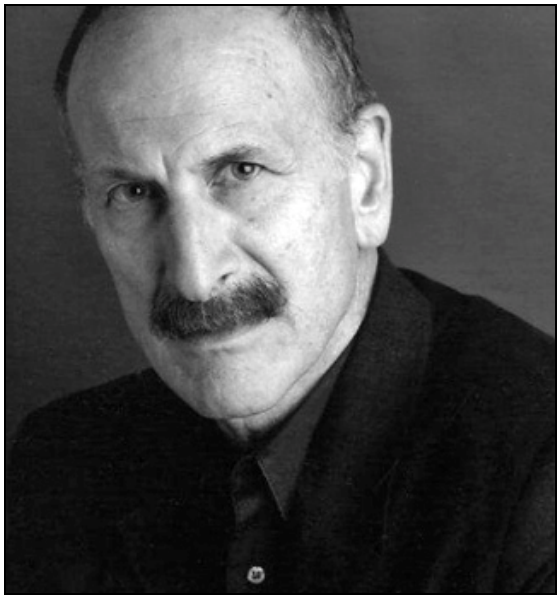

ROBERT A. ROSENSTONE
(b. 1935)

INTERVIEWED BY
SHIRLEY K. COHEN

June 27 and July 20, 2005

ARCHIVES
CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
Pasadena, California

Subject area

History

Abstract

Interview in two sessions, June 27 and July 20, 2005, with Robert A. Rosenstone, professor of history in the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Dr. Rosenstone, a native of Montreal, received his BA (1957) in literature and his PhD (1965) in history from UCLA. He taught for a year and a half at the University of Oregon in Eugene, then came to Caltech as a visiting assistant professor. He joined the faculty of the humanities division in 1968, received tenure the following year, and became a full professor in 1975, specializing in the Modern Age and in history in film, a subfield of which he is the leading exponent.

In this interview, he discusses how his interest in film developed. In 1975, he began teaching a pioneering course at Caltech on history as it is presented in movies. He recalls his early association with the Academy Award-winning 1981 movie *Reds*, and later with *The Good Fight*, a feature-length 1984 documentary on the Lincoln Brigade, for both of which he was the historical consultant, and how these associations contributed to his development of the subfield of history in film. He recalls his stint as executive officer for the humanities (1983-1986) and his involvement in the art world at Caltech, where he served on the Institute Art

Committee for twenty years and oversaw the Baxter Art Gallery. He discusses the early art exhibitions in Dabney Lounge in the late 1960s and the subsequent founding of the Baxter Art Gallery in the early 1970s, in collaboration with the Pasadena Art Allliance. There is a lengthy discussion of the Baxter Gallery's history and the possible reasons for its demise in 1985. He also recalls the latest art flap at Caltech, over the proposed installation of a Richard Serra wall on the lawn in front of the Beckman Institute, the campus opposition to it, and his decision to resign from the Institute Art Committee as a result of its precipitous cancellation by Caltech president David Baltimore. He concludes by commenting on the division and the disconnect within it between the humanities and the social sciences.

Administrative information

Access

The interview is unrestricted.

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CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY ARCHIVES
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT A. ROSENSTONE

BY SHIRLEY K. COHEN

PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

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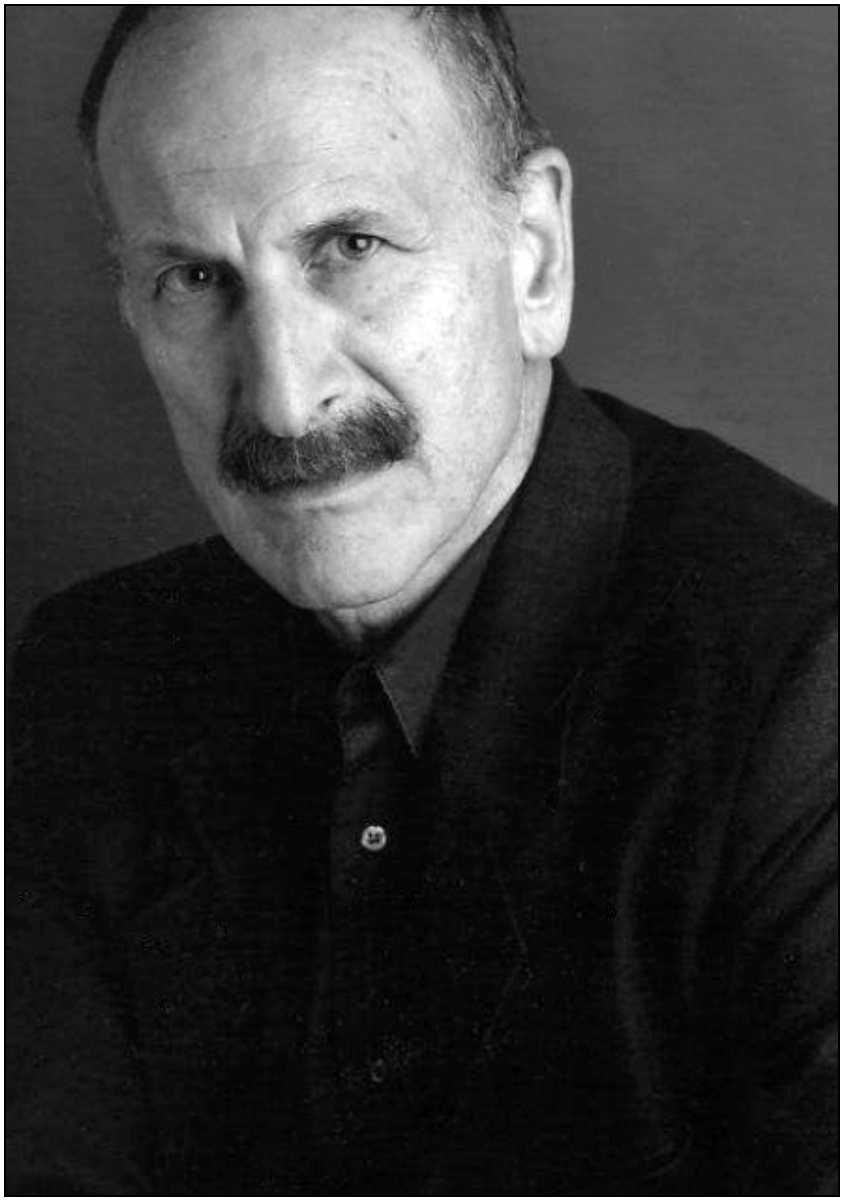

Robert Rosenstone

CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY ARCHIVES
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Robert A. Rosenstone **by Shirley K. Cohen**

Pasadena, California

Session 1	June 27, 2005
Session 2	July 20, 2005

Begin Tape 1, Side 1

ROSENSTONE: You want me to talk about my glorious history at Caltech and my biography—and humanities and social sciences and art.

COHEN: Often I go through everybody's history, family history, but I think there's no need, because that's very well recorded in your book.

ROSENSTONE: I've written a book about my family, yes—*The Man Who Swam into History*, which is about to come out in a new, beautiful edition from the University of Texas.

COHEN: So why don't we just start with you. Tell me why you went to UCLA, and what you did there.

ROSENSTONE: As an undergraduate or a graduate student? I went to UCLA for both.

COHEN: What did you study as an undergraduate?

ROSENSTONE: I studied literature. From my teen years on, I had the insane idea that I wanted to be a novelist. That was one of the great dreams of my life, to become a novelist, so I majored in literature. From 1953 to 1957 I was at UCLA as an undergraduate. I also was very interested in journalism. I thought that would be a way of supporting myself, so I worked a lot on the UCLA *Daily Bruin.* I was one of the editors in my junior and senior years. This gave me a lot of good training in journalism. I took very little history as an undergraduate—funny, since I've become a

history professor—I took mostly literature and philosophy. When I got my BA, I didn't go back to the grad school for about three years. First I worked as a journalist for about a year on the old *Los Angeles Examiner*, as a copy editor and a reporter. Then I switched to the *Los Angeles Times*, where I also worked for about a year. At the *Times* I worked in the public relations department and did publicity for their charities. They have a summer camp fund to see poor kids to camp, and in my day they had an annual charity football game—the Washington Redskins and the Los Angeles Rams. After about two years in professional journalism, I was smoking a pack-and-a-half a day and drinking three martinis. It's a very high-pressure job, and I realized it really wasn't what I wanted to do. That's when I decided to go back to graduate school in history. I was interested in history—particularly contemporary history—and I had a good friend who'd already finished his PhD at Princeton and was beginning to teach. It looked like a nice life where you could write, think about things at your leisure. I imagined there was more leisure than there actually is. [Laughter] One of the problems with journalism is that a lot of it deals with trivia when you start out.

At that time, I was married—my first marriage—and my wife had a fairly good job in Los Angeles. This was in the early sixties. When I applied to graduate schools, I got into Yale, Brown and several other schools back East in history. But my wife didn't want to give up her job and move, and I didn't blame her. So I went to UCLA. The theory was, in those days, that if you went to UCLA you would never get a job on the West Coast, and as a confirmed Californian, I hoped to spend my years in this state. So going to UCLA was taking a chance, but I thought well, maybe if I'm lucky enough I can—

COHEN: Get a job.

