

NORMAN DAVIS

Interviewed by Evelyn Klebanoff

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KLEBANOFF: Would you like to talk about public support for the arts and your relationship to public officials?

DAVIS: Let me put it another way. I had been a member of the original Pacific Northwest Research Foundation for more than twenty years, when the new Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center was built. I walked into the lobby and felt that it should have some feeling other than walls and carpeting and fancy panelling. It seems to me the most melancholy function is the waiting room of any medical institution. And I gave to it a bronze figure by Rodin, which encouraged somebody else to put another figure on display there to warm the place up a little, to give some feeling of sympathy and comfort to those who might come there. The figure's a gentle one; it's a seated female nude, headless - there's nothing there except tranquillity, and I think beauty. But a great deal of the so-called public art to my mind has neither beauty or quality. And there is, I'm sure, among the most illiterate of humans, and certainly among the general populace, some sort of feeling for beauty, whether this beauty is expressed in flowers or sky or mountains or what have you. And the grotesqueries - put it that way - that are often presented as contemporary art are a disservice in my view to its cause.

KLEBANOFF: Would you like to be specific?

DAVIS:

I'll be specific. For instance, a few things: the Seattle First National Bank Building has a handsome sculpture, a Bourdelle. And it has a large Henry Moore. The Henry Moore to me seems hopelessly out of place - it should be on green grass with hills behind it, something to give it background and gentleness. As it is, one risks being run over by a car trying to get into any kind of position to see it properly. At least it's a step forward. And there are all kinds of things at the Seattle airport building which might as well be invisible. One wanders around there and hardly sees them. They have neither status, stature or visibility, and the magic word "quality" has no meaning.

KLEBANOFF:

Is that because of their location or because of the individual pieces themselves?

DAVIS:

Both. I would say some of them are the wrong things in the wrong place, and some could be called the right things in the wrong place. But I can't for the life of me - and I'm a frequent flyer - remember any single one item visually, and I have a good visual memory. That last sculpture - so-called stoneware, it's by Noguchi - in front of the Federal Building - it's the ruddiest nonsense that one can imagine. It's out of scale, it's out of proportion, it's out of place. I can see it in front of a one-story building of some kind, set

in a real building, on a lawn, or on a gravel courtyard, standing where one can see it. But there - it's ridiculous!

KLEBANOFF:

They ought not to have done it?

DAVIS:

I think the building would be better off without it - at least the people who use the building wouldn't smirk sarcastically as they came by. I think it's a disservice to what is called art. I think that what happens is that the vast mass of people, when they look at it, will "Is this what you call art?" and turn away from it - and condemn everything that is so-called.

KLEBANOFF:

Well, now what about the museum's role in contemporary art? Has the museum a responsibility to educate the taste of the public or to reflect only what is going on, or try and set some kind of objective standards? I think you're probably involved with the Accessions Committee, aren't you? And things come up for purchase or gifts...

DAVIS:

I'm of the opinion that the primary function of the museum is conservation and exhibition. It is not to teach, it is not to propagate - it is to conserve and exhibit. I don't think there should be any formal teaching program.

KLEBANOFF:

No art history courses or anything?

DAVIS:

These can be done as entertainment if you like, but I don't think they belong within the purview of the museum as a museum.

KLEBANOFF:

Why?

DAVIS:

Because contemporary art is so much a matter of fashion. Now I have in my library an illustrated catalog of the pre-Columbian Art Exhibition at Chicago in 1893, I think it was, or 1897. I remember that committees were set up in every one of the major countries of Europe and in the United States, and a half of the works there were by American artists and a half by foreign artists of foreign countries. I'm reasonably familiar with the names involved. Looking through it, I find only four of one hundred and ninety artists whose names ring a bell today. The rest are as dead and forgotten as the artists who painted those paintings in the Frye Gallery today. They were fashionable - they were the rage at the time. And looking back, one of the deadeast exhibitions I recall ever seeing was in that museum in Philadelphia, or perhaps it was Baltimore, where tremendous canvases by the Cubists were hung. The names again escape me - they were corpses. These were the fashions of the '20's and '30's - Delauney is one name that comes along.

