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INTERVIEWS

Thelonious Monk / T.S. Monk

Nicholas Fox Weber

Joop M. Joosten

by

HARRY & MADALENA HOLTZMAN

(Edited by Wietse Coppes)



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Wietse Coppes
Madalena Holtzman interviewing Joop Joosten at the RKD – Netherlands Institute for Art History
November 28, 2013

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FOREWORD

In November 2013 Madalena Holtzman visited the RKD – Netherlands Institute for Art History. Being one of three children of the American artist Harry Holtzman, she was particularly interested in the material regarding her father that was acquired by the RKD in early 2012. Harry Holtzman became a good friend of the Dutch artist Piet Mondrian, whom he first visited in Paris in December 1934. Holtzman financially supported Mondrian when the latter immigrated to New York in September 1940. In New York, Harry Holtzman let Mondrian stay in his studio and continued looking after and supporting him, both financially and morally. Out of gratitude for this lasting friendship and help, Mondrian declared Holtzman the sole heir to his Estate and belongings.

When the RKD acquired the personal archive of Piet Mondrian in early 2012, this turned out to also contain the letters that Piet Mondrian had written to Harry Holtzman between 1935 and 1943, documenting their friendship, travels, exhibitions and work in the aforementioned period.

During her study at the RKD of this and other material regarding her father and Piet Mondrian, Madalena Holtzman developed the idea of doing a series of interviews with various people that have a connection to Mondrian and/or Harry Holtzman. The first three of these interviews are presented here. It starts of with an interview by Harry Holtzman with the famous jazz musician Thelonious Monk, held at Minton's Playhouse in 1948. 65 Years later, Madalena interviewed the son of Thelonious Monk, TS Monk. Both interviews are combined here and contain striking resemblances between father and son Monk, but also between father and daughter Holtzman.

The second interview is with the writer and director of the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Nicholas Fox Weber. Fox Weber is currently writing a biography on Piet Mondrian, an artist that was greatly admired by the Albers' as well as by the author himself.

The third interview was taken at the RKD during the visit of Madalena Holtzman in November 2013, with former RKD-curator and Mondrian-expert *par excellence*, Dr. Joop M. Joosten. The interview provides a rare insight in the man that dedicated a large part of his life to studying and writing about Mondrian. The results of his thorough research culminated in the *Piet Mondrian – Catalogue Raisonné*, which was published in 1998. This book is an indispensable source of information for anyone studying Piet Mondrian, his circle and the modern art scene of that period.

The three interviews that make up this booklet are the first of hopefully many more to come. With the interviews, Madalena Holtzman hopes to stimulate the further scholarly research and provide more insight into the seminal period of early abstraction in Europe and the United States.

Wietse Coppes

Assistant-curator *Mondrian & De Stijl* Archives
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THELONIOUS MONK AND T.S. MONK - TWO INTERVIEWS

A short introduction by Madalena Holtzman

"Speakeasy", is the title of a 1929's drawing that Harry Holtzman exhibited in his first group show* of the very early 30's in New York City. "Speakeasy" was also, in the prohibition era, the term used to designate a club in which administered alcohol and was possible to listen to jazz music. The "atmosphere" of open hearted black people with their charm and youthful qualities opened Harry's eyes to a new period of a Jazz movement that would lead him to his destiny in more ways than one, historically and profoundly in the coming years. A connection followed, as a relationship was formed between Mondrian, Holtzman and Thelonious Monk as well as the link between modern art, Boogie Woogie and Beebop.



Harry Holtzman
Speakeasy (# 677), 1929
pencil on paper
18 7/8" x 13 7/8"



Unknown photographer
Harry Holtzman and two friends in his studio, early 1940's

Both Thelonious Monk (beginning of his career) and Piet Mondrian (entering into a new culture and time), came to a point of convergence with their work back in the early 1940's when Mondrian arrived, Harry Holtzman (artist friend) brought him to Minton's Playhouse to hear Monk's music. A time where, in both corners of NYC two revolutionaries (Monk and Mondrian) of modern art and music came together to express themselves in "breaking the boundaries" with individual form, subjective emotion and expression taking precedence through pure rhythm, breaking the limitations of "form as particularity", making universal unity possible using intuition as their guide.

In 1948 Harry Holtzman interviewed Thelonious Monk.
I interviewed his son, T.S. Monk in April 2013.

* Exhibition of paintings third new group, GRD Studio, 58 West 55 Street. 11 – 23 January, 1932.
Entries by Harry Holtzman were: 13) *Poker Player*, and 14) *Speakeasy*

INTERVIEW WITH THELONIOUS MONK, MINTON'S PLAYHOUSE, NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 27, 1948
by HARRY HOLTZMAN

HH = Harry Holtzman

TM = Thelonious Monk

HH: I want to know about your beginning toward music. When did you start fooling around with music? You took lessons, didn't you? How old were you when you began?

TM: About 11

HH: Did you begin with piano lessons? Was it a very conventional type of training?

TM: I guess you might call it that.

HH: Did you play all the old exercises?

TM: Yes

HH: Who was your teacher?

TM: His last name was Wolff.

HH: White fellow?

TM: yes

HH: Did you go right on with those all through high school?

TM: I stopped. I went on the road somewhere. The teacher didn't allow me to play jazz. I used to play that under cover.

HH: Is your father still alive?

TM: no.

HH: How did you happen to start taking lessons?

TM: They thought I was musically inclined. I wanted to play. I started to play the trumpet. I wanted to play a horn. I took one or two lessons. The teacher saw me messing around the piano - said I ought to take up piano.

HH: But before you took lessons you were messing around the piano?

TM: Yes

HH: Are you the youngest in your family?

TM: No. I have an older sister and a younger brother.

HH: You must have been some time in high school before you began to feel you were something or did you start playing for your friends even when you were a kid?

TM: I was playing even before I went to high school.

HH: What kind of stuff were you playing?

TM: I used to try to play swing, jazz so called.

HH: Did you do that just for yourself?

TM: Yes. I had some technique, some studying. You have to learn the notes. I learned mostly about harmony

through experience.

HH: Did you study harmony as such?

TM: I can't remember ever studying harmony. I learned about major and minor, augmented chords in some kind of way. I learned about that. I learned the rest from experience like you learn simple arithmetic. I found it out for myself.

HH: By hearing, trying and thinking about it?