ROSENSTONE: Yes. So I went back to school—but in history, not literature. I wanted to write and literary criticism didn't at all interest me. But doing history meant you could tell stories. I returned to UCLA in '61 after a brief stint in the Army, the National Guard really. I was trained in armor at Fort Knox. I got my degree in 1965 after majoring in American history, modern Europe, and modern literature. That's a very brief history of the beginning of my career.

COHEN: So you stayed in Los Angeles and your wife kept her job?

ROSENSTONE: Yes, though we went through a divorce before my first teaching job at the University of Oregon. I went up to Eugene and was there for a year, then I got hired at Caltech, and I've been here ever since—since 1966. And I wouldn't exchange it for anywhere else.

COHEN: How did you come to Caltech? Were they looking for someone?

ROSENSTONE: Yes. Hiring was still the old-boy network in those days. My mentor was a man named George E. Mowry, who was a very famous historian; he'd been the president of the Organization of American Historians [1965-66]. He was at UCLA, and he was a specialist in Teddy Roosevelt and the Progressive Era of the early twentieth century. When I went to the organization's annual meeting in San Francisco, I had about six or seven interviews—Santa Cruz, UC San Diego, Long Beach State, University of Iowa, and a couple of others—because the Oregon job was actually a fill-in job; it wasn't a permanent job, although actually they offered me a tenured position a couple of years after I came to Caltech. One of my interviews was with Rodman Paul, who was the lead historian at Caltech at that time, a very eminent member of the profession. He brought me to Caltech as a visitor for one year in a fill in position. I did this rather than taking a permanent position somewhere else, because I wanted to come back to Southern California and I hoped I could remain.

COHEN: You're a confirmed Southern Californian.

ROSENSTONE: Yes indeed. I was filling in for Dan [Daniel J.] Kevles, who had been here just one year and was off on a grant. Then the next year Rod Paul went off on a Guggenheim and I was asked to stay on and replace him. And then a young historian named Byrd Jones was denied tenure and a position was suddenly open. I was given a three-year contract as an assistant professor [in 1968].

COHEN: Did you move to Pasadena at that point?

ROSENSTONE: Actually, I've never lived in Pasadena. I lived on Mount Washington for the first seven or eight years at Caltech, and then I moved to the Westside. At the time I had two very elderly parents who lived in the Fairfax district, and I wanted to be close to them. I was married

again, and my wife had a job on the Westside. In truth I've lived in West Los Angeles ever since – Laurel Canyon, Venice, Pacific Palisades.

COHEN: How did you find Caltech, in those early years? How did you feel about the division in general—or what was going on?

ROSENSTONE: Well, the thing I liked about Caltech from the beginning was the size of the classes. At Oregon, the smallest class I taught had forty students in it; the largest had 250 students. When I came to Caltech, I suddenly had twelve or fifteen students maximum, and I found it just a more exciting way to teach. It's always riskier, because you can't really lecture. Occasionally, I'd give a half-hour lecture; our hum classes are often two hours long, you know. But you can't really sit and lecture to ten students; it's too intimate; their eyes glaze over. [Laughter] You're too close. So it's fortunately a give-and-take, which forces you to always be on your toes and to kind of rethink things, because they're good at asking questions. So that part I liked—the size of Caltech I liked very much. In the early years, I missed a little bit having graduate students, but not terribly. Because I came into this wanting to be a writer—and I still think of myself as a writer who writes history. Of course, over the years, I've taught a couple of graduate seminars at UCLA and USC, so I've had the exposure to graduate students occasionally. But something about the atmosphere at Caltech—it was like a small town, which was very unknown to me since I'm a big-city boy. [Laughter]

COHEN: You didn't feel overwhelmed being with all those scientists?

ROSENSTONE: I don't know if I felt overwhelmed. I mean, it was clear at Caltech, from the first days, that as a humanist you're never going to be a star. You're never going to have what some of the scientists have—and that historians or philosophers might have at some other schools. However good the students are, and however much they're interested in a particular class, it's the rare student who actually follows you around and for whom you become a kind of mentor. Over the nearly forty years I've been here, I've had maybe ten or twelve students with whom I had that kind of mentor relationship—maybe a few more, but not that many.

On the other hand, because the classes were small, there was always lots of free time for writing, lots of free time for research. Caltech's always supported research very well, even in the

humanities. We have low teaching loads—as low as any school in the country. So I adapted fairly quickly.

COHEN: Didn't you eventually make a major out of history, so that students could get a PhD?

ROSENSTONE: Not a PhD, no. You could be an undergraduate major; we created that shortly after I got here. There are majors in history, literature, philosophy, and public policy.

COHEN: I bet you didn't come in every day, then. Did you come in every day?

ROSENSTONE: No. The only time I ever came in to Caltech every day were the years I was executive officer for the humanities [1983-1986], and then I came in virtually every day—sometimes I'd miss Fridays. But normally my schedule at Caltech has been three days a week, because I write at home. And when I do research, since I do modern history, twentieth century—except for one of my books—I use the UCLA research library. I've used the Huntington occasionally, especially when I did my book on Americans in Japan in the nineteenth century; they have some papers I used. But as wonderful a facility as it is, the Huntington doesn't do twentieth-century history; most of the history of the twentieth century has had to do with Russia or Spain, and those are not areas of concern to the Huntington.

COHEN: You got tenure.

ROSENSTONE: Yes. I got tenure in 1969, after my first book was published [*Crusade of the Left: The Lincoln Battalion and the Spanish Civil War*]. Tenure is a little harder to get these days. I think I would still get tenure, but few young scholars in history publish books in three or four years these days? I don't know why this has changed.

COHEN: Well, maybe some people have this sense of perfection and keep thinking they're going to make it better.

ROSENSTONE: Yes. Well, anyway, I was tenured, and then I became a full professor when my second book was published, in '75.

COHEN: What was your second book?

ROSENSTONE: The second book was a biography of John Reed called *Romantic Revolutionary*.

COHEN: And that's the one that the movie *Reds* was made from?

ROSENSTONE: Well, the movie *Reds* was made from me! When I was writing the book, Warren Beatty came to me and he wanted to make this movie—this was '72. I remember quite well, because I had started working on it in '70. I spent '71 at Harvard, going through the Reed papers.

COHEN: So you took a sabbatical leave in '71?

ROSENSTONE: Yes, '70-'71.

COHEN: Which you had to ask for, since it's not automatic at Caltech.

ROSENSTONE: It's not automatic. I had a year-long grant from the Old Dominion Fund to do research. Later I had a couple of NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] grants for years off. These helped with doing later research projects. Caltech has been very good, in that when you get a major grant, they will usually top it up to your full salary and let you go for the year. That's happened three or four times. I spent about six months of the year at Harvard in 1970-71, doing research in the Reed papers—and also at other places, Rutgers, New York Public Library, the National Archives. I also made a trip to the Soviet Union. And then Warren Beatty came in while I was writing, and he said he wanted to make a film about John Reed and could he talk to me about it. Essentially we talked for six years, until the film went into production. I was on the payroll officially as historical consultant. Warren never actually bought the book, but he bought my services, and he had access to my archives. So in essence—

COHEN: It's your stuff.

ROSENSTONE: Yes, it's mostly based on my stuff.

COHEN: It was a good movie; I remember it.

ROSENSTONE: Yes, it won a bunch of Academy Awards, but they don't give one for historical consultant.

COHEN: So you went to Russia, then, with the making of this film?

ROSENSTONE: No, I went to Russia long before that. The film was shot in the US, the UK, Spain, and Finland. It came out in '81.

COHEN: Then let me ask another question. When did you get so involved with film? Or was it always lurking there in the background?

ROSENSTONE: Well, I've always loved film. But two things pushed me towards writing about it: One was being involved with *Reds*. And at the same time *Reds* was going on—it's sort of a six- or seven-year period—there were three young filmmakers who wanted to make a film about the Americans who fought in the Spanish Civil War, the so-called Lincoln Brigade, which had been the subject of my doctoral dissertation and my first book. That was an NEH-funded feature-length historical documentary called *The Good Fight*. I was the chief historical advisor and I ended up writing the narration. Soon I began to be asked by various historical publications, very eminent historical publications, to write something about these films. So I wrote a long piece on *Reds* for *Reviews in American History*, which does long reviews of books—you get eight, ten full pages. This was the first time they had ever reviewed a film. ["Reds as History," *Reviews in American History*, 10 (Sept. 1982) 299-310.] And then I wrote about *The Good Fight* for a journal called *Cineaste*, which is a film and politics journal. ["History, Memory, Documentary: A Critique of 'The Good Fight'," *Cineaste*, 17:1 (1989), 12-15.] After that it sort of grew like Topsy, as they say, because I got interested and then people would invite me to a conference and say, "Could you talk on films in general, not just *Reds*?" You know, historical films. So I'd turn out a paper for a conference, and some of them would want to publish it. In the eighties, I began doing that. It's the one topic, of all that I've written on, that sort of reached out to me. [Laughter] As I started to write on film, people responded, and then I realized in the early nineties that I had all these articles in print and they became a book of essays which Harvard

published [*Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (1995)]. Later it was translated into Spanish, and parts of it are in German and French and Portuguese and Korean and Japanese. Then I started getting invited to lecture all over the world, because it was just the period when historians began to take historical films seriously or began wondering about the epistemological questions they raise. And suddenly—it was like being a surfer on the crest of a wave—suddenly this was all carrying me forward, and it was fun. I seemed to be saying things that nobody else was saying and that people wanted to hear.

