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Oral history interview with Mary and Clinton
Adams, 1998 April 24

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Transcript

Interview

**Interview with Mary Adams
Conducted by Paul Karlstrom
At the artist's home in Albuquerque, New Mexico
April 24, 1998**

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Mary Adams on April 24, 1998. The interview took place in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and was conducted by Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[TAPE 1, SIDE A]

PAUL KARLSTROM: I am in Albuquerque with Mary Adams and her husband Clinton Adams, who just happens to be another subject of the Archives. The interviewer for the Archives is Paul Karlstrom. This is Tape 1, Side A. Thank you for agreeing to do this on short notice, but it seemed to be a good opportunity to talk about a particularly timely subject. So much attention is being given to the brand-new Getty Center in Brentwood and both of us, although you earlier were involved with the earlier manifestations of the Getty Museum and that's what I would like to talk about today. Basically, just to get your memories of what happened and what it was like, because now it's so grand. But obviously it did not start out that way and you are one of the people who has had personal experience with that. So I would like very much to hear what you remember about those times. What year was it?

MARY ADAMS: 1954.

PAUL KARLSTROM: 1954.

MARY ADAMS: The the summer of '54. I'd been hired by Dr. Valentiner who had been engaged by Mr. Getty to be the director and open the museum. Mr. Valentiner couldn't drive, so I picked him up in this dilapidated old Plymouth coupe every morning. It had a terrible smell. It was a rattley old thing. And he hated it, but he had to depend on it, and I did, too, to get to The Getty.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was that his car ?

MARY ADAMS: That was my car, which I had been using anyway. I had been working at UCLA before then.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, what were you doing at UCLA?

MARY ADAMS: Oh, at UCLA, and before, I'd done many things but I was working for the Bureau of Business and Economic Research at UCLA. I was the executive assistant and secretary and all of that. At that time, Clint was on the staff of the Art Department at UCLA. In any event, that followed a period of time when I had been dancing briefly and then I had been teaching school before that. In any event, I was delighted to have the job at The Getty, mostly because I was so enchanted with Dr. Valentiner and also it sounded like a very interesting thing. I had no idea, of course, that it would become this vast museum, and I remember the first day I drove out there. Of course, there were lots of things to do before we could open it and Valentiner was in a great hurry to get it started and Mr. Getty was in a great hurry to get it started, too. Of course, he was in Europe at the time because tax deductions were necessary to get it going. The galleries of Louis Treize and Louis Quinze furniture and the Beauvais tapestries were all intact, but there was no place to hang the paintings; and one of the first things we had to do was decide how they were to be exhibited. Valentiner already knew that the little theater that was in the villa was the ideal place. He decided those Dutch and Italian paintings should be hung on red velvet, which seemed like the easiest thing to do. And one of the first jobs was to get in touch with The Huntington, find out how we could do all of this right away, and it was The Huntington that finally - I don't remember who it was at the Huntington - that guided us to get the theater taken care of.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you suppose is there any chance that it was Bob Wark? Robert Wark? Had he started ...

MARY ADAMS: No, I think it was a woman.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So maybe it was a little before ...

MARY ADAMS: It was probably before you knew him.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Uh huh.

MARY ADAMS: In any event, when we first came to the Malibu estate, there were huge entry gates that could only be opened with a key and I think we were met by Mr. Plews. He and his wife were the British couple that were in charge of the upkeep of the estate.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How do you spell that name?

MARY ADAMS: P-L-E-W-S.

PAUL KARLSTROM: They were?

MARY ADAMS: They were, they lived there, above what had probably been the maid's quarters, but became our offices, that opened on that Italianate garden, which you may remember. Of course, it's all gone now.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, the ranch house is still ...

MARY ADAMS: Yes, the ranch house is still there. Well, this was the ranch house and we were warned about the gate which had huge spikes on it. I was given a key to open it and get through it. The timing on the gate was such that there would just be time for me to jump out of my little car, turn the key, the gates would open briefly, and then I had to be sure that car started up right away so I could get through. There was plenty of time - well, not really plenty of time, but time to do it. The timing on the gate had formerly been set down because Mr. Getty had been briefly kidnapped at one time before he could get through the it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: He had been?

