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Oral history interview with Laurance P.  
Roberts, 1985 July 26-29

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Laurance P. Roberts on July 26, 1985. The interview took place in Boston, Massachusetts, and was conducted by Robert F. Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The Archives of American Art has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

ROBERT F. BROWN: Recording, recording. An interview in Boston, and this is July 26, 1985. Laurance Roberts with Bob—or Robert Brown, the interviewer. Perhaps we could begin by—you could talk a bit about your childhood, particularly things that may have led to your ultimate career. You were born in Philadelphia, I believe?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In 1907, I think you said.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes. What was the family background, in terms of—that led to what you later did? Were there—was there encouragement? Was there an atmosphere from early childhood on?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Um—not especially. Mother always liked—was interested in painting, and eventually became a painter herself, long after we were all grown up.

ROBERT F. BROWN: She did? Did she exhibit a bit or belong to the Art Alliance or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: She exhibited at the, uh, Art Academy. Pennsylvania. And well—exhibitions, but I suppose my interest came by being taken abroad in the '20s on grand tours—in and out of churches, in and out of museums.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you didn't go reluctantly?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No, I went [inaudible], willingly. In fact, I not only—at the end was leading my family; they weren't leading me.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] Because you were studying and reading up on everything, or just extreme enthusiasm?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes. And I had a year—courses in the history of art at Princeton—specialized in that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You were a class of 29—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —at Princeton. Can you, for a moment, at least, describe a bit the curriculum, the people who you recall at Princeton when you were there?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I remember the professors—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —very well indeed. There was Rufus Morey.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes, Charles Rufus Morey.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes—who was a brilliant scholar, a not very good lecturer, and—but he was so good and so interesting, you hung on every word he said. [00:02:06] And he—the examinations were usually based on footnotes, not on text. It was a tough course.

ROBERT F. BROWN: He was looking for your knowledge of the small details and—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes, and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —commentary?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: And also at that time, he was—his lectures were pioneering work. His book on early Christian medieval art hadn't been—was in the writing, but there was no book comparable at all, and you felt this was—you knew, in fact, this was his own work and his own discoveries. And that made the course even more interesting.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And he talked—spoke as a man who was making discoveries—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —sharing with you his discoveries—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Sharing, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Then he—his index of early Christian art was underway, too.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Was underway at that time, too, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you as undergraduates involved with that at all, or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Not at all. No. No, that was considered way above us—

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —and we would have simply gotten in the way.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was the—uh, his study, his specialty—was it backed up by museum holdings at the university at that time, or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No. There were almost no museum holdings at all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Or language departments or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —considerable classical studies?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No. He—he began to liken [ph] himself as a classical scholar.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Would you say Morey was the, uh, um, dominating figure in the art department there, or were there several others?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: There were several others, indeed. There was George Rowley. He was Far Eastern art. And Bert Friend, who was ear—medieval art. Elderkin, classical art. But Morey and Bert Friend and George Rowley, I think, were the—and—no, sorry—Baldwin Smith, who taught the history of architecture. He taught that very well indeed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was that connected with the School of Architecture as well? Or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No, I don't think he was connected with the School of Architecture. [00:04:02] But he—he was simply lecturing on the history. And I think the architects were required to take a certain number of courses in that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: At that time, wasn't the history of architecture a fairly uncommon undergraduate course?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Um, I can't tell you that. His courses were well-attended, very popular indeed. And, uh, it seemed a natural thing. We didn't think there was anything special about it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You did have a, um, broad training—not simply painting—in the course, so it spanned a—many—a number of the, uh, artistic media.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It was a very broad program.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes, except Princeton didn't lead to anything practical in the way of art—at all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But in—within the history?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Within the history. Within the history they taught you—um, the courses were in—in the Far East. And that was a rather pioneering course. There were awfully few there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: There were some at Harvard.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: And—and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Langdon Warner.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —Langdon Warner at Columbia. But I don't know any other places that really taught that—at all. Quite different from the way it is now. And of course nothing in language was taught then—of—languages of the Far East.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But were—was Far Eastern art of, of particular interest that early, for you?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I was interested in it from the course, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because much later, then, you did return—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: But—yes, but it's when I was—I then worked for the Philadelphia Museum [of Art], and—and—in the Far Eastern department.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you as a student particularly hardworking do you think, or was it a—a typical student of your time? [Laughs.]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: A typical student, I suppose. And I got by all right. Now there, I did enter a competition for—um, the competition was run by the—oh, damn! [00:05:59] I've forgotten what the—uh—well—well, it was an organization—which was—flourished in the '20s for students submitting, um, theses, especially written, and I entered that and shared the first prize with somebody else.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This was in art history?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: In art history, yes. I wrote on the history—believe it or not, on the history of, uh, Provence doors.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Really? Large topic.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: A large topic—which I hadn't seen, but [laughs]—

ROBERT F. BROWN: But it was during these years that you did, then, go with your family—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes, it was.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —summers—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —to Europe?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Most summers spent in Europe.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah. So everything was embedded and ingrained?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Somewhat, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you then did a year afterward with Morey, right? Graduate work?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Graduate work, yes, but not—it was not with Morey. And actually, there was—there was no graduate course then in Far Eastern art. And this was general—or a course—there was a course given by Mather.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Frank Jewett Mather?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Frank Jewett Mather. He was only teaching it in the graduate school. And he was not afraid to use the word "beauty." And there were courses—or a course in enamels and—I've forgotten—various other things.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But Mather was a—by that time, even, an old-fashioned lecturer, was he?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Um, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes. But very effective—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Very effective.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —for the classroom?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Very effective, yeah. But it was, uh, quite unlike Princeton. He was interested in iconography [inaudible] about that at all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: He wanted to—it was connoisseurship? Or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was conno—connoisseurship. And it was the old-fashioned connoisseur with the monocle in the eye and the rather long hair.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But this opened up for you, then, the, uh—this whole realm, didn't it?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes. [00:08:00] And I was amused by that. He actually later came to the Brooklyn Museum, and I remember going around in the galleries with him. And Jack Baur—and Brooklyn then had a few Italian paintings, and Mather would stand off and pronounce by whom they were and then approach closely and see the label, which didn't agree with what he'd said, and then he said, "Well, perhaps the label's all right after all." It was a lesson in connoisseurship.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That stood you in good stead, then, when you went on to museum work?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It must have. The eye—development of the eye. Well, of course, you—in iconography, you were developing it in another sense, [inaudible].

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: In another sense, yes. We were looking at small details—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes, yes.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —and—and the subject matter.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But not looking at formal qualities or aesthetic ones, particularly?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No, no.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It was a cataloguing procedure partly, wasn't it?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: More of that, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you then, uh, welcome going to the Philadelphia Museum? You went there, as you told me, in the summer of that—of 1930?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was this sort of a natural step, or were you—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No, I—well, it was the, uh—the—you would get yourself a job if you could.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: And I did odd jobs at the Johnson Collection. Then they offered me a job in the Far Eastern department.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was the Johnson Collection freshly in—it hadn't been there that long by then? Or was it coming in? Or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was housed in Mr. Johnson's house on South Broad Street—which was so crowded the pictures were hung on both sides of the doors and in the bathrooms, all over the place.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was he still alive?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No, he died. He died, and this was open to the public. And the Philadelphia Museum tried to get hold of it in all sorts of ways—by declaring the building unsafe, which it probably was, and by trying to drive a street through it, and one thing or another. [00:10:06] And finally, seven years afterwards, it did come to the Philadelphia Museum as a special enclave, which, I believe—it's still is.

ROBERT F. BROWN: With a vast library and an archive, I think—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Oh now—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —which was not—it was hardly explored.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But your job was to go through this crowded—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: My job—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —house—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —at that time was to go through all the letters written to Mr. Johnson by the dealers and connoisseurs.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And what, try to sort out—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: And to—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —lay out what they had—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: And to, uh, use that in the catalog of the paintings, so that the—what anybody had said about the paintings could be recorded. That's when I first saw Mr. Berenson's handwriting. Because he had written to Mr. Johnson on various occasions about his pictures.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did most of them—uh, was this very tedious work for you? Or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No, I thought it was fascinating.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You did? Was there frequently controversy—I mean, there'd be various opinions that Johnson would have—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —solicited? Did he seem to have been a very—rather discerning collector?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: A very discerning collector. He bought very well, and not expensively. Got some very good things. And finally, he could only buy small things, just because there wasn't any room for any big ones at all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: He was a lawyer, I believe, wasn't he?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: He was a Philadelphia lawyer.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right. So you might expect he would look hard at a case [inaudible]—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: [Inaudible]—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —what was offered and so forth.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But the Far Eastern, uh, work—was that what you particularly enjoyed doing and [inaudible]

—  
LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Very much indeed. It was—Horace Jayne was the curator.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Horace Jayne?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: He was curator at the Philadelphia Museum in Far Eastern art and head of the university museum at the same—same time. He was a particularly nice person.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was he a China expert?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes, yes. He'd been to China with Langdon Warner, yes. [00:11:59] And Chinese art was his specialty.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What did you particularly work on under him?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Oh, cataloguing. Errands. Anything which came—came handy.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They were just—at that time, the Philadelphia—there's loads of things that would come in, I guess, which had not—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —adequately—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes. We had many things—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —accession.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —that would come in. And the collection was then divided between Memorial Hall and the main museum.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. Because the main museum wasn't complete? Or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was, uh, opening—yes, it was complete, but they hadn't installed [inaudible] completely. When I was there, they were still opening various galleries and sections of the museum. And the Far Eastern things were still held in the Memorial Hall.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, this was a time—the—the director was, uh, Fiske Kimball, I believe.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Fiske Kimball, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Maybe you can tell me—tell a bit about him, as you recall him?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: He was always very nice and very decent to me. I think I was much too small for him to really get angry about.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Otherwise, he was—had a—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: He could be extremely difficult with his curators. He could reduce people to tears—and sometimes did. And, uh—but on the other hand, that—those who had worked under him knew him well for a long time, and when he died, missed him very much indeed. And under him, the museum grew and was lively. But on—on balance, he was really a very good director.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And did he extend the collections a good deal? Was he responsible for—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —many acquisitions?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Many acquisitions. He extended them—um—had gotten people to contribute money for a collection—or buying large groups of things in the '20s, and when the Depression came, was having a little time—difficulty getting them paid for. [00:14:05] But I think they finally did get them—

ROBERT F. BROWN: But he did succeed quite well with—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: He did succ—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —Philadelphia donors?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Fairly well, yes. Philadelphia was always divided about him, because he was not the most tactful man in the world.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And Philadelphia was a place where you had to proceed very diplomatically—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Well, you had to be a Phila—Philadelphian.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] So—they meant this, though, to be a, uh, museum of world class, didn't they?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Oh, yes. Indeed. I think it is. I mean, it was not—artistically, it was not confined to Philadelphia at all. And they wanted—wanted it to embrace, um, Near—Near and Fa—and Far East and, uh, all of Europe—as well as American painting and American period drawings, decorative art.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They were being installed, some of them, even then, weren't they?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes, they were being installed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Your interest particularly was moving more toward Far Eastern though, at this time?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes. Oh, yes. I was in that section.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. And you were taking courses, you had said?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, I went to Princeton one day a week for a course with George—George Rowley, which consisted of looking at Chinese paintings.