KLEBANOFF:

Well, if you're talking about the Cubists...

DAVIS:

I'm just saying that was one fashion - there'll be endless other fashions. French Impressionists - who looks at French Impressionists today? I have a beautiful Corot upstairs. But go to the Frye

Gallery - there are two Boudins there that are beauties. There is a - who is that man who paints moonlight? a Dutchman - a little beauty. There is a painting of white geese - beautifully painted, charming. But the rest were fashions in their time, and they're deader than any corpse in any cemetery. And I think a very great deal of what we call contemporary art today, when it is no longer contemporary, will be superceded by other fashions. There are fashions in art, and I don't think it's the business of the museum to promote fashion.

KLEBANOFF:

But what happens, then, when the museum is presented with a request from the curator or with an object from a potential donor who wishes that such-and-such an artist be included in the museum's collection? Now the Accessions Committee has got to make some kind of decision about that. It is very difficult, I assume, to know now who is going to be considered a great artist in 25, 50, 100 years.

DAVIS:

There's a point at which the members of the Accessions Committee are expected to have sufficiently good taste and judgment to decide what's worth taking a chance on and what not.

KLEBANOFF:

Well, then, we come back again to the discussion of taste that we had before.

DAVIS:

Taste is a word that one can go on philosophizing

over in the same way as quality.

KLEBANOFF:

Dr. Fuller's primary interest was in Oriental Art-Chinese, Japanese, and Egyptian. And the Modern Art Pavilion, which came into existence after the World's Fair, has become an addition to the art scene in Seattle, and I think has had an influence on directors and artists. And it seemed to me what you were saying was that the museum has no business being in that position.

DAVIS:

No, I don't mean that at all. I understood you to ask: should it be the business of the museum to propagate, to stimulate, to go out of its way, especially, to teach in terms of modern art. And I say ~~no~~ One must define the function of the museum. There are many opinions. My own is that its business is to conserve - it should be a repository and make available for exhibitions what has come to be accepted as the art - the civilized arts - of the world. And I think to that extent the Seattle Art Museum functions extremely well.

KLEBANOFF:

I wonder if we could put this on a more personal level for a moment. I read in the Archives a beautiful account that you wrote of buying a painting by someone called Nebbison - his name was unfamiliar to me. And the dealer had asked fifty pounds and you offered him forty and he accepted that. Then you felt badly that the artist was perhaps suffering because of your bargain and you were

sort of reaching out to him. Is that always the way you buy art - is it a personal thing between you and the artist? Do you have that kind of relationship with artists today? In this community, and if so, with whom?

DAVIS:

I started buying paintings for myself, for my own home, with no other thought in mind. But I was always enormously interested in painting and sculpture. As I say, I was brought up from childhood in familiarity with art museums. My native town has five art museums, each having its own special field, except the large one, which is general.

KLEBANOFF:

In Manchester?

DAVIS:

In Manchester. But in terms of familiarity, I have known a number of artists. I lived in London for many years and with time mutual friends brought artists to us - people at parties, now and again - one would buy a painting here and there, knowing that what you were doing was helping the fellow pay the rent. At the same time, though, one would go around looking and looking and looking, at dealers' and those galleries in London, but I was always interested in the view, the purview of the personality of the artist, as expressed in his work.

KLEBANOFF:

Meet him personally?

DAVIS:

Personally. And I went to see these people, and I came to realize that I was welcome whenever I



did go because most artists felt themselves excluded from contact, almost, with the rest of the world, by reason of poverty or narrow means. When I would go visit the artist in his studio, he would show me his treasures. And friendships arose. Let me give you one little incident. There was a man in Holland whom I met, and artist.

KLEBANOFF:

What was his name?

