



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

Oral history interview with Inslee Hopper,  
1981 July 28

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Inslee Hopper on July 28, 1981. The interview was conducted in East Haddam, Connecticut by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Interview

ROBERT BROWN: Perhaps we could begin to tell about anything that may have been relevant to your involvement in the arts in your childhood or in your education up to the point where you were involved in the 30s.

INSLEE HOPPER: I was from childhood interested in art and in a family that encouraged it, although there were no artists in the family. I was in the Department of Art and Archeology at Princeton, graduated in 1930 -

ROBERT BROWN: Was that a fairly large department then?

INSLEE HOPPER: Smallish, I suppose, two dozen at the most. But I also took all the architectural courses available as someone who was not in the school of Architecture, which was my prime interest.

ROBERT BROWN: The big name that I can think of at Princeton in art history then was C. R. Morey.

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, he was the head of the department of Art and Archeology and I studied with him. He was my guide and mentor, really.

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like to work with?

INSLEE HOPPER: Wonderfully precise, and of course exceedingly knowledgeable in his field, and in the whole history of art field. He could not tolerate mistakes, and he paid me what I thought was one of the greatest compliments at the time because I preferred to overlook the little barb at the end. He read a paper of mine and he said, "Hopper, you write with practically a pure Attic detachment. But unfortunately the Attic detachment extends to facts." [laughter] Which I liked! I preferred the complimentary part rather than the rest.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you quite studious there, as you look back?

INSLEE HOPPER: It depended entirely on how much something interested me. For instance, Albert Mathias Friend, Professor Friend, who was one of the great minds that I was ever exposed to, and his course "The Northern Renaissance," which was considered one of the most difficult courses, aside from Science, offered at Princeton, and I got top honors in that course and became a very great friend of Professor Friend's. So it's been a great regret of mine that no one has done anything about publishing his lectures, which one had to take, not knowing shorthand or anything else but one had to invent a method of getting every word down from his lectures and writing it oneself and memorizing it.

ROBERT BROWN: Really, because he would expect you to recall -

INSLEE HOPPER: He expected you to know the whole damn thing and then he expected you to think. It was an absolutely brilliant mental exercise and a great stimulation, and I know of no one who ever took his course who didn't say "my life was never the same after taking Bert Friend's course in "The Northern Renaissance." It was the Renaissance of a great many people. A great, great teacher.

ROBERT BROWN: Were these men both European-trained? Because art history was fairly in its infancy.

INSLEE HOPPER: Yes, they had trained at various places in Europe, at Athens and so forth. Morey, of course, was a Classics scholar. And actually it was through Professor Morey that I landed in New York in the arts, because Morey was not an ivory tower, I mean he had contacts with the rest of the world. And when I started job-hunting in the Depression, he sent me first to Professor Sachs at Harvard because I thought I wanted to go into museum work, and Professor Sachs said "delighted to have you but prerequisite is to take my course in museum work." And I was ready to do something and not to go on to graduate study at that particular point.

I spent two years in Europe after I graduated from Princeton, my "wanderjahre" and I sat in on courses at the Sorbonne and University of Zurich and several other places, trying to get languages as well as listening in where I wanted to. And seeing more of the things that I wanted to see - I'd been to Europe before but this was a serious looksee.

ROBERT BROWN: Was your family quite supportive of your interest in going in –

INSLEE HOPPER: Very much so, yes, although by that time I had no family, my parents were dead and I was on my own. But when I came back, job-hunting because the Depression really hit me – this was '32 – at that time, I went back down to confer with Professor Morey about a museum course and he rather sniffed at that kind of training. He said, “If you have the knowledge, you don’t need to know how to arrange things in a museum by going to Professor Sachs but you’re more valuable in other ways.”

But he then gave me a note to Forbes Watson, the publisher of *The Arts*. I went to see Forbes and was hired. Forbes was phasing out *The Arts* at that time because the angel for its publication had been Mrs. Whitney, and she had started her Museum at that point and had announced that she thought the Museum could do its own publishing. Therefore there would be no more money forthcoming for *The Arts* magazine. And Forbes decided to try to appeal to a larger public and started publishing *Arts Weekly*. He took me in out of the cold and within two weeks he made me assistant editor, which rather bowled me over –

ROBERT BROWN: Now, that was quite a different publication from *The Arts*?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, it was a weekly, and it covered the general field of the arts. Primarily painting and sculpture but also theater, music, dance, et cetera, and we had a very interesting group of people writing for us. Irving Kolodin did the music, Margaret Anderson wrote for the art, and John Anderson, her husband, wrote the theater criticism. And there were a number of people contributing to the art criticism. Forbes of course wrote the editorials, and I started writing for them also. And it was a wonderful, very exciting experience.

ROBERT BROWN: What was Forbes Watson like to work with, or for?

INSLEE HOPPER: Oh, Forbes was an absolutely great man. He’s a very important influence in my life and a wonderful wit with a very keen eye; and pugnacious – he loved to fight with various people in the art world. He had a knockdown dragout with Barnes, for instance, he had a knockdown dragout with Stieglitz –

ROBERT BROWN: Were you involved with some of that?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, no, I came in after that to pick up the pieces. I went to a show at Stieglitz’s and introduced myself as covering the show for *The Arts* for Forbes Watson, and I got a reception which would have [laughing] chilled a bird there.

ROBERT BROWN: You really never got to know Stieglitz?

INSLEE HOPPER: Not really, no. I went back to Forbes and said, “What is this? He doesn’t seem to be very friendly toward us.” And Forbes said, “It’s not you, he and I are not exactly palsy, we don’t see eye to eye on a lot of things.”

ROBERT BROWN: What were the essential differences as you recall?

INSLEE HOPPER: I don’t know, I think – Forbes disliked anybody who was grandstanding and trying to promote with an eye on the public, and of course Stieglitz was primarily a promoter. Forbes simply disapproved of a lot of the people that Stieglitz promoted. He didn’t think Georgia O’Keeffe was one of the greatest artists that ever lived, she being promoted by Stieglitz. He allowed Sheeler and Demuth and some of those a bit but not what Stieglitz was trying to present them as. I never found Forbes completely wrong, I think he certainly went out of his way to fight about certain things which were not worthy of him but he had a lot to be said on his side.

ROBERT BROWN: Whom did he promote? Do you recall his promoting anyone or was he even-handed?

INSLEE HOPPER: He was very, very even-handed. I’ll tell you one person he did promote – very cutely, his wife Nan Watson, and that little watercolor upstairs, one of her watercolors, and she did absolutely delightful, fresh, technically some of them brilliant, watercolors of flowers, and was a most charming person. She’d studied with Chase; she was really a still life painter, I never saw a figure piece that she ever did. She would have exhibitions at Kraushaar’s, and Forbes would always give a great boost to Nan Watson. This, I think [laughing] is quite justified.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you get fairly close to him while you were at the magazine?

INSLEE HOPPER: Very close to Forbes and also to Nan. And then it was through Forbes when *Arts Weekly* had to fold, we just didn’t make it financially –

ROBERT BROWN: A problem of advertising or circulation?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, we were getting about as much advertising as an art magazine could expect in those

days. And when we folded there was much conferring going on between Forbes and Henry Luce. Luce was thinking of buying the name of the magazine, *Arts Weekly*, and then finally it fell through, he didn't, and he bought *Life* instead. Forbes then went to Washington because Ned Bruce had then started the PWA, Public Works of Art, project.

ROBERT BROWN: Before we get to Washington, may I ask you: you mentioned earlier, perhaps before you went to work with Watson, you'd gone to meet with Francis Henry Taylor to discuss what you would be doing. How did that come about?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, that's when I was looking around for a job, when I went up to see Professor Sachs, because Morey had given me a note to Francis Taylor first, thinking there might be a job in the museum there. So I went to Worcester and met Francis Taylor, who couldn't have been more charming, and he said the usual in those days - "Well, it just happens I'm driving to Boston today to see Professor Sachs and why don't you come along with me. You should meet him and let's get his advice. I really think you ought to take his course if you want to go into museum work."

So up we went, and he amused me so much on the way because I could see his attitude toward things, which was certainly not exactly reverent, he didn't bow down to any of the accepted gods at that point. He deliberated more with Professor Sachs, the three of us had lunch together, and I was very much interested in and impressed by it all but I just didn't want to do it that way.

In later years I saw Henry Taylor, he had of course been director of the Pennsylvania Museum, and I asked him if one of the stories I'd heard about him was true. [laughs] One of the reasons he left there he said was because they were so goddamn stuffy. It used to be a custom or a regulation in the Museum that one day a week was ladies day at the Museum so that the ladies could go freely and see the classic sculptures, peer behind the fig leaves, [both laughing] and [last phrase obliterated by barking dog].

Then he said that one of the reasons he left this stuffy world was because he installed Kotex dispensers in the Museum's ladies' johns, and this absolutely horrified the board of directors. I mean, this sort of thing should not be recognized. [laughter] And Henry said, "Oh, but I was thinking of putting a dispenser for condoms in the men's room." Well, [more laughter] this didn't work.

ROBERT BROWN: But [laughing] he ended up on his feet, of course.

INSLEE HOPPER: And so he did, rather, at the Metropolitan. And thank God, I mean, compared to what's happened at the Metropolitan since, I find the ilk of Henry vastly more interesting.

ROBERT BROWN: He was a fellow, then, that you greatly admired from the beginning.

INSLEE HOPPER: Oh, all the contacts I had with him were really rather limited. He used to come to Washington, to the office there occasionally. We used to have a marvelous time at the office, luncheon parties were the usual thing there, Ned Bruce entertained at luncheon almost every day, and a very fascinating bunch of people.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, when *Arts Weekly* folded, Forbes Watson bounced around to another job, or he was immediately -

INSLEE HOPPER: Forbes was writing for various things but he got me together with Juliana Force and Mrs. Whitney, and I was employed by the Whitney Museum for about a year and a half to simply go around and look up sculptors, check on their work and report to them on the American sculptors.

ROBERT BROWN: They were thinking of people they might collect?

INSLEE HOPPER: Right, and hoping that I would find people they didn't know about that would be worthy of notice, and also people they weren't perhaps in touch with to note progress in their work and that sort of thing. Which was great fun and very interesting.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you remember some of those whom you went to see?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, you name them, the bunch in those days I covered a great many of them in over a year.

ROBERT BROWN: Lachaise, for example, did you go to him?

INSLEE HOPPER: Lachaise I didn't know. He was too well known and never out of the limelight.

ROBERT BROWN: What about Flanagan?

INSLEE HOPPER: Flanagan yes, and Bill Zorach, and oh, it's hard to recall all of them now but a great many of

them.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you get to know Zorach a bit?

