchi.

Collens: Yes.

di Suvero: Yes, but I think that the whole concept of Storm King I did not understand until I came back after having the shows in France. In France, they allowed me [00:07:00] to do the all-city show in Chalon, and afterwards, because I had done it with the help of Evrard, this incredible person who really responded to art, especially structuralist, open-space type of work that allows one to be in the middle of it, and to be surrounded by the work, just very much like architecture but really based on one's own response to structure. When I came back after having had the show in Paris, I understood the capacity of landscape with the sculpture. Before, I was just totally fixed [00:08:00] only on the sculpture itself. I mean, it comes from working on the beach in the early '60s all by myself. Now, on that beach in California, very close to where I'm working, hoping to build a sculpture park, there, on that beac—now you can't even walk a dog without the dog being on a leash.

Collens: That strict.

di Suvero: They wouldn't let anybody wrassle the logs and saw them up and weld them together, but that's what I did, and they just thought I was crazy. And they were about to make it into a National Park.

Collens: And that's where *Pre-Columbian* (1965/2004) was built.

di Suvero: Yes.

Collens: Which was in the Storm King collection, starting in 1968.

di Suvero: Really? It was there, and where is it now?

Collens: It went from [00:09:00] the Storm King collection—we returned it to you when we purchased *Mon Père, Mon Père* (1973–75) and *Mother Peace* in 1981.

[Discussion of photographs]

Collens: And then you restored—the sculpture *Pre-Columbian* with Lowell [McKegney], and it's in San Francisco now, and—

di Suvero: You did not see it in Washington, D.C.

Collens: I missed.

di Suvero: That was the Dwan Gallery. She showed it there, and it became a part of the collection when—I gave it to Lowell, because he wanted it. And it was in the collection of the de Young Museum, and I saw it in Washington, D.C., and they have broken that so that the piece no longer turns. There's a very good photograph [00:10:00] of this piece —in an *ARTnews* article where the guy who was interviewing me is hanging upside down on it naked. [laughter] It's a very small photograph in the magazine, and you really need a very strong lens to see that the person hanging onto it is naked, and it was because we'd made a bet, and it was there.

This is the smaller piece, *Kinetic*, built where I did *Nova Albion*, which—I don't know where *Nova Albion* is now, the logs.

Collens: Oh, in St. Louis? No?

di Suvero: I don't—I don't know. This is where we can ask Ivana.

Collens: But [00:11:00] I hope *Pre-Columbian* got repaired after you saw it.

di Suvero: No.

Collens: No? Still no?

di Suvero: No, no. When I saw it last in Washington—it rotates around this U-joint that I put into it. It occupies a circle, because it rotates. It is the outer limits of where you can stand. Well, since they had a very narrow tape on the floor type of situation—I don't know what it's doing now. Lowell gave it to the to the de Young, right.

Collens: I've seen it at the de Young a couple years ago when I was out there.

Well, we should start, then, with *Mon Père Mon Père*, since you were talking about Evrard and [00:12:00] Chalon, which is now in the Storm King collection.

di Suvero: I like the way that you look down on it, because when you look down on it you stand with the columns around you, which are obviously that echo that goes all the way back to Paestum, goes back to the Acropolis, where a human being stands with this thing achieved by human beings. It's wonderfully uplifting, and you're looking down on this moving piece. I built a piece and named it for my father, and it was shown first in Chalon and then was shown in the Jardin Tuileries, where they gave me the chance to be the first living artist to show in that very famous park. [00:13:00] It means that they should've stuffed me afterwards with, you know, straw and put me out there. [laughter]

[Side conversation]

Collens: Then it came to New York after Paris, and it wasn't installed as part of the All City Exhibition in New York.

di Suvero: Where was it installed?