TM: That's right. Then I played my own way. I always did have my own style of playing. I used to sound weird to everybody ever since I can remember. A lot of fellows would be playing like somebody else and I would be playing like myself which no one liked, I guess. Then after years went by, I found people trying to do things I did.

HH: In other words, somewhere along the line some people would begin to like it. You never would have gotten an audience without it. Let's follow through one point at a time. I would like to know as far as you can remember the kind of studies you went through with your teacher. I mean, you started at 11 in the traditional way of studying. - classical exercises and, I suppose you played those lousy little pieces. How long did you go on studying with this fellow?

TM: About three years.

HH: Until you were 14, approximately.

TM: Something like that.

HH: What about after that? You didn't study with anyone else?

TM: I used to play in a little symphony band like in a community center.

HH: Around the 60's?

TM: Yes

HH: Did you play in a high school orchestra?

TM: At the Stuyvesant High School. I went once and tested for the band then I never showed up.

HH: After that you didn't study anyone else?

TM: No.

HH: By that time you were studying on your own?

TM: Yes.

HH: Did you spend most of your time concentrating on music? Did you always think of yourself as being a musician?

TM: I always did play a lot. I was always interested in the piano. I was never the kind of fellow who had to be coached. I was always interested. The majority of my knowledge was gained from experience.

HH: When you were about 14 you entered high school and then no more lessons?

TM: That's right.

HH: But you were probably at that time more interested than ever in music?

TM: Maybe so, I must have been. Of course, I was.

HH: Who were you interested in? Who were the musicians you admired most at the beginning?

TM: You couldn't hear anybody but Ellington, Waller and Armstrong. That's all you could hear. But I didn't ever want to play like anybody else. But I liked everybody like everybody else did.

HH: Where did you hear your first live music and how old were you?

TM: I used to hear pianists a lot. Musicians used to live next door. I remember Jimmie Harrison, a drummer. He used to live next door and knew I was interested in music. A lot of the fellow I heard I don't even remember.

HH: How did you do in high school?

TM: I tore out before I was graduated.

HH: How old was that?

TM: I was nearly graduating when I cut out. I went on the road playing music with the Evangelists - playing church music. Isn't that crazy?

HH: Where you interested in religion?

TM: I don't know what it was. Just wanted to leave town, get out of New York, go somewhere.

HH: While you were in school were there any subjects that interested you?

TM: I liked mathematics.

HH: What did you study?

TM: Algebra, geometry. But I don't know anything about mathematics now. I don't remember anything about geometry, mathematics. In fact, I can't even prove that two lines are parallel to each other. Did you dig?

HH: You went on the road with the Evangelist group. Was it a man who led it?

TM: A Woman.

HH: What was her name? Do you remember?

TM: No.

HH: Where did you travel?

TM: Southwest, upstate.

HH: That was when you were about 17?

TM: Yes. For about two years.

HH: What made you quit? Just bored?

TM: That's right. Fed up. A lot of things.

HH: Did you think it was phony? Or was it the kinds of experiences?

TM: I didn't say I was religious. I was just doing like all the other fellows - making a living.

HH: During the depression was it?

TM: I never actually suffered real depression, like people starving, because I have always been able to eat. People were inviting me to dinner all the time. Playing in the churches. I wasn't making any money though. But I wasn't ragged either.

HH: Well, you learned about life?

TM: Yes. It taught me a lot. I learned a lot on that trip. It was very good for me. I wanted to see what happened in other places. I couldn't find out from reading about it. It gave me a lot of knowledge about rhythm. Played in all types of churches.

HH: About 1937 you came back to New York? Well, you were accustomed then to playing before audiences.

TM: I used to play before audiences before I left. I never was afraid to play.

HH: When did you start composing your own stuff? I look at you not just as a pianist, but as a full musician, pianist, composer.

TM: When I got in with musicians, I used to make up real things of my own. When I was about 19.

HH: When did you arrive back in Harlem?

TM: About 1938-39.

HH: What did you do first after you came back from your Evangelical experience?

TM: Just like all 18 - 19 year old fellows did. Get a gig, that's all.

HH: How old were you when you were with Coleman Hawkins?

TM: I forget - around 1942, 1 or 3. Something like that.

HH: How long were you with him?

TM: About two years.

HH: When did you begin to take your work seriously?

TM: I always did take music seriously.

HH: You just never thought of yourself as doing anything else?

TM: I never thought of myself as composing, as being a legend or anything in music. In fact I never noticed, you know, my style much. I used to notice it gradually. I used to hear musicians playing different things of mine.

HH: There must have been certain musicians like Ellington, and let's say Mary Lou Williams or Count Basie who particularly interested you.

TM: Well, I liked all the piano players. I always did watch them closely.

HH: Did you listen to classical music?

TM: I listened to all types of music.

HH: Did you play all types?

TM: No

HH: But you did listen?

TM: Yes. I had to listen to all because they teach you that from the elementary appreciation. You have to sit in the auditorium to listen music.

HH: Did you listen with interest?

TM: I don't know. A lot of things are subconscious to me I guess. I wasn't noticing them much. I didn't notice much what I was doing so somebody told me. Then I started noticing.

HH: How many bars are there in a piece?

TM: The average song has 32 bars.

HH: Do you use written music with your group?

TM: If it is necessary. For recordings. It's better to remember it, then you're more relaxed.

HH: Do you do your own orchestrations

TM: If it's my tune. Lots of times it's necessary to write down the music - melody and chords. Certain things you want to do in a piece, you jot it down and memorize it. Records for myself to remember what I did myself. Some things have to be written down because you forget.

HH: Do you write for the whole group?

TM: If it is necessary.

HH: Do you have a particular record that you are proud of or like?

TM: None of my records please me. I'm not satisfied with any records I have made. I feel I can do better.

INTERVIEW WITH T.S. MONK, GUARD THEATER , NEW LONDON, CT, April 26, 2013

by MADALENA HOLTZMAN

MH = Madalena Holtzman

TSM = T.S. Monk

MH: At what age did you start playing?

TSM: I started playing at 13. I was in boarding school and I actually practiced on a pillow until I was 15. I asked my father. I informed my father of what I was doing and that I needed some drums. But actually the first two years nobody knew but a couple of kids at school that I was only interested in playing the drums

MH: Why did you hide your interest?