INSLEE HOPPER: Yes, I got to know Bill and Marguerite Zorach fairly well.

ROBERT BROWN: What were they like?

INSLEE HOPPER: Rather ponderous, both of them. We had no simpatico meeting of minds. A very amusing incident with them, though. I'm digressing -

ROBERT BROWN: Please do.

INSLEE HOPPER: There was a party at the time the National Gallery opened, a party at the Brazilian Embassy. The Brazilian Ambassador's wife was a sculptress and a very interesting one, a most charming woman and a patroness of the arts, and she gave a luncheon party I guess either the day before or the day after the opening. And the guest of honor was Mrs. [presumably Cornelius?] Vanderbilt. Bill and Marguerite were there, I was there, and I was talking with them. I knew some of the Washington people, some of the diplomatic group there but I didn't particularly want to spend any time gassing with them as one did at parties. And Mme. Martinez came over and she said, "Oh, I want to present you to Mrs. Vanderbilt." And Bill Zorach said, "Well, I've met her." She said, "Well, do come over." And Bill Zorach said, "If she wants to meet me, she can come over here." Rather heavy. [both laughing] Later on that evening the charming diplomat's wife guided Mrs. Vanderbilt over in our direction and we were presented as if to royalty. Zorach said, "I think we've met" and Mrs. Vanderbilt said, "Oh yes, I think we met at that museum my cousin is running down in the Village." End of that scene. [laughter]

ROBERT BROWN: When Watson, then, was asked by Bruce to come in on the PWAP, in the very beginning, a brief project -

INSLEE HOPPER: It was very brief but it was also so damn speedy it was an incredible example of how Ned could organize a thing, conceive it and organize it.

ROBERT BROWN: Had you met Ned Bruce before this?

INSLEE HOPPER: No, I had never met Ned until six or eight months after I went to Washington to work in the section of Building [ ] and Sculpture, as it was then, although Ned and Peggy Bruce were very close friends of an uncle and aunt of mine, although I'd never met the Bruces through them.

ROBERT BROWN: Your family was from where?

INSLEE HOPPER: New Jersey. Aunt Harriet was a childhood friend from California of Peggy Bruce, which was the connection. But neither was there any nepotism in my getting the job in any way because my aunt and uncle didn't even know I was going to Washington nor did anybody in Washington know that I had the connection.

ROBERT BROWN: Watson went to Washington on the PWAP -

INSLEE HOPPER: Then it was eliminated, and Ned conceived in the meantime this idea of the Treasury Department allocating one percent of the cost of each building for art and got Mr. Roosevelt's approval of the thing. It was pushed through, so they started in - Forbes went over to it with Ned. Olin Dows had worked with them in Washington. Then Ed Rowan, was brought in, exactly on whose recommendation I don't know. He brought a knowledge of all the Midwestern art and artists - he had come from Iowa - and a large personal acquaintance among them. Then Forbes brought me down from New York particularly to handle the sculpture and liaison with the painting section and the architects.

ROBERT BROWN: This was the section of Painting and Sculpture from the Treasury Department?

INSLEE HOPPER: Right, in the Public Buildings Administration.

ROBERT BROWN: What had they to do? You've mentioned to me that Ned Bruce headed this, and that he got the government to hire artists rather than simply to put them on relief.

INSLEE HOPPER: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that a major distinction in those days?

INSLEE HOPPER: This had nothing to do with relief whatsoever. It was simply Ned's thinking through his experience with the Public Works of Art Project and getting the artists to work, and the artists in turn do a benefit to the country. Ned conceived the idea of worming in on public buildings construction and the allotments from

Congress. And of course there had been architectural sculpture and some murals in federal buildings from the beginning, but it was almost entirely by favoritism or political pull.

ROBERT BROWN: How was he going to –

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, that was the brilliant thing that Ned did, to make it an anonymous competitive thing, the works to be judged by a jury of peers.

ROBERT BROWN: To be able to do that, did he have to get some powerful people to push aside the patronage system?

INSLEE HOPPER: They had to fight that anyway, right straight along, practically every day. However many members of Congress there are, however many Senators, they all had their little projects, and Ned handled that brilliantly, too. But he had the wholehearted agreement and backing of Roosevelt, which was the great, great open sesame and it saved our necks so many times. But Roosevelt went along completely with the idea of not handing it out as just patronage but having it competitive.

ROBERT BROWN: What was Bruce like? What was your first impression of him?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, unfortunately, Bruce had had a stroke right after his strenuous work with the PWAP. He had been in Washington several years before that, lobbying first for Philippine independence and also lobbying for the Philippine sugar interests. Very, very strenuous work. All told it resulted in the stroke which paralyzed his left side. So Ned was physically only a diminished man when I first met him, but absolutely undiminished in his mind and his enthusiasm and spirit and drive. And he also kept on painting through those years in a very limited way with his one hand. Not much time for it, either. He used to take most of his summer off, either goes to Vermont or Virginia or West Virginia and he'd spend most of the summer painting.

Ned handled the whole political thing so brilliantly. A Senator would hear that there was a courthouse going up in his state and there were to be a mural and some sculptures, so he would call the office or if he knew Ned would drop around and say, "Now, So-and-So and So-and-So, they're the ones that have the job, they're friends of mine." And Ned would say, "Yes, I've heard of one or the other" whether he had or not, and "Very good. And by all means, where can we send a copy of the competition to them, be glad to have them enter the competition. Winning is awarded by a jury, with designs submitted in anonymous competition." How could they argue with him? I mean, he had them right then and there.

ROBERT BROWN: Because that was the democratic procedure.

INSLEE HOPPER: Sure, sure.

ROBERT BROWN: When did you come to Washington?

INSLEE HOPPER: I went down in 1935.

ROBERT BROWN: There was still a Painting and Sculpture section at that time.

INSLEE HOPPER: '39, I think, was the change. And it didn't really mean a damn thing except that that was another one of Ned's bright ideas, of getting some publicity and some attention in Washington and so forth. The section of Painting and Sculpture was rechristened section of Fine Arts.

ROBERT BROWN: When you came down in '35, what was your first job?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, to handle the liaison with the architects. And then to handle all the architectural sculpture.

ROBERT BROWN: Were the architects selected a broad spectrum of architects?

INSLEE HOPPER: Some of them were private architects left over from the old days of patronage. And then there was a group of consulting architects hired by Public Buildings in Treasury to design there, and those were mostly the ones I worked with because they did the major part of the work. But the outside architects were the ones who were doing the biggest buildings. And some of them went for the idea, a lot of them just didn't want any murals or any sculpture. Or if they did want sculpture, they wanted it done by some of the hacks that they had used before and who had been producing the so-called "architectural sculpture." And they were a little bit difficult to handle.

ROBERT BROWN: Was part of your job to try to ensure that there would be room for sculpture and murals?

INSLEE HOPPER: Absolutely. That's why I would consult with the architects in the designing phase and urge them to do it.

ROBERT BROWN: Were they fairly amenable?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, some were and some weren't. And then also the problem came up that an architect would think "Oh yes, it would be nice to have murals in the lobby" - well, the prime example to me, and I cannot recall his name, was the architect of the Cosmopolitan Club on Park Avenue, a very ladylike club, and he designed the Bronx Post Office, which is rather elegant for a post office. The color of the marbles was very carefully selected and the detailing of the capitals and pilasters and so forth was very, very important.

ROBERT BROWN: His work was very elegant. [laughs]

INSLEE HOPPER: And then there were these spaces all the way around the lobby. There was leftover money, oddly enough, in the budget for that building, so we got a fairly good hunk, I think a little bit more than our one percent -

ROBERT BROWN: And that one percent was not mandated but requested, wasn't it?? Was that in the law?

INSLEE HOPPER: It was mandated by the Secretary of the Treasury. It was administrative, it wasn't law. So, we had a competition and Ben Shahn won the competition. Well, the real catastrophe of this architect meeting Ben Shahn and seeing what he had done and seeing his walls [laughing] punched through by Ben Shahn's paintings, well, it was absolutely wild.

ROBERT BROWN: What had Shahn done at that point? Had he just done the Sacco and Vanzetti, or -?

INSLEE HOPPER: Yeah, sure.

ROBERT BROWN: And this architect was quite a conservative man by comparison?

INSLEE HOPPER: Exceedingly. He used pink marble [laughs] and lobby you don't exactly expect Ben Shahn to appear on the walls. The architect never could stand murals and he was never reconciled to it....

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INSLEE HOPPER: [continuing]....but we finally got the thing calmed down. At least he didn't dare take it to the press and make it a public affair, because he was employed by the Treasury and that would have been rather bad for his job.

ROBERT BROWN: Bread and butter.

INSLEE HOPPER: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, had Shahn been selected through competition?

INSLEE HOPPER: Oh yes, anonymous competition. Of course anybody who knew anything about painting at all could spot Shahn's style, didn't need to know his name.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this the first you'd known of him?

INSLEE HOPPER: I met him after he'd won that competition the first time, yes. And we became friends.

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like?

INSLEE HOPPER: Ben was very fascinating to me. As I recall, I'm quite sure that he had, studied to be a rabbi. He'd given that up, he was always interested in art, he'd done fascinating things, to me, such as working on a ship and going ashore in North Africa and disguising himself as an Arab, because Jews of course have to wear certain clothes there, a uniform practically, just because he wanted to see Arabs from their own point of view; learned some Arabic. And we had a most interesting relationship - we were not close friends at all but I enjoyed him and he enjoyed me. I don't think he quite knew what to make of me, I mean why I was doing this or where I came from or where I was going or whatever, because we were from two rather different worlds.

ROBERT BROWN: He was puzzled as to why you would be involved in such projects?

INSLEE HOPPER: And why I would have a very liberal point of view in wanting to do what I could for the cause, the artists.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you believe quite a bit in the cause that you -

INSLEE HOPPER: Oh definitely. I mean, you couldn't work with Ned Bruce and Forbes without believing in it, because they were so dedicated. You wouldn't have lasted there, you wouldn't have had a job with them,

because it was that kind of setup.

ROBERT BROWN: What were they dedicated to in your –

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, Ned's visions were large and to help artists of course, but that was just by the way, really. He wanted the American public to have access to art and art to come to the public.

Maybe jumping ahead a bit but to get into his concept of the Smithsonian Gallery of Art, which was to serve as a Luxemburg to the Louvre – because at that time the National Gallery accepted no American painters unless they were long since dead and no living painters, actually. And there was no “national collection of fine arts” at that time, it was not housed anywhere, I don't think it had even assembled or called that. But Ned wanted a repository, with money for acquisition and also where people could give. His idea was that it would be a collection much vaster than could be shown in a museum in Washington. But it would be a circulating library of painting and sculpture.

