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Oral history interview with Ernst Halberstadt,
1979 Feb. 16

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Ernst Halberstadt on February 16, 1979. The interview took place in Onset, Massachusetts, and was conducted by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. This is a rough transcription that may include typographical errors.

Interview

ROBERT BROWN: Interview in Onset, Massachusetts, with Ernst Halberstadt. Date, February 16, 1979, 1-7/8 inches per second.

What I would like to begin by asking you, if you could, talk a bit about some of your earlier childhood, particularly things that you think might have led to what you eventually did. What was your --

ERNST HALBERSTADT: Fairly simple, my introduction to the art world. Let me start by saying I arrived in Boston on some steamship when I was just one year old. My birthday was the day I arrived in Boston.

MR. BROWN: I see. You were born, where, in Europe?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Born in a small Gothic village 30 miles outside of Frankfurt (inaudible), Germany, an ancient Gothic home which eventually became my mother's property, and which I wish I had now, since she gave it to her sister during World War I, I think, so they could eat. It's now, I guess, one of the state-protected -- a 24-room house with 2-foot-thick walls. And I've never seen it, but I have photos.

MR. BROWN: So, were you a family -- did you come here with some means, your family?

MR. HALBERSTADT: No. My father had essentially, like, a fourth, five, sixth grade grammar school education. He was not illiterate, he read and wrote reasonably well. He had no business training.

My mother's brother -- the family had six or seven children, my grandmother's family, she was the youngest of the girls, had one boy who came to Boston and -- after being in New York. He was in the wholesale meat manufacturing business, and my father came and went to work for him. In New York -- I wish I had known him then -- he was boss teamster of the biggest meat delivery service in New York City, and he had his own table reserved at Lucien's (phonetic). And we lived at his house for a while, until my father got his own house down the street.

My memories begin at the age of four or five, essentially. The single most dramatic memory of childhood was my mother hollering for me to come quickly. And she spoke German and English. But in German she said, "Ernie, come quick," and she (inaudible) zeppelin that was a German zeppelin going across the railroad track up in the sky. That was an amazing sight. And, in fact, my shaving mug now has a zeppelin on it.

MR. BROWN: To commemorate this?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Like the sled in that motion picture. What was that motion picture Orson Welles did once, and he had one little childhood memory that reappeared as a little motif throughout the picture. It ended up with just the sled and the snow. That was his earliest childhood memory.

MR. BROWN: Were you a pretty lively child, as far as you heard?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Moderately. My -- to continue with my parents, my mother was a good dress designer, and I have many samples of work that she did as a child, embroidery, and I must have got some aesthetic talents from her side. She -- before she was 20 she had 4 or 5 girls employed, making dresses for local people, including local small-scale mobility.

MR. BROWN: This was when she was still --

MR. HALBERSTADT: While still in Europe.

MR. BROWN: Yes, yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: I was very susceptible to nose and throat illnesses, and I imagine at the age of five or six I

spent enough time in bed so that, to keep me pacified, they used to ply me with crayons and drawing pads and coloring books, which was a matter of three or four years, where I had ample time to explore the world of crayons.

MR. BROWN: You liked it, did you?

MR. HALBERSTADT: I guess I enjoyed it, although I don't remember a single item I did at the time. I probably scribbled.

Kindergarten was a little horrendous, insofar as I got so excited with the little bowls of wash coloring that I kept talking and working and slopping paint on paper that the teacher got irritated with me and stood me in the closet for half the morning.

MR. BROWN: Because you weren't -- you were making a mess?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Because I didn't stop working and do something else at the appropriate time. That's my only remembrance of early school days. Later school days, my father --

MR. BROWN: Now, this was in New York, still?

MR. HALBERSTADT: No, this was -- I never went to New York.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I'm sorry, yes. Boston.

MR. HALBERSTADT: My uncle came to Boston.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: He manufactured bologna, sausage, and hot dogs. He was the chief supplier for Joe and Nimo's (phonetic) in Sully Square. And many a time I went through the factory, which in those days seemed enormous. I've gone back and looked at the building. It's just a dirty old storefront up under the elevator there, at Dudley Street. But I wouldn't eat a hot dog there, I would have to ride with a horse drawn team to Joe and Nimo's. And there I could eat all the hot dogs I wanted.

MR. BROWN: In style?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Right, with everything on it. And --

MR. BROWN: What was your father like?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, he was fairly intense, outwardly good natured and going, but inwardly had a lot of fires that exploded once in a while, short tempered. And the greatest -- the most I learned from him was to learn when to retreat.

When he finally developed a going business in Newton (phonetic) -- he had an excellent income from a good restaurant, and delicatessen store. His local customers advised him to open up in Cape Cod, and he put a lot of money into a New York-style delicatessen, 30 years before anybody was ready for it. And that failed completely.

But, instead of just closing that -- or he wouldn't listen to me; I said, "Down on the Cape, all you need is good food, and you get a whole building out in the woods someplace, and people will come to you," but he got sucked into a long lease at a high, exorbitant rent. And instead of walking away from it, he sold a going business to support a failing business, after which he opened up a penny candy and newspaper store in Cambridge, and it was relatively happy. He didn't have the problems trying to become wealthy, just survive.

MR. BROWN: So you -- economically, at least -- in your childhood, you had sort of an up and down --

MR. HALBERSTADT: My father moved once a year to another location because rent problems kept cropping up.

MR. BROWN: You think this produced any effect in you, as a boy?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, it gave me an intimate knowledge of the streets of Boston. I know the greatest shortcut from one place to another.

MR. BROWN: How did your mother respond to this? Was she pretty close to you?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Neither of the parents were that close to either myself or my brother. My brother has some rather bad feelings. I accommodated myself to my folks, and eventually we became pretty good friends. My dad and I got along well in later years. My brother won't even visit their cemetery. He was put off by them, thought

they were stupid and unfeeling.

MR. BROWN: Was he older than you?

MR. HALBERSTADT: He is eight years younger. The reason for that discrepancy is that an incompetent gynecologist assisted my birth and caused some spinal damage of my mother. And she had a back problem for many, many years. She was finally operated on, maybe when I was 16 or 17, which improved quite a bit -- improved the situation quite a bit. But they were hesitant to have another child. And possibly some grudges.

But my father always thought it was stupid for anybody to go in the arts. You know, one could eat well in his own delicatessen store.

MR. BROWN: Well, how soon were you -- and your brother, too, right -- showing inclinations toward art?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well --

MR. BROWN: When you were still in grade school or high school?

MR. HALBERSTADT: At the old sausage factory in Washington Street, I used to get -- order from my uncle, and go to the nearby 5 and 10 and buy paper and crayons, and sit at his high desk and draw pictures. Some of those pictures I remember clearly, the outline drawings of horses and wagons going to Joe and Nimo's. I don't know what happened to them; they vanished. My mother was more or less supportive of my interest in art.

Grade school, up to the eighth grade, before high school, the -- one of the teachers whose name maybe I can remember. Her name was Wyatt, a little brick grade school in Brighton (phonetic). She suggested I take the Saturday classes at the Museum of Fine Arts, which I did for several years. And I found that, just by association, not necessarily because of the teaching methods, which were not very good, I guess, but in association with the great collection at the Boston museum was invaluable. And it certainly had an influence. I don't think I will ever depart from being influenced by sort of a Far East perception of the world.

MR. BROWN: Far East? Was that --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Japanese, Chinese.

MR. BROWN: That was probably the thing that most influenced you, as you look back, of the things they have at the museum?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes. I was attracted by the massive sculpture of the Egyptians, the great Basalt-like heads, and big limestone figures of the kings and queens. But the -- I guess the poetry of the Japanese screens and prints and the -- possibly the Japanese -- some of the Chinese sculptures were more influential. I responded to it.

MR. BROWN: Why do you suppose you did, as you look back?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Undoubtedly because Quan Yin, the figure of -- the goddess of sympathy, is it, or -- what's the proper title for Quan Yin?

MR. BROWN: I don't know.

MR. HALBERSTADT: She is the soothing goddess of sympathy, I guess. It has always struck me as being something I was close to.

I think, in a sense, that during the many years of my mother's illness, I became sort of a chief chef, bottle washer and housekeeper, possibly why I enjoy cooking nowadays. And that undoubtedly is responsible for my response to a more subtle or feminine art of the Japanese brush drawings, and so forth. I think that's as good an analysis as I'm going to come up with.

At the museum school there was a -- one of the instructors was Jeanette Greenberg (phonetic), if I can remember her name -- it was similar to that, anyway -- who was also involved in the Jewish settlement house, a series of Jewish settlement houses, and asked me if I would like to go to some of the settlement house classes on the west end, which I also attended after she made the suggestion.

MR. BROWN: You mean to study?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Art classes. And I must have been about 15 or 16 at this time. Jack Levine and Hyman Bloom were part of the group at the settlement house.

MR. BROWN: This is when, in the late 1920s?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, 1925, 1926, 1927 area.

MR. BROWN: Okay.

MR. HALBERSTADT: The emphasis there was somewhat on the decorative side of -- her emphasis, I might say -- is on the decorative side of Hebrew calligraphy. The thing was essentially biblical illustrations, because this was a Hebrew school and settlement house, neighborhood. And, of course, the --

MR. BROWN: So that --

MR. HALBERSTADT: -- was predominantly Jewish at that time.

MR. BROWN: Did you enjoy doing that?

MR. HALBERSTADT: I have no feelings about it, in retrospect. I don't think I got much out of it.

At the same time that I was there, as I said, Hyman Bloom and Jack Levine were there. Harold Rotenberg, who was a moderately good water color painter eventually went into the gift shop business, and made a lot of money, and eventually turned his studio shop and real estate over to his wife, got a divorce, and was settled in Spain.

And let's kill that for just one --

(Interruption to recording.)

MR. HALBERSTADT: Harold Zimmerman was also in the offing, and eventually introduced Bloom and Levine. I didn't get involved, because I didn't particularly become enamored of his teaching techniques, although he certainly was successful with Bloom and Levine.

MR. BROWN: Why didn't you -- why do you think you resisted him, or didn't --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, I will come to that.

MR. BROWN: Okay.

MR. HALBERSTADT: They introduced kids to Denman Ross, over at the Fogg Museum. And, as just an aside, if you've ever seen any of Denman's paintings hidden in the cellar --

MR. BROWN: Yes?

MR. HALBERSTADT: I'm just as glad I didn't.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: But the reason I didn't go along with that, his theory -- which was perfectly good and adequate -- was studying the old masters to the point where you could duplicate the technique. Well, Levine, for example, could make a Degas copy good enough to be a first class forgery. And they studied old master drawings until they could duplicate them almost to memory.

MR. BROWN: Did you -- was this tedious for you? You weren't --

MR. HALBERSTADT: No, that -- I must say at a relatively early age, or without any -- art had not reach Boston. There are very few exhibits of contemporary European art at that period. The Guild of Boston Artists and the Boston Art Club predominated the --

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: -- aesthetics of Boston.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: I can't remember all the names --

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: -- the conventional salon, French salon painters --

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: -- dominated the area.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: I felt that anything I wanted to do in art would have to be based on my own reaction to the external world. Good, bad, or indifferent, I was not going to get involved with the history of art, and my own production of it. It may have been an error. On the other hand, I have enjoyed -- and still tend to work with that concept, to see the world in my own way.

And good, bad, or indifferent, as I say, I would rather create something which exists in its own right, without the history of art supporting it.

MR. BROWN: But, for instance, to be with Zimmerman, you had to go along with his way?