TSM: Because I was upset that there was so much pressure for me to play the piano and I didn't like the piano as an instrument for me. I mean, I loved what my dad did. Everybody said "don't you play the piano? Why don't you play the piano? When are you going to play the piano?", and I didn't really understand it. You see somebody play and you say, I can do that. Well, I never got that "I can do that moment" from the piano.

MH: You didn't identify with that instrument?

TSM: It just didn't mean anything to me, but on the other hand, I can recall being as young as 7 or 8 years old and watching people like Max Roach and Art Blakey.

MH: What kind of person was Max Roach?

TSM: Max was an intellectual person first and foremost. He was probably the best read. He was a well read Jazz musician. Max was a Mobius genius.

MH: How did you find this particular person? was he a friend of yours?

TSM: He was at the time already one of the greatest drummers in the history of Jazz but also a very close friend of my fathers. He was actually a star before my father was.

MH: And Clifford Jordan?

TSM: Clifford Jordan is a Tenor sax player. He got the first tier in terms of fame like Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, Ben Webster, Coleman Hawkins and them Cats, and then, the next level, the next Cats underneath those guys who are like the absolute icons, there's a bunch of Cats that were really their contemporaries and never got notoriety that John Coltrane did, but he was really on that level and lead a lot of young players in general play so much in the spirit with what music is all about no BS. He was for real, down to earth.

MH: Was he a lot like your dad?

TSM: Yeah. Both were cut from the same chord and Thelonious dug him too. He could really play. He's a great writer too. If you ask anybody in Jazz from Herbie Hancock down they all speak highly of him.

MH: Are you interested in playing other instruments?

TSM: If I could play another instrument it would probably be the bass. I always loved the bass because it's an instrument I understand. I can see it. I can see what's happening when someone is playing it. It talks to you. Like I said, piano I never really understood and I took 5 years of piano lessons and my father was a great piano player but piano never grabbed me like that. I like the trumpet too. It was my first instrument that I played but I didn't like what it did to your face. Man it hurt. All those brass instruments are a hunk of metal pressed right on your face and you gotta get passed that. So I let the trumpet go.

MH: What were your father's first words when you had decided to become a musician?

TSM: Oh, that was easy. He said: "you're late." I'll never forget that. That was the first thing I recall. I said: "Dad, I think I'm gonna play." He Said: "You're late man."

MH: Did your dad give you any advice from his past experience of working with masses of musicians?

TSM: No. The only advice he ever gave me was: "Aah...it's about time MF". Beyond that seriously, not only Thelonious but a lot of Cats, Jazz musicians, there is not a lot to tell a young player because you know if you pick up an alto sax and you want to play like Charlie Parker nobody will tell you have to practice all day and all night. In fact, I've never known a Jazz musician that had to be told to practice. Never in my life. You do it automatically.

MH: What does the word "Beebop" mean to you?

TSM: Beebop is a funny word because it really doesn't mean anything to me. Let me tell you how that came about and you'll understand why. So, you had the swing era and then a generation of young musicians and their basically playing similar music but not in a small ensemble, it has no name. One night great player Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker were playing a tune titled "Beebop" that was the name of the song and Dizzy was walking off the stage and a writer from the Daily Newspaper said: "Hey Dizz, what do you call that music?" she was talking about this new ensemble music. Dizzy was thinking about the tune. what is the name of the song and said: "We call it Beebop." So, the writer ran with that and said, oh this is the new music called "Beebop" and that's how it got its new name Beebop and that's why when you talk with the hardcore Cats they say, what is hardcore. I'll tell you something else about the word "Beebop" that it is a very, very misleading word because if you take the prime proponents of Beebop which were Charlie Parker , Dizzy Gillespie and Thelonius Monk, "The High Priests of Beebop", and you look at what they actually did. What did Charlie Parker really do? Charlie Parker changed the way we heard melody in music, period. That was what he did for everybody for all the jandras. Dizzy Gillespie went to Cuba, hooked up with a guy named Mauro Valga. Thelonious, where are the Beebop tunes in his Catalog? Because if you go through Thelonious Monks list of tunes you won't find any Beebop. He wrote one tune called 52nd Street Theme (that's the only) but if you look at Thelonious Monks' compositions: Round Midnight is not a Beebop tune. Crepuscule School with Nellie is not a Beebop tune.

Epistrophy is not a Beebop tune. Bluemonk is not a Beebop tune. But, what Thelonious did was to bring the new harmonic structures right, because of this so called Beebop music was just a transition. It was just a part of a language of "scatting" and these writers who had a very hostile relationship between these very Eurocentric writers and these African American artists you see. So, they gave it this name Beebop which almost connotes a somewhat juvenile term we're talking about some of the most sophisticated music of Planet Earth. It's music that caused Gershwin to write. And Irving Berlin. If you asked Bernstein what is Duke Ellington about he would have said: "Oh my God. Oh my God." He never considered himself as good a writer as Duke Ellington. So, Beebop is one of those words that gets on the music.

MH: Tell me about your first time playing with your father.

TSM: The first time playing with my father he came through the door, hadn't said a word to me in five years about music. I was just practicing playing my stuff. He didn't say anything to me. He's off doing his thing and comes to the house one day and looks at me and says: "Are you ready to play?" I just reflectively said: "yeah". Three days later I was on National Television. Malcom X's birthday. That was the very first time I played with Thelonious on television. No rehearsals. No nothing. I just hit it. I said: "Dad, are we going to rehearse?" He said: "You know the music don't you?" "I wish; I've been listening to it all my life", I replied. Trial by fire. That's what it was which I was told to have. You know what he did to me? I'm young, 19 years old. I'm hyped and ready to play. He called the tune: Bowler Bar Blues. I was in such another zone from where my head was, but the object lesson was that you gotta be ready to play anything at any time. It didn't matter. So, I was geared up for something red hot instead.

MH: Was it not long after you started your own band in 1974-1975?

TSM: I started in 1975 a band called Natural Essence. Today, it would be considered Smooth Jazz. The beginning of electric piano and all the music was changing. You have to understand that was a function of a changing industry. What happened was you had this new popular music coming in and the clubs disappearing. So, although the Miles Davis' and the Monks' and the Coltrane's were doing very, very well there wasn't this plethora of clubs for young players to play. So we all found ourselves doing things like dance gigs and that's why there was such an explosion intellectually in RNB music that gave us the Earth, Wind and Fire and all these groups had all these young Jazz musicians that couldn't get a Jazz gig. We all went into R'n'B music. So, when you listen to R'n'B music from the mid 1970's to the mid 1980's before Hip Hop, that's when the greatest R'n'B music ever played was made because you have the influence of Jazz into R'n'B. It was amazing and along came the open and close hot hat sound. Along came electric bass; all these instruments were not staples in R'n'B music Jazz.

