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DAVID COLLENS

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Interviewed by Sarah Dziedzic
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Interview with David Collens
Conducted by Sarah Dziedzic
January 23, 2018

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Audio File 1

Dziedzic: Today is January 23, 2018, and this is Sarah Dziedzic, interviewing David Collens for the Storm King Oral History Program. So, David, as I was saying, we're just going to start with a few artists today and jump in that way, rather than go chronological. And the first artist on our list is Alice Aycock. So I'm just wondering if you could talk about how her work came to be in the collection. Maybe we can start with how your relationship with her began and what your sense here at Storm King, you and Peter Stern, was of her work before her sculpture came to be part of a collection.

Collens: With Alice Aycock, I was aware of her sculptures [00:01:00] and drawings for many years, and the relationship with Storm King started with *Three-Fold Manifestation II* (1987, refabricated 2006), which was at the Doris C. Freedman Plaza in New York, on 59th Street and Fifth Avenue. And it was part of the Public Art Fund program for exhibiting sculptures in that particular location. Alice created the sculpture for the Public Art Fund, and she had support from collectors to do that. At that point it was probably the largest sculpture they put on their Fifth Avenue location that kept on rotating each year different sculptures.

We went to see it, Peter Stern and myself [00:02:00], as I recall, and we thought the scale was terrific, at just 30 feet high, approximately, and overall size would be wonderful for Storm King. And it departed the Doris Freedman Plaza for Storm King when its time was up for being in that location. We got to know Alice, and we put it in what are now the di Suvero fields—before the Mark di Suvero sculptures were in the South Fields. It was in the fields before any di Suveros were in the South Fields at Storm King, and it was very close to the maple allée. You'd walk from the Museum Building down the maple allée, and see [00:03:00] the large Alice Aycock, white sculpture, and that was a wonderful location for it in the beginning.

It was a terrific sculpture in terms of scale and also expanding the collection at Storm King with certainly a woman artist and an excellent example of Alice Aycock's work—which it still is to this day. It's a very important historical early piece, from 1987. It has moved location from the South Field as the fields evolved with Mark di Suvero's sculptures and exhibition of Mark's that took place in 1985, a 25-year retrospective of his sculpture and drawings. At that point we moved the Alice Aycock to the North Hill [00:04:00], which was available, and it's been in that location to this day, since being in the field. It's in our highest point at Storm King. People walk to it since it is not accessible by tram. It's accessible by walking

or biking around, as well. So people enjoy going up to see it in its present location. And all these years later, it's still one of the important Aycock sculptures, which I think was inspirational to many of her recent outdoor works that she is creating for public places. She's really excelled as an artist, creating outdoor sculpture for urban locations and [00:05:00] collections that are in beautiful landscapes.

Dziedzic: Can you go into a little more detail about the conversations with Alice at the time that, I guess, you and Peter had gone to see it, and just how those exchanges began about, "Well, maybe this could come to Storm King next?"

Collens: I believe it went with the idea that it was on loan to Doris Freedman Plaza, even though Alice had support from outside sources to build it. It came to Storm King on loan and shortly after was a gift to the Art Center from Alice Aycock and was a perfect example of an [00:06:00] outstanding sculpture to be in this collection, scale as well as really expanding the collection. It's not always about scale at Storm King—yes, we're looking for certain examples of works by a range of different artists, but I think Alice understood the Storm King landscape, where she first placed the sculpture in the South Field. And then we moved it to the North Hill and—actually, the North Hill is the location I thought it should first go. Anyway, that did not happen at that point in time, so we put it in the field, and then several years later it went up to the North Hill where it still is, as I mentioned. People walk up the hill to see it and take in [00:07:00] the view of the surrounding landscape as well. And it's an excellent location with views of Storm King, Schunnemunk Mountain, and the sculpture park itself.

Dziedzic: Did it come up at all, this public sculpture versus outdoor sculpture, those intersections? Was that a conversation at all?

Collens: I don't think at that point in time there were many artists really working and doing public sculpture for urban locations. The Lippincott Foundry, where many sculptures were fabricated in the early years, and Don Lippincott worked with a wide range of artists that were doing large-scale works, and many of the sculptures [00:08:00] would go into urban locations—by Louise Nevelson and other artists—Barnett Newman and Claes Oldenburg and Robert Murray, David von Schlegell. Don worked with a long list of artists when he had the foundry, for many years, and that was one aspect of what was happening with public sculpture and what people were used to.

Storm King was started in 1960, and large-scale sculpture needed places to go besides urban areas, and Storm King certainly had the landscape being worked on by Bill Rutherford, our landscape architect, and our founder, Ted Ogden, and Peter Stern, and eventually myself. Forty-five years of landscaping. We were a wonderful [00:09:00] site for particular sculptures that would enhance the Storm King collection

and also having the artists understand what our landscape was about and being able to react to it, whether it was a commissioned sculpture or an existing work.

Dziedzic: Speaking of landscaping, did you have any thoughts about work that Alice Aycock had done earlier in her career that had been grouped into earthworks or Land Art? You know, I guess, it sounds like you've made the case for why this particular sculpture would be great at Storm King in terms of its size and the presence that it has, but did you have any discussions at the time about some of the older work of Alice's which [00:10:00] did eventually become part of the collection?

Collens: We didn't discuss some of her architectural sculptures that were either underground or—and I remember seeing exhibitions in Nassau County Museum in Long Island, of several artists doing earthworks, and some were underground. It was a wide range of artists, both men and women, and fascinating, but we did not discuss Alice's early work and reconstructing an earlier piece. Storm King at that point in time was really focused on *Three-Fold Manifestation II* and also understanding the history of that sculpture as well, which was fascinating and inspirational to this day for her more recent [00:11:00] sculptures that she showed on Park Avenue a couple years ago.

Dziedzic: So then shortly after *Three-Fold Manifestation II* came here, she had an exhibition here, in 1990 of drawings and sculptures [*Complex Visions: Sculpture and Drawings by Alice Aycock*, 1990]. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Collens: That was a retrospective exhibition of Alice's that took place in 1990, and it was very challenging with her early work in the Museum Building, some of the work being motorized, and other work had a live bird installed as part of it, and to keep everything going was very difficult. She created an outdoor sculpture for the exhibition, which was very complicated, [00:12:00] south of the Museum Building, on the lawn, with the overview of the maple allée, where all the artists like to have their sculptures in that one location. And that's true to this day. It's probably the most important location at Storm King, where the Museum Building and the maple allée line up just before it drops off on the top of the hill, to the south. Artists really enjoy creating sculptures for that particular location, an access where you can see it from down below or walking around the top of the hill. It relates to the exhibitions always in the Museum Building.

Her exhibition was very complicated, as I said, with large-scale drawings, sculptures that needed to be turned on, the motorized ones, at certain [00:13:00] times of the day only because their motors were fragile and they were old. We had to maintain all this, and the bird had to be in its cage in the gallery for only certain hours a day because it needed to go into an office with air conditioning; it was so hot in the building. No climate control at all, and just opening windows and putting fans on. And, I might add, where

the bird was, the windows were painted black because that was part of the environment that Alice wanted. So it was even hotter in that particular space, as I recall.

Dziedzic: Was that the first time there was a live animal as part of an artwork at Storm King?

Collens: To my knowledge, [laughter] yes. I think that was the only time.

Dziedzic: [laughs] First and last. [00:14:00]

Collens: But I might add, it was a great exhibition. Very difficult to monitor and maintain and circulate the visitors throughout the building, being fragile sculptures that had sharp edges and so forth to them. People were fascinated when the motorized sculptures were operating, and it turned out to be one of the great exhibitions of her career. She has not had many large exhibitions at museums of her work.

Dziedzic: I want to ask about the indoor/outdoor dynamic. Did you feel that—or glean from the visitors, or from Alice herself—that there was [00:15:00] a balance between the indoor work and the outdoor work? In terms of maybe describing some of the thought processes that go into the outdoor work, or feeding into each other as an intellectual resource for interpreting the sculptures?

Collens: Well, I think the galleries in the Museum Building at Storm King, which used to be a private house, are wonderful with the French doors and connecting to the landscape outside, both from the first floor of the building, with the French doors and the casement windows on the second floor having an overview of the property on the top of the hill. The sculptures that artists who are using the building install outside are a wonderful combination, a flow between the exhibitions that take place indoors that really support exhibitions [00:16:00] for the outdoor sculptures. That makes it, I think, very special, and the artists understand that. It's not the ideal exhibition space. Sometimes you can't bring sculptures in because they're too large, and they won't break down into enough smaller sections to bring them in through the French doors. So you find another sculpture. But all the artists enjoy using the building. It's a little quirky, but it's enjoyable, and you don't always set up exhibitions chronologically like other museums. And that's fine. We emphasize the landscape and the outdoor sculptures at Storm King. We have for years.

We connected the galleries in the museum to the outdoors for the first [00:17:00] time in 1976 with the David Smith exhibition. And, I might add, when I first arrived, the first-floor galleries were covered with plywood walls covering all the French doors in Gallery 1, for example, and there was no connection to the landscape. It was a white gallery space, box inside. And I thought that really didn't make sense, so I discussed it with Peter Stern. We got a carpenter and opened all the openings where the doors are,

presently, and took out the plywood—connected indoors and outdoors for the first time in years. It really transformed the exhibitions and the building, being able to connect. And a lot of the windows on the second floor [00:18:00] were boarded up as well. So we took off all the plywood from the second-floor windows and connected the building to the outside landscape.

Dziedzic: Was the woodwork exposed at that time too, or was that also covered up?

Collens: That was, I believe, covered up as well. Because it was—on the first floor with all the paneling in Gallery 1, 2, and 3, one needed a neutral background for showing drawings, sculpture, paintings. And Joyce Rutherford at one point worked and changed the plywood over to sheetrock and really very architecturally figured out how to nail the sheetrock up without disturbing the wood [00:19:00] paneling and behind the sheetrock, but gave us that neutral space and really did it in a much better way than when I first saw it.

Dziedzic: This came up when we were interviewing Mark di Suvero, but the showing of drawings at all for some of these artists was kind of—Storm King was the first place where drawings and sculptures had been shown together. So I'm wondering about that—was that something that you offered to artists, or something that they brought up when the indoor space was offered?

Collens: It's something that I thought would be a wonderful combination, to see sculptures and drawings together, and at that point in time, that is true, it wasn't done. You'd see strictly shows of drawings or sculpture. There was no mix. And [00:20:00] for the di Suvero exhibition, we put out on the floor—and Dick Bellamy, his dealer space on 110 Chambers Street—we brought as many drawings as we could from his studio in France, in Chalon; a studio in California; New York. And we had 25 years of drawings out on the floor in a very large space and made the selection from that point. Seeing 25 years of drawings, which was a very large quantity, on the floor, and just kept on paring it down to what we could use at Storm King. It was not something you'd see together at all in galleries or museums at that point in time.

Dziedzic: And that [00:21:00] happened—that was 1985, right?

Collens: Nineteen eighty-five.

Dziedzic: Was that one of the first times where Storm King started to invite artists to show drawings and other kinds of materials inside?

Collens: It always seemed appropriate to me to show paintings or drawings, photographs, whatever flat work was relevant to the sculptures. But primarily sculpture indoors and outdoors of course. But the flat work did start appearing in different exhibitions.

Dziedzic: It seems especially helpful—to loop back to Alice Aycock—to have that kind of—you know, so much of looking at artwork is often interpretation and translation, but to have the drawings there—that's an issue with regard to architecture (an architect will have so many more drawings than actual constructed buildings, so often we can only imagine the building based on the drawing). And to see a drawing that translates then [00:22:00] to the actual sculpture, the object, seems like it's really a rich resource.

Collens: I think it was fascinating for people to see, even if the drawing didn't relate exactly to a particular sculpture but was close. And sometimes drawings that sculptors do are after the sculpture's made. Or it could be a working drawing, or done before and working out a detail of a particular sculpture. It's hard to say. But it was wonderful to see drawings by different artists and see their sculptures as well, both in the Museum Building and outdoors. There was a clear relationship.

Dziedzic: You mentioned Alice not having a lot of museum shows. Do you recall her response to having this opportunity to show her [00:23:00] work in this space? Did she consider it a museum show? Did she—

Collens: Oh, she clearly—

Dziedzic: —what sort of impact did you see that the exhibition had for her career?

Collens: Well, I think over the years this exhibition of Alice's has taken on a life of its own and is an important exhibition in the history of Storm King as well as Alice's career. I think some exhibitions are more important to the history of Storm King Art Center and the artists than others, naturally. But this certainly was an important exhibition maybe at that point in time. When it was done in 1990 it was a very difficult exhibition to install, both indoors and outdoors, maintain through the season. And in retrospect [00:24:00], there's no question it was a highlight of her career. And she's done other exhibitions and so forth at various museums in Europe or this country, I believe. But this was an outstanding effort on everybody's part.

Dziedzic: How did it end up that she had her retrospective here?

Collens: Yes, I figured out that I thought she would be a terrific artist, seeing *Three-Fold Manifestation II* and knowing the history of that particular piece and what her thought process was with that sculpture at Storm King. And seeing her drawings and other indoor work as well, and her willingness to create an outdoor sculpture which was, again, a very complicated piece. But people can interact with it and so forth. [00:25:00] It was very enjoyable, and people really were fascinated by the machines operating, but it was challenging.

Dziedzic: Yes. And, I guess, let's make our way to *Low Building with Dirt Roof (For Mary)* (1973/2010).

Collens: *Low Building* was part of her show in 1990. And that was near the Museum Building, on top of the hill, in a location that we've used for several other sculptures over the years. It was very close to the south side of the building where the patio is, just off the patio area. And we constructed it according to Alice's blueprints and plans. It was the second time, I believe, that it was reconstructed [00:26:00] from its original site in a Pennsylvania farm field where she did it originally in 1973. It was a temporary piece, and we built it and had to rebuild the roof halfway through the exhibition because it was very heavy, and the roof became saturated with water, and it started failing. So we had to take all the dirt off, rebuild, and grass it over again—but a wonderful sculpture.

People were fascinated by *Low Building* on top of the hill, and we kept it there for the exhibition one season, and then asked Alice for our fiftieth anniversary to rebuild *Low Building* at Storm King in [00:27:00] 2010. And we put it in a very different location. So it had a connection to *Three-Fold Manifestation* on top of the north hill, and one could see it from *Low Building*—*Three-Fold* looming up on the north hill at 30 feet high and walk up the hill to see the sculpture, if you were standing at the *Low Building*. We rebuilt it with slightly heavier wood and improved the supports for the roof so we wouldn't have roof failure again, all with Alice's permission. And she in turn gave us the sculpture as a gift last year, in the summer of 2017. [00:28:00]

Dziedzic: Is that the work—in that it started out ephemeral, or temporary—is it the sort of thing where Storm King is the only institution that will own that work, or is it the thing where another institution or site could choose to—or Alice could choose to—create it somewhere else?

Collens: No, I think that's a good question. Alice gave us all the blueprints and drawings for *Low Building with Dirt Roof*, so it's a unique work, and it will only be at Storm King. We can rebuild it in other locations as appropriate. We can take it down when we have different issues with the wood, and it doesn't have to be [00:29:00] in its present location, maintained there forevermore. We can take it off exhibit and rebuild in another location, if that's what we select to do.

Dziedzic: Does it have a certificate of authenticity—in the sense you always own this sort of document, and then occasionally you may choose to manifest the work? The way that some Minimalist work came to define itself. Does it—does it carry on that tradition in that sense?

Collens: We have all the rights to move it, rebuild it, as appropriate. But we don't have that type of certificate, no. [00:30:00] Alice was thrilled to have this sculpture at Storm King, in the Hudson Valley, and was concerned about her earlier work. And there's another one also in the Hudson Valley, at Art Omi, which was a reconstruction, and one could go see that. It's a cement block sculpture that is underground, and you crawl through it and go down a ladder and crawl through the tunnels and come out in a different location, of course. But those are the two examples of early pieces that are in different collections.

Dziedzic: And you can go into this house, right?

Collens: No, it's very low, of course, so it's not particularly high and very hard to go into, and certainly I [00:31:00] probably don't [laughs] recommend going in. You know, it's fine to look into it, but you never know when a woodchuck is [laughs] taking up residence or other animals.

Dziedzic: [laughs] That's true. And so the year after the retrospective that we were discussing, there was a group show that had to do with architecture. It was called *Enclosures and Encounters: Architectural Aspects of Recent Sculpture*, in '91. I wondered how much of Alice's work had influenced that next year's exhibition.

Collens: Oh no, that's interesting. You know, I've always been fascinated growing up in New York with architecture and noticing a wide range of [00:32:00] artists that were inspired by architecture, and with their sculptures. I wanted to incorporate that into an exhibition and with a wide range of sculptors—like Siah Armajani, for example, and many others. It was a group show, both indoors and outdoors.

Dziedzic: When did Siah Armajani's work come here? Was it around that time?

Collens: Well, we borrowed the Armajani sculpture (*Gazebo for One Anarchist: Emma Goldman*, 1991) for that exhibition. It was just one section, again, placed on the south side of the Museum Building, with the view of the maple allée. People could enter into the sculpture and go up a few steps, open the door, enter, and close the door and be able to sit down, and the view through the window, open steel sculpture painted, I think [00:33:00] teal and white, as I remember. You'd be sitting there and facing south, and people enjoyed that interaction with the sculpture as they do with the Armajani that we presently have (*Gazebo for Two Anarchists: Gabriella Antolini and Alberto Antolini*, 1992).

Dziedzic: The ability to go into a work is pretty novel—artists who have taken advantage of that opportunity to invite, I suppose, or to build that space.

Collens: Oh, I think that interaction's important, if the artists like that and want to have that connection to the public. Definitely so.

Dziedzic: And you mentioned this a little bit, that Alice's work was included in *5 + 5: New Perspectives* (2010–11), the anniversary exhibition. [00:34:00]

Collens: Yes.

Dziedzic: So how was she chosen for that? I'm curious about all the artists in that group, but—

Collens: Well, the fiftieth anniversary exhibition, there were five artists that had major exhibitions at Storm King, and five artists that had never shown at Storm King before, and wanting to give artists an opportunity to do work at Storm King as well. And Alice and Ursula von Rydingsvard, Chakaia Booker, and Mark di Suvero and Andy Goldsworthy were the artists that were selected to be part of the exhibition that had major shows in the Museum Building as well as outdoors. That was the criteria for the artists that were selected. [00:35:00]

Dziedzic: And so had you overseen all of these—the exhibitions that these five artists had had at Storm King?

Collens: Yes. When—you know, we have a small staff—even to this day [laughs] it's still a small staff. It's grown, in comparison to when I first came to Storm King. But with the exhibitions I did all the curatorial work and installation and the lighting and the full design of where the sculptures and flat work would go in the Museum Building, so oversaw all that.

Dziedzic: And the first time around, when these artists had their exhibitions too, right?

Collens: Yes.

Dziedzic: And [00:36:00] now the five artists that were invited to show their work at Storm King—I know Alyson Shotz—

Collens: Oh, there was Stephen Talasnik, Alyson Shotz, Darrell Petit, Maria Elena González, John Bisbee—

Dziedzic: Was there a sense to pair these artists, the younger artists? What sort of connection did you see between the original five and then the invited five? [00:37:00]

Collens: Well, the artists that had major exhibitions at Storm King, some of them created special works for the exhibition, like Andy Goldsworthy, with the wall that he created (*Five Men, Seventeen Days, Fifteen Boulders, One Wall*, 2010). And Ursula von Rydingsvard, with *Luba* (2009–10). So that was terrific, and Alice recreating *Low Building with Dirt Roof*, which was at Storm King in 1990, and reconstructed in 2010.

The artists that had never shown at Storm King—I think it was about materials as well. Darrell Petit [00:38:00] had a very large stone sculpture—he primarily works in stone, from Stony Creek Quarry in Connecticut—and we brought over a very large stone sculpture, two vertical sections titled *Kiss* (2008) that came together, and you could walk through the base of the sculpture. It was vertical, maybe about 16 feet high. And Stephen Talasnik, using bamboo, created a special work (*Stream: A Folded Drawing*, 2009–10). So I think it was a combination of different materials—Chakaia Booker was one of the artists from the permanent collection that was part of the show and created a special work as well for the exhibition (*Foci*, 2010). So I think it was a combination of different materials that artists were using and whether [00:39:00] they were permanent collection artists that were part of the show or artists showing for the first time.

Dziedzic: This is a broad question, but it seems like Storm King is very good at making use of what it has in its collection, in a sense, and maybe reframing it, and having another opportunity for people to hear about it and come see it. How much of that is out of necessity, and how much is really a deliberate choice to stick with what's already in the collection?

Collens: I think there's always been an interest in carefully expanding the collection and adding new sculptures to the permanent collection. And one has to remember that the sculptures stay outdoors all year long, since we have very little indoor storage [00:40:00] at Storm King. At some point that will change, but we don't have purpose-built buildings, and we're using different spaces for indoor storage that are not necessarily appropriate, but doing the best we can. And we like to rotate sculptures when appropriate as well, like all museums do, and that's very hard for us to do, not having good indoor space. So it really goes into wanting to broaden the collection with different artists that I think understand the Storm King landscape. It's not for all artists, and not for the sake of just having large-scale sculpture at Storm King. I think there's a lot more to [00:41:00] it than that.

The relationship with artists is very important to us and always has been and continues to be, even more so. We're very sensitive to the artist's needs and respect that and try to execute and work with them on

sculptures that they want to build, whether it's younger, less established artists or working with more established artists that are showing at Storm King. So I think it's part of our philosophy, really, to have a strong working relationship with sculptors and do the best we can in exhibiting their work, both in the Museum Building and outdoors. [00:42:00]

Dziedzic: Who do you think of as peers in terms of collecting? I'm thinking about the history of this place as starting as a private collection, and then really becoming an institutional collection open to the public. So, have you seen or sensed that change since the time that you've been here, and who do you think about now in terms of peers? Is it institutions? Private collections?

Collens: You know, it's very hard, because when we travel to different locations in this country and Europe we always like to see sculpture gardens, sculpture parks, private collections, and so forth, whether they're public or private, and see what is happening with landscape and sculpture. And you [00:43:00] come back to Storm King, and really it's unique. There is nothing like it. People come to us, and they're inspired by Storm King Art Center, and they go off and create their own museum, or they create their own private sculpture park, inspired by what they see in the landscape, some of the works in the collection, the way the sculptures are exhibited. There's something that catches their eye. They don't want to recreate a Storm King wherever they are in the world, but there's something that inspires them to do something that is similar to Storm King, or parts of it, with landscape or a collection or certain artists.

Dziedzic: Yes, I guess that was a trick question. [laughs]

Collens: But it's fascinating to come back and [00:44:00] see Storm King, and it's really very different than any place I've seen. And we all enjoy going and seeing other locations and meeting other staff members at different museums and having that dialogue.

Dziedzic: How much of Storm King sculptures are either not on view or lent out? It strikes me as being a rather low percentage, since there isn't storage space.

Collens: Right. An excellent question. We have very few sculptures that are on loan at the moment. And I think that's very much the case of what happens. There are requests for loans on occasion, but it's [00:45:00] very expensive to move sculpture. Moving it, insuring it, and so forth is difficult and challenging. And keeping outdoor sculpture in excellent condition, whether it's painting or other surfaces that need maintaining, is always very challenging with the materials. So loan requests occasionally come in, and some are very surprising, like Chrissy Field in San Francisco with SFMOMA wanting to borrow Mark di Suvero's *Mother Peace* (1969–70), when we had finished doing a full restoration to the sculpture, with Mark's permission, a few years earlier. SFMOMA was inspired by the exhibition we did, [00:46:00] *Mark di*

Suvero at Governors Island, in New York in 2011 and 2012, and they had a perfect site when they closed the museum for renovation and the large addition they put on. The museum was fully closed for three years. And they decided to do an exhibition of di Suvero inspired by Governors Island at Chrissy Field, overlooking the Golden Gate Bridge. They borrowed eight di Suveros, including *Mother Peace*, and it was a spectacular exhibition of large-scale sculpture, which everybody in San Francisco enjoyed seeing and walking around and bike-riding and jogging around the Chrissy Field area by the Golden Gate Bridge with beautiful views of San Francisco Bay and the bridge and seeing the di Suveros. It was a terrific photo opportunity, and it [00:47:00] really just resonated perfectly with the landscape and the bridge and the water.

