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Oral history interview with Luigi Lucioni,  
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# Transcript

## Interview

**RB:** ROBERT BROWN

**LL:** LUIGI LUCIONI

**RB:** This is an interview July 6, 19971 with Luigi Lucioni, Robert Brown, the interviewer in Manchester, Vermont. Well, to begin with, I'd like to just ask very general questions and possibly at first you could give us some idea of your upbringing, particularly those things might have led to your later career in painting. . .

**LL:** I started at the age of six, of all things. My school teacher, you know, in Italy, I was just a boy, was a professor of painting, so I used to stay in after school and play around with watercolors and drawings and things like that, we made flowers and things like that, so it seems to me I've always been interested in art. I don't know when I started. We came to America when I was ten years old and right away I went to drawing school. It never came into my life. It seemed it was always there. And then at the age of fifteen I did go to Cooper Union. So I can't tell you any more than that. I've always been in it all the time.

**RB:** Well, at Cooper Union were there any particular things that stick in your mind, teachers or incidents?

**LL:** Well, there was a teacher by the name of Perad I think was his name in my Life class. You know I think it was a wonderful training because we had, it was at night you know. The first three years we went three nights a week. Then the last year, which was the Life class, was five nights a week. But it was a marvelous training because you started the first year doing just geometrical blocks and things like that which was wonderful, in charcoal. Then the second year was just heads. Mostly from the antique naturally, but they were all heads. Then the third year was what they called the antique class, large figure things like that. And the fourth year was Life. So it was a rather wonderful training. I don't know whether they do that nowadays, but it was an awfully good foundation, you started right from scratch. And then after that I started going to the Academy, when I started to paint. But those four years at Cooper Union I find very, I don't, as I say, know whether they do them nowadays anymore, but I think it was a very good way. Lots of people say drawing from the antique is not very good. Well, a lot of the great artists used to draw from the antique, you know. Ingres and Rubens and people like that. So I don't think there is anything the matter with it.

**RB:** What particularly do you remember deriving from studying the casts?

**LL:** I remember particularly in the antique class, the first year as I said were just blocks and square and in the second year there were heads. I remember one or two Greek heads, I think one of them was Seneca or something. But the third year, the one thing that I liked very much was, I remember, a cast of the Laocoon, you know the one with the. . . I was really fascinated by it. And so I really enjoyed the antique class at Cooper Union very much. As a matter of fact I got the prize for drawing there at Cooper Union. But there was a good teacher there who later became my first painting teacher. He was teaching at Cooper Union for the first time, I guess that was quite a while ago, 1918. While I was at Cooper Union he used to have a Sunday morning painting class. I started going to his painting class when I was about 18 or something like that. So, there you are. My whole life has been in it.

**RB:** Who was this teacher?

**LL:** His name was William Stockweather. He just died a few years ago. He was quite an old man. But he was quite a good teacher. He had been a pupil of Sorolla, you know, the famous. . . although later his point of view and my point of view were not alike and he belonged to the very flashy school of painting, you know, brush strokes and things like that which I did in the beginning too but then it just didn't go along because I became, I would say terrible realistic, but I became frightfully interested in classic realism, you see. And I hate brush strokes and things like that. We remained good friends right up until he died. He died about three or four years ago. He was never, was not a very successful artist, I am sorry to say, but he was a very good painter - very dashing nudes and big brush strokes all over the place, you know. He believed certain parts of the canvas you shouldn't pay any attention to. Well, I believe that every inch of the canvas is very important. But I didn't believe so then. I went along slavishly with him until after I went to the Academy and I worked at the Academy for five years. And then, you know, everybody is influenced by somebody at one time or another and then they finally find themselves. I think the greatest change in me came when - you see I had come to America when I was ten years old, and then I went back to Italy after all this training when I was 24, 25. That was the first time I ever saw the Renaissance, you know. That was a complete change in my life. And you know the very funny part of it, in this little town where we were born, there were some very very famous frescoes, which are still there, by the great painter Masolino di Panicale, who was the teacher of Massaccio, by the way. And I had seen these things when I was seven or eight or nine years later, I think it was when I was at the Tiffany Foundation, there was this man who was the Director of the Tiffany Foundation and he didn't like me very much because he liked Southern

Italians, you see I am a Northern Italian, so he didn't pay much attention to me. Then he said "Where do your people come from?" Well, I said "My people come from Castileone da Rona". Well, he was fascinated. He said "Do you know that. . ." Well, I said "I know that they took me up to see them." Then he became quite a \_\_\_ person. And he had written a book on this man. And then when I went back to Italy in 1925 I went to see these things, and they were marvelous things. I think, the Frick in New York has a Masolino. There's one Masolino. . . He lived to be older than Massaccio, but he was quite a remarkable. . . I think his most famous things are in this town, Castileone. It think very few people go there except art students. But there are some things. . . Have you been to Florence?