MH: That was when you developed an interest in singing?

TSM: That was the function of the time. Somebody had to sing. So, we all found ourselves singing and then I just got lucky. For me it was insane that I had been practicing goddamn drums all day and night for fifteen years and here I had won a hit record as a single and I said what kind of BS is this, the whole system was skewed. I just got a hit record singing and I'm trying to get in by having people listening to me playing the drums. Real singers during that period, a lot of really, really good singers, couldn't get no work. It was post Disco. Neville Period. Luther and (The Water Sisters) was singing background. Luther was really an apparition because very few "died in the wool" background singers get out front. It's like if you play character roles too many times they don't think of you in the movies. They just think of you as a supporting actor. You don't get thought of as a lead. So, you don't get called. Luther was in there and when he broke out we were all so happy and we all knew he could sing even better than most of the people he was singing for on background records.

MH: Your father had created songs dedicated to you and your sister BooBoo such as : Little Rootie Tootie and Green Chimneys. At what age were you when he had created these songs?

TSM: We were young, little kids. He wrote tunes for people he liked. He wrote : Skippy for my mom's sister. He

wrote Jackie-ing for my cousin Jackie. A relatively simple song called Oscar T that I distinctly remember him composing and he probably worked a good 2 months everyday at the piano on this tune, and when you hear relative to some of his other compositions you would say it is a really simple song but this critical detail that people like Thelonious Monk or Duke Ellington or Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea - all the great writers - there's critical details in the music that are there all the time most often than not when other people play them they don't play those details and that's why you say, man, this sounds good.

MH: When did you feel you came into your own?

TSM: I felt inside when I got to play with Clifford Jordan. I got to meet so many new Cats and that was when I felt like I could get back into the club. You see, this Jazz musician thing, is a club, and when you play on a certain level with certain Cats you know you're in the club. But until you do that, you don't feel like you're in the club. You're around and there's a lot of people that got instruments and lots of Cats to be part of the family of Jazz musicians. This has always meant a great deal to me as a player. I know I knew I was in the family because of my heredity; my dad. I'm automatically in the room. To get a seat in the room is really what it was all about. I didn't feel I had a seat in the room until I started playing with Clifford Jordan. Then I had a seat in the room. Then I knew I was playing with Cats that I knew on a certain level and that if I was playing with them, then I would at least go on that level.

MH: What is your favorite Thelonious Monk song?

TS: Oh. It's a very simple song. It's a tune called "Monks Dream" and I just adore it. It's the only tune we played together, in the five years I played with my father. I couldn't get him to play. Really, he played everything. You cannot assume that I knew who he was. I was 19 years old. He was just daddy, and people used to tell me your father is this, and your father is that and his music is going to be this and that and for years to come and that kind of BS it just didn't compute. I never called the man one time in my life *Thelonious*.

I called my father *daddy* from the day my eyes opened until the day his eyes closed. All I ever called him was daddy. You know and not until I was 19.

NICHOLAS FOX WEBER - AN INTERVIEW

by MADALENA HOLTZMAN

INTRODUCTION

Nicholas Fox Weber is a cultural historian. He is the Executive Director of the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation and has written extensively about each artist and curated many major exhibitions and retrospectives of their work.

Weber is a graduate of Columbia College (B.A., major in Art History) and Yale University (M.A., Art History; Fellowship in American Art) and is the author of fourteen books including *The Bauhaus Group*, *Le Corbusier*, *The Clarks of Cooperstown*, *Balthus A Biography*, *Patron Saints*, *The Art of Babar* and *The Drawings of Josef Albers*.

He is at work on a biography of Piet Mondrian to be published by Alfred A. Knopf.*

The interview with Nicholas Fox Weber was held by Madalena Holtzman at the premises of the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany Connecticut, 2014.

MH = Madalena Holtzman

NFW = Nicholas Fox Weber

MH: Tell me about your upbringing. How did you become interested in art?

NFW: I was brought up by my parents, my mother was a painter and my father a printer with studio in Manhattan. (I remember the) art works freshly created appearing around our living room; periodically (they) had some artists friends and them were amazingly interesting people. While they did not have a lot of money they had courage and great sense of vision, when I was 5 my parents bought a beautiful Matisse rug for \$100 dollars, when I was 6 they acquired some Picasso's ceramics, also with no financial expense, but in the early fifties it was very courageous.

MH: Were you influenced by your parents ?

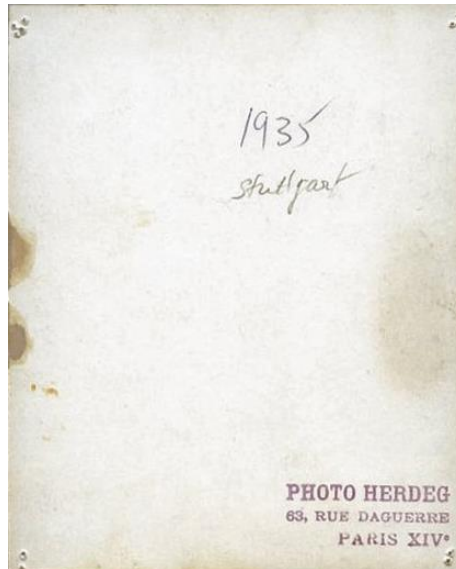
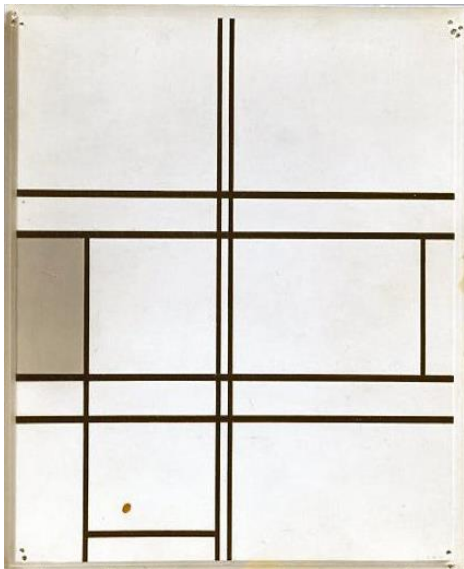
NFW: I was deeply influenced by both more than anything because they were happy people. My mother was lively , colorful very worldly and attractive, very acerbic her manner, but because she was tough I think I developed an ability to cope with tough people without much problem. My father was very, very gentle but strong in a gentle way and that influenced me.