MR. HALBERSTADT: That's correct.

MR. BROWN: Yes? So who did you go with, then?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, at about this time I was ready for high school, and I had to decide what type of high school I was going to go to. I think I made a good decision. I went to a sharp trade school called Mechanic Arts High School, which was a four-year introduction to the mechanical trades.

I probably got more out of that four years than any other formal education I ever had. I can today walk into most industrial plants and be able to operate any but the most sophisticated machinery. And I can design a piece of sculpture, mentally, knowing whether or not it can be built, or -- I will explain later how it came into good stead when I went to New York, looking for work at the height of the Depression. I was able to accomplish things for painters in New York that they had problems with.

At the end of the first year in high school -- oh, I had four years of drafting classes, formal engineering and architectural-type drafting, and later had four more years of the same sort of thing in art school. I didn't -- I was not much interested in that sort of thing. But I have (inaudible).

I had a fairly -- a couple of fairly sensible teachers in the art department of this high school, who just about gave me a free hand. I didn't have to do the prescribed work. I could paint or draw, go up on a roof, and so forth. In fact, I made a woodcut from a roof which was published in one of the local Boston papers, while the other kids were still doing engineering and drafting. So I have to thank that teacher, whose name I can't even recall.

And through their -- high school teachers -- influence, it was no problem for me to go to the Massachusetts School of Art, which was the only one with tuition that was in scale with my family's income -- a state school, a very low -- well, as it is today, relatively very low tuition.

MR. BROWN: Yes, yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Now, I decided the Massachusetts School of Art was as good as any, because the museum school was not very good at that time. And the private art schools, I don't even know (inaudible), but they are -- like the sign painting schools, very low-grade art schools.

Incidentally, before I forget, during this high school period I also taught settlement house art to children, neighborhoods of Dorchester and Roxbury, when I was about 17 for 3 or 4 years.

MR. BROWN: Did you enjoy that?

MR. HALBERSTADT: That was sort of interesting, yes. I enjoyed teaching.

MR. BROWN: How did you go about it, do you remember?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, there was a wide diversity of age groups in these settlement house classes, anywhere from 7 to 8 year olds to 15 year olds, and I would try to pick things that I thought would be of interest to them.

Aggression in poor neighborhoods is not unique today. We had some of the older kids very hostile and aggressive, but still didn't know what to do with themselves. Only one of them, who threatened to beat me up, I had to pick up and put him out. The rest of the time was no problem.

Essentially, of the various things I did, the only program I can remember for the very youngest kids was to invent little short stories, which I then asked them to illustrate. But, rather than have them just duplicate what they were doing in public school, I added to it cutting out pieces of wood with a jigsaw, and putting these illustrations -- making little bookends, so they had pictorial bookends to take home. So they felt they built something, and so

they kept coming back. That was one of the ways of getting them involved.

There was no history of art, no showing of old masters. I tried to get them to do things maybe comparable to what -- the summer time program that's done on the outside walls today in cities across the country.

MR. BROWN: Yes. But these settlement houses were set up by charitable organizations?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Right.

MR. BROWN: And were the kids ones -- they came voluntarily --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: -- or their parents put them in there?

MR. HALBERSTADT: I think it's mostly the kids finding that -- I guess it was before the era of pinball machines on every corner.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: It was something to do on an evening or an afternoon, especially in wintertime, when you couldn't play football or baseball.

MR. BROWN: So you had to amuse them, to an extent, didn't you?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Had to hold their attention and interest.

MR. BROWN: Right. Yes, yes, yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Or they would have walked out.

MR. BROWN: And you continued doing this while you -- after you began at the Massachusetts School of Art?

MR. HALBERSTADT: I doubt it. I don't remember clearly on that.

MR. BROWN: Yes?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Now, the Massachusetts School of Art, as I say, was available, economically.

And secondly, after looking very carefully at who was teaching where, there was a man called Richard Andrew, who did the murals at the state house, who -- his background is interesting. He studied with Mauve (phonetic) and Jerome (phonetic). And in later years, I worked with artists who studied with Castle (phonetic), among others -- I mean were assistants or students of people in the contemporary art world at the time.

So, my traditional background came secondhand from people who had worked with masters of the French salon and masters of the modern movement. And the unique experience, which I wasn't quite aware of at the time -- this is mostly in retrospect --

MR. BROWN: Well, was Andrew limited by his academic training?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Very much. He was a very bad painter. But he had one facility. He knew how to teach the art of drawing. Many people can draw well, and don't know how to teach what they're doing.

MR. BROWN: How did he go about that, can you remember?

MR. HALBERSTADT: (No response.)

MR. BROWN: Or why was he -- why do you think he was successful?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, drawing -- the craft of drawing -- not the art of drawing, but the craft of drawing can be taught to almost anybody, much as the alphabet, or the process of reading can be taught. There are certain procedures which, if you understand them, you can proceed and produce a drawing. Now, what kind of a drawing you make depends upon many other things. But the elements are scale, proportion, character of the line, the medium, the -- innumerable -- or possible, more likely, numerable -- divisions of the craft can be taught individually. A drawing can resolve itself into several steps of observation and performance. And he did this, and did it well.

And, furthermore, I made a special effort to understand his psyche in learning, and slanted my work so he

tended to like it. And, as most instructors in art school do, they tend to select three or four or five most promising students, and concentrate the basic time of each morning to working with those students. You can give 10 seconds to 20 students and give 20 or 30 minutes to the ones you've picked out.

MR. BROWN: Well, what was it that he liked, or that you picked -- the procedure that you tended to follow?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, one reason I went to see him -- when I went to art school I thought I was a damn good painter. I had painted landscapes I wish I still had. They were very good. One of the big disappointments in my life, after I had painted some rather violent and bold (inaudible) pictures was seeing the big Van Gogh show of the period at the Boston Museum. I said, "The son of a bitch has done it ahead of me, I can't go ahead this way."

MR. BROWN: So you got rid of those?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Oh, I don't know what happened to them.

MR. BROWN: Well, they disappeared, at any rate.

MR. HALBERSTADT: They disappeared.

MR. BROWN: What -- with Andrew, were you trying to --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, with Andrew, I felt that I wanted to be able to draw any way I wanted to. I wanted to be a so-called master drawer, at least have the facility to draw. And I had problems of specific realization of what I had in my mind. And it was well worth spending three very dull and boring years.

It was much like high school. I ran up the record for playing hooky in the City of Boston. I don't think it's been broken yet. After the first six months in high school, I took every Monday off for the next three-and-a-half years.

MR. BROWN: To do what?

MR. HALBERSTADT: I went to local theater for \$.10 in the morning. You could sit in the theater until it was time to go home, see the same movie three times.

But I was an A/B student in high school. Unfortunately, the high school had no program for advanced students. I was highly interested in math. The math teacher probably had 45 students in his class. The school was built for 2,200 students and they had 3,200. And he told me, he said, "You have a native ability for math, and I wish I could spend more time with you, but," he said, "There is no way." So I didn't become a scientist, which would have been interesting.

MR. BROWN: Yes, yes. But at the Massachusetts School of Arts, you also --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Oh, deadly.

MR. BROWN: You were a bit truant, too, when you felt you were in a --

MR. HALBERSTADT: I wasn't truant, I -- first of all, in order to go to school at all -- and this included high school -- I worked afternoons and nights. High school -- excuse me, grade school I was a caddy, which I am glad, because it brought me a great deal of pleasure, getting me involved with golf, and I still enjoy golf, bad as I am. And high school -- oh, I also delivered newspapers at 5:00 in the morning Sundays, all that crap. In fact, there is no job a kid ever had that I didn't have.

In high school days, I worked in the factories until about 11:00 at night after school. When the other guys were out dating (inaudible), I didn't know what the hell they were doing, because I wasn't involved.

MR. BROWN: You were putting into practice in the factories what you were learning in school?

MR. HALBERSTADT: No, what I was doing in the factories --

MR. BROWN: Sweeping, or something?

MR. HALBERSTADT: The lowest work. One factory I worked for the school year, wiping spilled tar off radio condensers. With a wet rag soaked in kerosene, I would clean the tin. Not very elevating type work, but it gave me enough money to live on.

The -- well, let me give you a "for instance." The fourth year of the fine arts course at the Massachusetts College of Art, as it's now called, there was an instructor -- he and I became pretty good friends -- Leo O'Donnell (phonetic). And he was a good draftsman, a pretty good artist, and I liked his work, and he tended to like mine.

But in addition to his classes, he was required to teach a course which I just refused to take, a six-month course. And the course consisted of the instructor handing out photographs -- and I remember two of them, one was an 8x10 glossy of Greta Garbo, and the other was an 8X10 print of President Harding -- which we were supposed to transcribe in stipple dots so it would reproduce in the newspaper as a line cut.

And I said, "I see no reason for anybody doing this at all." He said, "Well, the reason the school is doing this, they found out that 99 percent of the people who take fine arts course end up in commercial art, and we want you to know how to do newspaper illustration." I said, "If I wanted to do newspaper illustration, I wouldn't be in art school, I would be doing it, and I'm not going to waste time on this."

So, I didn't play hooky, I set up a -- my own little research lab in the basement of the school, with -- borrowed some (inaudible) lights from the theater department, and some third-dimensional forms like balls and cubes, and studied the effect of space perception as affected by color, various color gelatins on the background and foreground. And I was able to prove that space perception is a (inaudible) thing, depending on the elements involved, rather than color relationships.

For instance, Kapishan (phonetic), whose book called "Vision," states dogmatically that red always comes forward and blue always goes back. Well, it doesn't. I painted a picture of a man with a blue nose and red ears, and the nose always comes forward. That's the sort of thing I did, rather than waste time on the other.

And then they refused to give me a diploma. And since it was a state school with political appointees, and a neighbor of mine was head of the New England Art Teachers Federation, I took him by hand -- or he took me by hand -- and we went and saw the administration and said, "This is such a ridiculous program, that if you insist on not giving a diploma," he would have gone to the newspapers, browbeating the school and saying I was right. So they gave him -- gave me my diploma. They decided not to face the press.

Now, Andrew and I got along quite well, well enough so that a major effort of my final year at school -- which eventually resulted in a big cartoon for a thesis -- the original drawing, he signed his name to and exhibited it. And he helped on a two-hour drawing, he put in five minutes on it. And I must say his five minutes gave it a certain snap. And I would never take the credit away from him. But the concept was mine, and the basic -- I hired the models, I made the studies, and came to the final drawing, he couldn't keep his goddamn hands off it.

MR. BROWN: What was this, a large-scale cartoon, or --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, it was -- the drawing he signed was, you know, a charcoal-sized paper drawing. The cartoon itself, which was finally developed, has a long history, in retrospect, which I just got some information from out of a recently published book. When I left the art school --

MR. BROWN: That was 1932 --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Right, I was interested in, of course, in going into the mural field.

MR. BROWN: Oh, you were? I mean --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well --

MR. BROWN: You say "of course," because --

MR. HALBERSTADT: All right. Andrew was a mural painter. And, at the time, the Mexican mural movement was in full swing. I had always admired (inaudible), et cetera, some of -- a whole -- the renaissance murals, Raphael, et cetera, their sort of --

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. HALBERSTADT: (Inaudible.)

MR. BROWN: Yes. And now there were the Mexicans, who were exciting and contemporary --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, there was a new world opening up for contemporary --

MR. BROWN: Right, right, right, right.