MARY ADAMS: That was the story. I don't know whether that was apocryphal or not, but Mr. Plews told me this, that he [Getty] had once been briefly kidnapped and released and so he, having a little tendency to be a little paranoid about security - he had the timing set down so that there were just eight seconds to get through. But he had it set too closely, the timing too closely, because one time when he was trying to get through in his Lincoln, the spikes got the car. So we had a little more time. Well, I was sort of impressed with that. That sounded like the Getty was going to be an interesting experience. In any event, it turned out to be an interesting experience. But then driving up through to the ranch house, it was so beautiful and the whole setting was magnificent and ...

PAUL KARLSTROM: Were the animals there at that time?

MARY ADAMS: Yes, there were animals. They were off to one side so, of course, the visitors didn't see them. But there were some wolves and there were some bears. And Valentin, of course, was a great nature lover and a great animal lover. And I remember one incident. One of the little bears had been sick and should have been put down because she couldn't recover - she had pneumonia - but Mr. Getty would not permit her to be put to sleep, I guess, and that irritated Valentin enormously, because he thought that cruel. Yes, there was also a cemetery for animals way off in the hills. I think there was a lion that had been buried up there. But there were buffalo and there were other things on various parts of the estate. But mostly the zoo had disappeared except for just a few animals. But I didn't see that the first day, of course, because they weren't there when I drove up.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did the - I'm not quite sure of the chronology - what years did J. Paul Getty actually - when was he in residence? He obviously wasn't when you were there.

MARY ADAMS: He was not there and didn't come back. His wife was living down in Malibu; I think she was living in Marian Davies's house, as a matter of fact. This was wife number four, I believe. And there was a son, one of his sons, a little boy, who was about four years old.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So his wife was living, not on the property?

MARY ADAMS: No. No.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But in Malibu:

MARY ADAMS: She had a key to the gate, too, and she did come in occasionally, I think she came in to make a television film. Or she let the people who were making the film in. She was an actress.

PAUL KARLSTROM: They were separated at that time, or ...

MARY ADAMS: Yes, of course. And apparently, he didn't like that because at one time the key was removed from her and she wasn't allowed to come in without the key, which was a little embarrassing. But she lived with the son, the little boy, down in Malibu. Didn't meet her at first but, except for the Plews, we had full run of the house and there was no need to go into the house except, of course, I did, out of curiosity because I wanted to see his library. The library was very interesting carpet and there was a beautiful Aubusson carpet on the drawing room floor and some other, very few other, great things, most of it was 1920s stuff, it seemed to me. And no art, really. But the library was extremely interesting. There was one book on Cézanne, just one book on modern art and that was an Impressionist. Everything else was old art. Well, 17th, 18th, 19th century. Not much in the 19th. And there were a lot of books in that early German movement, the Strength Through Joy, the Group in Germany, 1920s Pre-Hitler. That was interesting. I don't know what that means, except one does look at the books on the shelves to find out what interests people. The Cézanne was probably left over from, I think, his third marriage, to a woman who was very much in tune with the Impressionists and more contemporary art. And, of course, the joke was that's why they got the divorce, but that's just an apocryphal joke.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about the - I'm trying to visualize The Getty at that time. There was, of course, the Ranch house, which as I remember was up above what became the actual museum.

MARY ADAMS: Yes. Yes, it was. It was on the hill.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So what was the structure that became the museum that I knew in the mid '60s when graduate students from UCLA would work there on Wednesdays and Saturdays, as I did? Was that a part of the original complex, was that the little theater?

MARY ADAMS: No. The theater was really part of the ranch house.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I see. Up above.

MARY ADAMS: The wing that housed the 15th, 16th century furniture and the Beauvais tapestries which, of course, were magnificent, came out from the ranch house as an L and the theater was part of that whole structure, but it was connected to the ranch house. One didn't enter from the ranch house. Beyond that, where you remember it, was a rose garden and gardens, mostly. The little courtyard that Valentiner's office and my office opened on was that Italianate one, with the Lansdowne sculpture and a few other things. All the Greek and Roman stuff was inside the house in a long gallery in glass cases-- a really beautiful little gallery with some exquisite things which turned out to be my favorites in the museum. It was a lot of fun getting all of that organized with Val. And then when Paul Wescher came on the scene, of course, they got to work immediately on the first guidebook, which I still have a copy of. Have you ever seen that?

PAUL KARLSTROM: I'm not sure that I have. Let's pause a moment, and then we'll pick up.