ROBERT F. BROWN: With him?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: With him.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And he was a man who was a connoisseur or—how would you describe him?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, well he was a professor of Far Eastern art, and had written an extremely good book on Chinese painting. And a man of—he was really a very good lecturer and a person who really inspired me, aside of being a good friend. And the other person in the course was Blythe—Perry Cott, who later became curator at the Worcester Museum and then at the National Gallery in Washington. [00:16:00]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So it was a very good thing, wasn't it?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was a very nice—

ROBERT F. BROWN: A very small group—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was a very nice course.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Two people, a collection, and a professor.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And is the collection quite notable—or it was then?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes, it was notable then indeed. It hadn't been catalogued at all. Had been given, uh, to Princeton by Mr. Morris. And is still there and has, I think, one quite important Sung painting in it. The rest seem to be rather imitations of Sung period, but now considered very interesting indeed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You had courses at Columbia as well that you—you said you'd—at this time you took some —

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No, I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Or was that—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: That was when I was working at the Brooklyn Museum.

ROBERT F. BROWN: A bit later you did that.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yeah.



ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, then, in '32, the, uh—well, the Depression hits the depths and the job ended in—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Job ended—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —Philadelphia?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Ended indeed. And the—but you—but father managed to—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You didn't—you knew you wanted to go on, of course.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes. And father—father managed to send me to China.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So he was in favor of your—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Indeed, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —studies and pursuits?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Always was.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Had he been a collector himself?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No, never.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Or at least somewhat—but he saw that this was—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Not at all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —you were blooming in this world.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: But never a collector at all, and interested in history and in music, and in general, sightseeing in Europe. But he'd always support me in all these things.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You would go to China regardless. [Laughs.]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Regardless. That's the idea.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Can you describe that a bit? It was a time of some unrest and so forth there in China, wasn't it?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, not in Peking [Beijing], when I first arrived. It was perfectly quiet. Uh, the only unrest came with the Japanese—uh—uh—getting within 15 miles of Peking before a peace was set up. [00:18:01] But people in Peking weren't particularly perturbed. There was martial, uh, law. You couldn't go out after nine o'clock, and you didn't especially want to.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was their attitude toward the Japanese—apart from the fact that they were enemies at that point?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: They didn't like them. At all. They found the Japanese rather overbearing. And—but the—the armies, uh, stopped within 15 miles of the city and then went back to Manchuria. It was only in—in '37, long after I had gone, that the war really became much more severe.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you were able to study on the [inaudible]—were you studying, primarily, in Peking?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I was studying with—with a teacher, studying the language and taking lessons in calligraphy—and seeing what I could see of Peking. The collections from the Palace Museum had been in large part moved out shortly after I got there. They were moved out in—early in January, because the Chinese authorities were afraid—rightly—that the Japanese, if they took Peking, would seize the imperial collections.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So they were hidden?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: They were moved to Shanghai. And everybody said that within three weeks after they'd been moved out, everything would be on the market—which didn't happen to be true at all. They were held in Shanghai, and they were in part lent to the big exhibition of Chinese art at the, uh, [inaudible] house some years later when they were still in Shanghai. But they were moved, luckily, out of Shanghai before it was bombed. They were, uh, then held in a, uh, schoolhouse—I've forgotten exactly where—and they missed being bombed by about two days. [00:20:05] And they spent the war in Szechwan [Sichuan]—and then were moved downriver and got out of China from the—about—some months before the communists took over in Peking.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And they went to Taiwan?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: They went to Taiwan, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So they were retained? They were—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: They were retained. And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —precious heritage [inaudible]—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes, and a few things were sold from—considered fakes, I believe—were sold—whether they were not, I don't know—were sold when they were in Shanghai. But it was an amazing thing that they had been kept together.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Although it was a—not a, uh, monarchical regime, they still, uh, took great care of the—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: [Inaudible.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: —treasures accumulated by the emperors.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes. Yes, they did the best they could indeed. I thought it was awfully impressive under—under the circumstances.

ROBERT F. BROWN: As opposed to an American—you would think with the change in regime, they might have—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —tossed everything over—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —but they hadn't. Did you get to examine and spend time with the imperial collection?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, no, I saw a few things before they left, but by early January, most of the things had gone. And they left a certain number of things in—in the palace. And the palace was, of course, open in those days—had been—you could wander around and see—see what was left. But the major things had—had gone.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was it—uh, you were presumably, uh, absorbing greatly, uh, the Chinese aesthetic and studying calligraphy yourself. What was it that was—that captivated you about it at that time, do you think?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was something unusual—and very beautiful. And studying it made one realize how difficult it is and give respect and regard for what is good calligraphy. [00:21:59]

ROBERT F. BROWN: The, uh, studio experience—if we can call it that—sensitized you, I'd say, to—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —to these—the craft of these.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It simply—I simply—simply learned to respect this, to have enormous regard for it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Had you had any, um—done any painting or drawing yourself earlier—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Never.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This was the first?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I have no talent for that at all. I wouldn't dare impinge on that field at all, and thus I have great respect for people who can.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you—at that time in Peking, were there many Westerners there at that time?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: A few, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you—but you were mainly among educated Chinese, I suppose?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No, mainly among—among the Westerners.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Among the Westerners?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: The Chinese society was quite closed, and unless you spoke Chinese very well or they spoke English very well, they mainly were closed. We knew a few, but not many.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you married by then?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you would, uh—were they mostly Americans or Europeans there?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, some few Americans. Larry Sickman was there as a—and John Fairbank. Both—Larry Sickman buying for the Kansas City Museum, John Fairbank writing a thesis on the customs—that is, the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Customs of, uh, [inaudible]—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Not the customs of China, but the custom—the custom office, which was run by—it had been run by Sir Robert Hart, with the foreign—foreign service—that the Chinese had asked to be set up.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was—at what level had Sickman been buying? He had a large purse, didn't he, to buy, but he couldn't, for the most part, get things at the quality of the imperial treasures?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: He got some extraordinarily good things, yes. In—some of the best paintings in Kansas City now I think he purchased then—and some of the best ceramics. [00:24:08] In part, he was greatly helped by Otto Burchard, who was a Chinese dealer who left Germany and set himself up in Peking and was also purchasing for Sir Percival David for his collection of Chinese Sung ceramics.

ROBERT F. BROWN: How did these come, by and large to the dealer? Through—were there families that would bring something out?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I—I presume that was it. I had no money, so I was not in that business at all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh. I thought maybe you [laughs]—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —learned from Sickman how these—some of this—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Well, it got to be known—and—but I suppose when you went to a couple dealers and you asked them—who were important dealers and you went right into the back room—you never bother with things in the front—and sat down and asked to see their best things, very quickly word would spread that things could—you were paying good prices—and for the cash.

ROBERT F. BROWN: How were, uh, trips arranged? You ment—you've seen the, uh—some of the classic cave [inaudible] still lifes—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Didn't arrange a trip at all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: No problem? I mean, you just—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No. You got a—a visa written into your passport to visit that province, and then you got yourself a traveling boy. And the—my friend who was with me, Ted Starr, knew also some Chinese, and we simply arranged for a traveling boy, and, uh—and that was necessary, because he—even though he only—didn't speak any English, he came from Shanghai and he knew a certain number of dialects, and he could understand outs—what was said outside the city. I couldn't. The dialect would change a little bit, and it would change just enough to put a foreigner off. [00:26:04] So you'd have to have somebody to interpret and make the arrangements for you.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Where did you go particularly—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: We went to—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —in your travels?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: We went to the caves at Yungang. And the caves at Luoyang and Gongxian. And I went to Xi'an. One gets there now by airplane, but I got there by train and bus.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were they quite as stunning as you thought they would be?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: The caves were, yes. Especially the Yungang ones. We were there for about three days,

climbing around all to ourselves—with a couple of soldiers on guard, but that was all—and the villagers.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They were guarded because they were—they were—again, they were—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —part of a treasure that they were [inaudible]?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes, and people—a great many of the heads had been gone—some figures. They had hacked them out.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I've heard that in the teens and '20s, there was a bit of that by—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: A great deal of that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —Westerners had, uh, arranged for such—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: A great deal of that. The, uh, caves at Tianlongshan had been completely removed by [inaudible], and a good many of the pieces are here in the Fogg Museum right now, given to them by Mr. Grenville Winthrop.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Much of the, um, resentment—it has abated, hadn't it—since the '20s? I mean, they weren't so—when you arrived as a Westerner—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —they weren't—because I've heard that it could be rather hot in the '20s [laughs] for some Westerners at that time.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No, it wasn't. Dreadfully easy. One had no trouble at all. And you could go anywhere you wanted to if there weren't any bandits in the country. You usually found out in advance if the bandits were supposed to be there, so you'd try and avoid being—being kidnapped. [00:28:02]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But they—uh, at the caves, because they were perfectly welcoming to you—whereas I've heard in the '20s there was resentment still so—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No, it was—there was nobody—at Yungang, the soldiers paid no attention to us. At Luoyang, there was nobody around at all. The—the—I went out of the city of Luoyang in a rickshaw; there was nobody around. They weren't all—they weren't fenced in at all—there was nobody paying any attention at all. And some time after I was there, they had hacked out the famous Donor reliefs—one set of which is now at the Metropolitan—they have it in Kansas City. But neither the Metropolitan in Kansas City had arranged that at all; they simply bought them when they were out to preserve them. They did not arrange to have them hacked out.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I—that seems—uh, that it appalled you when you saw evidence of, uh, you know—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —things having been hacked out.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yeah. It appalled—because these were famous reliefs indeed. And I had—I had seen them in situ.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yeah. They should have—have remained there and not been hacked out.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So evidently, the avariciousness was still—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Avariciousness was there indeed, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In the country.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Oh, yes. Anything was for sale. The country was poor, and the—the government was really not in control of anything. The communist government is much more in control now.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes. Yeah.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: And interested—and they would undertake scientific excavation—which the Chinese

government at that time could only—only did in one case.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What—well, why did you leave, uh, China—or did you leave—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: A lack of money.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Good reason to return.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yeah. I had to return.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you return with—you had a—you were enthusiastic the whole time—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Oh, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —you were there?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was never-never land. It was a marvelous place to be. [00:30:01] It's an extremely beautiful—a medieval life.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Uh, by that you mean?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, well, it was a—uh, China was not up-to-date then at all. The—plenty of—of servants. Uh, life was as it had been for—I presume for several centuries. The only—only changes in Peking were a few, uh, broad streets, a—electric light, and, uh, running water. Otherwise, I think it probably was as it had been in the 19th and 18th centuries. The walls were still intact—the most beautiful walls in the world. The gates were shut at nine o'clock at night, and you had to have a military pass to get in and out after that. And life was—life was cheap and very pleasant. And the daily scenes of life in the streets were always endlessly fascinating. The Chinese furniture which is now so valued and appreciated was just being found. One would go out and bargain for this—they thought—uh, northern furniture—the simple kind, not the carved, blackwood kind. And the chairs cost only a few dollars apiece. For everything—all sorts of things would be bought very cheaply. And it still had, of course, a—a faint odor of imperial grandeur about it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The city was maintained quite well?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Perfectly well. It was reasonably clean. The lights worked. Water ran. [00:32:00]