**RB:** Yes.

**LL:** Do you know the Church of the Carmine? Well, one of his, in that chapel where the Massaccio is on one side, one of them is Masolino di Panicale, who also worked with Fra Lippo Lippi, or something like that. He was quite an important painter. Well, he was much earlier than Massaccio, but as I say, Massaccio as you know died at 26 or 27 and Masolino lived to be quite old. But I get very fascinated by, I mean, when people try to be polite and they say "Oh your things look like a photograph". I think they mean to be complimentary. I don't think a photograph is realistic, you know. They mean to be very complimentary, "Oh it looks just like a photograph" so I just don't say anything. But when a critic calls me photographic then I get a little hurt. Because I don't think I am photographic. But I am a realist, so I have to accept that limit. There's nothing I can do about it. But I don't care. It doesn't make any difference to me. I do just what I want to do. It may not be stylish anymore to be photographic but, so what? You can only be yourself. That's all that matters.

**RB:** You said that when you went to National Academy you began moving away from--

**LL:** I began not too much. I began moving away slightly, see, when I started to paint with Stockwether I was only interested in nudes and portraits and then after I went to the National Academy, after I was there about three or four years, I got a scholarship to go out to the Tiffany Foundation and I was painting landscapes out-of-doors, and of course I didn't like landscapes at all. Now I'm known as a landscape. . .but I didn't really like landscapes at all. And then I began to realize that this technique of flashy brush-work didn't work very well in landscape. And then I began to experiment. I got very much interested in Cezanne, and Matisse. I still like Cezanne very much. I don't like Matisse, but I still think Cezanne is a great artist. And I began to experiment, to paint like them, you know. Then I all of a sudden for two or three years. I didn't have a brush in my. . .I painted nothing but palette knife all the time. And little by little, you know, you develop. And then when I finally did go to Italy and saw the Renaissance I decided I was going to be one of those. Of course I'm not, but I would like to be, but that's it.

**RB:** Well, at the Academy or at the Tiffany Foundation were there certain teachers who played an important part.

**LL:** At the Academy we had teachers. We had Charles Hawthorne and Curry. But at the Tiffany Foundation, this was a rather wonderful thing, Mr. Tiffany gave this. You were not there. You was more or less an advanced student, but you were left on your own. You worked by yourself except every once in a while, once a month, there would be a well-known artist come out to visit and just give a few criticisms. Everybody worked on his own. That was the idea of the Tiffany Foundation. As a matter of fact I remember meeting Childe Hassam out there. He came out there, Gifford Beal and some of these people that were well-known. I think what's-his-name came out there too, the man who started what is known as the Garbage Can school in New York, John Sloan. He came out there and visited too. But the Tiffany Foundation was a wonderful place because, we were about 10 men and five women at the most, I mean we were never that many. But we all worked, no one was influenced by the other. Well, of course, this was the beginning when people are beginning to find themselves, you know. They are influenced by somebody. Everybody thinks he is going to paint like Titian or something like that. Eventually you find out it isn't so easy to paint like Titian or Michelangelo or those people. But we were all twenty-four, twenty-five, we were all finding ourselves. It was a very good experience.

**RB:** Well, at this time you were more concentrating on your own development and not so much under the influence of particular mentors?

**LL:** No. Well, Mr. Lothrop, who was the Director of the Foundation, was a mentor in a way, but a rather intellectual mentor, not the least because he, as I said there were about ten different students and ten of them all painted differently, so there was nobody there. But that's when you began to provide yourself. But Mr. Lothrop, who had written books on Italian primitives, he sort of threw along that line, which was natural for me. I was born in Italy. It was probably even a kind of atavistic thing that you have, you know. It was probably in me. He helped me a great deal. In fact when I went back to Italy he told me to go and study Mantegna very much, because he thought I could get a great deal from Mantegna. So, from then on it's always been, I've always been sort of involved with the - I don't think you call them primitives, I mean it's sort of a full Renaissance, full Italian. . .well of course my favorite of all is Piero della Fancesca, which I don't know, you couldn't call him a primitive,

could you? Well, I mean he's an early one, but I mean--

**RB:** Only in that sense--

**LL:** Yes. I think he's 1400 or something like that. He was not a Giotto or any of those people.

**RB:** What, when you got to Italy, was the effect upon your work, and what in the Renaissance did you--

**LL:** Well, the effect upon me was, when I got to Italy - when I went to Italy I was still kind of mixed up with Cezanne and Matisse, Renoir, Sargeant, you know, mixed up. When I got to Italy I completely concentrated on the Italian point of view, you know. I would call it classical realism. But it took me many, many years to develop it because, as you know, you just don't turn around and become a Michelangelo overnight, you know. I would love to, but I don't think I ever will. It was a great change my going to Italy, it did me a lot of good. I've been back. One year I went back and I painted for six months over there. I haven't been back now since 1955. But it's still my aspiration to be able to paint like that. But I don't suppose I ever will, but I try anyway.

