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Oral history interview with Louis Bouché,
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Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
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www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Interview

JM: JOHN MORSE

LB: LOUIS BOUCHE

JM: This is a recorded interview with the painter Louis Bouché for the Archives of American Art. It is taking place in Bouché's summer home in Old Chatham, New York, on August 7th. The interviewer is John D. Morse. Well, first of all Mr. Bouché, I think we might as well begin at the beginning of your schooling. Who are some of the teachers that you remember best?

LB: Now you're referring to art school?

JM: Art school. Yes.

LB: Well, my art schooling first started when I went to Paris as quite an adolescent. I went over there to live with my family in 1909, and I went to the Lysée Calneux [phon. sp.], but I wanted desperately to go to art school. So I often played hookey from the Lysée and went to Colorossi [phon. sp.] and the Grande Chaumiere.

JM: How old were you at this time, Mr. Bouché?

LB: Oh, in 1909 I was thirteen.

JM: Thirteen and your parents were living in Paris?

LB: My father died in 1909. We were living in New York before, where I was born and my mother was so grieved by the loss of my father that she decided to move the family to Europe, so we lived in Paris for six years. And then the greatest joy I had actually studying art over there in Europe, in France, was My mother had the good sense to let me apply for tutoring in painting, and so in the summers I go with this man to Brittany and usually the trips to Brittany with this private tutor lasted from six weeks to two months.

JM: During the summer time?

LB: During the summer time. And we had a regular schedule of work. We'd get up fairly early in the morning and we'd sketch and paint from about 8:30 in the morning to about 11:30. Then we'd come back and have a marvelous lunch of seafood in our little house. It was near Campere [phon. sp.]. And then, my tutor would oblige me to take a nap after lunch which I did religiously. And then after that, along about three o'clock he'd get some models, and the fisherwomen would pose for us, or the fishermen. And then we'd sketch and then about 5:30 we'd go out painting again and just get twilight effects which were very popular in those days. And of course the thing that thrilled me is that so many of the salon paintings were of Brittany. People like Lucien Simon, Mannard, Douchez and so on. We'd walk around and see actual living scenes that I'd seen in the summer.

JM: What was the name of the tutor? Did he later achieve any fame?

LB: His name was Bernard Dumey [phon. sp.]. No, he never achieved any reputation in France. It was damn tough, of course, over there. It wasn't like here where having an exhibition is of all importance. I think he was received at the Salon once in his whole career, the poor guy, but he was a nice man, and he helped me out a great deal.

JM: And then when did you come back to this country?

LB: We came back to New York after World War I broke out in Europe, and I went immediately to the Art Students League in 1915.

JM: I didn't realize you were there as early as 1915. Who was teaching there then that you remember most vividly?

LB: I studied for a while with Romanovsky. I studied with DuMond mostly. I was at the League for just one year, and probably my most joyful memory of the League was Alex Brook, who, although he was not in my class, he was in Kenneth Hayes Miller's class, but we palled around a great deal, and I saw a great deal of him at the League.

JM: You did not study with Miller?

LB: No, I didn't study with Miller.

JM: Well, this, in 1915 you say, this was right after the Armory Show, and so you were not there in '13?

LB: No, I wasn't there at the time of the Armory Show. I was in Europe.

JM: What impressions did you have? It must have been talked about quite a bit in '15 when you came back. Of the importance of the Armory show? Was there much talk around the League? Do you recall?

LB: Well, in 1915 I was pretty much of a silly ass. I had an idea that I'd come back to the land of the Indians and having lived in Europe for six years I wasn't terribly interested in what had happened in New York. I thought that nothing much had happened in New York. I thought that nothing much had happened, and we hadn't heard about the Armory Show. Of course, in Paris, my whole aesthetic heart was still abroad, so the Armory Show meant nothing to me until a few years later when I really discovered what had taken place.

JM: I see. You mentioned to me at one time that you had a gallery at Wanamaker's. Was this in the 20's, about this time you're speaking of, or later?

LB: I got married in 1921, and we went to Europe on our honeymoon. My wife and myself. I spent every penny I had on the honeymoon. I remember we spent seventy-five dollars going on the boat just on champagne alone.

JM: Proper honeymoon.