MR. HALBERSTADT: -- field and mural painting. So that's why I developed the cartoon drawn on craft paper, or wrapping paper, which we essentially meant to wrap up mattresses, probably 8 by 12 feet.

And, at the same time, I had heard that Ezra Winter received a contract to decorate a large wall at Radio City.

MR. BROWN: This was someone you admired?

MR. HALBERSTADT: No, I did not admire Ezra Winter. He was another of the -- essentially the Boston School, French salon --

MR. BROWN: But you knew who he was?

MR. HALBERSTADT: The American Academy at Rome. No, I didn't.

MR. BROWN: Okay.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Took my newspaper clipping, went in the library, and got a -- every bit of information about what type of art he produced. Then I went through what I had done in the last 10 years, and picked out a small folio of things related to his thinking, along with this big cartoon, which was essentially classical. (Inaudible) Andrew of classical -- painter.

MR. BROWN: And so was Ezra Winter.

MR. HALBERSTADT: And so --

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Ezra Winter is just a dull classical painter.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Andrew, as bad as he was, was better than Ezra Winter. No, I must say, though, that some of Ezra Winter's painting -- the Vincenze (phonetic) memorial -- was better than anything Andrew did.

First, I took my folio to Ezra Winter, who apparently needed somebody to work for a low price -- I worked for \$10 a week. But I did get a job in New York at the height of the Depression between \$32 and \$33.

MR. BROWN: This job was at Radio City, right?

MR. HALBERSTADT: That was the world's biggest oil painting, 40 by 60 feet.

Now, during the time I worked for Ezra Winter -- we'll come back to the cartoon -- I heard other artists were going to work on other sections of Radio City. And I took this big cartoon over to Raymond Hood, the architect -- among the other architects, but the prime architect in this particular area -- and unrolled this tremendous sheet of wrapping paper.

He said, "That's really a good thing. I wish we didn't have contracts out. Besides, you're too young. I wouldn't take the responsibility of hiring somebody your age to do a mural in this place. But that would unify the work of the three artists we have selected: Cirque (phonetic), Brenguine (phonetic), and O'Burne (phonetic). They can all work monochrome on craft paper, color background, black and white on craft." You know, "I will tell them they've got to do that." And he said, "Who do you want to work for, and I'll set it up," an introduction. He said, "I can't hire you, but they can look at your work. You want to go to England and meet Pranglin (phonetic)?"

I said, "No, Rivera (phonetic)." So I showed my work to Rivera, and got hired. Now, Rivera, based on my opinion, partially -- a good part of his loss of the contract had not so much to do with the picture of Marx, Trotsky, and Lenin in the mural, as it did to his deviation from the unified color scheme which the other two artists were following, certain (inaudible) and my monochrome. And he started putting purples, reds, and blues in.

Now, the book I have just acquired on the history of Radio City indicates that there was some communication with the Rockefellers and Rivera giving him more leeway in color, so that maybe less to the appearance of Lenin in the mural than I previously thought.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: At any rate, to finish one detail on that, my father, who had this delicatessen store in Newtonville (phonetic) at the time, said I was still a damn fool. His chronic remark was, "When it comes to art, no matter how you slice it, it's bologna." When I first -- when he first was in the studio, and I sold a watercolor for \$100, he couldn't believe it. He said, "I have to sell a hell of a lot of ham sandwiches to make \$100. You did that in a half-an-hour."

But at any rate, I --

MR. BROWN: (Inaudible) way you had parental support, or admiration.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, I finally rolled up a sheet of newspaper and a one by three piece of strapping, and starting hitchhiking out in front of my old man's store. He finally ran out afterwards and put \$5 in my hand, and said, "Here you go. I don't want you to be broke on your trip to New York." I went to New York on \$5 before I got that job.

MR. BROWN: Well, you were with Winter, but then you went with Rivera?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Right.

MR. BROWN: What was Winter like to work with?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, why don't we take a rest?

(A brief recess was taken.)

MR. HALBERSTADT: All set? Running?

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Okay. Rivera was a great contrast to Ezra Winter. Winter is essentially a manager of factory production. He had 8 or 10 assistants who literally did all the work. And he sort of supervised. One reason I could hold my job with him is that I was able to build rigging to take the canvases they were working on and hang them up on the wall. I eventually gave some suggestions for mounting them at Radio City.

Rivera insisted on doing everything himself. I mean the finished work. The concept was his, and the finished production was his, whereas Winter had some first class assistants who not only thought up the ideas, but executed. It was a conglomerate production.

MR. BROWN: He was just an impresario, sort of, maybe.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Essentially.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: And the work has been criticized as being extremely dull. And even -- while I was influenced by the sketch -- the concept -- it was a sketch of a designer for -- the interior designer for the building. Instead of debating it, he just executed it. He couldn't have cared less.

MR. BROWN: How long were you with him down there, Radio City?

MR. HALBERSTADT: A few months.

MR. BROWN: And then Rivera came in, and you --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Then I met Rivera, and went to work for him in Detroit.

MR. BROWN: Oh, so you didn't work with him down at Radio City?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, I worked a year in Detroit, about which time he was ready to go to Radio City.

MR. BROWN: I see.

MR. HALBERSTADT: I worked on preliminary studies for Radio City.

MR. BROWN: But you met him, and then you went out to Detroit.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Right.

MR. BROWN: Why did you go with him? Because -- you told me already you admired the Mexican --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes. I had seen a number -- numerous reproductions of Mexican murals, and liked his pictures of the peasants, and so forth. And I thought they had more validity than the work of Surrat (phonetic) or Branguin (phonetic). So I was pleased to have the chance to work for him.

MR. BROWN: What was he like to work for?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, most of that is covered in about a two-hour interview on another tape, okay? You can pick up the other --

MR. BROWN: Sure, sure. But I mean briefly, I mean --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Oh, polite, reasonable. And a driver, a very hard worker, and we all worked hard, hours and hours beyond what any workman would do. Two eight-hour days together was normal. However, the experience was worth it.

MR. BROWN: And that lasted --

MR. HALBERSTADT: That lasted about a year. Toward the end of the year, I decided I had run out of wearable clothing, and wanted money to buy clothing. The \$12 a week I was earning was not enough to expend for other things, so I asked for a raise. And since he had maybe 10, 20 letters a day from people who wanted to work for nothing, he saw no reason for paying me an increase. So I pointed out to him he was in a hurry to both go to a job at the Chicago World's Fair, and go to Radio City and do the mural at Rockefeller Center, and he couldn't afford to break in new helpers.

And he still balked, so I said -- made the suggestion that if he didn't intend to give me a raise, that I would picket in front of the museum with a big sign saying, "Rivera is unfair to labor." He said, "You wouldn't do that, would you?" I said, "You're damn right I would." And he said, "Well, you'll get your raise." But he was never cordial after that.

MR. BROWN: No?

MR. HALBERSTADT: We carried on very few conversations, as we used to.

MR. BROWN: Well, did he talk much about the ideas he was trying to express?

MR. HALBERSTADT: I don't think he discussed those with anybody, except (inaudible) from the left, the Trotskyite point of view. He probably carried on in French, Spanish, and German. But he didn't discuss concepts with any of his helpers. Probably with Frida Kahlo.

MR. BROWN: What did he talk about with you, mainly?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Technical. Very short discussions. "Do this," "Do that," or, "Wait."

MR. BROWN: Did you find the work kind of dull?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, it was novel and interesting for a few months, and then it was just mechanical. Eventually I got involved in research on designs for Radio City or details of the Detroit mural. And when he went to New York to work in Radio City he had sent me, by myself, to Chicago to build the wall for the World's Fair mural for General Motors, which eventually -- there was a Radio City fiasco. It was canceled by General Motors. But I did put the wall up.

MR. BROWN: What was it like, being out in Detroit? Did you get out to meet local artists, or anything of that sort while you were there?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Quite a number. (Inaudible) growth of labor unions, mass meetings, left-wing factions feuding with each other. A neurotic, almost brutal complex on the part of the entrenched black poor. Some dangerous neighborhoods. But I did attend a couple of voodoo ceremonies which were exciting and frightening. But having made enough friends, I felt I could go safely through these areas. But I made some sketches of the period, or made them at the time.

Having been back there last September, I think much of the same atmosphere still pervades. Much of it has shifted since last September. The immediate emphasis was on the strike of maintenance people from Wayne University that blocked traffic all around the museum. Different accent

MR. BROWN: But a pretty brutal atmosphere?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes. Essentially, it was a -- degraded, poverty-stricken. I had a room with the rental of a dollar a week, and ate in a restaurant called the "Penny Restaurant," where every item in the place was one cent. A piece of butter was one cent, but a steak was one cent, also. So you could have a good meal for six, seven cents.

Before Rivera took a little offense at my wanting a mild increase in the salary, he had asked me to continue at Radio City and go to Mexico with him. However, when I finished my work at Chicago, I had finished working for

him -- I met him a couple of times in New York briefly, semi-cordially, he never was as cordial as he used to be --

MR. BROWN: All because you'd defied him?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, it wasn't a matter of defying him.

MR. BROWN: So you didn't go to New York with him?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, I visited New York while they were working.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: At the time, I met the Dimitrovs (phonetic), who were working in Detroit, and following New York were working there. Bernie Quint (phonetic), whom I saw a week or two ago used to be a -- eventually became art editor of Life Magazine.

MR. BROWN: Bernie Quint?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes. You might visit Bernie some time in Rockport. He has a --

MR. BROWN: Well, did you go back to New York, or did you then go back to Boston after --

MR. HALBERSTADT: No --

MR. BROWN: After Detroit and Chicago --

MR. HALBERSTADT: After Detroit I came back to Boston. And without going through the fantastic trip I had coming back in my 1937 (inaudible), I got train fare back to New York, and spent the money -- spent \$35 -- for a used car.

MR. BROWN: Wow.

MR. HALBERSTADT: And maybe I should tell you a little about that, it's sort of fun.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: In Michigan, due to the Depression, you didn't have to have a current registration. You could drive any old car. So I headed back east. The car ran all right for about 20 miles, and then sort of konked out, and I went to the nearest mechanic, and he --

(End of side A, tape 1.)

MR. HALBERSTADT: "Well, somebody put a new carburetor in there. Let me see if I can find an old one." He put an old one on, and it started running again.

And I got through New York State, where I was arrested by one of the state police and brought up to a farmhouse where a local justice of the peace said, "How much money you got on you?" And I told him, and he said, "Well, I'll leave you \$3," and he fined me the remainder.

So, I went on to Massachusetts, came into -- over the Berkshires with the car overheated, having to stop and get buckets of water from the nearest stream and cool off the engine and fill up the radiator again. This is at the rate of one mile an hour in low gear up the hills.

MR. BROWN: Oh, geez.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Going downhill, and I had driven about 24 hours straight, trying to get back to Newton, where I lived -- my folks lived -- and so I sort of coasted down into Springfield. But I was afraid the car would stall, and I came right from the middle of the most heavy traffic in Springfield, in the business area. A policeman put his hand up just ahead of me to stop, and I said, "Well, he's got to mean the car in back of me," so I went through the signal.

And outside of Springfield, a cruising car came up, and he said, "You're the guy who went through the policeman's signal. Now follow us back to the police station," which I did. They said, "Well, you're the slowest driver we've ever seen." And I said, "Well, I don't want the car to stall out in the middle of traffic," because I had been stalling.