Dziedzic: And it's such a different landscape from here, and yet they still—

Collens: Very different, and we said, "Sure! You can borrow it." [laughs] And we prepared to send it there for a year. That was a very unusual request for a large-scale sculpture. We've lent David Smiths to LACMA several years ago. Very difficult to move sculpture. But we did that for a major David Smith exhibition, we wanted to participate in that. Presently we have the Roy Lichtenstein *Mermaid* (1994), America's Cup Sailboat, at Middlebury College for [00:48:00] two years before it goes for restoration and comes back to Storm King in spring of 2019. But there're not many loan requests because I think people realize the difficulty of moving and the costs of a loan.

Dziedzic: And what about in the other direction? Work that Storm King shows that's on loan? Is that from institutions or often from the artists themselves?

Collens: I'd say really wide range. It depends whether it's indoors or outdoors, of course. And we borrow works from artists and different estates for exhibitions, like the Estate of David Smith, where it was very involved with the David Smith [00:49:00] exhibitions, as well as private collectors and other museums. But it depends on the artists we're working with and where we can borrow the work from.

Dziedzic: Let's go to talking about Ursula—unless there's anything else that comes to mind about Alice Aycock that you think we should discuss.

Collens: No, I think we've covered Alice. Certainly an important artist doing public sculpture, and for a long time really had no gallery and really carried on and now has, over the last [00:50:00] several years, had gallery representation and I think is focused on outdoor sculpture, beautifully fabricated.

Dziedzic: So am I correct that both of Ursula's sculptures here were commissions? Was the first one a commission?

Collens: *For Paul* is a sculpture that evolved over the years, and part of the sculpture was shown at RISD, but it was not the way it looks today. It was considerably smaller, and she took it to her studio in [00:51:00] 1992. She had her first museum exhibition at Storm King, both indoors and outdoors (*Ursula von Rydingsvard: Sculpture*, 1992). And until that point she had shown in many gallery shows in New York and other locations. That was terrific. And went to her studio in Brooklyn—her old studio, not her present one—much smaller—and had seen her work in different galleries and other locations. I thought she'd be a terrific artist to show at Storm King, and just the right point in her career. And indeed she was.

She created many sculptures for the exhibition at Storm King, and, again, understood the landscape and the building. She really [00:52:00] excelled at it artistically, which was so extraordinary to see, and had a large group of sculptures. There were three large sculptures outdoors, including *For Paul*, which we purchased after the exhibition. It was on top of the hill, near the Museum Building, and about 15 feet high, and graphited cedar wood, her signature material. One would walk around and look at it. There was a very large horizontal sculpture, only about maybe 30 inches high, that was quite large, near the Museum Building. And then there was a third piece that she made for Storm King as well. Those were the three outdoor [00:53:00] works basically, and there was a smaller sculpture that we borrowed from a private collection on the patio, *Three Bowls* (1989). And indoors were a wide range of her cedar sculptures. It was a special exhibition, and people loved it, seeing the diversity of her work and how she used the material, and the building had a wonderful smell from all the cedar wood as well. [laughs] That exhibition put Ursula on the map, with excellent reviews.

Dziedzic: It won an award, I believe.

Collens: That is correct. And her career just moved forward from that point, with gallery [00:54:00], museum exhibitions, outdoor commissions for sculpture in different sculpture parks and museums. Been fascinating to see what she's done to this day—she has an important exhibition opening in Philadelphia in the spring of this year, at the Philadelphia Museum and The Fabric Workshop. But artistically it's wonderful to go see her studio in Brooklyn and see her working on the sculptures with a very small group of people.

She created *Luba* for the 2010 exhibition, and it was sited just south of the Museum Building, the location that the artists always use, the view of the maple allée. [00:55:00] I asked Ursula to create a sculpture for Storm King, and I went to see *Luba* in the process of being created, and it was very clear to me going to her studio—she cleared out this one section. She'd never even built a sculpture in it, but she needed a [laughs] higher ceiling and so forth. So she cleared out a storage area to build it. And she couldn't fully assemble *Luba* even in the [laughs] area where she was creating it, because the ceiling wasn't high

enough. But I walked around on a wood scaffolding and everything around it. It was extraordinary. I knew it was a very different sculpture.

That's what I was really hoping for, was giving artists the opportunity to create a sculpture for Storm King that would really push their artistic career forward. And certainly that's what [00:56:00] happened with *Luba*, using bronze for the first time and wood together in the same sculpture, and cantilevering out the way she did. It is quite different. The wood and bronze now blended together after several years, and you can't tell which material is which at all—what's the bronze, what's the wood. It's all blended in terms of color. I think it's really artistically a breakthrough piece that inspired many other works in that direction in 2010, when it was completed and brought to Storm King. We were fortunate to be able to purchase the sculpture for the collection. So we have two pieces, two sculptures, that are very different, of Ursula's: *For Paul*, from 1992, and *Luba*, from 2010. And [00:57:00] she works in bronze and is very successful with bronze sculpture. Carbon fiber is another material that she's worked with. But I think still her signature work is out of wood.

Dziedzic: A lot of her work wasn't originally meant to stay outdoors. Is that right?

Collens: Well, she builds work for outdoors. And she's really learned how to use cedar wood and create sculptures that are wood for outdoors. Very few artists do. But Ursula's one of them. And it's either created from the beginning for being outdoors—and we've had no problems with *For Paul*, which has been outside since 1992. We do basic maintenance to it like we would any sculpture, and it's holding up beautifully and has plenty of air circulation, sunlight on it. [00:58:00] And we do other graphiting and work on it to keep the wood in good shape, and the same thing for the more recent piece, *Luba*, from 2010.

Dziedzic: In what sort of tradition do you see her as an artist, or her work fitting into here, in terms of the collection?

Collens: That's an interesting question. I don't think it's quite that clear. A lot of the sculptures we have were created by the artists by hand, whether it's Mark di Suvero cutting steel and being in the tradition of David Smith, with the way he has worked all the years, and inspired by David Smith. Or [00:59:00] Ursula using wood and having very tight control over the process of working. I find that fascinating. I think Ursula's work is—I can't quite pinpoint it into a certain area of sculpture. And I don't think it has to be framed that way as well. But I think it changes the collection and is certainly inspirational the way it fits into Storm King's landscape and the landscape that we've built, particularly for *For Paul*. We built a hillside to put it on, when we moved it from its first location on top of the hill for the exhibition [01:00:00] to where it is now. We had a house mover be able to lift it up and bring it over to the new location because it's only doweled together. There're different units that are stacked up and doweled, and so it's not bolted

together and so forth, and had to be gently [laughs] lifted and moved to a new location, and proper water drainage and supports underneath it were very important.

Dziedzic: How often does Storm King use a house mover? I feel like this has come up a lot. [laughs]

Collens: Yes, we moved the George House, which we're sitting in right now, with a house mover. And we lifted a di Suvero sculpture up, again, with the same person, to be able to put new concrete bases under the di Suvero so [01:01:00] it would be level on *Mother Peace*. And then we got the person to move Ursula's sculpture to its new location, a hillside that we built for it. Ursula was so excited about the new location and added another approximately 17 inches on to the height of the sculpture, so when you look down upon it, it's the right height to look into it. It was a little low for the new location before, so she came up with her assistants and all the wood and all her equipment and spent a week here adding the extra 17 inches to it, which blends in perfectly now. It was the right move.

Dziedzic: You mentioned that it changed the collection, *Luba*, by [01:02:00] acquiring it. So I wanted to ask how it changes the collection, to your mind.

Collens: Well, certainly, with materials it's changed. And we have very few wood sculptures that are outdoors. I can't think of anybody but Ursula's two sculptures that we have that are wood outdoors. I think in terms of the collection and—yes, museum collections, the way they expand within certain traditions—it's made some changes there. I think having women artists is terrific as well, and pushing in different directions aesthetically.

Dziedzic: [01:03:00] How did you end up identifying Ursula for having a major museum exhibition here, a retrospective?

Collens: Well, as I recall, I started with going to see gallery shows of hers in New York, which are terrific. And looking at the scale and the quality of the work and so forth, and I thought, after going to see her studio in Brooklyn—which was on the second floor of a wood frame building, as I recall, with Judy Pfaff on the first floor of the building—and Ursula creating these large-scale sculptures at that point in time, and [01:04:00] her energy was inspirational to me, to see aesthetically that—I mean, as an artist she was really ready to move forward and plunge into working outdoors in a very different way. And she had the understanding and willingness, and really the spirit to do it. It was at the right point in her career aesthetically to be able to come to Storm King and see the Museum Building and the outdoors on top of the hill and really go back and be challenged artistically to produce new work. And she did that. And had a very hard time [laughs] getting the sculpture out of the second floor [01:05:00] for the Storm King exhibition, and had to take the window out and put in a block and tackle, put a truck next door, and just

got everything down off the second floor, and took out the floor—her floor—so she could get a large-scale sculpture out through Judy Pfaff's first-floor space for the Walker Art Center. She was just bursting at the seams in this second-floor studio and trying to get the works out of the window, or cutting a floor out to get it onto the first floor for—in Judy's studio and out the door. It just—I think the materials and the quality of what she was doing was just really inspirational.

As it is, I love going to her studio every year, a couple times a year, and see what [01:06:00] she's up to and the way she expands her career in terms of drawings, sculpture. It's really evolving and terrific to see. She's had other shows over the years—at Yorkshire Sculpture Park there was a very large exhibition of her bronze sculptures, her wood sculptures, indoors, outdoors. And now this show coming up in Philadelphia.

Dziedzic: Did she have a gallery at the time of the retrospective?

Collens: At the Storm King show? She did. She was just changing galleries, actually, at that point.

Dziedzic: Okay. I was thinking that would be an awful lot of trust [laughs]—a very [01:07:00] a direct relationship, I suppose, between the artist and Storm King.

Collens: I think it was really a relationship between Storm King and Ursula, because she was just at the point of leaving one gallery and joining another one, of course. She's been with Galerie Lelong for a long time, Mary Sabbatino. But that was just in the early stages there, so—

Dziedzic: And how did the dialogue between her and Mark di Suvero happen—the actual dialogue that's in the di Suvero book?

Collens: Oh.

Dziedzic: And then, I suppose, the broader [01:08:00]—she was honored by Socrates Sculpture Park, I believe, or had work there in some exhibitions?

Collens: She's on the board of Socrates Sculpture Park and has been for a long time, and has been a, I think, close friend of Mark's for many years. And we thought for the di Suvero book, after thinking about various possibilities, that having a dialogue with Ursula and Mark would be terrific, and it took place at Mark's studio. [laughs] No one was present, except the person that occasionally ran in and made sure the batteries were working on the recording device. But there's a nice energy between Ursula [01:09:00] and Mark and I think, of course, respect as artists and so forth that they have.

Dziedzic: Ursula really seems to have a lot of—her personal biography is part of her work, in a sense: how she defines her practice, her hands-on practice, and also the materials as well. She talks about being a refugee, and so I wondered if there was any connection with Peter Stern, in terms of his early biography too. Did that ever come up in terms of their discussions together?

Collens: That's an interesting point. Not that I recall. [01:10:00] But I think there is certainly a wonderful relationship there, and I'm sure they did discuss that. Totally different backgrounds, and when they arrived in the United States, different points in time for both of them. But I would think in conversation that probably did come up between both of them. Nothing that I did hear, though.

Dziedzic: Yes, many things will bring you to an appreciation of an artist's work. I just wondered if that had been—

Collens: But that background certainly is inspirational to Ursula to this day, and living in the camps and—you know, in a very different way than, say, Magdalena Abakanowicz. But I think it's there, and [01:11:00] Ursula does do a lot of reading, and I've seen her bookshelf that was a lot of books on that period of time and the Second World War and so forth.

Dziedzic: Well, let me ask you, David, do you think we have time to move into talking about Chakaia Booker?

Collens: Oh, I think we should start, sure.

Dziedzic: Yes, I wanted to ask about how Storm King's relationship developed with her, or with her work.

Collens: Well, Chakaia had shown at Socrates Sculpture Park. I don't remember if that's where I first saw her work or not, actually, but she has a close connection to Socrates, where she [01:12:00] likes to go and teach in the summertime to the children, different camp groups and programs that they have. She's been always very involved with Socrates over the years.

Dziedzic: She had some work there in the late '90s, I believe. Did you see it that early?

Collens: Probably. If she had any gallery shows or group shows in New York I probably saw that. But I think probably through Socrates or Peter Lundberg—who was an assistant to Mark di Suvero at one point and is an artist in his own right and has done—been involved with establishing [01:13:00] sculpture in different locations over the years, but is primarily back, I think, to doing his own sculpture in Australia or

China or this country. Travels around a great deal, but was an assistant to Mark di Suvero for eight years. So I think that's—yes, somewhere along the line [laughs] I've seen Chakaia's work and met her.

Dziedzic: I would ask this similar question of her too, or of *A Moment in Time* (2004). How did the decision come about to acquire that work, and what was Storm King's interest in it?

Collens: It was acquired after the exhibition. That sculpture was on the second floor in [01:14:00] Gallery Nine for the exhibition of her work. And she did a wonderful exhibition both indoors and outdoors, using her signature material, automobile tires—some were steel-belted, others were not—but slicing them and attaching them to a metal frame. And she really, like many of our other artists that have come to Storm King, put all her energy into the show, both aesthetically and physically, with a small team, creating work for the museum.

Gallery 1, the large gallery on the [01:15:00] first floor, had a special work she designed for the interior of that space as you walk through. Made it very [laughs] clear to her that you can't damage anything in the building—the parquet floors, the walls, or anything. And she kept on bringing all these [laughs] different rubber sections in that needed to be bolted, and was so protective of the building. And it was just wonderful to see, and ended up with this large 30-foot sculpture that you could walk all the way around, circulate, like a serpentine shape to it. But I said, "People can't always walk [laughs] all the way around. You need a cut-through." So she made a cut-through partway, in the gallery space, so you could take a shortcut [laughter] to get to the other side. It was a terrific piece, and quite large, and consumed the space very nicely. [01:16:00] And the outdoor sculptures were terrific as well. And she's gone on to have many shows in a variety of different locations—the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, Millennium Park in Chicago most recently.

Dziedzic: You said that *A Moment in Time* was shown originally indoors.

Collens: Yes.

Dziedzic: How did that decision get made, I guess, to show it indoors, and then to site it outside?

Collens: Well, she created it actually as an outdoor sculpture, has a stainless steel frame to it. I think she at that point was with Marlborough Gallery, and the person at Marlborough that was very familiar with outdoor sculptures said, "You know, I think you should really change from steel frames to stainless steel for outdoor sculpture." And she started doing that, [01:17:00] and changed the frame and other materials that she was using to fasten the rubber together so it'd be far more durable and be good in different climates.

Dziedzic: She has a lot of work that's outside. I think that's part of the use of the automobile tires. Was this around the time that she started to shift all of her work to be more durable in this way?

Collens: Well, she went to Rutgers University and was—basically I think grew up in Newark and at that point in time rubber tires and spare tires were [laughs] very available in that area. So it was a material that she started using when she was in art school.

Dziedzic: Was any of her [01:18:00] earlier work, the worn garments, was that part of the indoor exhibition?

Collens: No, I mean, to this day she changes—I think her headdress is always different. This is, again, I think family tradition for her. And that's how it started with that. She has a pocketbook that's made out of rubber tires and so forth. But that's the way I've always seen her.

Dziedzic: And her work is also extremely deliberate in terms of its critiques of class and also color, identifying as an African-American woman and [01:19:00] identifying with her family and their tradition as well. How was that involved in the kinds of materials that were associated with the exhibition, or was it?

Collens: Now, as I recall, virtually everything was out of tires that she sliced. Her studio when we did the exhibition was on Broadway—maybe about 137th Street? And I remember driving there. She said, "Oh, just park in the garage," about a block away or something. Anyway, I drove up there to see her one day in this very small studio, and she was cutting all the rubber, and it had an incredible smell to it, and a very safe building, because I think the police department was [laughs] on the first floor, and it was a large building. But I got [01:20:00] up there, and I thought I was seeing a robbery, but it was *Law and Order* being filmed! [laughs] I was very nervous about being up in that area. But it was only *Law and Order*. [laughter] Television program being filmed.

So we went to see her. And she kept on working outdoors in the hallway; she just didn't have enough space. It was very small. She stacked everything up and brought it up to Storm King. We also showed some bronze sculptures that she did at the Polich Tallix Foundry with Dick Polich, which were wall sculptures, extremely heavy, that also used the rubber tires, and they bronzed it. So that was the other material that was used. And she's done drawings and so forth and expanded a bit, but [01:21:00] I think it's all usually the color black that is her signature color, and using rubber tires is the signature material for her. But there are references, being African-American and to different activities and situations that have taken place.

Dziedzic: How did that exhibition come about? I think it sounds like you identified her as being an interesting artist, and—

Collens: Right. No, absolutely. I think primary to me was the artistic work and not always the history behind and the titles and what it represented to her [01:22:00], in all due respect. I was interested in the creative process. She really hadn't done museum exhibitions, had some gallery shows. And I thought she was at the right creative point in her career, like Ursula, to really take on the challenge of an exhibition at Storm King.

Dziedzic: And in a sense I can see the ways in which you described Ursula's work being very unique in terms of materials and form, that also being similar maybe with Chakaia as well, in terms of using tires and—even though I guess that's—there's a tire or two in Mark di Suvero sculptures. [laughter] But—

Collens: Indeed. [laughter] Yes.

Dziedzic: —but using them in an incredibly different way and [01:23:00] having the process, in a sense, be part of it, much like Ursula too.

Collens: And actually, I should add, Mark and Ursula are also close friends and—

Dziedzic: And so the piece that was on loan for the fiftieth anniversary exhibition, *Foci*, how was that selected?

Collens: Well, again, she created the sculpture 30 feet, the largest sculpture she's built, to date, actually. It was a little late because she kept on working on it. And she didn't know how long it was. Now, clearly, an outdoor sculpture, that wasn't the issue, but trying to figure out where to put it. It went down to Allentown, Pennsylvania, where she had this very large factory building, at that point—she took on the responsibilities of the building. She's still in Allentown but a different space. It became [01:24:00] too difficult to maintain this old factory building and make sure it didn't freeze during the winter and the roof wasn't leaking and all those details. So she's moved within the last few years to a much smaller space, I gather. I haven't seen it.

But I went down to see what she was doing, and she had no idea how long it was, so we measured it, and it turned out to be 30 feet. Then she covered it with her signature material, the steel-belted or the tires, and came up late. But it was really a terrific sculpture. And it was here for a couple years. And at one of the openings Chakaia went up to Mark di Suvero and said, "Oh, Mark, I'm catching up to you! I just made a 30-foot sculpture!" [laughs] It was so funny. [01:25:00] [laughter] She couldn't wait to tell him how

large her piece was. It was significantly larger than anything she's ever built before and created. And for Mark, he just creates sculpture—whatever size it is, it's human-size to Mark. That's the way he thinks about it. But yes, she was so excited to go up to him and tell him about *Foci* and how tall it was. [laughter]

Dziedzic: How did she get up there to put the tires on it?

Collens: I think it was built horizontally. It was very difficult to get out of this large building, because they built it in interior space, and then trying to get this 30-foot sculpture horizontally out, weave it out of large doors and everything, became a challenge, and onto a truck.

Dziedzic: I was wondering if she was taking crane-operating lessons [laughter] from [01:26:00] Mark.

Collens: Totally horizontally built, as I saw.

Dziedzic: Were there issues in the building with her interior sculptures, in terms of weight? You mentioned that some of the wall sculptures were really heavy.

Collens: Oh, we had to really support them underneath and use fastening devices. It's still a challenge, using the Museum Building to this day. And I think we're more aware of its limits. I mean, it was clearly built as a residential house, and yes, it's concrete, stone, and wood, but it was still built to residential standards, not industrial buildings or what a museum would use today. So we're far more aware of that, I think. I never thought about it particularly. We brought in what we had to, on the second floor [01:27:00], first floor, and so forth.

Dziedzic: It comes up sometimes in terms of apartments, even. You know, the load that they can hold, because everyone starts going upwards, and—

Collens: No different for building, and we're aware of this far more now at this point in time than we were. So we're sensitive to that. I wasn't totally insensitive, but it raised awareness, definitely.

Dziedzic: And then, I guess, from your perspective, how has Chakaia's career developed since her show at Storm King, in terms of the work that she's made or places she's shown?

Collens: Well, now, I think she's moved forward. She's not with a gallery at this point still. She left Marlborough Gallery after a number of years and has had shows at Millennium [01:28:00] Park in Chicago, which is, I think, probably just finishing. That was there for a year, outdoors. And different, I

think, college and university art museums, and she's shown outdoors in different locations. But I think it's hard without a gallery. More challenging.

Dziedzic: Well, I guess let's also talk about Grace Knowlton today, and then I think we'll wrap up, probably.

Collens: Yes. How we doing on time?

Dziedzic: It's 11:06. How's that?

Collens: Yes.

Dziedzic: Okay.

Collens: That sounds good.

Dziedzic: So Grace is the earliest of all the artists that we've talked about today. Her work has been at Storm King the longest. But you were also here at that time. Do you remember how this acquisition [01:29:00] came about, of her work?

Collens: Well, Grace actually predates me, [laughter] I have to be honest. It started with, I think, my predecessor, when Grace's *Spheres* (1973–75/1985) arrived at Storm King. They were, I believe, all clay, that Grace created at her studio in Sneden's Landing, just outside of New York, near the Palisades Parkway, exit 4. And she has lived there since, I guess, mid-'60s or so. Still in the same location, same house.

Dziedzic: Who was your predecessor, David?

Collens: Dorothy Mayhall was Director.

Dziedzic: I saw there's this [01:30:00] work of hers in the collection too.

Collens: There is. It's an indoor work, yes. She was an artist as well.

Dziedzic: So do you know how that relationship began with Grace Knowlton?

Collens: I don't know the connection, how Dorothy met Grace. I'm going to have to research that out. But her *Spheres* arrived in the early '70s, and for many years were near the Kenneth Snelson *Free Ride Home* (1974) in the little valley there. They were tucked in by the curve of the driveway, where on the left-hand side is a very large oak tree, and they were just down the hill in a little valley there. They were all ceramic, as I recall. [01:31:00] And beautiful, because Grace created them at her studio, and she could glaze, and she had a kiln and everything at that point. And they were large. So they were wonderful—and not particularly good for our climate, with freezing and thawing and snow on them and everything, and they started, I guess, breaking up.

Then Grace started creating sculpture out of fiberglass, which was very interesting and not a particularly healthy material to use. And they weren't perfectly round or anything. They were regular shape and very textured. So we borrowed some of those. Then she started going to concrete, being a better material [01:32:00] to create sculpture for outdoors, and not a health hazard to make it. But we brought some of the larger ones out. They kept on changing as some of them broke up, and that was part of the process, and she'd repair them as much as she could up here. She'd bring them up on a little boat trailer because they were large, [laughter] and they just nestled and tied up on the boat trailer and got towed up here with a truck or something.

Dziedzic: I saw that she—so *Spheres* arrived in the early '70s, and then they were officially acquired later. But that was even before her first solo show, that I could find record of.

Collens: Yes, they kept on changing as the weather got to them and she couldn't repair them anymore, and sizes [01:33:00] and so forth changed. We have, I think, a couple of the clay ones inside. They're really beautiful, and I didn't want to endlessly leave them out. She never had a solo show at Storm King.

Dziedzic: Right, but even her shows in SoHo were after her sculptures were acquired here. So we'll have to see, maybe there was a personal relationship.