LB: And while I was in London I got a cable from Ruby Ross Goodenow, who then was in charge of Belle Maison at Wanamakers, Belle Maison being the very fashionable decorating part of Wanamaker's at that time. And she sent me a telegram asking me if I would be interested in taking over the management of a small picture gallery in the store that she had had the idea for a long time, and was anxious to know whether I would manage this little gallery for Wanamaker's. I said yes. So when I came back in 1922, instead of being terribly worried about money, I had a job waiting for me.

JM: Fine. And as I recall it was there that the paintings of Reginald Marsh were first shown. Is that true?

LB: That's right. And I think I showed the work of George Picken for the first time in that gallery.

JM: George Picken?

LB: Yes.

JM: Who else?

LB: It was a cinch because most of my exhibitions were scene exhibitions which pleased the store, and the whole idea of the gallery, I could do anything that I wanted because it was a publicity stunt, and like the auditorium, it wasn't supposed to make any money.

JM: Well, you sold things though?

LB: Oh, yes. We sold pictures, but not very many. So I had scene exhibitions, for instance a scene exhibition of New York, the circus. I had an exhibition of sporting pictures. When the Prince of Wales was in New York at the International Polo Match, I had an exhibition of pictures which had to do with polo which included East Indian pictures of polo players. I even had saddles in the gallery and bridles and all. But the wonderful thing about that gallery is that all I had to do was to go to the Foreign Office of the store and say, "Will you cable our Paris office? I want six Derains, I want three Matisses, I want eight Picassos, I want this and that and the other thing."

JM: And did you get them?

LB: And I'd get them.

JM: And sell them?

LB: Sometimes I'd sell them. John Quinn was one of the frequent visitors to our exhibitions, but he was unapproachable. I knew who he was, and I'd just sort of sneak up on him and say, "Can I help you, Mr. Quinn?" And he'd give me a dirty look. I don't think John Quinn ever bought a picture in the gallery, but we did sell quite a few. We sold quite a few to Earl Horter in Philadelphia.

JM: Oh, I see. Who are some of the other people you recall. Collectors who have bought from the Wanamaker

Gallery?

LB: Frankly, I don't really remember the name of the collectors that bought there. Earl Horter was the biggest buyer.

JM: Well, then as I recall, you left the gallery to start painting murals.

LB: That's right. While I was handling the management of the gallery, I also As it will happen in business, they kept shoving more and more work on me and one of my jobs at the gallery was to find artists for various mural projects that had mostly to do with interior decoration, and these murals were generally of a classical nature. They had to do with the types of rooms that the Wanamaker decorating department was doing. And I decided that instead of giving these jobs out to people that I might as well do them myself, and I might as well get out of Wanamaker's. For one thing my wife had been wanting to get out for a long time because I think I was there for four years. But the annual furniture sale, one day I looked at the ad, the Wanamaker ad, in the paper for the annual furniture sale in the store and it said, "John Wanamaker would have loved this furniture sale." So that was a banner headline and it disgusted me so I got out of the place.

JM: Well, what about the technique of your painting? Where did you study that?

LB: Well, I had a great break because I didn't actually study it. I shared a studio with a man by the name of Rudolph Gertler who had a studio on Ninth Street and who had been Robert Chandler's foreman.

JM: Oh, yes.

LB: And Bob Chandler knew nothing about the technique of mural decorating, so somebody had to know it, and this foreman of his, Mr. Gertler was a very good craftsman, and he actually became my foreman, although he did his own work, nevertheless all the technical end of my job that I undertook at that time he advised me and he helped me with, and so while I had no real schooling in the technique of mural painting, it was not necessary because he helped me immeasurably in that respect.

JM: I see. I recall a painting, is it in Detroit, of you standing on a ladder painting a mural.

LB: No, no that painting is in the Los Angeles County Museum. It was bought by one of the big movie men. I can't remember his name now. Apparently, he got fed up with it, and he gave it to the Los Angeles County Museum. That was a portrait I did on the ladder, and my brother in law who helped me with the dirty end of the mural that I was doing for the Department of Justice in Washington.

JM: Oh, I see. Well, apparently I'm familiar with it only in reproductions because I thought I'd seen it for it's very clearly in my mind.

LB: You may have seen it Mr. Morse. I don't know. It was exhibited in New York.

JM: Yes, I must have. Speaking of technique in general Mr. Bouché. I have found recently to my horror that there seems to be a widespread and general indifference on the part of painters to honest technique to the craft of painting. I was told the other day for example that for only a brief period at the Art Students League itself was technique taught, technique as such. That is the preparing of the ground and all the rest of it. But where did you perfect your technique? Down at the League or in Paris?