So, he came up with the chief of detectives -- captain of detectives -- and he had two or three newspapers spread in front of him, rapes and murders. And he looked one look at me, he said, "You're bringing this kid in

here because the plate ain't registered? They don't have to be registered in Detroit. Tell him to go home and get a Massachusetts license. Here we are, we're being banged by the newspapers on murders, and you're bringing in a kid who is driving a car." He said, "Get the hell out of here and get to work." So they let me go.

And I got as far -- the next town is Karma (phonetic). And a motorcycle car pulled up and he said, "You'd better follow me in to the state police headquarters, because you don't have a current plate on. You need one in Massachusetts."

So, I hadn't shaved, hadn't eaten, and I was tired, and the lieutenant on duty must have taken a little pity on me. He listened to my story, why I didn't have plates. He said, "Well, you know, you need them here." I said, "Well, I will get them when I get back." He said, "Why don't you take a nap? We will talk about it later."

So, they put some blankets in a cellblock and gave me a pillow and I slept until toward evening. Dinner time, when they woke me up, he said, "How about something to eat?" So I had frankfurts and beans, and he took me out in the yard and he said, "Now," and he winked at me, he said, "You can't drive the car in this state. Take it down to the first garage," which was a mile down, "and put it up until you get it registered." And he winked at me. And he said, "If anybody ever asks what you're driving that car in Massachusetts for, don't tell them you were in here."

(Laughter.)

MR. HALBERSTADT: So, I drove back to Newton without any further incident. The car eventually drove around Cape Cod until the engine was just barely stuttering and there were no brakes at all, no brake linings. And the brake handle was in the middle. The gearshift and the brake were in the middle of the front seat. So when I went for a drive, I always had to have somebody sitting in the back seat with a rope attached to the brake handle. When I wanted to stop, I would put my hand up and they would haul up on the ropes. And you could hear metal against metal, and the car would slither to a stop.

(Laughter.)

MR. HALBERSTADT: Then it was put in my old man's backyard in Hyannis, and it sat there until some local fisherman decided he wanted it, and gave my old man \$5 for it. And he took the engine out, and it's probably still in a fishing boat down in Hyannis.

MR. BROWN: So you really left Detroit.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Completely.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Now --

MR. BROWN: What did you --

MR. HALBERSTADT: My original idea was to be a mural painter. And since, in the Depression, there were no new buildings being put up, and no chance for mural work -- even in old buildings, there was very little chance -- and because I didn't like being (inaudible) of the slums, I thought the least I could do was have them torn down.

So, I put in a year or two drawing some of the slum conditions in Boston. They were taken up by a private housing association called The Boston Housing Association, which had an office on Mount Vernon Street, near (inaudible). The man who directed that actually went to Washington, in charge of the Alley Dwelling Authority, some (inaudible) in Washington, D.C. They arranged for a great many exhibitions of these drawings, in the sense of -- as propaganda for renovation.

One of these exhibits occurred at the Boston Chamber of Commerce, where they denied -- they said I had fabricated or imagined these locations, at which time I borrowed a camera and thumb-tacked up pictures of same scenes where the drawings were made at. That got me started in photography.

About the same period, the treasury art projects -- oh, incidentally, these photos were -- and the drawings and the newspaper publicity, which was extensive -- were instrumental in Boston becoming the first city in the country to have low-cost housing funds allocated. And old Harbor Village in South Boston and all the early projects were the result of my photographs of the areas, including a great many dismal projects, where were just political, quick make-money for contractors, who took advantage of the desire to renovate. But they put up buildings just as bad as what had been torn down. I didn't have any part in what they put up.

MR. BROWN: But did this have -- make you fairly well known in the Boston area, as an artist?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Oh, reasonably, I guess, you know.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Then the treasury art projects came up. The first project was for a mural at old Harbor Village. It was billed one of the slum (inaudible) projects I had something to do with. They ran out of money before I completed it, and --

MR. BROWN: When was this, about 1934, something like that?

MR. HALBERSTADT: About that period.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: And I went to work as a supervisor for the public works department, and then the WPA art projects. The first program was under the direction of Holger (phonetic) -- not Holger. Holly (phonetic) or Hal Perkins (phonetic), who was --

MR. BROWN: Harley (phonetic) Perkins.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Harley Perkins, who was --

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: -- who is probably an unrecognized early Boston impressionist, in his own way just as good as Goodwin (phonetic). But nobody knows who he is.

MR. BROWN: Yes. Well, he was an art critic too, I think.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes. He did write.

MR. BROWN: Yes. Well, what did this job entail for you?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, the first thing it entailed was I got \$132 a month, instead of \$98 a month, because I had a little family that was coming along, and I had a little more responsibility than some of the single painters. The actual work involved was meeting with the other supervisors, the directors of the projects, and then visiting each artist once a month. I may have had 30 or 40 artists, all together, and had a good part of each day going from one location to the other. I had taken inventory, what materials they used, what materials they were likely to need, making out a supply list for materials the government would furnish. They lived on an income of \$98 a month plus free materials.

Very few problems occurred. Typical of the problems would be the case of Hyman Bloom, who refused to show what he was producing to anybody, including his supervisor, myself. And since I knew Hyman for many years, I knew he was a serious artist, hard at work. In fact, you could smell the boiling oils and varnishes, going up the stairway. So all I would do is ask him what else he needed.

But the administration always wanted to know when is he going to turn in some paintings, because we're paying him, and he should be decorating schools or libraries or legal offices or courthouses. He just can't get payment for not doing anything. I said, "He's doing something. If he needs five years to do one painting, that's his privilege." I said, "No way we're going to drop him." So I talked to the other supervisors, and they agreed that any serious worker was entitled to work in complete privacy, his work was not subject to review by politicians, and that if they insisted on dropping him, we would all go and leave the project. So --

MR. BROWN: Did you make your point?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: I mean, did the administrators finally agree?

MR. HALBERSTADT: They finally agreed that, "If you're that convinced that he is really doing something and is worth it to the country to have him work undisturbed, then we will let him go ahead." Well, he was in the minority, and I don't know of any other artist who --

MR. BROWN: Who was the supervisor? Or who was the administrator there, at that time?

MR. HALBERSTADT: That could have been Dick Morrison (phonetic), Richard Morrison.

MR. BROWN: What was he like to work with?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, let me give you the other end of the scale, the same project, the same time. A little old lady, who kept turning in antique canvases, various schools of American genre and landscape art, most of which I could tell by looking were bought at the thrift shop in (inaudible) Memorial, or pulled out of the ash can. Definitely not anybody's recent work.

And so, after a couple of months -- and I saw three or four more of these pictures taken out of their frames, being (inaudible) with just her signature painted over the other signature, I said, "You know, these aren't your work. I don't understand why you're trying to get away with it." And she broke into tears. She said, "I don't know what I will do if I'm fired." I said, "Well, let me look into it."

So, I went back and talked to the administrative group and said, "We've got to find her a job, or something she can do, because she is certainly taking a job away from somebody who can paint, or doesn't deserve to be rated as a professional painter, because she's just faking it." And they said, "Well, can she file stuff in a file drawer?" I said, "Sure." So they got her a job as a file clerk at the same salary, and she was very happy, and didn't have to fake it any more.

So, there are two of the extremes: artists allowed to work undisturbed, and somebody not allowed to fake.

MR. BROWN: Yes, somebody not allowed to work at all.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Right. Well, no. She did a good job at filing, I understand.

MR. BROWN: Yes, but not as an artist.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Not as an artist.

Then, as I say, I was involved with the production of a great many artists. And the period itself -- without it, painters like Bloom and Levine would never be known today. They had time and materials and incomes, and (inaudible). It was probably the most important thing in the rise of American art as an international school.

MR. BROWN: It gave them leisure.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Not leisure. It gave them work time.

MR. BROWN: Work time. But I mean, you know --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Big difference.

MR. BROWN: Yes, yes. And was the --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Subsidized work time.

MR. BROWN: Were the administrators sympathetic with this? Is this what most of them felt should be the case --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Generally. Morrison was an acute judge of relative good and bad art. He was also a highly aggressive political appointee who wanted to make a big name for himself. I broke with the WPA in about 1937 or 1938 or 1939 -- about 1938, I guess, beginning of 1939.

In the first place, I had a commission from the treasury art project to do a mural for the post office in Nantucket on a whaling thing, which was exciting and interesting. And I barely got into my sketches, and being very young and easily intimidated -- it wouldn't happen today -- Morrison came over and said, "I want you to quit that job, and I will put you on as supervisor of the WPA." And I said, "There is no way I'm going to quit the job."

He said, "Well, I carry a lot of weight and influence around here. If you're going to amount to anything in the art world in the future, you'd better do what I tell you, kid." I said, "What's the reason for this?" He said, "We're both treasury art projects with the WPA, competing. And we don't want two programs. We want our program to be the only one." And he said, "If I get all the painters to do anything in our program, they won't have anything going for them."

I said, "Well, let me finish this, and I will join you." He said, "No. You make up your mind right now. Just write them a letter." Well, in later years I told this to Halger Kale (phonetic) and he was furious. No right to do that. But at any rate, I was weak enough or stupid enough to give in, quit the post office job in Nantucket.

Got a good assignment to do a big mural for the Coast Guard -- or not the Coast Guard, the coast artillery, a branch of the Army in Virginia.

MR. BROWN: Did you have to go down there for that?

MR. HALBERSTADT: On the installation.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: And I traveled around the countryside, doing research on materiel there, including firing 16-inch cannons for me.

MR. BROWN: Were you happy doing this sort of thing?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes, I enjoyed that project.

MR. BROWN: Was there a feeling of desperation, because it was the Depression?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Oh --

MR. BROWN: Or did you get used to it, and --

MR. HALBERSTADT: I was poorer before I got in the WPA than I was on it.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. HALBERSTADT: You know, growing up, working to go through school, not having an income of any sort, you look on it as a bonus.

MR. BROWN: Did you help -- as a supervisor on the WPA, did you help to select the artists that would be subsidized, or did you recommend them to Morrison?

MR. HALBERSTADT: I think on occasion we would see somebody who needed a job whose work was good, and we would have him put a folio in. But I think it was very easy to get on. Anybody who could almost call himself a Depression artist could get appointed to -- it was a type of (inaudible) project.

MR. BROWN: And you didn't have to evaluate their work before the government would pay them for it?

MR. HALBERSTADT: No. The work they didn't like, it was just either discarded or we would tell them to try to do -- well, when I went to see their work at the studio I would frequently be very critical of the things I didn't like, and maybe not take any samples back at all until they changed what they were doing.

The ones that were amenable to going another direction would, and the others that wouldn't (inaudible) work, they just -- wasn't a case of getting away with it, we knew it was an income-producing welfare-type program at its worst. At its best, it was an inspiration for people who wanted to work, and had a chance to work.

MR. BROWN: You were also a supervisor on Cape Cod. Was that a --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes, I --

MR. BROWN: -- different sort of artist?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, the subject matter was essentially different. They're more involved in landscape, or beginnings of abstract expressionism and -- whereas the Boston group were essentially genre painters. The Boston group was a large influence of German expressionists. They painted, like, Koska (phonetic), Soutine (phonetic), Dix (phonetic).

(End of side B, tape 1.)

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, the major influences on Levine and Bloom at the time were the reproductions, an occasional exhibition of the original painting (inaudible), major expressionist works. Soutine was a stronger influence on Bloom at the time, went off on his own direction rather shortly. And Levine went in for the distorted mirror, slight distortions, based on a classical Degas, and with the influence of the expressionists, which he has continued with up to date.

