

## Brooklyn Museum

Joan: So, Duncan, we met in 1986 at the Brooklyn Museum.

Duncan: That's right.

Joan: Do you recall the circumstances of that meeting, and why you were here?

Duncan: I certainly do. I was here for a site visit, a site tour, which was being led by you, because we were one of the short listed firms for the Brooklyn Museum competition to create a master plan for the future development of the Museum. And one of the first things was to come out here with the other competitors and to take a tour of the building and the grounds, and Joan led that tour, and it was the first of many times that she yelled at me. We got off to a good start. She told everyone not to touch the model, and I did touch the model, and she yelled at me, so fair, fair enough. Yeah. So that was the first visit, first time we met.

Joan: The front entrance.

Duncan: Uh huh, yeah, yeah.

Joan: The epitome of all of this work, the crowning glory of all this work, and I remember very distinctly something you said to me, our first meeting with Arnold Lehman, when he took on his directorship, and we'd been working on this project for how many years by then, fifteen plus years.

Duncan: A long time already, yeah.

Joan: And we sat with Arnold and I think I asked him the question, or you might have. I can't remember which one of us asked the question, "What do you want for the visitor, the first time when they see this new entrance?" Do you remember what he said?

Duncan: I don't. Tell me.

Joan: He said, "I want them to want to come back before they even enter the building. As soon as they see it, I want them." Then you know what he said?

Duncan: Yes. I do remember that.

Joan: But what it brought home to me was this whole idea of the individual being able to identify with the Museum.

Duncan: The Brooklyn Museum was better known in Europe than it was to many of the people who lived right here in this community. It had a kind of fortress quality sitting in the middle of a community which obviously had changed over the years, and it was quite clear that a lot of that community didn't feel at home, or didn't feel comfortable coming to this building. And that was something that the director, Arnold Lehman, was very interested in reversing that. And it was a long process getting to a solution that we felt was right, and would be successful, and was also on the deepest level appropriate for the building. In that solution, as in a lot of solutions, it has to be right on a couple of levels, so that one was right from the point of view of geometry. You know, what was generated was generated from the center of the Central Pavilion. It was right metaphorically on several levels, because it was transparent, and so it was achieving its role of opening the building up to the public, making the building visible to the public. It

was right on a kind of geometric and metaphoric level because in lieu of putting back the classical stairs, we created a kind of stepped approach to the building, with the form of the skylight. It was right on a kind of sort of civic metaphoric level, because we provided a platform facing the street, a stepped platform which was like an enormous over-scaled Brooklyn stoop, looking out on the street, and this great public space. So although to many people it was a startling form to put on the front of the building, it just seemed, at the end of that process, that it was doing so many things correctly, both visually, and programmatically, and formally, that it was the right solution.

Joan: You finally convinced us to leave the piers exposed.

Duncan: Inside, yes.

Joan: Under the glass.

Duncan: Exactly, yeah.

Joan: When you walk into the lobby, in the new lobby.

Duncan: Yeah. New lobby, and yet to see the history of the form and the technology of that building was tremendously important to us. The power of seeing that, you know, support formed there, as you walked into the lobby, as you walked into this very glass and steel structure, and then to see this very strong masonry force supporting this building. The front of this building was, you know, a wonderful thing. I think it is a wonderful thing.