MH: Do you remember an event in particular that influenced you when you were little?

NFW: I recall when I was 10 years old, my mother received an honorable mention from the Connecticut watercolor society for a painting that she had done of a pheasant my father had shot, which she had at her studio, and the painting went on view at the Wadsworth Atheneum where there was a

*The biography is taken from the official website of Nicholas Fox Weber: <http://www.nicholasfoxweber.com/about-the-author/>.

reception. I had to attend, I was 10 old and not very happy there because surrounded by adults and my mothers friends. So I asked my father if I could go upstairs and I went up the circular staircase to the third floor. Twenty minutes later I came down and said to my father: Daddy, there is something I love! My father went upstairs with me and after seeing what I had struck said: "very good Nicky that's a painting by the artist Piet Mondrian, Mommy and I have a book of his work at home and I am glad that you like it". I had no idea that was the first abstract Mondrian ever bought by an American. It was bought in 1936 for \$350 dollars from Mondrian. Glorious painting I did not know its history, I didn't know the name. I just knew that it filled me with joy. The most incredible sense of well being and even euphoria at 10 years old. Now that I am Writing a biography on Mondrian one of my main objectives is to understand what the qualities are that could provide such a sense of joy to a 10 year old, nothing to do with fame, name or money.



The painting by Mondrian that struck the ten year old Nicholas Fox Weber at the Wadsworth Atheneum is *Composition (No. IV) Blanc-Blue* from 1935 (B258). It was bought by the director of the Wadsworth, A.E. Austin, who visited Mondrian in his Paris studio in the summer of 1935.

The painting is represented here by a contemporary photograph from the Holtzman Family Archives. The photograph was commissioned by Mondrian at the photo studio of Hugo P. Herdeg. Photo Herdeg was at walking distance from Mondrian's studio on 26, Rue du Départ. The pinholes suggest that Mondrian at one point stuck the photo on the wall of his studio, possibly as reference for new works, or perhaps simply as decoration.

MH: This episode shows great sensitivity indeed, have you ever experienced your creativity, perhaps also in the painting?

NFW: Yes. I have. It's a complicated issue that has not been entirely worked out. I liked painting and drawing a lot when I was very young and one day I discovered that my mother had thrown out most of my art work which was really unusual. She claimed she was concerned about dust under my bed. I was around 16 years old. I wiggled out. She had a tremendous fear that I would try to make a living as a painter and that I would not have enough money. She was perhaps very competitive and that she was the painter in the family painting Connecticut scenery.

MH: I understand, I would like now to know how did you meet Josef and Anni Albers? Do you have an anecdote?

NFW: There is a very simple reason as to how I met them. As I tell you this I think about something Anni Albers used to say to me quite a lot which is : you can go anywhere from anywhere. You never know what will lead to what in life. The reason I am at Albers Foundation is essentially through tennis. To explain I was at Columbia University undergraduate during the summers wanted something totally different from the intensity of New York and art history which I loved and I taught tennis at the tennis camp in New Hampshire and fell for a

girl who was also teaching tennis there. She did not fall for me the same way but she still brought me to her parents' house whom collected Josef and Anni Albers work and her mother thought that I would be the perfect son in law. I went to Yale graduate school and her mother asked me to go with her to go meet the Albers, and I said "sure!".

MH: This is more than an anecdote, I would like to know what year it was and if you knew at the time the artistic work of the Albers?

NFW: 1970, I didn't know Josef and Anni's work particularly well.

MH: Do you remember how you imagined them first to meet them and what happened during this first meeting ?

NFW: I pictured them living in a house that would be like the Bauhaus. So, I put on my one pair of clean corduroy pants neat and well shaven, and then my MG car wouldn't start. I had to get underneath it and hammer fuel pump with a rock so I was covered with grease. By the way when I arrived at The Albers front door, Josef looked at me and simply said: "What do you do boy?" I answered " I'm studying art history at Yale sir", I was convinced he was looking at the grease on my pants... he said: "Do you like it boy?" I just looked at him and said: "No sir I really don't". "Why not Boy?" "I 'm losing my passion for looking at paintings Mr. Albers. For The past two months I have been doing research on gas lighting fixtures in 19th century France for a course called 'Seurat and the Eye Iconography of Entertainment' and I finally asked the teacher if we could talk about Seurat's color and he said no this is a course only for imagery , not for technique and visual things and I said "Mr. Albers it just seems so removed from what painting really is." I said "I just can't feel it". Mr. Albers answered "this I like boy. Which of those bastards in art history don't you like?" We talked a little. Anni Albers was taking this in and then he asked me: "What does your father do?" I answered that my father was a printer. At this point he told: "Good Boy, then you're not just an art historian then you know something about something". That was the beginning of a friendship.

MH: They didn't have children. Did they "adopt" you like a son?

NFW: Let's just say that it became an explicitly close and wonderful relationship.

MH: How did you start to collaborate with the Albers?

NFW: I began writing a book about Anni and her work, so I saw a lot of Josef, and every time I went into the house I brought them German food which they loved and we became closer and closer. When Josef Albers died in 1976 I was one of the first people Anni called and I rushed to be with her. The day of Josef's funeral his lawyer asked me if I would help her and one thing lead to another.

MH: Did you remember if Josef talked about his painting with you?

NFW: Josef couldn't stop teaching. which is to say he was 85 and I was 25 and it wasn't a formal classroom setting. we would look at paintings together and he would say : "Nick, do you see this, do you see that..." He was a person who so loved vision, light, and the interaction of color that the minute you looked at something with him he taught.

MH: Were you present when he was creating his works?

NFW: I was not actually present when he was working but for example, he told me that when looking at Homage to the square that his father taught him to paint the way you paint a door. You start at the

center and you work your way out because that way you catch the drip and you don't get your cuffs dirty. With every Homage to the square there's never a paint on top of a paint and he always began in the middle and always worked directly on the white ground. Josef talked to me about the mechanics of his technique.