ROBERT F. BROWN: What about Shanghai? Did you get down there?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I never went to Shanghai. It was too far off, and it was a Western city, which didn't interest me then.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It would break the spell, so to speak.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It broke the spell.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: And it was too far off. And I—I had neither the money nor the time to go.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, when you—did you come directly back to the United States?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes. No—uh, via Japan. You had to—come by—[clears throat]—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Could you spend any—a little time in Japan?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I spent then about a week in Japan. And on the way out, we'd been there, in Japan, for about two weeks.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did that fascinate you too?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes. I saw the Shōsō-in on its annual opening airing day, which was—it took an embassy and production to get into. Now it's exhibited in a different way, but then—then you had to have special permission to get in when they opened the godown [ph] for its annual three-day airing. [Inaudible] behind somebody else, all done up cutaways. And the wise people had flashlights in their hand so they could see something. There was of course to be no light inside at all except what came in in the open door. And it's a collection that had been there since 754. And those collections were—that's in point of—of being collected, and being in—quite intact.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That itself must have been mind—mind-boggling—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —just the thought of that.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was indeed. The thought of it. Yeah. It's now exhibited, in part, uh, each year in the Nara Museum for about three weeks in the fall. And the collection is now housed in a new concrete building. The old eighth-century building is—is still there, but no longer used as a storehouse. [00:34:05]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But there was a, uh, culture like the Chinese, which is in some ways very medieval and very —

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And yet at the same time, you were aware that it was—had become militarized and was very aggressive. But that wasn't, perhaps, apparent to you—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It wasn't apparent as a—it was perfectly apparent if you were in China and knew what was happening to Manchuria and, uh, all the rest of that. But in Japan, it wasn't. As a tourist, you weren't conscious of that at all. We were much more conscious of that when we were in Japan in the summer of 1940, when the war was on. And Japan was heavily militarized and strongly anti-Western. And one was conscious of that, conscious of the censorship, of being followed all the time. You'd have to talk only about the weather and art, never politics. That was a different thing then.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But when you got back, it was 1934?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you—did you go to see, uh, your professors? Or—what—what did you set about doing? Because I guess—I assume you wanted to [inaudible]—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: [Inaudible.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: —back in museum work?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes. And the Philadelphia Museum offered me a job of—if I would come back and work for, uh, for \$30 a month—which I think I did for a short time. And then, thanks to Rufus Morey, I was told to go to Brooklyn and be interviewed for a job in the Far Eastern department.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now did—did you know much about the Brooklyn Museum at that time? [00:36:06]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I did not at all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. And what did you discover in the—when you got there?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I—I discovered there was a job there, and they hired me. And the—the museum was being reorganized, rebuilt, under the director, Philip Youtz. He was one of the first people to get the WPA into, uh, revising and rebuilding things. And he changed all the galleries around—rather, brought them up-to-date. And the whole Far East and Near East collection, too, wasn't—uncatalogued, unarranged. And so I had the job of laying out the new galleries and installing them—first, the, uh, Near Eastern, and then the Indian, and then the Chinese, and finally the Japanese.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It was a—quite a wonderful opportunity.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And who had—uh, had—did you have a say in the layout of the galleries?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes, I did. And in those innocent days, you were expected to do it all yourself; you didn't hire a decorator and that sort at all—this was the job of the curator to do.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What—what did you have in mind as models? Uh, did you go around looking at other museums, or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I'd seen a number of—uh, other museums. Which—uh, there had been nothing special preparedly straight forward galleries, or all the nicely painted and nicely labeled. And we thought in those days it looked really very well indeed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you attempt, in any of the galleries, to give something of the ambience of a—of a temple or of a—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No, no.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —such as you may have seen in China or, uh, Japan?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No, we didn't. We couldn't attempt that at all. [00:38:01] And, uh, it's always rather—I think a rather dubious thing to do. You can't do it, uh, to make the—you're not in the country. You may have certain of the elements, but I think they always look a little bit fake. They look a little bit like the Alice Foote MacDougall restaurants of the '20s.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The—which were they?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Alice Foote MacDougall.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So they cutened—cutened it up to look like something they want, or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: The restaurants were cutened up, yes. [Laughs.] They were Spanish or Italian and whatnot. And if you tried something like that, you did look like that. The Philadelphia Museum had done a good deal of that. I had always thought they—it wasn't exactly real.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You must have felt the same about the Cloisters then, for example, is that—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No, the Cloisters is—is—the Cloisters—the Cloisters are beautifully done.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: And they're real cloisters.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right. They're large—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: They're large.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —architectural elements—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes. And they're outside, as they ought to be.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: There's a cloister in the Philadelphia museum which is inside, and it had a fake moon in the ceiling and so forth, which—

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —and it doesn't give you the feeling of being outside at all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [They laugh.] But the WPA, uh, rebuilding that in Brooklyn was, uh—I think it was a very good thing.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was a very good thing—thing indeed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They removed the grand staircase, I know, but—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: They did indeed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was that lamented or was it—it's such a huge thing, it took up too much [inaudible]—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was lamented, I think, by the architectural firm that built it, McKinley and White [ph].

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: But on the other hand, the entrance to the museum for years had been under the staircase, and if you climbed the staircase all the way up, you found the doors locked. And I think it was much wiser to remove—take them off, and so you wouldn't tire the people before they got in.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Had Brooklyn been on, uh, rather short rations for a good while? Or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: That—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —was it fairly well provided for in the '30s?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Well, I—[inaudible] was always [inaudible]—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You had pretty good funds? [00:40:00]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No, it had—for those days, ra—still rather small funds for acquisition. It was fairly well looked after by the city. And the city took care of the salary of the guards and the maintenance people, and the upkeep of the building. And the city did—LaGuardia's, uh, mayorship did all right indeed. You always asked for more money than you expected to get, but they didn't cut you back too much.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you as a curator have a, uh, a bit of a role in planning the budgets and?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That was all handled by Youtz, the director?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: That was handled by the director, and they apportioned out what small acquisition funds one had. They—there was—there was only specified funds there for American art and for Egyptian art.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So your funds, you had to get—special—occasionally you would get—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —special gift money and—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes, they came out of private funds. And, uh, private funds, a private endowment, paid for the salary of the curators—and—but not for the salary of the director—and paid for the—the acquisitions.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was there quite a lot of—of, uh, interest, at least, if not substantial support, in the Brooklyn community?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Or was much of its attention across the river by then, in Manhattan?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No, I think the—there was a small Brooklyn community interested, and a large school population. But the—with—it was very difficult then to put your finger on where your support came from—rather amorphous.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. The—perhaps you can describe or mention a few of the, uh, people you worked with on getting acquisitions—um, perhaps some of the dealers or private collectors? [00:42:07]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yeah. Well, the—the—one man who was awfully good to me was a professor, Meyer Riefstahl, who had been a dealer in—one time in Near Eastern art, but at that time teaching courses for NYU on Near Eastern art. And anything which I'd want to get I would usually take to him, and he would pass it on. And there were several dealers—I, uh, don't remember the—but—a man—a Persian named [Hassan Khan] Monif had a very nice gallery and some very nice things indeed. And there was [Hagop] Kevorkian, who seemed rather more expensive. And in, uh—C. Edward Wells was dealing in Chinese things more reasonably, and I learned a lot from him. And in Japanese things, Roland Koscherak—a dealer in Japanese material.

[END OF TRACK robert85\_1of2\_SideA\_r.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: —areas in the Far East or Near East or that you needed to fill or that you hoped to fill?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Oh, it was actually—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —that you—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —every area. They didn't have too much need. But they did—they did have—they owned some very interesting Indian 17th-century textiles. And the—but the—the main strength of the Brooklyn Museum was in the pre-Columbian material, in the Egyptian collections, and in the American paintings.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now the, uh, pre-Columbian was—the curator was Herbert Spinden?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes. And was he, uh—were most of these men—was Spinden university-trained in this? Or



how did he come about—acquire his expertise?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Isabel [side conversation].

ISABEL S. ROBERTS: What?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Did you know Spinden?

[Audio Break.]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I guess so. I don't really—

ISABEL S. ROBERTS: But—but most of it—most of it was, of course, the way everything was 50 years ago—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

ISABEL S. ROBERTS: —or 60 years ago.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

ISABEL S. ROBERTS: You went into the field.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes. And so Spinden had acquired this through field experience.

ISABEL S. ROBERTS: And the courses just didn't—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Field experience.

ISABEL S. ROBERTS: —you know, the courses just didn't exist.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: And his own work—you trained yourself then.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: There were no courses.

ISABEL S. ROBERTS: It was just—it was just that way when Laurance was trying to learn Chinese. There was only one place that taught it even in New York in that time. So that was one reason why he wanted to go to China.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. So Spinden, then—it was field experience—but he had been able to build up a notable collection.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yeah.

ISABEL S. ROBERTS: Yes.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: And he was self-taught, I'm sure. In those days, you simply learned—went to work as best you could and trained yourself.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes. And you'd rely heavily on the eye and the—the experience of dealers, for example?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes. Experience—

ISABEL S. ROBERTS: Well, and even more—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —and excavation.

ISABEL S. ROBERTS: —even more the experience of being in situ—of—of actually going to the sites and—while things were still coming out of the ground—and it was still possible to do it that way. Nowadays it wouldn't be possible.

ROBERT F. BROWN: No. As you had done in the Far East. [00:02:01]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, you've mentioned that John Cooney, uh, who became the Egyptian, curator, started as a registrar—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: He started as registrar, and when he was given the job of taking over the Egyptian

collection, he trained himself. Uh, but Dows Dunham, who was a curator at the Boston Museum, was fairly good to him indeed and told him all he knew, but otherwise, Jack picked it up himself—and ended up at the top of the field. And I think in—in many ways, that Jack Baur—the same. There—there may have been courses in American painting, but there wasn't much. And—but he went to work and became an expert in 19th-century American painting, in large part by putting on exhibitions of—with Eastman Johnson and—I think he was—he was rather a pioneer in this. And, uh, he put on an exhibition of [Thomas] Worthington Whittredge—and I don't remember the others, but they were all listed then, but finally, you know, each year he would put on a show of that kind and do a catalog of them which was a pioneering work.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And in the process was teaching himself. He—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Exactly. And Jack Cooney did the same thing by putting on a big exhibition of Coptic art, the first time [inaudible] Coptic art had been given an exhibition and a big catalog written.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. Baur had—uh, you mentioned—uh, of course you could get American art such as you described very inexpensively at that point—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Very cheaply.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —and he had some funds apparently—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: He—he had a special fund, yes. One didn't think it was inexpensive at all, but by today's figures it was indeed. He would put on also a semi-annual watercolor show of international—a big American section, and then he would usually limit the international thing to one or two or three countries, so he was trying to have fairly good representation. [00:04:02] And he would buy watercolors from those and also add to their distinguished watercolor collection. And he would fill out with American paintings—either—both contemporary and 19th century—18th century, too.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well you—uh, when you became director in, uh, 1938, did you continue as a curator of—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I did, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —the Near and Far East?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I did, simply because—because there was—there was no money to hire anybody else. [Laughs.] But I soon found that you could not do two jobs at once. I would more or less neglect one to do the other.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So did you then fairly soon bring in a curator? Uh—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No. I—there was no money to do it—