That's not the only thing I've done, but in the last fifteen, eighteen years, I've been writing steadily. I have another book coming out [*History on Film / Film on History* (Pearson Longman: 2006)]. I ended up creating a historical journal called *Rethinking History*, in which I and a historian from the UK, a historical theorist, began to think about new ways of writing history, film being just one of them—I mean, it's written history in different ways—and this opened up a whole new world for me, thinking about the theory and philosophy of history.

COHEN: And obviously you just did what you wanted to, here at Caltech—you started teaching history in film, and they were happy with it.

ROSENSTONE: Well, this is the wonderful thing about Caltech—among many wonderful things. I have criticisms of Caltech, too, but among the many wonderful things is that in humanities we all teach two freshman courses a year, and those have certain guidelines—for instance, I teach the Modern Age, the nineteenth and twentieth century—but within that, we're pretty free. But for your elective courses, you can pretty much teach anything you want. So in 1975 I said to my colleagues, "I want to teach a course on the historical film." They said, "Fine." That's thirty years ago now. I later learned—because now there's an H-film group on the Web and an association of film historians—that I may have created the first course on history in film in the world. [Laughter] At Caltech it was very easy to do—the proposal just sailed through the faculty. That's part of the great thing at Caltech; people trust the faculty. If you're a serious scholar, you can take chances, do new things, and so forth. A lot of the stuff I've published in the last ten, twelve years has been in cinema studies journals. But as long as you're publishing in reputable places—

COHEN: You get points.

ROSENSTONE: Yes.

COHEN: I sat in on your course, the movie part of it, about the Spanish Civil War through film. That was wonderful!

ROSENSTONE: Yes, that was one of the very early courses I did. Film, it turns out, is a great way of teaching history—not because it gets the history right, but because the best films raise the same kinds of questions. It's very easy to get students to discuss the film and then lead them into the historical issues. It's a wonderful pedagogical tool! Right now, if you go on the Web, you will find syllabi for hundreds of film courses throughout the world—and probably they're not all on the Web. It's become a major enterprise. I was the first, and I didn't even know that—it just seemed like a good thing to do.

COHEN: So then, how did you get from that to some of these other committees? Well, first let's talk about when you were executive officer for the humanities. How did you find that?

ROSENSTONE: Well, like a good academic I always hated the idea of administrators or administration or being an administrator. And when Dave Grether, who was chair of the division [of Humanities and Social Sciences, 1982-1992], asked me in the mid-eighties to do this job, I of course said, "No, I don't want to do this." But chair people have their way of persuading you to do things. So I did it. [Laughter] I actually found it more interesting than I thought it was going to be. Executive officers don't have a lot of power; the chairs have all the power at Caltech. But you get to set the agenda, you get to highlight which issues get talked about, so I had a certain small amount of power to change things in the division.

COHEN: At that time, was there just one executive officer for all of humanities?

ROSENSTONE: There are two in the division—one for humanities, one for the social sciences. I was EO for the hum faculty. And I found there were certain things I wanted to change about the way hum did business. So I tried to do that, and, yes, I made marginal changes—I mean, there's always this inertia on the faculty. [Laughter]

COHEN: As long as you don't bother them.

ROSENSTONE: Yes. I enjoyed it for about two years, and then it got to be a bit of a drag.

COHEN: What's the normal term? Three years, isn't it?

ROSENSTONE: I did it for three years, yes, and I think I was asked to do it again, and I passed. Three years seemed enough. But it actually got me more integrated, in a sense, into Caltech. I'd been here for seventeen years by that time. You see Caltech in another way, because you see that some people have to take responsibility for things. I mean, as a faculty member, you can always be in opposition to things. [Laughter] And it didn't interfere with my scholarship that much. Early in the morning, I would do some writing. I was in the midst of a project at that time, so that probably helped.

COHEN: What project was this?

ROSENSTONE: That's when I was writing the book on Americans in Japan in the nineteenth century, *Mirror in the Shrine*. The executive officer job gave me more of an appreciation of what it takes to run a division. I've been somewhat more sympathetic to division chairs, in a sense—not in agreement with them, necessarily, but more able to see the other side.

COHEN: At that time, who was the president? Was Murph [Marvin L. Goldberger, Caltech president 1978-1987] president then?

ROSENSTONE: Murph was president at the time. Then I got involved with the Institute Art Committee for many years.

COHEN: How did that evolve?

ROSENSTONE: Well, I actually want to tell you the whole story of art at Caltech. [Laughter]

COHEN: All right, let's get into that—unless you want to say anything else about your teaching.

ROSENSTONE: To me, the main thing about the teaching is that I've been allowed to create new courses and to change courses over the years. Teaching can become deadly if you have to teach the same course year after year.

COHEN: Now, I hear people complain that sometimes the students care but mostly they're not interested at all.

ROSENSTONE: In hum courses?

COHEN: Yes, and that's what's discouraging, maybe, about being here.

ROSENSTONE: You know, I used to be more discouraged when I was a younger professor. Because you come here from a graduate program where everybody's in history, and you're used to people really being interested in the past. And it's true that here—I think I said this already—you're always secondary on the students' agenda, except for those few who are doing a senior thesis—actually taking a history major, which is usually a double major—and then they really focus on what they're doing. Or when you're working with students on SURFs [Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowships]—which I've done a number of times—they really focus on that particular research and they're very bright. I've taught at other schools; I've taught classes at UCLA, undergraduate classes, too; and I've taught abroad at several universities. And Caltech students are just really smart! [Laughter] They write well and they think well. They're logical. Some of them are very expressive. My feeling is that the freshmen are a bit of a pain to teach, because the core curriculum is so demanding and they're on pass-fail. They know they can pass, so they do the work, but they don't really force it—except maybe the 20 percent of them who are such super achievers that they do superbly in everything.

Third-term freshmen, now, under the new system, get graded—so they really do extend themselves. I just finished a third-term freshman course in which I had eleven final papers. Seven of them were brilliant [laughter] and the other four were pretty good.

In the advanced classes, it's the same thing. Because any given class they take is either at the right time or they really are interested in your topic. I'd probably say a quarter of the students in any given class are not very interested; they're just there because they have to fill their requirements. But I'd say two-thirds to three-quarters really are interested, and some small,

subset—maybe 25 percent—are *really* interested. In a sense, you teach those and the others come along. So I don't find the advanced classes discouraging. Sometimes the freshmen can be a bit of a pain—especially in the first term when they are blitzed by the shock of physics and other core sciences.

COHEN: OK. So, let's start on the history of the art program.

ROSENSTONE: The first institute committee I was appointed to was the Institute Programs Committee. There was another humanist on it, David Smith, who was my senior colleague in literature. And my first year on that committee—this was probably my third year at Caltech; it was probably around '68 or so—David came up with the idea that we should have an art exhibition space, and he and I were formed into a subcommittee to look into that.

COHEN: And this was part of the Programs Committee?

ROSENSTONE: Started as part of the Programs Committee. David had a lot of friends in the art world, and he was very interested in the visual arts and well connected with a lot of local visual artists. I was just going along, because I didn't know much, but I was learning from him. What we did search out was where we could find the space on campus to exhibit art, and the space we found was the Dabney Lounge—which is wainscotted. But we got bids on temporary panels that could be put around the Dabney Lounge, to turn it into a white-walled exhibition space. I have no idea how much it cost. I have no idea where the money came from to do that. But I know, after the next year or the year after that, we started having art shows under the Institute Programs Committee, put on by this subcommittee of David and me.

COHEN: So that meant while there was an exhibit going on, Dabney Lounge could not be used for other things?

ROSENSTONE: Yes, it could not be used for other things. The first exhibit was four artists from Cal State LA who were printmakers—and I still remember it. There was also some kind of temporary lighting with spotlights.

COHEN: David did all that?

ROSENSTONE: Well, he was in charge. I helped him a lot, and we did things together, but he was the one who knew what he was doing. I was getting on-the-job training in art, which later led me to being the chair of the Institute Art Committee forever and ever. And so we started having art exhibitions there.

COHEN: And this was all through David's connections?

ROSENSTONE: Yes. But very quickly, and maybe by the end of the first year, a woman named Virginia Steele Scott—a very wealthy lady who's endowed things at the Huntington—made us a grant for the arts at Caltech. My recollection is that it was $50,000, which in the late sixties seemed like a lot of money. The idea was to hire an art director to continue with these art programs, to have the director seek out money to do more art at Caltech, and even to bring some artists-in-residence.