[Recording Stops]

[Recording Begins Again]

PAUL KARLSTROM: We paused and we took a little break for technical reasons. What I'm trying to do, Mary, as you talk, is project myself since I'm familiar with The Getty at a later period and try to see what had happened, or get an idea of what had happened since, well, since you opened up and I gather that being in the spring of '54 ...

MARY ADAMS: Spring and summer. I'm a little -I'm a month off ...

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, nobody's going to call you on that. But by that time, just to recap, Getty had been gone a short period of time?

MARY ADAMS: I think probably a period of one or two years and that is only my impression from what I've heard. And I don't know that is factual, but that was my impression.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And so he, at least, hadn't been in residence for some period of time but, presumably, there was art, some art, already in place.

MARY ADAMS: Oh, yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I'll bet that he was collecting while he was still in residence.

MARY ADAMS: Yes. And he was actively collecting. In Europe he was still actively going to galleries and collecting. We would get crates shipped from Italy. Usually they were of large, busty Roman copies of Greek goddesses. Valentiner worried that sometimes he [Getty] would go to dealers that would take advantage of him, which is odd to have anybody take advantage of Mr. Getty, because he was a very keen businessman, as we all know. But he didn't completely rely on advice from Valentiner. He didn't ever come back. And he didn't come

back to Malibu, partly because he had a fear of flying, he didn't like flying. And even when his little son was ill he didn't get back to see him. He lived in Europe. He would summon Valentiner to come and see him in Paris. And that summer he was living in a third-rate hotel called The Bellman, in Paris, and he had summoned Valentiner to come over, but he didn't even pay Valentiner's expenses, which really, really annoyed - to put it mildly - Valentiner.

PAUL KARLSTROM: If I may just point this out. That trip, and his annoyance, I guess maybe even frustration of Valentiner's, on that occasion is all well documented in his letters...

MARY ADAMS: Yes, in the letters that I gave to the Archives. Not all of it is documented.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Let's hear about the part that isn't.

MARY ADAMS: Valentiner described at other times how Mr. Getty was living in a room full of newspapers. And he kept Valentiner waiting two hours - while he was taking a bath.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you think that was a power [inaudible]?

MARY ADAMS: Yes, I suspect. But he [Val] felt it was uncivilized, in any event. However, he finally got invited to lunch, and Getty bought lunch for him once, which was pretty interesting. He thought -- that's documented in the letters, too - that he [Getty] was actually very polite with him, and took him to the elevator with him when he went down and all of that sort of thing. Valentiner believed in all the courtly manners and he was a little put off by the rude way in which he felt he had been treated.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How did - again, in terms of sequence and chronology - Valentiner hired you presumably shortly after Getty hired him?

MARY ADAMS: Yes, shortly after.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you know anything about the circumstances of how Valentiner was hired and what Getty communicated as his duties to him, what Getty said the job was?

MARY ADAMS: I wish I could tell you all that. I can surmise why he was. I think one reason he chose Valentiner was because Valentiner had a reputation at The Detroit and he had a long history of working with all the big-time collectors, from Mellon to everybody else, and had been an advocate and helped them select paintings and that touch of greatness that comes from tycoons, which Getty really was, too, and wanted to be, is one reason that Valentiner attracted him. And his scholarship, of course, Valentiner was a well-known Rembrandt scholar.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did he have a Rembrandt?

MARY ADAMS: I don't know. No, I don't think Getty had one then. And I don't know - I know one thing he told Valentiner was that he had to have that museum opened for the tax deduction, so ...

PAUL KARLSTROM: And so you believe, at least on the basis of the information that you have, and you were there, that the main motivation, why Getty had to hire a director - was he called the director of The Getty Museum?

MARY ADAMS: Yes, I think so.

PAUL KARLSTROM: ... was, first and foremost, if not exclusively, for tax considerations?

MARY ADAMS: Well, that was the impression I got and, you know, I hesitate to impute that motive to anybody, except it seems like a legitimate guess. But that's one of many factors; I think there were other factors, too.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But you just said that Valentiner told you that Getty did say that to him.

MARY ADAMS: Yes, Valentiner implied that and joked about it, of course. And then we had to give this big cocktail party, which invited museum directors, and not many museum directors from all over the United States came ...

PAUL KARLSTROM: Not many came?

MARY ADAMS: Not many came, but a lot of Hollywood people ...

PAUL KARLSTROM: But they came?