DAVIS:

His name was - oh, dear - he's now a very popular man, and very high-priced. I will remember it in a short time. And I bought one of his paintings. My son now has it - my oldest son. And a little while later, I went to see him a second time and he asked me if I as a man of affairs, a businessman, could advise him. I said, "Well, what is your trouble?" He said, "I'm always broke. I'm selling paintings, but I never get paid for them. The dealers don't tell me how much they get. I get barely enough to get by. And I see some of my better paintings - no artist ever produces uniformly - disappear, and I don't get anything from them. What shall I do?" He lived in a loft at the time, the top of a barn. He had a wife, and no children, and he looked as if he needed a few square meals. And I said to him, "Now and again you produce something that's special. But you're contracted to these galleries, these dealers, and there's nothing you can do about these specials.

except send them to them, knowing that they are special and should command higher prices. I suggest to you that ~~what you should do is not~~ sell them, not send them to the dealers. Don't you have other artists in your group? Exchange them. You'll recognize when this fellow has got a special and you've got one - trade, so that they're not your paintings. On that wall of your shed there, this loft, get some plywood and nail up a cupboard with a padlock on the door and give the padlock key to your wife. And store in there, as her property, something that'll keep the wolf from her door when maybe you're gone. Those specials which you've exchanged with the other men here, whom you know, and with whom you sympathize, and who are your friends - and over a period of time you'll find that you have something of monetary value, which you would not otherwise acquire." He wrote many years later to say that he'd done that.

KLEBANOFF:

What about local artists? Must be your contact - I see that you have a Horiuchi upstairs, and a Callahan - have you had that kind of personal relationship with artists?

DAVIS:

No. I have had at one time - no, no, I've not. But I've phoned them, I've talked to them. I spent six months - a couple of hours a week for six months - with Tobey. I studied composition.

KLEBANOFF:

You were studying composition?

DAVIS:

Yes, with him. And then we'd go out for lunch together and argue there for a couple of hours. I've known Horiuchi well - he's a charming man, gentle. And a man of complete integrity. Callahan I only know as far as having - oh, I know him well enough, but I don't know him as I do the others. I've known one or two other artists. But no, I would say that I was rather kept at a distance by the fact that I had a connection with the Seattle Art Museum. It was difficult.

KLEBANOFF:

You felt that it would compromise your integrity.

DAVIS:

Not mine. But there might be some...

KLEBANOFF:

Conflict of interest.

DAVIS:

There might be some comment. And that would hurt them. And I preferred not to do so.

KLEBANOFF:

Do you think there is too much dissension now over the role of the museum?

DAVIS:

That Dutch artist was named Lucibert.

KLEBANOFF:

Lucibert. I'll look for his work. But the role the museum plays in the making or breaking of artists' reputations...

DAVIS:

I don't think it plays a role. It did do, I would agree, it did make reputations, but it was the province of one man, Dick Fuller, who had a following and who was in plain terms a loner. Emma Stimson was a great help to him, in terms of Oriental art, and of course there was Mrs. Frede-

rick, initially. But after that there were very few. In terms of a role, now, I think the term is a misnomer. I don't think that the Museum had a role, or has a role, in making or breaking artists at all. I think that they'd either remain obscure, or emerge. Let me give you a little instance. About three or four years ago, I went to the Henry Gallery and there was a show of art teachers who were not within the school system or the University. There were some paintings on view, and one of them in particular took my fancy. I asked the price of it - \$250 - by a man named Don Barrie. Imagine it - I was angered by the snobbery that not one single work had been bought - it was an outrage. I then asked where the man was - was he a local? Yes. Give me his address. They gave me his address, and I found him somewhere on 15th or 19th Avenue with this class of schoolchildren. Obviously he was hungry. He lived and worked in the same couple of storerooms and kept these classes going opposite that big school. Yes, I think it's 19th. Anyway - 19th or 16th. It was a church school. St. Joseph's. Anyway I like the painting - it's hanging in my home now. This poor fellow was just literally short of a meal. I asked him if he wanted to be paid, and I paid him in cash. And he was exhilarated. I told him to go downtown and see some of the gal-

leries downtown and see some of the galleries there and get a show. And he did, and he got a show, three months later. And the same pictures, of the same order, were then priced from \$500 up. Since then he's worked and slowly got a little recognition. He called me two or three weeks ago, to tell me that he's painting a mural, and will I come and look at it. It's almost finished. It's on the wall of a government building, on Yesler, between 14th and 13th on the north side. It's fun.