COHEN: But this still had nothing to do with the students, then, did it? Except they could come to the exhibits.

ROSENSTONE: Right, it had nothing to do with the students. This was a public program of the Institute Programs Committee. I suspect at some point we broke free of the Institute Programs Committee, because this money somehow was controlled by David and the Humanities Division—it became part of the Humanities Division, but I don't know when, exactly. And we did, in fact—and again, it was more through David than me; I'm not trying to blame him but to praise him, because he was the guy who really got this going—we did hire an art director named Lukas van Vuuren, who had a secretary, and I guess it was all paid for out of this grant. The exhibitions continued for two or three years; again, I'm foggy on the exact amount of time. They all were in Dabney Lounge.

COHEN: Was that before Baxter [Donald E. Baxter Hall of the Humanities and Social Sciences, 1971] was built?

ROSENSTONE: Yes, of course. There were maybe two or three exhibitions a year; and they'd be up for a month. Lukas van Vuuren, our director, showed work there—some kind of high-tech painting on metal which he had done with some fancy equipment at JPL. "Art and technology" was one of these buzz words in those days—still is, I guess. And there were artists-in-residence, three or four prominent local artists—Helen Pashgian, who has a studio right off Colorado; and Bob Basler, Connor Everts—they were both artists-in-residence and teachers of courses for undergrads.

COHEN: In the humanities?

ROSENSTONE: I don't know if they got humanities credit.

COHEN: Where did the money come from? Because that $50,000 wouldn't have lasted long.

ROSENSTONE: I don't know. Maybe hum kicked in some money. I'm unclear on the details because I was a junior faculty member and David handled all the financial stuff.

COHEN: But it obviously was quite successful.

ROSENSTONE: It was successful enough. Then several things happened. Lukas van Vuuren ran through all the money. He was here only three or four years; and though he was supposed to do so, he never raised any more money. So that part—the artist-in-residence, the artists teaching—all went broke after three or four years. But just about that time, Baxter was built [1971]. We were a smaller division then than we are now. David somehow seized this huge space in the basement of Baxter, three big rooms plus a couple of offices—Bob [Robert A.] Huttenback was then division chair [1972-1977] at the time. I don't know whether it was planned for originally, but we just took over those rooms for the art program and they became the Baxter Art Gallery.

COHEN: And that would have been when?

ROSENSTONE: Early seventies—'72, '73. The first few shows David Smith himself curated, and they were wonderful shows. I remember the title of one, "Surrealism Is Alive and Well in the

West." He also did a show of Tijuana artists and other interesting exhibitions. Once Baxter started, David was gallery director and completely in charge. And I was no longer in the scene, except as a spectator and admirer. David was an associate professor. He really wanted to be a full professor, but he hadn't published more than one monograph, and usually to be a full professor you would have to have produced another major body of work. This I remember clearly, because he and I talked about it several times. He kept trying to get promoted on his service to the institute; and I remember that Huttenback and other people essentially said no, they were not going to do that. You know, occasionally at the end of somebody's career you may promote them for service as a kind of courtesy; in fact, a few years later we did this with David at the end of his career, because he never published anything else. But earlier he got very annoyed at one point and said, "I'm not doing Baxter Gallery anymore."

COHEN: How much did Annette Smith have to do with all of this? I remember her being very prominent at the openings.

ROSENSTONE: Yes. This was really David's baby; I don't think Annette was, in any official way, involved. Husband and wife, maybe behind the scenes she was very involved

So David quit in sort of a fit of pique: "I'm not doing this anymore." And at that point the chair—I think it was still Huttenback—called me in and said, "Rosenstone, I want you to take over the gallery and make it work, and raise the money and somehow continue Baxter Art Gallery." By this time its exhibits were being written up, in the *L.A. Times* , and the rest of the local press. The gallery had become very quickly a major force for contemporary art. It was showing cutting-edge, innovative art. The openings were huge; people would come from all over Southern California. David had created something important.

So it fell to me to take it over, and that was the beginning of a long career in art at Caltech. [Laughter] I actually curated one show myself. I did a show of four women artists ["In Search of Four Women/Four Cultures," Baxter Art Gallery, Oct-Nov 1976]. It was the so-called Year of the Woman. I did it as a multi-ethnic show; there was a Latina, an Asian American artist, an African-American artist, and an Anglo artist. Later there was talk of an alliance with the Norton Simon Museum. It was said he wanted to give his museum to Caltech.

COHEN: But one wonders if he was serious.

ROSENSTONE: What I did with Baxter—and I don't remember where the initial impulse came from—was to contact a group known as the Pasadena Art Alliance, a rich group that gave money to support art. I began to meet with them to see if they would support Baxter Gallery. After some very tough negotiations—because those ladies are tough negotiators, and they're very strong-minded about what they want—they agreed to fund a salary for a director and for exhibitions if Caltech would pay the rest of the operating cost. We formed a joint committee—three Caltech professors, three Art Alliance people—to choose a director.

COHEN: Whom the Art Alliance was going to pay for.

ROSENSTONE: Whom the Art Alliance was going to pay for, but we couldn't give them control over the director. I remember we had a number of meetings—they would do this, we would do that. Then I'd have to go back to the chair and say, "Could we do this?" because he wasn't sitting in on the meetings then. So eventually it was worked out, and we had a three-person committee. I'm trying to remember: Noel Corngold and I and somebody else—I can't remember the third person right now. It's funny; Noel Corngold and I were talking about this just last weekend. We advertised in art journals and art education journals for a director. You know, we did the normal search thing. It was apparently a modest salary—$25,000 or $30,000. But it wasn't supposed to be a full-time job; it was a twenty-five-hour-a-week job or something like that. We had a large number of applicants. And here is a funny story. After reading dossiers and interviewing the best candidates, it came down to two. One was the woman named Melinda Wortz, who was a professor of contemporary art at USC—a well-known art historian—[Tape ends]

Begin Tape 1, Side 2

ROSENSTONE: And the other was Michael Smith, who was from a very rich Pasadena family, and he was extremely tall and good-looking. We faculty members wanted Melinda Wortz. And the women would have none of her. We were actually stuck in this three-to-three deadlock. One, because he was from this Pasadena family, I think. And the women wanted this good-looking young man. [Laughter] So we eventually gave way and hired Michael Smith as our first

director. And he was in many ways a disaster! He was a disaster administratively, for one thing, but he was a disaster on the personal level because he came in with the attitude that Caltech centered around him. Now, you don't have to be at Caltech long to know that art is not exactly at the center of Caltech. Let us say he had an attitude problem. And he really was not nice to people. He offended a lot of people—not the women; he was careful with them—but the people at Caltech, and he had to live with us; the women only came in for the openings.

His taste in art was exceedingly minimalist, to the point where after about a year—there were three or four exhibits a year—I had to go and talk to him. There had not been the slightest bit of color; everything was geometric. That was the only thing he was interested in; and I think even the women were not very happy. It was all the kind of art that was being written up in *Artforum* and these avant-garde art magazines, but it wasn't the kind of art that was terribly popular with anybody. So it got very good press in L.A., but people from around here... We got a lot of flak—students and faculty members. "My six-year-old child can do art like this"—you know, that kind of thing. [Laughter] And also Michael was very brittle and contentious. I remember doing a lot of picking up after him and smoothing things over with people at Caltech. Even the mailroom, I remember, once got mad at him for something he was doing, and they didn't want to send out his invitations to a show.

COHEN: [Laughter] How long was he here?

ROSENSTONE: He had a contract for maybe three years. And eventually he did put on some shows with color. I remember he had Nathan Oliveira's paintings, and Nathan is a wonderful colorist. You could go back to the records and find all the shows. But they were very minimalist, and people were not happy. In the humanities division, he offended people. I know when his contract ran out we didn't renew it. I think even the ladies were fed up with him by that time. So we went searching for a new director.

COHEN: Now, at this point, the gallery had existed for four, five years?

ROSENSTONE: Oh, yes; maybe five or six years. Again, I don't remember the exact number of years it was in existence. After Michael Smith left, we hired Jay Belloli.

COHEN: Who's still around.

ROSENSTONE: Jay Belloli is at the Armory Center for the Arts. And Jay was everything Michael was not. He had wide-ranging tastes of many sorts of art. He was personable, pleasant; everybody liked him, and he put on great shows. And the gallery went on being talked about and written up in the local press. I don't remember the exact number of years, but Jay was here until Murph Goldberger, in a fit, I think, of pique, simply ended Baxter Art Gallery [1985]. I was still the faculty overseer of Baxter Art Gallery and I had that role all the years Michael was there and all the years Jay was there—probably six years in all. And the women were paying for it; that arrangement lasted. And they liked Jay a lot, too.

COHEN: That's the Art Alliance?

ROSENSTONE: The Pasadena Art Alliance, yes. I think it was $50,000 a year they gave, but I don't know. They continued to give money. As I remember, the director and the secretarial help was paid for by the Art Alliance, and the other costs, which would have been the costs of setting up the show, repainting the gallery, shipping works of art, mailing out invitations—all that I think was paid by the division.