Collens: I don't think so. I think, as I recall, Mark, you weren't able to get it up in time, and it sat in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and they used it as [00:14:00] a platform for painting. And then it came to Storm King when Peter Stern saw you at the Whitney Museum, the opening of your exhibition at the Whitney, and said, "What are you doing with all the largescale sculptures after the All City Whitney exhibition show?"

di Suvero: Right, and we lent it to Storm King at that moment. Yes, so that's '75, right?

Collens: Yes, yes. It came up.

[Side conversation]

Dziedzic: Well, why don't we talk a little bit about *Mother Peace*, also?

Collens: We'll move on to *Mother Peace*?

Dziedzic: Yes.

di Suvero: All right. *Mother Peace* was built in Los Angeles. It was built with beams that I got out of Terminal Island. I had been working in a forklift factory. The man allowed me a little space so that I could do small pieces, but when I got these beams the promised space that was behind the Pasadena Art Museum evaporated, and I decided to build the piece anyway in the parking lot, which they allowed me to do. [00:16:00] I built a piece alone, and at the very last moment, when it came time to take it apart, Dallas Haynes helped me take it apart. And Lowell's parents were there. This was a long time I was working.

Barbara Haskell had helped me get—it wasn't a commission because they just allowed me to build a piece there. Then didn't it get all taken apart? I remember one moment with it when we went to take it apart, and Dallas was there, and Lowell's parents happened to come by. George's [00:17:00] father had worked in naval shipyards and stuff like that. And I had the upper part—it was a sloping parking lot. They were building a throughway or something like that, highways, in Pasadena right there. And I had the moving part, the upper part was on the crane. I was running the crane. I went to take the cables that suspended it off, since they were slacked off, and Lowell's father said to me, "You didn't notice the back of the crane, but your outriggers are up off the ground." And a crane, which is the essential part of any of these large pieces, depends upon stability to the ground in order to work [00:18:00] with large weights, a question of tons at a far distance. And so the great danger of any crane operator is that the crane turns over, and when the crane turns over your life is in danger. So when he told me that the outriggers on the far side were up off the ground, it meant that it was about to tip over. And I said, "Dallas, you've got to go up there and undo the shackle." He says, "I'm not going up there." [laughs] So I had to climb up there like I used to. There's a ladder that is left, a temporary ladder that I welded when I stood the whole piece up. If you imagine that the moving parts were not on it, I built the piece on the plane that has the large, [00:19:00] taller triangle to it, the one itself, but I was able to turn the whole piece up as a unit because the crane that I had.

I think that this is the real difference between David Smith and myself is that I work with, naturally, with a crane, and he only had an indoor crane, a bridge crane, to work with. When I saw him working that way with a crane and with a wall-controlled—the controls were separated from the actual cutting machine, and he was cutting like that—I knew that he was very far ahead in knowledge of [00:20:00] handling steel than I was at that time. So this one is—you know the dates?

Collens: Nineteen sixty-nine, 1970.

di Suvero: Okay, so my work in Chicago is over with by then, because they arrested me for wanting to be for peace, and threw me into a pool, and then had to fish me out, and "Mace him in the face," said the cops, because I was for peace, and they were for war. I'm still for peace.

Collens: Can you comment, Mark, about the peace sign on the lower I-beam?

di Suvero: I cut the peace sign into the beam because I felt so strongly at that time. There was a factory right next to them who were producing [00:21:00] something that was dynamax or something like that. They were producing war materials for the war, the colonialist war that we went through in Vietnam. That's what happens when you're much tougher than the other people, people tend to bully other people. When a nation is much stronger, as happened in Vietnam—the United States acted in a way that was not democratic, libertarian, not forward-thinking, you know, acted horribly. I really had an extreme revulsion of that war, because I grew up in China, and I saw what a country that is [00:22:00] overrun—it was overrun by Japanese. The torture and misery that they brought was terrible. What we did to Vietnam was horrible. It's part of the bad history of the United States, just like slavery.