MH: Have you a favorite painting of Albers?

NFW: Sometimes the very pale white, very light Homages to the square move me the most. Sometimes the most vibrant in color do. It depends on the moment.

MH: After more than 35 years at the Albers Foundation is there an exhibition that you feel is most important to you?

NFW: I have a couple of pet exhibitions of Josef's work. One is the one I organized at The Guggenheim in 1988 for his 100th birthday. I was deeply affected by the Mondrian exhibition at The Guggenheim. I was at Columbia College and that show was one of the joyous experiences in my life and the design of the way the museum functions, worked perfectly how you began at the top and worked your way from the figurative etc. When I did an Albers show 21 years later I followed that idea. Start at the top with the chronological work and get to "jewels". Others in Mexico. Milan and I did another show in Perugia, and I am very pleased with the show that is on right now in Madrid.

MH: Did Albers listen to music when he painted?

NFW: No. He did not listen to music. He didn't want any distractions. He had a very compartmentalized life and the only life that was more reduced and simplified even more so, was Piet Mondrian's. And now I am writing Mondrian. The artists we're talking about reduced lives so that they could focus on painting more than anything. Even with Mondrian, I cannot figure out what he did some of the time. In 1924 he finished one painting and did some writing he didn't have an active social life. I know that he liked to dance and that he occasionally saw other people but there are big voids and it's deliberate. They wanted space and quite. Josef loved music. He made some record covers for some record company called Provocative Percussion and he enjoyed doing that. The music he listened to was Bach more than anything else.

MH: Did Josef ever talk to you about Piet Mondrian?

NFW: He told me about one exchange with Mondrian. when Josef was at Black Mountain College Mondrian agreed to send him some work for the students to see. This was around 1942. It was very likely they met through Sidney Janis who represented Josef as well and your father [Harry Holtzman, WCS], whom I met at Sidney Janis Gallery in 1972. He was very nice and terribly friendly. The only story I know of Josef about Mondrian was that he called Mondrian and asked when he was going to send his paintings and Mondrian replied : I am so busy because I keep repainting things and every time I change the width of a line I have to change the way I put down a white and the way I put down a blue. And Josef said to Mondrian: You know that in America they have something called black electrical tape and it comes in different widths and you can try it and use the different widths and then when you get what you want you can paint it. Mondrian called again and said: Albers, why didn't you tell me about that black electrical tape years earlier it would have saved me 20 years of work. Josef and Anni always loved Mondrian's work.

MH: Do you know if the Albers visited Piet Mondrian in New York?

NFW: I do not think they ever visited him in NYC. Josef and Anni only traveled once to Paris.

MH: About your activity of writer, you wrote 14 books from Bauhaus, Le Corbusier, etc. Which one out of all was the most important to you and why?

NFW: I have a weak spot for the book on Balthus because it was the most criticized and when you become attacked for something you become defensive and proud of it.

I am proud of it but I can't say its where my passion is. I prefer it when my own writing is loose. Where I am really allowed to express my deep feelings about art personally.

MH: You are writing a book on Piet Mondrian, without anticipating too much, is it possible to delineate if there is a particular focus on Mondrian's life you are interested in ?

NFW: I am trying to understand in every way possible what he was like as a human being and revealing the depths of his commitment to the making of his art. As far as I can tell he tried to live in a pure world more than almost anyone I know of. Your father wrote that he was the sanest man that ever lived. I am not sure that I agree. I am not sure what exactly what sane is. But I am struck by that impression. That's really such a profoundly interesting observation. And there are times when I know exactly what your father meant. Most people have the lives they wished they had lived or the things they wish they had done Mondrian lead the life he wanted to live and he knew what he wanted. He was about to get married in 1911. He had an engagement party, his friends were there and he broke it off, went to Paris wrote a letter (to Aletta de longh) saying that he had dreamed saying that he was like other people and that he was going to live the way other people lived. But he couldn't and didn't. He made his decision and I find it utterly fascinating. I want the Mondrian book to be everything it should be, totally researched, written correctly, I want to do it totally right.

MH: I understand, so we do not anticipate more and expect to be able to read the book, to conclude I would like to know what did you learn most from Josef and Anni Albers?

NFW: 'Stick to your guns' is what I really learned from them. 'Stick to what you believe in'. 'Life can be incredible'. A life devoted to visual art can provide the greatest joy. I learned from them that Art, and particularly Abstract Art, can give you a sense of richness and balance and equilibrium that are difficult to find in life. For me they exemplified a quality of integrity. They were not interested in going to parties in the Hamptons, name dropping or the social scene. They enjoyed life in a much purer way.

MH: Did Josef and Anni Albers have a 'Golden Rule' that they abided to ?

NFW: They thought that morality and honesty in art were the same as morality and honesty in life. They were his and her different way totally straight forward. They had balls.

MH: What is your 'Golden Rule'?

NFW: I have ideals that I would like to live up to. I would like to also share some of the great, good fortune I've had in life. I'm not talking about just financial but also psychological in spite of a great deal of suffering. My greatest goals are as a parent and trying to do what I can for my kids and my work in Africa. My absolute abiding goal is to get hospital equipment shipped there.

JOOP M. JOOSTEN - AN INTERVIEW

by MADALENA HOLTZMAN

INTRODUCTION:

Listening to the recent Lecture at the RKD – Netherlands Institute for Art History* that Wietse Coppes dedicated to the relevance of the information contained in the letters that Piet Mondrian wrote to my father, the late American artist Harry Holtzman, I immediately go back in my mind, to a few lines written by Dr. Joop M. Joosten some years ago in which, referring to this epistolary material he wrote: "this information" was "so fundamental for a good understanding of the development of Mondrian's work in the New York period."**



Harry Holtzman
Portrait of Piet Mondrian in the studio of Harry Holtzman
New York, 1941-1942



Harry Holtzman
Untitled, 1933
Tempera and casein on canvas
18 ½ x 22 ¾ inch

Between 1932 and the very early 1933 Harry produced a number of works on paper, in an abstract lyrical style, that he titled 'Rococo' (the presence of the title is rather unusual in its production of the time but not casual).