**RB:** In their work then, you were particularly taken by their technical virtuosity?

**LL:** Well, I don't think it's virtuosity because, I don't think you feel the technique in the Italian painting. Do you think so?

**RB:** No, but you were saying earlier you don't see the brushwork.

**LL:** Well, that's what I mean. But the point about them is their technique is the means to express themselves, and it's hard to copy their technique. There is no technique. I mean that's something which is quite remarkable about the Italian School. The French Impressionists, of course, they have a certain amount of technique and things which - now for instance, you could copy the Cezanne technique, but you just can't copy a Leonardo technique because the technique is completely hidden and I was really fascinated by, and I still am fascinated by it. I still think they are greatest painters that ever lived, Do you think so? Well, lots of people think differently, but I still feel they're the greatest. Of course there have been some wonderful Flemish painters like Memling and of course I think Holbern is a marvelous painter and Durer. You know, I hate to tell you this but I don't like Rubens. I think he's a marvelous painter, but I was thinking this morning that except there are two wonderful, have you been to the Uffizi in Florence? There are two marvelous landscapes by Rubens. How in the world he got away from those big fat nudes and did these wonderful things. I don't think there are more than these two landscapes that he's ever done and they are quite wonderful. And as I say, I have tremendous respect for him. I do think perhaps he's the greatest painter who ever lived, but I don't really like him very much. I'm supposed to, but I don't.

**RB:** Well, this meant that you were evolving slowly toward what you call realism. Could you explain what to you are the virtues of realism?

**LL:** My idea of realism is not what you see, but it's to create what there is in reality. I mean, because for instance, even when I paint now I take opera glasses to study this and that, you can't see that with a bare eye. But I like to know what there is in there in order to bring out, I still have not done it in order to find a way to express that essence of realism. You know, the thing that makes it real without copying all the little trivial things. People say I paint every leaf on the tree. I don't. I mean, if I painted every leaf on the tree, I'd be. . .No, it's a kind of a searching out the thing that makes it look real. And I think that's what the Italian painters did. I keep trying for it, but I don't know whether I ever get it or not. I'll be dead before then, but that's alright. But the idea of realism is to paint what you see, I don't think, maybe some people do that, but. . .I paint what I think is there. I mean I try to make it look as though it belonged there, but very often when people look at my landscapes and look at the painting I am doing, "Oh, you changed this, you changed that," they don't realize that, you know, you don't. . .first of all, you can't cope with nature, as you know, and therefore you can't put in all the little things that nature can do so easily and you can't. So you have to get the essentials of these things and that is my idea of realism. Of course, nowadays realism is a dirty word, so, you know, if you are a realist you are a lousy painter, so that's alright. I accept it, it doesn't matter.

**RB:** But for you nature is the great subject?

**LL:** Well, for me nature, you can't. . .first of all you can't cope with nature, but for me nature is the greatest artist that ever lived, you know, and all the great artists have tried to follow nature, well, they can do so many things that a brush can't do, I mean, for instance, how can you paint, well to begin with you can't paint sunsets, you can't paint sunrises, you paint a blue sky, but if you paint it blue it looks absolutely opaque where nature can have it transparent. Nature is a great, great inspirer, but also a terrible tease for an artist, but you do the best you can.

**RB:** Well, from the mid-twenties onward then you were moving more and more towards realism?

**LL:** Yes. My first exhibition was in 1927.

**RB:** Where was this?

**LL:** At the Ferargil Gallery in New York. I got a lot of good reviews, then I had an exhibition once almost every year for about seven or eight years. Then I began to skip two or three years. But it was always toward realism. And I am sure that I am much better now than I was, in fact I look back at some of my early things, I think I am much better now. But it takes a lot of doing to get there.

**RB:** Was the Ferargil Gallery a good one for a young artist to work with?

**LL:** Oh yes. As a matter of fact the Ferargil Gallery was the one that started that whole American School: Grant Wood, Thomas Benton, myself, John Steuart Curry, this young group that started out. Now, of course, we are. . . I think I am the only one, no, Thomas Benton is still alive. He's old, much older than I am. But all the others have gone. But it was that American school. Ferargil Gallery was quite a good gallery.