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you'd just—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —to bring one in at all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —you did the best you could?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yeah, the best I could. We were running on a very tight budget.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You had, uh, notable, very able curators in each department, so they—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes, the other curators were very able. And the restorer, Sheldon Peck—it was his first job. Very well-trained indeed, did beautiful work.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Where had he been trained?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: At the Fogg. The Fogg then had a school of restoration.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: And he was one of their first, and one of their best products.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And did you send him—in all manner of things that had to be restored and—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —and tested?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Well, he—he cleaned whatever painting needed to be cleaned. And of course anything which you'd want to buy he would examine for condition, especially if it was a painting—the condition and see if he thought it was genuine, too.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were—did many museums, um, have lab—laboratories such as his at that time, or was this—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, they did not.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —or was this a fairly early one?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was an early one indeed. The Metropolitan had one, of course, and the Fogg, where he was trained, had one. The—I don't know where others existed now. [00:06:03] I know Philadelphia did not have one at that time. I can't—and the National Gallery hadn't been started. I think it was fairly unique. But I always thought it was most necessary.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because there was this risk of, uh—to the collections—either the risk of—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Risk to the collections. And you could also, uh, clean the paintings if they needed cleaning, re-back them if they were—if—if the back—if they were—if the paint was—was coming off the canvas, which happened at times.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But apparently not too much thought had been given to that before that—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No, this was a new thing.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —generation?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: And it was—the Fogg was the first organization ever to set a cleaning and restoration laboratory up and train people. But the Fogg gave that up, and it's now being taken on by New York University, which has its—a very good, uh, training center for restorers.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was it—uh, in those years, in the late '30s, was, uh—were there a lot of visitors to the museum?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mentioned there were a lively program of exhibitions.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes. There were. The figures don't mean much now, but I suppose there were about—they had about a quarter of a million visitors a year. The habit of going to museums was not nearly as widespread then as it is now.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Would you characterize the typical adult—apart from schoolchildren—adult visitor as a rather serious person who might come several times during the year?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I think a few were serious. You got the usual number of drifters—people simply wandered in out of the cold. But if you—if they had gotten that far, they usually were serious. [00:08:03]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were—but there wasn't the, uh, quite the, uh, pressure of—among middle class to go to museums—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —that there is today.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No. The habit of going was not nearly the chic—it wasn't the chic thing to do then.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: You prayed that people would come in and look at the exhibitions.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] Was the—the art school then associated in—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No. At first it wasn't. The art school was run by the Brooklyn Institute, of which the Brooklyn Museum was a part. And the—uh, it began running on rather hard times. And so I finally moved it in to a wing of the museum and got Jack Baur, for no increase in cash, to run it. And he hired the instructors, and ran it very well indeed. And I think that—and my wife was running the museum during the war, that continued. And

she finally got a man named Gus Peck towards the end of the war to run it. He ran it very well for a long time. I think it's now no longer there, but of that I'm not certain about.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was Baur originally trained at all in an art school, or was he—as Lloyd Goodrich had been, for example?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I—he graduated from Yale, and he came to the Brooklyn Museum in the education department. And so he—I know he took courses in the history of art. I remember his describing Toby Sires [ph] would lecture, and Toby Sires was in the art department. And—but he was not specifically trained there. The only people who were really trained for the museum were—they came from Harvard. [00:10:01]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was Baur at all—had he had some art studio work? Had he—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I don't think so.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you picked him because he was a good administrator, is that right?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Well, he—he was interested in the job, and I think did a very good job indeed. And if he hadn't he wouldn't have gone on and run the Whitney.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was there difficulty—as some museums, that have been at one time or another, seemingly—strain or tension between the museum and its curatorial staff, and the art school?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No. No. Not at all. I think the museum at that time really didn't pay any attention to the art school at all [laughs]. But—but the—there were some—some distinguished teachers there. But you see, in—in those days, that—everybody was self-trained. That—John Graham—I got to head the American decorative art section—was completely self-trained. I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And how did you discover him?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I discovered him through, um, Joe Downs.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Of the Metropolitan.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Of the Metropolitan. I went—they needed somebody and I went to Joe Downs and said, "Who do you know?" And he told me about John Graham, who was then selling lamps in Sloane's—

ROBERT F. BROWN: The furniture store.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: The furniture—I asked him if he would like the job and he said he would love it. And Luke Vincent Lockwood, who was the trustee most interested in that, approved because Joe Downs had recommended him.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Presumably Joe Downs had had to talk with him extensively [laughs]—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes, he knew indeed. And John Graham eventually went on and ran Williamsburg.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That's right. Of course he—that he was learning as he went, wasn't he?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: He was learning as he went. And he was learning in the Brooklyn Museum, extremely hard. He was very good indeed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Brooklyn had a fairly notable early American decorative art—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Very good indeed. [00:12:03] They had the—their period rooms were thought of and being installed for the Metropolitan's. That was their claim. But alas, they were open to [inaudible]. But they were very good indeed there. Listen, I'm afraid, you know, that we're going to—

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: —in—and while you were still at Brooklyn in the 1940s, you mentioned earlier, you went—you had a special study, uh, trip to Japan?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And how did that come about? Apparently—you said it was a government grant from the Japanese government, correct?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It came about through the intercession of Louis LeDoux.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Louis LeDoux?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: L-E-D-O-U-X. He was a great collector of Japanese, um, prints. And he—I'd gotten him to come as a trustee to the Brooklyn Museum. And he was especially interested in, naturally, the Japanese collection. The Japanese government had offered me a fellowship for a year's study in Japan. And I felt I could not naturally be away from the museum that long. So we came to a—an agreement that—my wife and I went there, paid for, going and coming, by the Japanese government, and we paid for ourselves the months we were in Japan.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because you couldn't stay the whole—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I couldn't stay the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —term—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —the whole whole term—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —that they desired?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes. And this was a compromise. It worked out very well indeed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What program of study did you—had you set to yourself?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Individual. We had teachers in—living in Kyoto, teaching in Japanese language. My wife took lessons in flower arrangement. And we saw as much as we could. There—there again, there was no—were no courses to take at all, nothing like that at all. You simply went to look at stuff at the—at the museums—in, uh, Tokyo, in Kyoto, Nara. [00:14:09]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Your wife had had art history training herself—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —at Vassar, I believe, you said?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: She had, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you—you'd been married in the late '30s or so—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: We'd been married, yes. In '37.

ROBERT F. BROWN: She was very much a kindred spirit in all of these—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Absolutely.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —things?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: In all of these things.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes, yes.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: [Inaudible.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: You came back then from Japan in '40, in the same year you left?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes. We came back late September, early October.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And those next two years then you were—war was brewing, but otherwise you were—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Oh, the war, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —the exhibitions and everything continued as they had?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: They continued.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: —interview with Laurance Roberts in Boston, Massachusetts, July 29, 1985.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: —Brooklyn Museum.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: About the Brooklyn Museum. One more thing that was a, um, pioneer effort—it had an excellent—and still has—a costume and textile collection. And with the—uh, under the direction of the then-head of the education department, Michelle Murphy, and with the support of, uh, Morris Crawford, who was the editor of *Women's Wear Daily*, established a costume institute there for the use of American designers of clothes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this was the first, was it?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I think this was the first, yes.

ISABEL S. ROBERTS: It was darling [inaudible].

ROBERT F. BROWN: And it was not merely historical but, uh—uh, kept up to date?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I tried—I've tried to keep it up to date by asking one of the big dress shops to, uh, donate each year a costume which was—women's dress—which was typical of that year. [00:16:12]

ROBERT F. BROWN: What about problems of installation and just—and, uh, even study in such a collection? Isn't it very bulky—unusually bulky?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It is bulky—unusual. The installation—of course, you could—could show—the costumes were shown throughout the collection, depending where they fitted in. But only a very small section of the costume collection could be shown, and the rest were simply—simply stacked in—well, I think open storage, so people could get at them and look at them—to properly [inaudible] and [inaudible] and actually, uh, handle the material.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did the ability of people to have access to your, rack, so to speak, apply to other departments at Brooklyn? For example, Egyptian or American—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No, that—you would have had to have been a special scholar for that, and really very few people would really want to get into such a collection, unless you were—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Of course.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —a special—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —scholar in their field.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did Brooklyn, though—did it—by—was it quite up-to-date, though, in its storage and—well, you've mentioned conservation, of course—it was a leader.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No, it was not, uh, up-to-date. It was trying to be.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, you've suggested, I think, that the Metropolitan by then, despite the, uh, bloom of the Brooklyn—the Metropolitan was the dominant institution by the '30s certainly, wasn't it?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It always was in New York, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you mentioned—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: [Inaudible.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, you went into the army in, uh, in '42.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: In—in December of '42.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Forty-two. Were you simply drafted, or you knew it was coming and—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I was actually, um, given a commission by the Signal Corps. [00:18:05]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was the Signal Corps—did it have some kind of task that was appropriate to your training?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What sort of—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Alas, it was secret.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Secret?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was secret and remains so.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh really?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But it did have something to do with your training?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: With communications, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Ah. So you—well, you were luck—very fortunate then that you were put into to a—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I was extremely fortunate indeed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you largely just in this country or you were—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I was in Washington the whole time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And it was challenging and your in—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was challenging.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —fulfilling kind of thing?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Interesting.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mrs. Roberts became acting director then, as you left?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yeah. As I left, she did.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: And was there for three years.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Three years. What training was there that lay behind that, or what preparation? Simply working closely with you, or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Well, she had been an art major in Vassar and had worked in the education department of the Brooklyn Museum, so she knew it well.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was education, uh, mainly a matter—the education department, excuse me—a matter of preparing things for schoolchildren or was it for a series of lectures for adults? Or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It could be for schoolchildren or for—and for adults too.

ISABEL S. ROBERTS: Well, part of it was the—the series of courses, uh, given for New York school teachers by which they got what were known as increments, and as they piled up increments they got salary increases.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Ah, I see.

ISABEL S. ROBERTS: It had nothing to do with their ability to teach they uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yeah.

ISABEL S. ROBERTS: But it meant that there were courses in anything you could possibly think of—

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.]

ISABEL S. ROBERTS: —Egyptian art, Chinese art, American Indians. And those they had to come and take, and pass the exam.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You've mentioned that, uh, at one point, I think—it was Francis Taylor, then director of the Met, discussed the possibility of having the Met simply absorb the Brooklyn Museum, and Mrs. Roberts was director of Brooklyn at that time. [00:20:11]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was that—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: In fact she was told by Robert Moses, who was the park commissioner and a member of the board of both the Metropolitan and the Brooklyn Museum, that that was in the wind—uh, shortly after she became acting director. And Mr. Moses suggested that she get hold of a friend on the board of the Metropolitan. So she explained the whole matter to Nelson Rockefeller, who was then a trustee. And that was the last I ever heard of it. So Brooklyn remains independent.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was that—uh, how would you have felt if that—that had occurred?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It would have been a disaster for the museum.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They would have siphoned off the best perhaps [inaudible]—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Well, the best would have been siphoned off and, um—it's a matter of Brooklyn pride—would have gone.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah. There would have been not much reason to support it, uh, as an institution on its own—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: As an institution—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —thereafter.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —no reason to support it at all. But then the Metropolitan was then in an—an acquisitive mood. It tried to absorb the Whitney too. That didn't—fortunately that did not take place either.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was Taylor someone with whom you had, uh, contact occasionally, uh, as director at Brooklyn?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Oh yes. But I had known him first when he was the curator of medieval art in the Philadelphia Museum. Then he went from there to Worcester and then became director of the Metropolitan.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And what was your impression of him then? What was he—was he something like, uh, Fiske Kimball? Was he a dominating figure in the same way?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, in—in a different way. He was much more suave. [00:22:03] And very intelligent. And later on when I was at the [American] Academy in Rome, he was a trustee there—and very helpful indeed. Rome was too far away to be absorbed by the Metropolitan.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you're—[laughs]—you're quite certain that Taylor, knowing him as you did, might very well have entertained that idea, at least in passing?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Oh, he did indeed entertain that idea.