So then we come to the end of Baxter—about which there are many stories, and I can only give my own story of it. I didn't control the budget, but I had the budget figures with me at all times—I had files on what was being spent, because when it was overspent I got called in. One day in 1985 I was told... I don't even know if Goldberger called me himself, or his secretary called me, but I was suddenly told that Baxter Gallery would be closed, that there would be no more Baxter Gallery.

COHEN: And you had no inkling this was coming?

ROSENSTONE: I had no inkling whatsoever. And in fact, just to back up, the last show at the gallery—maybe it was up when this closing announcement came—was something called "JPL and the Space Race," a show of photographs taken by various satellites. It was the most successful show we ever put on. This show toured the United States and various parts of the

world for four or five years after it was put up. It was a spectacular show, and it was during that show that Baxter was closed.

It must have been a secretary or somebody who told me, or maybe the chair of the division told me, who by this time was [Dave] Grether. I remember calling up Goldberger's office saying that I had to see the president, and I remember going in and seeing him and saying, "Why is this being closed?" And he said, "Well, we can no longer afford it; it's taking too much money; we're over budget all the time." And I said, "No, we're not over budget; I have the budget. We're right on budget." And he said, "No, no; it's costing too much money; we're over budget. I'm closing it."

COHEN: So he was taking the onus for doing it?

ROSENSTONE: Yes, absolutely.

COHEN: Because there are other stories.

ROSENSTONE: Well, I'm sure there are other stories, and I have a back story to this that's certainly totally hearsay. So that's what I was told. The reasons he gave me were not true. It certainly was not closed because it was over budget, because I had the budget. If it was because they didn't want to spend whatever we were spending on it any longer, he should have told me that.

COHEN: And he didn't say anything about wanting the space for other things?

ROSENSTONE: Not at that point, no—which may very well have been the case. But it was done very precipitously.

COHEN: And this didn't have anything to do with Robbie [Rochus] Vogt? He was the provost at that time.

ROSENSTONE: Not on this. I had other encounters with Robbie when I was executive officer. We should talk about that next week: We had a paranoid provost at one point, who thought that

the humanities faculty was going to hold his daughter hostage. But that's a whole other story. [Laughter] I like Robbie, but not as a provost.

But Goldberger certainly took the onus. And I'd love to hear your other stories off microphone. [Laughter] I mean, the story we always heard was that Mildred Goldberger wanted to join the Art Alliance and they wouldn't let her in. Now, that was a very prevalent story at the time. Just like Mildred Goldberger wanted to join the humanities and social sciences faculty and they wouldn't let her in. I mean, she wasn't qualified.

Anyway, it was done very quickly and it was done by fiat. Whatever the reasons, it certainly got me very annoyed, got many of the faculty very annoyed. It was a kind of atrocity, you know. I never had liked Goldberger much anyway because of some other dealings, which I could go into. But it was just an unsavory thing, the way it was done—even if he was taking the fall for somebody else.

So that was the end of Baxter. It ended so precipitously that Jay Belloli had another year on his contract, and we paid that year on his contract even though he didn't have a job. He stayed around and taught an art class.

COHEN: So then they opened up the Armory, but there was Norton Simon in between for those ladies.

ROSENSTONE: Well, Pasadena Art Alliance supports a lot of art things. Baxter wasn't their only venture. You know, I think they support the Museum of Contemporary Art and the Pacific Asia Museum. They do a lot of things.

So that's pretty much it. I want to fill something in that happened earlier, unless you have any questions.

COHEN: No. I think that takes care of the gallery, and the fact that it closed under very discordant, ambivalent—

ROSENSTONE: Yes, it was very discordant. It was done just like that—you know: "We're closing the gallery."

COHEN: And nobody really knew the reason.

ROSENSTONE: Well, the only reason was the reason I was given—that we were over budget, which wasn't true. You know, there were other suspicions—there was the story about Mildred Goldberger, or that possibly the space might have been needed for offices, etc. There was just something very unpleasant about the way it was done.

COHEN: I think I heard something at one point about the ladies just getting so demanding that Goldberger didn't know how to cope with it; they made him crazy. But that may not be true, either.

ROSENSTONE: I think this is the story about Mildred Goldberger. I don't think Murph had anything to do with it. I mean, I dealt with them regarding the gallery and the shows. Now, of course, these are rich ladies of Pasadena society. I assume Goldberger had some contact with the power elite of Pasadena, and so maybe they did nag him in some way or other. [Laughter] It's quite possible; I don't know.

COHEN: But you don't have Robbie Vogt interfering in this in any way?

ROSENSTONE: No, no. Now, I'm trying to think of how we get from that to my being chair of the Art Committee. I certainly dropped out of art at Caltech after Baxter.

COHEN: How involved were students at Caltech in this Baxter experience?

ROSENSTONE: Not terribly.

COHEN: OK. That may have been one of the things that entered into it. Although universities have major galleries, and I don't know how much students are involved or not involved.

ROSENSTONE: There was no particular role for students, other than coming to the exhibits. In fact, *The California Tech* wrote lots of humorous reviews, particularly about Michael Smith's shows, which were so minimalist and could seem—if you weren't interested in the vocabulary of contemporary art—could seem very silly or easy to ridicule. Some students would come. I think there was some vague attempt—well, not so vague—by people who taught art or art history

classes to bring the students to the gallery and that sort of thing. But we didn't have docents—it was too small. You know, Jay, who's much more attuned to it—Michael Smith certainly wouldn't have done anything with students; he couldn't have cared less about students. But no, it was largely aimed at the community, part of Caltech's outreach; it was not aimed at students.

COHEN: Maybe this is a good place to stop.

ROSENSTONE: Probably, yes. [Tape turned off]

ROBERT A. ROSENSTONE

SESSION 2

July 20, 2005

Begin Tape 2, Side 1

COHEN: Now, some other thoughts you had on Baxter Art Gallery.

ROSENSTONE: Well, we just got to the ignominious end, the precipitous end, of the Baxter Gallery. And I was just saying I thought there were three possible explanations—nobody knows. One was the Mildred-Goldberger-not-being-allowed-into-the-Pasadena-Art-Alliance explanation, which was ripe at the time—and I think Mildred Goldberger was also annoyed because she wasn't allowed into the humanities division as a faculty member, which they also wanted and the faculty wouldn't go for. A second explanation may be that the economists in our division—and Dave Grether, the chair, was one of the economists—wanted more space because we were growing, and Baxter had simply been seized by David Smith and made into an art gallery. And that somehow Grether got Murph Goldberger to do the axing because Murph was farther away from the faculty who may have been annoyed and angry about this.

COHEN: He's a non-confrontational man anyway.

ROSENSTONE: Who, Grether? Yes; he does prefer to do things behind the scenes. I was his executive officer [for the humanities] for a few years [1983-1986], so I know that very well. And what was the third explanation?

COHEN: That the Art Alliance was too demanding and Robbie Vogt axed it.

ROSENSTONE: Yes, and Robbie Vogt axed it. I had not heard that, until you mentioned it. There was some talk between those of us on the faculty committee and the Art Alliance about wouldn't it be nice to have a freestanding museum someday. To my knowledge as head of that committee, it never went beyond that; it never got to the point of even thinking seriously about it. But I suppose the women, being independent-minded women, could very well have nagged Robbie

Vogt. So if that was the reason for the end of the gallery, maybe Robbie was heading them off at the pass before people could get started.

COHEN: Were the trustees ever involved in it?

ROSENSTONE: Not to my knowledge, no. Because the Baxter Gallery was run partly out of the budget of the division and partly by the Art Alliance, and the division budget [for the gallery] was pretty small—we were simply taking care of the space and the maintenance. The Art Alliance paid the director's salary, and I guess we paid the expense of the exhibitions. In that period, I was asked to become chair of the Institute Art Committee.

COHEN: Yes, that's what we wanted to talk about.

ROSENSTONE: I was later reappointed to it by Tom [Thomas E.] Everhart [Caltech president 1987-1997]. But I did a first stint under Goldberger. This committee had been active on and off over the decades, and there were some records from it, which I have and which I'm going to turn over to the Archives now. It was simply an advisory committee to the president. We didn't have much to do, except that we took a survey of all the artworks at Caltech at the time. The membership of the committee included Christina Smith, who was then a secretary in the humanities division and later became a secretary in the chemistry and chemical engineering division.

One thing we did was a survey of all the artworks Caltech possessed. It turned out that Caltech owned about 1,200 or 1,300 works of art. And we found some of them that were moldering in cellars and in the Athenaeum basement and all kinds of places. The provenance of a lot of them was totally lost, and the Institute Art Committee got some of the ones that seemed more important appraised. We even tried to sell off some—which were not being well cared for and were evidently moldering away—through a dealer. And just when we were doing that, I resigned from the committee. That must have been in the late seventies.

COHEN: Why did you resign? Were you just tired of it?