MR. BROWN: But you feel -- now, you said in the beginning they went along with Zimmerman, which, among other things, meant copying from other painters.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Analyst copying, yes.

MR. BROWN: Yes, and you mentioned the case of Levine, he could do a Degas that almost looked like Degas.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Didn't forge, but he could have.

MR. HALBERSTADT: He couldn't have painted an original thing for some years after.

MR. BROWN: But now they are still very self conscious about -- I mean they're very conscious, let's say, about these other painters. Is their work still --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Which other painters?

MR. BROWN: When you --

MR. HALBERSTADT: The contemporary painters, or the --

MR. BROWN: The Soutine --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Oh, yes. They still lean heavily on it. They haven't changed their basic -- except Bloom has departed more toward decorative abstractionism, the jewels and (inaudible) -- excavation sort of things, which -- you take a second look at it, you can see the fragments uncovered by the sand with iridescent colors.

But they have not explored any of the vibrant contemporary (inaudible) to individual --

MR. BROWN: This was true then, too?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Yes, yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Yes. But did you -- how did you relate to that? Did Levine -- rather, Bloom, was he fairly approachable? You said he was pretty --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Oh. Aside from his work, which he didn't care to discuss -- I don't think he would discuss it today; he is a clam when it comes to talking about his work. Have you talked to him at all on your program?

MR. BROWN: Yes, it's very difficult.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Okay. I think I could get with first base with him and carry on his underlying meanings and concepts. But -- actually, they're very easy to address by looking at them. There is no great hidden meaning in them. And Levine is simply social protest, social caricature in a (inaudible) style, and they're influenced greatly by his affinity for left-wing philosophy.

MR. BROWN: Did he talk much about his work back in the 1930s, when you were --

MR. HALBERSTADT: I don't know any painter who talks much about his work.

MR. BROWN: What did he talk about, Levine? What was he like?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Oh --

MR. BROWN: You've told me how you helped him with technical matters.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes. Well, some help on technical matters. He would have accomplished the same thing without my help. It might take him a little longer. His interests were, you know, who he was going to bed with, or --

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: -- would he dare, if he went in a restaurant -- the first time he went in a restaurant in his life, he had liver and onions. And the next year, the only thing he ever ate in a restaurant was liver and onions. He was afraid to try anything else.

MR. BROWN: Really? He was fairly timid about --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes, he is still very shy and timid. I talked recently to a mutual friend, who had him deliver a lecture at a college, and he said Levine was just in a running sweat, could barely bring himself to give a short talk.

MR. BROWN: Why was that? Do you know why he is so -- it was so --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, it's one thing to be a liberated, competed genius in the paint field. But when you consider that -- well, even my own education is such that there is nothing of a liberal arts background, except what I picked up by buying books and reading them, or talking to people in the academic cultural field. One gains a great deal.

But Levine's education was probably -- I don't know if he completed grammar school. I don't know if he went to high school. So the ability for this sort of verbal interplay that you would get in a college is something --

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: -- he never latched on to.

MR. BROWN: In 1934 you were showing, and you had a one-man show in the federal art gallery. Was that where they --

MR. HALBERSTADT: That's the mural I did for Fortress Monroe. And at the time -- I forgot to mention I was not interested in continuing indefinitely in the WPA. And my interest in slum clearance led me to many contacts in the trade and union and labor field. And there were -- members of the sort of various AFL-CIO organizations worked with me in developing slum clearance. Because, for them, it meant work for the construction trades.

As a result of these contacts, I went to Washington, D.C. and met John L. Lewis's personal economic advisor, a man by the name of William Jett Larke (phonetic), who was a theoretical economist. He liked the work I showed me (sic), and informed me that United Miner workers were building a new central headquarters, and I might have a chance to do a mural, if I could show John Lewis some good samples.

I came back and told Morrison that when this job was going down to Virginia, I want the shipment held up in D.C. at the railroad yards, and we're going to open up a crate and show him -- and Lewis had agreed to go to the railroad yard and look at some of these panels.

So, when the shipment finally left Washington for Fortress Monroe and the Chesapeake Bay, I went to Washington, D.C. and waited for the shipment to come. I finally called up Morrison. He said, "You didn't think I meant that I would just ship them right through," so I went down to Virginia and installed them and came back and confronted Morrison. He said, "Oh, I just gave you a pat on the shoulder to make you work faster. You didn't think I was going to drop you off a project there so you could pick up a job or something." I said, "You bastard," and that's when I quit the WPA.

MR. BROWN: Yes, yes, yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: And it was so aggravating, you know?

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: I had a chance to go on my own, get a good paying job with --

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: -- some interesting subject matter: history, United Mine Workers --

MR. BROWN: And he thought he could -- he wanted to keep his little empire going?

MR. HALBERSTADT: That's just -- just as he did when I originally went to work. He wanted anybody with a reasonable amount of competence to work for him.

So -- and essentially, I would say off the record until Morrison has kicked off -- I don't care otherwise; I certainly at this stage don't have any -- but I got even with him because when World War II came along, he applied for a position in the art curating department of the Army, when they go into another country and go through the artworks to collect them, analyze them, and ship them, protect them and all that.

So, naval intelligence -- I think it was through the Navy he was applying -- came and interviewed all the supervisors, as to what kind of a guy he was to work for. And without stretching the truth a great deal, I was very pleased to say, "Well, Morrison is a hell of a good egg." "How is he to work for in the office?" "Well, if you see him in the office occasionally" -- "What do you mean, occasionally?" "Well, if he's not down in the bar, having a drink, or out to the race track with his secretary" -- "You mean he doesn't work steadily and he gets drunk?" I'd say, "Well, I didn't mean to say that."

Well, he never got his appointment. Other people had it in for him, too.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: So he never got any appointment in the Army or Navy, because he had built himself quite a record of hostile people.

MR. BROWN: Yes, yes. Well, you said you'd known -- you knew Holger Cahill (phonetic) then.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, no --

MR. BROWN: What was he involved with?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, this is four or five years later.

MR. BROWN: I see.

MR. HALBERSTADT: I was in D.C. and went to dinner with Holger. And he asked me what I thought of Morrison, and I told him essentially the same thing I just told you.

MR. BROWN: Yes, yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: He was furious, outraged.

MR. BROWN: Well, you did the things related to slum clearance in Boston about 1940, is that --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes, from -- maybe from -- well, I did some of these before I went to work with WPA, and continued with this stuff. And then, when I left the WPA I went essentially to photographic documentation of Boston slum conditions. And then got contracts for the city for the demolition and construction records. But some of the earliest projects in the country --

MR. BROWN: So you developed a proficiency in photography pretty quickly, hadn't you?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, I had to learn from the ground up.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. HALBERSTADT: I never studied. Now, my brother, for example, who was never interested in painting, became a regular photographer long before I did. In recent years, he's got an interest in painting, but I am still interested in photography as an art form.

Then, I turned my working time into -- the slum clearance became no longer a problem. It was now in the hands of the politicians, who saw the money roll in as the projects rolled on. They didn't need my prodding. I turned to commercial or advertising, industrial photography, and opened up my own studio. And I think maybe for the first year I didn't have a job worth over \$5 a job.

MR. BROWN: Now, when was that?

MR. HALBERSTADT: A job that -- it was during World War II, the beginnings of it, that brought me a little better income. Instead of photography, one of the advertising art agency art directors who remembered my paintings wanted to know if I would do some advertising illustrations in black and white -- not photography drawings -- that were going to be printed in Fortune, Time, and Newsweek, and so forth.

So, they were good-paying jobs. I made enough money on those to upgrade my equipment, and then I got into the better brackets of advertising photography.

MR. BROWN: Well, you had said earlier -- I remember when you were talking about the art schools, when you were going to them, that in Boston they weren't very good, and that the -- some were just commercial art schools.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, by "commercial," I mean the low end of commercial.

MR. BROWN: Okay.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: But you had no reservations about going into it yourself at a higher level, where you could do very high-quality work?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, for many years after I got going, I was the highest-priced photographer, and insisted on doing quality work, only. You know, in a sense, that rubbed off on my kid brother because he became probably the best studio photographer in the country, and wouldn't take a rush job on for any money. And a quick job for him would take three or four days to two weeks, and he would charge accordingly. But he was always kept busy from agencies, New York City, Chicago, wherever. They would fly out and have him do something, because he would do it better.

And much of my work could have been done by many other photographers, but I would frequently debate with a client or the art director, rather than the client, as to their object in doing what they thought they wanted done, and suggested better ways of producing the same sales message. And so, essentially, I got paid for thinking, as well as photography. There is more money in thinking than there is in snapping a camera shutter.

MR. BROWN: You find this pretty -- this -- apart from the income, did you find this pretty fulfilling?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Not all fulfilling, but always challenging. It was a new chess game every day of the week, and two or three chess games a day, sometimes. And no two problems the same. So, it kept one busy enough so you didn't have to really think much about anything, except -- well, you have four growing boys going to school -

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: -- a couple of them going to college eventually, so you -- I mean, I had bills to pay.

MR. BROWN: Yes, yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: I couldn't do that painting. Nobody I knew could have made an income in painting in that period.

MR. BROWN: Well, you did work beginning in 1942 through 1945 or so in Harvard, the office of scientific research and development?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: What was that out at -- what was that? What did you mean by that artwork there?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, essentially, it was a good foxhole. I took the job because kids were growing up, and being near the age -- close to being of the age where they wouldn't have drafted me anyhow -- I had been draft exempt -- I thought I would be more -- I was a little upset because I had stopped doing all routine commercial work, and was only doing industrial work for companies that were engaged in war production.

Nevertheless, the draft board ruling was that all photography studios were non-essential, and owners were subject to being drafted, same as any ordinary GI. And I could not explain to them that if I were not doing these for Arthur D. Little (phonetic) or national research corporations, you know, somebody else will be doing them, and that it was work that had to be done in relation to the war effort.

So, it looked like I was very likely to be drafted. I got myself a job at Harvard University, the countermeasures division of radio research, working closely with MIT and Harvard groups.

MR. BROWN: Were you doing photography in this, or what was the --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, the first thing they did was ask me to work in the photo lab. That was run by Roley Rogers (phonetic), who still runs a model agency and charges ugly little girls an enormous fee for making proof sheets for them so they go out and try to sell modeling jobs. And he actually used to have a little musical group, Roley Rogers Band or something, and he knew nothing about photography. And I went in there the first day I was in there, and they had an ultra deluxe equipped dark room set up and geared for high-speed production.

And he gave me an A10 (phonetic) negative and said, "By the end of the week" -- this was, like, on a Tuesday -- "we would like about 700 prints of that." And he said, "If you do them, I can get out of here." So he left. And I looked at it, and looked at the equipment. There was an A10 enlarger, which would print 4 12x5 negatives, simultaneously on 1620 paper. And I made four copy negatives reduced, so they would all fit in at once, on one sheet of film.

Then I put an automatic counter -- I went to the stock room and got counting gear and an automatic switch. And by 4:00 that afternoon, I had the 700 prints dry, which -- just ran through like clockwork. Roley came in about 4:30, quarter of 5:00, and said, "Well, I hope you got two or three dozen done." I said, "They're all done." He said, "Hey, how did you do that?" I showed him. He said, "You can't do this to me. You want me to get fired? We've never had production like that." I said, "This is supposed to be a war effort, you said it was a big rush." He

said, "Never mind that. Don't produce like that." I said, "Roley, you run the photo lab. I've got to get some other work to do."