Collens: And just to conclude with *Mother Peace*, it was part of the All City Exhibition and the Whitney Museum in 1975, and came to Storm King after the Whitney show as part of the group of five sculptures, but we can—

di Suvero: What were the five sculptures that went? *Mon Père, Mon Père*, *Mother Peace*—

Collens: *Are Years What? (For Marianne Moore)*.

di Suvero: *Are Years What?*.

Collens: *Ik Ook* (1971–72).

di Suvero: And *Ik Ook*, and where's it now?

Collens: And *One Oklock* (1969) was the fifth one. *Ik Ook* is the National Gallery of Australia.

di Suvero: Right. Oh, I have [00:23:00] some pictures of that.

[Discussion about fetching photograph]

di Suvero: This is putting it together, and *Ik Ook* was built when I was in Holland. They were [00:24:00] building a thing in Canberra. This is a piece that I built in Holland when I left the United States, and finally, after—well, there was a guy in Eindhoven that said, when he saw the piece that I did, *Praise for Elohim* [*Adonai*], (1966) in Brooklyn, he saw it and he said, "Ah, you've made a 10-meter piece." And that became, "We will get you a show in Eindhoven." And so I went there and I built these pieces, and they

were horrified, except that they had with the show that was my first all-city show in Eindhoven. And what happened is that they'd built a bicycle map where you could go to see all of the pieces by following the map. [laughs] [00:25:00] And that, they loved.

Collens: Oh, I'm sure.

di Suvero: Nobody from Amsterdam, of course. I shouldn't say "of course." Amsterdam is the main city in Holland. I mean, Rotterdam has more ships that come in, but Amsterdam is the oldest cultural capital of Holland, and I've admired, like many people, some of the great artists that have been there, you know, van Eyck or Rembrandt.

Collens: Definitely.

di Suvero: And so the scale was a little bit bewildering to them. However, opening day—they take the train rather than drive there, and Eindhoven is a mere [00:26:00] 45 minutes by train, 30 minutes probably now. And nobody came to the opening because Barnett Newman had the opening the same day. That's life. [laughter]

Dziedzic: I actually want to ask one more question about *Mother Peace*. You said that where you built it was right next to a factory that was manufacturing these war materials. And so as it travels, and has been placed in different locations, and particularly at Storm King, how does that change your perception of it?

di Suvero: Oh, it can change it tremendously. Where it was built was the edge of a parking lot, and they were building a highway on the other side. There was one lady that got out of her car, and she thought I was working for the highway, and she took a photograph. [00:27:00] She said, "Oh, this is as good as anything that they have in the museum." [laughter] I did not disillusion her. Having a piece at Storm King is like having jewels in velvet. You look at it, and you feel the goodness of the landscape, of the sense of space, the sky that comes with it. And any place that you show outdoors, the sky is there. But if you're there between where they're cutting up stolen cars and you have to look out that you don't step on anybody's toes [00:28:00]—it's very, very different. You have to be—what are they called? For horses?

Collens: Blinders, yes.

di Suvero: Blinders.

Collens: Yes, look straight ahead.

di Suvero: And to look at art with blinders is not the way to be. There are many people, for instance, restorers, all that they see as they look at a painting are the flaws. Storm King is just the opposite: it is the wonder and gorgeousness of nature, and you're allowed to put in a work of art that somehow makes you feel as good as the nature, but completely different. And this very bizarre work that I do, because it looks like factory work, depends upon an idea of [00:29:00] structure, and we respond to structure so basically because every word that we have is made up out of letters, and every letter is of a different structure. People who really look at words are responding to these symbolic structures that say something to speech, but mostly to understanding. And to be able to understand other people's thinking, it can seem very impossible, yet it is what poetry depends upon. And thank you, David, for the poems that you have sent. They have been magnificent. This guy that you sent me, Balaban, now, what a guy. [00:30:00] Incredible. How did you find that guy?

