Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Holger Cahill, 1960 April 12 and 15

Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

Contact Information
Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington. D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Holger Cahill on April 12-April 15, 1960. The interview took place at 12 East 8th Stree, New York, and was conducted by John Morse with the help of Peter Pollack for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

JOHN MORSE: This is John Morse reporting for the Archives of American Art. This afternoon, with the help of Mr. Peter Pollack, I am interviewing Mr. Halger Cahill, who was the former head of the WPA Arts Project, at his apartment at 12 East 8th Street in New York. Do I have your title right first, Mr. Cahill?

HOLGER CAHILL: I was the national director of the Federal Art Program, which meant painting and sculpture, and toward the end of the program I was made director of all art projects. Writing and theater and everything. The theater was out by then, music was still going, and writing was still going.

JOHN MORSE: I think it might be well, first of all then, if we can, to establish how this actually began. Whose idea was it? Or was it any one person's idea?

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, in those days, you'll remember, the early days of the Depression, so many people were unemployed. We had had a big program of labor. And of course the whole idea -- the curious thing is that the art projects were run just as labor projects were run. They were run on the idea of force account. You know what that is? You have a timekeeper going down and marking the people. We tried to do away with that in the art program, but that's jumping ahead of ourselves. Who actually started this? Now, when people write about this thing and when George Biddle writes about it, he claims that he did it because he knew Roosevelt at Groton and at Harvard. Well, I'm not so sure of that, and really I don't believe it because there were so many people -- the terrible excitement about the unemployment and the possibility of our program, which nobody had ever envisaged in this country.

PETER POLLACK: Describe anyway what was happening to the artists of the day.

HOLGER CAHILL: They were really starving. There was no patronage for the arts. It lasted only -- you see, these programs began first in 1934 under the so-called PWA, which was run by Ned Bruce.

JOHN MORSE: Now I would like to get that straight. Did PWA...

HOLGER CAHILL: Public Works Administration.

JOHN MORSE: This preceded the WPA?

PETER POLLACK: That's right. The Works Project Administration, but Eddie, you must answer that question because we want this on record. Now who in your opinion was the first person to conceive the art program?

HOLGER CAHILL: At that time I had been working at the Newark Museum, and I directed the Museum of Modern Art one year when Alfred Barr was away. And at this time, in 1932 -- the Newark Museum job I quit in 1929 because the director, Mr. Dana, had died and I saw there was nobody else over there who had the authority that he did.

PETER POLLACK: The years we're talking about now are later. The project was first conceived when?

HOLGER CAHILL: I can't answer that. But I can answer you that there must have been at least ten thousand people who had ideas and that hundreds were running to President Roosevelt. I know that many art dealers were running to Roosevelt with ideas of art programs. And Biddle, who pressured ahead and takes credit for himself, I'm afraid I don't quite agree with him. I think that the original impetus for an art program came more through Harry Hopkins when he was here in New York. He had some friends in the art world and the photography world. For instance, Walker Evans was a great friend of his. And if you look up, you'll find that the ERA, Emergency Relief Administration in NewYork City, had an art project.

JOHN MORSE: That's the ERA?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes. ERA, the Emergency Relief Administration.

JOHN MORSE: That would have been in 1932?

HOLGER CAHILL: It would have been in 1934.

PETER POLLACK: Was that before Bruce from the Treasury Department, or after?

HOLGER CAHILL: It was before Bruce from the Treasury Department.

PETER POLLACK: Explain that first.

JOHN MORSE: Let's get that straight first. The Treasury Department thing has always been confused in my mind.

HOLGER CAHILL: The money for an art project came -- or all art projects -- came through Harry Hopkins. Every one of them. Bruce's, the ERA, and mine, they all came from Harry Hopkins. Now when Bruce set up a project -- Edward Bruce, he was a painter, a very good man -- he was dealing with a man in the Treasury Department by the name of Roberts, Chip Roberts they called him. I don't recall his own first name, but they called him Chip Roberts. And through Chip Roberts -- Chip Roberts, I think was a go-between between him and Harry Hopkins. And Harry Hopkins said that he would finance, that he would allocate money from the Work Relief Program, which was nearly four billion dollars at that time.

JOHN MORSE: Did Harry Hopkins have the authority to allocate money?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, he did. Harry Hopkins was an extremely powerful person in almost everything he did. He was a very remarkable man and I must say that I have the deepest affection for him.

PETER POLLACK: What does he say in his book? Before he died he wrote a two-volume book about Roosevelt.

HOLGER CAHILL: No, I think it was Sherwood that wrote that.

JOHN MORSE: Hopkins and Roosevelt. Robert Sherwood.

PETER POLLACK: Did Sherwood take this up at all, do you know?