ISABEL S. ROBERTS: He wanted to absorb the Whitney too.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The Whitney.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: And he wanted to absorb the Whitney and Juliana Force, who was then the director of the Whitney Museum, wasn't—told nothing about this at all. And she finally heard it through the grapevine.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But he would sort of express his ideas, then his trustees would—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Work behind people.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —work around—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Work around—and behind.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. Do you suppose his aim was to just be a—the New York art museum?



LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I think yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The only one, practically?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes, the biggest thing.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: In New York and in the country.

ROBERT F. BROWN: With respect to the Whitney, uh, what do you think it would have done to the collecting of contemporary American art had the Metropolitan acquired it? Do you think it would have made any difference? Or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Again, I do not know. They might have had more funds available for that. But I thought that the—the Whitney, uh, created for that purpose alone, should be allowed to continue independently.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It was a considerable force in the collecting of contemporary art—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was indeed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —at the time.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: And Juliana Force made it very important—the first, I think, just for that—at least in New York. [00:23:59] And a—well, she was the kind of person who loved paintings and sculptures—and the people who made them.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: What about—was the [Museum of] Modern [Art] a notable presence? Did it spring upon the scene in the '30s as a—that people took considerable account of?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Of course Nelson Rockefeller was in on it very soon, as his mother had been, so—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I remember going to the first exhibition, which was an eye-opener.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was it? In what way?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: The first time I had seen any number—Cézanne, Van Gogh, and—I've forgotten who else was there, but they had some marvelous paintings. And I think it was the first time I'd ever seen that number anywhere.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In Europe, in your travels, it simply wasn't that easy to see very much—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —of that?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Or [inaudible].

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: There were a few around, but in no great quantity at all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What—where was it housed, or in what way were things displayed before they had their own building?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was housed first in the Heckscher Building. You had to take an elevator up to the umpteenth floor, and there were a number of rooms there that had been changed into galleries.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was it—was the display different from in many museums, or was it, uh, simply the art itself which was—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: The art—art itself. The display was relatively normal. They had blank walls, I think, painted white, which was the standard color then, and, uh, spotlights. You couldn't do much else with those office rooms. I gather it became so popular that the other tenants of the building complained bitterly that the

elevators were constantly used, taking people to the Museum of Modern Art.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] Well, your installations at Brooklyn—you said you didn't believe in period—suggestions of period—of a period. [00:26:05]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were they in fact mainly painted white too? Were they—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, painted white with some occasionally contrasting colors. I mean, the Chinese gallery I had [inaudible] had been painted yellow. The—rather bright and attractive. We—we tried to liven that up a small bit. And to make each gallery a slightly different color—so to try and indicate to the person that you were in a different country.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you would sort of very subtly suggest—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Suggest that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —a color suggestive of that culture, or one commonly used, say, in—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Or one commonly used and one that would not go—square too badly with the, uh—what you exhibited.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were the rooms one following another? Were they sort of en suite or—at Brooklyn? Or were they—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: The ground floor rooms were—for the pre-Columbian exhibit, it was one large area broken up by small temporary walls, and there was also a big room there for contemporary exhibitions. The Far East and Near Eastern galleries were rather long and narrow and around a—in succession—around a central opening—what was then an open space.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was the open space used for—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No, the open space—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —some circulation?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —the open space was simply the space above the, uh—pre-Columbian galleries. That went up—part of that went up—the center section went up two floors in height. I don't know why, but that's the way the building was built.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was the lighting still natural at that time mainly? [00:28:03] Use of skylights or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, the—for the painting galleries on the top floor they used—the skylights were there. The other galleries would—it depended—had to depend on artificial light, because it was only the top floor, naturally, that could have the skylights.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And that was thought the nicest way to display paintings?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes, I—it was. And I still think it is. The paintings change in a way depending on whether it's a sunny day, cloudy day. They become much more alive. But under a constant artificial light, they—they go as dead as the light does. And since the paintings were painted by daylight and intended to be seen that way, I think it was good to exhibit—much better that way.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, you were fully intending when you were out of your military service to, uh—to come back to Brooklyn, weren't you?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Well, I didn't have enough points at the end of the war to get anywhere. You received points, I think, for each month you were in the army, and more points if you'd been overseas, and a lot more points if you'd been wounded. And I had really no points at all, and the army seemed reluctant to let anybody go in the Signal Corps, so I had no idea how long I would be held in at all. And I felt it—uh, my wife was—had been—after three years, for reasons of health, had to give up, and Charles Nagel, from St. Louis, had come in as acting director. And I felt it simply unfair to him to be over his shoulder and at some uncertain time come back to that job. [00:30:07] So I resigned and he became director.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you still—were you casting about though? You say you didn't have too many points to parlay into another position, but you were casting about after you did that?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No, I wasn't casting about at all. I was simply—simply continued to work for the Signal Corps. And one day I came, by accident, back to the house in Washington for lunch and found a telegram at the door asking if I would be interested in going to—to Rome. My wife happened to be there at that time and I asked if she'd like to go to Italy, she said yes.

ISABEL S. ROBERTS: But you had already resigned [inaudible].

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I had already resigned, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this was from—from whom?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, the telegram was from Henry Allen Moe of the Guggenheim Foundation, who was on the board of the academy—and, I presume, head of the committee to find a director. The previous director, Chester Aldrich, had died in Rome in either—I think 1940.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What had you—what did you know at that point about the academy?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I knew absolutely nothing about it. I knew of its existence. And that's just really about all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you know Moe then?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I did know Henry Allen Moe. And I did know the president of the board, James Kellum Smith, who had been in the Signal Corps and stationed in Washington, and whom we'd gotten to know very well. But it was the furthest thing from my mind, seeing anything like that at all. [00:32:06]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And what did they say in their discussions with you? What was the plan they outlined—or what did they have in mind for you should you become director?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, I went—uh, got a day off from the army, flew to New York, saw Henry Allen Moe, told him I was not a classicist—because the academy had a large classical interest. And that—he said, "That's the reason we want you."

ROBERT F. BROWN: Why did they not want a classicist? Do you know?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Because also, you see, the academy was for contemporary art—uh, interested in—they gave fellowships to painters and sculptors, and architects, and composers of music, and they didn't want, uh, the head of the academy to be only a classical scholar who would probably ignore or at least not be interested in the creative half of the academy. And I presume they wanted somebody who was in between—who had some scholarly interests and also a sympathy with, uh, present-day painters—and other—

ROBERT F. BROWN: The uh—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —artists.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You said that the academy in the—before World War II, the reputation was that of a very conservative place.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was very conservative indeed. It was close—not closely connected, but it usually chose people from the Yale Arts School, who were very conservatively trained. And its reputation was that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They had, for example, people who taught mural painting at Yale, so—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: They did indeed. And they were most interested in mural painting. They were interested in having a competition—or a—a collective program between the artists, the architects, and the sculptors. [00:34:03] They tried to—it was a Renaissance idea. Whether they'd ever worked on the Renaissance I don't know, but it was very hard to make—make that work then a success in the '20s.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes. And in your opinion it was, uh—would be ridiculous to try—continue on that tack?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Well I thought—yeah, I thought you really continue on that tack at all—and, uh, have the academy have any reputation with present-day people.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Of course there had been an attempt, uh—but not a particularly conservative one—under the New Deal—the WPA had sponsored such projects hadn't they?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It had indeed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But I expect those weren't—largely weren't to the taste of the, um, conservatives?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because they were—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: And the—and in retrospect, a great deal of the WPA work wasn't very good anyway. But it was—it was really a, uh—it was—they were more interested in keeping people alive than they were in producing art, and for that reason it was—it was justified on those grounds.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, were there members of the trustees who were sort of bulwarks of this conservatism—at the—of the academy's trustees?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Oh, yes. There were plenty.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] Maybe we could talk about them in a moment. You then—did you—uh, this—I believe it was about May in '46 that they approached you—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —and talked to them—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you fairly quickly make up your mind, uh, that you would be interested in—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I made up my mind at once. No question about it at all. And I got out of the army the first of October. And in, uh—in December we flew to Rome—to see the academy and to see how we could get the thing open again and going. [00:36:01]

ROBERT F. BROWN: It had just been maintained by a skeleton—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It had been maintained—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —staff?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —by a small staff. And at that time, that—uh, Professor Morey would—was, uh, with the —what later became the Information Service, and he was in—in Rome looking after the academy and looking after the U.S. Information Service. And the academy was housing a few ex-GIs who were painters and singers, so it was being—being lived in. And the property had not been—had been maintained during the war. At one point the Germans, I understood, wanted to use it for a hospital, but then they decided against that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So in fact, although perhaps a bit run down, much of it was intact, was it?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was intact indeed. And the library was there. And Professor Van Buren, who had been a professor at the academy before the war and lived in Rome all during the war unmolested, was still using it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you met him, of course—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —when you got there?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Met him at once.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. Was he pleased to see you?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I think so.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: You know, the famous tale was that Henry Rowell, who was a trustee and a classical scholar, came into Rome several days after it was liberated and made his way up to the academy. He found it quietly open, Professor Van Buren reading in the library, and he spoke to him. And he noticed the whole time—and Rowell was the first American Professor Van Buren had seen for several years—he noticed the whole time he was speaking to him, his finger was in the place in the book.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Huh.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: A true scholar.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] That must have been rather poignant—for you—when you came—met Van Buren and realized—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. [00:38:05]

ROBERT F. BROWN: —the extent of his commitment. So you—then did you stay on long at that point—that December?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No. We stayed on for two months until we—and then returned to the States—and got the competitions for the fellowships started.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. They had been in abeyance also for—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: They had been in abeyance during the war. After all, you were supposed—you were supposed to go to—to Rome, you couldn't. And they had given, I think, other fellowships occasionally during the war, but they weren't the equivalent of the Rome Prize fellowship. And, uh, we got Mary Williams to come as secretary—who had been secretary for my wife at the Brooklyn Museum. It was one of the best thing to ever happen to the academy—to get her.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Ah. She was excellent at administrating and—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Excellent administrator in New York. Did a wonderful lot of work. Kept up with the fellows. An enormous help to me.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The—you said the students at that—when you came on at—uh, had—always had to be single and male?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: They had to be single and male. And the war really broke that, because the new fellows were—uh, since they'd been in the army or the navy or something at least three or four years, were automatically older. A good many were married. They had admitted, uh, women who were classical scholars before the war, but they were rather downgraded. They were kept apart from the main dining room. They couldn't live at the academy building itself. And this seemed to be rather—rather silly. [00:40:01] So the women were considered as well as men, and people could be married.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But this was something—things like this you would have to put through your board in New York?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes. And the board was perfectly—perfectly willing to have that done. And the board also accepted the idea of having artists and professors-in-residence.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This was an idea you introduced—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: They had—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —early on as well?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes, they had a few, uh, before the war, but some were permanent and some were—uh, not too many came. My idea was to induce somewhat older people who were distinguished to be at the academy—either Americans or also foreigners, since we were in a foreign country—Italian, English—and to—not to give any instruction, but to be there in case anybody wanted any help, assistance, comfort, encouragement.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I believe you had some problems when you wanted to appoint non-Americans—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —to that?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I did.