Collens: I think this was a friend of mine—Judith Nichols—she was teaching at Vassar, and my daughter, Stephanie, knew their daughter. They went—or it was actually Rachel, I guess—went to the Friends School in Poughkeepsie, together, and she thought that this would be a good poet, to do a reading at Storm King when we were doing poetry at that point in time. And we stopped the program, but—

di Suvero: Why did you stop the program?

Collens: It always took place in the early spring, and [00:31:00] we had many good poets, but it was very difficult to really bring people out, get the attendance. We were doing it under a tent, and either, you know, we had heaters going and it was noisy, to try to do a poetry reading, and—

di Suvero: I think it's just wonderful. You know, this man, Balaban, who really was a conscientious objector, and he's in love with a woman poet who lived a few centuries before him. He fell in love with her poetry. Her name is Ho Xuan Huong. And that he fell in love with this ancient—it's like falling in love with Emily Dickinson or something like that. It was—wonderful, wonderful man. [00:32:00] Thank you for the poems you've sent me.

Collens: Oh, my pleasure.

di Suvero: Okay.

[Side conversation]

Collens: Is there anything we've missed so far on *Mother Peace* or *Mon Père, Mon Père* that you want to cover?

Dziedzic: I guess one question is, since those both traveled to Storm King after the Whitney exhibition, maybe we could talk about siting the sculptures for the first time at Storm King. Because what David said was that the places where you were interested in placing them had never had sculptures there before.

di Suvero: Well, with *Pyramidian* (1987/1998), it used to be a cornfield. Was it a cornfield when you first—?

Collens: Oh, yes, definitely so.

di Suvero: [00:33:00] Now, cornfields are very interesting. They produce a giant amount of food. Corn was developed in—you probably know—what we call now Mexico, and changed the world. Changed the world for Mexico, changed the world for—look at Indiana or Illinois. [laughs]

Collens: Iowa, yes.

di Suvero: All of those without corn.

Where I built—which piece? Do you have a piece that I built there in Chicago?

Collens: I don't think.

di Suvero: No.

Collens: We brought sculptures in from Chicago, but not part of the permanent collection, and I guess what Sarah's asking about is the group of five that came to Storm King after the Whitney Museum exhibition, [00:34:00] in the location underneath the columns. Where you placed *Mother Peace*, *Mon Père*, *Ik Ook*, *One Oklock*, and *Are Years What? (Marianne Moore)* was so extraordinary, in my view. There had never been sculpture there before, and the juxtaposition—

di Suvero: That's where the cornfield was.

Collens: There was cornfield, and it was not Storm King Art Center property at that point in time. It is now, but you really pioneered, Mark, with putting the sculptures into this field, and positioned them, each one, in being able to walk around.

di Suvero: That was Ted Ogden, Dick Bellamy, and you, right, that did that.

Collens: Peter Stern, yes.

di Suvero: Peter Stern, right. [00:35:00] He was a marvelous man, I thought, Peter Stern, but wasn't he tied up with the uncle's property? They were fasteners.

Collens: Right, he was in business with Ted Ogden, his father-in-law—

di Suvero: Father-in-law.

Collens: —and started expansion of the company, and Ted Ogden started Storm King in 1960. He died in 1974, Ted Ogden did, and then Peter had the full responsibility of Storm King as president, and chairman at that point in time. And he came up with the idea of going to your show at the Whitney Museum, 1975, and asking you what you were doing with the largescale outdoor sculptures that were scattered throughout [00:36:00] New York City.

di Suvero: I remember you and Dick coming out to Petaluma. That means that you started there when Peter Stern was there.

Collens: Yes. And I started in 1974, in October 1974, just before the Whitney show, and we lent *Pre-Columbian* to the Whitney, and Dallas de-installed it at Storm King for you, and took it to the Whitney.

di Suvero: I see, okay.