HOLGER CAHILL: I have talked that over with Hallie Flanagan, who used to be the director of the Federal Theater Project, to whom I was closest of all the directors there. Hallie and I were very close. Sokoloff and Alsberg were sort of on the outside, but Hallie and I moved together. She was a woman of great courage. Unfortunately the poor woman has Parkinson's disease and I don't think she's feeling very well. Anyway, let's get back to the PWA. It was called the Public Works of Art Project.

PETER POLLACK: Would you say -- can you give Harry Hopkins as much credit as any one person for the origin?

HOLGER CAHILL: Oh, yes. For all his projects. I'll tell you a story. It happened some years after the project was started. Harry Hopkins and I had dinner together in this French restaurant over on Sixth Avenue. We sat and talked there and I was arranging a meeting place with the artist and him, and we were to meet in Dorothy's apartment.

JOHN MORSE: Dorothy Miller's apartment? Before you were married?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes. And George Biddle, I think George Biddle was there. Stuart Davis was there, Louis Lozowick was there. There were dozens of artists who had been engaged in fighting for art projects. And they had this long conversation there with Hopkins, and you know he had a very quick mind. Brilliant fellow. And when the thing was all over I was there talking with Dorothy and she said to me, "There were several people here tonight who are interested in art, but basically, as I see it, the one that was most interested was Harry Hopkins."

JOHN MORSE: That's very interesting.

HOLGER CAHILL: Because Harry had that curious feeling for things.

JOHN MORSE: What about Roosevelt himself, if I'm not going too far ahead?

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, the one thing I can say for Roosevelt above everything, that during the seven and a half years that I ran that project it was attacked by everybody under the sun. There was a dead cat coming through the window every few minutes. And never once in that whole period of seven and a half years did I have a word of criticism come from the White House, either from the president or from Mrs. Roosevelt. They were both interested.

PETER POLLACK: But there were words of praise.

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, there weren't very many words of praise. The Hearst press was after us all the time.

PETER POLLACK: Remember "Children of the Rich"? Big headlines. "Children of the Rich on the WPA Art Project".

HOLGER CAHILL: Oh, sure. Sure, they had everything. And I remember Roosevelt came into an exhibition of the project -- we're jumping a little ahead of ourselves -which was held in the Smithsonian in that big downstairs -- the one, you know, that you can walk in from Constitution Avenue, and Roosevelt came there with Secret Service men and what-not on the Sunday before it opened. That was in the morning, and these Secret Service men prepared the whole thing and they wanted to know if they should bring him in the wheelchair, and I said, "Oh, of course, bring that wheelchair, that's easier for him," and they said, "Yes, he likes it better too." And Roosevelt came in and he was jolly, full of life, full of pep. He had an extraordinary energy, that man.

JOHN MORSE: This was your first exhibition?

HOLGER CAHILL: No, it was one of the later exhibitions. He came in there and after he had wheeled around a bit, he said, "Now tell me, how is the exhibition compared with others that we held here last year?" meaning in Bruce's time. Well, of course nobody wanted to criticize anybody, and we were absolutely silent. He looked around and laughed and said, "Don't all speak at once!" Nobody uttered a word.

JOHN MORSE: Now let's get back to the actual chronology of the WPA and the PWA.

HOLGER CAHILL: Bruce's project was officially formed at a meeting in December of 1934. The Public Works of Art Project. The director of it was Edward Bruce.

PETER POLLACK: What was its purpose?

HOLGER CAHILL: Its purpose was to make art for public buildings, murals in post offices and all that sort of thing.

PETER POLLACK: But only that. Not to hire- artists for easel paintings. This was for public works buildings, is that right?

HOLGER CAHILL: I think it was mostly for buildings. It may have said something about hiring to make easel pictures, but I don't think that came before the so-called Treasury Relief Art Project, which was co-terminus. I wouldn't say co-terminus -- but began about the same time as we did, also with money that had been given by Harry Hopkins. All of these projects started that way until the Public Works of Art Project changed over and called itself the Section of Fine Arts and was financed directly by the Treasury. But it hadn't been financed until, I guess that was in '35 when Congress agreed to setting up the Section of Painting and Sculpture under the supervising architect of the Public Buildings Administration, who was George Howe, who has since died.

PETER POLLACK: That still continues does it?

HOLGER CAHILL: No, it doesn't continue. Not the Art Project.

PETER POLLACK: I'm not speaking of the Art Project. I'm speaking of the building program. The decoration of buildings. It still continues, doesn't it?

HOLGER CAHILL: No, not with painters. It's gone back to an old, some old thing that, oh, you know, people used to hire Italian sculptors and painters

PETER POLLACK: Yes, to paint the mosaics, and so forth.

HOLGER CAHILL: But the Art Project is gone. But the Buildings Administration is there, and of course the supervising architect is there.