Collens: Oh, very much so, always with Grace. Yes, it was hands-on in that sense. She worked in copper, with smaller sculptures that she made in copper. And they'd be 40 inches long, that she did herself, and put them outdoors, and always the spheres out of the materials I mentioned. And photography, drawings. Very important to her [01:34:00] career.

Dziedzic: I know there was an issue with her sculptures over the summer, is that right?

Collens: Oh, yes. Grace always has been very easy to work with. I've known her a long time, and I actually knew her before I came to [laughs] Storm King, in my previous career, I have to confess. [laughter] I have to reveal.

Dziedzic: [laughs] Personal relationships abound.

Collens: Yes. So she was upset when I moved them from near the top of the hill there by the Snelson in that little valley to the more recent location (in the North Woods) a number of years ago. Everybody wanted to be absolutely dead center where [01:35:00] all our visitors were going by the sculptures, whether it's on the driveway or somewhere in front of the building and whatever. Anyway, it worked out fine. I moved them to the location that they were for a number of years. And she came up and made no changes, loved it. [laughter] That was fine. Mike has worked with her on the restoration work of sculptures, and so it was a wonderful relationship with Grace. And she's about 85, I think, now. Close to it.

Dziedzic: So the sculptures that had been out are being restored, rather than replaced by a new set of spheres?

Collens: Oh, yes. No, she could not do that at this point in time. So yes, Mike knows what to do. We've discussed it with her. I've been down to see her. I think Mike and I probably will go down. He's spoken to [01:36:00] her on the phone, and someone will drive Grace up here, when we start getting ready to do the repair work on them and do it outdoors, during the fair-weather season. So she'd love to come up. She was at the Storm King Gala, I guess, last October—a surprise—with her daughter.

Dziedzic: Was her work included in group shows at Storm King, or what was the history there?

Collens: I think Dorothy Mayhall must have had it in one of the *Sculpture in the Fields* shows, I would guess. I think that's how it started, probably, Sarah.

Dziedzic: Yes, I know there were some exhibitions that are "Recent Acquisitions of Storm King" or something like that. But I don't have [01:37:00] the details.

Collens: I mean, there were 100 sculptures on the right- and left-hand side of the main driveway when I first saw Storm King. And other locations as well, but the critical mass were on either side—various aesthetics, sizes, stages of decay, and so forth.

Dziedzic: Wow.

Collens: It was a very different Storm King when I first saw it, in terms of the sculptures outside that either Storm King owned, which were not very many, and the ones that were on loan. And the landscape was not the way you see it today. Oh, you say it's great today, but it evolved, year after year. I mean, that's what people find hard to believe. Forty-five years of landscaping. Relentless. No let-up. [01:38:00]

Dziedzic: And it's happening now, too, to open more space for visitors, I suppose.

Collens: Yes, in a very different way than the creative landscaping of Bill Rutherford over here, and putting in the parking areas, and planting the trees, and—yes, taking space that is not particularly usable for the sculpture area.

Dziedzic: So when you first arrived, *The Arch* (1975) wasn't—

Collens: No *Arch*.

Dziedzic: —wasn't out. [Alexander] Liberman wasn't out.

Collens: Well, the Liberman *Adonai* (1970–71, refabricated 2000) was there. *Adam* (1970) was there. *Adam's* always been on top of the north hill—except when it went to National Gallery of Art in Washington for an exhibition. Another Liberman, *Eve*, was here, but we traded *Eve* in, I guess to help out when we bought *Iliad* (1974–76). And we had a [01:39:00] smaller Liberman that was here as well, I think, called *Free*, if I'm not mistaken, but I could be. And the Robert[Grosvenor] was here (Untitled, 1970), and David von Schlegell (Untitled, 1972); a small di Suvero that we returned to Mark, *Pre-Columbian* (1965/2004); small Alexander Calder that we, again, traded in for *The Arch*, plus cash.

Dziedzic: So those were all on the—and the David Smiths—all on the side—

Collens: All 13 David Smiths—were behind the building. But some were indoors by that point. I can't pinpoint exactly when the five came in the Museum Building. But it was before I got here, I think.

Dziedzic: So in a sense you could drive, look at the sculptures, turn around, and leave.

Collens: Yes. It was top of the hill, and there was nothing really in the fields, except [01:40:00] von Schlegell, the open cubes, the untitled sculpture, which was commissioned in 1972. Bob Grosvenor, untitled sculpture, commissioned in 1974. All Lippincott fabrications.

No, it was the top of the hill. There was no Isamu Noguchi. Yes, some other pieces looking north towards the north hill. *Adam* was up there. Some other minor sculptures were hanging around. [laughs] Whatever they were. I don't know. Sol LeWitt was here, *Five Modular Units* (1971, refabricated 2008), in a very different location.

Dziedzic: And were those—

Collens: Mostly loans.

Dziedzic: Those early commissions—did Peter negotiate those, or was Ted still doing—

Collens: Ted.

Dziedzic: —all the—

Collens: Oh, yes. Ted Ogden.

Dziedzic: So he was making the choices to move forward with those artists.

Collens: Yes.

Dziedzic: [01:41:00] Who was he turning to for advice in terms of that? It seems like David Smith was sort of his first sort of formal—that was how his art education started.

Collens: Yes—I've always understood that there wasn't a formal advisor to either Ted Ogden or Peter Stern. And at one point the connection to David Smith was through his niece, Judy Bullitt, and her husband, Lewis Cabot. She was Judy Cabot at the time. But anyway, they knew Clem Greenberg, and that was the connection for going to Bolton Landing. But very clear that Ted Ogden made his own [01:42:00] selection. It wasn't Clem Greenberg saying, "Oh, you can consider this piece, this, this, and this one, whatever, one over there, three over there." No, he went up, took the photographs that we have, his Polaroid shots, and made the decision according to what aesthetically appealed to him. Different than what I originally thought, because I didn't know Clem well, but I had to deal with him for the David Smith show in 1976 (*David Smith*), which was interesting. Anyway, I'm surprised that's the way it happened.

I think it's terrific, because it's a wonderful collection of 13 sculptures that Ted Ogden selected. Actually, there were 14, because Ted Ogden kept one, as he always intended, for his personal collection. Thirteen went to Storm King, and Ted Ogden had a smaller one, which was sold to buy the Calder [01:43:00] that

was known as *Seven Foot Beastie*, but Sandy Rower changed the name because he found research to indicate a slightly different name. But it was a beautiful early Calder, stabile, and that was traded plus cash for *The Arch*. And then the Calder family gave *Seven Foot Beastie* to the Whitney Museum of American Art immediately after getting it back.

Dziedzic: So you think he went with his—continued his aesthetic in these commissions.

Collens: Oh, yes, he went with his instincts, right or wrong, what he related to in terms of materials of sculptures, the aesthetics. [01:44:00] Very much so. And I think he wanted to, hit or miss, collect what he thought was good for this museum and landscape. And certainly inspirational, seeing Bolton Landing, no doubt about it. He went to other places, whether it was Kröller-Müller Museum, which Lisa references. But I think—true or not, I don't know if he was there. It doesn't matter. But I think the inspiration of seeing David Smith a year after he died with virtually all the sculptures outside—what Bob Murray captured in the film is what Ted Ogden saw. I mean, wow! Doesn't get any better. [laughter]

Dziedzic: Yes. It's really beautiful.

Collens: And I think you [01:45:00] could translate that from the Adirondacks—175 miles north of here, four hours' trip going up to Bolton Landing—to the Storm King landscape, farm fields, mountains of the Hudson Highlands. It resonated with him. That's the point. More than any other site he could have seen. Maybe he went to Scotland and saw the Henry Moores up on the sheep farm, which I saw with Andy Goldsworthy. Inspirational. There're two or three sculptures there, of Henry Moore's, way up on this hillside. But seeing David Smith at Bolton Landing, I think that was instrumental and just so key to thinking of Storm King. [01:46:00]

Dziedzic: All right. Well, let's end there for today.

Collens: Good.

Dziedzic: [laughs] All right. Thanks, David.

Collens: I'm off-duty?

Dziedzic: [laughs] You're off-duty.

Collens: [laughs] Thanks for breakfast.

Dziedzic: Oh, yes, of course.

End of session

Interview with David Collens
Conducted by Sarah Dziedzic
July 18, 2018

Storm King Art Center Archives
1 audio file
Open for research use

Audio File 1

Dziedzic: Today is July 18, 2018, and this is an interview with David Collens for the Storm King Oral History Program, the second session. So, David, I wanted to ask you how you first learned about Mark di Suvero's work.

Collens: The history of Mark di Suvero and Storm King goes back to 1968, when Storm King purchased *Pre-Columbian*, an early sculpture of Mark's from 1965, that was purchased from an estate in California and brought to Storm King by the caretaker at that point, who went to California [00:01:00] and dismantled it with other people and shipped it to Storm King. And *Pre-Columbian* was in our collection, and it was a wonderful early sculpture from 1965 of Mark's made out of wood, rubber tire, steel. And it turned, as well. And it was a smaller-scale sculpture that was on the grounds—very hard to take care of because of the materials outdoors in our environment. Mark created the sculpture originally at Drakes Bay in Northern California on the beach along with several other sculptures. And there are some wonderful photographs of *Pre-Columbian* and other early wood sculptures of that period, with the ocean crashing in on the beach, that are really classic [00:02:00] photographs of early di Suveros. And it was a terrific piece to have in our collection.

We lent it to the Whitney Museum exhibition of Mark di Suvero in 1975 and brought it back after that exhibition. And when we decided to purchase two works of Mark's that would be appropriate for outdoors, being *Mon Père, Mon Père* (1973–75) and *Mother Peace*, we traded *Pre-Columbian* to Mark in exchange for the two larger steel sculptures that were really perfect for Storm King—the scale and being in the fields at Storm King—which Mark pioneered, actually—being in the fields—plus [00:03:00] cash for the two larger sculptures.

Dziedzic: Where exactly was *Pre-Columbian* installed here?

Collens: It was in several locations over the years at Storm King, and I remember probably the most recent location being between the Noguchi and the David Smith collection, where we always put up a tent for the May opening. It also at one point, I believe, was on the hillside near Claes Oldenburg's and Coosje van Bruggen's *Wayside Drainpipe* (1979)—in that area.

Dziedzic: So when you first started here, that's when you learned about that history of Mark di Suvero here? [00:04:00] Or had you heard about his work before you started at Storm King?

Collens: No, I learned about di Suvero being at Storm King.

Dziedzic: You mentioned acquiring some of his works, but can you talk about how some of his other sculptures were here on loan—that Peter Stern arranged?

Collens: Yes, I can. Mark came back from France, where he had been living in Europe for several years during the Vietnam War as a protest, and he came back in time for his exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. And his exhibition took up one floor of the Whitney, in addition to having [00:05:00] several outdoor sculptures scattered around New York City as part of the Whitney exhibition. Peter Stern went to the opening for the di Suvero show and saw Mark and asked Mark what he was doing with the approximately 14 outdoor sculptures that were around in various parks and in front of office buildings throughout New York City—and Prospect Park, Battery Park, the Rose Garden in Central Park, in front of the Seagram Building—they were all over. So Peter asked him what was happening to the sculptures after the show. They could only be in New York for a certain period of time. Mark said he was going to fold them up and put them in storage. [00:06:00] And Peter immediately asked Mark to bring a group of sculptures to Storm King, which he did in the winter of 1975.

Dziedzic: And you were here then, right?

Collens: I was at Storm King. And the decision about what sculptures was really left to Dick Bellamy, Mark's close friend and dealer, Mark, and myself—to come up with a list of sculptures to bring to Storm King. And we came up with a list of five large-scale steel sculptures that we brought out to the Art Center in the wintertime and installed them in the spring.

Dziedzic: Do you remember your first meeting [00:07:00] with Mark?

Collens: I don't have a clear recollection of the first meeting—and where that took place, whether it was at Storm King when the sculptures came out or in New York.

Dziedzic: How did the sculptures that were here on loan in '75 get sited?

Collens: Mark came out and looked at Storm King. And we gave him freedom of where to put the sculptures, considering the scale—some of them were up to 40 feet high, like *Mother Peace*, and others were anywhere from, I would say, [00:08:00] the 25-foot range to 40 feet in height, *Mother Peace*

probably being the tallest. And they were painted steel; some had unpainted steel; there were moving elements to them, as well. And we selected a group of five sculptures that came to Storm King. And Mark started looking around, and he found a location in the field below the five ionic columns from the top of the hill, and he spread the five sculptures out below the columns in different directions. And it really was an immediate success, with Mark's uncanny eye for [00:09:00] placing his own sculpture, as he has done at Storm King—and I've worked with him on placement of sculpture during different exhibitions over the years. But it really was wonderful to see the di Suveros. There were five large-scale pieces, and they arced around. And the juxtaposition of them when you were underneath them, walking around in the fields and seeing them, was really quite an extraordinary sight.

Dziedzic: I read in Peter Stern's oral history that Mark was okay with people looking down upon his sculptures—not just looking up through them. I know that he physically opened up the South Fields, in a way, for sculpture to be placed there, [00:10:00] but did that attitude towards viewing the sculptures open up some possibilities for different sculpture placement at Storm King, or different kinds of sculptures?

Collens: Well, first I would say that Mark's sculptures had the size, being steel I-beams, and the expansiveness of each work in the height, where you could stand at the columns and you would look straight out to *Mon Père, Mon Père* and you were the same height [laughs] as the upper portion of the sculpture. So most artists don't want their work looked down upon—and I think that's a very good point you made, Sarah. With Mark, you were standing on top of the hill looking straight out to large-scale sculptures of his. And that was really quite extraordinary—to see really a bird's-eye view of them [00:11:00] from being on top of a hill. And they were still rising up, vertically—some of them. And it was a combination of different sculptures. There was *Mother Peace* and *Mon Père, Mon Père*, which Storm King eventually purchased, and *One Oklock* (1968–69), *Are Years What? (For Marianne Moore)* (1967). And there were, as I recall, a total of five—and all different shapes and sizes. And it was really a remarkable experience for people to see the sculptures of di Suvero at Storm King in the fields—the scale. And he really pioneered into new territory at Storm King for placing sculpture. [00:12:00]

Dziedzic: Were any of those first loans the kinds of sculptures that he has where you're interacting with them? And was that something that was permitted in those early years?

Collens: I'm just trying to remember if there were any swings on the sculpture—I don't think so. But with future exhibitions, we did have sculptures where there were large swinging platforms that people were able to interact with, yes.

Dziedzic: What was the visitorship like when you first started?

Collens: It was very low compared to now, of course. And people knew about Storm King. They were still coming year after year. [00:13:00] For many years, it was word of mouth—as it is today, to a certain extent. And people love coming up to the Art Center and new people finding it by chance or through reviews of exhibitions and travel articles and other possible ways of finding out about Storm King. It certainly was under 50,000 visitors a year.

Dziedzic: Yes, let's talk about some of Mark's exhibitions over the years. So in 1985 there was a retrospective, *Twenty-five Years of Sculpture and Drawings*. [00:14:00] Can you talk about how that exhibition came about and what sort of discussions there were around that?

Collens: Well, it really started, I think, with a group of five sculptures that we brought to Storm King in 1975 and how successful that was. And we really had an unusual space for Mark to be showing. And being such a dynamic, creative artist, as he is—he's still working—I was fascinated by the range of work that Mark did in terms of sculpture, whether it was large-scale sculpture, a sculpture two feet high. He was very adept at working in steel, and that fascinated me. And his ability to do the work himself, in very similar fashion to David Smith, who Mark knew—he went to [00:15:00] Bolton Landing and was inspired by David Smith.

So I was interested in bringing the di Suvero drawings together in an exhibition with the sculptures for the first time. And we brought drawings from his studio in France and his studios in the United States together and put them out decade by decade and came up with about 45 drawings of various sizes that we showed in the Museum Building on both floors, along with indoor sculpture, as well, to complement the drawings. Outdoors, we used the top of the hill next to the Museum Building, as well as the fields. And we brought in approximately 14 sculptures from all over the United States for this exhibition. And it took about a month [00:16:00] to install, because we brought Mark's studio from New York City to Storm King—his crane, his welding equipment, and all of his assistants, as well, of course, to help assemble the work. So this was an extensive project, to install the outdoor sculptures, which we borrowed from private collections, public collections—from Mark, as well—from different parts of the country and brought them to Storm King. And that was the first time such a large group of his sculptures had been shown together.

Dziedzic: Was it also historic for Storm King, in a way?

Collens: I think it was historic both for di Suvero as well as for Storm King—mounting such a large exhibition. We really had tremendous acclaim from various art critics. [00:17:00] And Mark, just seeing the sculptures at Storm King—whether they were originally made at his studio in Chalon in France or the California studio or in New York or various other locations in the early years—really was very familial to

him. And that was the term he used, looking at the sculptures at Storm King that had never been together before.

Dziedzic: I can't help but notice that there's a pattern every 10 years, for a few decades, of retrospective exhibitions of Mark's work. Can you talk about that? I know there was one in '95 and 2005, and then we get into some unique territory after that.

Collens: Well, again, emphasizing the creative [00:18:00] aspect of this particular artist, I've continued to be fascinated by his work, seeing exhibitions in galleries in Europe and so forth. I was always intrigued with moving forward with other exhibitions, and he certainly was an artist that deserved that and could handle the landscape at Storm King as his sculptures were getting larger. And the 1985 retrospective—as I said, we showed the drawings for the first time with the sculptures. That was not the way exhibitions were being done—it was strictly a sculpture exhibition or maybe a drawing exhibition. But they were integrated into the indoor exhibition in our building. And I, 10 years later, wanted to show the paintings [00:19:00] of di Suvero, which I had seen for a number of years, and most of them were too large to put into the building at Storm King—into our gallery—so I found examples of three that we could fit into the first-floor galleries. And we showed his paintings for the first time in the United States at a museum, along with more recent sculpture, both indoors and outdoors.

Dziedzic: Which exhibition was that—with the paintings?

Collens: Nineteen ninety-five (*Mark di Suvero*).

Dziedzic: I guess I'm wondering, how did that work, every 10 years, to come back together? I mean, was there a dialogue in between that time? And how do you coordinate this? You know, "Well, surprise! We want to do another one!" And [laughs] [00:20:00] "It's the anniversary!" How did that all work out?

Collens: Mark and Dick Bellamy are two people I was constantly in touch with, and I went to see Mark's exhibitions in Europe, other locations. And I was really very interested in the way his sculptures were progressing—not just in scale, but the quality of what he was doing with steel and the way he was exploring the metal, and the use of steel by bending it and cutting it and bolting it and other means and methods. So that was really, I think, a decision I made—Mark's an artist that one can really investigate in many different ways. [00:21:00] And I thought that would be very interesting to the public, as well—not just museum people and art world people, but a broad range of individuals.

Dziedzic: Are there other locations where his sculptures are—throughout the world—where you feel like they're also very successful in whatever unique landscape, or city?

Collens: I've seen Mark's work in France and in various locations. And they work very well. He has worked in France—he did work in France before he gave up his studio for over 20 years. And the French sculptures have a very different, I think, aesthetic to them, for some reason. It's something I've been thinking [00:22:00] about and I'm very curious about why that is, but I think there is something different about the sculptures he builds in France versus in the United States at his two different studios. I find that quite interesting. But his work has always been very successful, I think, in urban areas, whether it's in Cannes in southern France or other smaller cities and towns that he's exhibited work in. It fits in beautifully without being confrontational, and I've found that also quite interesting. The scale, the aesthetics of it—it works very well.

Dziedzic: So let's talk about [00:23:00] Governors Island—that exhibition. And I'm curious to know how that came about, and also just to have you talk about what was unique about it, basically.

Collens: With Governors Island, we were invited by Governors Island to do the exhibition. And Ronay Menschel was the chair of the Trust for Governors Island. And at that point, in 2011 and 2012, Governors Island was not developed to the point where it is today. And they were interested in bringing more people out and having a sculpture exhibition with the appropriate scale to really bring people out, to launch Governors Island [00:24:00] to another phase as they were preparing to develop the landscape and have a larger visitation by the public.

Storm King raised the money for the exhibition in a very short time. We brought out 13 sculptures to Governors Island and different locations—we had to find the sites. Picnic Point, overlooking the Statue of Liberty, is where the larger-scale works were, with just a spectacular view of the water and the Statue of Liberty very close in New York Harbor. And we worked around many difficult situations, getting the sculptures and the cranes and all the equipment we needed on a ferry to Governors Island to do this [00:25:00] exhibition. And it really was a resounding success. We were there for two years with different programs and events. It really, I think, brought the island to a different point in preparation for their landscaping they did over the years and sculptures they've commissioned in their art program.

Dziedzic: Was there a special ferry that was going from his Long Island City studio to Governors Island?

Collens: The ferry basically went from Lower Manhattan—next to the Staten Island Ferry is the location for the ferry that goes to Governors Island. They're open to the public far more than they were in 2011 and 2012 when we were there. And they've [00:26:00] finished working on the landscape—most of it—demolishing buildings that were very close to the di Suvero sculptures by the Statue of Liberty area,

Picnic Point—those are all gone. So it's a very different landscape today than when we were out there and doing our project.

Dziedzic: What was it like to work with, I guess, a different landscape—in terms of figuring out where the sculptures would go and discussing that with everybody involved?

Collens: You know, certainly it was a challenge. Working out there, there were a lot of restrictions—once we were out there with the equipment and installing and not disturbing property—because part of it is owned by the [00:27:00] National Park Service, so we had sculptures on their property. We couldn't dig into the ground at all; we had to place the sculptures on steel plates in those areas not disturb anything—being a National Park Service site with a fort out on Governors Island, being an old Army base. And other areas, we had a little bit more freedom. But it was just a difficult site to work with for positioning sculpture as well as getting equipment there.

Dziedzic: Do you have any thoughts about doing an off-site exhibition in the future? Or lessons learned from this particular exhibition about considerations for something similar in the future?

Collens: Well, it's always something to be considered. [00:28:00] At this point, I'm not sure we would do something off-site. It was the perfect time for us to do it, and certainly helped to raise the profile of Storm King. And it's nice to partner to do an exhibition and programming when appropriate. But one has to weight that with other projects.

Dziedzic: What made it the perfect time?

Collens: I think it was perfect in our history with what we were doing at Storm King, and excellent for Mark di Suvero. And Governors Island was—everything really came together just before they started their major landscaping and they were closed for a couple of years while the landscaping took place, when they were demolishing buildings and using the building material for creating hillsides and [00:29:00] so forth. It's a very different type of landscape today than it was when we were there in 2011, 2012. And it certainly was fun to be there. It looks very organized and elegant today with landscaping for large crowds that go there, and a lot of programming.

Dziedzic: Well, speaking of big changes in the landscape, coming back to Storm King, can you talk about the process of clearing the South Fields and the sorts of discussions with Bill Rutherford—and just what that process looked like when that happened?

Collens: With the landscaping at Storm King, basically we landscaped for 45 years—it was year after year of [00:30:00] landscaping. And in the South Fields, we had Mark's work in the fields, as they are today. However, Bill Rutherford was focused on the fields for several years and really having the fields still grassed but not wet, so people could walk through them, and putting appropriate drainage into the fields—unlike the 1985 exhibition of Mark's, when we were taking his sculptures into the fields and we would get stuck with the crane because it was too wet and have to get towed out of the field with a heavy piece of machinery for the crane and other pieces of equipment. So Bill came up with a plan to drain and channel [00:31:00] the water out of the fields and create places for di Suvero sculptures. And every year, I would have to call Mark up and ask him [laughs] to move a large-scale sculpture—which, after a while, he wasn't so enthusiastic to do—to get it out of the way of the machines and gravel and shaping the fields so it would be a better experience for visitors.

Dziedzic: So a lot of the changing of the landscape over the years was not just about changing the shape—changing the topography and the views—but also what you couldn't see underneath—just stabilizing the ground and taking care of the drainage?

Collens: We have plenty of gravel at Storm King, and it really was a project so that we could circulate people through the di Suvero fields [00:32:00] in the future and other areas in the fields that are not being used for sculpture at this point in time. But it was really building Storm King for the future—draining the fields and being able to properly exhibit the di Suvero sculptures, as well.