Collens: So we lent that sculpture and then Peter asked you at the opening about what was happening to your largescale outdoor sculptures, and that he'd love to borrow those for Storm King.

di Suvero: That show—[00:37:00] in the movie, *North Star*, you see the opening. It has a few shots of my building the piece alone out there in the middle of Bourgogne, in France. And the Whitney offered me a show when they saw that all of the works that I'd been doing in France were coming to the United States, and that there was, aside from the recognition in this small town, Chalon-sur-Saône, they offered me the show in the Jardin Tuileries, and that's what the film is about. [00:38:00] Some of those pieces, like this, and others have since moved across oceans. But when they saw that there was going to be a Whitney show, they gave me a show in the Jardins Tuileries, and that way they had given me a show before the Whitney. The first one in line is—has nothing to do with the artistic, emotional, spiritual, whatever you want to call it quality of art. It isn't how heavy it is. It isn't how tall it is. It has nothing to do with how much money got paid for it. It's what the charge inside the work is, [00:39:00] and the response of a person to

that, and that is something that art historians can talk about, and is very hard to quantify. But the French really responded to the work. But there was no *Pyramidian* then.

Collens: Oh, absolutely not.

di Suvero: Yes, that was much later, yes.

Dziedzic: Well, let's start talking about *Pyramidian*.

di Suvero: Okay. *Pyramidian*, it involves so many people. Claire Shulman, our borough president in Queens, allowed us to build Socrates Sculpture Park, and since the space required this grand space [00:40:00] that had not mountains behind it but had a river in front of it, and on the other side, the skyline of New York, she allowed us to go there, and in one corner of the park I built this piece. And I thought, it didn't look like anybody wanted it. [laughs] That's one of the things about an artist is that you build them and you find out that you love it, and they don't really want it. [laughter] They won't show it. They won't buy it. They won't—but it's continual, through all of art history, all of that life. And anyway, I built this piece that was obviously too big for any gallery in New York, and they had already given me [00:41:00] an All City show, which they had never done before, and they did that with the Whitney, and this is much later. This is in eighty—what?

Dziedzic: Seven.

Collens: Yes, 1987, and finished in 1998 at Storm King.

di Suvero: Yes. I like looking at that and feeling it move, and thinking that it was once all a cornfield, you know? [laughs] Like, it just has that kind of good feeling to it. What would you like to know about it that you don't know already?

Collens: I can fill in some details, and that will kickstart Mark, I think.

Dziedzic: Yes, I'm wondering if there was something about this location where you built it that inspired its form.

di Suvero: Well, the pyramid is a very stable form, [00:42:00] as we know, because of the thousands of years that the pyramids in Egypt have existed. There's a whole difference between cast bronzes, cast steel, cast whatever, and what I work with, which is structural steel. Structural steel has, for me, a great beauty, and a great capacity. I enjoy doing things with it that are not the usual. Structural steel is there in

order to maintain the loads, and provide you with a bridge that you can drive over without it collapsing, things like that. But I like sometimes to bend that [00:43:00] which is straight in order to give an emotional feeling to the work. And I think that it all depends upon emotion, upon the joy of sex, the joy of feeling, the openness that the world offers us. And it also comes out of a tradition that is—Gonzalez, Picasso, David Smith. It's a real lineage. You have a great Calder in Storm King. The Calder in Paris, which is central to La Défense [00:44:00] there, is not cited as well as the Calder at Storm King.

And it has to do with the neighborhood, also, being able to look at New York as on the other side of a river, and the river is, no matter what humans do to it—sure, we have contaminated it, but it is something so healthy and so necessary to our lives that I think that I was really inspired by that. Well, you can see it right here. Inspired by the East River.

Collens: Definitely. It was built at the Point Studio, right next to Socrates Sculpture Park, and was the largest sculpture that Mark had built.

di Suvero: [00:45:00] Yes. It's a 60-footer. Well, I think that I built the *E=MC2* (1996–97) before that, but they're not the scale that you would expect from somebody who was an ex-paraplegic. Okay, it's twelve o'clock now.