So, I went to the head of personnel, and without telling them why, I said I didn't think I could work in the photo lab. So they gave me a job in what was called the test lab, where new equipment was tested for all sorts of action conditions, including weather and temperature control and vibration, and so forth. And my job was to record the instruments, make up drafts, and illustrate manuals on how to operate the equipment, which took very little mental effort, and relatively easy working day. So I had a lot of (inaudible) time, during which time I did a lot of painting after work at Harvard. I was able to go home, not fatigued, and accomplish some painting.

MR. BROWN: What kind of painting were you doing then?

MR. HALBERSTADT: I did a type of painting that won the Pepsi Cola fellowship. That was one of the canvases I did at that time. I painted mostly scenes of people that I saw around the slums, chess players and --

MR. BROWN: What did that fellowship, that Pepsi Cola fellowship, enable you to do?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, I got a grant of \$1,500, and my proposal was that I should go to New Orleans and paint pictures of the jazz scene. Boston, as again, it is now, is a very lively jazz center. The (inaudible) and Mass Avenue, and Connelly's (phonetic) up on Columbus Avenue are great spots, especially after hours, when all the good musicians from other places have come in and play for the fun of it until 4:00 in the morning. So, I made a lot of sketches in those places, and I thought it would be fun to go to New Orleans and work in the original setting of some of these groups.

However, with the family I had, I figured \$1,500 wouldn't pay the round trip, hardly. So I painted the Boston jazz scene, instead of going to New Orleans.

MR. BROWN: And did you exhibit these things? Were you exhibiting --

MR. HALBERSTADT: No, they were shown -- I think all the fellowship winners from around the country had a group show at the National Academy in New York after the year was up. And I got some good reviews on it. And Kraushaar (phonetic) Galleries took my work on at that time, and gave me a one-man show, also.

MR. BROWN: That was 1946?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Just about, yes.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: The stuff I showed there essentially was an extension or a derivation -- a little more expressionistic -- of the Ashkan (phonetic) school, which was what the Kraushaar Gallery was noted for. And I stayed with them for some years, until I stopped painting, at least temporarily, pictures of people and went on to explore some of my own ideas in the field of contemporary art.

They -- Annette (phonetic) Kraushaar is a charming woman, I like her, but she has no knowledge and no feeling for anything but what her father used to show. She still shows the old New York school.

MR. BROWN: But did this showing in New York open up jobs or --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well --

MR. BROWN: -- interested collectors down there?

MR. HALBERSTADT: That show got me a reproduction in the New York Times, which was sizeable. In fact, it was reproduced next to (inaudible) and gave me more space. That painting sold -- that was reproduced, because a reproduction always helps sell -- sold immediately. And three other people wanted to buy it. So she asked me to paint three copies, and I -- maybe unwisely -- said I didn't think I should copy my own work. So I only sold one painting during that show. And the following year she sold a few others.

My prices were very low in those days. I think \$400 to \$800 was the price range, which didn't pay for the cost of production, you know. After you paid the commission, it was less than the cost of production.

MR. BROWN: But you realized then that -- you were 46 -- that you really couldn't continue just on your own, as an independent painter.

MR. HALBERSTADT: As a painter, I didn't know anybody -- rather a good, modern, non-objective painter, a Greek man, more or less illiterate, but (inaudible). (Inaudible) Constantine (phonetic) had something on the ball, but he

just -- he either burned his canisters, threw his paints and brushes away, and worked in a restaurant some place. He said there is no market for painting, it's like banging your head against a wall.

And it was only an exceptional painter, like a Levine, who got international recognition in competition, made the grade, or a Bloom, who had financial support from a couple of wealthy people.

But the run-of-the-mill artists -- painters like Karl Marx (phonetic), you know, down on the Cape and just scraping along --

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: They were teaching, or whatever. Very few painters made an income from their work. You had either outside -- or family money, or teaching.

MR. BROWN: And you went into teaching in 1947 at the --

MR. HALBERSTADT: The museum school.

MR. BROWN: The museum school in Boston.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Two mornings a week I put in a class, mural painting. And I only spent about three years there. It was economically not feasible. They paid \$15 a morning. I could make a lot more money in the photo studio.

MR. BROWN: Did you find it otherwise memorable, or interesting, at least?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, the best thing about teaching is you have to think about what you're thinking, you know? It's self-analysis. So, in that respect, it was useful. The other -- the reason I stopped is a great teacher and a fine painter, Karl Serbe (phonetic), who was head of the painting department, and when I would see a freshman come in with unusual talent for structural mural concepts, he would ignore that, and just recognize a man as having ability, and put him into his advanced painting class for four years.

As a result, he produced some great artists, like, let's say for example, Aaronson (phonetic), and I could name a half-dozen others, but people that he thought had unusual talent, that he concentrated his teaching on.

MR. BROWN: So he sort of milked your --

MR. HALBERSTADT: The ones I got who were the ones who were flunking out in other things, and just put them into some unknown, small department. And several of these students I convinced were much better off to drop out of fine arts entirely, and just -- I sent some back and -- it was a good idea, because they would never make the grade out there in the field, much like when I went to the state arts school, the Massachusetts College of Art. The ones who couldn't pass anything else in fine arts took up teacher training, you know. And none of them could make a living out in the field, even the lowest element of commercial art. They couldn't do a (inaudible), but they're out teaching.

MR. BROWN: You think that that's dangerous, at least for students, for children who are going to go --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, the visual arts in public schools are the worst of all the subjects taught. They're either teachers with a general background who have one credit in art teaching, another credit in science teaching, another credit in history teaching, they know very little about any of them, or they're specialists in art teaching, but they're the drop-outs from production. That's still true today.

MR. BROWN: Did you get -- have much contact with Zerbi (phonetic) and --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Oh, yes. I got along fine with Zerbi. There are some good instructors. They have Terry Bentz (phonetic), who is a teacher of drawing at the museum school who is probably better than Richard Andrew, when I went to school. But he ran into conflict with later administration, so I don't think he's there any more.

Some of the individual problems were difficult. I had a young Syrian lad, who was already -- young, he was in his late thirties, a perpetual student. And he wanted to get married and he wanted to come back for his sixth year at school. And he was a plodder, but not gifted. And I recommended that if he wanted to get married, he give up art school, take a job as a clerk at Woolworth's and paint and night and weekends. And he wanted me to convince his parents to support him longer.

So, my wife and I went for a Saturday night dinner at his folks. And we were supposed to convince his folks to support him for another year at school, and even help him get married. They lived in one of the worst run-down old brick buildings. The poor family, you know? This little old Syrian man who worked in some corner grocery

store, struggling. The mother cooked a delicious Syrian meal. Everything was neat, spic and span. After dinner we had a conference, and the old man asked me, "Should my son go to school? Shall I help him some more?"

And I said, "The worst thing you can do for him is send him to school." I said, "If he wants to be a painter, I will let him do it on his own. And if he's got it, he can make it. And if he's not that much interested, the hell with it." The kid was heartbroken. I don't know (inaudible). But I thought a half-dozen years was a real burden --

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. HALBERSTADT: -- to an older couple. It was -- if he had a great deal more talent, he would have been out of school a year ahead, anyway. He wouldn't have needed to continue. No reason for him to be a perpetual student.

MR. BROWN: Yes. In general, do you feel that, I mean, there is only so much you can learn from school, from art school?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes. You can learn all the technique of drawing, all the technique of painting, all the technique of sculpturing. You still can't produce anything that anybody wants.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. HALBERSTADT: So that was his case.

MR. BROWN: Yes, yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: I had another student who was, like, low C in everything he ever had in school, and I could see he was a hard worker, fairly intelligent, that they had passed him through without really giving him ground work in any of the things that he was not doing well in. They started putting him on advance work. I put him back to basic elemental things, more basic drawing, study of color theory, and so forth.

And eventually, I said, "You know, by the time you catch up with these last students, you're going to be 35, 40, and you're not going to have an easy time with them." And I said, "Why don't you do something related to that?" And so he went in printing in graphics, and is now an owner of a successful business, is very happy. He comes in -- called me up two weeks ago to see how I was, and was very pleased I talked him out of trying to be a painter.

MR. BROWN: Yes. But even the case of the most gifted students, after they have learned the techniques --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Oh, even the exceptional genius-rated --

MR. BROWN: Should they --

MR. HALBERSTADT: -- ones have to know they're up against almost impossible economic situations. You're familiar, I presume, with Elizabeth McCosalin's (phonetic) study of economics and American artists?

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm.

MR. HALBERSTADT: That's like one or two percent that make a living at fine art. The rest have to be subsidized, or income from other sources. That hasn't changed.

MR. BROWN: You feel the situation should be changed?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, the danger -- and I hate to say this -- I think the WPA was great, because nobody got rich on it. But large-scale government outright subsidy will lead to more political shenanigans. It's controlled by ignorant people who are ambitious politicians. So it could drive down a little of that, as well as improve the economic security of the painter. We don't want another French Academy.

Back in those days, when I was really struggling to eat meat occasionally, a wealthy manufacturer bought a painting from me, and paid me -- was holding coal -- in the coal business, and he was down (inaudible) in his library now, looks very fine. In those days I said, "Why don't you just give me \$5,000 a year, and you can have everything I produce?" He says, "It's better to see the (inaudible)." I said, "That's a crock of bullshit."

So, I went to lunch with him at the Algonquin Club a month ago, and reminded him of his former attitude. He said, "Did I say that?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, I know better now. I should have given it to you."

(Laughter.)

MR. HALBERSTADT: So he had to learn that.

MR. BROWN: Well, that's about as far --

MR. HALBERSTADT: I feel that, from the period of 1934 and 1935 until when I stopped taking commercial or industrial photography, which was in 1968, that 80 percent of my time was forced -- well, not forced, but in order to paint at all, I had to have some economic base. And my entire production, 90 percent, 95 percent of my working time, as far as I'm concerned, we just wasted time.

All the things I wanted to produce and could have produced were produced in the some-essential and mostly non-essential products for other, you know, manufacturer's factories, advertising agencies. I didn't make moral judgments about what I was selling, I just wanted to get paid for my time, and I got paid at a high rate. If I was going to be a whore, I wanted to be well paid for it.

MR. BROWN: But you do -- as you look back on it, you wish, in a way, it had been possible to work more for yourself, doing what --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Oh, I felt -- didn't have to look back. I felt it at the time.

MR. BROWN: At the time?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Sure.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: I was -- I had a feeling of resentment throughout.

MR. BROWN: Right, right.

MR. HALBERSTADT: That I wasn't free to --

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. HALBERSTADT: -- develop --

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: -- my own particular interest in the visual world.

MR. BROWN: Occasionally you were given acclaim in the art world as a -- for what you were doing. Like in 1951, you had a one-man show at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes. That was --

MR. BROWN: How did that come about? What was that like for you?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, I had a photo assignment to document the Gillette Razor Company factory. And I took the photographs, and out of my own interest in the subject matter, made a few paintings. So the combination of both came to the attention of Cloud (phonetic) -- what's he called, the --

MR. BROWN: James Cloud.

MR. HALBERSTADT: James Cloud.

MR. BROWN: The then-director of the --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Right, Institute of Contemporary Art. And to be realistic, I could even smell, at the time, that he was due to hit up Gillette for a sizeable annual donation, which he did, and which he got. But I got my show, too. In other words, we used each other, okay?

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm.

MR. HALBERSTADT: If it wasn't for Gillette, if it had been for the Salvation Army, I wouldn't have had the show. The work would have been just as good, okay?