MARY ADAMS: Most of them came. You know, free booze. And Valentiner hated all of that stuff, but that was my

job. About 400 people came and that was one time when I did have help from his wife, because she knew the house and she knew that there was plenty of china and plenty of glassware and all of that stuff. And I depended on her to get the best caterers. And, of course, we did get lots of booze, but arranged for it to be taken back to the people that furnished it if the bottles were unopened. We were trying to be very careful and conservative with the money we were spending.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But he did foot the bill? Getty did pay for it?

MARY ADAMS: Yes, he was unhappy about, as I remember, what I had spent for cocktail napkins. He was, as my sainted father would say, tighter than the bark on a tree.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But now I'll tell you a story and we'll see if maybe things - if there's some consistency of some sort because, when the Malibu facility, the present Getty Malibu facility, The Villa [inaudible], I think it's called.

MARY ADAMS: The what? I didn't hear.

PAUL KARLSTROM: The Villa. The present Malibu facility.

MARY ADAMS: Oh, the new one.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Not the brand new one. But at any rate, when that opened up Steve Garrett was the director, and the story goes that Getty did not want to spring for a nice opening, a grand opening ...

MARY ADAMS: I'm not surprised.

PAUL KARLSTROM: ... and so Steve Garrett and I guess Steve's wife had to - they were determined that there would be something gracious, they had invited people. And so, as the story goes they actually prepared, she prepared, and arranged for something a little more special. Then Getty really wasn't interested in helping?

MARY ADAMS: No. Well, I took the liberty of arranging for the Fine Arts Quartet to be playing in the theater during our opening, too. And we paid them strictly only union wages. They just got scale. He had an accountant then - Mr. Getty had an accountant named Mr. Bramblett who would come out ...

PAUL KARLSTROM: He stayed throughout?

MARY ADAMS: He stayed throughout. And Mr. Bramblett at one time felt he should take me to lunch and tell me how careful we all had to be. And Mr. Bramblett is a character that has turned up in a number of my fiction short stories, too.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, do you write short stories?

MARY ADAMS: Yes. In any event, he reminded me a little bit of Ziggy in the cartoons except he was taller than Ziggy but the same shape. Anyway, he was a very nice, but very quiet, conservative man. It was very difficult to have a conversation at lunch because, all business, no jokes. But I think he was probably an ideal representative for Mr. Getty's financial business because he was very conservative and very careful. The Plews reported to him, too - Mr. and Mrs. Plews reported to him, too.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So he was, in a sense, in terms of management, was he kind of in charge, then?

MARY ADAMS: Well he would -- no. He would come out like maybe every three or four weeks, or every two weeks, or something, and check up. But mostly it was done, you know, the books were kept elsewhere. I can't - I was paid a lot of money, I think, probably about 75 cents an hour. I can't remember.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That was a lot of money?

MARY ADAMS: Well, I can't remember. It wasn't very much, I can tell you that. After having worked for UCLA it didn't shock me.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So he paid about the same rate as UCLA?

MARY ADAMS: Oh, yes, I would guess so.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I think it is about time to turn this tape over. Yeah, let's just do that.

TAPE 1, SIDE B

PAUL KARLSTROM: This is continuing the interview on the subject, The Early Days of The Getty Museum, with

Mary Adams, who was indeed there. This is tape one, side B. I know we are going to get, eventually, to the second director, Paul Wescher, I believe, was the second director, but before we leave Valentiner, what I'm really interested in learning is what you may have learned or perhaps even the impression you got from Valentiner regarding Getty's hiring of him and any kind of indication of what Getty wanted from Valentiner, what his idea for the museum was. He must have had some notion of what Mr. Getty had in mind, eventually.

MARY ADAMS: Well, the reason Valentiner, of course, really took the job, quite aside from whether he needed the job or not, is because Getty really did care about art. He really cared to preserve art. In particular, as Valentiner said, old art. And Valentiner, of course, was very catholic in his tastes. He was a wide, very noticeable supporter of contemporary art and young artists and didn't care when it was made, when it was painted, when it was woven, as long as it was art, and in the best sense. And he felt that, while Getty was very limited in his capacity to understand art, he really did care, that he really wanted to preserve it, and that he was willing to put his money there. And, of course, this is exactly why Valentiner did want to work for him. He felt at odds with Getty over Getty's, what he called his "inhumanness", his lack of understanding of social problems of people, his cruelties, his social cruelties, and he felt that very inhuman and uncivilized, but he was willing to overlook that. I think eventually he came to the point where he wanted Paul to take over, too, because he himself had a chance to go to Raleigh, North Carolina, where he would be happier working with somebody that wasn't quite as distressing to him as Mr. Getty. I think partly he was getting old and he wasn't very well. He didn't want to leave Southern California particularly, but he did have an opportunity to do one more thing and he was just devoted to art of all periods. But he felt that Getty was a limited man. But as long as he was going to put his money into something, Valentiner would be glad to help him with the arts.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, so, in a way I gather that Valentiner saw this as an opportunity to encourage patronage.