LB: Well, I'm not sure that I ever perfected my technique, and as a matter of fact, I'm afraid that I have committed a great many abuses over the years. In Paris, we were taught nothing of the kind. As a matter of fact, those years that I was in Paris at the Grande Chaumiere Colorossi, and I also went to the Ecole de Beaux Arts for a short while, we were taught nothing about technique, and technique was being terribly abused there. Painters were piling colors on top of colors that hadn't dried. And all kinds of crimes were being committed at that time. So we didn't give it a thought. In 1915 when I went to the League no attention was paid to technique as far as I can remember. In fact, technique, the thought of underpainting and all the things that made for safety in our painting didn't come about until very much later. The concern with making the painting live so that it wouldn't go all to pot from abuse.

JM: What is your normal practice in, well let's take a canvas from the beginning, from the support. What sort of priming do you use, or size?

LB: Well, I buy the best linen canvas I can get, and I don't prepare it except to give it a thin coat a neutral tone which is usually grey or a burnt sienna tone.

JM: Very thin, mixed in oil?

LB: No, I don't use any oil at all. It's mixed in turpentine.

JM: Turpentine.

LB: Then I paint directly. I usually paint from nature and if I see something that I want to paint, that I like, because I find that the best results, this had nothing to do with technique, it had to do with the visual and emotional response to the subject if I see something I like. Very often, like the other day, I started a landscape of an old men's home down in Ghent. And I think I've passed the spot for over ten years and I've kept saying to myself, "Someday I want to paint that old house there, that group of old houses." And so the same formula is itself in my mind to some extent, but when I got there, I was so excited by the whole idea I just started right in painting. In fact, I didn't draw it or anything. I just started right in with the full color.

JM: How long normally do you let the canvas dry before applying your first coat of paint?

LB: You mean from that thin coat?

JM: From the thin coat, yes.

LB: Oh, I don't know that I ever actually count but I've got canvases in that little studio of mine there that have been, I gave the first coat of paint to maybe four or five months ago.

JM: And what about the final coat of any painting, the protective varnish film? Do you varnish yours?

LB: I never varnished a canvas. I find every now and then I'll go into my dealers and Mr. Kraushaar will pull out a canvas, and I'll find it's been in the gallery for a few years. It's nice and shiny with varnish, but I didn't do it. The gallery did it. I never varnish pictures. In fact, I like matte surfaces. That's why I use only turpentine. And I'm afraid of oil. I'm afraid of the slow drying qualities of oil as a medium. And I don't even like it.

JM: Well, what about a painting in New York City, I've understood, subject to gas and smoke and cigarette smoke, is bound to deteriorate unless it is protected with varnish. What do you think about that?

LB: Well, I suppose that's true. The painting over there on the wall is simply disgusting, but with a little castile soap

JM: Castile soap?

LB: Yes, castile soap and tepid water I think it could be cleaned off, but then of course there is no dust here like in New York.

JM: No. Have you ever had any trouble with a painting beginning to deteriorate or paint falling off?

LB: I certainly have. I remember a few years ago when they started underpainting, I tried it. And I was fascinated by the very thing that I should be fascinated with, and that is to paint lean on fat, and this was the biggest crime you could commit. I remember in one case in the question of doing over a sky, and I found that by using dry white and egg emulsion I painted over the sky, and then I used oil paint right in with the, shows you how criminal one can be, used oil paint right with the dry white and the effect was absolutely just what I wanted. I never could have gotten it with oil paint, but within a matter of two or three years the sky peeled off.

JM: Well, was that because of, as you said, a violation of the rule of lean on fat?

LB: Yes, it's all right to paint fat on lean, but it's not all right to paint lean on fat. And like a lot of things that one shouldn't do there is a delight in the vice of doing what you shouldn't do. What happened was that I had to scrape the whole sky off at great cost of time and trouble because I wanted to save the picture, my wife liked it, and then I repainted the sky years later, and it's now hanging in mine and my wife's bedroom in this house. Of course I'm glad I didn't sell it because had I sold it the shame would have been even greater.

JM: You teach, Mr. Bouché, at both the Art Students League and the National Academy School. In your classes does this kind of discussion come up, lean on fat or fat on lean?

LB: No, no. Because unfortunately today we have so many amateur students, and they don't want to take the time to They're not interested in anything except the joy of spreading oil paint on a canvas. They just don't want to listen. Most of them you can't help even in that direction. That's what I find.