ROSENSTONE: I was tired of it. I was kind of fed up with art at Caltech, having been through the Baxter thing. I'd just had enough; I wanted to do something else. And I was going abroad for a year on a grant. So I stepped out and Nick [Nicholas W.] Tschoegl took it over. I didn't hear much about the committee again until sometime in the late eighties, when Tom Everhart asked me to chair it. Pasadena had passed a law saying that 1 percent of building funds had to go to public art, and the building committee of the new building—which was going to be Moore [the Gordon and Betty Moore Laboratory of Engineering, 1996]—had decided that rather than using the money for art, they would just give the money to the city of Pasadena for public art projects—this was one of the legal options.

Tom Everhart made the decision that no, we should do something with that money. And he appointed me chair of the Institute Art Committee and asked me to reconstitute it and deal with matters of art, but primarily to advise him on what to do with that money—which was about $85,000. The reconstituted committee had Christina Smith on it; Mel Simon, who was not yet chair of the biology division; Sue Walker, from Development; Fred Culick, of aeronautics; Dan Meiron, from mathematics, and later; when she came aboard at Caltech, Denise Nelson Nash, from the Office of Public Events. So it was a fairly wide-ranging committee. We went through the process. It's a long story, but basically there's a process in Pasadena whereby, if you want to commission a work of art, you have to hire an art consultant. So the committee interviewed art consultants and hired the one we thought would be best. She presented half a dozen possible artists to us through their work.

COHEN: Did this come out of your money?

ROSENSTONE: This all came out of the $85,000, or 1 percent of the Moore Building funds. The consultant's fee was fixed by Pasadena law. Her fee included bringing the artists to us, then narrowing it down to three artists who made proposals, and then we chose one of the proposals. And the end result was Moore's Stone Volute, done by Lloyd Hamrol, who's a local artist.

COHEN: I think it's wonderful.

ROSENSTONE: I think it's wonderful, too. It was somewhat controversial at first. You know, finding a space for a big work was difficult; we had to survey the campus, et cetera, et cetera.

And then at the last minute, there was some complaint on the faculty board about it. Now, I don't know all the details of this, because I was off for six months on a research trip again—this is '89-'90. Christina Smith, who is not on the faculty, was the one who took it to the faculty board and argued with them. Later, it was taken to the trustees. Gordon Moore approved of it—although, he didn't actually have life-or-death approval. But it was taken to Gordon Moore, and he rather liked it, which I think helped. [Laughter]

I think it was the faculty board that made trouble, but then the trustees OK'd it. And I was very proud of that. The sculpture was a real addition; it took a very dead space on the Caltech campus and made it a focal point of interest. I've seen classes being held there; I've been told people have gotten married in the Volute. Yes, I think it's a wonderful work and wonderful for the campus.

A lot of the other work on that art committee was rejecting attempts of people to give art to Caltech. People are always trying to unload art upon Caltech for income tax deductions. Or artists who are not well known are trying to give work to Caltech. And the problem with all that is, we don't take very good care of the works of art.

COHEN: Well, things get stolen here.

ROSENSTONE: Things get stolen. So the policy we came up with was that we would only accept works, one, if the committee vetted them first as a sitting group; we would look at slides or whatever of these artists. Well, actually the first step was if I thought something was totally absurd, I would just say no, as chair. Two, if I thought something was worthwhile, then the committee would take it up. The third step was, if the committee liked the work of art and thought it was worth having at Caltech, we would circulate notice of this to division chairs and various people at Caltech, asking them whether they had a site for it. So this means we turned down 95 percent of the works that were offered but accepted a few that people thought they had a place for. And the other work was overseeing, sometimes, the annual present of the graduating class. Once, for example, they wanted to give a very bad reproduction of the *Manneken Pis* for Chandler Hall. And somehow it came to our committee, and we just said no.

Another thing the committee got very active in—I chaired it from about '87 through 2002, when I resigned, after the flap over the Richard Serra sculpture, which I'd like to talk

about—but the one other thing we did was, when we heard there was going to be a new campus center, our committee lobbied fairly heavily for a permanent art exhibition space there.

COHEN: Now, that's right across from Chandler?

ROSENSTONE: Yes, right across from Chandler. And I met a number of times with the building or the planning committee—I think Paul Jennings [professor of civil engineering and applied mechanics] was chairing it—emphasizing why we thought this space would be a good idea. And partly for outside shows—because often Caltech is offered shows, sometimes very interesting shows.

COHEN: Well, now there's some kind of cooperation with the design school [Art Center College of Design], isn't there?

ROSENSTONE: You mean Art Center?

COHEN: Art Center, yes.

ROSENSTONE: I don't know, actually, but it's all very adhoc now. Sometimes there are exhibitions up in the student lounges and things like that, but there's no very adequate space. Sometimes they have exhibitions in the bookstore.

COHEN: And there's been stuff on the campus this past year. They're not understandable, but they're there.

ROSENSTONE: Yes, well, that's out of the new Art Committee, the Pietro Perona committee. There was one other thing we did. We sponsored an artist-in-residence.

COHEN: We talked a little bit about that.

ROSENSTONE: No, I'm talking about the last artist-in-residence we had. He's very well known. He came to us somehow through... Mel Simon knew him. He did a small work of art here, and

he taught a class. He does this kinetic art. And then there was an exhibition of the students' work, which was held in the bookstore, which isn't a great place for student exhibitions. So I'm very proud that we got this foothold in the new center, assuming it gets built. [Laughter]

COHEN: [Laughter] Well, they say they have the money.

ROSENSTONE: Oh, do they now have the money? So the final major thing about the Art Committee—and what caused my leaving it ultimately—and the biggest controversy we were involved in was the proposed Richard Serra sculpture. I suppose here you want the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

The building going up was the Broad building [Broad Center for the Biological Sciences].

COHEN: Maybe before you get into this, you might want to make some comment about the fact that the present president [David Baltimore, Caltech president 1997-2007] is really interested in art. Has that affected any of this?

ROSENSTONE: Yes, when David Baltimore became president, we had for the first time—we on the committee... A lot of us were art lovers on the committee; it was a labor of love. So now we had a president who had a collection of art, and we thought, "Great! We now have somebody who really cares about art." And we met with him two or three times when he first came here. We actually presented a list of proposals of things we thought would be nice to do. And David Baltimore heard us out and was very supportive—at least with words. We didn't get any money, but he seemed open to art proposals. So when two guys from—I don't know what office they were in, but they were artists; one worked in Development, maybe—these two guys decided to take an empty lot over near the president's house and turn it into an exhibition space. And for two years, there were these ad-hoc exhibitions on the empty lot.

COHEN: Yes, I do remember that. It was right near the parking structure on Holliston, behind the garbage dump there.

ROSENSTONE: Yes, on Holliston. We, as a committee, approved of that, but we had no money. Actually, I think the president gave us a couple of thousand dollars—some very minimum amount. And I think we gave $500 to the artists who were exhibiting. And we had these two curators, who were already on staff in other capacities.

COHEN: I remember walking over there once or twice. They were very minimal, as I recall.

ROSENSTONE: They were minimal, yes. Well, they had to be. [Laughter] But we actually had quite a diverse collection of artists. We had an African-American artist; we had Latino artists; we had Asian artists. It was sort of this outreach.

So Baltimore was interested in art, and that, I think, led to the problem of the great flap over the Richard Serra sculpture. So let me try to describe it from the beginning.

We knew the Broad building was online, and we were told—and I don't remember exactly how—that we had $90,000 or $100,000 to play with. So the committee met to talk about whether we wanted to go through this process again that we went through with the Moore sculpture. Some of the membership had changed by now. Dave Goodwin was on the committee; Dan Meiron had left. But it was still partly the same committee. And there were other possibilities—like having an arts festival and spending it all at once; it didn't have to be a permanent thing.

COHEN: Right, that's something I just realized recently, that it could be something other than a piece of art.

ROSENSTONE: Yes. And actually I recommended an arts festival; but I was the only one; everybody else wanted something more permanent. So when Baltimore heard that we were meeting because we were an advisory committee, he said he would like to come to a meeting. And he came to the meeting—I think it was the second time we'd met—and he announced, "How would you like to have a Richard Serra sculpture, worth $2 million, more or less." And of course he was questioned, and he said, "Well, Eli Broad is willing to put up the money. He likes Richard Serra." The space would be the large grassy area directly south of the new Broad building and west of Beckman Institute, which is a big space, about 110 yards long. And the

committee said, “Well, it’s hard to say no to something like that; what do we have to do?” et cetera, et cetera. And he said, “Well, I have to try and work it out. But I’d like your approval.”

And then a couple of people on the committee—either then, or maybe after Baltimore left—said, “Wouldn’t it be nice if we kept the $100,000 and did something on our own with it,” since it seemed like a drop in the bucket toward this larger amount. In other words, the idea had been that we would put that money in and Eli Broad would supplement it, or other donors would supplement it, and we would get this Richard Serra sculpture. And the consensus of the committee was that it would be nice to have the Richard Serra sculpture, but we wanted, as a committee, to have our own work. I can’t remember if David was at that meeting; I think not. I think I had to carry the news to David that we wanted to use that $100,000 for our own. And he said, “No, we need to put it toward the larger amount.” And I said, “Well, why? It’s only one-twentieth of the amount.” And he said, “It would be a nice token for the donors that Caltech is putting up some money.” So I had to advise him that there was a process—that we could not simply choose a sculpture and buy it. We had to go through a process of selecting a consultant and presenting at least—the city has a regulation; I think at least three artists have to be presented, or you have to show that you’ve contacted them; it may even be five, I’m not sure.