JOHN MORSE: What year did you assume office? You mentioned a period of seven and a half years. What was the beginning?

HOLGER CAHILL: I was appointed director of the Federal Art Project, which means painting and sculpture and prints and all that sort of thing, in August, 1935.

JOHN MORSE: August of 1935. And you were its first director?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, I was the first director.

JOHN MORSE: The only director?

HOLGER CAHILL: The only director. I was the only one that lasted. Of all the directors that lasted through until

the last dog was hung. I went down there and said I would take it for six months anyway, try it. But I stuck there. There were several times I wanted to quit. I'd get sore as a boil, you know. But I never did. I threatened to, but ....

JOHN MORSE: When did the project begin to branch out into state and regional operations?

HOLGER CAHILL: That didn't happen until 1939. We stayed a federal project, directed from Washington until 1939. In 1936, one of the assistants of Harry Hopkins, under whom these professional projects were run, wanted to throw the projects back to the states and to the regions in the spring of 1936. Just before June 1936.

PETER POLLACK: The reason for that was what?

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, it's very difficult to say what the reason was. He will give you a very good and plausible idea, but the real reason, of course, was that he was being challenged by another administrator under Hopkins, who finally beat him. That was Ellen Woodward, a woman who, for a Mississippian, was a protégé of Senator Pat Harrison, who was a very powerful man in the Administration at that time. And Jacob Baker wanted to gather his forces together and throw these projects to the states and get all the administrators involved in it.

PETER POLLACK: What was Jake Baker doing at that time?

HOLGER CAHILL: He was just assistant administrator to Harry Hopkins. And it was under his aegis that these projects were run. He never knew as much about the art projects, or cared as much about them, as Hopkins did. Frankly, I would be a very poor person to talk to about Mr. Baker, because he has been my, well, you don't want to say enemy, but we don't see eye to eye, in other words, about how the projects began or anything else. He's a very curious man. He's married to Mildred Holzauer.

PETER POLLACK: He married your assistant, as I was going to say.

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, he married her. And you know that in that fight, she was the one that got me back to Washington from Atlanta, Georgia, where I had been through the South and had had an automobile wreck and had myself taped up from shoulders to navel, you see. I didn't have any bones broken, but what I had were cartilage bruises, which are very painful. And she called me up and told me about this in Atlanta and said, "You'd better come back to Washington, Eddie." I said, "Oh, the hell with it! Let the so-and-so throw the projects back to the states if he wants to. I'm damned tired of this whole thing anyway." And she said, "That's no way to talk. You come back." "All right," I said, "I can see I've got to come back."

JOHN MORSE: Wasn't it you, Peter Pollack, who told me that Jake Baker was instrumental in organizing the federal workers?

PETER POLLACK: Yes, I do recall. Jake Baker later -- he must have left the government employ at the time because he was organizing the Federal Workers of America. This was the first time that a workers organization was made possible among federal workers.

HOLGER CAHILL: Baker lost his job in the Administration mainly through the activities of myself and Hallie Flanagan.

PETER POLLACK: You admit you got him fired, eh?

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, I told him so to his face. I said, "Jake, you know who destroyed you in the Administration? Damn your heart," I said, "You stabbed a knife right between my shoulder blades, and you said, 'That's the end of Cahill and Hallie Flanagan.' But we destroyed you, you bastard." "I'm not destroyed," he said. "No, but you were destroyed as far as the Adminstration was concerned. You never got anything after that. You were finished."

PETER POLLACK: Well, he did try to do something of importance.

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, after that he was sent over to Europe to fiddle around with the cooperatives. And then when he came back he worked for John L. Lewis.

PETER POLLACK: Now we're getting away from the subject. Forget Jake Baker. You had an assistant who was devoted to you and did a beautiful job. I must always compliment Mildred Holzauer on- the work she did. What is she now? Director of Newark?

HOLGER CAHILL: No, she's assistant director. She is working with Katherine Coffey, who has become the director.

JOHN MORSE: May I go back to the question, Mr. Cahill. You indicated that you opposed this breaking down from

a central authority to a state authority over WPA. Why did you oppose that?