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ROBERT F. BROWN: —you were attempting from the beginning to broaden the base—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —of students?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: And to—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And the faculty—or senior figures?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: And I thought it would be very good to—since one was—we were in a foreign country, to try and induce the foreigners to have some connection with the academy. In fact—it—it worked out really, I think, very well indeed. The—I wish I could have been able to have many more.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Who were some that you, uh, brought in? Or perhaps we could talk about that a bit later, but, uh—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: One was the—Goffredo Petrassi, the composer—Italian composer. Another was—I'm sorry—I've got to—uh—

[Audio Break.]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Another composer was Martinů—the Czech composer, whose works are still constantly played in—over the radio in Europe.

ISABEL S. ROBERTS: Marino Marini.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Marino—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Marino, the sculptor?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Marino, the sculptor, came as our personal guest a number of times—and met all the fellows. Henry Moore did the same thing. Elizabeth Bowen was one of the writers-in-residence. And the Italian architect Ernesto Rogers was also there at one time or another.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were they housed at the academy while they were there?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: They were housed at the academy, yes. We had a series of small flats which were available for that purpose.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The—but did you also—what was the relation when you—that you discovered with the other national academies in Rome? [00:02:02] Were they fairly cordial after the war?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Oh, very cordial indeed. And one knew, of course, most of the directors. We would occasionally have parties for the fellows of the other academies. I remember one famous occasion we asked the fellows of the Finnish academy, which was fairly close, but I'd always spoken to the director in Italian. And these fellows were classical scholars, so we assembled—with Lily Ross Taylor, who was head of the, uh, classical school then—we assembled the art room. And when the Finns came in, we realized, to our horror, that the Finnish fellows spoke only Finnish, nothing else at all. And so I said, "Lily, what should we do?" And she said, "I haven't the vaguest idea." So I suddenly grab hold of two more gin bottles, poured them into the punch, and the conversation sprang up from that moment on.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] Something was, uh, transmitted.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Something was transmitted indeed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: And that—we also had relations—uh, formal relations by having an annual exhibition of the painting and sculpture from all the academies, held in the—downtown in Rome. And that brought us together. And in addition to that, there was a form—a union of the academies—of the heads of the academies—met formally about four or five times a year. They thrashed out problems in—mutual problems. And also the running of—right after the war, the former German libraries, which had been seized as enemy property. [00:04:03] And before being turned back to the Germans, they were run by the—this union of academies. So the relationship was fairly close. And if you knew the directors and liked the directors, why, they were even closer.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I suppose they had in the past—they'd been rather nationalistic—or some of them—the German or the French, say—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I can't say that, having not been there before the war.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But they were not, at any rate, by this time?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No. Oh, no. They were perfectly friendly indeed. Uh, but we were—most of the academies were in the—the—had buildings in the—Via Giu—in the, uh, Valle Giulia. Then we were—the American academy was on top of the Janiculum, on the other side of town, and the Finnish academy and the Spanish academy were our only academic neighbors.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was Rome—uh, immediately po—immediate postwar Rome, in your opinion, quite a crossroads? Were—did people flock back there—not only fellows, but artists—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —on their own?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: But, um—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did it still have something of a mystique for them? Uh, were there many—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was still—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —contemporary artists?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —a very attractive place. And also, because fascism was no longer running the country, it was open to international influences, and the Italian artists suddenly felt themselves liberated. And it was a small—in fact quite a lively rebirth of painting.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Who are some of those painters you recall from that time?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: There was [Renato] Guttuso, the—who was—was a member of the Communist Party—and did rather, posterish figure painting, but his still lifes and landscapes and things of that sort were very beautiful indeed. [00:06:16] There was, um, Mirko [Basaldella], the—he was a—really a Renaissance figure. He could paint; he could sculpt; made jewelry; and finally, worked for the Carpenter Center in—at Harvard.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: And his brother Afro [Basaldella], who was a great friend of ours indeed, and a—I think quite a beautiful and sensitive painter—mostly abstract.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were, uh—noted, I believe—you and—and Mrs. Roberts—for—you were bringing people in and for entertaining at the academy.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: We tried to.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were these, uh, sometimes quite—sort of in series, you would bring people in repeatedly, or—and mix them with new people?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: How did you conceive that—of the—the effect of that to be? What—what did you have in mind?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: We had in mind to get—one, a good time—to get diverse people of similar interests—get them together, and to try and make an introduction for the fellows into the life of Rome. We'd—you'd have a series of lunches and then cocktail parties. We had—you couldn't feed everybody, but you could give drinks to an awful lot of people.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] Immediately after the war, the—the fellows were a bit older than they had been, and I—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: They were, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —suppose thereafter the—the age went back to—slightly—somewhat younger, didn't it?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, it went back somewhat younger. But I was hoping that—and asking the juries not to pick people who were too young. [00:08:03] I thought it was a great mistake to send to Rome, a rather sophisticated atmosphere, somebody who had never been out of this country before and had just gotten out of—of college. I thought that they were—either not capable of working independently, and that the place would be—would really throw them rather than help them. I gather, uh, before the war a great many of them were awfully young, and they rather resented Rome and never saw of it at all, rather clammed up and lived on top of the

Janiculum by themselves. And that was an attitude it was useful to have there. And—and also that I had hoped that they would send young professionals—the idea being that they would then expand their experience—and hopefully their—their talent. I—I wanted people who knew in what direction they were going—that is, the painters would continue to be painters—or sculptors.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You've mentioned that they weren't really required to produce. And in fact you said that Philip Guston did nothing [laughs] while he was there. But perhaps he was learning something.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, he was changing style. His style had been a lot of figurative—rather figurative—people hiding behind masks. And in—in Rome, he would develop what became his abstract style, which became very—very well-known indeed. But he was not required to do anything at all. He—he worked on one painting. Never really finished it. But this was something which was coming out, and I think that the experience in Rome helped him to bring that out.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Uh, did this bother, when they learned of it, some of your board? [00:10:00]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because presumably the, uh, conservative mural painting—the youngsters—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes. But—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —round out the mural painting—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —and this and that—mosaic—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: But by and large, the board then was perfectly willing indeed, believing that the experience of being in Rome, if it didn't produce any immediate result, would produce a result later on. And they were perfectly patient—willing to be patient and wait, thinking that it would come in time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because this is a—we're trying to make a record of people involved in the arts in America, maybe we could go over the—some of the trustees a bit.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: You've mentioned that, uh, most—some were rather liberal and were very, very supportive. For example, you mentioned Randall Thompson. Did he—was he someone with whom you worked closely? He was—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —a composer.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: A composer. He was, uh, frequently head of the jury. He was a composer here in—in-residence one year. A great friend. He had been a fellow of the academy before the war, knew of its good points and its shortcomings—failings. And the—he was a great help indeed. And that—at one point when a group of trustees wanted the academy put back in its old basis, which would have meant that I would have resigned at once and the president of the board would resign too, Randall Thompson was given the job of looking into the matter and wrote a report, which I still remember—very forceful, very fair, and, uh, allowed us to continue the academy in the direction in which it had been going.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Inaudible] so.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: He did an enormous service.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They wished to restore the single male—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Single male. The conservative attitude, as they saw—saw it. [00:12:05] The—no women. Nobody married. And a strict course of instruction.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But leading along a very narrow—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It would have—yes, it would have narrowed—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —path?



LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —it indeed. And—and I think its postwar reputation would have been destroyed at once.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was their objection to women then?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, they weren't allowed at first.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Others who were supportive—you mentioned, uh, Mason Hammond, a classicist.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yeah. Very.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Uh, Clare Mandell [ph].

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And of course Henry Moe.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Henry Moe.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What kind of advice did he give you, particularly? He was an—because he was an executive rather than a, uh, practitioner of, uh, music or scholarship, right?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Well, what—his position was head of the Guggenheim Foundation, so his—his experience and his viewpoint was extremely broad. He knew all people and in—in practically all fields. And I would frequently go to him for suggestions as to who should be, uh, considered for painter-in-residence or sculptor-in-residence or the classical scholars. And that—every year I would ask him advice. He was very helpful indeed—and helpful at the board meetings too in getting things we wanted passed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you apparently initiated, uh, coming back to New York—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —a couple of times a year—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —which, I gather, other directors had for the most part simply stayed in Rome.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes, they stayed—well, I—I thought it was highly important to come back to this country, to keep—keep in touch—and to see the fellows before they came, and to sit on the juries to see how the juries were working, and to tell the jury—the jurors what kind of person I hoped they would choose. [00:14:11] Naturally, talent came first, but the—uh, the age and the experience of the people, too, I thought, should—should be taken into consideration.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. Did you have a—did you pick the jurors?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, no. The—that was the prerogative of the board—but I could suggest to the president, if I thought that the juries were getting very stuck, and to ask that somebody else be made head of the jury.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Who were some of those heads of jury that—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, well, Paul Manship, the sculptor, was head of the sculpture jury for a long time—I think rather too long. And his tastes were very different from contemporary sculpture. And he was not—he frequently came to Rome—looked at the fellows' work, and I would have a quite a difficult time putting them back on their feet again. [Inaudible]—he was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, you mean he would, uh, be extremely critical to them?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Very critical indeed—I think unjustly critical. And, uh, his criticism was rather destructive.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was he a man who was absolutely certain of his ideas—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Oh, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —or do you suppose he was feeling a bit—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Oh, certainly. Certainly.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What were those ideas, as you recall? What in general was his outlook?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Well, at once he was against all abstract sculpture, which was very much en vogue at that time. Uh, that purely his own tastes were figurative and in a neoclassic formula. [00:16:04] He was a very good medalist, but his bigger work was un—I don't think would stand up now.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But he was a—created a bit of a ruckus each time he came, did he?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Each time, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And then back in New York on the jury, uh—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —he was a problem?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: A problem too.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because you had—there were some young Americans who were of a more—certainly more progressive turn of mind at sculpture—fellows, weren't there?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: How would they get through the—the jury process with [laughs] Manship in the way?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: You tried to get to the other jurors when new, and their taste and sense what—about that. One hoped for the best.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] Some of the other jurors that were—stick out in your mind—can you recall some of them? Aside from Manship. In the visual arts, particularly.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Well, Franklin Watkins was a marvelous juror. He had also been painter-in-residence too. And his—his—he was always looking for somebody who he thought could be aided and broadened by being in Rome. He served a good many years on the juries. Very good indeed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And he was perfectly willing to look at abstract work?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Oh indeed, yes. Indeed, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: He was perceptive; he didn't see a [inaudible]—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Very perceptive indeed, yes. You always—or one always tried to find a juror who wouldn't, uh, automatically go for the person who worked in—in his own style. And as a matter of fact, some of the—the more abstract painters themselves would not make always very good juror—jurymen. [00:18:10] They couldn't see anything else. But the far left was probably more academic in its own way than the far right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you didn't really ever consider, uh, as jurors, say, the abstract expressionists that were coming along at that point?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No. No. Because the—I think, perfectly rightly, that they wouldn't have made good jurymen. You—you had to find people in the middle who could see in both directions.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes. Yeah. And in fact were, uh, sometimes abstract—some of the notable expressionists, uh, appointed as fellows?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No. Alas, that they were not. And they—they probably wouldn't have accepted—they were making entirely too much money in this country.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, I see—the ones that were successful had no reason to [laughs]—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes. No reason—no reason to at all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Of trustees who were rather destructive, Manship, I think, was—you've mentioned. You mentioned also, I think, Barry Faulkner, who was a painter—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Barry Faulkner was a painter, and he was always looking for the ideal mural painter.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It must have been exceedingly rare to find by that point.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Extremely rare indeed. I remember—

ROBERT F. BROWN: The 1950s.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —remember on one occasion they'd thought they'd found the ideal mural painter, and he had a studio somewhere in the Village. And the jury—or certain members of the jury—all trooped down there to see his—his work. And they asked him if he went to Rome what he wanted to do most of all. He said be an easel painter. So—

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —the whole thing collapsed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did Faulkner make loud noises, or was he a—work more subtly than that? Or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No, he didn't—wasn't very subtle at all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: No? He was quite outspoken?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Rather outspoken, yes. [00:20:00]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And he and Manship were—were pretty close—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —friends, I think.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: They were indeed. Oh, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And Sidney Waugh, who worked—did work on—for Steuben Glass, was he—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: He was a trustee also, and a, uh—was occasionally a member of the jury. And—he was really a pupil of Manship. His style was based on Manship's work.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You've mentioned that when—the reaction in Rome to Manship's group for the Anzio memorial. Was that something that rather deflated Manship's prestige as a trustee?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Um—

ROBERT F. BROWN: He did a figure over [ph] for the Anzio memorial.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: He did indeed. And, uh—well, I think it—anybody who saw it rather—thought that Manship's reputation was not—was going to suffer. But set up in—in Anzio—in—in its—not many people go there at all now. It's rather hidden away.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But it was rather distressing in the sense that it was perhaps the major American sculpture commissioned in Italy, wasn't it?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was, yes. It was just not very good.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Eric Gugler, another person familiar to me, was also a trustee [inaudible]—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes, he was.