KLEBANOFF:

Yes, I know that.

DAVIS:

Now he's also done a mural on the wall of what is his studio. He told me yesterday - I stopped by to see him - that he's got a job coming up for a mural in Bellingham. And I would say at the time I landed on him there - and I give myself that much credit - the poor fellow was going absolutely nowhere. He hadn't a chance. He himself was almost in despair. But I was fascinated by these classes. Here were boys and girls - mostly boys - anywhere from ten to twelve years of age, with scratchpads in front of them and crayons, and having a marvelous time. Children's art classes. And I thought this man should get some recognition, should get some kind of assistance. This was a teacher of art.

KLEBANOFF:

What about your classes with Tobey? Were you drawing, or...?

DAVIS:

What Tobey did was this. I was interested in com-

position - he had a series of reproductions from LIFE, which at that time had a three or four page art section. And he would stick those up, on the wall, and he had a sketchpad of tracing paper, about, oh, twenty by twenty-four. And he would then work out the composition, the bones of the composition, of each one of them. I'll show you one of my jobs that I did with him at that time. And then he would procede to build or dissect, to analyze, the basic composition, the basic structure, of the painting, until we would finally come to what he called the "magic" - what I would call "what makes it tick." Now this we would argue over.

KLEBANOFF:

Was he a good teacher?

DAVIS:

He was a very good teacher. And I will tell you one little story about him. The time came - after the first month - when I said to him, "Tell me, what do I have to pay you?" So I gave him a figure. I said, "No." He said, "That's what I charge for classes even when there are three or four people." I said, "No, it's not enough. I insist on paying you at least as much as I pay the plumber, or the electrician, who comes here." And it was twice what he asked for.

KLEBANOFF:

Do you own Tobeys?

DAVIS:

I own three, which I've given to my son. I owned four, but I gave one to the Henry Gallery called "Indian Stones." And there are three others, two

of which one son has and one another.

KLEBANOFF:

I think we've talked about all the areas that I had in mind when I came, unless there's something you felt might be important to include.

DAVIS:

Oh, I can go on rambling for hours if that is what you want.

KLEBANOFF:

I think it has been very helpful. (Side Two of Cassette.)

DAVIS:

Continue or repeat?

KLEBANOFF:

You were telling about your introduction to the Museum people.

DAVIS:

I first met Dick Fuller through mutual friends, the Arthur Ayraults. His son now - Dan Ayrault - is the principal of the Lakeside School. This would have been about '46 or '47. But we had known the Ayraults during the war, when we lived in Tacoma. And Arthur Ayrault had retired after the war with some medical disability, and with the title of Rear Admiral. The Ayraults were charming people. We liked them and we remain to this day warm friends. At that time the Ayraults had moved from Tacoma to a house, a rented house, somewhere near Windermere. And I remember that we went there for cocktails one sunny afternoon and I met Dick Fuller - a rather silent but smiling man, in his forties, and Betty Morrison. And I also remember asking the Ayraults to come and visit me at the brewery in Tacoma, and Betty Morrison was

there, a charming woman, and I asked her to come along too, if she would care to do so. Later, she took my wife aside and asked if we would also invite Dick Fuller, which we did. And that was the beginning of that particular romance. I remember the Fuller party at the brewery - I made a small occasion of it, and we all enjoyed it. Now, then, a short time afterwards, Dick Fuller asked Millie, my wife, and me to come to the annual museum staff party at his home, somewhere near Volunteer Park. It was a big old house, I remember, and a very pleasant party. I had known the Museum - I'm an inveterate museum-goer myself - and I'd admired a good deal of what I'd seen there. I told Dick Fuller at the party - he had been showing me around the stacks, and some of his treasures - and I was so taken with his enthusiasm that I told him that I should be happy to help in any way if I could. Forthwith, he asked me if I would go on the Board of the Museum. To which I agreed, and he asked if I would visit his mother. I went along, and he took me upstairs, and the old lady was lying in bed - the formidable woman - and he told me she couldn't speak. But he introduced me and told her that I was a new member of the Board. And I smilingly and hesitantly told her that I would do my best - and she glared at me. She was quite resentful, it seemed, of being incapacitated