HOLGER CAHILL: Because the way the arts are organized in this country, they are largely centered. I mean as far as painting, theatre, and music, it is largely centered in one city, New York City. You had to have freedom to move workers from a city that had too many artists in it, and very skillful artists, to the regions that had very few artists. And you couldn't do that except you were working on a federal basis. We had to set up standards. You see, these small places, they didn't have the standards. I mean, for instance, we'd set up print shops -- these people didn't know how to make prints. They didn't know how to do this, they didn't know how to do that. You had to have technicians to show them how it was done, and we needed a federal project. Hallie Flanagan and I went to the White House and we told Mrs. Roosevelt that we would quit if this went on and that we would have to tell the public why we quit. She said, "I can understand that." You know, the Roosevelts were very liberal people. Then Hallie said to Mrs. Roosevelt -- Mrs. Roosevelt had said she'd like to get hold of Mr. Hopkins and she would try to get hold of him. She said, "Where will you be at nine o'clock?" We told her that we would be at the Roger Smith Hotel having dinner, which we did. That's the Roger Smith Hotel on 19th Street. And sure enough, just a little after nine o'clock there came this call and Mrs. Roosevelt on the wire. And she said, "I was able to get hold of Mr. Hopkins and I talked to him." You see, she didn't like Jake Baker. That was one thing, you see. She didn't like Jake Baker. Of course, he didn't know how to behave with the ladies. He thought that every woman ought to be a nice girl and would sit on his lap.

PETER POLLACK: Not Mrs. Roosevelt! Eddie, you don't mean it.

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, Jake Baker was that kind of fellow. He never did know how to deal with, or treat women. And Mrs. Roosevelt had really taken quite a dislike to him, I think. She said, "I got hold of Mr. Hopkins and he said, 'Oh, Eleanor, I have never had so much trouble with any project as with that art project. The people are very uppish. They are haughty. They won't listen to anything."' Then she said, "Harry, I had two of them here this afternoon. They seemed to talk in a very reasonable way. Where do you get your information about them, Mr. Hopkins?" He said, "As a matter of fact, I got it from Jake Baker." And then she fired the shot that destroyed Baker. She said, "Have you ever thought that the trouble might be Mr. Baker?" "Yes," said Harry, "I have." And he called Jake into his office and really gave him the works. He must have wounded Baker a great deal, because that next summer I rented Hopkins' apartment there in the Kennedy Warren on Connecticut for about half the price he was paying for it, and he and his wife went up north. You know, to get away from the heat of Washington. Jake Baker and another fellow from the project came up to see me one night and we were having a couple of drinks together. There was a book there, written by Baker. It was called *A Government Benefits*, or something like that. A very small book. And it was dedicated to Harry Hopkins, "In sincere friendship." And he joined the "n" and the "s" and it became "Insincere friendship." I said, "What the hell did you do that for? This is not my property, it's Harry Hopkins' property?" He just passed it off with a laugh or something like that. And then I had a row with him when I told him that Hallie and I had destroyed him. I told him that incident, about how he changed the thing. He said, "What are you trying to tell me, that I don't know how to spell friendship?" He's the kind of guy who tries to throw you off.

PETER POLLACK: Forget Jake for a while. This is a very interesting piece of historic evidence that we're trying to assemble together today. And it is essential because the projects and what they accomplished are under your direction. There is no possible chance of contradicting this. The personalities involved -- that's not important. What is important is the tremendous amount of work that was done in so many fields. Now, the Federal Art Project, under you, worked from 1935. That was the first money you got as the FAP, Federal Art Project. 1935 to what year, Eddie?

HOLGER CAHILL: To 1943. And then it was cut off in June at the end of the fiscal year.

PETER POLLACK: But when did it become state controlled?

HOLGER CAHILL: It became state controlled in 1939.

PETER POLLACK: The whole start of this conversation back then was, "What were the reasons it became state controlled?" And we haven't answered it yet.

HOLGER CAHILL: I would say that the administrator, Baker, there at the beginning tried to throw them back to the states because of a struggle he was carrying on with another administrator.

PETER POLLACK: But he did succeed. Because they were thrown back to the states.

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, but we went on for three years after that, you see, from '36 to '39, and we held the federal control and we got the projects started very beautifully, especially on the Art Project, because we went out and we funded those community art centers.

PETER POLLACK: Well, that's where you found me. You picked me up. I was making $300 a week and you gave

me $175 a month. That's how nice he was to me.

JOHN MORSE: I still don't understand, Mr. Cahill, why you opposed this decentralization of the WPA. It seems in the long run to have worked out very well, indeed.

HOLGER CAHILL: It worked out very well, but it didn't work out as well as the Federal Art Project, itself. The Federal Art Project set up the standards and shifted the people. For instance, there was one time when we sent out 150 people to those centers from New York.

PETER POLLACK: May I explain this from where I was sitting? I was sitting in Illinois. I was hired by him. He had sent a man in there from New York to go and head the art project. George Thorpe, a very bright sculptor and very dedicated man. He came there, and I was running a small gallery and working, supporting the gallery. Losing money on the gallery and supporting myself and my family, and this is a tremendous conception of preservation of the arts, of feeling part of something that was of national importance as a contribution to the arts. And because it was national, and little politics appeared in it, because we had a national head; we had Cahill there fighting with the proper people individually, with Congress to get us funds. We didn't care about funds. We weren't politicking, we were simply trying to do a job. Now, for the record, I want to bring in the fact that the artist was getting $94 a month. The artist was a qualified artist. He was not some hack who was given a job for $94. Every man passed the test.