COHEN: That would have been another reason for separating the Caltech money. It frees Serra to do what he wants and frees you to do what you want.

ROSENSTONE: Yes. That was one of my arguments. I said, “Why not let us do this and then you can just do the Serra, and we won’t have to go through this rigmarole.” I also pointed out—and members of my committee said this as well—that in fact we’d already chosen. So the rigmarole was going to be a façade, which wasn’t actually a hundred-percent honest. These objections were put aside. He simply said, “Well, you know, this is really what I want to do, so we have to find a way of making it seem as if we’re choosing.” It just had a very bad taste to me and to members of my committee. And I felt, probably for the only time at Caltech, caught in a real moral dilemma that I didn’t know how to get out of. Eventually—I won’t go through all the steps—I decided to go along with the president, and I pushed, cajoled, shoved, jawboned my various committee members into accepting this. That is not something I’m proud of, by the way. And then Denise Nelson Nash, who used to be on the Art Commission of Pasadena, kind of

worked out the whole thing—where we were all still looking at two or three other big sculptors. So there was this façade, this somewhat dishonest façade, created and taken before Pasadena, and they approved it.

Now, I have to say, I learned that none of this was entirely secret. Actually, the city of Pasadena, I think, knew it was a façade also. Everybody was looking the other way from these rules.

COHEN: Maybe that's how these things are done.

ROSENSTONE: Well, I'm naïve; I'm a historian, right? [Laughter] So, yes, I think everybody kind of knew that the rules weren't really being exactly followed. But hell, you were going to have a Richard Serra sculpture, one of the most, if not *the* most, famous sculptors in the world. So that went through.

Then Serra was commissioned—he was given $50,000 or so to present a model for the sculpture. Now, in our naïveté—and I include our president, David Baltimore—in our naïveté, we thought he was going to do one of those torqued ellipses, which were and are wonderful. What we didn't count on was the fact that all artists are, of course, megalomaniacs. So when Serra was taken out to see the space, he wanted to cover the whole space—as any self-important artist would. A torqued ellipse would actually fit in a corner of the space, but it wouldn't be that impressive. So he designed this rising, or sinking, wall—depending on how you look at it. And when the design came in—and there was a mockup, a model—I really liked it. I felt it was actually brilliant. Some of the people on the committee didn't think it was so brilliant; there was some controversy. But this was what Serra had decided on, and most of us thought it was OK. Anyway, that was the design, and David liked it; and he's, after all, the ultimate word on this.

So then it got somehow posted for the campus community. I think the model was put in the Athenaeum, and stories broke in *The California Tech* and other places. This was in 2001. Let's see; I was at the Getty—I had a Getty Fellowship in 2002-2003, and I finally resigned from the committee when I was at the Getty. Anyway, I don't know how much detail I should go into. There began to be big protests—essentially, students, graduate students and faculty members—that the proposed sculpture was creating a wall that would take away a space that was used for games, soccer and other games. People used it all the time. It would break up the space. And

also that somehow, it was a formidable wall that would keep people away from Caltech. I thought the latter argument was sort of bullshit, because it started at ground level and stayed at the same level, but the ground fell away.

COHEN: No. The only danger was a two-year-old starting at ground level and falling off at eight feet. [Laughter]

ROSENSTONE: Well, the wall was only two or three inches thick, so it wasn't one you could walk on. Anyway, the protests started, and they grew and grew. And there was a mockup wall put up by the students, which was very funny.

So there was this fuss. And then there were charges of sort of conspiracy—that nobody had been told about this. And that the Institute Art Committee didn't have any student members, and what kind of a committee were we, with no student members? Frankly, we had never thought of putting students on the committee because we never thought any students were interested in art. It never occurred to us. And on and on!

COHEN: I remember you filled Beckman [Auditorium].

ROSENSTONE: Yes. So I decided that since it was my committee that recommended this, and since I was feeling a little guilty about the whole process anyway... [Laughter] No, not guilty—I don't think I felt guilty. But it didn't feel quite clean. And you know, one of the things about being a scholar is—scholarship loves to feel clean. You know? You do something, it's yours. I'm from the old school of scholarship: You do your research; you acknowledge the people you think deserve it; you come up with your own conclusions. You know? And this just didn't feel that way.

So anyway, I decided to hold a public meeting to deal with this. Because some of the charges were absurd, I thought—that people would be lurking, that rapes would go up. So I held a meeting—actually two, but the second one I held only because people complained after the first one that they couldn't make it—in Beckman Auditorium, which I think was attended by maybe three hundred or four hundred people.

COHEN: There were a lot of people there; I went to that meeting.

ROSENSTONE: And all we had at the meeting was David Kremers, who was a member of the Art Committee and an artist himself, give a short presentation about Serra's earlier work and how this proposed sculpture fit into his body of work. And I gave a brief background on why the committee and I liked this work and why it was important. Most of the time was taken up with people at open mikes complaining, criticizing, and so on.

I invited David Baltimore to come to this meeting and he said, no, he didn't have time. I thought David Baltimore should be at this meeting. Anyway, the meeting went on for an hour and a half. I tried to mollify people. You know, the question was whether this was a juggernaut or it could be changed. I assured everybody that the final decision had not been made—which it hadn't, because there was no contract with Serra at that time, beyond the proposal stage. And on and on, you know—all these things were said. It would destroy the playing field, it would be a wall against the community, etc. Also, a lot of other complaints about Baltimore and the administration surfaced at this meeting. There were statements about the health facilities and conditions in the student houses. It became a lightning rod for all this stuff. And about the administration not being sensitive to students. I think I recorded this, but I never listen to tapes; I took notes, because there were certain few basic points made over and over.

Then we had another meeting, to which I also invited David and to which he also didn't come. It was more of the same, although without quite as many people. And it got written up in *The Tech*.

At the end of these meetings, I didn't convene the committee. I just went to David and I said to him, "I think you should cancel this. I think we've got opposition across the board." Though a few people spoke in favor of it. And I said, "You're president, but I think you're jeopardizing a lot of stuff here. Caltech is a community, and the opposition seems so overwhelming." Even on my committee there were people against it; it wasn't a slam-dunk with the committee, either. And he said, "No, no; we're going through with it. Blah, blah, blah." And that was the last I heard.

Next I heard—I was at the Getty Institute; I was a year on fellowship; maybe it was in the summer—I heard he had cancelled it. And I felt annoyed that I hadn't at least been informed about this. After all, I put in a *lot* of hours on this thing.

COHEN: Sure. Well, who was the head of things now that you were gone? Had you resigned at this point?

ROSENSTONE: No, no I hadn't. There was an acting chair. Pietro Perona [professor of electrical engineering], who now chairs the committee and had come on that year.

COHEN: So it was really Perona who should have called you.

ROSENSTONE: Well, somehow I should have been informed. Perona wasn't called either, by the way. David just went ahead and did it, so it came out in the press. So I used that opportunity. I was annoyed, and it just seemed to me that the whole thing was screwed up in various ways. And I thought David should have called me. I had gone out of my way—and he knew that—to get my committee on his side. This was a wounded faculty member. [Laughter] I felt I had been done wrong, and I sent in my resignation, and I said that I'd chaired this committee for the past fifteen years, that I thought I'd done my duty by Caltech, that Pietro Perona would be a very good next chair, because... Partly because he had his own money and outreach from his grant. Then I got an email back from David, saying, "Thank you for serving as chair." I was a little disappointed. [Laughter]

COHEN: Yes, sure. Of course.

ROSENSTONE: I think one of the things about Caltech, and the academic world in general, is that people are not—there are exceptions to this—but people in institutions are not very gracious. [Laughter] Except for official occasions, nobody ever says thank you for doing something.

COHEN: It's probably no different here than in other places.

ROSENSTONE: Yes, it may not be. There's not much real civility. I mean, I did that job for fifteen years. It's not something I had to do, and it was very time-consuming.

COHEN: So that was it? Just this form letter, saying, "Thank you"?

ROSENSTONE: It wasn't a letter; it was an email. I think it was, "Thank you; you've done a good job." I didn't expect him to give me a gold watch.

But anyway. I think Pietro is good. So that's as much as I can tell about the story of Serra, unless you have any questions.

COHEN: No. I remember when this was going on and everybody was talking about a Serra wall in New York that this judge finally had to take it down because he got tired of walking all the way around it, and people had stopped eating lunch in the plaza where it was.

ROSENSTONE: A lot of the objections were really these kinds of know-nothing objections. "Is that art? My three-year-old child could build a wall like that." And all those kinds of stupid things that we, who care about the language of modern art, you know, found stupid. So, yes, I've been freed from the Art Committee.