**RB:** What was the public's reaction to it?

**LL:** Oh, I got good reviews. I even got good reviews - well, of course, in those days the critics were what you would call conservative today, but, you wouldn't know him, Royal Cortezos, would you know him? He gave me very good reviews. The only critic who was a little bit snooty towards me was Henry McBride, who was on the New York Sun, who thought that I should try to find something more, but an artist can only be what he is. It's all very well to say. . . Oh I remember one exhibition in one of the reviews he said that I was the most popular painter, which is ridiculous, since Gilbert Stuart (I mean there is no relation between me and Gilbert Stuart) and he hopes someday I would try to find out what the apples and pears that I painted what they had to say. Well, I don't know that an apple has anything to say, Do you think so? Well, anyway, and also I was quite influenced by Cezanne for quite a while. I still think he's one of the great great great painters.

**RB:** What of his work did you. . .

**LL:** Well, I began to do still lifes. I began to do a lot of still lifes and his forced perspective I liked very much, sort of looking down on things. The design. And I do think he was a frustrated painter. I mean, sure I read a great deal about him and all that. I think he wanted to paint like Ingres and he just couldn't and he started too late and he was rather. . . I think one of the greatest painters of all time was Ingres, a marvelous draughtsman. I do not like a lot of those big battle scenes, but they are so wonderfully done. And you know I was quite surprised he lived to be 86 or 87. I looked at some of things that were done when he was 81 or 82, absolutely marvelous.

**RB:** Well now, could you say that at this period what was your approach to a subject, to what extent did you deliberately compose or work?

**LL:** Oh yes. Oh no, I deliberately thought these things out before, I mean these still lifes, I tried awfully hard to make it look casual, very often I didn't, very often they did look contrived, but my idea was to sort of compose things, but to put the realism in so it would look as if it were there. But even in painting landscapes, you know, I am very pick and choosy in what I pick out and in fact I do a little moving here and there. I mean, the realism is my point of view, naturally, but it's not a copy as I said before, it's not a copy of nature, although lots of people think so. But let them think so, it's alright. But the realism is something else. First of all, you have to know what a thing looks like, what a thing is made of, you know, like Leonardo took bodies, pieces to study, (I never did that) anatomical studies and all that. But I did look at the things, I studied the things that I painted, I studied the trees, I'd go and look at them up close and then when I would go back I'd try to simplify by a line or two. It doesn't always come off. But you try awfully hard to make a thing look as though it was casual. But I don't think there is anything casual in art.

**RB:** Then, what would you say is the purpose, once you have set these things down in painting?

**LL:** Well, once I have set them down, it's to make them look as absolutely alive as possible. I mean, three dimensions make them look even more alive than they really do look like to you when you are looking at them. And maybe that's wrong, I don't know, but I can't help it, that's me. I am too old now to change.

**RB:** Do you do a lot of preliminary sketching?

**LL:** I make a lot, not so much now, but I make a lot of, for instance, before I even start a still life, when I plan it, I use pen, you know, so I can't correct, my sketches don't look like rough of anything, but I make an awful lot of pen drawings, and find things, you know.

**RB:** You mentioned earlier the comparison with photography and whether people mean to praise you or not. How do you compare your work with photography?

**LL:** I don't think it compares with photography at all. People say, "oh you can take a photograph and make it look as good." You just can't, to begin with. I don't think realism and photography have anything in common, for my point of view, I may be wrong. In fact, I am really not a good photographer. I can't take good snapshots or anything, and I never. . . People say, "oh we can do that from a photograph." I never work from photographs. I couldn't possibly work from a photograph. There's something. . . But to begin with, I always say I have no imagination. I cannot imagine a tree. I have to study, I have to be in front of it in order to get it. See, that's one of my limitations. I remember Mr. Lothrop used to say that your imagination is unequal to your knowledge and I think that's true. I mean, you can't imagine something that you just don't know. I mean, you have to know about it. But there are a lot of people who do work from memory, but I am no good at that, I can't do that. I mean, it's as I say, it's my limitation, but it's me and there's nothing I can do about it. I am too old now to change, and I don't know if I would want to change or not.

**RB:** Well, you also then got into printmaking. When did you start?

**LL:** Oh I started that, oh, very young, in 1922-23. No, no, later. I went to the Academy in 1920. I started to do etchings around 1923-24. I started right away to do and I have been doing, now I do one etching a year, but I used to do three or four etchings a year. Well again you see, etching is, you have to be an awfully good draughtsman to be a good. I've always been very much interested in draughtsmanship and drawing so that etching was a very good training for it. And I've done prints, God knows, some of them are not very good, some of them as I look back, and some of them are quite good.

**RB:** Could you explain the difference if any in what you are trying to get at between your painting and your etching? Why did you go into this other medium?

**LL:** Personally I consider myself a painter. I found that etching kept you in correct drawing all the time. That's why I did it. It's discipline, and also it's quite interesting, etching, so I have been doing them right along. But I am fundamentally a painter.