JOHN MORSE: Who selected him.

PETER POLLACK: The director had his curators, comparable curators.

JOHN MORSE: Mr. Cahill?

PETER POLLACK: No, Mr. Cahill had his assistants in various parts of the country. He had one in Chicago, he had one in St. Louis, he had one in Denver, one in New Orleans, one in Los Angeles, et cetera. And these people -- Don Bear --mention some names Eddie, who where these people?

HOLGER CAHILL: These were regional directors. They were regional directors and the selection of artists was a complicated process. In the first place, they had to go through the local Relief Board.

PETER POLLACK: No, no, Eddie. Before that you didn't have to be on relief. That was the means test.

HOLGER CAHILL: That was the beginning. The means test came up and you had to ... It amounted to this, is what we fought all the time – practically amounted to a pauper's oath.

PETER POLLACK: Precisely. You see

JOHN MORSE: A pauper's oath?

HOLGER CAHILL: And yet if you were an artist making $50 or $60 a month, or even $100 a month, you couldn't live on it, but if you were making $100 a month they wouldn't hire you. After that... But before that if you were a qualified artist and a citizen of the United States, there was a time when the person who was not a citizen, like Julio do Diego .... We had some excellent – Bill de Kooning -- we had some tremendously important names in the art project who were not citizens.

PETER POLLACK: All the names of the great painters, for instance, Bill de Kooning, Jackson Pollock. They were both on this project.

JOHN MORSE: Where they on the program?

PETER POLLACK: Certainly.

JOHN MORSE: Mark Rothko, et cetera. Did you have difficulty with any who were non-nationals, such as de Kooning?

HOLGER CAHILL: They were fired off. They had to be. Congress passed a law and said they couldn't hire them anymore. But Bill de Kooning today ....

PETER POLLACK: Ivan Albright, for instance, one of the most high priced painters in the world, gladly worked for the Federal Art Project. And his brother Zsissly, they weren't broke at all, but they wanted to be a part of this important art movement.

HOLGER CAHILL: There were so many that wanted to be.

PETER POLLACK: And they were giving their pictures to buildings, to schools, et cetera, for let's say, $94. Somebody was allocating these pictures. And they still exist in some places. Ivan Albright has gotten as much as $100,000 for a painting.

HOLGER CAHILL: I suppose he has. He asked that, anyhow.

PETER POLLACK: He's asked it and gotten it, Eddie.

JOHN MORSE: You mentioned this pauper's oath. Was that changed?

PETER POLLACK: That never was changed.

HOLGER CAHILL: Once that came into effect, unless you were a supervisor -- we once put the non-relief quota up to twenty-five percent.

JOHN MORSE: What do you mean, the non-relief quota?

HOLGER CAHILL: That the men didn't have to go and sign ....

JOHN MORSE: Oh, I see. Just what was the means test?

PETER POLLACK: They asked you how much money you made, whether you had any money, how much money did you have in the bank. Somebody came in and looked at your furniture and said, "Sell that piece of furniture before you come to work as an artist." That was the sort of nonsense that was going on.

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, for instance, our colored maid here makes me think of it because her mother has been sick and they came to her and said to her that they would put her mother in some institution, but she'd have to turn over her life insurance and all that sort of thing, and that they would allow her, Dorothy the maid, $100 to bury her mother. And she said to me, "For God's sake, what can you bury for $100 in New York?" And she just had to turn it down.

JOHN MORSE: I want to get back for a minute, if we can, to some of the regional directors. Who were they? You mentioned Donald Bear, who has since died. Mr. Cahill, let me explain my point here. I think this is an important enough subject to explore thoroughly. I would like to go around the country talking to groups and shed some light on what was obviously one of the most important things that happened to American art.

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, Donald Bear unfortunately is dead.

JOHN MORSE: Donald Bear is dead. Who were some of the others?

HOLGER CAHILL: There's a very good woman who was in Oregon, Margery Hoffman Smith. She was the daughter of the woman who started the Arts and Crafts Center in Portland. She had studied art here in New York -- as a matter of fact, she had studied aesthetics with a teacher of mine, and that's how I first got to know her. But she was a well to do woman. And that's one of the people they talked about, rich people.

JOHN MORSE: What do you mean, "they talked about?"

HOLGER CAHILL: People were always ready to attack anybody who had more than a nickel, you know, on the project. They all had to be paupers.

PETER POLLACK: John, we must call your attention to the fact that this thing got a vilification constantly in the Hearst Press and various other newspapers. But the Hearst Press, I remember very distinctly this big headline: "Children of the Rich on WPA." They referred to Archibald MacLeish's brother Norman MacLeish.