ROBERT F. BROWN: An architect [inaudible] sculpture.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: An architect, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was he, too, a bit of a problem for a while?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: He was indeed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. But did these man—gradually, were they outnumbered, uh—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, gradually, they were outnumbered indeed. And he was not on the executive committee, nor was he a member of the—to my knowledge—a member of the jury. And so, so gradually, they either retired, withdrew, or became resigned. [00:22:05]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Most of your trustees, though, were concerned that the academy prosper and become even more important—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So they knew that times had changed and—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Knew that times had changed. And as the academy became better known, I think they were really very pleased indeed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you—as part of making it better known, when you were in the United States, would you, uh, lecture on it or go meet with a number of people to spread the word?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Well, at first we'd travel around to various colleges and to arts schools. But after that—that's interesting—when I was back in—in America, there wasn't time, and it did get to be better known indeed without—word got around. And we had some favorable publicity. There were articles in—in *Life*—I think once or twice, I'm sure—which was all to the good.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You encouraged students once they were in Rome to travel.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I hoped—yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you'd mentioned some before the war apparently had sat up on the Janiculum and hardly stirred.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: That's what I gathered. And I—we encouraged them to travel as much as they possibly could. We took them on trips around Italy. Shortly—we took the painters and sculptors and architects—writers, composers—on short trips around Italy so as to get them used to that. And the head of the classical school would then take the classical scholars on similar trips, visiting classical sites in Italy—and to show them where the things were, what traveling was like, what to look for, and hope they would continue on their own. [00:24:07] They were each given a small travel allowance, to be used in any way that they wanted to. And I would try and tell them, if they were traveling to outside of Italy, where to go, what to see, what they were interested in, and encourage them as much as they possibly could to do that. Otherwise there would have been no point in being there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was there a core—did you give lectures when you were out on these tours or were they rather low-keyed?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Low-keyed. Informal. Uh, you couldn't do a formal lecture. The classical people could do that, but I wasn't going to make it that formal indeed. So what we would do would be to tell them where they were going, talk on the—in the building, wherever it happened to be, to anybody who was—wanted to listen. And then they—we—shortly after we arrived at the hotel in the evening, give them a cocktail party. That always would help dinner.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I suppose—did the students really take to this?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: They did indeed, yes. They took to it very much indeed—so much so that—that—several times that the—we'd get repeats. If there was room, somebody from the previous year would want to go along again. And also it enabled us to get to—to know the fellows.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They were less apt to come up to you in Rome, whereas when you were traveling together, I suppose, you were—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —thrown into—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Exactly.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —close quarters and so forth.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: [Inaudible.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: I suppose many of them spent a good deal—percentage of their time out of Rome, did they, thereafter?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: They did, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Which was to the good.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: All—all to the good. They were not required to be there any—any length of time. Uh, usually, in the middle of winter, when travel wasn't comfortable, they were there, much more than, say—say, in the spring or summer.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The artist-in-residence program—when they were in Rome, would those artists be there, say, in mid-winter?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It would depend upon their, uh, ability to come. Ideally they would be there for the—in the fall through the spring, but if they could only come—especially architects—on a short-term visit because they were working, uh, that—they'd be there to suit their needs.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did the architecture fellows—what did they spend their time doing? Would they be—did they have drafting rooms and the like? Or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: They did have—each one was given a large studio with a drafting board on—if they wished to—to use that. But what they really did was to look at Rome and travel. It was the best thing, I think, they could—could do. Once or twice—uh, there were various projects, and—Nat Owings—you know, of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill—was there, but he—he arranged to get them together and to—gave them certain things which he thought they ought to do. And he—from his position as a distinguished practicing architect, he could—he could do that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: He was, uh, quite a steady supporter, wasn't he?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I—yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The teachers of painting—Franklin Watkins was there—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: —an artist-in-residence. You said he worked quite well with the fellows?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Very well indeed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was his particular gift as a—as a teacher?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Well, he taught—well, uh, he wasn't teaching, of course, there, at all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, not teaching, but as a visitor, what—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: What—as a visitor, he—he would occasionally look at their work and talk about it. That's all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was he quite an affable man? [00:28:02]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Very. Charming, charming person. A very, very, very good painter.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And Henry Varnum Poor you've also said was—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —effective with them—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Very—very effective. He—and when—when he was there, they even built a kiln, because he is—was a potter too—as—well, as a painter.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So did you have an explosion of pots thereafter for a while? Or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: No?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: One man took it up. That's all. Those things always go in—in—in cycles. Whether it's there still, I don't know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you attempted to broaden the program in a number of ways, including the contact with European artists and writers. And I gather these additional programs were—made for additional expense. I think

the—the cost of—simply inflation could cause an academy to cost a great deal more—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Well, when I was there, inflation really hadn't started at all. The—the prices remained fairly stable. And in asking the artists to come, we could occasionally trade space for [inaudible]—that is, we had living—living space, and that they would come for really very small figures, just for the sake of being in—in Rome and given a nice place in which to live. So it wasn't that expensive.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You said there were at one time some complaints that but that a couple of people stepped in to help you entertain the foreigners—stepped up whatever—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: That, uh—Wallace Harrison—

ROBERT F. BROWN: The architect.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —the architect, was a trustee. [00:30:01] Alas, he never—I could never get him to come as an artist-in—architect-in-residence. But he visited us frequently. But he and his partner Max Abramowitz gave money to the academy to be used at my discretion for the entertainment of foreigners. And that was very nice to have, because it showed that the board in that part was behind me in that, and behind me with cash. They understood well what was the—required and how valuable that could be.

ROBERT F. BROWN: For example, when you had Henry Moore over, what did he do? Did you entertain him or did you—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, well, he—he actually was our guest in the house that we lived in. And that he met all of the fellows, saw their work. They were, of course, enchanted with that. And he was a very good critic indeed. Beyond that, you can't—you can't ask a person to do any more than that. He was very kind indeed about that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you had—you had Alfred Barr over at one point—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: He was our—yes, as our guest. Uh, that—he and Jim Soby were with the [inaudible]—early on were choosing Italian paintings to be shown at the Museum of Modern Art for an exhibition, and they used our house as headquarters for that. And anytime was there he came back a number of other times. And they always wanted to go see what—what was being done. Endless curiosity. And the fellows, of course, he was a god to them, they couldn't believe he was—he really existed, he was there. [00:32:00] And Alfred was always sympathetic to any painter.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And he was interested in what they were doing?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Very interested indeed, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I've—I've heard, uh, Americans who were trying—who were rising at that time complaining that the Modern didn't give them as much of a look-in as they had hoped. It still had a great deal of European work—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —but, uh, in fact, you found he was very—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Very—very indeed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —interested—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —and met with the fellows—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —and so forth. The—you mentioned at one point writers at the academy—um, that there—there had been a lack of them, that [William] Somerset Maugham in fact—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes. That—actually, what—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —remarked on that.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I believe what happened—that—uh, Somerset Maugham, at a— literary luncheon in New York remarked that there were a great many fellowships for painters and sculptors, but none for writers at

all, and that the embassy of the American Academy of Arts and Letters took this to heart and made a fellowship available at the academy for a writer. Uh, they did the—the choosing, and then the—the American Academy board would accept or reject. When I was there, they fortunately accepted the whole time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because of its fine choices—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Very fine choices indeed. That—Tony Hecht was the first writer. He's now a distinguished poet. Ralph Ellison was there. Bill Styron. Um—oh, damn—

ROBERT F. BROWN: John Ciardi.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: John Ciardi indeed was there—whose words I hear occasionally on the radio. [00:34:01]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes. The—did they make a difference—these young writers?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes. I thought it was excellent. Because the writers would get between the other artists and talk. The painters were usually rather silent; the sculptors, the same. But the writers were interested and could talk and contributed enormously to the life of the academy. It was a sad moment when the Academy of Arts and Letters—long after I was there—discontinued that. But the fellowship has since been revived. And I thought it was one of the most important the academy had.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You hadn't—in your time there really—to be too involved with raising funds, did you?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was that taken care of by your board back at home?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Well, perfectly frankly, the academy [laughs] had enough money. Uh, we were always on the lookout for it. And that—my wife met a Mr. Louis Einstein once in Florence, and he became interested in the academy thanks to her. And sometime after I left, he died and left the academy a great deal of money. This was, uh, simply one of those things that when you are nice to people, they sometimes will give you—leave lots of money to you. The academy has always had—had a hard time, uh, getting people interested, because it's not a big thing which you can see in this country. It's remote. It's not that well-known. It's not like the—a museum, which is right there. So you have to find a special person. [00:36:00] But in those days, we managed to live within the budget, which was not very big, and to a—a reasonable fellowship. It was a fairly easy time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I gather, uh, Mrs. Roberts, as some sense was a manager of the academy—at least managed the personnel and certain things like that?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh—no. She—she would look after the—the—housekeeping and tell me what to do to keep it up in reasonable shape and trim. And, of course, ran the house we were in, the Villa Aurelia, and all the entertainment we had to do there. I was also very fortunate in having, uh, Margherita Rospigliosi, who was Princess Rospigliosi, as secretary. And she also looked after the servants at the academy.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well—she was—would have had many contacts, uh, in Italy, did she?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: She had indeed, yes. She was invaluable to me, and I thought did an excellent job there—and looked after, uh, some of the complaints of the students, looked after the servants. You had to respect her. Italy being an old-fashioned country, when you'd say *principessa* that meant something indeed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And I suppose she'd smooth things over with nationals—entirely natural [inaudible]—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: She did indeed, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: And guided us in many tricky situations.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were there times when anti-Americanism flared up? That—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, not when I was there. That came later on, with the Vietnam War. But when I was there, no. [00:38:00] It didn't exist at all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were followed by Richard Kimball, who was an architect—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —and probably—I gather was a bit more conservative person than you, wasn't he?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I guess he was.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Why did you decide to leave? You—you'd been there just about 15 years—or 13 or 14—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I'd been there actually 13—14, in fact.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Fourteen years.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Simply because, uh, I felt that in a position which depended largely on one person, we'd been there long enough, running out of ideas, running out of steam. It wasn't all easy work, although largely enjoyable. But I felt that it—that the—if you were in a position like that too long, you'd become long in the tooth, and that somebody else should do something about it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you pretty much know what you wanted to do afterward?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No. Not at all. I finally decided to get back to Far Eastern studies. But I—I simply knew that I—if we'd been there too long, it would not have been good for the academy.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were becoming—you detected you were becoming fixed in some of your—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Exactly. Exactly.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —assumptions or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I didn't want to be—I didn't want to become fixed in these old assumptions.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you—did you come immediately back to the United States? Or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: We remained in Italy. In fact, we remained in Italy until three years ago—in one place and another. Not in Rome, though. [00:40:00]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you set about formal studies again of Far Eastern art?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I've tried to pick up, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What—what—you've produced a good deal, I think, yeah.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: But in time—that Laurence Sickman, who was—was then head of the, uh, Kansas City Museum, suggested that I go to Japan and look at the Japanese museums and make a guidebook to them, since the Japanese museums were rather like icebergs, with only the very tip showing, and rather difficult to find—find out what is in them for all that, and that the—this—he thought this might be useful. So we did that on our own. And the Japan Society backed it by taking a number of the books, and the—to my surprise, found—found a publisher interested in Japan, and that got us back again in the Far East.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I—I gather you—you must have seen tremendous change from what you'd known before the war?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: A totally different country indeed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: For one thing, I suppose there hadn't been that many museums before the war.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Before the war there was only big—the national museums in, uh, Tokyo and Nara, and Kyoto—at least those were the only ones that we know. Now I'd been there in 1940, and there was enormous growth of them after the war. And they're still growing in number.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Are they—or were they—did you find them a bit different from the museums you were familiar with in Europe or in the United States, or were they modeled—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —on Western—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, they were most—no, they were never arranged like a Japanese house—unless it was a house museum. [00:42:08] They were arranged in the Western way—naturally, with vitrines and artificial lighting. And you didn't have to take your shoes off—