and being unable to give me a piece of her mind as to what my duties might be as a member of the Board of the Museum. Well, the Museum Board meetings were interesting. I'd been on the boards of several business organizations and other institutions and I'd never known a dictatorship so benevolent and so total. Dick Fuller ruled the roost. He stumbled a little and he was hard to follow when he read the minutes or conducted the meeting, but he came through. He had a sweetness about him that was so disarming that it was only with difficulty that one could challenge him. But I'm a challenger, and I did.

KLEBANOFF:

In what matters?

DAVIS:

In endless matters regarding the Museum, I looking at it as an outsider and he nursing it, if you like, as his own particular baby. And he had all kinds of plans, and I had all kinds of alternatives. He had plans for expanding the Museum; particularly I remember that he came up one time with rough layouts of a seven-hundred-seat auditorium for the back of the Museum, and the conversion of the existing auditorium into galleries. And I was quite sure that I'd had a lot more experience in building and building costs than Dick had.

KLEBANOFF:

What year was that?

DAVIS:

This would have been in the fifties. And by then I was his vice-president, and remained so for

sixteen years. And during the last few of those years each year I would ask him to find someone else - I'd been there long enough. He did not tell me that he was waiting for a suitable and more docile vice-president, but obviously that was what he was after.

KLEBANOFF:

What happened to the plans for the new auditorium?

DAVIS:

Nothing came of it and instead we came on to the business of the Kress Gallery. And that was the only enlargement. I wanted to build and I got drawings to build a section out from back of the present offices down about sixty or eighty feet deep, and about a hundred and twenty feet wide, on three floors, the top of which would have been gallery, the bottom one stacks, and the middle one offices. All were very much needed. But nothing came of that either. And instead we ran into the business of the Kress Collection. The Kress people, headed up by a Mr. Emerson as its director, came along on a visit to implement a program they had of setting up a number of original galleries within existing museums for Renaissance and post Renaissance art from the Kress Collection. We offered a small gallery at the back, the one which houses the smaller paintings of the Kress Collection. And I remember that Dick Fuller and Millard Rogers and Betty and I went East to discuss those paintings and we agreed with Emerson on those that

we were to have. They were to be left in the Museum for ten years, and after that if the Kress Foundation was satisfied that they were properly exhibited, then they would become a permanent gift to the Museum.

KLEBANOFF:

Were you able to choose?

DAVIS:

We were able to choose within limits. But what happened in the event was this. We set up with great fanfare the opening day of the Kress Collection, and Russ Kress, who was the brother of the original Kress who set up the original Kress Collection, came along with his wife. He was a fine fellow, and I liked him enormously. We got along extremely well. But he was outraged by how the paintings they had given us were jammed and crammed together in that small gallery, and he was determined at that time to take them away. Dick was ready to let him do it. So Emerson stepped in as the peacemaker - he was a wonderful chap, and we became warm friends until his death; I have the most moving letter from him, written just a few days before he did die - and we affected a compromise: that if we would build an additional gallery they would expand their gift into larger and more impressive-looking paintings, and we could keep the lot. And I was able to help with the building of that gallery.

KLEBANOFF:

Did they contribute to the cost of the gallery?

DAVIS:

DAVIS:

No. And we got the present collection which is reasonably representative of the period in that it contains few masterpieces; it contains one, the one in the right-hand corner...

KLEBANOFF:

The Rubens?