**RB:** Could you describe then, you were at the Ferargil Gallery, describe others of your exhibitions in other galleries?

**LL:** Then after Ferargil Gallery I went to the Associated American Artists which I still. . . and they are the ones, the Associated American Artists which started this \$5 etching thing, that goes back to 1934. That's quite a while ago, and that's when they made etchings very very popular. A lot of printmakers didn't like that because they used to make a big edition of these prints and sell them for \$5 apiece, which after all, there's nothing wrong with making a big edition. And they had a quite a good gallery and I had a big exhibition there in 1952. It was my 25th, I had my first exhibition in 1927, and in 1952 I had my 25th. The gallery is still going on now, but they don't have paintings anymore. Of course they had the same group like John Steuart Curry, Thomas Benton and all that, from the Ferargil. Then when they closed I went to the Milch Gallery, I am still at the Milch, but I have never had an exhibition at the Milch Gallery. I had an exhibition up here in the Shelbourne Museum two years, but I have not had an exhibition in New York for, oh, twenty years I guess. I have had exhibitions around here and there. Now I'd be considered old-hat in New York, so I don't bother. I do exhibit in the big shows, like the Audubon Society and the national Academy, but there you see, I belong to these societies and you don't have to go by a jury. You know, the funny part is I won't send to a jury show anymore. It isn't that I feel conceited and all that, but I do think that when you establish yourself people invite you, and if they don't invite you why should you go to the trouble of being passed by a jury? When you have passed fifty and all that you have achieved yourself I don't see any sense, so I won't send to any jury show. In fact I got a lot of notices and I just tear them up. It has nothing to do with conceit or pride or anything. It's just that what the hell, why should I bother? I might be rejected so why should I do it. I could easily be rejected.

**RB:** Were you quite involved in art activities in the thirties and forties in New York?

**LL:** I was quite involved in art exhibitions, but I never got involved in activities or anything. I never got into this business what were they doing, Artists Equity and all that. I am not a very good politician in any way whatsoever, so I never got involved.

**RB:** You said earlier you felt it was a good thing that etchings were sold by the Associated American Artists.

**LL:** I think so because they did make an edition of 250, well, I don't see any reason why, the plates are perfectly good, I mean, they steel face them like in the olden days. For instance, one of my favorites is Piranesi, you know the eighteenth-century, and they did some of them. And a lot of them, they have been printed, 2 or 300 hundred of them. I think it's fine because it's gone out to the public and I think there's a much more knowledgeable art-loving public in America than there was thirty years ago.

**RB:** Then what was it, the public?

**LL:** Well the public was rather limited, a little bit chi-chi, and you had to be quite rich. But there were these \$5 etchings around. Lots of people would buy these color reproductions or they decided they would rather have an original etching. And you could get an etching for \$5. Now, of course, the Associated American Artists still prints them. They are \$10 now instead of \$5. And later, when some of the etchings, when the edition ran out, some etchings I get \$25 and \$30, \$35. But they were all original for \$5. And I think it was a wonderful thing. It really created a big, big etching public in this country. And they are still going this. They still print them. Once a year they put out, last year I didn't do an etching, but two years ago I did an etching for them. They still put them out. Now they make you sign the number of the etching, which seems rather foolish to me because the printer prints them, you don't know whether you are signing number 1 or number 50 the way he gives them to you to sign. Unless you printed them yourself you have no way of knowing. I happen to know the first five of six I have printed, but the others I don't know. They make you sign, you know, one to two hundred and fifty. Still, I think it's a very good thing.

**RB:** What about the Milch Gallery? Could you explain something about your feelings about it? Your relationship with it?

**LL:** Well, I am very pleased with the Milch Gallery. As I say, I went to the Milch Gallery, about 10 years ago or something like that. Now it's a private gallery. They wanted me to have an exhibition there, but I didn't have, you see I am a very slow painter. All of my landscapes are sold, not all of my still lifes, but all of landscapes are sold, so you can't have an exhibition and borrow all these things for it's an awful expense to borrow them, insure them, a risk you know. So, I think they were quite a wonderful gallery. They carry some very good artists. You know, the old man, the father of this Milch that I go to, he had people like Childe Hassam and Abbott Thayer, all the great American painters. Milch Gallery really was one of the finest galleries in New York. Now, as I say, it's a private gallery. You just call up and he doesn't carry many artists. But they have done a wonderful job. I would say they were conservative, of course, you know what I mean, but rather liberal, you know. I mean they didn't have, well they didn't carry Picassos or anything like that. I mean, they were only American artists in that gallery. But you know we have some very great painters in this country. I think one of the greatest painters, almost better than any of the French Impressionists was what's his name, the Philadelphia man.