MR. BROWN: Yes, yes, yes. But into the 1950s, did you find that the galleries in Boston -- was there very much being shown? Was this a very lively art center?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, the only time I ever had a dealer in Boston was -- at the time was probably the most -- or the better art dealer, aside from Bosi (phonetic), which were antique dealers.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Merski (phonetic) had the best contemporary art. Now, I think sometimes if you help somebody lift themselves out of the mire, they feel resentment, or don't want to remember in later years.

But Merski was originally a frame maker on Charles (phonetic) Street, not a picture dealer. And when he moved up to Newbury (phonetic) Street and opened a gallery, he had some real financial difficulties. And a friend of mine who had some money and myself walked in one day, and he was back in a back room with tears in his eyes -- literally, a handkerchief, weeping. And he told us that he thought he had to close, that he had immediate payments due, and didn't have money, and he had to go out of business.

So, I scraped every cent I could get together, which is \$40, and the other guy gave him \$4,000. All right? My \$40 was more important to me than his \$4,000 was to him. And Merski kept open. And 2 months later he sent me a check for the \$40, and sent me that little bronze head -- one of those bronze heads.

MR. BROWN: The little Cambodian (phonetic) --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes. All right. But, in all the years afterwards, he would never walk around the corner from Newbury Street to my studio in Copley (phonetic) Square to even look at what I was painting.

MR. BROWN: Why not?

MR. HALBERSTADT: I would stop in and say, "Come on, take a look what I am doing. You might like to show it." He would say, "Well, I'm busy," or, "Some time." He always put it off.

I think a feeling that -- I don't know. It would take a better analyst than me to figure that out. It was not because he didn't like what I was doing. He wouldn't examine it. And I was too proud to carry it over, too. If he couldn't walk a block, the hell with him.

MR. BROWN: But he was probably the best?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes. He did a lot --

MR. BROWN: The liveliest dealer there, and showing the greatest variety.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes, yes. And --

MR. BROWN: He wasn't --

MR. HALBERSTADT: I've done better in New York than I have in Boston. Ellen Riegelhoff (phonetic) had a gallery. And she helped a lot of artists sell so much stuff that -- I think she opened up originally for a tax loss, and when she started making money she closed it.

MR. BROWN: Yes, yes. You were also in on the early 1950s, when the Boston arts festival was started.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Were you involved in that very much? You were a founding artist of that.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes, I was -- the original suggestion, as an idea, to give full credit, was due to Edna Hibel, who has galleries around the country now, and does about a million bucks a year with her Renaissance paintings of mother and child type things. She has made a career out of that. But her cousin, or some in-laws -- Harold Plotkin, who is head of the (inaudible) Businessmen's Association, had a store for ladies clothing called Plotkin's in Boylson (phonetic) Street. And she more or less forgot about it.

And I had met him one day -- and we had known each other slightly for some years -- he said, "How about a Boston arts festival? If I organize, you know. We can get together and get a committee." At the time -- I don't know if it's in that review -- I was -- Artist's Equity had come into New England, and I was chairman of Artist's Equity of the New England region. And that comes down, essentially, to one or two people doing -- getting all the letters and mail out, sending out news releases.

We did form a committee, got permission to use the triangle and Coffey (phonetic) Square for the first Boston arts festival. And we put on -- we tied it up with the 200th anniversary of something, of the fall of Bastille. And the French Navy had a boat in town. We had a parade with sailors. And the final night, the one we'd show, we were supposed to have a jazz band and dancing in the street. The jazz band never showed up, and I went home and got my new hi-fi with tremendous volume, and hooked it up from the Coffey Plaza Hotel, and you could hear that three blocks away. So (inaudible) came out next morning, "10,000 People Dance in Coffey Square."

The whole arts festival, we had a budget of \$300, which was provided by Jonas Arnold (phonetic), the owner of Chip's (phonetic) Clothing, on one condition. He had imported some French tourist pictures in hand-carved (inaudible) frames. If he could have a booth to sell them. So he was the only non-practicing artist at a booth. I don't think he sold a thing, but he gave us the \$300 to cover our necessary expenses.

The following year the arts festival was so successful that the politicians got in on the act, and they moved it to Coffey Square. Eventually, after 4 or 5 years, they had a budget of \$100,000, and they involved theater and music. Tom Messer (phonetic), from the Guggenheim, who at one time was head of the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, told me in New York they paid him a \$5,000 fee for 1-day consulting on the Boston arts festival.

MR. BROWN: Yes. So it became a real bonanza kind of thing.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: A little too large, and --

MR. HALBERSTADT: It was too large, and it became unwieldy. By the time you planned for two or three theatrical performances, two or three music groups, plus the paintings and police protection for all this, the budget became enormous. So they gave the whole thing up. It was fun while it lasted.

MR. BROWN: What -- do you think it did some good?

MR. HALBERSTADT: I'm sure it did. It was copied by many other cities, until they ran into the same sort of thing. So, I was the first artist represented -- representing Artist's Equity with the --

MR. BROWN: What did that do?

MR. HALBERSTADT: What did who do?

MR. BROWN: Artist's Equity. What did you do in the late 1940s, when you got first into that?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, it was a matter of trying to set up -- as they're still trying to do in New York -- artist-dealer relationships, copyright procedures, exhibitions like the festival.

For example, the festival committee, after we finally got the attorneys and the socialites and the promoters all together, they thought the artist ought to pay a fee of \$2 or \$3 for an entry fee, which is a racket, you know. You get 2,000 entries at so many dollars apiece, you've got a budget to work with. I figured the city ought to put up the money, or somebody ought to. I said, "No artist is going to show unless they don't have to pay a fee."

And Artist's Equity had a meeting with (inaudible) to promote the idea that nobody was to pay a fee. So it didn't take much convincing, and they agreed to just send your entry, and the jury selected. But no fees. They never did have a fee.

MR. BROWN: Did they have a jury, from the beginning?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes. One of the most successful shows -- they tried -- it's always hard to please everybody, you know. You can't.

MR. BROWN: Yes. I've heard there were bitter fights between --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: -- traditionalists and the newer --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Right.

MR. BROWN: -- more Modernist people in Boston.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes. One of the better shows, when they turned the whole thing over to one individual, Bartlett Hayes (phonetic), for his personal selection, that was a consistent show, at least. It represented one man's appreciation, rather than a compromise of four or five jurists.

MR. BROWN: He has a very broad knowledge of --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Very knowledgeable.

MR. BROWN: Right, right.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, hold that a minute, will you?

(Interruption to recording.)

MR. BROWN: Both Artist's Equity and the Boston art festival, didn't they bring more attention, public attention, to contemporary artists in the Boston area than --

MR. HALBERSTADT: The most active force for Boston artists in the 1950s was the Institute of Contemporary Art.

MR. BROWN: Oh, it really was?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Sue Thurmond (phonetic) has been widely criticized for not doing a good job, but I have an impression that she did a reasonably good job. And one of the things that was useful to me was the rental gallery they had. Any artist could submit work for the rental gallery. They got part of the proceeds of the rental.

During a period when I had a wood-type assemblage exhibition, a prominent New York collector who had a son in Harvard stopped in, saw my piece, called me from New York, and wanted me to sell it to him. I said, "You have to wait until the close of the show." He didn't want to wait, so I made him a similar one, which he bought. And then he bought the one that was in the show, too. And within two years after that, he was instrumental in selling maybe 10 more of these pieces to New York collectors, permanent collectors like -- well, you've probably heard of Tisch (phonetic) (inaudible).

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: And --

MR. BROWN: A real estate person.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Right. And (inaudible) major collection of avante garde art. And so, the Institute, as far as I'm concerned, was -- through its showing of what was going on throughout the country, as well as -- they did lean over more than the current institute for young contemporary painters' exhibitions.

MR. BROWN: They did?

MR. HALBERSTADT: I have the impression they did.

MR. BROWN: Well, they also have the arts festival, as I was saying.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Right.

MR. BROWN: And, right, the artists organization --

MR. HALBERSTADT: I feel now that I don't see that much of the galleries in Boston. Actis Krakow (phonetic) started out with a wife of a dentist whom I know, getting interested in getting prints and thought by running gallery they could buy them wholesale, which they've done, and gone on to be publishers, and so forth.

The best gallery in Boston begins with an A.

MR. BROWN: Alpha?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Alpha.

MR. BROWN: Yes?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Has been subsidized since its inception as a tax loss by two industrialists, both of whom I know. And I think they may be now dropping out of it. And -- but they do a good job.

But there is one thing about the art gallery and the artist relationship. Anybody can open an art gallery overnight, and within a week have 50 people coming to the door with paintings on their arm, looking for a dealer. It's the only industry I know of that there is no expense, except for insurance, to the entrepreneur. He gets the merchandise for nothing.

Now, that's a situation I would like to see changed. I don't know how it would be changed.

MR. BROWN: But beginning in the 1950s, though, is when you began to get quite a lot of contemporary and quite a lot of art shown in Boston? Hadn't it been rather conservative until that point? I mean --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes. There were odd shows. I remember a very early Picasso lithograph show at the Coup (phonetic) in Harvard Square. You could have bought big Picasso lithographs for \$50 a piece, if you had the money or the interest. But --

MR. BROWN: Yes, there were odd things like that. And Grace Horn (phonetic) came on pretty early.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Right.

MR. BROWN: Margaret Brown (phonetic).

MR. HALBERSTADT: Oh, Grace Horn, you know, avant garde for her, literally, was maybe a John Worth (phonetic) watercolor. There was nothing startling there.

Margaret Brown was a little more adventuresome, had people -- I don't know if she exhibited Gifford Bale (phonetic) or Vernon Smith (phonetic), but they are, in today's terms, are highly conservative.

MR. BROWN: Sure, sure.

MR. HALBERSTADT: But the explosion of American painting in its own right really was much more a Cape Cod phenomenon than it was a Boston phenomenon. And museum curators and gallery people from over the country coming to P-Town (phonetic) in the summer -- Hans Hartman (phonetic), Carl Nass (phonetic), began to open whole new vistas.

MR. BROWN: Were you familiar with -- were you down in Provincetown in the 1950s?

MR. HALBERSTADT: I used to show an odd canvas now and then down to the art association, some of which they kept over the winter.

MR. BROWN: But I mean were you involved at all down there? Most of your --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Not with the WPA. Well, I lived further down the Cape. I would be living there now, if traffic wasn't so heavy.

MR. BROWN: Your main life, though, say in the 1950s and 1960s --

MR. HALBERSTADT: The Boston area.

MR. BROWN: The Boston area, where you had, really, a business, didn't you?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes. I might summer in the Cape or upper East Foster (phonetic) or Rockport (phonetic), and I was involved -- there was a vital modern art group in the old hall on Front (phonetic) Beach at Rockport that had a lot of New York painters come up in the summer, and great (inaudible) New England painters who were in the area.

MR. BROWN: When was that?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Oh, middle 1940s, middle 1950s. Much more avant garde than anything in Boston. And there are individuals like Louis Shapiro (phonetic) and Cole (phonetic) at Halibut (phonetic) Point, the Rockport area, who was friendly with painters like Milton Avery, Stuart (phonetic) Davis. Any number of people who are giants today would come to visit him in the summer. And strangely enough, from that drop in the water there, the circle expanded throughout the region.

MR. BROWN: But --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Painters like Martin Hartley (phonetic) were essentially unknown. Marin (phonetic) was essentially unknown. It took New York people with wisdom, or somebody like Hudson Walker (phonetic) from Provincetown to recognize their merits.