Dziedzic: So I had known about there being a little bit of—so, to talk about *Pyramidian*—that there had been some earthmoving to present that sculpture in the best way, but was there also some invisible work, too? [laughs] I'm not sure how this works, but I imagine that you might find out that there's a drainage issue only after you have the sculpture placed. [laughs]

Collens: I'd try to check with Bill Rutherford before I put a sculpture down. I was curious about certain landscapes and just wanted his opinion. And he [00:33:00] was a really very special and gifted landscape architect that worked very closely with our founder, Ted Ogden, and Peter Stern, and then eventually myself, as the landscape architect at Storm King. And he, on occasion, got involved with the artists, as well—whether it was Andy Goldsworthy or Magdalena Abakanowicz or Mark di Suvero—in terms of what the material was like and what the ground conditions were like in different locations. And he was extremely helpful in that respect.

And *Pyramidian*—we had a location, we thought, for this wonderful 60-foot sculpture that came up to Storm King. And we had it stockpiled—all the I-beams and everything—on the allée by the dirt road. [00:34:00] And we had three days of rain before Mark was going to move it into the particular location that

we landscaped for it. And Mark, early in the morning, started moving the steel I-beams to get them in position for erecting the sculpture. And it was so wet and we had so much water draining to the north in the landscape, he called me over and he said, “This is just too wet. We can’t get the I-beams out there without destroying everything onsite in terms of the landscape, and it’s dangerous for the equipment.” So he found a location on the highest point on top of the hill and asked Peter Stern and myself if he could assemble the sculpture in that location. And we immediately said yes. [00:35:00] We got an outside contractor to come in and prepare the site very quickly—the same day, a few hours later—and started assembling and moving the sculpture to the top of the hill to where you see it today.

Dziedzic: So that decision was in part because everything else was too wet?

Collens: Yes.

Dziedzic: [laughs] Wow.

Collens: It was—yes, just by chance. And the water in that area—the way that land is situated, it drains to the north. And after several days of rain, it was extremely wet, and we went to the high ground.

Dziedzic: Do you want to talk about how *Mozart’s Birthday* (1989) and *Mahatma* (1978–79) came into Storm King’s collection?

Collens: Let’s see. With [00:36:00] *Mozart’s Birthday*, it was a sculpture that was in a collection—Maurice Cohen in Michigan, along with several other outdoor sculptures. And Maurice Cohen was a collector that Mark knew and had a very large indoor collection, as well, of paintings and other work. And there were a few outdoor sculptures. And Maurice Cohen and his wife gave us a gift of three sculptures after Mr. Cohen died, and it was the di Suvero, Dennis Oppenheim, and Ronald Bladen—it was a gift of three sculptures at the same time. So we trucked those out of Michigan to Storm King. [00:37:00] And Mark is somebody that knew Maurice Cohen very well, and there was a discussion of where the sculpture should go in the future, and that’s the decision—to give it to Storm King.

Dziedzic: And *Mahatma* was also a gift, right?

Collens: *Mahatma* was a gift from Edward Broida. Ed Broida was a major collector from Southern California, and he lived in Florida. I knew him quite well over the years. He was the largest private collector of Mark di Suvero’s work at that point in time, many years ago, [00:38:00] primarily with sculpture. He had a full collection of di Suvero’s sculptures, from early works right up through *Mahatma* at

that point in time. And he passed away and made a gift to Storm King of his largest di Suvero sculpture, *Mahatma*. He would visit frequently.

Dziedzic: So I want to—sorry, I’m not following the bullet points I sent you at all, David, I’m sorry.

[00:39:00] I’m curious if we can maybe talk a little bit about Peter. I might be asking you to speculate a little bit, but I was struck in his interview how he talks about the Kenneth Snelson sculpture. He says that it was so dramatic that he could hardly even keep looking at it—he had to look away. And I think this is the first sculpture that he brought to Storm King. But right around that time is also him asking for Mark di Suvero to essentially have “outdoor storage” for his sculptures here at Storm King. [00:40:00] This is something that I’m interested with Storm King as an institution and with you and also with Peter and with Nora, too—but how you develop your eye for what is it that you like? Your eye for sculpture. What is it that you like? How is that connected with this landscape? So before we talk about that with you, I just want to ask about it with regard to Peter. So I’m just going back to these first few pieces that I know of—the Snelson and the di Suveros—and that being pretty much the first full year of him being president of Storm King. Can you just go back to that and maybe recall what seemed to draw him and what [00:41:00] some of his goals were in terms of sculpture acquisition?

Collens: I think when Peter took over as President and Chairman of Storm King in 1974, after Ted Ogden died, that’s when Peter really had the full responsibility of the Art Center and moving it forward. And he started looking at sculpture, and Snelson was the first purchase of a large-scale sculpture under Peter’s stewardship. And I think Peter, working with Bill Rutherford and becoming more involved with Bill starting at that period—because the earlier period really was Ted Ogden and Bill Rutherford working together—and [00:42:00] Peter got very involved with all aspects of Storm King and enjoyed the landscape and looking for sculpture and what would fit into Storm King. And I think he clearly understood the scale necessary of sculpture—quality sculpture, I might add—for Storm King—not just large-scale—because it’s big, but he understood quality.

He found the Snelson, which was first shown in New York City at Waterside Plaza, between two apartment buildings on the East River Drive—the two buildings are there and there’s the concrete platform between them. There was a Snelson show, and Peter went down and saw it and saw *Free Ride Home*, that he [00:43:00] purchased—the largest of the Snelsons that were there. And we put it on the hill at Storm King—same location as it is today. I think that really Peter understood scale and quality immediately. For Storm King, it wasn’t a formal garden where there maybe was a larger selection of sculpture that one could choose from that would be more traditional—it really fit into the Storm King landscape as it was being built. It required a certain scale, and I think that is something that he wanted to do—and not just collect garden-size sculptures.

Dziedzic: What sort of factors go into determining a quality sculpture?

Collens: I think for [00:44:00] Storm King, it always has been building a collection and having good materials that can withstand being outdoors and our harsh winters and hot summers. And yes, all sculpture needs maintenance, and we learn that—as everybody has—with outdoor sculpture, that's required, whether it's in an urban area or in our landscape at Storm King. And conservation is challenging, but I think Peter understood, going back to sculptures that were really appropriate for Storm King in terms of scale and materials, that it's not a sculpture park where all artists have to be included. We were very select, as we [00:45:00] are today, about purchasing or gifts of sculpture to Storm King.

Dziedzic: It sounds like there's a specific definition for Storm King, and that's what guides decisions—quality sculpture, in a way, means that it's a good fit for Storm King. Is that right?

Collens: I think so. We want to have certainly a broad collection of sculpture, with different types of materials and artists of different generations, and I think there's a difference between doing exhibitions of different artists and collecting. It's wonderful to be able to collect sculptures, but the maintenance and the care of the sculptures is really critical to have them in [00:46:00] the best possible condition, and also appropriate storage so you can rotate a collection.

Dziedzic: So you're always making decisions within the context of the collection—so in terms of what can physically, technically, financially be taken on, but also how this particular sculpture might grow the collection or change the collection or affect it?

Collens: Yes, definitely so.

Dziedzic: Thank you. So I want to transition into Noguchi. [00:47:00] So again, I read in Peter Stern's oral history that that was his definition of the best living sculptor at this time. I'm interested to hear how that commission occurred—the discussions here internally about trying to reach him and then how he actually agreed to work with Storm King?

Collens: Well, I think the introduction was through Cynthia Polsky, [00:48:00] as I recall. And Noguchi had his home and studio in New York City and enjoyed being in New York and would travel from Manhattan to Long Island City, Queens to his studio—and that was about as far as he'd want to go. I think Peter called Noguchi up and asked him about coming to Storm King. And also, I think Cynthia Polsky mentioned Storm King to Noguchi and that he should come out and see it—you know, interesting landscape and collection, you might enjoy it, and so forth. Always a little hesitant to travel too far out of New York. [00:49:00]

He eventually did come out to Storm King. And instead of spending 15 minutes and leaving, he spent all day here and had a picnic on the lawn near the David Smith area and walked around and really enjoyed what he saw. Peter discussed doing a sculpture at Storm King, and Isamu invited Peter down to his studio in Long Island City, which is now the Noguchi Museum and Garden. Peter did go, and looked at the sculptures. And Noguchi offered him various smaller-scale work. Storm King was clear [00:50:00] about wanting a stone sculpture and not steel or bronze, which Noguchi worked in as well, in different scales—but particularly enjoyed stone and Noguchi's expertise working on stone in his studio in Shikoku in Japan.

So Peter thanked him and said he'd like to really have a stone sculpture, and discussed with Noguchi what Storm King could afford at that point in time. They had a gentleman's agreement about the cost of the sculpture, and that Noguchi would do it in Japan; that it would be a larger-scale work for a hillside at Storm King that Noguchi selected [00:51:00] when he was here. Peter and I had selected three locations as possible locations for a Noguchi sculpture, and we clearly knew which was the best location. And Noguchi selected the hillside where *Momo Taro* (1977–78) is today. We removed another sculpture from that hillside and had to create the full hill as you see it today for the Noguchi sculpture. It was considerably smaller; it was not fully developed because it had a lot of brush and secondary trees on one side of the hill when Noguchi first saw it in 1977. So Peter and Noguchi struck an agreement about the price, and also that it wasn't necessary to come back from Japan for particular meetings and [00:52:00] show the progress of what you're doing with your sculpture and drawings and other details like that. It was a handshake.

Noguchi was quite relieved not to have to go through a bureaucratic situation, which he was used to with other museums in the City of New York—when he wanted to do a park with the architect Louis Kahn and Robert Moses turned them down on a few proposals for a park in Riverside Park on the west side of Manhattan. They were turned down, I think, twice by Robert Moses. So Noguchi had disappointments like that, and Peter wanted to avoid all of that. And Noguchi went to Japan to his studio with his [00:53:00] number-one stonecutter, Izumi, and started working on *Momo Taro*. And a year later, this great sculpture came to Storm King—40 tons of white granite—and avoided all the red tape and bureaucracy that Noguchi didn't particularly like. Peter sensed that and was 100 percent right. And this was done 10 years before he died, and really a masterpiece.

Dziedzic: Was there discussion about—I think you mentioned Peter going to the studio and selecting from a few different sculptures—

Collens: At one point, I think, when the agreement was made at Storm King, Noguchi did say, “Come to the studio and you can select work out of the [00:54:00] studio,” and Peter very quickly said he had something else in mind—it wasn’t just a sculpture that was sitting in his studio area in New York. And Noguchi spent the day here with his friend that he came out with, had a picnic, and really got very involved with the landscape and seeing Storm King—and didn’t leave in 20 minutes [laughs] upon arrival, which could have happened.

Dziedzic: Do you know why stone was the material that Storm King wanted?

Collens: Well, I think Noguchi had done sculptures out of other materials: steel that he had fabricated—there’s a very large steel sculpture in Cleveland, for instance—and he was accomplished at bronze. I think it was that we figured out [00:55:00] quite quickly that Noguchi’s ability to work with stone at his studio in Shikoku in Japan really was very special, with his stonecutter, Izumi. He had worked in Italy, in Carrara, with marble, as well. But using a stone at his studio in Japan and all the tools and—he really was probably most creative using stone, where some of the surfaces are polished, others are left rough-cut, and so forth. And it’s just a great combination of using white granite for this sculpture at Storm King, and the way it’s finished. [00:56:00]

Dziedzic: Was this the first commission here at Storm King that you were part of in some way, or witnessed?

Collens: It was. There were several earlier commissions at Storm King, but this was the first one under Peter Stern’s time at Storm King and his tenure, yes.

Dziedzic: Has Storm King been able to use that as a model for subsequent commissions?

Collens: I think we’ve always been involved and focused on the creative aspects of an artist, whether it’s Noguchi or Richard Serra. It’s become more formal [laughs] with paperwork [00:57:00] and so forth than, a basic handshake with Noguchi—which was terrific, and it worked in those days. I think at this point, with commissions and a process of working with an artist that we select to do a commission, there are more details that are important. And museums, at this point in time, I think, like to have a lot of archival material—

Dziedzic: I know all about that. [laughs]

Collens: —where with Noguchi, now we have a basic contract that was signed eventually with him and so forth. But the model for *Momo Taro* is at the Noguchi Museum in Japan. It’s not an exact model, but

it's an early model out of clay that Noguchi made, and it shows his thought process for [00:58:00] developing the sculpture at Storm King. And we don't own that. We have blueprints for the fabrication of the base for the 40 tons of white granite and that type of thing, but we don't have any of the other information about the creative part of what Noguchi was doing. I don't think there's a great deal. But it's been documented with Bruce Bassett's film in Japan—Noguchi working on the sculpture in Shikoku and so forth. But there's a not a lot of written material on that commission.

Dziedzic: And so you became director around—that same year, 1978, right?

Collens: Yes.

Dziedzic: How did that happen? I'm not [00:59:00] sure what your position was before, but how did that opportunity develop?

Collens: A very small staff—and my predecessor had left a few years earlier and emphasized a small staff and everything that really a small organization was doing, whether it was maintaining the grounds, working on the exhibitions—and less programming. So it was a very different point in time for Storm King. We had visitors coming, and that was well and good—we welcomed them. We weren't a destination like it is today for many people; social media has changed everything. But now, with a large senior staff and many more people working in different departments at Storm King, it's a very different [01:00:00] organization.

Dziedzic: Was that Dorothy Mayhall who was your predecessor?

Collens: Yes.

Dziedzic: And in addition to the things that you listed, did you become more involved with exhibitions and acquisitions, or was it a lot of the operations tasks that came onto your plate right away?

Collens: Shortly after Dorothy left, we had to do another exhibition, which was in the spring of 1976. She planned a very different type of exhibition, and she departed, I believe, in 1975. And [01:01:00] that commenced organizing an exhibition of David Smith, who was an artist that also fascinated me in a different way than Mark di Suvero. And there were fewer responsibilities than today, so I had more time to work on the exhibition on my own time, and also office time, and produced an exhibition that brought the *New York Times* and *New York Magazine*—Tom Hess—to review it. John Russell at the *Times* did a review, as well, and brought a large number of people to Storm King. That was not my intention, but we did some [01:02:00] publicity with major newspapers and magazines. We got excellent reviews, and

certainly that increased the number of people coming to Storm King—to see the exhibition, to see Storm King.

Dziedzic: And it had officially become—I can't remember now the terminology, but it had changed from being a private institution to officially a public institution by that time, right? And the board had opened up too? That was right around that time, right?

Collens: Around the same period, maybe a little earlier. But it changed to become basically a different status as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Yes.

Dziedzic: I was wondering, since you were describing that exhibition bringing [01:03:00] a lot of people—and attention, too—to Storm King, what the relationship was between those two things? Of, technically, in terms of your tax status, opening things up to the public, and the strategies early on to create exhibitions or programming that were geared to the public?

Collens: I think with the David Smith exhibition of 1976, one thing that made it very different than previous exhibitions at Storm King was the fact that it was a sculpture exhibition and it wasn't paintings, which had been shown in the Museum Building—and there are photographs of the galleries in the Museum Building with paintings and other flat work on the wall, and occasionally a sculpture in the galleries. My focus was [01:04:00] with David Smith's sculptures, both indoors and outdoors, and photographs that Smith took, as well, and drawings of David Smith. But I just used the building in a very different way than my predecessor did. Beyond that, the first-floor galleries were really white boxes. You could not see out the French doors to the landscape when I first saw, for instance, the large Gallery 1, which used to be the living room—it was a white box.

Peter Stern and I had very similar visions for Storm King. We got a carpenter and took out the plywood that was covering all the [01:05:00] French windows, and French doors. There were French windows on the second floor—some of the windows were covered up. I opened up all the windows that were covered on the second floor, opened up the French doors. So the building connected, for the first time in many years, to the landscape again. And the exhibition flowed from indoors with David Smith that year to outside, with a large quantity of David Smith sculptures on the top of the hill. Very similar to the exhibitions today, but that was the first time that was done.

Dziedzic: What inspired you to do that?

Collens: I guess it was really [laughs] starting to become interested in landscape. Working with Bill Rutherford and Peter Stern very closely and [01:06:00] really all of us having the same vision for Storm

King to improve the quality of what we were doing. Better exhibitions, more connected to Storm King and the history of sculpture. The David Smith Collection was purchased in 1967 and the di Suveros were outdoors; it looked very different in those days versus today—in terms of landscape, in terms of collection—but there still were some wonderful sculptures: the Robert Grosvenor, the von Schlegell—and there were some Libermans here, and Tal Streeter (*Endless Column*, 1968) and so forth. But we wanted to emphasize quality and [01:07:00] really move in the direction of sculpture, whether to borrow sculptures for outdoors from artists, museums, and start on occasion having the opportunity to collect the appropriate sculptures for Storm King.

Dziedzic: Well, thinking about the history of sculpture, as you mentioned, it seems like things were happening almost in real time—the Smiths were acquired years after they were made; the di Suveros, too. You think about how a canon is built and you think about how we need the perspective of 25 years before we can decide anything, yet some of the sculptures that Storm King was acquiring were being made right at that time. [01:08:00] I'm thinking of *The Arch*, too, being built in 1975, but Storm King working on bringing that sculpture into the collection very shortly after that.

Collens: *The Arch* by Calder came to Storm King in the spring of 1978. Very well documented. Just a perfect Calder for Storm King, and one of the last great Calders, created a year before he died. Not the largest one, but a very important sculpture that dates to—the model is from 1949, which the Calder Foundation owns, and we had it at Storm King on a few occasions. And the model of 1949 [laughs] shows the sculpture in the same form that it is today. [01:09:00] Calder didn't build it till 1975. Interesting to historically see that nothing changed on it when he did build it.

Dziedzic: I want to talk more about Calder, of course, but I'm still in the middle of this thought. [laughs]

Collens: Yes.

Dziedzic: Which is, spaces that are showing work that's recent are often galleries; the role of the museum is something different. Were you consciously thinking about, "what is the role of a gallery? What is the role of the museum? What do we show indoors? What do we show outdoors?" I'm also trying to go back to what the thinking was at the time. [01:10:00] And it strikes me that Storm King was being really forward-thinking by acquiring sculptures that were being made in the recent past. So that's just my—where I'm trying to sort things out in my mind. How would you think about it? How did you think about it then? How do you think about it now?

Collens: I think then, clearly, the galleries were white boxes—you know, indoor space. Occasionally, there were outdoor shows in Newport, Rhode Island and other locations—New Jersey. And there wasn't

an opportunity very often for artists to really show their work. In urban areas, on occasion, getting permits from the City of New York [01:11:00] or other cities for short durations—three months for putting a sculpture in and then having to remove it from the city park or whatever it might be. And the opportunities were far fewer, I think, in those days. You had people like Don Lippincott, one of the early fabricators, working directly with the artists, doing sculpture. And he would put them out in his fields in North Haven, Connecticut, where his foundry was, and—until they were sold, and so forth. And most of them went to urban areas, in front of office buildings, which was not always very sympathetic or a pleasant place to see contemporary sculpture or modern sculpture at this point.

I think Storm King was starting to come into its own. [01:12:00] It was founded in 1960, and just at the point that the Lippincott foundry was going into action and working with a whole range of artists, and that was inspirational. Don Lippincott has fabricated many of the sculptures at Storm King over the years. We know him well. And we were a perfect location for placing sculpture, at Storm King—in a very different type of environment—certainly a beautiful landscape, as it is today, and it was in the process of being developed. There's something very different about putting sculpture at Storm King versus an urban landscape or other types of landscapes. And we always [01:13:00] travel throughout this country and Europe to see sculpture. And we're not the oldest sculpture park around—maybe in this country we are, but in Europe, there are older ones. Each one has its own philosophy of collecting and philosophy of landscape that they want to develop.

Dziedzic: Talking about the foundry makes me think about—what's the relationship between the increasing cost of getting sculpture fabricated and what Storm King can imagine to acquire? I'm thinking of an artist talking about the expense of fabricating her work—that it's, you know, pretty expensive to make a large sculpture in bronze! [laughs] So what does that mean for Storm King? [01:14:00] How does Storm King stay flexible or change how it thinks about what is quality in the collection?

Collens: I think sculpture has become popular. There are museums with sculpture gardens in urban areas. And individuals are collecting sculpture for their [laughs] properties—beautiful, large-scale properties and so forth, country houses. That's putting a lot of, I think, pressure on for collecting, and it's becoming more appealing for people to collect sculpture. I think the price of sculpture certainly has gone up significantly, and there are many successful sculptors out working today who are selling their work to museums, private collectors, and so forth—and have it in public [01:15:00] places on a permanent basis. And there's more of a supply-and-demand situation happening. I think for us, it comes down to really carefully selecting artists that we want to at some point commission and that are passionate about the collection, the landscape, and want to be part of it. And it's, I think, a situation that, curatorially, we are very much in control and overseeing and guiding.

Dziedzic: Let's talk about the Calder hillside and [01:16:00] the relationship with the Calder Foundation. I guess I see that as connecting to what you were saying—that relationships are important, and you're working with people that understand Storm King. From what I know of the relationship with the Calder Foundation, that's an interesting and very fruitful example. So let's maybe go back to the beginning. I found a picture of you on the day that *The Arch* was installed, [laughs] so I wondered if—

Collens: [laughs] Nineteen seventy-eight.

Dziedzic: I wondered if you remembered that day.

Collens: Oh, very well—the spring of 1978 with *The Arch*. Peter Stern worked with another gallery, Larry Rubin, on trying to find a large-scale [01:17:00] Calder to bring to Storm King. I think there was a choice of two, as I recall, that were fabricated at Segre Ironworks near Waterbury, Connecticut next to Route 84. It doesn't exist today, but the Calders were sitting—many of them—next to this small building of Segre Ironworks. They were a metal pipe-building shop. And Carmen Segre struck up a relationship with Sandy Calder years ago, and Carmen Segre started working on the larger-scale Calder sculptures for Sandy Calder. It wasn't far from his house in Roxbury, Connecticut, so it was an easy commute to go over [01:18:00] there—to travel over from Roxbury to Waterbury and so forth. So Carmen started building the large-scale works for Calder, and they were out by the highway, which was always fun to see as you would drive by if you knew what you were looking at. It was wonderful to see them—some painted, some not painted, and just the shapes of them—of all sizes, sitting there.

Dziedzic: So is that where you saw *The Arch*?

Collens: That's where *The Arch* was made. It was fabricated at Segre Ironworks. And it was sitting outside for several years—three years—before it came to Storm King.

Dziedzic: How was *The Arch* selected?

Collens: As I recall, there were only two large-scale [01:19:00] works that were available, sitting next to the Segre factory. And certainly *The Arch* was the taller—the vertical one of the two pieces. The other was quite—more of a horizontal sculpture—maybe 36 feet high. It wasn't small, by any means, but it was horizontal predominantly, and—where the Calder *Arch* just had the beautiful curve, going up to its majestic 56 feet.

Dziedzic: And who was the contact in the Calder family at that time?

Collens: See, at that point, when it came to Storm King, it was Sandy Rower's father, Howard Rower, who was married to [01:20:00] Calder's daughter, Mary Rower. And they had two children: Sandy Rower, who founded the Calder Foundation, and his brother, Holton Rower, who was an artist.

Dziedzic: It seemed like figuring out how to acquire *The Arch* signified a big success in Peter Stern's terms, I think—typified a direction for collecting.

Collens: Oh, very much so.

Dziedzic: Was that your impression, as well? Did that come to be true for you as well as [01:21:00] Peter?

Collens: I think with the Calder *Arch* coming to Storm King as a loan in the spring of 1978—and it remained a loan until several years later—and the location of where it was put—the same location today as in 1978, a former farm field that Bill Rutherford just gently landscaped to raise a platform for the Calder, very subtly. Then came up with the idea of the native grasses, which are growing in that area today. But to have it as a location where everybody comes through the [01:22:00] main driveway, and to greet you—it's really a signature location and sculpture and fabulous to have in that space.