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.]



LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —to get in.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But in other respects they were different?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: In other respects—yes. The—the installation was usually designed for the showing of Japanese things, and—and rather different—slightly different from the normal way in the West. And [inaudible] was putting everything behind—behind glass, including Western paintings which were—or Japanese paintings in the Western manner, which would be framed, uh, glazed, and then put in—in a glassed, enclosed case. It was rather excess.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] So you really had several barriers—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —and reflection in the light—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Enormous barriers.

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ROBERT F. BROWN: As you were writing the guide to Japanese museums, were the, uh, Japanese quite open and made everything quite excessive? Or was—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Reasonably so. Uh, they're—the Japanese were never that open. And one had to do a certain amount of prying and poking around. And asking question.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because they didn't want a foreigner doing the guide? Or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Um—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —they didn't see the need for a guide?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: The—slightly resentful, I think, that a foreigner was doing anything like this. But the justification for some of this was that the—I could put my own comments in the guidebook as to whether the collection was worth seeing or not—in other words, evaluate it. And the Japanese lists in museums never did that at all. You had little idea what was there, and certainly no idea of the quality or lack of quality.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was that simply something too sensitive to—uh—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Well, I presume it was too sensitive then. They didn't want to make a judgment which would reflect on the museum. I'm afraid I had no such qualms.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And yet, you had a—you got, then, ironically, a Japanese publisher, so the [inaudible]—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It wasn't a Ja—it was actually an American, uh, in partnership with Japanese, and was publishing only in—in English.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So the—your guide, then, would only be to a limited degree accessible to most Japanese?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, only to those who—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Could read English?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Read English.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes. Yeah. Well you also—uh, was this—this was in the '60s, was this?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: In the early '60s, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Then you embarked—was this afterward—on a history of Japanese artists?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was actually a dictionary—

ROBERT F. BROWN: A dictionary? [00:02:01]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —of Japanese artists. Which—the work was suggested to me by the publisher, [Oscar] Meredith Weatherby, and that—there had been an—a small book of that kind put out in English before the war, and it had been reissued, but not brought up to date or enlarged, uh, by Tuttle sometime after the war. And they

suggested that it was time to do something bigger. And I honestly said yes, so that my wife and I were [laughs] tied up for nine years on it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Must have been a, uh—overwhelming task, wasn't it?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was a back-breaking task. How we ever got through, I don't—I don't know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: There were only a small percentage of Japanese artists' names even known.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes. I mean, unfortunately, there—a great many are—things are anonymous. But there are a great many artists known, and that, [inaudible]. I think there are several thousand names in it. But the dictionary contains their—all of their names—their artistic names, their—as well as their fam—family names. A—if possible, a small description of the kind of work they did, where it can be seen publicly, and what bibliography there is, both in English and—or any Western language and Japanese.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It must—I suppose it was very difficult simply finding the names, finding the work, was it?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Well, it simply meant in many cases going to a library—uh, if—being allowed into the stacks and then pulling down any book which would have Japanese names in it and getting the information from there. [00:04:04] But I—I protected myself by saying that not all Japanese artists is in there, nor is all the information about them contained. Because to do—to claim such a thing would be foolhardy—would take years and years, and years, and still you wouldn't get either correct or complete.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. But this was some—an effort that the Japanese had never shown interest in—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: That—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —making? Or did you get—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —some cooperation from them?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Um—no—well, I had, uh, Japanese assistance. And there are Japanese dictionaries of this kind. But they do not—and I'd get information from them indeed, but they do not contain any bibliography or any indication where the work can be seen publicly. And this was the edition which I would provide—and also, this was in English. The Japanese ones were, of course, in Japanese only. So I think the book is useful.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this is something that—it carried you into the early '70s then?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes. It came out—it was—came out of the press in '74.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Quite different—or completely different—from these efforts, but perhaps related to your experience in Brooklyn and in Rome, I gather you were involved in the founding of the New York State Arts Council?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: I was indeed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Can you talk about that a bit, please?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Certainly, certainly.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was that about the first there was?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was the first, actually. But Nelson Rockefeller was the man who really did the thing. He—he and I had talked about this—or such a thing—uh, off and on. [00:06:02] And after he became governor and I was leaving the academy, he asked me to come to New York and look into starting an arts council—what was then—started to call an arts council for New York State.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you kept in touch with him regularly? Was he someone you—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Oh, yes indeed. His—he married my cousin. And so we'd known him—I'd known him since the early—the mid-'30s.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What did he have in mind—by arts council?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: He had in mind something—uh, government support for the—for the arts. I think he—perfectly rightly that private support in this country well might not be enough—or would dry up, and that the—

since the—the government in—the governments in England and France, and Germany, and Italy and so forth have always done this, that it was time that America try it too. And so—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you do a study first? Did you—how did you begin your—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: [Laughs] What I did is very simple. I came to New York, uh, traveled around the state, talked to various people, and wrote a report. A page-and-a-half.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did they, uh, pay you?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did they uniformly think it was a good idea—the people you talked with?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Oh, perfect idea. Why not?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were they mostly people in museums? Or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: They were people in museums.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —theater and the like?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, theater. The Phoenix Theatre. It had to be a nonprofit theater. I didn't think the government was going—going to get into the business of supporting profitable organizations, they had to be nonprofit. People in [inaudible]—societies and museums, and [inaudible] people.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So what did your page-and-a-half report say? [00:08:02]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Saying everybody thought it was a damn good idea—and that—uh, several guiding principles—that the—the council should not get into the business of building—no bricks and mortar at all. And it would simply be for support of programs. And that the idea in general was, since it had to be a state thing, to emphasize either upstate New York institutions or use the New York City institutions, such as the opera and the symphony to travel more with—with under—travel with—with—with a—a grant or an underlying—some—money, through the state, to enlarge their season, and enlarge their program, for the benefit of New York State. There was probably something political in that, but it was actually a practical thing, too, at that time—that—the New York institution, being fairly well-endowed, and the—all they needed was a little more money or a little more guarantee to move about.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did Rockefeller accept that—that report? Or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: It was accepted. And that the—he then got a—this took about two months to do, then I went back to Italy, and then he asked me to come again. And they had gotten a small sum of money passed through the legislature by doing it at the—just—just before the season closed, and they really were tired and didn't know what they were voting for at all, so they voted—

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —the money in on his say-so. [00:10:05] Then I came back again and was given a small office and told to write a program, and actual suggestions, and form a board, which we did.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This was about when?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Oh, my. '61. I think it was '61—or either—the winter of '61 to ['6]2.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Who did you select for your board? Was—did you—people you knew or—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: People I knew.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —were—came well-recommended?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Oh, naturally. Uh, it was—Henry Allen Moe was on the board. And Wallace Harrison. And—damn. My memory goes so badly. The chairman of it was the chairman of the Buffalo Museum.

ISABEL S. ROBERTS: Seymour Knox.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, Seymour Knox.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: That, you see? He was awfully good indeed. And—and then my greatest contribution of

all was to get John MacFadyen to become director of it. I didn't want to continue with it. And I got him—uh, he was an architect and a former fellow of the academy, and he was made director on a part-time basis. And in very short time he was on full-time and put the thing on the map—really ran it—ran the program for a number of years. And this was the first in the country.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was his particular gift, would you say—MacFadyen's?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: MacFadyen—his particular gift was being sympathetic and knowledgeable about the arts, able to get on with people very well. [00:12:03] And to be tough enough about it. And a very good administer—administrator.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was the harder task raising money through the legislature or, uh—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, no.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —picking and choosing your way among the contending competitors [laughs] for the money?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Uh, that—John could tell you that. I don't know. But apparently the legislature came through with—and on a nonpartisan basis—once in a while John had to go to Albany and say, "This must be nonpartisan. We just can't get into partisan politics on this at all." And it was supported by both sides of the house. And in time they got enormous amounts of money. And apparently it was a very popular—and is a very popular program.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you stay in touch with it now and then—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —or just mostly informally?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: No. Informally. Uh, you know, once you're out of the thing, you stay out. Don't—nobody wants you around at all. And I was in Europe anyway. I remained in touch with John—and do still.

ROBERT F. BROWN: If I may ask, did you stay—decide to stay in Italy simply as a wonderful base, a place—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —culture that you enjoy living in?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: We enjoy living there indeed. The Italians are a remarkably easy people to live with. They either leave you alone or become very good friends. They make it very easy for you. They're—charming people. And a very beautiful country.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And when you're not writing, uh, you're simply traveling, I gather?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: A little bit, yes. Or existing pleasantly. The food is good. The climate is not bad. And the people are awfully nice.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Looking back, are you glad you had your career in museums and at the academy?

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Goodness, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And it's something you're glad also you didn't persist in forever? [00:14:00]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes. I am indeed. A certain amount of change is not a bad thing. But most of all, I'm very glad that I'm married Isabel.

ISABEL S. ROBERTS: [Laughs.]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: She's been a marvelous help.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Absolutely. Yes. You know, nothing would have been down without her at all—both in Rome—

ISABEL S. ROBERTS: [Inaudible.]

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: —and in all of the Japanese endeavors.

ROBERT F. BROWN: She really goaded you and—

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Absolutely.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —supported you.

LAURANCE P. ROBERTS: Yes. One piece of advice to anybody else: get your wife interested.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]