JOHN MORSE: Was he a regional director?

PETER POLLACK: No, he was a supervisor along with me. We made a tremendous sum, $150, $175. I think top salary was $200 a month.

JOHN MORSE: Who were some of the other regional directors besides Mrs. Smith?

HOLGER CAHILL: In Massachusetts we had a strange fellow who was a Harvard graduate, PhD. But he can never publish a book on his PhD, so he never completed the thing. Richard C. Morrison. He was an assistant to the fellow who later became director of the Boston Museum. He had worked with him in Cambridge, the Fogg Museum. He was all for New England.

JOHN MORSE: Do you have any idea what he's doing today?

HOLGER CAHILL: He's become an art dealer in Boston.

JOHN MORSE: Now we have the Northwest and New England.

PETER POLLACK: Speaking of the Northwest. Ralph Graves was on that project.

HOLGER CAHILL: You mean Morris Graves.

PETER POLLACK: Mark Tobey, he was on the project.

JOHN MORSE: Let's get a few more names while we're on the subject. Who were some of the others that occur to both of you? I know, of course, here in New York, Lauren MacIver was on the project.

PETER POLLACK: Aaron Bohrod, Eddie Millman, Mitchell Siprin.

HOLGER CAHILL: Edgar F. Britton. These were all Chicago boys.

PETER POLLACK: Nicola Ziroli, Constantine Pougialis.

HOLGER CAHILL: We mentioned Jackson Pollock, Bill de Kooning, Mark Rothko, Milton Resnick.

JOHN MORSE: Motherwell?

HOLGER CAHILL: No, Stuart Davis was on for awhile. For a long time.

PETER POLLACK: Charles Sheeler, was he on?

HOLGER CAHILL: No, he was another one. He was a middle-aged man.

JOHN MORSE: Let's take one man. Stuart Davis. Would he be one of those who received $94 a month.

HOLGER CAHILL: That's right.

JOHN MORSE: And what was he supposed to turn in for his $94 a month? Were there a certain number of pictures?

HOLGER CAHILL: No, I think he would turn in .... I've forgotten, you see. He's not a fast worker, so you see, it would have to depend on how fast a man worked. You see, a man like Peter Blume just turns out one picture a year, or something like that. With Davis, he turns out several. But it had to be tempered to how fast he could work. Theoretically he would have to work under a time-keeper, to be checked in by a timekeeper. But we more or less didn't pay too much attention to that on the Federal Project. Many other administrators told me that I was going to have them all sent to jail because of that. I said, "Look gentlemen," now you say... Now I'll call your attention to a printmaker over here, who lives on Staten Island. She's an old lady, Mabel Dwight. A very good printmaker. She was on the project, she was deaf and she couldn't hear the alarm clock, and by golly, she'd have to sit up all night to get here from Staten Island to sign in. And what good did the signing in do her? Nothing. It just meant that she was reporting, that she could go back and she could go and have a swim for the rest of the day." You see, this was the phoniness of this sort of thing.

PETER POLLACK: We were working with artists, that was the whole thing.

JOHN MORSE: Let's be specific. What happened to the pictures that Stuart Davis painted on the project?

HOLGER CAHILL: Some of them are murals. There's one down in the New York City Municipal Broadcasting Station.

JOHN MORSE: I know about that one. What about the easel paintings?

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, they are allocated here and there. I wouldn't know the names of them right away.

JOHN MORSE: Where are they hanging today? Some of these.

HOLGER CAHILL: They're hanging in schools and museums.

PETER POLLACK: Federal buildings, state buildings.

HOLGER CAHILL: For instance, I allocated some things to the Museum of Modern Art, which didn't have the legal requirements to become a sponsor, so they were allocated basically to the Brooklyn Museum, with their consent, and are on loan to the Museum of Modern Art. Like most of the pieces of Pure Reason, that really belongs to the

Brooklyn Museum, of Jack Levine.

PETER POLLACK: Jack Levine was one of the boys, Hyman Bloom.

HOLGER CAHILL: The best artists in America.

PETER POLLACK: The best reputations today.

HOLGER CAHILL: Every one was on the project.

PETER POLLACK: Ninety-four dollars a month, it was really between life and death. They needed that money, and needed it very badly in most instances. In some instances they were men who were idealistic and wanted to be part of a very important massive program, who joined it.

[Interruption]

HOLGER CAHILL: James Brooks, he worked on the Federal Art Project.

PETER POLLACK: Worked on the United States Works of Art Project.

JOHN MORSE: Who were some of the others?

PETER POLLACK: That's Edwin Dickinson we're talking about.

HOLGER CAHILL: Philip Guston, he was a brilliant mural painter.