He had hoped eventually to have a room built into each federal building erected in the United States which could be used as sort of an assembly room, an auditorium, a gallery, for whatever community purpose but primarily, from his point of view, to make it possible to have these traveling exhibitions coming from the Smithsonian in Washington all over the country. The number of letters we got from people when a mural would go up in a post office in some town in the Middle West from people who had never seen an actual painting before! And then the very excited ones where the artist would work on the wall and they would see a real live artist creating a work of art. This was part of Ned's plan, he wanted to get it all going and get it together.

ROBERT BROWN: And you, meanwhile, had to work with these architects who were largely conservative, I suppose.

INSLEE HOPPER: Very conservative, all of them.

ROBERT BROWN: Who were some of the others you worked with – on the Bronx Post Office you mentioned – and were Shahn's murals well received once they were installed?

INSLEE HOPPER: Oh, critically yes, very much so. I could mention names of some of those architects, I don't think anybody would ever have heard of them or has since. They don't really matter, there was no great distinction that came from any of them. Most of the better work was done by young guys just out of architectural school who worked for them, who were responsible usually for the design ideas; and the rest was just for getting it through the mill. Same old story. No, they were, I'd say, rather unimportant.

But the important ones, and what could have been a great turning point in federal architecture and in Washington architecture was if the Smithsonian had been built. Because the design was won by the Saarinen and Swanson their brother-in-law, and it's a brilliant, brilliant building. This happened of course at the beginning of World War II, 1938-39, so all that died aborning. But the jury for that competition, I may add, was Mies van der Rohe, Gropius; Richard Hudnut was the adviser of the competition, and John Mabee of the Museum of Modern Art. It could have created a great change in Washington.

When I came back after years in the Air Force overseas, theoretically the government had to give me back the same job I had left. Well, the job didn't exist, the section no longer existed, the whole thing was gone with Ned's death and the War. I thought seriously of going down there just on my own and trying to promote the Smithsonian, but it was not exactly a simpatico atmosphere at that stage of Harry Truman in the White House and –

ROBERT BROWN: No, not much interest in the –

INSLEE HOPPER: I didn't know anybody in the Smithsonian then, none of the luminaries who have come in since were there then. Mr. Frederick Delano, the President's uncle with whom we worked very carefully on the Smithsonian Gallery, was dead; he would have been an entree.

ROBERT BROWN: He played quite a role in this? He was the one that pushed the Smithsonian idea in 1939?

INSLEE HOPPER: He helped. Ned used anybody that he could in high places and Mr. Delano was a charming old gentleman, very civilized, and he was very sympathetic with what we were doing and with what Ned wanted to do and very willing to help in anyway. A number of things would come up with the President, the President would have the time nor would he have enough interest in that field, and he'd say, “Talk to Uncle Fred about this. I'm sure he'll be helpful.” And he always was.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you ever meet with Roosevelt?

INSLEE HOPPER: Oh yes, several times. And with Mrs. Roosevelt many times, she used to come to the office

quite often, sometimes for lunch. She took a very definite interest in our work, she and Eleanor Morgenthau.

ROBERT BROWN: Were they both fairly easy people to talk with about these things?

INSLEE HOPPER: Oh, tremendously, amazingly. I first met the President with Ned when the Hyde Park murals were to be done. Olin Dows was out of the section at that time and he had submitted anonymous sketches in a competition and the jury picked from each competition aside from the winner X-number of designs and say, "We think that this artist is worthy of being given a small job somewhere else."

So, on that basis we could give Olin Dows a job. Franklin knew about it, and of course they were neighbors and friends in Rhinebeck, and he said he would like Olin to do the murals in the Hyde Park Post Office. That's when I first met them when we got together in the oval office to show him the sketches and discuss it. And he gave notes of certain historic things that he wanted brought into the murals, being of course very immersed, of course, in the local history and very knowledgeable about it.

ROBERT BROWN: Of course, these unfortunately could be just small interludes in his busy routine.

INSLEE HOPPER: Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: But he was impressive in his knowledge or intention of what he wanted.

INSLEE HOPPER: Oh, very much so. He gave a reception buffet for Ned at the White House at which Ned lectured in East Room. Another time he gave a dinner party for Ned and Peggy - oh, this is an aside, it's absolutely heaven - Ned and Peggy were living in New York when Roosevelt was Governor, and Peggy was seated next to him at a big dinner party. Halfway through dinner she turned and looked at her neighbor's placecard and she said, "Good God, your name is Roosevelt. Why, you talk like a Democrat!" [hearty laughter] Oblivious to the fact that he was the Democratic governor, of course. Roosevelt absolutely loved it, coming from the beautiful woman Peggy was, she could get away with it.

But that's beside the point. He also at one time, and this was just before the War, in 1941, invited Ned to come to a Cabinet meeting. He sent word that things were sort of easy that week and would Ned like to educate the Cabinet in matters cultural? So Ned and I went, I to help Ned, and he was seated on Roosevelt's left. Ned lectured the Cabinet on what we were doing in the Section of Fine Arts. Roosevelt introduced Ned saying, "I don't have to introduce Ned Bruce to most of you because you already know him, but Ned is here today to give you some culture. It's about time [laughing] you had some!" That was a very happy occasion.

ROBERT BROWN: By then, however, funding was going toward other things than culture, was it?

INSLEE HOPPER: Not really, not for us, I mean right until the end we still had that. It was just that everything went kerflooie, there was no more building being done, so therefore we were wiped out. It was just a question of - [inaudible name] stayed on during the War finishing up the contracts, the details of that, office work -

ROBERT BROWN: The political and financial support was there, it was just that the building -

INSLEE HOPPER: It was just there were no buildings, therefore we didn't have any money.

ROBERT BROWN: You'd pretty much done the buildings that had been built.

INSLEE HOPPER: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: I wanted to ask....So your specialty from the time you came was working with the architects on architectural sculpture projects

INSLEE HOPPER: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: - and Ned Bruce had already set up a system of regional competitions -

INSLEE HOPPER: Right. And national competitions.

ROBERT BROWN: - and he turned over, then, to you that that concerned sculpture.

INSLEE HOPPER: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: They had in place, as I understand it, regional committees that would get this sort of thing going. They would select the juries and the like?

INSLEE HOPPER: No. All that was done in Washington. The regional committees were in the Public Works of Art

Project, the earlier thing, when he got everything going in a month. He had his committee chairman within 36 hours by phone or by telegram. Most were museum directors or critics all over the country.

ROBERT BROWN: But from the time you came along, what was first called the Section of Painting and Sculpture under Treasury, and then the Section of Fine Arts from I think 1938 on, it was a more centralized operation; at least in the Treasury Department?

INSLEE HOPPER: Entirely centralized, yes. We sent out a monthly bulletin to anybody who wished to be put on the list, I've forgotten now how many thousand it was but it was considerable, and that gave all the details of the competitions. For further details of the competitions, the inquirers wrote in and wanted all the specifics.

ROBERT BROWN: Would you prepare the bulletin?

INSLEE HOPPER: That was done by, well, all of us would contribute to it - Forbes Watson did most of the public relations and the writing.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that his main job with Ned Bruce?

INSLEE HOPPER: Right. And he would also keep an eye on the bulletin.

ROBERT BROWN: So that would go out, and then people would write in -

INSLEE HOPPER: Get the details of the competitions. And they were usually allowed a fairly extensive time, I mean it would be a number of months anyway to prepare their designs.

ROBERT BROWN: The first sculpture competition you were involved with was for the Postmaster General's office?

INSLEE HOPPER: The very first one, in '35, was not this kind of a competition. To get things going in the very beginning a group of sculptors were taken from lists submitted by critics, museum directors and so forth, and the top - I've forgotten how many, maybe 20 - were taken from the list and invited to compete for I believe there were ten jobs. They submitted models to a certain scale toward niches. The subject matter was no prescribed, it was to do with the Post Office; suggestions were made but they could do whatever they wanted. That was the competition that Heinz Warneke won, I mean one of the ten jobs.

ROBERT BROWN: And the jury was - what?

INSLEE HOPPER: I've forgotten who really was on that jury, it was half academic and half slightly more enlightened.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you pick the jury, pretty much?

INSLEE HOPPER: The jury had already been picked when I got there.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that a sensitive matter they had to balance between the conservatives and the modernists?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, it was always a problem, because you never knew which direction you were going to get a barrage from. We'd get criticisms from an artists group in saying, "there's no point in going into the competition because it's already thrown by a jury so goddamn conservative that they wouldn't look at us." And the conservatives would say the same thing in the other direction. So it was a question of trying to balance the juries. And, also, even within the balance to pick people that we knew would be fair-minded and fairly objective.

ROBERT BROWN: Who were some of those, do you recall, who turned out to be good jurors?

INSLEE HOPPER: I was going to say to my astonishment, for instance, Paul Manship was. I wouldn't have expected that particularly from Paul's work, although I got to know him and I realized that as a person he would be. He didn't go for his own type of sculpture at all particularly, and he was really a very fair judge. Lee Lawrie, I would say, was quite the opposite - everything, to even get a glance from him, had to sort of look like Lee Lawrie. That isn't what we were looking for.

ROBERT BROWN: The Warneke one, how would you characterize him at that time? As sort of a middle-of-the-road sculptor?

INSLEE HOPPER: Oh, I think very conservative. I think Heinz's only sculptures that I would consider not conservative are some of his animal sculptures which I think are absolutely delightful and just don't fit into any particular category, they just are.

ROBERT BROWN: For the Postmaster General's office you required figural work?

INSLEE HOPPER: Yes, pretty much so.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that executed, then, by him? And then there were other –

INSLEE HOPPER: They were all bronzes. They were about, I don't know, four foot high figures in niches.

ROBERT BROWN: When the work was under way, then, would you have a role in –

INSLEE HOPPER: Supervision, yes. And answering questions – they'd want details, the architectural drawings, and that sort of thing.

ROBERT BROWN: How active would you have to be in your supervision?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, I always went around, on any major jobs, to visit the studios and see the work in progress and bring back photographs and submit them. Because what we wanted to avoid was just what happened – it was Heinz's ego, to suddenly have the supervising architect of Public Buildings Administration, who had the final say on everything, say nix.

We had several stages: There were preliminary sketches, and then there were cartoons for the paintings and details, where there were scale models for the sculpture. And there were several stages at which changes or criticisms could be made, and those were all sent to the supervising architect – first approved by our office and then by him to try to avoid this contretemps at the end. And in general we were very successful in it.

ROBERT BROWN: You mention Heinz Warneke's ego, was that one of his earlier commissions?