JM: They just buy a piece of canvas and start.

LB: They buy a piece of canvas and they are like children at a birthday party. They make a lunge for the ice cream, and they don't give a damn about anything else.

JM: There must be, however, a few students, a few younger painters, serious painters, who are concerned with

having their paintings last. Where do they go? Do they read Doerner and books like that?

LB: I've got Doerner's book in New York, and it's like a lot of other textbooks. To my way of thinking it's not very simply gotten up. It's a chore to follow the rules, and I don't think very many students pay any attention to Doerner or know anything about

JM: What about Mayer's book?

LB: I think that's probably true about that. I'm not really in a position to answer that question because, unfortunately I suppose, I don't give enough thought to the technical end of painting because my whole approach to painting is, I suppose, like my students. It's one of excitement, and when I see something I want to paint, I just go to it. I don't even give the subject all the consideration I should give it. It's a spontaneous thing with me. And I try not to violate rules, but possibly at times I still do. I mean if I have a thick glob of paint, and I want to change it, I usually make an effort of scrape it off and change it after the canvas is, I take a little rag and maybe I change the canvass as near as I can, but a great many times I don't do that because I'm too excited about my subject.

JM: Well, isn't it possible, Mr. Bouché, that after these years, you've assimilated this technique, and it's unconscious with you?

LB: Well, I hope so. I'm not conscious of committing too many crimes. I don't even think the students do because they usually come to class with a virginal canvas. And I try to tell them not to pile the paint on. I explain to them how long it takes for an oil painting to dry. However, I'm not that conscious that, there was a spell There are so many fads in the U.S.A., I mean like the men wearing little caps and so on. I meant there was a time when underpainting in tempera was something everybody was doing. Now I don't hear much about it any more. Maybe it's because I don't get around enough. I don't know.

JM: Tell me, you obviously like to teach or else you wouldn't be teaching in two schools. What are the pleasures of teaching for you?

LB: Well, way down deep I'm an exhibitionist, I guess. I like to throw my weight around, and I love painting so much that I like anybody who feels that way about it. And the greatest thrill, I think, in teaching is to find out that you're wrong. I mean you can learn a lot from your students, too. You never get what I call a driver's license as a painter. You never get to the point where this is it. You know it all. I mean life isn't long enough to know it all. Anyhow, the great thrill I get out of students is that I'll see a person who looks absolutely hopeless. I think, well, they'll never get anyplace. And first thing you know they begin to come out of the shadows, and they're doing very good work. Next to that I've seen very competent students who have great ability and great facility and they've never gotten beyond that point. Those are the students I don't think are very interested as a rule. But I think the great joy is to see somebody really making fantastic strides. And then of course I never get over the extraordinary sensation. Now this summer I was up in Skowhegen giving a little talk up there, I went around across the classes and saw what they were doing in the school. There was one little brilliant snip of a girl, I mean she was about four feet tall, she was very young, and she was painting brilliantly. She had a great big canvas, and she was really a very competent young painter. And I asked her how long she'd been at it and she said she'd been at it for about a year. Well, this is terribly exciting. One of the great joys of teaching is to think in terms of future generations, and you think there's hope because some of these kids are really brilliant. But of course in a class the talented ones are always few and far between. Out of a class of thirty, maybe you'll get three or four of them that have any merit.

JM: Well, I think I know your answer to this, but you do believe in the principle of the Art Students League. It has been called too free by a number of people.

LB: Of course I believe in the principles of the Art Students League. It's come back to my early years as an art student. When I came to the Art Students League, I was very smug about the Art Students League. It's mostly because I wasn't in Paris and I was so young that I thought I'd left everything behind. But as years went on I looked back to my one lonely year at the Art Students League with a great deal of joy. And to me the League is the most exciting alma mater for me. I look back to the League with much more, at this stage of the game, I look back to the League with more joy and feeling than I look back to the art schools in Paris.

JM: That reminds me to ask you, who have been some of your life-long friends, many of whom I imagine you made the acquaintance at the League?

LB: Well, actually, probably my oldest friend I met at the League is Alexander Brook. But then I stayed at the League after all for only a year. And I have since childhood, maybe it's because of my Latin blood and so on, I have always associated with older people, so that when I left the League, I didn't go around with my own generation, I went around with older artists, and the man I met and had closest contact with after I left the League was Walt Kuhn.