JOHN MORSE: In fact, you've enumerated, Eddie, most all of the leaders of the abstract expressionist movement, but they weren't painting abstract expressionism then.

PETER POLLACK: Not at all. Philip Guston was painting a very good expressionist painting in those days. I think some of those things seen today would be highly respected.

JOHN MORSE: Where can we see them? That still bothers me. Did someone ever make a list of all the paintings that were produced and that were hung, that were given to schools, as you mentioned?

HOLGER CAHILL: This would be a tremendous list because there were so many thousands of them. But if you go up to, for instance, the Van de Charles [phon. sp.] High School in the Bronx, that was the one that got the mural that won the gold medal of the Architecture League that year by a fellow named Newell, a very good painter, and that school has a lot of pictures by other artists.

JOHN MORSE: But was there ever any attempt to catalogue all the paintings produced?

HOLGER CAHILL: Who could do it? We were so busy during the time of our working on the Project, that we couldn't do it. We would have had to set up a project afterward to list all those things.

PETER POLLACK: Well, it wasn't a question of listing, the paintings that were brought in were listed. Those records still do exist.

HOLGER CAHILL: Oh, the records exist, of course.

JOHN MORSE: Where?

HOLGER CAHILL: In the archives in Washington.

PETER POLLACK: Wherever they store the material. I don't know. I do know this. For instance, I became very interested in prints. I always was. Carl Schniewind, curator of prints and drawings at the Art Institute in Chicago, came to the project headquarters. We went through every print in the entire collection and Schniewind selected the prints he wanted. Those prints are still in the Art Institute of Chicago. Every one of them tabulated and listed and every one of them protected in Solander boxes, along with the Durers, the Rembrandts and the Cranachs. But this was a man who knew what was going on, and respected the project's enterprise.

JOHN MORSE: Mr. Cahill, what about the other aspects of this tremendous program of the thirties? You mentioned Hallie Flanagan, I think she was in charge of the theater project. What relation was there between the writers project, the theater project, and your own, WPA?

HOLGER CAHILL: We were under the same administration. Not in the beginning, I was later made director of all those things. But that was during the time of liquidation. I had to come in there as the man who cut their heads off. Cut my own off too.

PETER POLLACK: Well, you were lopping off heads because you were starting a program which was later taken by the United States government, I understand. A map project grew out of it, didn't it?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes. Some things like that grew out of it, but on our program we had not only the painting of easel pictures and the painting of murals, on which we have very distinguished people like Philip Guston and Stuart Davis on that mural project, and Burgoyne Diller, and so on and so forth, but we had also a sculpture project and printmaking project. We got together on every project a print shop where the printmakers worked together and they developed various marvelous things. Wonderful things came out of the project.

PETER POLLACK: Silkscreen was revived by the project.

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, silkscreen was revived by it. But also there is a print curator down in the Cincinnati Museum who worked on it.

PETER POLLACK: Von Groschwitz. I spoke to him on the phone yesterday and he said to be sure and say hello to you.

HOLGER CAHILL: He's a wonderful fellow.

PETER POLLACK: Von Groschwitz has just put together an international print show that is really first rate. He remembers those days on the project with great pride.

HOLGER CAHILL: I know he does. He talked to me about it in Cincinnati, whereas his director, what the hell's his name?

PETER POLLACK: Phil Adams, no, Phil feels the same way about it.

HOLGER CAHILL: Well maybe he's been convinced by Von Groschwitz, but he didn't fell that way.

PETER POLLACK: Oh, no. Phil's a liberal and he understands the value of these things. But Von Groschwitz has a real affection for those days in New York when he was here, the head of the print department on the projects on the projects.

HOLGER CAHILL: Wonderful fellow.

JOHN MORSE: In order to...

HOLGER CAHILL: And then, John, in addition to all that, you see, we had all these creative projects where we had creative people working. And then we had programs for the people who were more on the educational side, like teaching projects. Lots of teaching projects.

PETER POLLACK: That's where I came in, you see, in the centers.

JOHN MORSE: No, I don't know about this at all. Tell me about it.

HOLGER CAHILL: Teaching projects. Also the community sponsored art centers. Those were very popular and they paid. Usually the WPA project had to pay 25 percent to the government's 75 percent.

JOHN MORSE: How do you mean "pay?"

HOLGER CAHILL: They paid into the costs of the ....

JOHN MORSE: The cost of running a center.

PETER POLLACK: Explain that, Eddie.

HOLGER CAHILL: If a school wanted to get a painting allocated to itself, it came to the projects, saw the paintings in the racks and bins in the exhibition gallery, and would pay for the cost of the paint, canvas and frame. The basic costs of these three items, which amounted to, let us say $6 for an 18 inch by 24 canvas, or $12 for a 30 inch by 40 inch. That's all they paid for. The cost of everything else was met by the United States government, whether it be earlier in the day during the Federal Art Project by the federal government, and later through the states.