INSLEE HOPPER: No, that was a commission later on recommendation of a jury that he be given a job. Being a well-known animal sculptor, he seemed the logical person to do the job. But, unfortunately, the original might have been perfect in a smaller scale in a gallery or in a studio but enlarged to 14 or 15 feet high on the top of the Social Security building on the Mall in Washington, it didn't work out. The last I heard of it, by dark of night it was being trundled on a flatbed truck off where to God knows, I never did find out.

ROBERT BROWN: Did that create a bit of a political problem?

INSLEE HOPPER: It would have had it gotten to the press, but it was all done as if it were [laughing] a CIA operation. I was no longer in Washington at the time this happened, I was in the Air Force and gone, so I just picked up the pieces.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, you said the supervisory architect of the Treasury would have final say. Was he a fairly broadminded sort? Who was it over there?

INSLEE HOPPER: His name was Louis Simon, you'll see his name on federal buildings all over the country, he was supervising architect for many years. A very charming, sweet person but very leary of anything except hack architectural sculpture and to never hear of such a thing as a mural in a post office. So we had quite an educational job to do. He was amenable, and I think he finally decided that the easiest way was to just let us go our own way and not create any stir. Because he was rather in awe of being Civil Service of the power-that-be, and since he knew this power came directly from the White House, with a blessing on Ned Bruce, this is what saved our hides many, many times.

ROBERT BROWN: You mentioned FDR. Eleanor Roosevelt took a great deal of interest.

INSLEE HOPPER: Very much so. Both Eleanor and Franklin were exceedingly conservative in their interest in art. Eleanor used to buy watercolors of sailboats and things of that sort to give to Franklin, but from the human point of view, she took a great interest in what we were doing.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean what you were doing for artists?

INSLEE HOPPER: For artists, exactly.

ROBERT BROWN: What about Eleanor Morgenthau? She too was –

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, she trotted along, being a close friend of Eleanor Roosevelt's. She simply wanted to be in on the action. There was no judgment to be expected from either one of them, but they were benevolent.

ROBERT BROWN: Ned Bruce gave dinner parties, for example. Were you involved in a good deal of that, where a

good deal of business was done?

INSLEE HOPPER: Oh constantly. My workday started with a telephone call from Ned at 9:30 every morning, at home. I did not keep the usual office hours because we would start that way and then meet at the office around 10 o'clock or so. And then almost invariably there were people in for lunch. It was a lobbying job, really. There were members of Congress there, there were visiting important people, that sort of thing. And then it went on through the night. I suppose I dined five nights a week at the Bruces' and they were always entertaining people that Ned felt could be helpful in some way to the project. He was just completely dedicated to it, heart and soul. And financially too, he spent a great deal of his own money. Naturally all this entertaining came out of his own pocket.

ROBERT BROWN: His aim was to upgrade the taste of the general public?

INSLEE HOPPER: And to bring art to the public. And also to help the artists, and to help unknown artists become known. But he was very stern about - the friction between the WPA and us always was that Ned insisted that our artists were strictly chosen on merit, and WPA would take anyone who said they were an artist, simply on relief or for relief, and then try to figure out what they could do. And of course there were many, many very talented people in that group who needed the help of the relief, but there were also plenty of duds. And that we didn't have, really; they were pretty well winnowed out by the time -

ROBERT BROWN: Well, Harry Hopkins, Roosevelt's special assistant, was for employment above all, wasn't he.

INSLEE HOPPER: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have many meetings with him?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, there was sort of a - not really a schism, between Bruce and Hopkins but the original project, PWAP, was proposed by Ned Bruce to Harry Hopkins, at a dinner party, and Hopkins said, "I've got to employ all these people" and Ned said, "I will employ 5,000 people [who will be] very helpful to the country, I'll have them at work within a week if you give me the money." And Hopkins said, "That's ridiculous, how could you? Who are they?" And Ned said, "The artists of the country."

And it was about that same time that George Biddle had written the letter to President Roosevelt, they being social friends, and George being not eager at all to get publicity for himself, proposing that there be government patronage of the arts. George always quietly assumed that he gave birth to this whole idea. Actually it wasn't so, Ned Bruce did, and what's more, Ned Bruce put it in action.

ROBERT BROWN: Was Biddle someone you saw occasionally? What was his role in the years that you-

INSLEE HOPPER: He was one of that original group that were recommended by the Committee votes in the section of Painting and Sculpture to be given a commission not in competition. And he did the series of frescoes in the Justice Building at that time. And George was a very meticulous, very slow worker, so we had George and his fresh eggs every morning, and his frescoes, working in the Justice Building.

[laughing] I have one phrase that comes out of George Biddle to me over the years. "You see what I mean? You see what I mean?" Well, anybody could have seen what he meant, I don't know why he worried about "see what I mean," he wasn't that obscure, but I think he was rather unsure of himself despite all the Biddle background and George's self-assurance in a way but I don't think it really was.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he therefore something of a problem for you all because he had the ear of FDR?

INSLEE HOPPER: No, he couldn't have been more charming, and he was very sympathetic and helpful in any way he could but I don't think George really counted very much. Likable. But his painting was so labored, his mind was labored....

[End of Tape 1 - Side 2]

INSLEE HOPPER: [continuing]....and he was trying desperately to the Biddle who was seeing social problems and doing something about them. It somehow didn't hang together.

ROBERT BROWN: What was the nature of the schism between him and Bruce?

INSLEE HOPPER: No, between Hopkins and Bruce. Well, it was chiefly that Bruce's attitude was that relief was fine, people ought to have work, but also the kind of work that was produced should be taken into consideration. And Hopkins, of course, just wanted to spend money and employ people and didn't give a damn for the results. Bruce felt that there should be a standard, I suppose even in ditch-digging.

ROBERT BROWN: The Fine Arts section which succeeded the section on Sculpture and Painting became, as far as I know - in July '39 there was a reorganization - became part of the Federal Works Agency which also included WPA. So there was sort of a clouding of the distinctions at that point, wasn't there?

INSLEE HOPPER: Yes but it really didn't make much difference -

ROBERT BROWN: Did Bruce continue with his insistence on quality as you said earlier?

INSLEE HOPPER: Completely, and the WPA could not work in federal buildings. I mean, we had the prerogative of doing all the work in federal buildings. They could work in municipal buildings and that sort of thing but not in federal. So there were very distinct different bailiwicks. And no clash that way, really.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, on the relief side more or less was Holger Cahill, right? He was director of the Federal Art Project in 1935, what became the Treasury relief project.

INSLEE HOPPER: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: How did they relate, since Bruce had his idea of quality and Cahill was charged with employing people?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, the funds were gotten for the Treasury Relief Art Project to use some of the talented artists who were working for Cahill in federal buildings. And also there was an easel project for decoration of embassies, government offices, that sort of thing. They did graphics, they did watercolors, they did oils, small sculptures, but all for federal buildings.

It was very helpful because, for instance, we would have a town where there were no funds left over from the building, so we wouldn't get our one percent, so there'd be nothing there. And Olin Dows and the TRAP could move in and his group could do a mural there.

ROBERT BROWN: With Olin Dows sort of the connection you had or could have with the people on the relief side of things?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, yes, he was, but also Ed Rowan was very friendly with Cahill and all the others of the group and there was a rapport there. Actually I think the only problems were when something would happen in the press and it would be sort of blown up, not by any of us or by Cahill. Usually some disgruntled artist would stir something up, and then we'd all have to try to pave it over. It usually resulted in no good to anybody; in fact invariably not.

Ned was so smooth about those things also. There was a stupid situation when Rockwell Kent's murals were unveiled in I've forgotten which building in Washington but one was a tropical scene, as I remember Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands. The other was an Eskimo scene. The Eskimos are sending a letter to their brothers in the tropics which is written in Eskimo in the mural. And Kent with his usual use of the press in personal publicity suggested that it just so happened that Amundsen was in town and perhaps they could get him to translate the Eskimo.

Amundsen had it all ready and it was "our colored brothers in the Tropics, rise up and down the oppressor" - something of the sort. And of course the press grabbed it and blew it up like mad. And the Congressmen began saying "what the hell are we doing in federal buildings recommending overthrow of the government" and this that and the other. And Ned [laughs] suddenly with a twinkle in his eye said to one of our pals in the press, "You know, I wonder how much Eskimo Amundsen really knows? I've got somebody else to look at it and of course it may be just gibberish and may not say anything at all."

So, naturally, with something like this to go on, the newspapermen simply published that the whole thing was a hoax, simply gibberish, and the whole thing was turned on Mr. Rockwell Kent and forgotten about.

ROBERT BROWN: But you constantly had these little brushfires to put out.

INSLEE HOPPER: Absolutely.

ROBERT BROWN: What was Cahill like as you recall? Did you have much to do with him?

INSLEE HOPPER: A very amiable guy. I was first aware of Holger Cahill long before all of that, when he did the first American folk art exhibition at the Newark Museum -

ROBERT BROWN: Back in the late 20s or so.

INSLEE HOPPER: - which was a marvelous job, and as a direct result it got Edith, Halpert of the Downtown

Gallery going on collecting American folk art, which in turn got Mrs. Rockefeller going on collecting American folk art. And Juliana Force, the director of the Whitney Museum, under Mrs. Whitney, of course had an apartment full of American folk art, aside from a lot of other things. He did a great work in bringing American folk art to public attention. I enjoyed Cahill. I never had very much to do with him.

ROBERT BROWN: He and Bruce of course were in regularly in touch, weren't they?

INSLEE HOPPER: Very little. There was that cleavage between the two offices and a lot of petty jealousies among some of the underlings over at Cahill's. There was really not too much give-and-take there, we each went our own ways.

ROBERT BROWN: Olin Dows was with Cahill, was he, for a while?

INSLEE HOPPER: No, never.

ROBERT BROWN: Who was he with?

INSLEE HOPPER: He was with us, yes, in our office. Treasury Relief Art Project was part of the section of Painting and Sculpture.

ROBERT BROWN: What was his special gift? He was an artist himself -

INSLEE HOPPER: He was a painter. He had met Ned socially and had admired his painting and went up to Vermont before all of this happened and worked for a summer or so with Ned, doing landscape painting. They became very good friends and Olin lived in Washington as well as in Rhinebeck, so it was logical to enlist Olin in the work, and he did an extremely good administrative job. And of course he was invaluable in his connections. He was a personal friend and neighbor of the Roosevelts and that sort of thing.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he more or less your counterpart on the Painting side?