Dziedzic: And can you talk about the development of the Calder hillside?

Collens: See, with the hillside—after the di Suvero exhibition of 1985, where we had large-scale di Suveros surrounding the Museum Building—very close to the building—that were 26 feet [laughs] high, for example, and steel I-beam sculptures, one with a swing—another one had a swing, *She*, which is now back at Storm King—was at the base of the Noguchi sculpture and [01:23:00] was quite large as well. And we decided at that point, with these large-scale di Suveros so close to the building, that it would be wonderful to have more space for large-scale sculpture and a walking path to get people down to the fields, where we had other sculptures as well. So Bill Rutherford came up with an idea of expanding the top of the hill with a sculpture platform and a walking ramp that would be easy to walk down to the fields and also ascend back up to the Museum Building—if you were going from the fields up to the hillside it would not be overly steep. So he was just a genius at all this and came up with this idea of what is probably about a six-acre [01:24:00] hillside that we built. We raised it out of the farm field, 30 feet in height and overall six acres in space, to give us a place for more large-scale sculpture and a very broad walking path.

This took five years to build in the 1980s, and we finished it in the summer of 1988. And I was looking around for sculpture to put on this hillside. I didn't want to have a mix of different artists, because I had

changed the aesthetics at Storm King—or started to change that—where there was a mix of different artists in various areas, and I wanted to have one artist. And I came across a group of Calder sculptures that were available [01:25:00] to put on the hillside, and it became the Calder hillside in the summer of 1988. And we had an opening in September of that year for the Calder hillside, with three large-scale Calders and two smaller ones.

Dziedzic: Do you remember which ones they were—the sculptures?

Collens: Well, one Calder that has been here from 1988 is *Five Swords* (1976). That was one of the original ones we brought. And two of the other sculptures that came to Storm King went to the National Gallery many years ago. So they've moved and we've changed them to this day for [01:26:00] different reasons—as sculptures go to other exhibitions. We brought *Black Flag* (1974) in from the Walker Art Center years ago for the Calder exhibition of 2001, 2002, and 2003. That one came from the Walker. And earlier this summer, we just had two sculptures that we returned to the Calder Foundation and borrowed another one that was larger in scale, just to freshen it up.

Dziedzic: I keep checking the time here. It's about 3:15.

Collens: It's gone so fast, Sarah.

Dziedzic: I thought I'd been torturing you. [laughs] Well, let me see here. So I have some more questions about *Grand Intuitions* (2001–03), but [01:27:00] I could also ask those at a different time, and I know you have another meeting at 3:30. So—

[Side conversation]

End of session

Interview with David Collens
Conducted by Sarah Dziedzic
July 31, 2018

Storm King Art Center
1 audio file
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Audio File 1

Dziedzic: Today is July 31, 2018, and this is session three with David Collens for the Storm King Oral History Program. This is Sarah Dziedzic. All right, so we were talking about Calder last time, and there were a couple of things we didn't get around to. So can we start with talking about *The Arch*—and basically some of the technicalities around how it came into the collection.

Collens: *The Arch*, by Alexander Calder, arrived in the spring of 1978. Prior to that, we had a small Calder stabile that was part of the permanent collection, and Peter Stern wanted to try and find a large Calder for Storm King. He reached out to Knoedler Gallery, [00:01:00] which represented the estate of Alexander Calder at that time. And the director of the gallery was Larry Rubin, and Peter set up a meeting with him. And it came to a choice of two large stabiles that were at the Segre Ironworks next to Route 84 in Waterbury, Connecticut. So we went over to look at *The Arch*, which was a 56-foot vertical sculpture, and thought that would be perfect for Storm King. The other was a large horizontal sculpture, which was sold to another client. And we proceeded to bring *The Arch* to Storm King in the [00:02:00] spring of 1978.

It arrived on many trucks and various sections, and was put together by a steel fabrication shop through Segre Ironworks, who fabricated the sculpture for Sandy Calder. It was fully bolted for the first time at Storm King to go on exhibit, and painted black. It's been in the same location, as you enter the Storm King property coming off Old Pleasant Hill Road, you have a chance to see it as you're on the road and making your turn to come into the main drive at Storm King. It's sitting there majestically at [00:03:00] a great height, and welcoming you to Storm King. It's been in that location since 1978, and it's still the perfect location for it.

Dziedzic: Now you said you painted it black here. What had it been painted with when it arrived?

Collens: When it was fabricated, it sat on steel plates outside of the small building at Segre Ironworks. And they specialize, really, in creating steel pipes and other industrial products they were making. And there was a relationship between Carmen Segre and Sandy Calder, and they started creating sculpture at the Segre Ironworks. It was very close to Sandy Calder's house in Roxbury, Connecticut, so that was an easy drive. And they collaborated on [00:04:00] creating the sculptures, which would sit outdoors next to the building. And it was always wonderful to drive by Route 84 and see Calders sitting there, some of them painted, others not painted.

The Arch was sitting there, and it had a primer coat on it, and it wasn't fully bolted. It sat on steel plates for several years. It was created in 1975, a year before Calder died, and came to Storm King in 1978. And that's the first time it went on exhibit.

Dziedzic: So essentially it was on loan when it first came?

Collens: It was on loan to Storm King. And it proved [00:05:00] to be so successful in that location, and an important Calder stabile—not the largest, but certainly the grand scale of it was perfect for the Storm King collection. And we acquired the sculpture in 1982—and we felt very fortunate to be able to do that—and exchanged a small Calder, *Seven Foot Beastie*¹, plus cash, for *The Arch*. And we negotiated with Calder's son-in-law, Howard Rower, representing the Calder family for the sculpture.

Dziedzic: And then you had mentioned that *Seven Foot Beastie's* future [laughs]—

Collens: [00:06:00] *Seven Foot Beastie* from 1957—a black stabile, a very unusual work that Calder, I believe, fabricated. And we returned that to the Calder family. And they, in turn, gave it to the Whitney Museum of American Art, where it is today. The Whitney has a very large collection of Calder's work, and it fits in perfectly.

Dziedzic: All right. Thank you. So let's go on to talk about *Grand Intuitions* and how that exhibition came about.

Collens: The Calder exhibition, *Grand Intuitions*, was [00:07:00] a special exhibition that was selected with sculptures both in the Museum Building and outdoors by myself and Sandy Rower, Calder's grandson and the founder of the Calder Foundation. And it was 2001, 2002, 2003—it was a three-year exhibition that did not change, unlike the David Smith exhibition of 1997, 1998, and 1999, which was a three-year, changing exhibition—both indoors and outdoors each year.

The Calder exhibition was very different, in the sense that we had extensive conservation to do on the outdoor Calders—which we accomplished—therefore, we needed a lot of lead time, and [00:08:00] we left the sculptures in place for three years, both outdoors and in the Museum Building. And it was really a special exhibition that showed the Calder maquettes that he made in the galleries on the second floor, and you could see the full-scale sculpture outdoors. And people understood immediately the relationship between the indoor maquette that Calder created—they were delicate, and earlier work, so looking out

¹ The sculpture was known as *Seven Foot Beastie* during the time it was at Storm King Art Center, and is reflected in the records as such; further research by the Calder Foundation led to a change in the artwork's title, which was changed to *Seven-Legged Beast*.

the windows to the hillside and surrounding area—and the Museum Building, filled with a large selection of Calder work. You could easily identify the maquettes inside the Museum Building and see the full-scale work outdoors. And that was of great interest to people [00:09:00] who very much appreciated seeing that artist's process of the maquette and then the full-scale work and how it changes sometimes.

Dziedzic: Do you recall the conversation around how to use the indoor space? Did that change over time—until it settled on maquettes?

Collens: I think it was our immediate thought to bring the maquettes here. We wanted to really have a full exhibition of Calder's earlier work in the building that wasn't too fragile—if we couldn't have it in vitrines, or if it moved around, then we had to rely on visitor services staff to make sure that people were not overzealous in handling the work and moving the sculptures. [00:10:00] But it was really a full selection, from the 1930s up to 1976 when Calder died.

Dziedzic: I think that Sandy Rower in his interview said that it was the biggest survey of Calder's work that had been shown up to that point—and I don't think there's been anything since that has covered such a broad scope.

Collens: I don't think so. It was unusual. One aspect of the show was bringing so many pieces from Calder's property in Roxbury, which is still owned by the Calder family. And there were many pieces outdoors—many sculptures—that we had to do the conservation work that had not been seen before, in years, or ever [00:11:00] on public exhibition. But they required a full conservation treatment, so that made this exhibition and the preparation of it very difficult and challenging.

Dziedzic: Is that something that Storm King typically takes on when mounting an exhibition?

Collens: I think this was unusual—the quantity of work that we had to move, and very strict guidelines with moving and handling the work and having a paint shop that could do it under strict supervision—and then bring the sculptures to Storm King and do the installation. It was labor-intense.

Dziedzic: What was your takeaway from having a three-year exhibition that didn't change over those years? [00:12:00]

Collens: Oh, I think it was a terrific exhibition. And Calder is an artist that one can continue to explore to this day. And many exhibitions have taken place since the Storm King exhibition. Yes, it was very large and we really focused on stabiles and not standing mobiles outside, with our windy location on top of a hill. But all these exhibitions with sculpture are enormous efforts. And it was really well worth it. People

love seeing Calder's work, and I think it brought new people to Storm King—as each exhibition has over the years.

Dziedzic: And what about the title of [00:13:00] exhibition? Sandy talked about that a little bit—that it felt important to call it that at the time, and that maybe now it feels a little dated. He was very committed to the idea of relating that Calder was an intuitive artist—did you feel like that was successful in the exhibition? How did the title come about?

Collens: Personally, I really gravitate to titles that aren't quite as grandiose—you know, more straightforward, and let the work speak for itself in exhibitions. And I think that's a good point you made about Sandy Rower, who came up with the title. We looked at several possibilities, and this seemed to be the appropriate title for the exhibition [00:14:00] at Storm King.

Dziedzic: And what about that sense of Calder as an intuitive artist?

Collens: I think that was certainly demonstrated in the exhibition and his working methods, because we did have photographs by Herbert Matter and other photographers showing what the Calder studio was like in Roxbury and Saché, and Calder working. Alex Liberman took some photographs. So we had a range of photographs as part of the exhibition—I think in a stand-alone gallery, so there wasn't a mix of photographs and sculptures, but we did discreetly use photographs and document what Calder was doing and his process of working.

Dziedzic: I wanted to ask about [00:15:00] conservation—basically, conservation at Storm King, but looking at, I guess, *The Arch* as an example of developing new methods and experimenting with new materials, or new products. “Experiment” makes it sound cavalier; I know it's not. [laughs] But to me, it seemed, from talking to Mike Seaman, that there was a really dedicated effort to figure out the best ways of upkeeping the Calders broadly, and that *The Arch* and Storm King's maintenance of it has been played a really big role in adding to the knowledge around that.

Collens: With sculpture conservation, we try to use the appropriate paints—if that's the material we're talking about—in many cases, it is paint—and other products on the sculptures that are appropriate for each artist [00:16:00] and certainly approved by foundations and estates—or artists, if they're living, we want their input. And we certainly try to do our best to communicate with appropriate people and come up with the right combination of materials to use. Certainly paints are changing very rapidly, and they can be very expensive and difficult to use. And the outdoor environment makes it much harder and challenging. In the Hudson Valley or any outdoor situation, if a sculpture can't be dismantled, then we have to paint it in situ. We've tried various paints, and one can spend a great deal of money for different [00:17:00] types

of paints, and that doesn't always [laughs] guarantee that it's the best product to use. We need durability and certainly longevity with paints.

We've tried several different paints with Calder outdoor sculptures, and sometimes more successful than others. Now it's becoming more challenging with such a large visitation at Storm King, and people handling the sculpture—it's not like a Rembrandt painting, but you still can damage paint surfaces. And sunscreen is very damaging, as well, to the paints, and we haven't figured a way—nor has anybody—to remove sunscreen from the paint surface, so that is blemishing the surface of the paint. And the environment at Storm King, with the winters [00:18:00] and particularly in the summertime—the steel gets very hot. And it's challenging to really have a good-quality paint that's going to stand up to the elements.

Dziedzic: And can you talk about Mike Seaman's direct role in being the one who's involved in painting the sculptures—and his role in researching different paints and materials?

Collens: Well, Mike Seaman's our sculpture specialist at Storm King, and is doing a terrific job on painting sculptures—outdoors, and the smaller ones brought into a more controlled situation for painting when possible. We really don't have the [00:19:00] proper facilities for doing this at this point in time, so we're doing the best we can. And it's always a complicated process, because we're communicating with many different people to take care of the sculptures. And they sometimes need more than paint: they need welding; they have bases that need to be worked on—the concrete bases or other bases—and fastening devices to hold the sculpture in place.

We're consulting with a lot of other people when we go to work on a sculpture. It could be engineers and fabricators that have created many of the sculptures at Storm King, like Don Lippincott—Lippincott Foundry in North Haven, Connecticut created several of the large-scale sculptures at Storm King, and Don's always a very good resource. Or Dick [00:20:00] Polich, who has a foundry 10 miles from Storm King, and has worked on two of the large-scale sculptures and several smaller ones at Storm King. And these men have different resources, working with many of the artists at Storm King to help out with the conservation work, and other sources as well—the artist themselves, of course—that goes without saying—that we want to communicate with them—or foundations and estates. Also, the team at Storm King and our records of what we've done in the past for each sculpture and what has been recommended—and other sculpture conservators—are very important to the process. So it's really multifaceted to work and [00:21:00] take care of each sculpture at Storm King.

Dziedzic: I mentioned that I wanted to go into talking about Louise Nevelson next, but there's also a conservation connection between Calder and Nevelson, right?

Collens: I think the connection there would be the Getty Institute of Conservation in L.A. And they have been working with different estates and living artists, because they want to put together as a resource information on different paint systems that artists are using today, and also what has taken place with artists in the past, and try to develop more durable paints for outdoor public sculpture. [00:22:00] And they've also been working with the Department of Defense and using paints that were used by the military for Iraq and Afghanistan on equipment over there, and adapting that to sculpture—public sculpture—systems for painting. So this is still a work in progress.

Some paints have been approved, for example, by the Calder Foundation for outdoor use that started with this process with the Getty. And most recently, Louise Nevelson is another artist besides Calder that's involved with the Getty. And Tony Smith and di Suvero—there are many artists [00:23:00] and estates and foundations that are involved with recording the information with the Getty and being involved with this list of paints that are being used and trying to improve upon paint systems that are presently on public sculptures outdoors, whether they're at museums or other locations—General Service Administration. The government owns a lot of outdoor sculptures in front of federal buildings, and I think they're looking to a better system to paint with in the future. And currently, we're working on a project on our Louise Nevelson sculpture (*City on the High Mountain*, 1983) that is being painted with a more experimental paint that will be returned [00:24:00] to Storm King later this season. And it's going through a full conservation treatment—the first large-scale treatment since it was fabricated and came to Storm King.

Dziedzic: Can you talk about how Storm King's relationship with Louise Nevelson developed?

Collens: We've had *City on the High Mountain* in the collection since the 1980s. It's a large, 20-foot steel sculpture of Louise's from 1984—it was acquired. Nevelson worked at the Lippincott Foundry in North Haven, Connecticut for 20 years. And people really don't realize, for the most [00:25:00] part, that she did steel sculpture for 20 years, and became very adept at it and very creative. With her outdoor work, people are used to seeing the boxes that she stacked up that are wood, painted black or white—or gold, on some occasions. But we have a very important example of Nevelson's outdoor sculpture—it's not her largest, by any means, but certainly the scale of it and the aesthetic content is terrific with the Storm King sculpture—it's recognized as a very important outdoor Nevelson. And therefore we have partnered with the Getty to do this project—with painting and doing other conservation work on the Nevelson. It's the first time [00:26:00] it's been fully dismantled. And it's in Virginia right now, and we're doing welding and other corrective work to the sculpture before it's primed and painted and returned to Storm King.

We had a Nevelson exhibition to celebrate the acquisition of *City on the High Mountain*. And we had several of her outdoor works at Storm King for part of a season, as I remember. And Louise came up here and certainly approved of the location in front of the Museum Building.

Dziedzic: I have in my notes from Peter Stern's interview working with Arne Glimcher a little bit to figure out [00:27:00] what work would be purchased by Storm King. Do you remember working with him?

Collens: Very well. Arne Glimcher at Pace Gallery was Nevelson's long-time dealer since he was in Boston, before he moved to New York, and represents the estate of Louise Nevelson as well—he still represents her work. We worked directly with Arne on purchasing a Nevelson sculpture for Storm King. They were certainly in demand in the 1980s, and we were the next museum to acquire a sculpture. We had to sign up in advance and wait a long time, as I remember. [00:28:00] Peter Stern and I flew in a helicopter from Storm King to North Haven, Connecticut to the Lippincott Foundry to see the sculpture for Storm King in progress, which was certainly very interesting. And basically, Louise dismantled, I believe, three sculptures to create *City on the High Mountain*, and then added different elements to it. And it's a Nevelson where—she created this ball out of steel railroad spikes, and they were sitting around the Lippincott Foundry for years, and Nevelson decided to include it in the Storm King sculpture, *City on the High Mountain*. And that's what finished the sculpture for Nevelson—when she put the spikes on the top of the sculpture.

Dziedzic: And [00:29:00] did Storm King basically have a sculpture that was made that was available to purchase, or was there an element of being able to select a sculpture?

Collens: No—I think the scale of our work, which is 20 feet high—there were not other works available. It wasn't commissioned by Storm King; it was a process of Louise living in New York and, on a regular basis, going to the Lippincott Foundry and working on her sculptures for a couple days at a time and going back after they bolted and welded different parts of the steel sculpture together, so she could see it again—and going into her stockpile at the Lippincott Foundry to select other work to be put into the sculpture, more in a spontaneous way. And she would pick [00:30:00] different elements off of the scrap pile and include them in various sculptures. That was part of her process—and, I think, makes the Storm King sculpture very special, with the quantity of work that has been pulled off her pile of steel scraps that were collected for her—and just, very imaginative way, she included those.

Dziedzic: Was this helicopter travel typical? [laughs] Tell me more.

Collens: [laughs] It wasn't. It was a small helicopter. And always flying over the Hudson River, the wind is quite strong over the Hudson, so we were pushed off in different directions crossing the river. The

weather was generally good. But it was a difficult trip over and back, and [00:31:00] we needed to really save time—you know, two hours or more driving to Lippincott's place.

Dziedzic: It just seems really crazy! [laughs]

Collens: It was. [laughs] But I think with Peter Stern's schedule and everything, that became the best way to take a look at the sculpture that was potentially coming to Storm King. And indeed it did.

Dziedzic: I think the exhibition that you mentioned is an example of the more straightforward titles that you've mentioned you preferred—just, *Louise Nevelson: Outdoor Sculptures, 1971-1983* (1984). Do you recall how the selection of sculptures for that exhibition? [00:32:00] As an addendum, Peter Stern said something that I thought was interesting about her work as wall pieces—not just the indoor works, but the outdoor works, too—and I wondered if you might be able to elaborate on that in the context of this exhibition.

Collens: Well, the exhibition of Nevelson outdoors was all free-standing, smaller-scale sculptures—mostly black; there was one white sculpture—and probably around 10 feet high. Some were more complicated than others, of course. And she did all of the outdoor sculptures out of aluminum or steel at the Lippincott Foundry. I don't think there was an overly large selection, because the gallery was selling Nevelson work at a rapid rate. [00:33:00]

Dziedzic: And Storm King has a number of loans of Nevelson sculptures, too. Do you want to talk about how those came about?

Collens: We have two loans from Bev and Peter Lipman and the Lipman Family Foundation. There are two indoor works: one is black, a very early black wood sculpture; the other is an early wood sculpture painted gold. And the scale is terrific. They're on the second floor of the building, so they're intimate in scale. They were owned by [00:34:00] Peter Lipman's parents and were in their apartment in New York at one point. So they look, I think, quite wonderful at Storm King together. It's a wonderful loan—to see two Nevelsons indoors. And then you go into another gallery and you have a view of *City on the High Mountain* through the window and from the Museum Building. And you can see it outdoors at 20 feet high and painted black as well. It's a wonderful combination of sculptures—to see works indoors and a work outdoors by the same artist. And I think we have a few other works by Nevelson in the collection that were gifts as well.

Dziedzic: Okay. I was going to ask about *Diminishing Reflection XXV* (1966), which I think was an acquisition [00:35:00] in 1984, right after *City on the High Mountain*.

Collens: That was a gift of Cynthia Polsky. And it's a black box of Nevelson's, with plexi and different wood elements inside—very hard to see—it's very dark and very mysterious. But you can see all of the wood elements. It's about 16 inches square and hangs on the wall.

Dziedzic: Is that out upstairs?

Collens: Not at the moment. No.

Dziedzic: And then there's also *Transparent Sculpture VII* (1967–68), which was a loan in 2002.

Collens: That is plexiglass—it's a plexi sculpture that Louise had done. And she went through and did a group of [00:36:00] these plexi sculptures using very small screws to hold the different sections together. And it's very fragile, but quite interesting.

Dziedzic: And what was Louise like when she was here?

Collens: Oh, a character. And looked always terrific, with her eyelashes and elaborate way of dressing and presenting herself. And enjoyed seeing her *City on the High Mountain* for the first time at Storm King. She came to the opening of her show on a very rainy day in the summer, and the grounds were wet after a heavy rain, and she didn't mind walking through the rain after it stopped and the wet grounds. Very adventuresome, [00:37:00] and, I think, really enjoyed seeing *City on the High Mountain* in front of the building. And was, I think, very appreciative and grateful to be in the Storm King collection.

Dziedzic: How was it determined to be sited in front of the building?

Collens: There was a thought to put it on our new hillside—what is now the Calder hillside—at one point in time, that maybe it would be good in that location. The hillside wasn't quite complete, I don't think, as I do recall. But I said I thought it was too small to go on the hillside, and not the right type of sculpture—because it's really quite flat, and I guess it has a front and back and it's not very wide [00:38:00] on the sides—and I didn't think that was the right location. I built a basic model—20 feet high—that could be moved around and roped down like a tent to keep it in place for a short time. And we moved the model to the front of the building, and that really was the perfect location for it. Both Peter and I realized that. We also had the experience of another Nevelson that was sitting quite close to the building that was 32 feet high. And, for example, you'd be in the second-floor David Smith gallery looking out the window and you'd see a black wall in front of you, because the sculpture went way beyond the second floor of the Museum

Building. So it was a beautiful sculpture—it was curved like the roof of the building, came up to a point. And anyway, that went to [00:39:00] another location.

Dziedzic: Who would build these models? Who were you working with at the time to do these kinds of—

Collens: I think it was just the grounds team that could build a basic wood frame. There was nothing special about it. It was just a wood frame that was 20 feet high. And we could assemble it and then tether it down to really stand away and take a look at it and see what the overall dimensions looked like and the landscape.

Dziedzic: Was the grounds crew shared with Star Expansion at that point, or were they separate?

Collens: It was really stand-alone. We had our own grounds crew, but there were certain areas that we still needed assistance from different people at Star for various reasons.

Dziedzic: That would be the engineering kinds of issues, right? [00:40:00]

Collens: Correct—and regarding painting sculpture and what type of paint to use. Alex Liberman, for example, came and asked us, “Well, what type of paint should I use on my outdoor steel sculptures?” And after research, Peter Stern asked Lester Knaack at the Star lab, a research lab, to look into it, and he came back with a DuPont Imron paint that would be durable. And that’s exactly what Alex Liberman started using on his steel sculptures for paint—and we did as well—on Libermans and other sculptures, for a long time. It’s still a very good product, DuPont Imron paint. But there are other paints to use, as well, and it depends what color artists like [00:41:00] and ratio of gloss and so forth—what paint we might select or recommend. But we did early research into that and came up with an excellent-quality paint.

Dziedzic: I’ve seen Lester Knaack’s name a couple times coming to the rescue with [laughs] some questions about sculptures. Do you want to talk about him a little bit more?