MR. BROWN: Yes, yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: And develop them, yes.

MR. BROWN: Well, your own career moved more and more toward New York, didn't it, than --

MR. HALBERSTADT: I have been always --

MR. BROWN: From the mid-1960s on?

MR. HALBERSTADT: -- been more acceptable in New York than I have in Boston. I'm sure if I went with a folio of slides of my work up and down Newbury Street today, nobody would have any interest in them, whatsoever.

MR. BROWN: Whereas in New York you find they're much more amenable, they're much more willing --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Much more acceptable. An illustration of that might be -- you reminded me -- I got a call from (inaudible) in two days ago. Yesterday I went and picked up some lithographs I had left there for their rental gallery for some years. I had forgotten they were there.

It reminded me when I first made them I had a set of them in my car, which I parked on 80th Street, just near the Kraushaar Gallery. And I went up to say hello to Aunt Nette (phonetic), whom I'm still very fond of. And she said, "What are you doing?" And I said, "Wait a minute" --

(End of side A, tape 2.)

MR. HALBERSTADT: -- car, and brought up a set of 12 prints. And she looked at them and said, "You know, this is beyond me. I know nothing about this stuff." She was very honest. But it made me furious that somebody engaged in the art world who has never taken time in her life to know the first thing about what the contemporary world in art is doing, let alone school, the new school of realism, abstract expressionism. It was meaningless to her. Probably don't know what the words mean. And I was so furious.

Now, I had never -- the Metropolitan had owned two or three of my photos, but I had never met John McHenry (phonetic), who was the new curator of the print department. It was only -- Aunt Nette's place was only a block from the Met. So I walked over to the Met with this folio under my arm, and went to the guard's door, and said, "I want to talk to Mr. McHenry." He said, "He's in conference." I said, "Well, tell him Ernst Halberstadt wants three or four minutes if he's got the time."

Well, he picked up the phone and said, "Well, I can give you just a very short time, but come on up." So I took the folio up, and they pressed the buzzer, and I went into the library room and laid my prints out on the table. I put a couple out and the rest were in the folio. He came out and he said, "What can I do for you?"

And I appreciated it, the man was busy, head of a department in a conference. But he took time, which wouldn't have happened in Boston. No way. Nobody I know in Boston, let alone Boris Brinsky (phonetic), whom I did my best to help. McHenry picked a couple of prints up, opened up the folio, went through them. He said, "I like them. I would like a set for the museum."

Now, I thought from his tone that maybe he thought I should give him a set. And I think it's unbecoming of an artist to present his own prints to a substantial museum just to be in the collection. So I said, "Well, I have never given the museum a set of prints, but I will try to find a donor for you." He said, "Who said anything about that? Just send the bill with them." And I said, "Well, great. Thank you."

And I walked out, and put the cards back in the trunk of the car and walked upstairs again and saw Annette Kraushaar, and I said, "What do you think, Aunt Nette?" She said, "What?" And I said, "I just went to the Met, and they bought a set of those prints." She plopped down in the chair, sat back, and said, "What's the world coming to?"

(Laughter.)

MR. BROWN: In a way you might summarize Boston by that very suggestion, as well.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, the --

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: To me, I can find -- the only response (inaudible) I have had is when Chris Cooke (phonetic) first got the job at the Addison (phonetic) Gallery in Landover (phonetic), and I hadn't known him well at all -- had met him once, I guess. But I was going through Landover, and had a set of prints. I took them to the museum, and he had only been there about a month. He said, "Before you show me these things, I want to tell you something." He said, "I have made up my mind I am not going to purchase one thing for a year, and I am going to get acquainted with what they've got, and I want to know what I'm going to do." He said, "I would like to look at them, but I don't think we're going to take them for this gallery." He looked through them, he said, "I've changed my mind. We want a set." And he bought a set. And they're up there now.

Now, I can assure you the same prints up and down the street, every gallery in Newbury Street, not one would take them. I think if I want to, I could do better with some of my photos on Newbury Street, like the Vision Gallery, because I know Steve Rose (phonetic), who has moved into there. But because I know him, I sort of lean back, not calling on him. But I think I will call him, and see if I can't have a photo show.

But New York has a more open mind. Most dealers in New York -- and it's a very difficult thing for a painter who thinks he has worked hard and done a lot of good work to get any kind of an audience in New York. I'm sure you've heard endless painters try to get a representative gallery in New York, or a dealer to represent you. You met with a high school graduate who is a receptionist who has a pat line, "Our stable is full. We make appointments for Tuesdays. Will you please send some slides on Tuesday at 2:00 from now, and let you know." And it's very hard to get beyond that.

One gallery I went into I got the same line from a young gentleman who had a small folio of color reproductions I had taken with me. And I said, "Well, I didn't come here to show you samples of any contemporary art work, I just have some photos of a collection of Goya (phonetic) prints, which the owners asked me to find an agent to sell. But since your stable is full, I won't bug you any more." So I walked down the street, he came running after me for a block and a half, "Let me see them, let me see them."

MR. BROWN: On the other hand, you have gotten admission to New York. You've had murals, and --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, that's dealing directly with architects, not art galleries.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: Most architects, you can walk into them with a head designer, and they will take time to see what you're doing. And I just -- I think possibly I'm fortunate in that most of the chief designers went through school about the time I did, and they're about my age bracket. And they're fairly receptive to taking time to look at what I have done.

And I must say I average a commission out of every three calls, in general. And I have kept busy. I probably have more work on walls and buildings in New York than any other living American artist.

MR. BROWN: And in these you have used a number of various media, right?

MR. HALBERSTADT: Yes, I've used --

MR. BROWN: At a point --

MR. HALBERSTADT: -- straight media without combining it with anything else to a very complex mixed media involving photography and sculpture and color, painting, all the same complex designs.

The clients in the arts are pretty good. Once you do a job for them and they're happy with it, they're willing to give you pretty much a free hand from there on. They don't even have to look at your sketches, if you don't want them to look at them.

MR. BROWN: Do you find you can go to work pretty directly? It's fairly -- I mean, you don't have to do too much preliminary work?

MR. HALBERSTADT: No. I generally try to understand the needs of the client. I think the problem -- not a problem, but the job of the mural painter in our society -- I'm not sure, like, in a revolutionary social set, fixed outlook society it's hard to deviate from a centralized concept. But in an open, honest society, social society such as ours is, the duty of a mural painter is to understand his client and the public's relationship is always what the artist personally wants to do.

And I attempt to give -- make a study, first, of what the needs of the client are, what will function for him in his activity, plus the interests of the people that have to go by or live with this material, in addition to what I think will be a respectable piece of work that I have produced. So, taking those three things together, I usually make four or five approaches, considering potential budget, the reaction of the public, and the needs of the client. And then, give them a choice of what they would like to do. And generally, they -- in general, I think in every case, they pick the one that I would have preferred to do anyway, without any prodding on my part. And generally I keep out. When they're making a selection, I don't want to see.

So, many of the sketches I have made -- say if I make four sketches for one project, and then the other three will be suitable for something else. And right now I have made -- well, I've been called twice to New York for potential jobs, but I'm in competition with some internationally famous names.

But the owner of the buildings might rather prefer -- one advantage, again, of living down here instead of New York City is that I can produce at about half the price as a New York artist can, with the same identical production. Let's say for worthy identical production, my production costs are a heck of a lot lower. Rent in New York is something. Eating a hamburger sandwich in New York is expensive.

MR. BROWN: Well, if you had your way, I mean, in the future, would you want to be handling a certain number of

commissions? Or how much of your own painting and personal work do you want to --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Well, my preference is to work on some major mural commissions. In the past year I have been approached by a large Boston bank to consider what they can do to liven up the lobby of a new building. And I thought of all the work I had done, most of it had been non-objective in character. And there is some hidden or direct symbolism involved, if somebody wants to study it and analyze it.

But I think, in the current times -- and I've thought so for two or three years -- it would be quite a challenge and interesting to do the thing that I think makes this country great: the American Bill of Rights, from the first 10 articles of the Bill of Rights down to the ERA movement of today, and the changing attitudes toward what is a human right and what isn't.

And I made this proposal to the bank, and they refused it, saying it was much too controversial. They said even a photo of the Constitution would be too controversial. They refused it. They wanted something completely -- decorative design without significance. So I refused to do that. So we haven't stopped talking, but we're at a little standstill. In the meantime, I have tried -- I've got the outline for what I want to do worked out, three or four months' work laid out.

I think one of the federal buildings -- especially since the president at this time is apparently interested in human rights internationally -- that might have somebody in the government's interest. Now, the General Services apparently did not look kindly on my sample slides or other material I have sent them. I have never had any response from them. And I have contacted Tip O'Neill, who used to be a neighbor of mine in Cambridge, and I knew from way back when, and he's in a situation which is strictly political. He's been feuding with the General Services, as you may know.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: And his office -- not he, but his office -- is afraid that if he makes personal inquiry or recommendation, that there will be a hint of a kick-back or a personal interest in my getting a job. So it is better for him, and possibly better for me, if I don't go through him. And I am -- should now call up Francine Gannon (phonetic) in his office. He is supposed to be making an appointment for me to interview the GSA New England representative to have him carry my ball to Washington and try to get one of the new buildings going up to have a story on the American Bill of Rights.

So, I am interested in following up on this. In the meantime, I have the same bank that didn't want a controversial mural -- from their standpoint; it was not controversial from mine -- decided that I could easily analyze their interests, so they would like sweet, picturesque calendar pictures to decorate their building, and I've sold them about three dozen live-scale color photographs of New England scenery, which -- I went out last fall and made a great number of pictures, 200 or 300 pictures. And they selected enough to pay me for my time. So the thing is not a total loss, but I feel I'm being commercial again when I'm doing that, not really doing what I want to do. I took some very good what you might say are photography photos in this session of photos, none of which they wanted. They wanted the calendar type.

So, I come back to the studio, and primed up some canvases, and I made two excellent non-objective paintings in the last couple of weeks, and plan to make a few more shortly. Have to keep myself busy.

MR. BROWN: Yes. And that's your real element, I think, isn't it? I mean, that's what you really like to --

MR. HALBERSTADT: Strictly easel painting, and make a canvas for myself?

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: I would rather do a mural for somebody else to look at.

MR. BROWN: Oh.

MR. HALBERSTADT: I really don't care if these easel paintings are ever exhibited. I enjoy doing them. I like -- just so I can hang it up here, I'm not going to make a great effort to have them exhibited.

One thing. After so many years of learning to see in mural terms, it took me -- I have two events, learning to make a photo for a photo's own sake -- it took me seven years to make a good print, although I was doing good commercial prints for reproduction. And when I turned from mural painting to easel painting, it took me six or seven years to learn to see what a canvas was all about, not as a segment of a wall. As a personal thing.

And one of the troubles with easel painters who want to do a mural is they have not learned to see in mural terms. A good example of that would be the Motherwell black and white painting at the Kennedy Building in Boston --

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. HALBERSTADT: -- which is a very bad mural, although I think it's one of the greatest easel paintings. But he has just not learned mural concept.

So, for me, it was a struggle, or hard work, to learn to make an easel painting. And I am pleased I can do one.

MR. BROWN: A mural has got to carry much stronger, doesn't it? And relate more to an audience?

MR. HALBERSTADT: It has to be structurally related to the building, for one thing.

MR. BROWN: Right, right.

MR. HALBERSTADT: You don't even have to think of that when you're doing easel painting. No relationship.

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