Collens: We should move on to *Mozart's Birthday* (1989) from Maurice Cohen [and Margo Cohen].

di Suvero: Okay.

Collens: That was a gift of Maury Cohen.

di Suvero: Yes, I thought that was very wonderful, what Maury and Margo did, to give—now they are all—I think that part of the art world that is very public, very noted and everything, has to do with the market. [00:46:00] They're all into it because the market, and now that they have this questionable da Vinci sold at those prices, it's all become crazy.

But when this guy Trump said "I like grabbing women by the pussy, it's just locker room talk"—and Nancy Pelosi was at Berggruen Vineyard, and I met her, and she said, "Now we've got it made." You know, like, "Now it's done. Hillary will win." And I said to her, "Look, America's crazy." And she stopped and she looked at me and she said, "You're right, America is crazy." [00:47:00] Proved it, you know. Terrible.

Mozart is somebody that I've always admired. He has done such great work, and I've always found him inspiring. So this piece that I built right in here in the studio alone took a long time, more than a year. And

I think it's great that you guys accepted it because I think Mozart would have enjoyed playing underneath it, but I'm not sure that he would've accepted it as a kind of respect that I gave it by naming the piece for him. [00:48:00] I like the way it moves. It's got to have some work done to it. You know that. Has to do with the balance point. Everything has to do with balance points, stabilities, and the way to relate forms to each other. I think I'm talking too much like a professor. [laughter] I lost my job as a professor. I was one. Well, I've been one in Venezia, and one in Berkeley, but I try not to be that.

Dziedzic: Well, you were talking about the kind of straightness of the steel, or the curvature, so maybe this would be a good example to talk more about the process of shaping the work in this way.

di Suvero: All right. [00:49:00] All of the works that I do begin with drawings. To be able to draw is to be able to put what you have imagined onto paper. When you go to do it into steel, it's drawing on a bigger scale. It's drawing in such a way, and cutting, and then after you have found a form that is willing, or in tune with what you're dreaming to do, then you have to know where its center of gravity is, what it can resist under certain pressures, 00:50:00] what would prevent it from collapsing. In *Mozart*, I really found that the use of curves really was closer to what I felt about the music that had so inspired me so often.

You know, there's an *Exsultate, jubilate*, which is just a magnificent praise of existence that he does, and he had a way of—you've heard music that he wrote when he was12 years old that sounds a lot better than some of the stuff I've heard [00:51:00] from 70- or 80-year-olders who have had a whole lifetime experience. The motion is very gentle in the piece, although it's not allowed for people to climb on it, to ride on it, like we had [laughs]—part of the show that they did in Paris had my pieces on the Esplanade des Invalides that they had never given to an artist to show work on, and they put my piece right near Les Invalides, where Napoleon, who is, for the French, the supreme idea of what a leader should be. But it's called Les Invalides, which—[00:52:00] like invalids—and I had a sculptor friend of mine who said to me, "Oh, they gave you the show there because you're an invalid." [laughter] Well, he only said so because he didn't understand French.

Collens: No comment.

di Suvero: What else do you have?

Collens: *Mahatma* (1978–79), yes.

Dziedzic: We actually have a drawing of *Mahatma*.

Collens: Oh, really?

Dziedzic: Yes, and so you mentioned how everything starts with a drawing, so I'd be curious to hear what your—I know that in 1985, when you had an exhibition at Storm King, your drawings were shown indoors, and paintings, too, I think.