Collens: Well, he worked for Star, and he was always very meticulous, and designed the concrete bases going underneath the Nevelson sculpture, for example, and the appropriate hardware to fasten sculptures down. And he really took an interest in the sculptures at Storm King, and was here on a regular basis to advise when necessary.

Dziedzic: All right. Let’s start talking about [00:42:00] Alexander Liberman. And I have a similar question about him, which is, how did the relationship with Liberman begin?

Collens: Storm King quite early had three Liberman sculptures in the collection. It started with Ted Ogden bringing over *Adonai* from Warren, Connecticut, where Alex's home and studio were—northwestern Connecticut. And seeing *Adonai*, which is—at that point, rusting—used oil tanks that were underground for a number of years. And Liberman bought oil tanks from auctions and so forth, after they had been taken out [00:43:00] of the ground and couldn't be used anymore. That was his prime material for creating sculpture. So he had dozens of tanks of all different sizes—some were painted silver and some were unpainted—stacked up in his yard. And he created the sculptures with two other people. Bill Layman and sons helped and had the equipment very close to his house in Connecticut. So on weekends, he would go out and be working with Bill Layman and a crane, welding these tanks together and creating large-scale sculpture.

Alex got involved with this later in life, and he had done photography earlier and published a couple of books—*The Artist in the His Studio*, which is a book of artists from Paris that he [00:44:00] met after he left Russia and went to Paris, and then the Second World War came, and he left Paris for New York. But he met a full range of artists that were living in Paris and took their photographs and published a very interesting book. So he's well known as a photographer, and then started moving into painting, sculpture, printmaking—all this later in life, and became an accomplished sculptor. In addition to being the editorial director at *Condé Nast* and responsible for *Vogue* magazine—the American and European editions—and *House & Garden* and other publication. Very much involved with the fashion world, as well.

The beginning of the relationship [00:45:00] was with Ted Ogden wanting a large-scale Liberman quite early at Storm King in the early '70s and bringing that from Connecticut and then purchasing other sculptures of Liberman's. And then it changed when I did the exhibition in 1977 of Alex's work (*Alexander Liberman*) and showed his paintings inside—his early paintings and his later work; his photographs; smaller-scale sculptures. We brought over *Iliad* for the exhibition in 1977, and we were able to purchase it and return another sculpture to Alex that we used to trade it in for it.

Dziedzic: That was your second exhibition?

Collens: Correct.

Dziedzic: What was your thinking around that [00:46:00] following the '76 exhibition of David Smith's work?

Collens: I started looking at Alex's work, and I was fascinated by his early paintings—that he did not actually do himself—he came up with the design and sent them for somebody else to fabricate and create to his specifications using, I believe, different materials, like Formica and other materials. And I thought

that was interesting—everybody else was using their hand to paint and so forth, and Alex was doing another process. And then Alex decided to switch and started creating paintings on his own, which were also very interesting. But that was in the early 1950s, and I was curious about that process of sending paintings out to be done [00:47:00] [laughs] to his specifications. That was quite interesting to me. And the abstract scale of the paintings, I thought, was fascinating.

So I went to see him. And he was very surprised that I wanted to do an exhibition of his work—paintings, sculptures, drawings, printmaking that he did in Italy—full range. And we accomplished that in 1977. Because he was really a renaissance artist, and that's what the reviews by John Russell, the head art critic at the *New York Times*, and Tom Hess, and others pointed out about Liberman's work. And we weren't used to that in this country—a renaissance artist who was so accomplished. So it was his second exhibition during his lifetime. The first one was at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, which doesn't exist today, in Washington, D.C., [00:48:00] where he had his first museum exhibition. And then the one at Storm King.

Dziedzic: Was there any landscaping that had to happen for the placement of these sculptures? How did that area of Storm King, I guess, get developed?

Collens: We had to do a little landscaping and grading for *Iliad* because it was so large, and it's in the same place as when it arrived in the spring of 1977, and it had never been installed before. I saw it in Liberman's yard, and it had to be fully painted. And it was just quickly painted, with rust showing through, to show Alex what orange would look like on it. I thought it was an important sculpture and I wanted to bring it to Storm King. So [laughs] we did [00:49:00] bring *Iliad* and many other large-scale sculptures to the Art Center. We were able to purchase *Iliad*, but we had to create an area for *Iliad* where there was another significantly smaller sculpture sitting. And we had to stake out a much larger footprint so we could put concrete foundations in for the large-scale sculpture versus a small little work by another artist that was sitting there for years.

Dziedzic: I hate to do this, David, but I just want to pause for a minute.

Collens: Yes, absolutely.

[Break in audio]

Dziedzic: Okay. Resuming session three with David Collens. [00:50:00] I wanted to ask about, I guess, another Peter Stern quote that I'm hoping you can elaborate [laughs] on, which is that "Liberman's resting tanks challenged and pleased Ted the most." Something that I've been asking Bea and John about was

trying to understand Ted Ogden's aesthetic a little bit. And this "challenged and pleased" was a real mystery to me and I wondered if you might be able to—

Collens: I'll try to give you some insight. [laughs]

Dziedzic: Please do.

Collens: I would interpret that to be the following: [00:51:00] I think Ted Ogden at Storm King and Star, and at Glenoden Farm, loved challenges and moving earth and seeing machines moving—whether they're digging with bulldozers and backhoes and trucks moving gravel and earth around—creating something was, I think, really part of his spirit and enjoyment. I think with the Liberman—*Adonai* was a very challenging sculpture, because it was built out of used oil tanks that were underground for probably 20 years. Alex bought them at auction—[00:52:00] bought them from suppliers that were pulling these underground oil tanks out of the ground—and stashed them. That was a material that Alex liked—slicing off the ends at very sharp angles, like *Iliad* is—and Alex could get the scale that he wanted in creating sculpture—where if it was new materials, he couldn't afford it. He made that very clear.

I think for Ted Ogden, going to the Liberman studio in Warren, Connecticut and seeing *Adonai* and having this reaction to the scale of it, the color being just rusting metal—[laughs] it was very thin, as well, after being underground for that period of time. And they would pull them out before they started leaking [00:53:00] oil into the earth and so forth, and having other issues. I think getting the sculpture to Storm King in a very short period of time, dismantling it—it was fully assembled when Ted Ogden saw it, and he wanted to have it here in a short period of time. Getting Bill Layman and Alex to get it dismantled, installed at Storm King, bases made—it was a very quick turnaround to bring it here, weld it together—and also challenging to maintain it for a long period of time. And it was being maintained at Storm King. Eventually, we started putting an oil coating on it to help preserve the steel as much as possible—and extend its life, maybe, [00:54:00] to a certain extent.

But it came to the point that we couldn't keep it going; the tanks were really starting to decay. And it wasn't a matter of just surgically removing one tank and replacing it with another one—we could have done that. That was an option. There were extra tanks the same size. We might have been able to do that. But after really looking at it, we would have had failure in other areas. We decided to refabricate the sculpture, with Alex's full approval—we would not have done it unless we got Alex, who we knew well, to sign off. And he did that two weeks before he died.

Dziedzic: And how was the sculpture refabricated? [00:55:00]

Collens: We purchased tanks the same diameter as the oil tanks that it was created out of originally from a supplier in Louisiana—because they were building offshore gas and oil rigs in the Gulf of New Mexico, and they fabricated tanks the size that we required. They were capable of doing that. We had the tanks sent up to the Polich Tallix Foundry in Rock Tavern, 10 miles from Storm King, and the sculpture was fully assembled inside the foundry, welded, and prepared for exhibition at Storm King, and dismantled after it was fully [00:56:00] assembled and welded. And the base design was prepared, and we had to create a very large concrete base for it and bring it to the Art Center and do an installation. Alex would have done this if he was able to afford using new materials—he made that very clear to us in the beginning—but that was not something he could do early in his career, so he went to the used oil tanks.

Dziedzic: Was that the first refabrication that Storm King took on? [laughs]

Collens: Yes, it was. And it really was a process of—with sculptures sitting outdoors all year long and [00:57:00] conservation and really learning what conservation means for an outdoor sculpture versus an object that is sitting in a museum with full climate control, whether it's in storage or on exhibit—very different. And it was a learning curve for us and, I think, for everybody that was collecting outdoor sculpture. You know, how do you take care of them? And I think conservators were learning—it wasn't something they were particularly trained in. And the materials artists were using, as well—it was all very challenging for outdoor sculptures. We had to start putting more effort into it. It's not just washing, waxing, taking bird droppings off the sculptures and putting wax on bronze and so forth. There's a lot more to it. [00:58:00] So we started really looking into it and ramping up in that way.

Dziedzic: Can you talk a little bit more about that community around outdoor sculpture conservation? Who were you in dialogue with in that time? I'm interested to hear how that's changed over time.

Collens: It's changed significantly. I think conservators—everybody was really looking to a variety of different people—to the individuals like Don Lippincott who fabricated sculpture early on. There were not many fabricators, and Don got into the business and was very accomplished at working with Oldenburg and Barnett Newman and Bob Murray, Bob Grosvenor at Storm King, David von Schlegell. We have a range of [00:59:00] Lippincott fabrications at Storm King. And if you fabricate a sculpture, it's different than during the conservation, but it's a starting point—talking to different fabricators, engineers—because each sculpture really required something different. There's not always a uniform answer that applies to all the sculptures. And the artists themselves—of course, some are more knowledgeable than others and care about it, and others don't—on conservation and really preserving the pieces. Very interesting to hear what artists, foundations, estates—how they weigh in on this subject.

I think everyone's more sophisticated today than years ago, in the 1980s, when we really started getting involved and trying to, on a regular basis, [01:00:00] take care of the sculptures with a consulting conservator, and learning what it was all about. And we're still learning. And the Getty—you know, once they acquired the Stark collection, which was given to them—many of the same artists that Storm King has—they had, I think, a different knowledge base to start working on taking care of outdoor sculptures that are painted and what it requires. We had several Getty grants before they had their own permanent collection of sculpture. And they kept on wondering why [laughs] we were going back so soon for more grants to paint sculptures and so forth. They didn't understand the climate at Storm King and how difficult it is to take care of outdoor sculpture—the painted surfaces and other surfaces on them. [01:01:00] But now they've become very knowledgeable on that subject and devote a lot of resources to it, with an excellent staff. But it's really a learning curve for everybody.

Dziedzic: You're saying in part because the Getty acquired the Stark collection that they then—

Collens: Yes.

Dziedzic: —had first-hand witnesses?

Collens: I'm convinced—it's not, you know, Greco-Roman sculpture that they could take from the galleries to conservation and put in storage, where it's always climate-controlled, and do the conservation on it and so forth. It's very different when it lives in the environment outdoors.

Dziedzic: And then the era that you're talking about with *Adonai* is early days for outdoor sculpture—

Collens: Oh, definitely so. I mean, there was a GSA program where the government was purchasing sculpture for outdoors in front of their [01:02:00] federal buildings, and there are wonderful examples of a full range of artists. But there's major repairs to sculptures that the government owns, and they had to really focus on it—take sculptures down and do the welding and repair necessary—and the painting, eventually—to work. But it's challenging—for everybody.

Dziedzic: I've seen some of the very recent documentation of conservation efforts; what was it like then in terms of documenting what you were doing?

Collens: I think it was more basic. It's important to document with photographs—there's just no substitute for photographic documentation. Written, also, of course—what's being done on a regular maintenance basis or a much larger effort to do conservation [01:03:00] is important.

Dziedzic: Is there anything else that you want to mention about Liberman at this time? Because I would like to move on to talking about Richard Serra.

Collens: You know, I think Liberman's had a very interesting history at Storm King. And we knew Alex quite well. And he really appreciated what we were doing for his work—and certainly the exhibition at Storm King in 1977 was a hallmark of his career.

Dziedzic: So last time we talked about the experience of working on a commission with Isamu Noguchi. So I'd like to hear about working on this commission with Richard Serra (*Schunnemunk Fork*, 1990–91), [01:04:00] and how the discussions came about with that, and who was the liaison to make that first contact?

Collens: Let's see. That would be Peter Stern. We decided Richard Serra would be an important artist for Storm King. And it wasn't a matter of finding an outdoor sculpture for Storm King, but it really was getting Richard to Storm King with his wife Clara and having them walk around and see what appealed to them in the landscape of Storm King. And early on, nothing seemed to really happen. And Peter, on his various trips to Europe, would always [01:05:00] go see Serra's sculptures—whether it was in Germany, France, and so forth—different locations where they were. He made an effort to see the large-scale outdoor sculptures of Richard's in Europe and different parts of this country and so forth—we both did—and really studied the sculptures of Richard's.

Then the sculpture of Richard's was being taken out of the Federal Building in New York, and we thought maybe that would be a good sculpture to move to Storm King—*Tilted Arc*. And we put a request in, as well as, I think, three other organizations, to be able to borrow *Tilted Arc*, which was owned by the federal government. [01:06:00] And Richard—we told him about it—we were open about that with Richard, of course—and he did not want us to do that, so we withdrew our letter of request for the sculpture. Then Richard came out again and started walking around the fields. Peter and I had an idea—it would be great having Serra near the allée of trees in the south, and Richard and Clara said, "Well, let us walk around on our own." And they had the topo map for the South Fields, which we gave them. And we had no sculptures in the south at all; it was all farm field. And anyway, Richard and Clara walked around and came back [01:07:00] in the afternoon and said, "We found a location. We'd love to create a sculpture with four steel plates jutting out of the ground in this old farm field." And they respected the farm field very much—they enjoyed that landscape and so forth. And we agreed to do a sculpture of Richard Serra's that we would commission in the farm field at Storm King.

Richard found out that the steelyard in Maryland was going to potentially be shut down—they were going on strike, and he was anxious to move the project forward. So in a short time, we agreed to move forward

with the project. This was in [01:08:00] 1991—in the summer of 1991—when the four steel plates were installed in the farm field at Storm King. And one plate arrived on each truck. The plates were all different sizes—two-and-a-half inches thick and from 34 to 54 feet was the largest one. They were all rectangles. And we did a lot of preparation in the field, and put in concrete to set each plate into a channel, and then they were bolted and welded in place once they were set into the channel. And special riggers came up from New Jersey, a large crane—Richard only uses certain riggers with these extremely large plates. And it was done over several days, and we just put the earth back in [01:09:00] that we saved, and used the same grass seed as the fields already had—because they were being grown for hay and baled, and so we wanted to use the same grass.

It was an important sculpture, this commission, that we gave Richard this opportunity. And he's really quite extraordinary in landscape. He really has an uncanny ability to place sculpture in landscape—very different than seeing his work in urban spaces. So he understood Storm King in a very different way, and really loved the undulating farm field, with Schunnemunk Mountain as the backdrop. And the farmer threw rocks into a pile every spring, and the trees grew up. [01:10:00] We still have the piles of rock there, and the trees. And he just liked that feeling of it being a farm field. And we still maintain it and bale the hay from that field.

Dziedzic: So he basically acquainted himself with the landscape here by going out with a map, is that right?

Collens: Yes. We were touring around—Peter and I were touring around with Richard and Clara. And he'd come up here before and nothing appealed to him. And this last visit, he said, "Fellas, why don't you go back and do some work and let us walk around." And that's when he went considerably further out than we were thinking of. And we said, "Why not?" And we installed the sculpture [01:11:00] and the four steel plates in the summer of 1991. And people were really not walking out there at that point, and we'd do special tours out to see the Richard Serra. People thought it was quite interesting, but hard to get to—and this was before we had a tram or anything. Then Andy Goldsworthy was commissioned in 1997, 1998, and then people started moving out in the fields more. And the tram roads were being put in and so forth—more accessible.

Dziedzic: And there was no earth moved for his sculpture? It was really just setting in the plates?

Collens: Absolutely. He wanted everything to remain—all the contours of this undulating farm field to remain as is, and we just had a machine cut [01:12:00] out the area where each plate was going to go and put concrete in to stabilize it and basically filled in after.

Dziedzic: Was there ever any consideration of doing an exhibition of Richard Serra's work?

Collens: I think—certainly not in the building, because we wouldn't be able to put anything in the building except works on paper. The sculptures are all too heavy for the galleries at the museum, and it's not possible to bring in. We have a very important Serra sculpture outside, and, I think there were other exhibitions that were contemplated—the Museum of Modern Art and so forth—and very busy with outdoor sculptures in different places [01:13:00] in the world that that really wasn't, I think, an option for us.

Dziedzic: Well, I think I have to let you go now. [laughs] It's 2:00. But like last time, we can think about anything else that we need to start off our next session with—

Collens: No, absolutely.

Dziedzic: So thank you so much, David.

End of session

Interview with David Collens
Conducted by Sarah Dziedzic
August 13, 2018

Storm King Art Center
1 audio file
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Audio File 1

Dziedzic: All right. Today is August 13, 2018, and this is Sarah Dziedzic interviewing David Collens for the Storm King Oral History Program. And this is our session four. So, David, I wanted to start off by talking about Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen. And I guess I'd like to start with *Wayside Drainpipe*. How did that work come into Storm King's collection?

Collens: I should start by saying that Claes has a long history with Storm King, going back to 1972, when we have photographs of Claes on the north hill with Dorothy Mayhall, who was the director of Storm King Art Center, and Tom and Chris Grisea, who are close friends of Ted and [00:01:00] Peggy Ogden's. And that is when he first came to Storm King—invited up by Ted Ogden, I believe. And he proposed a sculpture of pads of butter that would flop down from the top of the north hill going all the way down to the base, which was a fascinating idea. It was not executed.

Then there was a lapse, and we borrowed—many years ago—*Standing Mitt with Ball* (1973), and had the *Standing Mitt with Ball* sculpture, which was about 10 feet high; it was a first baseman's mitt with a wooden laminated ball in the center—a wonderful early sculpture of Oldenburg's. And we had that on top of the hill for 10 years, [00:02:00] and protected it during the winter against the elements. And at a certain point in time, after 10 years, it needed to go for a full restoration, because it was made out of lead, Corten steel, and the laminated ball and fastening devices holding the lead and the Corten steel together that were deteriorating after many years. And it went to the Polich Tallix Foundry—and Don Lippincott, who fabricated it, was involved with the restoration, and Dick Polich. And they did an excellent job restoring the sculpture. However, it could not go outdoors again. If it was going to be properly maintained, it would not be a good environment to put it back outside. So it did not return to [00:03:00] Storm King—much to my disappointment, since it was a fabulous Oldenburg sculpture.

We started looking for another Oldenburg, and we found *Wayside Drainpipe*, which had a very interesting history. It was fabricated by Don Lippincott, and a collector in Germany purchased it. It went to Germany for a year. The collector died. And it was fabricated, I believe, in 1978, when Oldenburg was doing the sculptures by himself—before he married Coosje van Bruggen. It's an early Oldenburg sculpture. And it's the only drainpipe that is outdoors; there are two soft drainpipes in museum collections. He was thinking of an [00:04:00] outdoor drainpipe for Toronto. And he started working and did the drawings for the colossal drainpipe for Toronto, but that was not completed. So Storm King has the only outdoor drainpipe.

And it was in Germany for a year, and the collector died, and Don Lippincott brought it back from Germany and had it on his property in Connecticut, where I saw it. It was in a field, and quite wonderful. And we decided to bring it to Storm King. We were able to purchase the *Wayside Drainpipe* with funds from the Ralph E. Ogden Foundation, through Bea and Lisa Stern. We're very enthusiastic about it. Bea has been a [00:05:00] supporter of Claes's work from early on at Storm King, and we also looked to commissioning Claes to do a project at Storm King—which also was not realized—after his wife, Coosje, died, he hasn't done any large outdoor sculptures (since her death). There are models for it that exist for the Storm King work that relates to Rip Van Winkle. Oldenburg came up, looked at sites, spoke about the sculpture, but never went beyond the model phase of it. So there are several models for Storm King that [00:06:00] Claes has in his archive.

Dziedzic: Both for the Rip Van Winkle sculpture and for the pads of butter?

Collens: Yes. I believe the pads of butter was a sculpture he thought of for a different site entirely from what he said in Europe, and that did not happen, either. And he saw the north hill and thought that would be a perfect site. And anyway, I don't know how detailed the discussions were with Ted Ogden about having it fabricated, but it didn't happen at Storm King. It would have been terrific. But we're thrilled to have *Wayside Drainpipe* in our collection. And it's a very unusual early sculpture of Claes's. And it fits into Storm King with the pan of water that's 16 feet in the air that collects the water and goes down a [00:07:00] pipe and onto a pyramid of rock that was all from our property—fieldstones that we collected and used to build the pyramid.

Dziedzic: Do you know how Ted Ogden would have had the connection to Claes Oldenburg when he invited him here? His work seems different from some of the other early works that Ogden was directly involved in bringing to Storm King. I'm thinking of the von Schlegell and Grosvenor and Liberman.

Collens: I'm not sure what the connection is with Oldenburg and how he came to Storm King. It could be through a gallery. I think Mr. Ogden reached out to different people, [00:08:00] and there were suggestions that various people made to him about different artists—like Mark di Suvero, for example. I would imagine that the Oldenburg connection came through maybe a gallery or an individual. That needs to still be researched. I mean, it could have been Paula Cooper, because the Robert Grosvenor sculpture, which was commissioned at Storm King in 1974—being the second commission at Storm King—Bob Grosvenor to this day is represented still by Paula Cooper, and Oldenburg was represented in the early years by Paula Cooper, as well, so that could have been the connection. Something we could ask her.

Dziedzic: Yes. The stones that you mentioned from Storm King's [00:09:00] property—is that something that Claes himself collected and set up? Or were those his instructions?

Collens: We had collected fieldstones for Andy Goldsworthy in 1997–98 for his walls. We have a lot of fallen-down farm walls still on the property, and we thought that would be appropriate to create the pyramid out of stones from Storm King, from our property. When I first saw it in the Lippincott field in Connecticut, there were stones just roughly stacked up from Don's property, fields and woods, that they collected. And it wasn't done in a [00:10:00] particular order and organized way, but it was just stones that were stacked to give you an idea what it would look like for the pyramid section of it.

Dziedzic: And you mentioned the models that exist for some of the works that didn't get built that were proposed here. Can you talk about your decision to include some of those materials and focus on Storm King's relationship with Claes Oldenburg for *The View from Here: Storm King at Fifty* (2010–11)?

Collens: Well, for our fiftieth anniversary exhibition, we focused on particular sculptures. And certainly, the Oldenburg had just arrived—*Wayside Drainpipe*—and we borrowed a beautiful model [00:11:00] from Claes of the drainpipe. And Don Lippincott had two watercolor drawings of the *Wayside Drainpipe*, which was fabricated at Lippincott Foundry, and we borrowed those from Don, as well as a photograph of the *Wayside Drainpipe* in the woods at Don's house, where it was originally sited—and then Don became very concerned about branches and trees coming down, and they moved the *Wayside Drainpipe* to a field where that would not be an issue, near trees and the possibility that something might land on it. So we brought together, really, a small grouping of drawings and models for the drainpipe, and we had the sculpture outside, and it was a wonderful background history [00:12:00] into it. And we're hoping to at some point receive the watercolors as a gift to Storm King.

Dziedzic: All right. Let's maybe stay with Bea's involvement in acquisitions at Storm King and talk about her proposal that she made early on—I think initiated in 1996—about working with artists John Knight, Daniel Buren, and Michael Asher. So what do you remember about this? Did she come to the Collections and Acquisitions meeting with this suggestion?

Collens: Well, Bea had certainly a very clear [00:13:00] vision of artists that she liked and artists who she knew that she thought would be appropriate for Storm King. And she did a presentation with the thought of commissioning three artists—John Knight, Daniel Buren, and Michael Asher—to do projects at Storm King. And they would complement each other in very different ways; they were three artists that knew each other well and shared a similar aesthetic. So we proceeded to bring all three of them to Storm King over a period of time, and introduced them to the landscape, to the collection, and [00:14:00] have a weekend so they could become more acquainted with the property. Each came up with very different ideas.