MARY ADAMS: Oh, exactly. Because he has encouraged so many patrons in his life. The Rockefellers and the Morgans and all those people. And, as he said, "I've always worked for rich people but I'm a socialist myself". But I've always worked for rich people and some of them have been very nice to me.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Noblesse oblige.

MARY ADAMS: Noblesse oblige. But that's what he saw it as. I don't think it was true, necessarily. But what he and Getty had in common is they did care about the preservation of art, and that was important for him.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's important to know because there are those who are very cynical about Getty and his motivation and also have been harsh in judgments concerning the quality of the collection and it is interesting to hear about the early days and that certain works were already in place. Valentiner is then hired to, in effect, operate as a professional museum person, presumably to build the collections, or to help build the collections. How much was he really able to do that?

MARY ADAMS: Well, he wasn't able to do it much, but he could do positive things to preserve what was there. And he could encourage -- he did encourage Getty to buy things. Getty could ignore him, though. And he often didn't get the best things in the fields that Getty was interested in. And Valentiner would worry that he would get conned by dealers - in Rome, particularly, he was very - he thought it odd that he would get conned, but he just didn't trust his taste to know quality.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So he cared about art, but his taste was not very [inaudible]?

MARY ADAMS: No, no. As it turned out, I think Getty's taste probably changed, too, later.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Of course, he remained pretty cheap to the end.

MARY ADAMS: Oh, he remained cheap to the end.

PAUL KARLSTROM: According to people who worked later at [inaudible].

MARY ADAMS: I think a lot of change came with Getty with his last woman friend.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, really?

MARY ADAMS: Yes. That was the opinion of several people who have worked at the museum since.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Really? I had no idea of this.

MARY ADAMS: Yes, that he really began to understand qualities in art that he should be looking for. But that is only rumor, I don't know, I only know that from what people tell me.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, I do know this much, this is the kind of conversation -- and I have a little bit of

information on this -- that, when my wife was working there, which was in the early '70s, just about ground-breaking time for the new Malibu Villa, The Herculaneum West, that he would have a pretty regular basis of curators come to visit him at Sutton Place. My wife actually went one time and met him. But he would have the director at that time, which was really before the ground breaking, was Steve Garrett, the architect, the British architect came and became director. Burton Frederickson was involved in the paintings and buying, and he would go consult, fairly regularly it seemed to me, Gillian Wilson when she was hired as head of the Decorative Arts. And what they would do was then [inaudible] antiquities, they would go and have to present their wish lists. So this wasn't truly, then, professional curatorial activity. I guess maybe [inaudible] for the first time [inaudible] different departments. And they would have to convince him that such a piece wasn't too expensive.

MARY ADAMS: That's right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I was curious to know if that started with them or maybe with Valentiner, or perhaps not Valentiner but Wescher?

MARY ADAMS: Oh, it started with Valentiner.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It did?

MARY ADAMS: There was a great deal of that sort of thing.

PAUL KARLSTROM: He would recommend pieces that he heard about?

MARY ADAMS: Yes, and you know, it was too much money, which Valentiner, of course, thought was pretty ironic since the pieces he did buy were not very good and were too much money, too, for what they were. Yes, that was going on.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But maybe he started listening more to - as you suggested - that there was this development of, well, perhaps, taste, but certainly some knowledge, and perhaps he began to respect a little more professionalism, those people who were professionals knew the market and knew what was the better deal in getting quality for money. He had Frederico Zeri [phon. sp.] at one point as an advisor, so he wasn't getting gyped, I think, in Rome anymore, as you [inaudible]. So Valentiner, then, was in place for about only a year?

MARY ADAMS: Yes, I think so. I can't remember when he went to Raleigh, I think he was in place about a year. Seems to me he went to Raleigh in March of '55, but that's a guess. That's a matter of record that I can find out for you, if you need it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And did you continue working or were you pretty much a team with Valentiner?

MARY ADAMS: No, I was a team with Valentiner. No, Clinton and I moved then.