Harry Holtzman
Rococo, 1933
Gouache on paper
19 x 25 ¼ inch

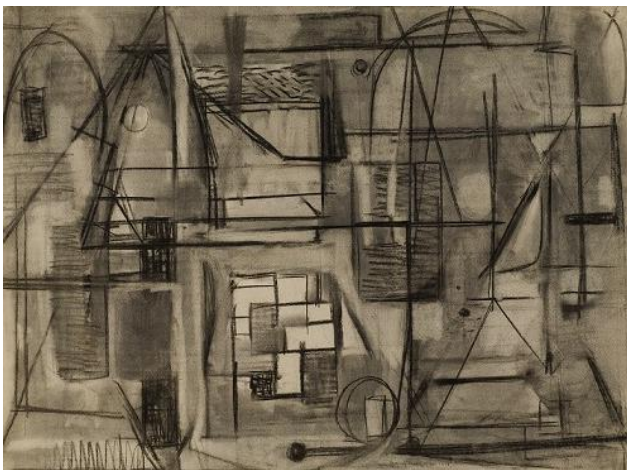


Harry Holtzman
Rococo, 1933
Tempera on paper
25 x 18 inch

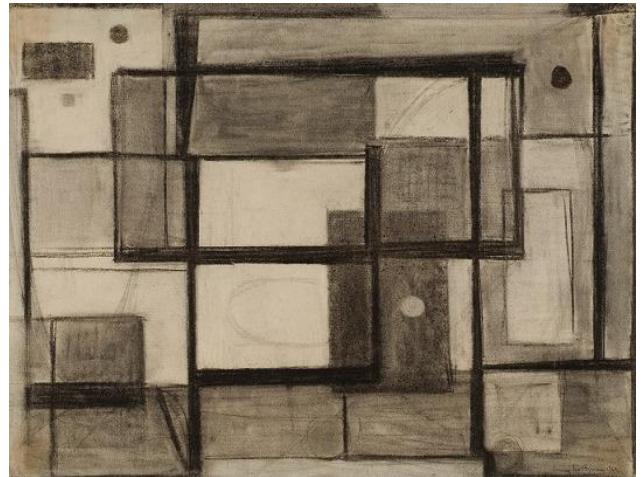
* The lecture *Midnight in Paris - Mondrian and Woody Allen* was held by Wietse Coppes at the RKD on November 28, 2013

** Letter by Joop M. Joosten to Mrs. Sue Davidson Lowe of the Mondrian/Holtzman Trust, Leiden 24 January 1995. Mondrian/Holtzman Trust Archive

In architecture the Rococo style asserted asymmetrical tendencies, breaking the hierarchy of the static, rigid symmetric equilibrium. Never would have been more explanatory title to symbolize the meaning, the intent of his frantic, solitary research that will take him to conceptualize them in a plastically linear style, well summed in his 'Equilibrium of Movement and Countermovement' of 1933.



Harry Holtzman
Untitled, 1933
Charcoal on paper
19 x 25 inch

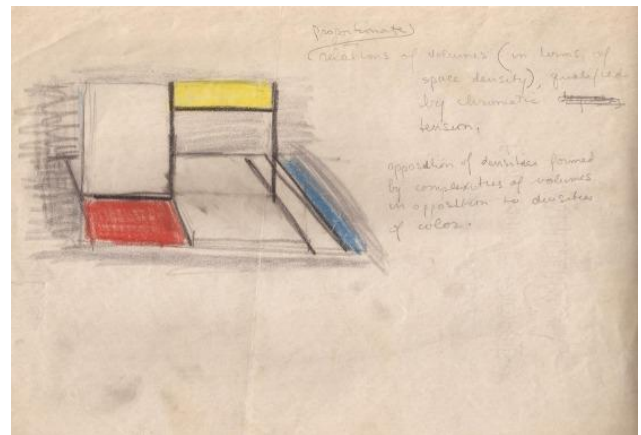


Harry Holtzman
Equilibrium of movement and countermovement, 1933
Charcoal on paper
19 x 25 inch

Unit of intent with the research of the Dutch Master, genesis of his trip to Europe, momentary point of convergence, but not final destination, of a research that will bring Harry in the following decades to decline the neoplastic theory in a new personal plastic iconographic alphabet, which in the domain of three-dimensionality was able, in his own vision, to overcome the division in art between architecture, painting, and sculpture.



Harry Holtzman
Untitled, ca. 1938
Ink and watercolor on paper
Dimensions unknown



Harry Holtzman
Untitled, ca. 1940
Pencil and Oil pastels on paper
13 x 8 inch

My father met Piet Mondrian in Paris in 1934. At that time he was 22 and the Master 62, a dynamic, asymmetrical but balanced and harmonious friendship, still waiting to be told, so close with the art of Mondrian that was the first to recognize the possibility of balance in asymmetry.

In the Netherlands, in the company of Dr. Joop M. Joosten, Hans Janssen, Benno Tempel, Dr. Chris W.N. Stolwijk, Anita Hopmans, Wietse Coppes, Erik Löffler, and Frederique van Steekelenburg-Van der Stelt, I felt at home, and for that I thank you all...

INTERVIEW WITH JOOP M. JOOSTEN HELD ON 28 11 2013 AT THE RKD the Hague
by MADALENA HOLTZMAN

MH = Madalena Holtzman

JJ = Joop M. Joosten

MH: Where did you grow up?

JJ: In Roermond, which is Southeast of the Hague in the Netherlands.

MH: Have you any siblings?

JJ: Yes, I was one of six children, the middle one, I have three brothers and two sisters.

MH: What did your parents do for work?

JJ: My father was a Lawyer. My mother was... my mother (he laughs), she was very socially active, helping poor people and so on.

MH: How did you meet the love of your life?

JJ: Her name is Tiny. She belonged to a group of friends of my sister. There were about 5 girls and I decided to bring them out. She was around the same age. It was not long after the war. I must say I was too young to ask to her to marry me at this time. I was working at the Museum at that time and it was not the moment to ask her to marry.

MH: How many years have you been together?

JJ: We married in 1956

MH: Is she interested in your research?

JJ: No

MH: Do you have any children?

JJ: Yes one son, Rick, who lives in Paris and is an engineer. He is married to a French girl and they've got two girls and a boy.

MH: Your parents were Catholics? Are you a religious person? Did you grow up with religion in your family?

JJ: No

MH: Any strict philosophies?

JJ: No

MH: Do you consider yourself a free spirit?

JJ: I think so. Yes.

MH: Do you have your own Doctrines?