JM: Walt Kuhn.

LB: In fact, the greatest debt I owe to any school or anybody is to Walt Kuhn. He taught me more about painting than anybody I ever met. I have the greatest love and respect for the help Walt Kuhn gave me.

JM: And you continued that relationship I imagine when you moved out here to East Chatham?

LB: Oh, yes.

JM: You pointed out his house this morning.

LB: No, no. That was George Luks. I never knew George Luks. I knew him very, very slightly.

JM: George Luks, I beg your pardon.

LB: But I knew George Bellows very well. I knew Henri slightly. As I say I went around with a great many. I knew Pascin very well through Walt Kuhn. Walt Kuhn who was the founder of the Penguin Club.

LB: Well the Penguin Club was really not a club at all. Walt Kuhn was a great organizer, as you probably know.

JM: Yes.

LB: And Walt Kuhn adored the circus as is evidenced by the fact that he painted so many clowns. Walt Kuhn, if he hadn't been a painter, would probably have been a stage director, and Walt Kuhn was a great impresario, and Walt Kuhn loved to pull the puppet strings so he organized this little sketch club which was called the Penguin. I forget now why it was called the Penguin. The Penguin was located on Fifteenth Street between Union Square and Fifth Avenue, and the curious thing of it is that I found out many years later that in very house where the Penguin was located that my mother and father were married in that very house.

JM: Extraordinary.

LB: The Penguin had a sketch room where we used to meet once or twice a week. It also had a gallery in the front parlor because it was an old brownstone house. Now the building does not exist anymore. There is some kind of industrial plant there. There were no membership dues, and there were actually no members. Anybody who, I suppose passed the inspection of Walt Kuhn was eligible because he was the czar and dictator of the whole thing, and a charming dictator he was and a very efficient one.

JM: How did you pay the rent?

LB: The rent, the gas, the electric light bill, and phone, everything was paid by one costume ball that was given every year. That paid for the whole year's expenses and the ball was based on the same idea as the Kit-Kat, but the Penguin Balls were really fabulous affairs, because, as I say, Kuhn had a great sense of the theatrical, and the costumes he designed and the whole ball was really a splendid affair. And he saw to it that it was financially a great success. Well, in those days

JM: Excuse me Mr. Bouché, but in what years was it flourishing?

LB: Well, the Penguin was flourishing from, well, I guess it started in about 1916. John Quinn, who was a great buddy of Walt Kuhn, had provided the first show for the Penguin which was an exhibition of the work of Wyndham Lewis and the Vorticists in London who were holding sway at that time and [inaudible], the sculptor, and all the avant garde painters who were working in London before World War I. Then the shows would succeed one another through the art season. And the art season then of course was not what it is now. But the interesting thing about the Penguin was that any artist who came to America was immediately welcomed in the Penguin, and so Pascin became a regular member there, and he never missed a night's sketch class. Albert Gleizes became a so-called member, although membership did not exist. Brancusi came and sketched with us. And then there was a vast group in the club that were commercial artists, who were not really good artists, but they were men who were good carpenters and who could be called upon when the ball came around to make the props and so on. It was a marvelous friendly little organization. It was based on good fellowship, and if there was any crab in the place, well, he just automatically disappeared.

JM: You mentioned some European members of it. Who were some of the American painters?

LB: Wood Gaylor.

JM: That's G-a-y-l-o-r, isn't it?

LB: Yes, Wood Gaylor, who later married Adelaide Lawson who was the sister of Lawson the playwright. I think

most of the American painters, I know Alexander Brook came in for short time but he was never really one of the inner circle, most of the American painters outside of Pop Hart who became very well known, most of the American painters who were in the Penguin, we don't hear about them anymore. And I don't think they ever really made the grade in terms of having their names in neon lights.

JM: What caused its final dissolution?

LB: It broke up in the early '20's. Well, I don't know what actually, oh Stella, no Stella was not one of the real regular members. I don't know. I suppose the guiding spirit of the whole thing, Walt Kuhn, just decided that he had had enough of the whole thing, that's all. Without his piloting, the club just couldn't exist any more, that's all.

JM: And so it folded in the early 20's.

LB: It folded in the early 20's. I think around 1921 or 1922, or maybe it was slightly before that.

JM: If you do have, as you mentioned earlier, if you could put your hands on some of the old catalogs or programs, the Archives would be very grateful.