PAUL KARLSTROM: At about the same time as Valentiner?

MARY ADAMS: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Where did you go?

MARY ADAMS: We went to Kentucky where he was head of the Art Department. The University of Kentucky. Lexington, Kentucky. So I went with him.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, that was very altruistic.

MARY ADAMS: Well, I thought it was nice of me.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And, so, that really then ended - that's interesting - the two of you were the team in opening up or really establishing ...

MARY ADAMS: Yes, well, we had to include Paul because Paul came on board, too, so there were the three of us, really.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So Paul came on when?

MARY ADAMS: Oh, when? Mid-summer, something like that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Just a little bit later?

MARY ADAMS: A little bit later, I believe, and he and Valentiner immediately started on the guidebook. We did take people around on Wednesday afternoons and on Saturdays, you know. We could only open two days a

week and Valentiner had to convince him -- Mr. Getty -- that it had to be open to the public twice a week. But I think the hours were limited to like three to six or ten to two in those days.

PAUL KARLSTROM: [inaudible] to know that was pretty much the schedule in the mid-60s when I was there.

MARY ADAMS: But that would have satisfied the IRS.

PAUL KARLSTROM: They were not particular about being public minded, shall we say?

MARY ADAMS: No.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, tell me about these ...

MARY ADAMS: Valentiner was really very impressed with the stuff that he did have there. It was the new stuff being sent in that Valentiner was unhappy with.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That must have been frustrating for a museum professional who really knew the field and had been in charge of many other museums. So, once again, I'm trying to get a sense of what Valentiner expected from Getty and that whole enterprise with the museum when he was hired. If he really did harbor the hope at that early time that Getty was serious and was really going to develop . . .

MARY ADAMS: I think he harbored the hope, but was becoming discouraged and when this other opportunity came along I think he felt he had to do that. His health was beginning to suffer; he was getting very tired, too, although he vigorously opened the museum in Raleigh, the state museum in North Carolina in Raleigh in April, 1956. And did a fine job there. He actually died in New York. I went to see him several times when I was in Kentucky and he was in North Carolina. No, I guess I went to see him after we were in Florida. Valentiner died in New York in September, 1958.

CLINTON ADAMS: We visited him in Raleigh at least as late as 1958. But that date, of course, could easily be established.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . That, by the way is her husband. We are happy to welcome Mary's husband Clinton Adams who, of course, was around and who observed some of the same things. Perfectly fine, Clinton, for you to step in at any point with this. Our subject being, of course, the early days of The Getty. It's great to have you here. So then there was a period of time when Paul Wescher was there as, what, chief curator?

MARY ADAMS: Yes, I think chief curator. I can't remember exactly the title but it must have been curator because he got to work immediately on the scholarly end of the operation -- he and Valentiner together. Valentiner was very impressed with the Louis Quinze and the furniture and also the Beauvais tapestries. And I saw it as an opportunity to really begin to understand a lot more than I understood about those things, too, and also the early Dutch and Italian things so, of course, it was very educational for me and I loved being out there. It was a little exciting to think you could get something really started.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you did have this, well, perhaps idealistic notion and enthusiasm about being in on something that was just the beginning of something that was going to become big?

MARY ADAMS: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Of course, you had no idea how big it was going to be.

MARY ADAMS: No, I didn't. But Valentiner was an idealist, too. He was a very inspirational sort of person for the rest of us because he always hoped things would get better and he planned - he was constantly coming up with ideas about how to protect the Lansdowne sculpture. Particularly, he had an architect come out. He thought it should be kept out of the weather, and he was constantly planning how to improve what was there. He had so many plans. His only problem was to get Getty to pay for it, you see. That was another problem. He had worked for other people, like the Morgans, who were not quite as tight with a dollar and I think he was a little disappointed that Mr. Getty was going to be so penurious.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Of course, he was a first-generation philanthropist in a way. I mean, it's hard to think of Getty as a philanthropist in terms of his motives and priorities but, of course, as it turned out, he was one of the great philanthropists in the humanities.

MARY ADAMS: That's right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Strange, isn't it?

MARY ADAMS: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Despite himself, wouldn't you say?

MARY ADAMS: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did Valentiner, or Wescher, for that matter, ever talk about the future of the museum in terms of, well, needing an expanded facility, if he knew the collecting was going to continue?