DAVIS:

The Rubens - the Rubens sketch, which I think is a masterpiece. I remember one amusing incident about Sherman Lee who was here at that time. When we opened up the second gallery and made a whole ceremony and affair of it, the Museum invited the city fathers to a pre-opening cocktail hour. And we officers and board members were told to shepherd the individual members of the City Council and the Mayor around the Museum and around the exhibit, and be hospitable. And I clearly remember coming out with my man in tow thankful to have finished my chore, and seeing Sherman Lee standing on the steps in front of the Museum, his face as black as thunder. I can't tell you who the individual was, but he said, "Do you know what that so-and-so asked me? I showed him the Caniletto and he asked me, 'Is it hand-painted?' " This is a true story - one couldn't really invent a thing like that. Well, anyway, going on to the Museum, Dick Fuller did me an enormous service in recommending me for the job of Fine Arts Director for the Seattle World's Fair. I had a wonderful time over it. And by the way, there's my testimony...

KLEBANOFF: Oh, yes, I read about that - your three-dollar-a-year...

DAVIS: Three dollar bills numbered for a year of service.

KLEBANOFF: I read about that in the archives. I thought that was beautiful. Do you feel that Seattle - the Museum and the art community in Seattle - has radically changed because of the Fair, or do you think it would have happened anyhow?

DAVIS: I think it would have happened anyhow. I think that the art scene in Seattle is quite exceptional, having in mind that this is not Los Angeles or San Francisco and compared with what I've seen elsewhere, in the East for instance. I was asked if I would stop over in Boston to judge their annual amateur art festival.

KLEBANOFF: Like our Northwest Annual?

DAVIS: Like our Northwest Annual, with this difference, that it was held in an open square, in booths, and it was quite an affair - three or four times larger, in terms of the number of objects exhibited, than ours was. I had business in Boston, and I took the occasion to go, and went round the show twice, morning and afternoon, with the man in charge. When I finally gave him my view of the show it was that it was the most pathetic affair that I had seen - it was incomparably, if one can use the term, inferior to the quality of amateur work in the West. And certainly if any of

these could be called professionals, the title was a misnomer.

KLEBANOFF:

Why do you suppose that is - or was?

DAVIS:

All I can say is that the quality of art production, of art appreciation here is high. I was born and raised in England, and I bought my first painting as a twenty-first birthday present for myself. It's a sketch in oils of a village in the Yorkshire dales, by a woman named Bradshaw, - I forget her first name. I saw the finished painting several times larger in London later, and I think my sketch is better. I gave it a couple of years ago to the Hutchison Cancer Center for the Director's office, which looked a rather gloomy place. But I would say that the quality even in simple technique - I'm not talking of art - was about on the level of a good English show, here in Seattle. And Seattle was ahead of similar shows in England that I have seen, in ideas and freshness of mind. Positive. Now I was talking about this Boston affair -

KLEBANOFF:

The Boston affair that you were asked to judge?

DAVIS:

Yes. And I would say that generally there's a lot of bad painting in Seattle as everywhere. You asked me if the Fair had an effect on art life here. I would say it opened a lot of eyes, but a lot were at the best half opened - there's still too much trash being sold. By the same token, we win-

ter in Carmel, and I remember, last winter, being stopped by a couple in a car who wanted to know where the art exhibits were. There are about seventy art studios - if you want to call them that - selling paintings in Carmel, which is a very small place, with a total voting population of about 1700. And my own reply was, "There are a lot of very handsome picture frames in the windows if you go down the street." No, I think standards here are high.

KLEBANOFF:

Is that because they have been educated by dealers, or by the Museum, or, how would you attribute that?

DAVIS:

I think there's something in the atmosphere here - in the scenery. Seattle is an unhandsome city, but it's surrounded by beauty. And I think that if one were to put the same artist in Des Moines, Iowa, which is everlastingly flat and melancholy, then you would probably get art worthy of Des Moines. There's something in the scene and the tone. And there's a freshness of mind here generally - we're on the edge of the world. There's a willingness to experiment here, and fail if you like, but chance it.

KLEBANOFF:

Do you feel that there are really, in this country and in the Northwest, schools of art - or that each artist somehow reacts in his own way to...?

DAVIS:

No, I think that every man, whether he's an artist or a kite-flyer, is a creature of his own environ-

ment here is of better quality. There is one thing here; Dick Fuller did an enormous amount to encourage art. He had magnificent taste, and an unerring eye that out of three paintings at first glance would pick the best - wouldn't have to come back and look. I followed him around and watched him. Secondly, he recognized talent, and encouraged it, and subsidized it. I'm not going to reminisce about the individuals because most of them are alive - it wouldn't do. But I know them, and he helped them enormously - helped them through the dirty, dark years of the Depression, when groceries were a problem.