INSLEE HOPPER: No, Ed Rowan was Painting, I was Sculpture, and Olin was the TRAP. And before he started at TRAP, Olin was - we were all sort of in it together, I mean whenever new designs came in we would all meet - Forbes Watson, Ed Rowan, Ned, Olin and myself. And also if there were visiting artists there, Ned would invite them in and get their ideas on the sketches or cartoons or whatever had been submitted.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, TRAP was under the Treasury as well but it has the name "Relief" in it, so it was Treasury relief.

INSLEE HOPPER: The money came from the WPA, from Harry Hopkins.

ROBERT BROWN: So that served as an enlargement of the Treasury work - beyond Federal Buildings?

INSLEE HOPPER: No, no, we were all in Federal Buildings. That was the whole point of it, to get some of that relief money to work in federal buildings where we had no money from the building appropriation.

ROBERT BROWN: At most, you had one percent, and you didn't always have that, as you said earlier, if the cost of a building went beyond -

INSLEE HOPPER: Went to the top, we didn't have it.

ROBERT BROWN: Ed Rowan, then, was your counterpart.

INSLEE HOPPER: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you work fairly closely with him?

INSLEE HOPPER: Oh yes, very.

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like? Was he a lot older than you?

INSLEE HOPPER: I don't know really, I would imagine Ed might have been ten or 15 years older. We all worked very closely together. We were all a very congenial bunch and we all worshipped Ned Bruce. Forbes of course was a particular friend of mine, he also became a very close friend of Rowan. Ned and Forbes had known each other for years -

ROBERT BROWN: And Forbes's role was mainly as publicist?

INSLEE HOPPER: Yes. Any writing to be done, I mean if Ned were making a speech, Forbes would go over it,

make suggestions, polish things up. Any press releases Forbes would get out. He edited the *Bulletin*, he also handled PR with the press.

ROBERT BROWN: What in your opinion was Ed Rowan's strength?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, his personal acquaintanceship with so many artists, and a very sympathetic point of view with them, and a very good eye and very good judgment. I don't know really whether I'd say he was a good administrator. Olin was definitely a good administrator, and Ned marvelous. Maria Elan [phon. sp.] was extremely good too. She kept the office going, all the drudgery and all the details. Maria was a niece of Mrs. Bruce.

ROBERT BROWN: You yourself said you dreamed up the idea of artists going out of the continental United States -

INSLEE HOPPER: Yes, to Alaska and to the Virgin Islands. That was done - they were TRAP artists. I proposed it and Olin liked the idea, Ned liked it, and the first one that we bearded was Governor Bruening of Alaska, a very civilized, delightful man. He loved the idea, so a group was gotten together to go up there. Then we met Larry Kramer, who was then governor of the Virgin Islands, and he went for it in a big way, so we sent a group down there.

ROBERT BROWN: What was the idea? To record things in each of those places?

INSLEE HOPPER: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: For a national record?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, not so much a national record as just to paint whatever appealed to them down there, to get the flavor of the place. Then the paintings were sent back and they were available for government offices or embassies or whatever. It helped publicize both Alaska and the Virgin Islands.

ROBERT BROWN: Who recruited the artists?

INSLEE HOPPER: They were chosen by Olin Dows from a roster of artists available from WPA and chosen strictly on the merit of their abilities. Of course, out of that came a number of other things. For instance, the corps of artists during the War that were sent out to make a record of the war.

ROBERT BROWN: You had a pool, then, available of people that demonstrated ability.

INSLEE HOPPER: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: That was an idea that you had that you tossed out. Was George Biddle involved in that?

INSLEE HOPPER: No, not at all. And they were all comparatively unknown artists.

ROBERT BROWN: Were there some you got to know?

INSLEE HOPPER: I knew all of them, really; the Virgin Island group particularly, although my close friend Henry Varnum Poor went up to Alaska. He went because he, I think, wanted to do Alaska and see Alaska. And then he wrote that book, illustrated by him, of his time up there. In the Virgin Islands, it was Stephen Dohanos who was mostly a Saturday Evening Post illustrator, really, but was unknown when we got hold of him and he went on to financially much more remunerative things; very successful that way.

ROBERT BROWN: Had you gotten to know Poor in New York?

INSLEE HOPPER: No. Henry I met at the section when he was doing the murals and frescoes in the Department of Justice building. We became very good friends. He and his wife, Bessie Brewer the writer, and I became close friends. Actually I have Henry's first fresco study in the other room, which is - I didn't exactly pose for it but it was "of" me.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he quite an innovative artist, in your opinion?

INSLEE HOPPER: I think he was a fascinating man of many different interests. After all, he went off into ceramics for some years and did all sorts of things, winding up doing a most marvelous tile bathroom in his house in New City. From that he got several commissions to do tile bathrooms, which ended rather abruptly - I don't know whether it was Mrs. Crane or Mrs. Kohler, telephoned Bessie one day and said the toilet wasn't working in Henry's bathroom. And Bessie said [laughs] "you've got just the wrong person, call a plumber, I'm married to the artist who created the damn thing." She said to Henry, "If you ever do another goddamn bathroom I will divorce

you.” So that was the end of Henry doing ceramic bathrooms.

ROBERT BROWN: He was one of your close friends during those years.

INSLEE HOPPER: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: You took some time out, I guess – in ‘37 or so you were briefly away, and then you were back at it, as I see, in 1938.

INSLEE HOPPER: They had one of the usual government cuts. You have to slash your staff – a third off or something or other – so I was the most recent arrival, logically I was the first one to be let off. And then was determined that I would be back, so he promoted the idea that I be brought back to supervise the work in the federal building at the World’s Fair in New York, so I came back then, in ‘38. I worked on the Federal Building at the Fair.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that a difficult assignment?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, it was a little difficult because there was a lot more politics involved there with the Commissioners than we were used to in Washington, but we managed to handle it all right. The Chief Commissioner was a guy named Ed Flynn. He had a very suave assistant with an Italian name I’ve forgotten now and Ned did have a run-in with Flynn about one of the sculptures for the Federal Building.

ROBERT BROWN: One was destroyed by Flynn, wasn’t it, one of Lincoln, I think.

INSLEE HOPPER: No. He wanted to, but he didn’t. Ned downed him on it, it stayed there, Flynn wanted to eliminate it.

ROBERT BROWN: You had some involvement with the people from the Guggenheim.

INSLEE HOPPER: That was the same time. We got a letter from the attorneys of the Guggenheim estate saying that they were very much interested in making a donation to the Federal Building at the Fair on behalf of two mural painters. So Ned sent me up to New York to discuss this with the firm – I can’t remember its name, one of the more august international law firms on Wall Street and very much oak-paneled – and these three lawyers bearded me, saying that they would like to make a donation of \$100,000 to the Federal Building, provided that two German artists, refugees, would be given the two most important mural spaces to do murals.

I said, “Well, it’s a very interesting idea but you really don’t understand how we work, which is through anonymous competition. We would be very happy to have them come into the competition, it doesn’t matter whether they’re citizens or not; but there is the other problem: that a donation cannot be given to the federal government unless it’s accepted by Congress.” Well [laughs] of course the whole thing was a promotion scheme. They were two German refugee Jewish artists who were particular protégés of the Baroness Hella Robaye [phon. sp.] and she was trying to promote them into front-page publicity, both the squabble that would ensue and also the spaces in the Federal Building.

Well, these august lawyers were just left floundering, they didn’t have any answer to this but there it was. So we didn’t get the \$100,000, we didn’t get the two artists. I don’t think that they entered the competition.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have to do with what was to occur in the Federal Building, apart from the murals or sculpture?

INSLEE HOPPER: I worked very closely with the young architect who designed it. Actually he was a designer working for one of the consulting architects but it was entirely his building. His name was Charles M. (Chuck) Goodman, a very bright designer. He later did the terminal building at the first airport in Washington.

ROBERT BROWN: So he was working in a fairly contemporary mode.

INSLEE HOPPER: Very much so and wanted to be even more so than he could get away with. We were very simpatico, we were very close friends actually. He was making space for murals and sculpture everywhere we could get them, and of course we didn’t really have a one percent limitation on that building, we could have gone further and we went as far as we could. It would seem rather sad to me that the whole thing was impermanent, I mean, everything was in plaster and the murals were to be destroyed afterward.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you able in that competition to get some fairly modernist work?

INSLEE HOPPER: Not too, not too. It was pretty limiting. I don’t know whether the sculptors were sort of awed by the Federal Building angle or whether they thought they had to come down to some public level of comprehension, but it wasn’t very exciting, it was quite disappointing to me, actually.

ROBERT BROWN: No breakthroughs by any chance?

INSLEE HOPPER: Oh no, by no means. Nothing compared, for instance, to what the Smithsonian Gallery of Art would have been, a very different world.

ROBERT BROWN: I want a bit more on sculptors: you mentioned earlier establishment sculptors, such as Manship and Paul Jennewein. Manship you said was on the one hand a fair-minded juror but the two men in your opinion weren't all that original in their own work.

INSLEE HOPPER: No. That whole group, their system was to hire skillful young guys particularly who had a design sense and were creative. I know Manship hired different people that I know said, okay, now come up with five or six sketches for a fountain or a park figure or whatever. Then he'd play around with them and decide if he wanted to use any one of them, then he'd sort of re-work it a bit and present it as his own.

For instance, Lee Lawrie's [piece] christened "the guy escaping the wedding ring," the fountain at Rockefeller Center, was designed by Henry Kreiss, who was working for Lee Lawrie Lock, Stock and Barrel. And also the figure over the door of one of the buildings there, the lintel, was designed by Henry for Lee Lawrie.

ROBERT BROWN: But the established sculptor took the credit.

INSLEE HOPPER: And the money, sure. The big loot, and paying, you know, meager weekly wages to these guys who were working for them. But all those guys who worked for these men were winning competitions with us and getting jobs. Which proved the point that Ned was after - to bring out these talents and give them a chance on their own.

ROBERT BROWN: And the same thing as far as you know happened on the painting side in some of these murals -

INSLEE HOPPER: Oh sure, very much so.

ROBERT BROWN: - because there were very conservative establishment figures there.

INSLEE HOPPER: Yes. But of course the mechanics of sculpture is another matter, particularly architectural sculpture, and there [is] always the factory where the scale models were thrown up into full-size models for carvings or castings or whatever. And that was all pretty mechanical.

ROBERT BROWN: So you tried to make sure that you had an innovative initial idea at least.

INSLEE HOPPER: Right, right. As an example of Ed Rowan's acquaintanceship, close friendship really, with so many of the Western artists - he and Grant Wood were very good friends - he told me this lovely story. He and his wife had a house in Iowa which they wanted to sell, when their sons were born they needed a bigger house. They advertised it and had gotten nowhere. They complained to Grant Wood about it, and Grant said, "Let me handle it, I'll sell it in a week." They said, "How can you??" He said, "You wait and see."