MARY ADAMS: I got the impression that Valentiner thought it was a stopgap and that it would expand, but I don't think that they anticipated - of course nobody anticipated it would be the grand thing that it is now. Had Valentiner lived he would have been very pleased, though, you see, to see all that expansion and to see the collection extended, and also the involvement with the humanities would have pleased him enormously because he was a humanist in every sense. He had many, many friends - actors, musicians, writers, he was a friend of Huxley. Just the fact that it was the humanities thing that he thought important in life, not just the visual arts.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You know, this is interesting. I was thinking of the cultural community, or whatever you want to call it, the creative community, in Los Angeles at that time which, in some ways, has been underestimated, considering some of the people who were there. Do you remember - well, you worked out the guest list and so forth for the early events and the early opening - can you recall any especially interesting people who were present or involved at all with the museum?

MARY ADAMS: Well, many didn't come, but people like Huxley obviously got on the guest list.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, but he didn't come?

MARY ADAMS: No.

PAUL KARLSTROM: He didn't?

MARY ADAMS: No.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So he wasn't interested ...?

MARY ADAMS: Maybe ...

PAUL KARLSTROM: Maybe he was away, who knows?

MARY ADAMS: Who knows? Or he may have been ill.

CLINTON ADAMS: I'm curious [inaudible] context of, more or less at the same time that The Getty came on the scene, there was also the Huntington Hartford Foundation, another one of the Los Angeles canyons, and I think it would have been the conventional wisdom among the Los Angeles Art Community that the Huntington Hartford Foundation had great promise for the arts in Los Angeles and that The Getty establishment really didn't matter much. And it's ironic, I think, that things have turned out exactly backwards to that. But The Huntington Hartford, with a great deal of publicity, of course, was making his collection and later, of course, started his own museum in New York, but the perception of the Los Angeles art community at that time turned out to be just a 180 degrees wrong.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I remember hearing about that. Did it come to anything? The Huntington-Hartford and [inaudible]?

CLINTON ADAMS: No, the establishment up in the canyon there - which I visited because my uncle worked there - was a very elaborate layout with great gardens almost on the level of the Huntington Museum's gardens - and villas where artists would come and stay on the [inaudible] of the MacDowell colony. But it all ultimately collapsed because Hartford went broke.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And Getty didn't.

MARY ADAMS: And Getty certainly didn't.

CLINTON ADAMS: But also I think that Getty had some real values about art, for example, that great collection of French furniture and some of the antiquities, whereas Hartford, I think, thought Salvador Dali was the greatest painter in the world.

PAUL KARLSTROM: He was more interested in modern art, I guess.

CLINTON ADAMS: Yes, but then with rather bad taste in modern art.

MARY ADAMS: Yes, Mr. Bramblett did tell me a very interesting episode about Mr. Getty and his capacity to make money. We sort of had a saying that Mr. Getty has one great talent, he can make money, which he could. He did have his portrait bust in the Louis Quinze room, which was sort of out of key but, in any event, he did have some talents. During World War II he had at one time bought a plant of some sort - it wasn't making anything for the war effort . But after he bought it, he discovered it also had an army contract to make trucks. But it was only coincidence, so instead of making just a little bit of money, he made a great deal of money. He had supported Roosevelt at one time, Mr. Getty had. But in later times he changed his mind, I think, several times. That was interesting. But Mr. Bramblett did tell me that and he confirmed the fact that we were right. He did have an enormous talent for making money, even by accident.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I don't think, necessarily, that you are in a position, or even that it's too relevant here, to comment on his political views. On the other hand, you did mention in the library that particular book, and I don't really know about that. What was it called, The Strength Through Joy ...?

MARY ADAMS: I can't remember what that movement was called.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I don't know about that but it has a side that is sort of interesting.

MARY ADAMS: Oh, I thought it was interesting.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sort of Nietzsche in a sense.

MARY ADAMS: It was. It was very - it was that Nietzschean movement that Adolph Hitler encouraged, too, I think.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you have any thoughts on that, Clinton?

CLINTON ADAMS: I wouldn't link that too closely to Nazi politics. That movement existed in Germany before Nazism came on the scene and in some senses was quite progressive, although it was then utilized by Hitler for nationalistic purposes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I see. Well, I, of course, don't want to make too much of that. Isn't the odds and ends that is part of an oral history [inaudible]?