LB: I do have some in New York. I've got to look them up. As a matter of fact, Walt Kuhn, who was always getting somebody else to do the job because he had this complex of always wanting to be in the background and to pull the strings, as I said before, he always wanted me to write a history of the Penguin. The one I told you is not, there's not enough material there to write a history of the Penguin except that in New York I do have some material that he gave me, whereby I probably could write some account of the club.

JM: Well fine. The Archives would be most grateful. We'll send around for the material. I made a couple of notes here of other questions. What kind of books do you like to read Mr. Bouché? Although I should tell you a story on myself. One time a questionnaire person came around and asked me that question. I didn't know quite what to say and so I told it to a friend and he said it was very simple, read good books.

LB: Well, that's a wonderful answer. But I'll tell you what I do.

JM: Well, do you like novels, or do you like fiction, or history?

LB: Well, my wife's a great reader and she has very good taste, very good taste when it comes to books, and she gets the books and I just read them. Now our next door neighbor, as I think I've told you Mr. Morse, is Robert Coates, the writer.

JM: Yes, out here in the country.

LB: Yes, and it's very convenient for us because the Coates house is church full of books and my wife goes over there and she picks out some books and she reads them. She reads them a lot faster than I do. And then when she gets through with them, I pick them up. Now I just finished a book called, which is not typical of my reading, I just read Naked to Mine Enemies, the life of Cardinal Woolsey.

JM: Oh, yes. Naked to Mine Enemies.

LB: Yes, by Ferguson. I'm now reading Elizabeth Taylor's book called Angel. I started it last night. I just finished, the day before yesterday, Caitlin Thomas's book called Time to Kill, or something. It is the account of her sorrow after the death of her husband, Dylan Thomas, and her crazy stay on some island in Italy.

JM: I see. I don't know it. How do you like the book?

LB: Well, I enjoyed it very much because I had read the other book on Thomas written by the, I can't remember his name because my memory is bad, the man who organized his tour of lectures in the United States. So the trouble is I forget so quickly most of the books I've read, most of the books I've read this summer, so I've made a practice recently of writing down when I finish a book, or writing it down in a book of appointments I have. So I write it down and I can see what I've read over the year that way. The little book is in the desk there and I can tell you what I've read since the first of January if you were that interested.

JM: Well, I think your memory is holding up pretty well. You mentioned more titles than I think most people would on the spur of the moment. What about music? Who are some of your favorite composers?

LB: Well, it's funny. I've found that so many painters are not interested in music. I don't know whether that makes any sense or not. Most of my artists friends, and they're mostly my friends don't seem to care too much for music. I am very ignorant about music for the most part. I am very fond of Bartok, what I've heard of him. I've enjoyed Saint Saens, I've enjoyed a good many of the Russians. I enjoy a lot of popular music too. I don't enjoy

rock and roll stuff, but the other night up here, as a matter of fact, Thursday night, there was a concert at Tanglewood of all Gershwin music. I would have liked to have heard that too. But it was raining and I didn't want to spend five dollars to go into the shelter. Anyhow, I find it more fun to sit out on the lawn.

JM: Do you go to Tanglewood very often?

LB: We usually go two or three times a summer because it's a great treat over there. And, I like Berloiz very much.

JM: I was going to ask if possibly your French ancestry appeared in your taste of music?

LB: Well, I think so. I'll tell you one guy I don't like, and that's Wagner. I don't enjoy Wagner so much.

JM: Spoken like a Frenchman. And in a related subject, who are among your favorites of the old masters?

LB: Among the old masters? Well, now how far do you want me to go?

JM: Oh, Fra Angelico if you like.

LB: You don't consider Renoir as old master for instance?

JM: I do indeed. I think Renoir is an old master.

LB: All right. I am very fond of Renoir, I'm very fond of Delacroix. I'm fond of Rubens. I'm fond of most of the Venetian painters. I've also developed in the last few years a great admiration for Tiepolo. I realize that he's no great heavyweight, but Tiepolo had a gaiety and a charm and a lightness in his murals and his ceilings and his paintings which appeals to me. He painted very seductive little women in his decorations, and that kind of thing I like.

JM: Did you happen to be in Europe that summer they had the big Tiepolo exhibition?

LB: No, because I haven't been to Europe since 1938.

JM: '38. Incidentally, in that connection, do you advise your students to save their money and go to Europe? To look at pictures, to look at the place, to look at people?