**RB:** Eakins?

**LL:** Eakins. I think he's a great painter. Don't you think he is? And Winslow Homer is a great painter. We have some very good painters. We have some very good painters then. We didn't have any fanfare about them the way the French Impressionists did, we didn't blow them up to a faretheewell. But they are very very great. I think there is one painting of Eakins in Washington that is at the Phillips Gallery that I think is one of the most wonderful portraits I've ever seen. I think you probably know it, it's the woman with a fan. Marvelous. I think it's a very great painting. and I think, for instance, Innes was a great landscape painter. We have had some very great painters in this country. We just didn't publicize them. Well, they did very well without any publicity, so it's alright.

**RB:** What do you think now?

**LL:** Well, now we have so many, many painters in this country and so many different isms of all kinds that I really don't know. I have no opinion about it. I don't know anything about pop art, or op art. Is there something new now, is there something?

**RB:** There's always a new tag, of course.

**LL:** Whatever it is I don't know anything about it. I am now what is known as a senior citizen, so I couldn't care less. I paint just as much now as I did forty years ago.

**RB:** Well, after the second World War in New York did you find things were different for you, considering that you were beginning to get the abstract expressionists?

**LL:** I never, you know, strangely enough -

**RB:** Did you have any relations with them?

**LL:** I had no relations with them. But I always sold all of my things. I had a very good public, except just recently, I mean. There is a big depression going on. But I never had any trouble so I never worried about whether I was stylish or not stylish. It didn't make any difference to me. I just feel you do what you do, you are what you are. And if you go out of style it's just to bad. But if I am out of style, people still buy my paintings. I may be old hat, but I don't care. It doesn't make any difference to me.

**RB:** What was your relationship with any of these people, the abstract expressionists and the others?

**LL:** No relation. I don't know many artists, you know. When I was a student and all that we'd all hunt together but after you become yourself, I mean - I think, see I am very interested in music. More interested in music than I am in art I am not. But I am very much interested and most of my friends are musicians. But I have, we have several artists. I find artists get along better if they are separate rather than together. There's always a kind of jealousy and all that sort of thing you know. The only artist that I think is a good artist up here is Pleissner, you know who lives in at Paulet. I don't see him very much. In fact I don't see him at all. I have really no contact with artists and it's perfectly alright. I think it's better because you are bound not to like his things because if you are that way you only see your own point of view and so you find fault with him. So I don't, I never had any contact with Impressionists or Expressionists, I mean, they left me alone and I left them alone. They never interfered with me so it was alright. I certainly didn't interfere with them.

**RB:** What did you think of the criticism in New York?

**LL:** Well, I haven't read a review for, I don't even know, are there any good critics? I really don't know. I really don't know because I go back to Edwin Jewell and the *Times* and McBride and the *Sun* and Royal Cortezos, who was a very fine critic, a very fine writer. I don't know about, oh yes, I used to know what's her name, Emily Genauer. For a while she was rather sarcastic about me and then she gave me good reviews and all that. I guess criticism is very useful but I don't even know, I never look at the art page. I mean it isn't that I am not interested in art. when you are in art you are not bothered by all the trimmings that go with it, you know.

**RB:** You've been, I guess, you said yourself, described as a traditional or conservative artist.

**LL:** Oh yes.

**RB:** Would you say you are? What would you say are the virtues of being traditional?

**LL:** Well, I don't know if there are any virtues or not. That's just what I am. I am interested in that kind of thing, you see. I am interested in work that I think requires study and a great deal of concentration. If I see something that looks as though I could do it better myself, I don't think much of it, you know. So, I mean, I am very much interested in what I call difficult work and that's mostly it, that's the tradition. But, as I say, I have nothing against the people, I don't even know who the artists are today. I am sure they are very good, I don't know anything about them. I have nothing against them. I leave them alone, they leave me alone. The only objection is, my only objection is people who always resent you. I always said: I give you the right to do just exactly what you want as long as you allow me that privilege to do what I want to do. And after all that's not asking very much. I mean, if you don't like me, it's alright. It doesn't make any difference to me.

**RB:** Where have you been painting would you describe the various places you've had studios.

**LL:** The only places I've had studios are in New York and up here. I've been painting in Vermont now for forty years, I guess, yes, 1930, yes, forty years. I've had this house for thirty years and New York. I did paint in Italy a couple of times, I did a couple of sketches in France, in England a sketch or something, but most of my painting has been in Vermont and in New York.

**RB:** I've asked you something already about the New York place, the critics, the galleries and all. Could you describe a bit about when you first came to Vermont? What was there in the arts here, and what attracted you here?