MARY ADAMS: Well, I think you can tell by what is on people's shelves, or what is not on people's shelves, what they are interested in.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You know, I think like Ayn Rand - I guess that's how you pronounce it - and this is just a leap of my imagination - that maybe in some ways Getty would find that kind of philosophy attractive.

MARY ADAMS: Oh, I'm sure he would.

CLINTON ADAMS: I think he would have, yes. You have to be cautious about what is or what is not on people's bookshelves. But I think that the fact that his modern art library consisted of one book on Cézanne is nonetheless revealing.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Norton Simon had a much better, I think, broader library than [inaudible].

CLINTON ADAMS: On the other hand, one has to be careful of that. For example, I had a very large library at one time on classical, Renaissance, and Baroque art but because my bookshelves were crowded I gave all of those books to the university so now you would find only modern art on the shelves.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you would think that the Adamses knew nothing about ...

CLINTON ADAMS: You would think I knew nothing about old art. It's a problem of space.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about, and this is primarily an interview with Mary, of course, but this is great opportunity to have the two of you reminiscing. Clinton, what did you think of your wife being interviewed and then hired by Valentiner for this particular endeavor? You must have talked, obviously, about such things - what happened at work today? What kind of view did you develop about The Getty and where it might be going?

CLINTON ADAMS: I was fascinated by what he did have and I guess I suffered at second hand at Valentiner's frustration with the fact that Getty wouldn't listen more to his advice. I have tremendous respect for Valentiner, which I formed even before he went to The Getty, because of his accomplishments in moving the Los Angeles County Museum forward while he was director there. And I was fairly close to that, primarily through our friendship with Jim and Barbara Byrnes, because Jim was curator of contemporary art.

MARY ADAMS: And with Morton Levine, who was a very close friend of Valentiner's.

CLINTON ADAMS: And with Morton Levine. And we saw the Weschers socially, so my acquaintance with that was through those sources and, of course, even more so, after Mary went to join Valentiner.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you approved that she [inaudible]?

CLINTON ADAMS: Oh, very much. Very much so.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And no doubt grilled her for information - "Well, dear, what happened at work today? Were there any new acquisitions?"

MARY ADAMS: It got me off campus, too.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's right, because you were - were you chair of any department there, at UCLA?

CLINTON ADAMS: Well, briefly one summer session but, no ...

PAUL KARLSTROM: Not at that time?

CLINTON ADAMS: No.

MARY ADAMS: No, and we went then, immediately, to Lexington, Kentucky.

CLINTON ADAMS: In the year that Mary was at The Getty, I was already, shall we say, in the process of leaving UCLA. The internal combat in the Art Department there had become insupportable, and I was one of its victims.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about - what was the view of The Getty activity, quite as it may have appeared, among the art historians and, or in the Art Department at UCLA or, in a broader sense, the Fine Arts Division? Were they paying attention?

CLINTON ADAMS: I don't think they were paying much attention. Carl Sheppard who was by far the most competent of the art historians there, was certainly aware of it. Karl With as far as I recall, never said one thing or another about it. Karl was more interested in the Modern Institute in Beverly Hills, of course, at that time.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Vincent Price was involved with that.

CLINTON ADAMS: Vincent was doing that, yes. And then, also, while Mary was at The Getty, through Vincent I took a part -- time teaching job with Millard Sheets at Otis, and was working with Vincent on a couple of projects there, so it was a complicated year for us.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sounds interesting, though. Fraught with possibilities.

CLINTON ADAMS: Yeah. I might have stayed on at Otis if the Kentucky position had not ...

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, Kentucky, even then, probably had a much better basketball team.

MARY ADAMS: Yes. It had always had a better basketball team then.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about Wescher? We don't actually have too much time, here, but you haven't said too much about his role and what he may have been able to do there. How long was Wescher actually there?

MARY ADAMS: I don't know, because, of course, I left and Wescher was there and -Byou knew Wescher.

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, I never did. I ...

MARY ADAMS: I don't know, but I know he stayed on through, I suspect, two or three years. His secretary is a person who could give you this information. Her name is Molly Rannalls. She herself was an art historian, I believe - daughter of an art historian, and a very competent woman. And she is still living -- she is living now in California. She could give you more information about what went on when Paul was there. And I will be glad to get you that information before you leave.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's great.

CLINTON ADAMS: That connection came about because her father, Ted Rannalls, was professor of art history in Kentucky.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, well, what a coincidence.

MARY ADAMS: Well, yeah. So we were able to ...

[End of tape]

END OF INTERVIEW

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