So he went to the Five and Dime and he bought a bunch of aquaria and goldfish. Then the ad appeared in the paper: "House, seven rooms with an aquarium in every room including the bathroom." And [laughing] the people were lined up outside to get in and see a house that had an aquarium in every room! With the result that the house was sold in two days, because it churned in so many people somebody wanted it. [both laughing]

It was really rather touching, because when I heard that Ed was dying of cancer, as it was reported "galloping cancer," I said "Can I call him?" "No, you can't." "Can I write him?" "No, it'll be too late." Then I heard from his wife afterward that the day before he died, they had read in the paper that Grant Wood was dying. One of the last things that Ed said to his wife was, "Well, I think that I'll be meeting Grant tomorrow." They both died at about the same time.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you ever meet Grant Wood?

INSLEE HOPPER: No, never did. I don't recall that he was ever in the office, and of course he was not someone who would be bothered to come into a competition. He was such a slow worker and with relatively small production in his life. Nobody had ever recommended him on any of the lists as somebody who should be given a job without competition.

ROBERT BROWN: What about the Regionalists, Curry, Wood and Benton - did they figure much in things?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, Benton was always such a grandstander, too, I mean, always looking to the publicity. I can't put my finger on it entirely now, the details, but my impression is that he was rather against us; why he should have been I don't know but there it was.

ROBERT BROWN: Most of your artists would have been from New York City, wouldn't they?

INSLEE HOPPER: Not really, no, we had them all over the country - New Mexico

[End of Tape 2 - Side 1]

ROBERT BROWN: The St. Louis post office was a big commission, wasn't it? Was that handled under the Section, or was that under relief?

INSLEE HOPPER: It couldn't have been under relief because it wouldn't have been.

ROBERT BROWN: The mural competition there.

INSLEE HOPPER: I don't remember now.

ROBERT BROWN: That would have been under Rowan anyway, I suppose.

INSLEE HOPPER: A job as big as that I should remember. But you know, this is kind of a stretch, without any notes to refer to.

ROBERT BROWN: Mitchell Siporin was the painter there.

INSLEE HOPPER: That was one of our competitions, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: You mentioned that Bruce became a member of the Commission of Fine Arts in Washington -

INSLEE HOPPER: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: - was that to represent quite a chance? That was quite a powerful group right there under your nose.

INSLEE HOPPER: It was a terribly powerful group, and it was a group that had everything right in their little hot hand and they ran things the way they wanted. And Ned was one of the first wedges to open it up to the light and I can't remember that Ned was instrumental in getting any other appointees by the President to the Commission but Ned was a real hornet in the Commission but very suave, very smooth about it all.

Of course he hated what John Russell Pope stood for and the architecture of the National Gallery. He was in when the designs for the National Gallery were submitted and he'd done a little bit of legwork beforehand and said, "Let's give him a rather hard time." They decided at the meeting - Mr. Mellon was there, and John Russell Pope - that it must be built of marble and not of limestone, which on the Mall; and Mellon turned to Pope and said, "How much will that cost?" And Pope said, "I'll find out immediately" and put in a call to New York and before the meeting was over got the message back that it would be \$2 million more. And it was agreed upon.

The building went up and Ned took me for a ride one afternoon. He said, "Come on, I want to show you something." It was raining, and Ned had a chauffeur who helped him wonderfully, helped him around in a wheelchair and all the rest. We got in the car and drove down, we were only two blocks from the Mall and we drove past the National Gallery and Ned said, "Look at it." And it was pink Tennessee marble. The rain had darkened the pink, of course, and Ned said, "See?? Blood money always tells." [both laugh heartily]

ROBERT BROWN: Was there something about Mellon giving the Gallery to the nation connected with this?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, the President asked Ned to go over and take his staff along when the Mellon collection was in the apartments on Massachusetts Avenue. We went over and were met by David Finley -

ROBERT BROWN: He was sort of a curator for Mellon?

INSLEE HOPPER: Actually I think he started out as sort of a personal secretary to Mellon and then graduated into the collection and became Mellon's head. We were absolutely bowled over by the collection, which naturally you'd read about and heard about, but to see it was just -something.

So Ned hustled right over if not that day the next day to the White House and said to the President, "Oh, my God, it's absolutely magnificent, let's not waste any time, let's get it through the Senate to accept it" and so forth. The President said, "Now, take it easy, Ned, just slow up a bit, let's have a little fun." He said, "Andy, of course, is very eager to give his collection to the nation because there's no question that if he died before it was accepted, the inheritance tax would be walloping. It's a matter of record in many cases that because of the many lawsuits, Duveen testifying this, that and the other to the value of what was paid for many of the paintings, the appraisal would be enormous. And it could be very detrimental to the Mellon estate. So let's keep

Andy hanging a bit.”

Ned said, “Well, maybe he’d give it somewhere else.” And the President said, “Just take it easy.” So it was along for a bit, and then of course it was accepted, after exacting the promise of the building according to government specifications and all the rest of it.

ROBERT BROWN: Was Mellon serious about that, or was he all too anxious to –

INSLEE HOPPER: I don’t think he was in a position to be serious. He was an old, very sick man –

ROBERT BROWN: And you realized there would be this terrific tax law.

INSLEE HOPPER: But it’s such a different point of view from Paul Mellon’s, whose largesse is really most impressive, I think, what he’s given. I mean, the museum at Yale and his collection there, which I find very, very boring, a collection of English art, but what he’s done – the Pei addition to the National Gallery – it’s all very, very impressive, and it doesn’t seem to be from the same, point of view at all.

ROBERT BROWN: Whereas Mellon’s point of view was more personal?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, I think personal and definitely a banker’s point of view and thinking of the cash value of things rather than the greatness of the art.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you ever meet Mellon?

INSLEE HOPPER: No, I never did. Ned did, he had a couple of meetings with Mellon at that time. I’ve heard different versions of this but this was from Ned and presumably direct from Mellon: He asked Mellon how he ever managed to worm the Hermitage paintings out of the Russian government, and Mellon said, “Well, you know, I was then Secretary of the Treasury and it was largely a question of diluta..” [phon. sp.] In other words, he can control what a ruble was worth and therefore, “Come across.”

And the other one, which was a honey, Ned said, “You had a great many dealings with Duveen. What did you think of him?” And Mellon said, “Well, I did buy a number of paintings from Lord Duveen, and sometimes I questioned what I was paying for them. I had it scouted around a bit and I found that when Duveen was in the market to buy an important painting, he used a certain bank, and so I bought the bank. So I then knew what Mellon was borrowing to pay for a painting.” [both break up] “I was in a better position to dicker with him.”

ROBERT BROWN: What was Finley like?

INSLEE HOPPER: I found Finley kind of a prissy little type. I don’t know....a hanger-on, really, in the art world. I don’t think he had any instinctive interest, he’d obviously acquired some knowledge, and married to a “social” wife of some importance in Washington and that sort of thing. But he played that angle of the game.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he sort of a part of the package that the nation, when it took Mellon’s collection it took Finley?

INSLEE HOPPER: That I don’t know, but I would rather guess so, yes. But I think it was too much for Finley to handle. I think he retired, I don’t really remember.

ROBERT BROWN: It was about that time, then, in 1938 or so that Ned Bruce brought up, as you’ve already discussed a bit, the idea of a Smithsonian gallery of art which would be living artists or just American artists which were largely if not entirely at that time neglected in the Mellon collection.

INSLEE HOPPER: Right. It would be to the Mellon as the Luxembourg was to the Louvre.

ROBERT BROWN: And that idea appealed to Roosevelt and to his uncle particularly.

INSLEE HOPPER: Yes, very much. Also to many other people in Washington. Again, it was Ned’s genius in handling these things. He got an enabling act put through Congress appropriating the money to hold the competition and authorized the use of the site on the Mall directly opposite the National Gallery for the building. We had that whole block. Then the competition was held, the designs approved unanimously by the Fine Arts Commission, and a great brouhaha. Then, of course, along came the War, so the whole thing died aborning.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, you had something to do with getting people to come on the jury, did you?

INSLEE HOPPER: Yes, I helped advise on that.

ROBERT BROWN: Was it balanced between academics and modernists? I know, Gropius was on the jury, and Mies van der Rohe.

INSLEE HOPPER: Unfortunately I tried to find the competition program today but the friends who have the house for the winter are very much interested in art, and I made them promise to put every book in the library back in the same place they took it out; of course they haven't and I can't find a damn thing. It's going to take me days of work to get it fixed up.

Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, are both heroes of mine and I've been wracking my brain to try and remember who some of the conservative members were. As I recall, there were five or seven jurors and I just can't recall the names of the rest of them.

ROBERT BROWN: With Gropius and Mies, you knew their work?

INSLEE HOPPER: I knew their work –

ROBERT BROWN: You very much admired modernism.

INSLEE HOPPER: - and of course I didn't know Hudnut, the then Dean of Harvard, I knew him by reputation. He ran the competition, with the assistance of Thomas Dabney Maybury of the Museum of Modern Art from the museum angle, and Hudnut from the architectural angle.

ROBERT BROWN: You were a little freer than you would have been under the Fine Arts Commission or in the Treasury.

INSLEE HOPPER: Oh very much. And they wrote the competition program. Actually it was a little bit difficult because Ned would talk in rather sweeping, grand terms, and we'd have a luncheon meeting – Hudnut, Naybury, Ned and I – and then afterward they'd get me together with them and say, "Now, we still don't understand what he wants. What does he want?" So I had to interpret what I thought Ned wanted, I pretty much knew what he wanted, but I had to feed them the stuff for the competition program. Which was great fun but it was also nerve –wracking because I thought it was a responsibility to take on. But it all worked out very amiably – I mean, Hudnut was a delightful, savvy person, and Tom Maybury became a good friend and he was excellent to work with. And the jurors were.

ROBERT BROWN: Is it your recollection that the program for the competition was fairly functional, as opposed to the ones you were accustomed to in the government for the Treasury buildings?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, you see, the Treasury didn't have architectural competitions –

ROBERT BROWN: That's right, their own architect.

INSLEE HOPPER: Yes, and it was patronage – some well-known architect was a friend of a Senator, a few of them, or it was the consulting architect's group. No, the program, I think, was brilliantly gotten together by Hudnut and Maybury, and the jury worked quite marvelously and it was an absolutely unanimous decision. It was a pretty damned innovative building at the time for Washington. In fact, I felt, we all felt, we'd accomplished something because it could change the face of Washington architecture.