LB: Well, I certainly think it's a good thing. I don't know that it's entirely essential to painting. It's an awfully hard question to answer. I don't know. I mean they're bound to get a great deal out of it. It's a great thrill to go to Europe. I think one of the greatest thrills of going abroad is to have to handle a different kind of money, to get in different trains that don't look like our trains, the difference in language. Of course that has very little to do with painting, but it's all broadening and stimulating and I think if there's any chance of going abroad for an art student, it's an excellent thing. However I do think you can learn to paint just as well here as you can in Europe.

JM: In the European schools?

LB: In many respects, of course I haven't been to France since 1921, and the thing I remember mostly about art school there which has probably changed tremendously is that the thing that was so stimulating as a young man for me is that you felt that you couldn't win, and it didn't make any difference because the whole idea was to paint. It didn't make any difference whether you achieved fame or not. Fame, it doesn't mean a damn thing anyhow, as you know. I mean, it's a question of some people can put themselves forward, and other people can't. And you don't know in your lifetime whether you've made the grade, and it doesn't make any difference. The thing that matters is for somebody to have made the grade. It doesn't have to be you. As long as someone produces great painting, that's the important thing.

JM: Well, what do you think of the state of, now this is an awfully big question, but making the grade reminds me of course of the vogue for the abstract expressionists. How long do you think this vogue will last?

LB: Oh, well, I haven't any idea. The thing that I think is sad about so many of the non-objective artists today, the abstract expressionists, and so on, is that they're all concerned with art. And to me nature is so much more exciting than art. I've thought in terms of art all my life, but nature is actually much more thrilling. I'll never forget when I taught at Temple University in Philadelphia, I used to commute down there. I taught painting for two years at Temple Art School, and the students would ask me right away if I'd seen certain exhibitions in New York, and I'd say, "No, but I saw the landscape on the Reading Railroad." And they'd look at me as if I were crazy. Well, I started looking at art when I was a child because my . . . , I'm getting away from your question.

JM: Oh, not at all, please.

LB: As a child, my father knew everybody in the art world. That is to say most of the art dealers in New York.

JM: He was an architect, was he not?

LB: He was an interior designer. He worked with Stanford White mostly.

JM: Didn't you tell me once that he did the Oak Room of the Plaza?

LB: Yes, and the great friends of the family were the Duvend-Ruch, the great picture dealers. So as a small child I used to play lead soldiers with Pierre Duvend-Ruch, who now heads the firm in Paris. And on the walls were Cezannes and Renoirs and Monets and Pissaros and Manets. So I got the habit of looking at pictures at a very, very tender age. And when we bought this house up here twelve years ago, I had looked at nature of course for a long time before that. But I started sticking my nose down in the grass and I saw the little spiders walking around, and I saw the extraordinary things that happen in the country, and I became more and more fascinated and more and more in love with nature and God's creations. And I would say less impressed with beautiful works of art because I'll always be impressed with those. But when these people come along and sling paint and think they can get along without God's masterpieces, I just don't understand it because, I have great admiration for Picasso because he never lost contact with life and with nature. Picasso did a piece of sculpture, a goat. I don't know, it's made up of tin cans or what have you, but it looks more like a goat than a goat. It's got all the goat quality, and when Picasso did, I know in Knew York and London I saw the exhibition of sketches that he made for Guernica, and there was more pathos in those crying women with distorted faces who were not realistic at all than in all the tortured pictures of Baroque Italy. So it isn't that I mind the departure from nature, it is just that I'm distressed by abandoning nature as the non-objective artists are doing and have done in our own time. I believe that you cannot will to create beauty. You can't say tomorrow morning I am going to do something beautiful. It doesn't work that way. And these guys live in ivory towers, and they're just out to, as they say in French, they out to il pate la monde. I think it's a sad thing. I would like to tell you what I think of them but I suppose I can't.

JM: Do you have any in your own classes, any aspiring abstract expressionists?

LB: Yes, occasionally. And of course the charm that these people give at times is in the decorative value that is in their pictures. Many of these non-objective pictures have decorative charm. They look better on a wall than, for instance, a painting by Jean Francois Millet. They're more decorative, or a painting by would look, in a modern house, might not look so very well unless it had a beautiful tricked up modern frame on it. So many of the non-objective boys have the, in spite of the fact that they have thrown away all semblance of nature, they do evolve marvelous textures at times, and certainly achieve technical prowess. These things are decorative and they have appeal from that sense. They look like ...