**LL:** Well, I will tell you what attracted me to Vermont. First of all we had a cousin who lived up in Barre and we went up there. But I had been painting out on Long Island, which is not very attractive country to paint in, and then suddenly when I came up to Vermont I fell madly in love with the State because it reminded me little bit of northern Italy, you know, where I was born, though I left when I was 10 years old. And I don't think there was very much art going on in Vermont at that time. Now it has become very art conscious. There was one or two others. There was Henry Schnakenburg. I think that was about all that we had here in Vermont. And I went up to Barre, Vermont and started to paint there two or three years before I came down here to Manchester. Then we had the Southern Vermont Artists and there were three or four fairly good painters, and we had exhibitions here. But, as I say, Vermont now has become very artsy-craftsy all over the place, you know. Art Center here, Art Center there. I think that's fine, I mean they are very much interested. But when I first came to Vermont it was 1930, 1930 I came to Vermont which is forty-one years ago. There wasn't much art in Vermont. I didn't start it I assure you, but quite a few people have come to Vermont since, and it still a wonderful state. Is this your first visit to Vermont?

**RB:** No.

**LL:** It still is a wonderful state.

**RB:** Was it a good climate for you as a painter when you first came?

**LL:** Well, you mean weather-wise?

**RB:** No, I mean generally.

**LL:** Oh yes I liked it very much and also I sold all my Vermont things almost right away. But as I say, I've come back ever since 1930. One year I went to Italy, two years, but I'd painted in Vermont for a month or so before. As I say, I've always been painting in Vermont for over forty years. I am what you call a New England painter.

**RB:** Could you describe something of your work habits?

**LL:** One thing I am, I am very disciplined. I work every day here. First thing I do when I get up in the morning, I am a very early riser to begin with. I get up in the morning and I play the piano. I have absolutely no talent and it's not any false pride. I just love to play the piano but I have no talent for it, for about an hour. Then I go out and paint from 8:30 until about 12. Then I come home and have lunch. Then I go out around 1:30 or so and I paint until 6 every day. And of course, if it's raining, you know then I -but in New York I work every day. I mean, it's a discipline but that is good to have. I keep steady hours. In New York, of course, you don't paint as long, the days are short, but I paint from 9 until 12 and from 1 till four. And Saturdays and Sundays it doesn't make any difference, holidays don't mean anything. I enjoy painting, so for me painting is not work, so many people work so hard. I think anything that you do that you enjoy, I don't think you call it work, do you think so?

**RB:** While you are painting, there's enjoyment as you said, what other feelings do you have as you paint?

**LL:** In New York it's different. I have the radio going on all the time. I have a lot of wonderful operatic, you see I love opera being Italian, I have operas going on all of the time. But up here there's nothing at all, I am out-of-doors, so my feelings are, I am sort of with nature with God, you know. And sometimes some of the climates are not awfully good, some of these stones are, but I feel that's part of it, but I enjoy being out-of-doors, as I say. I take this little do along with me, who's good company. So it's great fun. And it's strange to have great fun and make a living out of it, it's rather lucky don't you think?

**RB:** What could you say in general, what do you think the role, the purpose of your art is, what do you think generally the purpose of art should be?

**LL:** I don't know if there's any purpose, but I think the purpose of my art is to keep me alive and to be interested in life and that's a good enough purpose, don't you think? And I think most artists are that way, I mean, interested in what they are doing and keeping them alive.

**RB:** Have you ever been a teacher?

**LL:** Yes. I am not a good teacher. I taught at the Art students League one year then I taught privately, you know. I don't think I am a good teacher. In fact I know I am not a good teacher. People thought I was good but I don't think I am a good teacher because I have a definite point of view and I don't think a good teacher should have a definite point of view. I think a teacher should be able to see various points of view, various students, I just don't see it. It's a limitation of mine. But I did teach. I learned more myself teaching than I actually taught. I mean I have taught etching. That's pure technique. You have to teach people how to lay a ground, and bite the plate and all that, that's all. But in painting you can teach to a certain extent and after that it's up to the person who is working.

**RB:** Who had you studied etching with?

**LL:** Will Averbach-Levy. He's the only one I studied etching with. He's quite a good etcher.

**RB:** Where was he, at the National Academy?

**LL:** At the National Academy. I never studied with anyone else in etching. He was a very good etcher, Averbach-Levy. But as I say, etching is pure drawing, that's all. I think if Ingres had been an etcher he would have been a marvelous etcher.

**RB:** Are you involved in Vermont with any art associations?

**LL:** Well, I am a member of the Art Center here and all that. I don't get too involved, as Carleton Howe will tell you. I never go to any of their meeting or anything. But I belong to that and I think it's a wonderful group and we've done wonderful things. But I am not particularly involved in anything. I remember, as I said, I had gotten so that I didn't like Hawthorne, but when John Sloan came out to the Tiffany Foundation, because Provincetown was the big place, you know, Hawthorne. I asked John Sloan, "What do you think of Provincetown, Mr. Sloan?" He said, "Paint rags that high." That's all he had to say. "Paint rages that high". I thought it was quite interesting. But as I said, I've never been to Provincetown. Have you been there?