And unbeknownst to me that I was being very bright at the time, I got rather disgusted with some of the things that had been built there and were still being built, and I said I think it was Tom Maybury, maybe it was Hudnut – we were walking around one day –I said, "You know, sometimes I think that the best critics of architecture in Washington are the pigeons." [laughter] They were very busy.

ROBERT BROWN: You were probably a bit tired of all those friezes and cornices and capitals and the like.

INSLEE HOPPER: Oh, and they were looking pretty grim under the pigeons.

ROBERT BROWN: Saarinen's winning design would have caused a bit of a stir. Or did it, when the news came out?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, it was received very, very well and I don't recall any serious criticism of it. I think David Finley probably fainted at the thought of it going across from the National Gallery, and it would have been such a wonderful wallop on the Mall. It acceded to all the accepted things that Washington official buildings had to be – it was to be done in marble, so what? But it was such a really handsome and functional building.

Looking back now, it would have been much too small for the purpose, when you compare it to the Kennedy Center – it had an auditorium, and it was supposed to function that way too, but it would not have worked in modern times. Nor would there have been storage space for the collections that Ned envisioned. But it was a

brave attempt. I'm very happy, though – I've been corresponding with a guy at the National Collection of Fine Arts [later the National Museum of American Art (now the Smithsonian American Art Museum)] which had an exhibition last year, and I said I was so upset because I didn't even know what had happened to the model that the Saarinen made in marble, which was just an absolutely beautiful scale model. He said that it had been found intact and was in an exhibition of Washington buildings.

ROBERT BROWN: Did the Saarinen actually come to Washington?

INSLEE HOPPER: Eero did; I don't remember that Elio did, he was rather old at the time. Swanson did. Then I got to know Eero quite well and I visited him at Cranbrook afterward and used to see them occasionally. Eero married a girl named Lillian Swann, [phon. sp.] who was one of Heinz Warneke's students here. Heinz used to take students in the summer. They were married, then divorced, and Eero married Aline Bernstein.

ROBERT BROWN: Did Eero have to argue for it at the time do you recall? Was he a persuasive sort?

INSLEE HOPPER: No, he really didn't. That was Ned again, the way was smoothed. As soon as the model was completed it was whipped over to the White House, I went with Ned to show it to the President. He was very impressed with it and excited by it. It was in the office and Ned began really entertaining and public relations on it. The British Ambassador, Senators, Congressmen and what not were all invited there to see it. So, there it was, the way was open. The money had not been appropriated to build it yet, but I think had there not been the War, it would have been very easy. Because then – come on, for God's sake, I think the budget was something like five or six million dollars to build it at that time. Nothing!

ROBERT BROWN: You say you got to know Eero a bit.

INSLEE HOPPER: Yes, a very interesting guy. Very intense, except that he was Finnish I'd have said very Germanic. Had a nice sense of humor. He gave a party for me at Cranbrook at the time I visited there and it was kind of a fun "do," because he and Charles Eames were designing a chair at that time and they had a mockup of the chair in plaster. Everybody at the party had to sit in the chair and move their ass around and move their arms around and say, "Well now, right here I don't think it's very comfortable." "I don't like it here." "It doesn't suit me here." And [laughing] the chair was really ridiculous when you looked at it, because there were X-marks in all the places where people had objected. Anyway, that chair, the Eames-Saarinen chair got born.

At that same party, Carl Milles of course was living there then and I met him at the party, and he said, "Have you seen my Greeks?" and, thinking it was some fountain group that he'd done that I didn't know about, I said, "No, I haven't, Mr. Milles." And he said, "You must come right now and see them." And I said, "Mr. Milles, it's a little difficult because the party's being given for me and I don't think I should leave now." And he said, "Well, you must because it's the right time of day, you must see them right now."

So I went to Eero and Lillian, I said, "I don't know what to do, Milles wants to show me his Greeks." And they said, "Oh, go, go, go. It's all right." So we went, we walked over to his house not too far away and he got out a latchkey, opened the door, and we went into an absolutely dark hallway with a gallery running around it. This wraith of a woman appeared, in kind of a negligee, up on a balcony, and he called up and said, "This is Mr. Hopper at the Saarinen's, I'm going to show him my Greeks." So she disappeared without a word.

Over here it was dark then, so he fumbled around and got a flashlight and he led the way into a gallery. The Greeks were his collection of Classic sculpture, which he showed me by flashlight. He would walk around, and he would shine the flashlight through the marble. He'd say, "Now, you stand there and see it from here," he'd shine it through. Or he'd come around and he'd shine it certain ways on the marble. And I was shown [laughing] every one. Some magnificent sculptures.

ROBERT BROWN: You got a picture of the way he viewed things, in a way.

INSLEE HOPPER: Exactly. And it was very exciting but it was sort of driving me nuts because I would love to have seen them in the daylight the bright sun of Greece, not this strange way. Well, anyway the tour was done and he said, "Now, we go back to Eero's." So back we went to Eero's and [had] a few more drinks. It was fascinating, though.

I had his huge ironcast Head of Orpheus in that show that I mentioned at the Metropolitan Club in Washington, and I found out afterward – the Orpheus was in iron, and it had been cast in Japan. Japan was the only place in the world in those days that could do that kind of ironcasting and still can. The head itself must be five feet high, just the head; enormous. I don't know where that fountain is.

ROBERT BROWN: Carl Milles made quite an impression on you, did he – at least his work did.

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, yes and no, I think it's fun, I don't think he's all that exciting, sculptor. I enjoyed the Milles

things I've seen.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this before the War that you were at Cranbrook?

INSLEE HOPPER: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that quite an interesting place to you?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, sort of inbred. It was a little bit strange....Milles and the Saarinen and Swanson were sort of the leading lights. Collegiate Gothic buildings. I think Cranbrook was sort of intended, as I understood it, as something like Avon Old Farms to encourage people to work with their hands and do things other than just intellectual teaching. I didn't quite get the picture of Cranbrook at all. I mean, God knows it's no place I would ever have wanted to have attended, nor would I have wanted to be associated with it. I think that Eero broke away as soon as he could, went on to bigger things.

ROBERT BROWN: You kept up with him pretty much?

INSLEE HOPPER: Not too. I never saw them after the War. I knew that he and Lillian had divorced, and then I heard about his marrying [he said Louchheim, presumably meaning Bernstein], and then the awful thing - his cancer of the brain and very quick death. [long pause] I think his skating rink at Yale is exciting. I think that building at the Graduate School is a little affected. I think he's a very interesting guy, though.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you keep up with studies in architecture? You told me earlier that you had thought maybe you might want to be an architect.

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, I have wanted to and actually I've done a bit of architectural work since the War. I've done some designing and some restoration of old houses both in the islands and up here in New England but when I found a client I liked and a client who liked me and we saw eye to eye. I haven't really practiced in a broad professional way.

ROBERT BROWN: Back to the 30s: In the summer of '37, you and Ned Bruce were discussing prefabricated housing. Was this something which is "in the air" at that time and then you eventually went on with Ben Shahn -

INSLEE HOPPER: No, not prefabricated housing. The Rural Resettlement thing which Ned got interested in because he was spending the summers out in Virginia and West Virginia and there was a Resettlement project there which he got much interested in. That is, I've got it here: he commissioned Ben Shahn to go up there with me to photograph, the two of us to whip up a book on it, really to praise Roosevelt's achievement in this thing.

ROBERT BROWN: What was the intention in Resettlement? A new life for impoverished people in their living -

INSLEE HOPPER: It was to give people - sort of the old idea of 40 acres and a mule, to give them land and a building to live in, and enough land so they could be self-subsistent. It was under Rexford Tugwell in the Department of Agriculture. My friend Adrian Dornbusch headed up a branch of it that was called Special Skills, which branch was to teach people how to make furniture, design furniture, work with their hands. Ben Shahn did the graphics, he worked for Adrian. There were a number of people there who were doing that sort of thing, working in clay, it was sort of a handicrafts adjunct to -

ROBERT BROWN: Was it "taking?" I mean, with these West Virginians?

INSLEE HOPPER: Oh very much so.

ROBERT BROWN: These were just average people?

INSLEE HOPPER: They were just derelicts who were homeless and living in shacks or whatever. This was to set up subsistence farming all over the country. For instance, one of the most desirable houses you can buy in Puerto Rico now is what they call a "Par [?] house," which is a concrete house built under the Roosevelt administration as part of the Resettlement project with a piece of land. They cost something like under \$3,000 to build at the time. If you can get one now for \$35,000 or \$40,000 you're very lucky. They're on usually good hunks of land. It was the sort of thing that was going on all over the country and tried to be designed to be indigenous to the area it was in.

ROBERT BROWN: What was your assignment with Shahn? You were to write up the nature of the project? What would he do?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, I'd been there, visiting the Bruces, to see it. I was to show Ben around and introduce him to some of these people that I'd met, who were very much interested in and excited by it. [showing a picture] This is it.

ROBERT BROWN: [after acknowledging] And how did Shahn take to it? Right away?

INSLEE HOPPER: He loved it. We spent about a week there, then we came back. When he had printed all his photographs, we got together in the Department of Agriculture and we did this book in a couple of nights running. Then I did the makeup, the cropping, and so forth. I had to sort of step in Ben a bit, because Ben at that point was still very much if not card-carrying, but he was very, very far to the Left. He was trying to make a little too much political capital in different spots here, but I managed to handle it....

[End of Tape 2 – Side 2]

INSLEE HOPPER: (continuing) ....with him, and I think what we got out of it was perhaps straddling the fence a bit but it was what Ned wanted. He got it to Franklin – in Ned’s usual subtle way, he sent it to Frederick Delano first, with praise for what Roosevelt had done, and then Uncle Frederic of course took it to Franklin and said, “Look at this.” To my surprise, it came back, that’s the only copy, and Ned gave it to me.

ROBERT BROWN: You wrote the text –

INSLEE HOPPER: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: - and it was partly recollections here, we’re looking at a man talking about “the way we used to live.”

INSLEE HOPPER: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: But Shahn whenever he could would try to interject a bit of his ideological material.

INSLEE HOPPER: A bit, yes, a bit.

ROBERT BROWN: The people, you said, were very open, and very much interested in it, but I think some of the juxtaposition of pictures, which is mostly Ben’s, is pretty brilliant.

INSLEE HOPPER: Was it deemed not to publish? It was decided that this wasn’t to be – ?

INSLEE HOPPER: Nothing’s happened. Ned gave it to me and I thought about it again after seeing this thing on the TV the other night and hearing Bernarda Bryson, his widow, and I thought perhaps I should get in touch with Bernarda and say, “I’ve got this and I think perhaps we should do something about publishing it.” Somebody at the Museum of Modern Art wanted to see it. My niece took it there for me last winter and they thought it would be lovely if I would donate it to the Museum.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, there was no thought of publishing it at that particular time? It was simply a documentation?