JJ: Yes I have my own ideas. This has nothing to do with it but at the time of the war, for 5 or 6 years, my uncle lived in a building next to the Museum in Roermond. On the block near where we were living in the 1940's there was a row of houses, that were all connected. That was funny, all complicated and connected upper floors and cellars. These houses were built by the Dutch architect P.J.H. Cuypers. It was very nice and interesting. During the war we lived at that place. The Germans bombed regularly...

MH: Tragic times indeed, when and how did you begin to be involved with the Arts?

JJ: I did my studies in Art History at University of Nijmegen, most of my Professors were teaching art from the Middle Ages, especially early Christian art. I studied 17th century history and then became more and more interested in modern ages and modern things; I wanted to go to work in a Museum, and have the works of art in my hands.

When I was studying at Nijmegen University I recall two Professors I had. One was very strict and the other a priest who was different. Both teaching early Christian and Middle Age arts, but the priest had a different approach. He was very, very interesting. As far as University, and what you learn, it all depends completely on your professor and what you make of it.

MH: So you had a love and a passion for art then?

JJ: Yes, and also for history. I had been working in a museum and that's also what I wanted to do. I started working in the Episcopal Museum [Museum Catharijneconvent Utrecht, WCS], and did not know exactly what I wanted to do next.

MH: How did you know that you wanted to do research? how did you get involved and where did you begin your research?

JJ: In Utrecht there were many religious artefacts, but I did little research. Then one day, I became interested in Johan Thorn Prikker, a Symbolist artist, but I never came to publish the work. After Utrecht I worked in the Hague for the Gemeentemuseum and was curator at the RKD for many years, when it was still located in the old building. After that I went to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam where I was in charge of the Department of Scientific Documentation.

MH: How did your interest in Mondrian begin?

JJ: I was asked to assist in a Mondrian exhibition at the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, because the curator had become ill. That was very interesting and it lasted for some months. Before that I had already worked in Utrecht. Some years later, when I was already working at the RKD, I was doing research on Johan Thorn Prikker, and met Robert Welsh. He was researching Mondrian's early career at the RKD and I helped him out and interested him in a lot of things here in Holland. I also introduced him to Thorn Prikker's work, and at the same time I became interested in what he was doing.

MH: So you helped put on the Mondrian exhibition, do you remember in what year?

JJ: 1955 1956 for what I remember.***

MH: How did you begin doing the Catalogue Raisonné?

JJ: Robert Welsh and I decided to work together on the Catalogue Raisonné. The first thing I said to him after we met at the RKD and had discussed Mondrian's oeuvre was 'what we need to do is to write a Catalogue Raisonné on Mondrian. That's what we need!' We worked on the Mondrian catalogue, yes, from the 1960's - 1970's onwards. It was finally published in 1998.

MH: How did you come to meet HH and where did you meet my father?

JJ: In Holland but I also went to his home in the USA

MH: I am curious to know of how the connection with my father was made

JJ: Oh, you ask me things from so long ago, I think that I had contacted him and he also knew I was a friend of Robert Welsh. He came to Holland for his research on Mondrian and together with Robert Welsh I visited your father in his house in Lyme, Connecticut.

*** The exhibition *Mondriaan* was held at the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag from February 10 – April 12, 1955

MH: You worked on the Two Mondrian Sketchbooks publication...****

JJ: Yes

MH: Do you feel that your life changed when you made the CR ? Did it change you as a person?

JJ: I did what I liked to do

MH: It made you happy?

JJ: Yes, when I was working on the Johan Thorn Prikker research, I became interested in his life. I wanted to get an idea of these things he did and where he was living at that time. For me this was the same with Mondrian. Maybe it's the consequences of working at RKD [because of the documentation that is collected there, WCS].

MH: The story of the RKD the Mondrian CR was born here

JJ: I also liked working at Episcopal Museum in Utrecht. I liked to hold things in my hands, paintings.

MH: You felt that when you held items in your hand, you had a direct connection with the artist?

JJ: Yes something like that. At the Episcopal Museum they had a lot of sculptures from the Middle Ages and to have it in your hands...

MH: Have you done any artwork yourself?

JJ: No

MH: So your art was the "art of research" and writing is an art form. Are you a collector?

JJ: No

MH: Researching is like being an Archeologist of sorts...

JJ: Yes. As I worked nearly twenty years at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, research was required. I had to do the inventory also writing about the paintings and documenting the collection (the early Mondrian's were painted in Amsterdam).

MH: How long did it take to complete the CR of Mondrian?

JJ: Twenty years or more

MH: So you were very busy

JJ: I had my work at the Stedelijk Museum and I was doing this in my free time. Yes I was very busy.

MH: What was your recollection of Michel Seuphor?

JJ: I did not meet him that often, only three or four times. My French was not that good.

MH: What is your favorite Mondrian painting? Or period? Research period that you preferred?

JJ: I like his work right from the beginning and am fascinated by his evolution. I cannot say I have a preference for one period in particular. I think it is all very interesting.

MH: Do you believe that Mondrian listened to music when painting?

JJ: I don't know, maybe. It's not impossible to think.

**** Joop M. Joosten & Robert P. Welsh, *Two Mondrian's Sketchbooks: 1912-1914, (with a Preface by Harry Holtzman)*, Meulenhoff Amsterdam, 1969

MH: Did you talk to Seuphor about that?

JJ: No

MH: In your opinion, what influenced the last work Victory Boogie Woogie? was that inspired because of Jazz Boogie Woogie?

JJ: He was very interested in Jazz both in Paris and New York and he had a Gramophone player.

MH: What are some of your other passions?

JJ: What I like most is Art History. Besides that I like working in the garden with plants and flowers.

MH: Do you believe to have made an innovation inside the RKD?

JJ: When I worked at RKD my idea was to bring together lots of material making a collection and a connection of the material by presenting what was happening at the moment not what had happened in the (recent) past. I made a calendar for all the current exhibitions, I invited other institutions, journals, dealers and collectors. I was looking to change the way in which people could find out what was happening in the modern art world to keep it in the present. At that time the RKD was mainly about 17th century Dutch paintings. I wanted to bring in modern art and had published by the Ministry of Art every two weeks what was happening with regards to education and research in the Netherlands.

This list became very long, and contained very many articles with exhibitions and such of modern art (...) from 1970's to 1990's. What I had done was revolutionary. My idea was : if you want to know what is going on in the arts, you have to be in the present, you have to do it now.