Collens: Following—another year, yes. Many drawings.

di Suvero: Sarah, this is a drawing of a piece that I never built. You see, [00:53:00] I talk very lightly about centers of gravity, but centers of gravity is what you deal with completely when you are a crane operator, and it doesn't matter whether you can see it or not; you end up knowing where it is. In a U-form, the center of gravity is approximately right in the middle, all right? In a circle, it is exactly the very center. This arc was the supporting arc for the piece, and what I have dreamed—that I did not achieve in *Mahatma*—is that this one, which goes up and down, has attached to the kind of balance that balance beams do, [00:54:00] where there is the blade that sits inside a saddle, and that is one of the things that normal, old-fashioned weighing machines do. So this one, the U would go up and down, and would cause the outside one to do that and that. So this is maybe a drawing for it, but is not an exact drawing.

Dziedzic: Should we compare the two? I think there's a picture of the built *Mahatma* in here.

di Suvero: *Mahatma* has to do with Gandhi, who changed all of India, and it was because of his spiritual nature, [00:55:00] real greatness. And I wanted to do a piece that was—how can I put it? That was an acknowledgement of what he had achieved.

It's very simple. It rotates, which the drawing does not show, and I think it's a good piece, mostly because of its simplicity, directness, and the motion is very—ell, I hope that the motion is uplifting.

Collens: Oh, I think well-stated. [00:56:00] Yes, absolutely. And that was a gift of Ed [Edward R.] Broida [trust] to Storm King.

di Suvero: Oh, boy, what a guy, Ed Broida. Unbelievable. (laughs)

Collens: Wasn't he?

di Suvero: Unbelievable.

Collens: Indeed.

di Suvero: Just a magnificent man, great antennae. I call them antennae—they call it taste. But he broke the heart of a guy that was in Minneapolis.

Collens: Oh, Martin Friedman.

di Suvero: You got it, who was a great person. Martin Friedman built a museum that changed a city. The Walker changed Minneapolis.

Collens: Yes, it certainly did.

di Suvero: He wanted this piece. You have to realize I was not bankrolled by [00:57:00] an industry or a bank. I would be able to find just barely enough to build these pieces. Now, just before I'm finished—you know, old and famous, and it doesn't help, it doesn't matter, because whatever I've done, the major part has been done. I can't do a major part after this, so I look back on them, and, it was worth doing it if it can end up in a place like Storm King. It can be exciting and gift-giving to people who come through and feel the emotion, because I think that we really respond to structures. [00:58:00] The man that built the first catenary bridges in America—the big ones, not the ones that are just for walking across a gulch in India or something like that—Roebling, there are still people who walk across the bridge and feel the enthusiasm. Marianne Moore could feel it in order to write a great poem. I think great structures really do something to a human being. Nobody counts how many people it took their whole lifetime in order to move all the stones that it took to build Notre-Dame in Paris, but it's still a wonderful experience, even if you aren't educated [00:59:00] in France. There is this thing about art is that it carries an emotion with it, unless, of course, the artist wants to get blank, no emotion, all white piece of paper. You know, that's a different way to be. [laughter] Not my way. All right, what else do we need?

Collens: Should we conclude with anything about Storm King, or the inspiration of your coming to Storm King, starting with 1968, and then the 1975, bringing the five sculptures to Storm King? I think we touched base on that, the 1985 show where it was the 25-year retrospective of your sculptures and drawings, where we showed the drawings for the first time, and we had the 14 sculptures outdoors that we brought from all over [01:00:00] the United States. [laughter] We brought your crane, your welding equipment from Spacetime, when you lived up there.

Dziedzic: Yes, I'd really like to talk about your team helping you out with some of these installations.

di Suvero: Oh, yes.

Collens: Very important.

Dziedzic: I just have one picture for that, actually. I think that was from the ’95/’96 show.

Collens: Nineteen ninety-five.

di Suvero: I’m trying to see who was up there.

Collens: I think that’s *Pyramidian*.

di Suvero: Oh, that’s me.

Collens: That’s a Jerry L. Thompson photograph. Installing *Pyramidian*.

di Suvero: I had the fortune of having a young man work with me, Lowell McKegney, who worked with me because—well, his grandmother said to me when I was seven years old, eight years old, maybe, [01:01:00] that I read too many books, that she was going to teach me how to work with my hands. And I did not know that she was changing my life. Lowell was really the first person that worked with me doing assembly of pieces.