INSLEE HOPPER: No, no. It was simply for kudos to Roosevelt and to the Resettlement project, from Ned’s point of view.

ROBERT BROWN: About when was it done , in the late ‘30s?

INSLEE HOPPER: I could identify it by that photograph of Ned in his car at the beginning there because it’s got a license plate. I think it’s ‘39 or ‘40, I’m not sure. [they search for the photograph] A couple of loose photographs that are glued in, just inside the cover –

ROBERT BROWN: They’re not now. You’ve already mentioned in conjunction with the Smithsonian’s gallery of art the pressures of money for War and so forth. The Section, as we know, pretty much folded by I think about 1943. Were you drafted, or were you caught up in the War –

INSLEE HOPPER: No, I took a commission in the Air Force in February 1942. I was in the Air Force until March ‘46.

ROBERT BROWN: Was it a patriotic impulse on your part to join?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, I was a pacifist, so I went in the Air Force. [he laughs] I’d had it when the insane Japanese did that on Pearl Harbor, that did it. I had always been very fond of Germans. Unfortunately, I’ll hate Japanese and Germans for the rest of my life, I just cannot excuse either nation. I feel very strongly about it.

I came back and, as I think I said, it was not a very sympathetic period in Washington to the arts. Theoretically I should have been given a job back, an equivalent job, which didn’t exist – I mean, all our jobs were quite unique there. I thought of trying to do something about keeping Ned’s ideas alive and the aims of the Section, but with neither Ned’s political savvy nor his connections, there didn’t seem to be much point. I thought of taking it up

with President Truman but he was obviously very unsympathetic. Then I sort of tried to do something about the Smithsonian gallery. Where do you go? And I didn't have personal funds enough to just go down there and be a one-man lobby. So the whole thing just sort of "went that way."

I did plan to try to do something about, if not a full biography at least some kind of a publication about Ned, after the War. I spent a lot of time at Peggy Bruce's in Ned's files before they were turned over to the Archives. The more I thought about it, the less I was able to do justice to Ned, because he was such a remarkably many-sided person that to me it's a story that anybody would be fascinated to read, because he did accomplish so much in his life in so many fields.

He was a lawyer to begin with. He studied with Justice Stone at Columbia, they were close friends through life. And he went to the Philippines – I think he was with Cravath & Degierstadt, [phon. sp.] a big firm in Wall Street, to do some international law in the Philippines. He loved the Philippines and he stayed there. He bought the *Manila Times* which was practically bankrupt, for \$1 and promised to pay so much in a year and in less than a year he paid it off. He edited and ran the *Manila Times*.

He started a big construction company, which did construction in the Philippines and also in China. Then he and Peggy Bruce in the meantime had married and went to China, lived there in the teens, and he started as I say the construction company there and also several other projects in China. It was at that time that he got so interested in Chinese art and began his Chinese art collection. Then came 1929 and the Crash. Ned wasn't bankrupt but he lost practically everything he had, had to sell his Chinese collection, which fortunately was bought by David Stone, a relative of Chief Justice Stone, a friend of Ned's –

ROBERT BROWN: It was an important collection, wasn't it?

INSLEE HOPPER: A very important collection. Stone gave it to the Fogg Museum, where it is. Mostly paintings. Alan Priest, who is curator of Oriental Art at the Metropolitan Museum, a friend of ours, knew the collection and said it was a very fine collection. I've never gone there to try to pick it apart and see which paintings were Ned's from his collection; sometime I'd like to do it.

ROBERT BROWN: He'd become a painter, too.

INSLEE HOPPER: Then in the Crash and all the financial worries and so forth – he had been a painter, his mother was a "Sunday painter," a Victorian painter, and used to take Ned painting with her when he was young, and Peggy Bruce went out to F.A.O. Schwartz and bought a set of paints to give Ned something to preoccupy himself with when he was pacing the floor at night worrying about J. P. Morgan and a few things like that that had done him dirt in Wall Street. They knew a lot of people in New York who also were patrons of the arts and he met, among others, Maurice Sterne and also Leo Stein, Gertrude Stein's brother. The more he painted, they encouragingly said, "Ned, you really have talent, you should do something about it."

So, suddenly, at this stage of his career – he was 45 or so then – he said to Peggy, "You know, I'd like to give it a whirl." And Peggy said, "I'm with you, fine." So they went to Italy, having cabled Maurice Sterne saying, "I want to come and study with you in Italy." Sterne cabled back, "I never take students. I can't be bothered." Ned arrived bag and baggage, rented a villa – I think it was in Fiesole – right near the Sternes and reported to Sterne the next day and said, "Well, here I am, you've got to." They were friends so anyway they worked it out.

Ned then got hold of Leo Stein and said, "I want to pay you to come here and act as my critique." Leo Stein went and they worked together for a year and Ned burned everything he'd done after the first year except a few paintings, which he gave to two of their maids, they'd liked them very much. Burned everything else. He painted for another year, then he said to Sterne and Stein, "I'm going to take the paintings to Paris and have a show." They said, "You can't do that, nobody's ever heard of anybody having a one-man show after only painting for a year and a half or so." Ned said, "Well, I'm going to."

So he did and it was opened by the American Ambassador and it was a sellout within the first few days. So he went back and painted for another year and went to London where he had another show; the same story all over again. And in those days, the late 20s, Ned was getting \$1,000 or \$1,500 for a painting. Then he painted some more, in France and Italy, and then he came to the U.S., had a show in New York; same story again. Went to California, painted there, and it was that time that his friends in the Philippines, the sugar barons, asked him to go to Washington on their payroll to lobby for a sugar quota for the Philippines, and other Philippine interests to lobby for the Philippine independence bill.

So that's how he got to Washington, and that's how he happened to be there when all of this happened. Peggy and he were both born and bred Republicans but they went absolutely wholeheartedly for FDR, they were completely with him.

ROBERT BROWN: Did they ever say why?

INSLEE HOPPER: Because they just believed in what he was doing and his ideas, and then they hate their stuffy Republican relatives in France. There they were from then on. I can't do justice to Ned. And a delicious sense of humor, impish and so smooth, so clever; quite a combination. I don't know anyone else who could have done what he did in Washington. He was a one-man job. Great.

ROBERT BROWN: He was quite an influence on you as you look back, as you think about what happened after the War?

INSLEE HOPPER: Very much so, Ned was a great influence in my life. And a great pleasure to have known him and Peggy. When Arnold Genthe photographed Peggy years back, he said that Peggy Bruce "is one of the most beautiful women in the world of her generation," which she was indeed. Peggy left their collection to Howard University, mostly. A few things to the National Collection and a few things to Princeton. And to me, that heavenly rabbit up there, which is one of the few things that they kept - they kept just a few small sculptures when Ned had to sell his collection of paintings. It's a Tang sculpture and it was sent to me this year by Maria - land as a memento of Ned and Peggy. It's a beauty I think.

ROBERT BROWN: After the War you thought about reviving the Section or the Gallery, you thought about a biography, did some of this impetus from the 30s carry on thereafter with you? I mean, you couldn't apply it in that direction.

INSLEE HOPPER: Oh, in spirit yes, very definitely.

ROBERT BROWN: In what ways would you say?

INSLEE HOPPER: That's the trouble. There wasn't really any outlet for it. You see, I can't cope with things like that; Ned could - he could barge into an absolutely cold meeting of the Congress and charm them and sell his ideas. I don't function that way. I think they're plain goddamn stupid if they can't see my point of view right off - I mean, how can you sell it? It's so patent they should get it. But they don't. So I'm no good at that kind of thing.

ROBERT BROWN: But you have chosen to work in more private ways -

INSLEE HOPPER: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: - not necessarily in the public realm.

INSLEE HOPPER: No, right.

ROBERT BROWN: In restoration projects, things of that sort.

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, I've done some restoration up here, old houses, and also in St. Thomas and designed a couple of modern buildings down there. But it's been very sporadic, I haven't done much about it, and I haven't done any writing at all. After *The Arts*, I used to write for the *Magazine of Art* fairly often. That whole world has sort of evaporated with the War in me.

I had a very definite feeling of resentment to the lack of appreciation of artists for what had been for them. I mean, we all really fought, bled and didn't quite die but we really fought and bled for them in Washington. And they were still thinking of nothing but their own selves, they were critical, they were bitchy, they were impossible. And I thought, "You know, come on! You've spent enough years doing that" and Ned really gave his health and his life to it. What did he get for it? He must have gotten a satisfaction but not really the appreciation.

A number of artists that I know really are deeply appreciative of what was done remembered him. Ben Shahn is one of them. The last time I saw Ben was just crossing, he coming out of a theater in New York, I going in, and we stood and chatted for about ten minutes and he said, "You know, Bernarda and I were talking about you and Ned Bruce just a couple of nights ago and wondering what had happened to you and regretting those wonderful days when all those things were being accomplished. It doesn't happen now, does it?" I said, "Nope, afraid not." It needs somebody like Ned Bruce to push it and guide it and nurse it. But I think things are looking up now. There certainly is a lot more patronage of the arts by the Government. Some of it I don't exactly go along with but then I'm afraid my taste is becoming dated. [both laugh]

ROBERT BROWN: You feel that the Government should have a role in the arts?

INSLEE HOPPER: I think it's absolutely essential in any civilized country. God knows, our country is rich enough. I think the interest in the arts is just astonishing, the way it's grown, and since the War particularly. We have become a much more civilized nation. Horrible as War is, it does enlarge the outlook of the men that go far away and see there is another way of living and eating and talking and seeing. But I really would not want to be mixed up with it any more, I mean in the Washington world/whirl.

ROBERT BROWN: So in the postwar years you've largely worked on your own.

INSLEE HOPPER: I've led a completely personal life, where I wanted to go and that's it, and I've spent the last, well, 22 years now I've been in the Islands every winter. Up here in the summer, down there in the winter. I love it very much down there, and physically I'm better off down there in the winter. But I also love New England. I've had a split personality ever since I discovered St. Thomas because when I'm down there I miss Connecticut, and when I'm up here I miss St. Thomas. But I can have both of them in different courses.

ROBERT BROWN: Since the 30s it's been hard to blend where you are and what you're doing.

INSLEE HOPPER: Pretty much so, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: That was a grand time when a lot came together, did it?

INSLEE HOPPER: Well, it was exhilarating in those days in Washington. I wouldn't have missed that for anything. You know, you really felt that you were accomplishing something and there were many, many dedicated people there. Even in the Congress. [he laughs] And certainly a lot in government.

END OF INTERVIEW

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