We moved ahead, with John Knight (87°, 1997–99) being the first one. And John had known Bea for several years and had come to Mountainville, had walked around Storm King, walked around Mountainville, was familiar with Star Expansion Company, which was started and run by Ted Ogden, for many years—and then run by Peter Stern for many years, as well. And he came up with the idea of having a telescope originally—we changed it to a binoculars—on top of the hill at [00:15:00] Storm King and looking two miles to the south and seeing the top of a water tower. There was a very creative water tower that Peter Stern and Ted Ogden purchased in 1958. They just didn't want a water tower for fire protection that was not particularly interesting. They found one that was steel, and it was 153 feet high—it's still in place—with a large, round ball on the top of it.

So John Knight wanted to connect Star Expansion factory and property to the south with Storm King, which was started by Ted Ogden, and he came up with the idea of having originally a telescope that you could site on our property—on our hillside—and look out to the water tower. [00:16:00] And we had to clear trees off neighboring properties and establish working relationships with many different property owners to take down or prune their trees so we could have a clear view of the water tower. And we did that many years ago. People were very cooperative, and we helped to clean up their property, besides doing the viewshed for the telescope, as well. And it was a long project that Mike Seaman was involved with, being in the tree business before he started working at Storm King full time. That took at least one or two seasons to be able to do the pruning and establish the view to the water tower. And that is something that we [00:17:00] continue to reassess—what the view is of the tower and what we have to do to maintain it—and also, other maintenance on the water tower, since it was painted silver originally, and it has not been painted in many years. So we're looking into that, as well—what our choices are. And we do not now own the water tower, so we're trying to really figure out what options we have to maintain the view of the water tower, and going to other new property owners who have purchased houses over the years to get the view back.

Dziedzic: Given those unique challenges, and also the fact that there isn't a sculptural object that's part of this work, was there any [00:18:00] apprehension about moving forward with this commission?

Collens: Well, certainly, it was very conceptual, and John Knight is a conceptual artist. And we thought this was intriguing—the way he really wove together the history of Star Expansion with Ted Ogden and Peter Stern and Storm King Art Center, and having the telescope, which we changed to binoculars several years ago. But I think it was a different dimension of having a sculpture at Storm King than what we were used to. And it was an adjustment, but it was broadening the collection, as well. Bea came up with a very interesting idea.

Dziedzic: Can you talk a little bit more about how it broadened the collection?

Collens: Well, certainly, it was the first [00:19:00] conceptual artist we had. And having the focus two miles away on a water tower that is clearly related to the history of Storm King was quite different and a surprise to all of us—but, we thought, appropriate. And there was a publication that was done on John Knight's project at Storm King, describing it, with photographs and an article by Benjamin Buchloh.

Dziedzic: And I guess it kind of expanded the vista or the view a little bit—to then include that water tower, too. So, not just conceptually, but also kind of physically—making you look further, right?

Collens: Definitely so. We were really used to sculptures out of stone, wood, steel, other materials. [00:20:00] And John came up with a very different idea, and really traveled around, thought very hard about this. And it seemed like the right project for John Knight to do.

Dziedzic: You talked about how the maintenance of the trees was a part of John Knight's work. But I know that was also part of Michael Asher's proposal. Can you talk about what you remember about that proposal and how that developed?

Collens: With Michael Asher, he came up with an idea for Storm King—that he wanted us to review the history of spraying and the maintenance of trees, from the beginning in 1960 moving forward, and looking at all our records of how we did tree maintenance. And that [00:21:00] was very difficult for us to do—with the early years of Storm King, trying to find those records—and continue that project with him. Unfortunately, he died and we did not move ahead with the project. But I think we needed to really have a better understanding of what he wanted to do, and I think there would have needed to be more of a dialogue to take place.

Dziedzic: So it kind of stayed at its early stages—the proposal?

Collens: Yes.

Dziedzic: I see. You mentioned that it was sort of an issue of getting together the information—which, you know, being here in the archives, I can understand how that's changed over time—that we're working on making all of this information more accessible. [00:22:00] But I think there was also a question of deciding whether to make that administrative history available to the public. That was something that Bea had mentioned that seemed to be a concern—about sharing those kinds of records, I guess, with the public. So I guess I wanted to ask if you recalled that being an issue and maybe how that's changed.

Collens: With the early records, we weren't highly organized like we are now. And this is going back many years. I think the information—the records were not all in one location, so that made it more difficult. We haven't looked for the full history of our maintenance of trees at Storm King [00:23:00] that started in 1960 when the Art Center started. And Bill Rutherford certainly was very involved with that, as well. So we'd have to bring a lot of different sources together and discuss a project like this, as well as having—I think Michael was interested in the invoices and the type of material that was being used to spray, as well. I think there was sensitivity towards how the trees and the other plant material were being maintained at the Art Center in the early years and whether this is something that we should release.

Dziedzic: Yes.

Collens: But it was hard to start because [00:24:00] the information was not in one place, and that was going to take a lot of time to research. And I think it would be easier to do now—and make a decision whether that's appropriate to have open to the public or not.

Dziedzic: And what about Daniel Buren?

Collens: Daniel visited and proposed an idea of doing 10 benches (*Sit Down*, 1998, refabricated 2010), which would be originally made out of wood and put out during the season. And they were striped, because a characteristic of Daniel Buren's work is, he's always done work that is with stripes, different colors—whether it's red or green or other colors. [00:25:00] He's done very large projects in urban areas and so forth. And anyway, he came up with the idea of doing 10 benches that were rectangular benches that people could sit on. They would be white and a very dark green stripe on them. And eventually, the wood did not age well, so we created them out of aluminum, so they had a very nice edge to them, as well. A little warm to sit on in the summertime if they were in the sun—and some people didn't want to sit on them; they didn't realize they were available. It's called *Sit Down*, the title of the 10 benches.

They were really to be a group of 10 that you would place so you can see one to the [00:26:00] other in a pathway curving around—on roads or wherever you wanted to put them. We move them occasionally to different locations, so people can see them in the North Woods; they've been on the allée heading south for many years, underneath the trees. And the idea was that all the benches at Storm King would be these striped benches, and those would be the primary benches for people at Storm King.

Dziedzic: How many benches are there?

Collens: We fabricated 10 out of aluminum.

Dziedzic: And then the other benches that are around at Storm King?

Collens: Well, we've had the English teak wood benches for many years, which are, you know, very good, very durable, and they stay outdoors all year long. And at some point, I think, they need to be changed as they deteriorate. [00:27:00] I'm not sure the English teak wood bench is appropriate for the Storm King landscape—that's another discussion. I like to have benches for people, and I'm sympathetic people need to sit down as they walk around, but we really haven't come up with the correct bench design for Storm King.

Dziedzic: And are all of Buren's benches usually out?

Collens: Yes. We have them out now in the north area.

Dziedzic: From what I've seen, they seem to move around a lot, more so than some of the other sculptures. Is that a part of the work, to draw attention to different parts of the landscape? Or is it also a sense of, well, they're more easy to move than some of the bigger sculptures, so—? What's the philosophy there? [laughs]

Collens: [laughs] They are easier—clearly easier to move. But [00:28:00] I think that was the guideline of the benches—that you could move them to different locations; they didn't have to be in a stationary location year after year. So periodically, we do move them from the allée heading south to the North Woods, and then they'll move to another location in a year or so, as well. But people like finding them and sitting on them—I think they realize they can sit on them. And it's very clear from our map and the sculptures that you can interact with, so the Buren benches are on the map, indicating you can sit on them.

Dziedzic: All right. Let's talk about Andy Goldsworthy. [00:29:00] How long had you been thinking about trying to work with Andy Goldsworthy, and how did that connection happen?

Collens: Well, I think at that point I was looking to find an artist, before we decided on Andy, that really could work with the landscape in a very different way than other artists. I was thinking of Richard Long, the British artist who would be, I think, fascinating to work with at Storm King and have him come and walk around the property—Schunnemunk Mountain—and I thought he [00:30:00] might be a good candidate to bring to Storm King. At the time we were talking about it, Joel Mallin was a trustee of Storm King Art Center, and Joel and Sherry Mallin had commissioned Andy to do the first private project in the United States—to build a wall on their property in Westchester. So they had met Andy and he had done

the wall for the Mallins in Westchester. And it was a natural fit that Andy should come over to Storm King.
[00:31:00]

The Mallins suggested that he should come at some point in time, and he did, and spent time walking around the Art Center—and came back on a few occasions, doing ephemeral work—creating sculptures out of leaves, twigs, and other materials in different locations at Storm King, and photographed them. And that's the documentation that exists today—are Andy's photographs of the work that he created at Storm King in the 1990s, before he started doing the *Storm King Wall* (1997–98). And he spent time walking around in all sorts of weather conditions and doing his ephemeral work and decided what he liked about Storm King were the fallen-down farm walls.

He found a location where there was a [00:32:00] farm wall that was on the ground—it was not an arbitrary decision on his part to just build a wall around trees that grew up—and the remnants of the farm wall are still in the south. So Andy decided to build a wall where the old farm wall was, except the trees had grown up over the years, and the Goldsworthy wall was to go around all the trees and down the hill, ending at a beautiful, large white oak tree. And that was going to be the project. Andy was excited about that. And he was going to end at the white oak tree, maybe 20 yards before the [00:33:00] farm pond that was created in the early 1960s. And Andy spotted the pond, and he'd worked in a pond before in Europe, and thought that would be a great idea—to expand into the pond, instead of stopping at a white oak tree a short distance away. We thought that was well worthwhile.

He had his wallers here from England. And it took a year to prepare and organize all our stone for Andy, who taught us the type of stone he needed—and we would gather it by hand, bring it to the south location, where he would use it and line it up—and the particular order that the stone would be used by his wallers. He started [00:34:00] walling in the fall of 1997. And it was six days a week, with four wallers and an apprentice. He had mapped out on the ground using a string line exactly where his wall would go, around all these different trees—there must be a dozen trees that his wall goes around. And some of the curves were very tight, others were more open, depending on the distances of the trees apart from each other. And he created the *Storm King Wall* in the fall of 1997. It was eight weeks of walling.

And we thought, as I mentioned, it would be terrific to go into the pond instead of stopping at a large oak tree. And he was excited about that, so we went all the way into the pond in 1997. And then Bill Rutherford [00:35:00] came up with the idea that we should carry the wall on the other side of the pond and up to the New York Thruway. So Andy came back in 1998 with the same wallers and continued walling with the straight wall, all the way up to the New York Thruway. And the Goldsworthy wall is just under half a mile long. It's still one of the iconic sculptures at Storm King. We have one of Andy's wallers coming every few years to check on the wall and do some repairs. All of the stone came from our property

for both sections of the wall. Nineteen ninety-eight is the straight part, and that took five weeks to build—and many more weeks to gather all the stone for Andy. His wallers created a British agricultural [00:36:00] wall with no concrete. And you have the through stones sticking out on each side of the wall every meter to really hold it together—to bind it together.

Dziedzic: When he first started doing some ephemeral work, was there a possibility that that would be his commission for Storm King, or was it while he was thinking about something more permanent?

Collens: He spent a couple weeks walking around in all weather conditions—rain—he'd have his Wellies and oilcloth on, his camera. And we'd see him maybe at lunch or dinner. He didn't find the correct project in the beginning, but he looked through the woods, fields, and decided [00:37:00] Storm King had a lot of fallen-down walls, and it was very good-quality stone, similar to what he was used to in England, and he thought it would be terrific to really create a wall at Storm King. And this was documented in his film, *Rivers and Tides*—the creation of the wall at Storm King in 1997–98.

Dziedzic: And where exactly on the property did the stones come from?

Collens: We gathered stone from a mile away—from where the *Storm King Wall* is today. And we hired people and the tractor and cart to hand-pick the stones depending on what part of the wall they were needed for. The [00:38:00] final stones were the flat coping stones that are on top of the wall. And we lined all of the stones up down in the field, and Andy began, in the fall of 1997, to work on the creative part of the wall that goes around all the trees. It really was a very large project. And they enjoyed being at Storm King, and we continued the relationship with Andy and artists that are important to Storm King—all of the artists are. And he brings the same wallers back to do different repairs to the wall to this day.

Dziedzic: Was there any kind of landscaping that went into this? Preparation? I'm kind of curious about what Bill Rutherford thought of this wall and the process of [00:39:00] building it.

Collens: Well, Bill was very involved with different artists like Andy Goldsworthy, and immediately just had an instantaneous friendship with Andy. They spoke the same language. And Bill understood the project from the very beginning—going around all the trees—it would be perfect for Storm King—and thought we should start immediately gathering stone. “This was a big project,” he said to Peter and myself, and “don't waste time.” You know, get some men and a tractor. This is not a two- or three-week project gathering stone; this was months of gathering stone and bringing it to the site and preparing everything for Andy and his four wallers from England that he used. But [00:40:00] Bill thought it was the perfect Storm King project.

Dziedzic: And I guess I'll ask the question that I hear everyone ask, which is, does the wall continue under the water? [laughs]

Collens: That is the big question that everyone does ask. And it goes in 30 feet on each side of the pond, and we put some heavy boulders into the pond, thinking about frost and the wintertime conditions for the wall. So it's really quite stable. And there's always work to be done, because the wall only has a narrow channel that was dug out for it; it doesn't have a foundation, except for the heavier stone that was used for the base of the wall. And [00:41:00] it goes down a hillside, so it's soft and needs to be repaired as the wall pushes out with frost during the wintertime and ground condition changes.

Dziedzic: What has the reception of this work been like?

Collens: Well, I think it was instantaneous. When people, in 1998, the spring, heard about the Goldsworthy wall—and we did a press release on it and so forth—people would be arriving at Storm King and asking staff members where the wall was, and they would make a pilgrimage to the south to see the Goldsworthy wall. Because the first sculpture in the south was Richard Serra, *Schunnemunk Fork*, that [00:42:00] was installed in the summer of 1991—and people really weren't walking out to the south part of the property like they are today. And then Andy's wall came in the fall—late fall—of 1997, when the wall was built, going around all the trees and into the pond, and then 1998 for the straight part, coming out of the pond and going up to the New York Thruway. So people were very excited and wanted to see it. Andy's film was also released, *Rivers and Tides*, which documented the construction of the wall.

Dziedzic: It's striking me as so different than what we were talking about with John Knight and Daniel Buren—just in terms of the act of seeing the work and engaging [00:43:00] with the work. I mentioned I took the tram tour for the first time [laughs] last week, and it was interesting to see how people responded to certain things and not so much to others. I guess I want to go back a little bit and ask about the reception of the more conceptual work. How do you gauge the reception of this kind of work that's maybe a little bit less physical—less easier to engage with?

Collens: People certainly liked looking through the binoculars. And we are in the process of creating a sign with more of an explanation that John Knight has approved to be put up near the binoculars with a little bit of an explanation. But I think probably [00:44:00] it's more difficult for a lot of people to understand the connection between the binoculars and the water tower and seeing the top of the water tower two miles away. It doesn't have the same, I don't think, understanding as looking at fieldstone and this beautiful wall of Andy Goldsworthy's. People are used to seeing walls in Vermont and New Hampshire and other places—farm fields in England, Ireland, many other locations. I think there was an immediate positive reaction. Many people saw the wallers building the wall that had been coming to Storm King for

years. They would talk to the wallers. They're a very friendly group, and would explain what they were doing, and just fascinated to see them working and chipping the stone [00:45:00] so it would fit together into the dry wall. It wasn't a lot of stonework and hammering with their hammers that they liked very much that we got them, but it was really fitting stones together and binding them into a strong wall. And the face of the wall is very different than other walls. It's a British agricultural wall, so it's textured, and the stones are not flat, like other walls that you see in different parts of the country.

So I think there was a, you know, immediate reaction—a positive reaction to seeing a stone wall. And, you know, it makes you feel wonderful. And I think John Knight, Daniel Buren—it's a different aesthetic that is taking place. And probably most people don't have that understanding of [00:46:00] conceptual work and trying to tie a water tower two miles away into the Storm King property and that history that John Knight found out about and went to the factory site and walked around Mountainville—the little hamlet—and around Storm King. So he had a very interesting take on it all, I think, but harder for the general public to put together and understand.

Dziedzic: Yeah. I think art is barely taught in school, let alone conceptual art or institutional critique. [laughs] But what kind of role does that play in discussions around whether to acquire a work or have an exhibition?

Collens: Well, I think we're certainly, you know, interested in broadening the collection of sculptures [00:47:00] that we have and trying to find the appropriate artists that we think really would fit into the Storm King collection, and—whether it's commissioning or purchasing a particular piece—and doing exhibitions that will broaden the public knowledge of what is happening in the world of sculpture today.

Dziedzic: And then Andy Goldsworthy has another wall here. Can you talk about how that wall came about?

Collens: Well, for our fiftieth anniversary exhibition, we invited five artists that had major exhibitions at Storm King to do projects and create sculptures for the fiftieth anniversary, if possible, and five artists that had never shown at Storm King. And Andy's one of the [00:48:00] artists that we invited to do a sculpture for the fiftieth anniversary.

Andy had an exhibition in the Museum Building in the year 2000, which was quite fabulous, in honor of the *Storm King Wall*. And it was on top of the hill, as well, with some sculptures. And it was in the Maple Rooms, so it was really scattered around outdoors, as well as the Museum Building. And he created some fabulous work for the building: a clay floor in Gallery 1, which was very challenging to process the clay from our property and dry it out and have it crack like Andy was used to. And we had a very rainy

season, so it didn't dry out for quite a while. And a very large oak ball—fallen oak branches [00:49:00] from Scotland that he wove together. The building also had this large oak ball—one was inside and one was outside. Then we had a stone sheepfold in another gallery on the first floor. The sheepfold went through the window and onto the patio outdoors, around one of the trees. So it was really fascinating. And photographs on the second floor and other aspects of his work—in the year 2000. And it really showed what a broad-ranging artist he was, doing work outdoors.

Dziedzic: I see this work, *Five Men, Seventeen Days, Fifteen Boulders, One Wall*, would seem to have taken less time to [laughs]—to build (than the *Storm King Wall*). [00:50:00] Is that just because it was shorter? Or was there still a cache of stones from that first project?

Collens: No, we had to go collect stone for Andy for the wall that he built for the fiftieth anniversary exhibition. And he wanted to do another project that we couldn't realize—we tried. It was a fabulous idea, and we tried coming up with different boulders or stones in our farm fields—what used to be farm fields—but we found no stones in the field. We dug to different levels—five feet down, three feet, eight feet down, still found no rock. So Andy came up with the idea to do another wall, since we have an abundance of fallen-down walls on our property. So we gathered more stone [00:51:00] to do the Goldsworthy wall—the *Five Men* wall. And he had a limited amount of time to do that at Storm King with his wallers—the same wallers as 1997–98. And so it's 308 feet long, and he had only limited time, and he had to stop. So we came out with the wall that we have, which is still on loan to Storm King.

Dziedzic: Well, I think, speaking of limited time, that was probably your call to [laughs]—to return downstairs. So let's at least pause, if not end, for today, and just double-check on your schedule.

End of session

Interview with David Collens	Storm King Art Center (various locations)
Conducted by Sarah Dziedzic	Video sites
August 22, 2018	Open for research use

Video site 1 – East Parking

[Side conversation]

Collens: [00:02:37] This is a good example of a sculpture that needs maintenance, being bronze, Arnaldo Pomodoro (*The Pietrarubbia Group: il fondamento, l'uso, il rapporto*, 1975–76). Two moving doors were taken off this past winter and we had them in our indoor [00:03:00] space, which we barely got them into, being so large. We polished the doors so they're a bright bronze—they tarnish with people handling it and being outdoors—and did other work to the sculpture before we reinstalled the two moving elements this spring. But it's a piece that people are allowed to move. And of course they handle the golden part of the bronze doors for moving them on a track. We had other work to do with the wheels, had to replace those so the two very heavy units would move more easily. And the sculpture's a combination of Corten steel and bronze, [00:04:00] and we're constantly working on it because it's a very odd combination of materials and needs a great deal of maintenance.

Dziedzic: We spoke to that artist too, didn't we, before that conservation project?

Collens: We did. It came to Storm King as a gift. And unfortunately we didn't have time to do any work before putting it in. It was a rush installation, pouring the concrete. The site is exactly where this sculpture was on loan in 1977 to Storm King. So it's back in the same location, which is historically very interesting. And people certainly find it. They know they're allowed to move the two doors. Staying outdoors all year long, the combination [00:05:00] of the materials, as I pointed out, is very difficult to maintain. The way the materials, steel I-beams, are fastened with the bronze doors, it's a sculpture we have to keep a close eye on.

Dziedzic: Is it common for Storm King to have sculptures that have multiple kinds of materials involved?

Collens: That's really of course up to the artist, but yes, they do put odd combinations together. And the *Three Legged Buddha's* another example of that, where we have to closely monitor what's happening with the *Three Legged Buddha* (Zhang Huan, 2007)—and the interior, which is built like the Statue of Liberty, a steel frame inside with a ladder that you can go down to inspect it. But the combination of copper and steel is a very odd combination that [00:06:00] one has to monitor and put a coating on the steel to keep the possibility of electrolysis between the two metals taking place.

Dziedzic: All right. Thanks, David.

[Side conversation]

Video site 2 – Museum Road by Alexander Liberman's *Iliad*

Collens: It started with, a few years ago, examining the concrete bases and how the tanks, which were used oil tanks, were attached to the concrete, and correcting any problems with the concrete and the fastening devices. The following year we [00:10:00] looked at all the vertical tanks. We cut hatches into each of the vertical tanks so we could get into them and strengthen the interior of these thin vertical steel tanks that had been underground for 20 years, and Liberman used to use used oil tanks, and that is the particular material that he selected. And we strengthened the interior of the tanks once we got in there with some more steel to make them rigid. And the upper parts we also took several sections out and did some new bolting systems and cut more holes for drainage and checked the larger tanks that are bolted at various angles up in the air, which really make it a very dynamic sculpture. [00:11:00] And this year, early summer, we painted it for the first time in 10 years, probably. So it really looks spectacular to have it back to bright orange.

[Side conversation]

Video site 3 – Alexander Liberman's *Adonia*

Dziedzic: When we talked about this before, David, you'd mentioned Ted Ogden being the one to go to, Liberman's—

Collens: His studio? Yes.

Dziedzic: And connected Ted's interest in it to the conservation work that was done and the refabrication. So [00:14:00] could you talk about the history of this sculpture at Storm King a little bit, and then get into the refabrication?

Collens: Yes. I think it's maybe similar to the Pomodoro in the sense that the Pomodoro and the Liberman *Adonai*, where we are now, came to Storm King very quickly. Apparently Ted Ogden saw the sculpture at Alexander Liberman's studio in Warren, Connecticut, where he had a weekend and summer home and did all his sculpture and eventually his paintings there as well. But he had his sculpture studio set up, and the decision was made to bring *Adonai* to Storm King quite quickly and dismantle it in

Connecticut—it was fully assembled—and [00:15:00] pour the concrete base, prepare the site where it's been for many years, and install it.

Sometimes I think one neglects doing more preparation when installing a sculpture and checking it out when it's done on a short-term basis versus having a little more time to really think and properly examine a sculpture and prepare it for the long-term outdoors. I think materials of sculpture—it was quite new to everybody that was putting sculpture outdoors that thought it was going to be permanent, whether it was government with the General Services Administration program, putting large-scale outdoor sculptures in front of their office buildings—everybody thought, “Oh, it's steel and Corten steel and other materials, [00:16:00] and it's going to hold up very well.” And after probably 10 years people realized, like everything, it needs maintenance on large-scale sculpture. The welds need to be repaired; it needs to be repainted; you have to check the foundations, where it's attached and how it's attached to concrete and other foundation materials. So sculpture conservation started, and people didn't know a great deal about that at the beginning either, and they really had to learn about the materials that were being used by artists for large-scale work and how to keep them in good shape and safe for people.

Dziedzic: So let me ask you—these sculptures are made mostly with industrial materials. And so what was it about making use of those materials for sculpture that made their deterioration different [00:17:00] than when it was used it for its industrial purposes?