[Side conversation]

I work with a team now. Ivana Meštrović is part of a team. And together we have built a park for which—out of this garbage land—for which a good president, Obama, gave us a medal. [01:02:00] But now, I’ve reached that level where to put structural steel together you have to have a team. You have to have a crane operator. You have to have people that can handle taglines, which is what controls these large masses when they’re suspended off a crane, and be able to do cherry-picker, which is a way of elevating a machine. But when I built many of these pieces—like [*Yes! For*] Lady *Day* (1968–69) was built all alone. This was built all alone, this built alone. This I had help with; Lowell would come in. I think a team is necessary [01:03:00] for large pieces of sculpture.

Collens: At the right point in time, but you still are overseeing the—

di Suvero: Oh, yes.

Collens: —doing everything, the artistic—

di Suvero: —controlling—

Collens: —content of the sculpture.

di Suvero: There are more and more people that don't. I saw David Smith stand at a wall and turn dials in order to do a cut on steel. And that was way ahead of where I was. I was badly crippled because of trying to pay the rent. But my idea at that time was if one is cutting steel, one is holding the torch, one is doing the actual work, like drawing—and I saw him already at that [level of] remove. And what people do now is [01:04:00] you come up with a computer thing and you send it off. The engineer okays it, and the company builds it for you. It's a very different idea about art. That's all. Different ideas come sequentially.

Collens: You saw David Smith—that was on the trip to Bolton Landing—

di Suvero: Right, where they started. It was Henry Geldzahler. I'm not sure that Dick was there. Well, maybe, because when they got to the point where they started drinking the whiskey out of water glasses, I looked at it and I took my sleeping bag out into the field and spent the night out there. I wasn't going to get that headache.

Dziedzic: You spent the night with the sculptures?

di Suvero: No, I was out in the grass. [laughs]

Collens: [01:05:00] But all the sculptures were—what year was this?

di Suvero: That's when they made Henry Geldzahler made the deal to buy a piece for the Met.

Collens: Oh, okay, that's the stainless steel *Becca* that the Metropolitan owns. They traded many sculptures to exchange for a different David Smith**.**

But that was inspirational, going to Bolton Landing, and seeing the sculptures?

di Suvero: Oh, yes. We of Park Place—I won't say worshipped him but—for us he was the sculptor that was doing something that was new in the world, that was with that material that, aside from Gonzalez, there were no other sculptors doing it. [01:06:00] Calder's work with metal was based on this idea of lightness and motion, and it's very different from the way that a block of steel that's one foot by one foot, weighs 450 pounds, which is, you know, a quarter of a ton—it gets very heavy very quickly. But the crane was the very big difference for me in terms of working. Like, there in Greenpoint, I traded welding time for crane time for a guy that was there.

Okay, I'm exhausted. [laughter]

Collens: Anything about Storm King?

Dziedzic: Yes, I suppose if there's anything else that you'd like to add, maybe, you know, having worked with David or Peter Stern, and just any kind of other comments you might [01:07:00] have about having your work at Storm King, generally?

di Suvero: Well, Storm King, in my time—there were no other sculpture parks in the United States. I had worked in Jersey and Brooklyn and Chicago, out on a beach, and the idea of the reception of largescale sculpture into nature is obviously long before the United States was born, but to find it happening in such a scale gives the work that is there a much greater life, a sense of it being [01:08:00] natural in the very growth that is nature, that is the forest, the fields. I think that Storm King has been a pioneer amongst parks, something that is very beautiful, and it's what every artist hopes to do is to do something that's beautiful, right? Okay, enough?

Collens: Yes.

di Suvero: [laughs] Yes.

Collens: Thank you, Mark.

Dziedzic: Wonderful. Thank you.

Collens: Thank you, Mark.

[End of interview]