KLEBANOFF:

He was a very unusual man. Seattle is greatly in his debt. I wonder - you referred before to his "benevolent dictatorship" at the Museum - if it has been difficult for the Museum to accommodate to his loss, to our loss of his directorship.

DAVIS:

No, I think not. First of all his own affairs, financial affairs, became troublesome in his later years, and he could no longer support and maintain the Museum. I would think that, year after year, he would put his hand into his pocket for thirty, forty, fifty thousand dollars to carry deficits, and he could no longer do so. And, of course, his own health failed. But I remember arguing with him quite loudly over his project to excavate a new set of underground storage areas for the



Museum - I thought it was a nonsense, in comparison to the cost of a building, a suitable extension to the Museum, exhibit space - and renting storage elsewhere if need be. And smilingly, as always, he turned to me and said, "It's my money." It was money he could ill afford at that time, but he was a determined man and he went on with it. And who's to say - whatever the plans for the future of the Museum or the Museums may be, the Museum today is an entity, a totality - it works. One of the things I'm happy to see, and it's something I was after Dick Fuller time after time about - I was opposed to the everlasting change of exhibits. I thought that three or four a year was more than enough, and I wanted to give the museum-going public time to see and know and understand the treasures that we had - Dick Fuller's treasures. No, he kept at it. But now at last we do have pretty well half the Museum full of the Oriental art collection, and I think it's lovely. Beautiful. And one has time to study and learn and see and know those things. To give you an illustration of permanence, I'm now writing a travel book, and I'm recounting my first interest or knowledge of Greek art was when as a child I was taken to the Manchester art gallery.

KLEBANOFF:

Yes, I read that.

DAVIS:

You read that. Now then, I went to the Manchester

art gallery four years ago, just for old times' sake, and in the permanent gallery, the same paintings were still hanging, and on the same walls.

KLEBANOFF:

Do you think that also the development of professionalism - there is a professional curator of Indian art, and a professional curator of modern art - in the system - do you think that the Museum benefits from this professionalism, or would it be better off guided by one man's tastes?

DAVIS:

Taste is a big word. What is taste? Taste is a combination of knowledge, of feeling, of judgment. And having in mind that when one talks of taste in relation to a specific area, one is involved with personalities, and I would rather not comment.

KLEBANOFF:

I hope someday you will write about it, though, because I think it would be too bad for your views not to be known.

DAVIS:

Well, you see, I'm almost the sole survivor of those days. I've been on the Museum Board now for more than thirty years. And I discussed this with Dick Fuller during the last couple of years of his life when he was ailing - I used to make it my business during the months we were in Seattle to go to see him once a week, and we would talk over, of course, the Museum's affairs, and what was going on, and so on. I wouldn't want to offer his views nor my own at this time. I am astonished and delighted that at the last Board meeting of the

Seattle Art Museum the president announced that the Museum's accounts were in the black.

KLEBANOFF:

Is that because of membership, or fund drive?

DAVIS:

Fund drive. This is the first time I've ever known that to happen. Again, in thirty years. I'm sure Dick Fuller will be rolling over whether he's in heaven or elsewhere, with pleasure at the thought. No, I would say that art - wise, Seattle is in a transition from a largely indifferent regard for the Museum to the recognition of it as something that has value - that does not belong to "them" but belongs to "us". Now I make it a general practice, not a rule, to ask people, particularly young people, if they have been, ever, to the Seattle Art Museum. Not one in fifty have been there, or else they fudge, and say their parents took them when they were children. I think the time has got to come - will come - when perhaps one in ten will have been there, and one in ten will be a great many. But I think that it's ripe at the present time for an administration, or a government, or a governor, if you like, who by great good fortune might be interested in art. It would be wonderful. The succession of governors whom I've met and known so far have been completely blind.

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