COHEN: So that was a good bit of your experience here at Caltech. Of course, you were always doing lots of scholarly work.

ROSENSTONE: Yes, of course. But in terms of my service to the institute, I've been on other committees, you know, like the Curriculum Committee and the Institute Programs Committee and others I can't remember now. But a lot of my service has really been in the realm of art.

COHEN: Well, this was your unique contribution.

ROSENSTONE: Yes. And I think probably with the two gigs on that—maybe twenty years in all as chair of the Institute Art Committee, and along with that being involved with Baxter Art Gallery. So, yes. I love modern art and I'm interested in it. I buy modern art; I have a small collection, and it seemed like something I could do and that I liked doing.

COHEN: Actually, if you look back at your Caltech career, it's been very good for you. I mean, you've done your scholarship as you wanted to do it.

ROSENSTONE: Oh, yes. I would not have had the same experience at any other institution, because of the strange nature of Caltech. I mean, I've actually—I haven't talked about this, but in my scholarship, I've actually shifted fields three times and nobody has said, "Boo." [Laughter] I started out doing a kind of social history of radical movements. I then edged toward biographies of a radical leader, John Reed, and then after two books and one anthology on radicalism, I made a shift into working on Americans in Japan in the nineteenth century and the intercultural interactions. And after that book came out—it's a very experimental book indeed, you know, being written up by philosophers of history as a breakthrough in the way you can write history. But after that, I got into this whole business about film and visual media. These are three fairly distinct areas. You see, you're able to do that here—that's one of the great things about humanities here. Because other than teaching the freshman course—and you can actually teach the freshman course almost the way you want—nobody cares much what you teach, so you can try out ideas. When I started teaching history-on-film courses, back in the late seventies, early eighties, my ideas began to develop, which led to this whole subfield of which I'm actually—if I can be self-promoting—the leader in the world today. It used to be some guys in France. And they recently said to me, "Listen, you're the head of this now." [Laughter]

COHEN: Do you think the students have been short-changed because of people just following their own bent?

ROSENSTONE: No. Look, the fact is, we don't have the students long enough in the humanities to give them a full-blown humanities education—it's 20 percent of their time. That's not enough. Now, if you were a humanities major, you would have 75 percent of your time in the humanities. So, given 20 percent of the time, you can either offer very structured introductory courses to Western Civ, American History, et cetera, et cetera—except nobody does that anymore, because our sense of the knowledge of the West or of the East no longer holds together. There's been a revolution in historical thinking—or humanistic thinking—about what students need to know. I think the students are best served by having faculty members teaching something they're excited about. And I've always been able to teach something I was excited about here, because when I got done with one field—like the radicals—I had all kinds of offers

to do big synthetic works. And I didn't want to do that. Synthetic works aren't original research, and original research was something that was fun.

COHEN: So it's been good.

ROSENSTONE: Yes, I can't imagine being anywhere else. I mean, you miss—in humanities and probably social science as well— [Tape ends]

Begin Tape 2, Side 2

ROSENSTONE: …the most famous literary critic in the world. I met a couple of those here. And the students have no idea who you are. They know who all the stars in science are. I think my students are sometimes surprised when they come into my office and see that I have a whole shelf of books I've written—you know, eleven books or something like that. [Laughter] Or sometimes I'll bring in other people, authors, to my class—like a writer of a biography or a memoir or something—and they're very impressed that this is an author here, not realizing they—

COHEN: [Laughter] Never mind what's here.

ROSENSTONE: Right. I think the students don't have much of a clue about the hum faculty.

COHEN: But I have heard people say, "It may be, but they're so smart. It's such a pleasure dealing with them."

ROSENSTONE: Oh, yes. And they're getting smarter. They're better educated now than they were twenty-five years ago. I think that's because they're all going to private schools now or something. And they write better. We hardly have writing problems anymore, except for the foreign-born.

COHEN: Well, that's been one of the scandals here, about this writing program. They try one thing and another thing.

ROSENSTONE: Oh, that's the science-writing program, [laughter] the idea that everybody should have some course in science writing. Yes, but the humanities writing program is doing wonderfully.

COHEN: OK. Should we wrap this up, or do you want to say something?

ROSENSTONE: Well, let me say this just for the record. When I came here—this was in 1966—humanities was just transferring from a teaching to a research division. And that was under the leadership then of Hallett Smith, who was a fine scholar, and Rod [Rodman W.] Paul, who was a fine scholar in history. And they began hiring—and I guess that decision was made somewhere—and that's all to the good. So we became a research division.

There was also the decision made to start this quantitative social science program—which I think is a less good decision, although they're doing very well, I guess. I mean, part of it came out of the hide of humanities—we got a bit cannibalized over the years. And a complaint along those lines is that we haven't had a humanist—a historian, somebody in literature or philosophy—as chair for twenty-five years now. It's all been economists, and our current chair is an anthropologist, a quantitative anthropologist. I understand they're trying to protect the graduate program in economics. But it's been a very funny development, because students here are much more enthusiastic about the humanities than they are about the social sciences. They take more courses in the humanities; there are larger numbers. But we're the ones now who have to scramble for positions. So I think that that development has gotten overbalanced here, and I would someday love to see it rectified. I don't think it will be. In an odd way, humanities is kind of taken for granted. I don't think the administration and the other leaders realize how good the humanities faculty is. I mean, we lose people—we've lost [Daniel] Kevles to Yale, Nick Dirks and James Lee to Michigan, Jerry McGann to Virginia, and Bill Deverell to USC. There isn't much done to keep the real stars, and I think that's a shame, because in what I'm doing now, I no longer have anybody to talk to here. There were people, and they left. That's because I do a kind of cultural history that nobody else does here. We used to have people who did it; [Nicholas] Dirks did it; Jerry McGann did it; and they left and they weren't replaced. I'm used to it by now. I mean, being so senior, I have contacts elsewhere. But I sometimes worry about the younger—

COHEN: What about this business of trying to do more with the Huntington Library research staff?

ROSENSTONE: That's good; that's a boost, for people who are interested in eighteenth-century Britain or the United States. I also think we have never diversified. We have diversified genderwise, and that's great; because when I was on the first affirmative-action committee here thirty-five years ago, a lot of scientists turned to me and said, "Well, you know, women aren't smart enough to do science, but you guys in humanities should hire some women." And happily that's changed over the years—slowly, but that's changed. And we've had a number of women on the faculty, women as division chairs.

It hasn't changed in the realm of ethnicity. Well, it has, if you think about East Asian ethnicity. But we've been very slow to diversify—or even try. Or even to diversify in what we teach. We've lost our Chinese historian [James Z. Lee] and we haven't replaced him. And so we're still, in the humanities, fairly narrowly focused on the Anglo-European world, which I think is a mistake and a shame.

COHEN: There's really never been a real marriage between the social sciences and the humanities, even though you've been lumped together?

ROSENSTONE: No, no. There's no marriage between social science and humanities. And in fact, the problem is, it's very unbalanced—in this way: Humanists, in general, are open to other fields and the validity of other fields. Social scientists tend to think humanities is not a valid field, particularly in history, which they want to quantify. And now we have an anthropologist who's a quantifier, which I don't understand at all—applying game theory to anthropology, I guess. It can be interesting, but the fact is that the kind of history I do—that Bill Deverell, who left us, does—is not demographic, it's not quantitative. It's interpretive. Now my argument would be—and this is a great old philosophical argument—that any quantification sits in the field of interpretive argument. The only reason you want to quantify is if you have some other verbal argument going on over economic development, demographic shifts, and so forth, and why they're important. You can quantify those things, but you can't tell me why they're important unless you get into the realm of values. And that's where value-laden, or interpretive, history comes in. So, no, they're almost totally incompatible. I don't doubt that some people who do

American political history, like Morgan Kousser—but he's a quantifier himself—spill over into some of the things that the political scientists do. But there's been a very great suspicion, on the part of the quantifiers, of people who do the kind of history I do, or people who do literature, or people who do philosophy that isn't the philosophy of science.

Another complaint would be that the model of science has more and more pervaded our division. And science is wonderful! What can I say about science? It reshaped our world. But science doesn't answer the ultimate questions of life and death, right? Scientists don't answer their questions, so the questions of meaning and values come back to the humanities, back to more traditional philosophy and more traditional literature.

COHEN: So you have to be a strong person, like yourself, to be willing to stand alone and do your work, being in a place like this, because it's not going to change.

ROSENSTONE: Yes. I find that a lot of the scientists here are actually interested in questions of value, and they're not interested in the social sciences and the econometricians and the quantitative political scientists. I find I have more in common with some of my colleagues in science than I do with my colleagues in social science—because they're willing. I mean, Kip Thorne and people like that know that beyond black holes there's: "What is this black hole?" [Laughter] I've talked to Kip, and to other people around here, about those kinds of questions. Those aren't the kinds of questions that interest social scientists, because they're instrumentalists.

COHEN: Well, then you're at a place where you can get scientists of that caliber who can think in that way.

ROSENSTONE: Yes. [Tape turned off]