**RB:** Yes.

**LL:** Of course, it's near Boston. Oh no-

**RB:** A hundred and some, it's at the tip of the Cape.

**LL:** I've been in Boston, I've been around there. But I've never been in Provincetown.

**RB:** Did you ever exhibit in Boston?

**LL:** Yes. I had an exhibition in Boston in 19. . .at, what's it called, Carson Gallery, is it still going?

**RB:** Carson Gallery.

**LL:** Quite a good gallery. I had an exhibition in Boston, when was it, 193. . .I know I had a portrait of Martinelli which I painted I think around 1935 or something like that.

**RB:** Do you still do portraits?

**LL:** No. I am not in the portrait field. I don't like portraits. It's a shame because it's a great form of. . .But I don't, maybe I am no good at it, I've done quite a lot of portraits, but I do not enjoy doing them. Now I do nothing but landscapes and still lifes. I've gotten to the point where people say: oh, do me this." I don't like commissions, any, to begin with. I don't like when people tell me what to paint. I only paint what I want. If they say, or they point, I say "Don't tell me what landscape you want." The next landscape I do you can have choice of refusal on it if you want to, but I don't want to be told what view you want, and all that.

**RB:** When you paint your landscapes, were you or are you ever conscious of influences?

**LL:** Not that I think, not any more. I was. Many years ago I thought I was influenced by Claude Lorrain and not any more. Now I know that this is myself. I have no illusions left. You know when you get to be seventy you don't have many illusions left. No. I don't have. . . I would love to be able to paint like Claude Lorrain, but I can't so that's that.

**RB:** What do you particularly like in his work?

**LL:** Well, I love his classicism. I mean, he's wonderful. You know his work, don't you? He was also one of the greatest etchers that ever lived. But I just his wonderful, he has a wonderful sense of distance that I wish I could get. I've always tried but I never. . . We have it up here, but this wonderful sense of miles he gets inside of his paintings. And you know some of the Italian painters, although the Italian school was not exactly what you call a landscape school, but all those people lie Perugia, in the background of their paintings are these wonderful distances they could do, although they never, they never, except well, you see, Magnasco or some of those landscape in the background. They were really quite wonderful. I think, for instance, Leonardo da Vinci, the Mona Lisa has a marvelous background, a wonderful sense of distance and mystery behind there. But the Italians were not landscape painters.

**RB:** Then you would feel that most of all painters the Italians you keep most in mind?

**LL:** Oh yes.

**RB:** They made the strongest impression on you?

**LL:** Well, I think they did, don't you? Have you ever of anybody greater than Michelangelo, or Leonardo? Well, I think Leonardo is the greatest human being who ever lived. And also a very great, he didn't do many paintings but whatever he did were quite wonderful. And Michelangelo is certainly one of the greatest painters, sculptors. Oh and Piero, I can just name them off by the. . .and you know strangely enough they all lived around the same time, which was rather remarkable. Leonardo, Raphael and Michelangelo were all, they were not contemporaries, they were, Leonardo was maybe fifteen years older than Michelangelo but they all lived at the same time.

**RB:** Well, today do you find many artists that you would say accord with your ideals of realism?

**LL:** I, for instance, what's his name, Andrew Wyeth I like. I don't know him at all, but I like him very, very much. He's a very fine painter. I think I even like Peter Hurd, some of his things. But I don't know many artists, and as I say, I never go to exhibitions so I don't know what's going on. It's probably perhaps the greatest movement in art that's ever lived but I wouldn't know about it.

**RB:** You think your primary task is to be painting yourself.

**LL:** Yourself. That's the important thing. Then let posterity take care of you, if there is any.

**RB:** Well, once you've painted your statement, you've done it for yourself in large part. How do you feel then about conveying it to people who buy? Your attitude towards the consumption of art?

**LL:** Strangely enough I really don't care very much afterwards. There are one or two paintings I would like to keep, but a great many I just don't care very much about. I love doing them and all that. I am not a great Gertrude Stein fan, but she said "It was in me, now it's out of me." And that's the way it is.

**RB:** Are you a collector yourself?

**LL:** No. No. I collect antiques and things like that, a collector of old records and things like that, but I am not a collector of art. I mean, I have an etching, three little etchings by Claude Lorrain, I have some good Piranesi etchings. The kind of art I would like to collect I couldn't afford. I couldn't afford a Michelangelo and things like that.

**RB:** What do you like your surroundings to be?

**LL:** I don't know. Such as it is now, comfortable surroundings.

[END OF INTERVIEW]