Collens: Well, I think artists many times would take materials like Corten steel, and then instead of using it—I-beams for bridges, for example, or other purposes that the Cor-Ten was intended for, to self-rust and create a coating and preserve itself when it got to a certain point—artists would take the Corten and start creating these different forms, whether boxes, or bend it into circles and weld it, and it would start deteriorating from the inside when you least expected it and fall apart on you. You didn't have a clue, looking at the outside, what was going on till it was really too late. I think they were just stretching the way the materials were supposed to be used.

But on the other hand, there're bridges [00:18:00] made out of Corten steel, and the salt from winter weather and heavily putting it on the Corten started eroding the bridges at a very rapid rate, and they had to be painted, sandblasted and painted. So [laughs] it's a combination of the use of these materials and deterioration, and people are figuring that out and having to react to it. But artists push and use different types of materials—industrial materials—Alex Liberman selected used oil tanks, which he purchased, and had a very large studio stockpile of them to be able to pick and choose the diameters and types of materials he wanted and sizes to use for his sculptures, and cut off at angles, which is characteristic of his work, having the sharp angles [00:19:00] cut onto the tanks, and you'd know it was a Liberman. That

was one of the things that he did. And sometimes he painted the sculptures, the used oil tanks; other times he would leave them rusting.

With *Adonai* it was used oil tanks that were underground probably 20 years and then above ground was a sculpture. And it started rusting at a very rapid rate. And it wasn't possible to repair it. So we had to speak to Alex and get his permission to refabricate the sculpture out of new material. He was thrilled that we did this shortly before he died. It's what he would have done if he had the resources to select and buy new material for his sculptures from the beginning. So he was delighted we were doing this [00:20:00] at Storm King. And that's what he envisioned, is new material instead of used oil tanks.

Dziedzic: It was new oil tanks.

Collens: It was new tanks that we had fabricated actually in Louisiana because they made it to our specifications—identical to the old oil tanks that we had, and down in Louisiana they were building platforms at the Gulf of New Mexico for oil and gas rigs, and they had all the equipment and steel to do the tanks for us, so that's what they did. And we had it sent to the Polich Tallix foundry about 10 miles from Storm King, and it was fully assembled inside and welded and prepared for outdoor exhibition at Storm King and brought here in, I believe, year 2000. Came to the Art Center.

Dziedzic: And it was the first refabrication that Storm King did, is that right?

Collens: It was. [00:21:00] At, you know, great cost. And we knew Alex because I had done a show of his in the Museum Building and outside in 1977. It was his second exhibition during his lifetime and it was really terrific in showing the full range of Alex's work. Really a Renaissance artist.

[Side conversation]

Dziedzic: [00:22:00] And are these shapes exactly the same as what Liberman had used?

Collens: They're the same diameter tanks. The one difference, which you can see on *Iliad*, all the small holes on the tanks—those are used oil tanks. And fortunately he painted those from the [laughs] beginning, and that's really preserved them, where unpainted tanks of Liberman's really continued to deteriorate, and they were very thin, and we couldn't stop that process. That's what happened to the first version of *Adonai* was used oil tanks, and there were some tanks that we noticed were sagging, some of the horizontal ones, and we thought, yes, we could replace one tank, that'd be fine; we could get a [00:23:00] similar one. But you start doing that, and it's really surgery and taking one tank out, putting another one in, and then everything around you is not in good shape, and how much longer is it going to

be before the other tanks start deteriorating? We determined that we better refabricate it. A much bigger expense, but in the long run it would be the better thing to do than dealing with many different tanks deteriorating at a rapid rate, and that could be quite dangerous, and eventually we'd have to replace all of it. But like with any artist, we wouldn't have done this without Alex's permission. And yes, he was thrilled, and we knew him well after doing the show of his paintings, photographs, and drawings in the Museum Building, [00:24:00] small-scale sculpture and large-scale sculpture outdoors.

And that's when *Iliad* came to Storm King was for his show in 1977.

Dziedzic: Well, what sort of maintenance does this sculpture need? I mean, I can see some aging on it, some oxidation, but I imagine that that's part of the work itself.

Collens: I think so. It doesn't have a protective coating on the steel. It's a mild steel. It's a half-inch thick, so it's not going to deteriorate very rapidly. But, you know, people handling, climbing, and so forth, you can see the marks on it. That doesn't bode well for the surface to really have an even surface on it when people are doing all those different movements. And it's not meant to be climbed on. Yes, it's very sturdy and solid, but the surface is important, and [00:25:00] you can't maintain a good surface quality on the steel when people are doing a lot of handling and walking on it and so forth, even though we have signage. And underneath we have worked to put the gravel back underneath it and keep it so it's attached to the ground and not suspended for the tanks.

Dziedzic: It sounds like Storm King was really important to Liberman's career. Can you talk about that relationship, which sounds like it was 25 years or so?

Collens: Oh, it really started with Ted Ogden bringing *Adonai* very quickly to Storm King when there were not a lot of large-scale sculptures around. So that was a major decision, [00:26:00] and I think Mr. Ogden had a terrific eye, and when he saw something that he wanted he was able to set the process in motion of bringing it. And he had a great location. It's been in this location since the early 1970s. And the exhibition of Alex's was the second museum exhibition during his lifetime. The first one was the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, across from the White House. That was in the early '70s. And 1977 was his exhibition at Storm King. He was thrilled to be doing an exhibition and very touched to do an exhibition at Storm King, showing the full range of his work. I thought of doing the exhibition; I met him; he was very elegant, and he was the editorial director at *Condé Nast* and [00:27:00] was responsible for *Vogue* magazine, the American and European editions, and *House and Garden* and many other magazines. Was a force in the fashion world and a very good photographer. So he really put everything into the Storm King exhibition, as we all did. It was a complicated, large exhibition to install, and we got excellent reviews. And through that exhibition we knew Alex very well.

Dziedzic: Is there anything else, David, about either Storm King's relationship with Liberman or the sculpture in particular that you want to add?

Collens: Well, he's spoken about the sculpture. I think on the side where the two vertical tanks are he refers in a film that he made about the cathedral at Chartres—visiting the cathedral and thinking of relationship [00:28:00] with the cathedral and the nave there to this one particular section where the two vertical tanks are, with the horizontal tank intersecting. He was inspired by Greek and Roman archaeology and had done photographs in Greece of antiquities, and that was very inspirational to him as well.

Dziedzic: Great.

[Side conversation]

Video site 3 – George Sugarman's *One*, 1975–77

Collens: This is George Sugarman. He died several years ago, but well known for earlier wood sculptures and then started fabricating at the Lippincott Foundry, where this one was made. It's aluminum.

Dziedzic: So when did Storm King acquire this sculpture?

Collens: I have to look that up probably (1982). Very intricate, the way the aluminum's been bent and—

Dziedzic: So this is kind of [00:32:00] like—

Collens: —fastened together and—

Dziedzic: —this is kind of a good example of what you were describing before, which is that it's an industrial material, but it's being used in a different way, and surprises can ensue.

Collens: Very much so. Now, I think it's a very complicated piece, and—this is an example: for some reason we did not have the correct color white, which is more like a cream white, and the orange color correct. That took us a while through researching with the George Sugarman Foundation and Don Lippincott, who fabricated it, to come up with what the correct colors were. We have it now fully documented, but [00:33:00] the white we had on it was more of a pure white originally. And it's very

difficult to paint and all the different sections that are fastened together that cannot be separated. So it's very challenging to do this work. I mean, it kind of reminds me of a Matisse cutout, the way it's folded and being metal, very different than paper that Matisse used at the end of his life, cutting out pieces of paper and collaging and everything. That's what this is similar to for me. I kind of find it fascinating, the density of it. You know, sculpture doesn't always have to be large-scale. I think it's a wonderful size and an interesting [00:34:00] dynamic work. It's always important to walk around sculpture to get a better feeling of what the artist is trying to achieve and what the artist wants you to see and do and participate visually in their sculpture.

Dziedzic: And when Storm King does maintenance on this sculpture, are there pieces of the aluminum that have to be replaced? Or so far is it just a matter of repainting?

Collens: It's really repainting. The aluminum is good thickness. It doesn't bend easily. And I'm sure when they made this it was a lot of welding and bending on the appropriate presses that the Lippincott Foundry had. But it's really painting that is a difficult process.

Dziedzic: [00:35:12] What is Storm King's relationship with the Sugarman estate like?

Collens: Oh, it's very good. We have contacted estates, foundations, to double-check our paint codes and what they suggest for the maintenance. Sometimes they're aware of these situations and other times not as helpful as one would like. But there's a lot of research being done by the Getty Institute of Conservation into paint for different sculptures. I don't think George Sugarman, at the moment, but they're expanding, and they're [00:36:00] working with Calder paints and what would be the correct colors for Calder outdoor paints, both red and black. Tony Smith and Nevelson.

Dziedzic: And what are the kind of different challenges that come from a sculpture being out in the fields versus under some trees, like where we are now?

Collens: Well, I think it's a process of washing and cleaning and using the right materials to wash and clean—the base also—and algae and lichens growing on wood bases as well. But it just raises one's awareness about pollen from the trees and just the dirt in the air and discoloring the [00:37:00] sculptures.

Dziedzic: I imagine the discoloration would be a little bit different in this kind of setting, a rural setting, compared to sculptures like this that would be in an urban setting too.

Collens: Oh, definitely. In cities with pollution from buses and automobiles and other situations in urban spaces, very different than our situation here. It's been a very wet season with rain constantly this summer, so that's [laughs] posing another issue with maintenance as well.

Dziedzic: [00:37:48] All right. Anything else about this sculpture, David?

Collens: No, I think we should probably move on.

[Side conversation]

Video site 4 – North Woods

Dziedzic: [00:38:20] So this is where the Buren benches are right now.

Collens: Yes, starting with this one, going all the way around, you'd see basically from one to another. And a few of them need to be realigned, but I think people like them here, you know. They periodically move to different locations.

Dziedzic: I've never sat on one.

Collens: A little hot in the summertime, being aluminum. [laughter] And they were originally made out of wood. We tested them out of a wood, and that only held up so long. [00:39:00] We fabricated out of very good quality wood and built it like wooden sailboats and everything, and still had its lifespan and—even though we took it in during the wintertime and so forth, it was difficult to maintain and not have the corners be splitting out and that type of thing.

Dziedzic: How long did the wood last for?

Collens: I think we saw wear and tear, I'm sure, after five years. You know, signs of it before that. Just the change of temperature and climate and, depending where they were, sun and then rain and—they had air ventilation, drain holes, but—

Dziedzic: Wow. You tried out everything. [laughs]

Collens: We really did. And, yeah, it was fine to test them, and then we finally [00:40:00] decided to make them out of aluminum and have hot seats for people during the summer [laughs] on that

[Side conversation]

Collens: This is George Cutts (*Sea Change*, 1996). That is our only motorized sculpture. But very popular always. Mike had to do some work on that, some welding on the stainless [00:42:00] steel and motor work, and he's contacting the artist to get more detail. We had to put the rope around—this is an example of trying to keep people away from it—even though there's a sign on the ground saying, "Please don't touch," they'd go up and hold on to the stainless steel tubes and try to stop them from turning. The motors are all underground. So he had to do some repairs to it.

[Side conversation]

Video site 5 – Alice Aycock's *Three-Fold Manifestation II*, 1987 (refabricated 2006)

Dziedzic: How often do a lot of the sculptures get repainted?

Collens: It depends on the types of paint that we use, but certainly every 10 years or less. It's like the George Washington Bridge. You start with the 10 large sculptures at Storm King—you do the Liberman, and so on. The Liberman over here's scheduled for painting as well, *Adam*.

Dziedzic: Is that the same color as *Iliad*?

Collens: Yes.

Dziedzic: So that's what it looks like when it's—

Collens: So whether we get to it this year or not I don't know, because Aycock's going to be first. [00:49:00] So we're going to try to do touchup—challenging.

Dziedzic: So why don't you talk about how the sculpture (*Three-Fold Manifestation II*) came into the collection and then when it was refabricated.

[Side conversation]

Collens: This sculpture was a gift to Storm King, and it was first shown at the Doris Freedman Plaza on Fifth Avenue and 59th Street. And it was the largest sculpture they had on the plaza at that point in time. It was quite a presence, and people enjoyed it. It was there for a period of time. And they had to move it from the plaza, and they moved it to Storm King. It was a gift to Storm King. We thought it was a really

important gift, and we appreciated having it at the Art Center. It was a sculpture that fit into the collection—the scale of it and an important work of Alice’s, even at that point in her career. It had been sited in two different locations at Storm King. It was in the fields [00:51:00] originally and then came to this site, where it is today. And it was part of the Alice Aycock retrospective of 1990 as well. She had a full exhibition in the Museum Building of work and work outdoors as well as this particular piece, which was always located quite far from the Museum Building.

It was made quite quickly in 1987 for Doris Freedman Plaza. It was thin steel and very light welds on it, and we knew it wasn’t a really detailed fabrication. So after a period of time we realized it needed to be worked on, [00:52:00] and it wasn’t a matter of just doing some more welding, repairing the steel. It would really require refabrication. So we raised the money with Alice’s permission, and she was very helpful to the process. And this is the second sculpture we refabricated at Storm King in 2006.

Alice was a full partner in the refabrication of it. It was done in Ohio, at a factory in Ohio that she used because they knew how to cut circles, and her sculptures are really about circles, and that’s always very hard for a lot of fabrication shops to do that if they’re not familiar with cutting [00:53:00] circles to the particular diameters that Alice wants. And this fabrication shop in Ohio was used to doing her outdoor sculptures and could cut aluminum and stainless steel. So we decided instead of using steel to make it out of aluminum and stainless steel so wouldn’t have the issues of rusting. And we corrected many of the problems of the original one. And we wanted drain holes to be larger—they’re still not large enough to not get clogged up with acorns and leaves. So that’s something we have to adjust when we do some work on it. And after a period of time it certainly needs to be painted, like all our outdoor sculptures. And that will be accomplished. It’s on a cycle for painting as well.

Dziedzic: Can we go kind of close up and [00:54:00] point out some of the drain holes and some of the kind of deterioration? Could point out where Storm King made improvements in 2006, and now what you know needs to be done the next time around?

Collens: We certainly improved on the materials by using aluminum and stainless steel. That is an enormous improvement with these three large dishes that really constitute the sculpture. And drain holes where—from a conservation standpoint we knew we had to increase the size, and we did make them larger than the original ones on the sculpture. But they’re still not large enough; an acorn or leaves get clogged and this lower portion will plug, the holes will be plugged, [00:55:00] and we will have several gallons of water collecting. And when I go around I always check the drain holes to make sure it’s unplugged. And we have issues, I’m sure, with the second tier—

Dziedzic: But you can see how it’s working up here.

Collens: Yes, a lot of drain holes that are plugged on the second level. So that's something that clearly needs to be improved. And painting.

Dziedzic: Is the film from—is that visible because the sculpture is white? Or is that because of how much water it holds, that it attracts dirt?

Collens: Yeah, I think that we have a lot of oak trees around, and you have [00:56:00] pollen and acorns and the leaves from the oaks coming down in the fall. And just the dirt from the area. We have a lot of visitors, and it's possible that people are liking to sit in it. But I think it's just general dirt, an accumulation of needing a full washing and maintenance.

Dziedzic: And the deterioration of the paint, is that just the elements?

Collens: I think so. It's always hard to get the right paints to hold up. And certainly this was fine for a period of time, and then when the paint starts deteriorating it's right down to the metal itself. So that's why this sculpture's [00:57:00] next on schedule for painting and improving.

Dziedzic: And when this gets painted, will there be a need to go back to Alice Aycock, to the artist, again, to check in with her? Or is it more just a matter of you know what to do, it doesn't need to be refabricated, and you can undertake it independently?

Collens: Well, we're independent on that. As a courtesy I think we might tell her, "This is what we're doing to it." If we switch paints we might certainly let her know that we've come up with a better paint system. And we're always looking to better paints. It's not always the most expensive; it's about paints that we can use in the large-scale sculptures in our environment.

Dziedzic: What other industries does Storm King or other people who are interested in this kind of sculpture conservation look to for kind of [00:58:00] innovations for, I guess, durability?

Collens: Well, certainly paints have improved over the years. And they can be very expensive and difficult to use, two-part paints, and they have strict guidelines of how long, once you do the mix, you [laughs] have to use the paint before it's not good. And you need the right equipment, and always the preparation with metal sculptures, whether steel or aluminum, is they need extensive prep time for cleaning the metal—and doing the base coat, the protective coat, before you put your final coat on is critical to the maintenance and final coat holding up. And you can clear-coat, and there are different UV

preventers as well. [00:59:00] So it's really become very sophisticated with different paints and holding up against intense sunlight discoloring the paint as well.

Dziedzic: And there's some strategies that, I guess, sculpture has taken from the Department of Defense, right?

Collens: That is true. There are certain paints they're testing. The Department of Defense has been using high-quality paints on equipment in Iraq and Afghanistan and other parts of the world that the equipment's going. And it was decided to try to apply some of the paints used by the Department of Defense for outdoor sculpture. And this is being actively tested and worked on with different foundations, and there's great interest in this—with Nevelson [01:00:00] and Calder, Tony Smith, and other foundations that think it's appropriate for their outdoor sculptures. Some of it is still quite experimental in seeing how well it holds up, but certainly should be durable.

Dziedzic: And so the conversations around paint durability bring together a lot of different kinds of groups, it sounds like. [laughs]

Collens: Very diverse groups. It sounds like a boring subject, and I've been to conferences, and it's not boring whatsoever. It's really quite fascinating what the choices are in terms of paints that are readily available, from expensive paints to less expensive that are very durable and will hold up well for outdoors. So you don't have to go after the most expensive Rolls Royce of paints that are sometimes very hard to use, and you need certain conditions to use them in for [01:01:00] outdoors as well.

Mason: Can I ask a question? I was wondering—can I ask a kind of broad personal question, David?

Collens: Sure.

Mason: Like, there's an aspect of your job that's—you know, there's the conversation of art, but then there's also just this place is 10,000 logistical problems that need to be solved. Is that part of the pleasure of the work here for you? Do you feel like you're particularly well suited to have that be part of your job?

Collens: It's an interesting question. And I think we all [laughs] adjust to the practical end of working with outdoor sculpture and really what that means. You know, there's nothing ideal or permanent about the sculptures and the materials, and [01:02:00] they sit outdoors all year long in our winter weather and hot summers and rainy summers like this past summer. And that's causing different issues with the maintenance of the sculptures. It's like taking care of an automobile or even more—taking care of the outdoor sculptures that are in the environment and trying to figure out what they need and what the

schedule should be and abiding by artists' wishes that are alive and estates and foundations. And sometimes we're very innovative with it, and we have to think out of the box to come up with solutions with engineers and other people. It's a combination of a lot of, I think, different types of people coming together. Like the person from the Department of Defense said he's very curious and wanted to apply the paints that are being used [01:03:00] to sculpture and working with conservators at the National Gallery in Washington and other conservators to really bring this to fruition. Trying it out. There's no guarantee with the paints that are being used how long they're going to hold up. And it's challenging. And the preparation of the metal is really critical to having the paint hold up. And, you know, for example, sunscreen is very difficult to get off painted sculptures, and no one's found a way to [laughs] neutralize it yet. And you can put sunscreen on and put your hand on a painted sculpture, and that's going to leave a lasting impression.

Mason: Do you think you have a sort of satisfaction, like the classic car hobbyist? Does it feel like a source of distress, or does it feel like a source that satisfies?

Collens: Oh, I [01:04:00] think—yes, very gratifying and very satisfying to all of us to come up with different solutions—what potentially are solutions—to problems with outdoor sculpture, and being able to share that with other people. We get calls all the time at Storm King about installing sculptures and foundations, concrete and other types of foundations, fastening sculptures to concrete, and how do we maintain them and so forth? And, yes, we all have to share information because there're not many of us doing it, and I think that's important.

[Side conversation]

Collens: This is what I do after heavy rainstorms—I come up and check the holes for drainage. Because unfortunately we didn't get that right the first time. We knew about it. We didn't want to make the holes too large. But as part of a full restoration, we're going to increase the size of the drain holes, as you see up on the next level. We've got to get up there with a ladder and clean them out. But they're different-sized drain holes depending which part of the circle we're in. This is all a buildup from water, I think, the discoloration and leaves that are sitting there for a period of time.

Dziedzic: Let me follow up Graham's question a little bit. Do you sort of feel like you're the caretaker here? [laughs] [01:06:00] How do you describe your role, I guess?

Collens: Yes, certainly multifaceted. Yes, caretaker and everything else. I mean, we have a great team at Storm King working in full range of areas. And working with the sculptures and the curatorial area and with the exhibitions and maintenance of sculpture, which a very small group of us are doing, is very

gratifying. And trying to keep the sculptures in the best condition we can. You can't always predict what's going to happen after a hard winter. We can't get out and drive around, even with four-wheel drive, to different places to see what the condition of the sculptures are, and you can have a schedule, which we do—five years out—but it's always something that creeps in that needs to be [01:07:00] done faster than one anticipates.

Dziedzic: And David, correct me if I'm wrong, but when you first started, and then when you became director early on, there was such a small staff that you really were kind of in charge of everything, right? [laughs] All the different kind of diverse things that you've just mentioned. So I wanted to ask what has it been like to have a bigger staff come on and assist with those various tasks?

Collens: You know, when I first started working at Storm King, it was a very small staff, as you're pointing out. And that was terrific. It was a very creative time with Bill Rutherford, our landscape architect, and Peter Stern, who I worked for for many years. It was really the three of us working on many different projects and doing the exhibitions. And with [01:08:00] a larger staff—since John Stern became president of the Art Center in 2010, we've expanded the staff, and diversifying with the staff is really terrific, and seeing people that are passionate as well about taking care of the sculptures and doing various aspects of the work at Storm King. Because it was—it's too much for any one person.

It's still a very creative organization and continues moving forward. And it's really extraordinary to see and wonderful to be a part of. And I still walk around and figure out sculpture locations and come up and keep an eye on the sculptures on weekends when there's less demand for meetings, and more time to walk around the grounds and interact with the public and figure out sculpture [01:09:00] locations. Because I love moving sculptures from the permanent collection as well. That's very important to doing exhibitions and for visitors to see different sculptures, and rotating the sculptures in our collection.

Dziedzic: Is finding new locations for the sculptures—what determines your decision around that? Is it a matter of the trees grow, the trees look different, you want to place things somewhere else? Or is it more like you feel differently about the sculpture?

Collens: Well, I think it's important to site sculpture in different locations to see how they look. One comes up with different ideas about landscape, the juxtaposition of different sculptures together or apart from each other. Also to rotate sculptures so they stay in better condition. Bringing out other sculptures for a short period of [01:10:00] time is always, I think, important, for the public to see the variety of work in the collection and for the artists to see earlier work together, like Charles Ginnever, David Stoltz. Doesn't mean they'll be there for long periods of time, but I want to bring artists' work together when possible and think about different sites for it and use different landscapes, as I've done most recently, putting sculpture

into different landscapes—in more natural landscapes, keeping it very natural and not doing a lot of maintenance and pruning to different areas. It's really for people to look and see the sculptures, not necessarily walk in and interact with them and circle around them. But they're just different sites I've been curious about for years and just really experimenting with landscape [01:11:00] as my thoughts on landscape change.

Dziedzic: It sounds like you've described curating, but—

Collens: [laughter] Oh, yes! Indeed! So I carry on with it, and I can show you different sites. I don't know if they'll photograph well, but it's interesting to see. And people really haven't found them yet because they're not on the map and need to get sculpture labels out and little pruning and so forth. But it's minimum.

Dziedzic: And like you said, the decisions that you make come from traversing the grounds by foot—

Collens: Absolutely. Walking around all year long and thinking about locations and waiting till I can have the right sculpture to move into the particular location. And rethinking the permanent collection, about rotating works and moving works that are outdoors to new locations on the [01:12:00] property. Always fascinating—for the public, for myself. Challenging.

End of interview