JOHN MORSE: How was this money forwarded to the proper agency?

HOLGER CAHILL: It was never forwarded to my office. It was forwarded to some finance officer of the locality who was .... All these projects would have -- for instance, the sponsor of the project here in New York was Mayor LaGuardia during his time and everything would be paid into his finance office. For instance, I met Mayor

LaGuardia once at the World's Fair. You see, I ran the art thing at the World's Fair in 1939 on leave from the project, and then in 1940, Commander Flannigan, who was the assistant to Grover Whelan, wanted me to do it again in 1940, so I said, "Oh, I don't know, I don't know how I can do it. I can't pay for the electric lights, I can't pay..." "Oh," he said, "I'll give you the lights." And I said, "I can't pay for the cleaning up, even that, we can't purport government funds to that." So he gave me everything. All I had to do, he said, "I know you'll give me a good show, just as you did in '39." There was a lot of niff-gnawing about that during the administration and Colonel Harrington, who was at the time the national administrator of the project in general, he agreed with me that it would be a good idea to have a show at the World's Fair. But the head of the Public Works Agency, which was sort of the holding company of WPA, he said that it would be a very bad idea. Colonel Harrington said, "Why, Mr. So-and-So, I've given Cahill my word." So he said all right. You know, he would have been a General if he had lived. He died just before the beginning of the war -- and a much lesser man, that Somervell who was the state administrator of New York, he was an Irishman, his name was Brehon, which is an Irish name for priest, or something like that.

JOHN MORSE: Let me go back for a minute to this matter of the regional directors. You mentioned one in the Northwest and one in New England. Who comes often to your memory as a regional director here from New York or from some of the other districts?

HOLGER CAHILL: In New York City, there was of course a regional man under Mr. Hopkins by the name of Ray Brannion, but he wasn't an art person. He was a business person.

PETER POLLACK: What was her name, Eddie? It was a woman.

HOLGER CAHILL: A woman here?

PETER POLLACK: Yes.

HOLGER CAHILL: I've forgotten that. There were women out in ....

PETER POLLACK: Well, we had a woman named Increase Robinson in Chicago before George Thorpe.

HOLGER CAHILL: She wasn't a regional person. She was a state person. We had a woman here, Audrey McMahon was a state person.

PETER POLLACK: That's the one. That's the one I was thinking of.

HOLGER CAHILL: She never was a good art person. She was just a big, blustering bluff.

JOHN MORSE: Well, who would have paid her salary, for example? The federal government?

HOLGER CAHILL: Federal government.

JOHN MORSE: You, in other words. You signed her paychecks?

HOLGER CAHILL: No. I didn't sign her paychecks.

PETER POLLACK: Who else, then Eddie, was among the regional directors, people like Don Bear?

HOLGER CAHILL: Don Bear had been a director of Colorado, and we made him regional director for the Rocky Mountain States.

PETER POLLACK: Who was on the West Coast?

HOLGER CAHILL: He was also for California.

PETER POLLACK: Who was that gentleman in the South? Was that Lyle Saxon?

HOLGER CAHILL: No, he was in the Writers Project. He's dead now.

PETER POLLACK: Yes, I knew he was from New Orleans.

HOLGER CAHILL: Tom Parker was for the South.

PETER POLLACK: That's right. Then he became your assistant in Washington.

HOLGER CAHILL: I sent him out there because -- I told him to go out and set up these community art centers. And he was a damn good boy.

PETER POLLACK: You must have known him on the American Federation of Arts.

JOHN MORSE: Yes, I was with him for years.

HOLGER CAHILL: He was a good boy, a good loyal kid, and he was regional director for the South and traveled over all those states. I shall never forget the time when I came into Washington, that time when we had this row about Jake Baker, when he wanted to throw the projects back to the states, and we had started those community art centers in December of 1935. The first one down in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, was started by Tom Parker and by Danny Defenbacher -- he was under Parker, you see. Defenbacher never had the drive or the originality that Tom had. I remember that when I came back to Washington, after I had been called back through the telephone call from Mildred Holzauer, I had a telephone call from Baker. "What are you going to do?" And all that sort of thing. Hallie Flanagan and I and the other directors sent a memo to Harry Hopkins and he called up and he said, "Well, I'll tell you Eddie, that request of yours to the boss, he'll see you sometime in June." This was in April, you see, and I knew damn well what he was doing. He was feathering his own nest. So I went around listening to -- he came in and gave me a terrific picture of Tom Parker. "Well," he said, "I never saw a state administrator anywhere down there in the South that said Tom Parker fixed it." "Well," I said, "Jake, did you ever hear of any of the federal art centers that he started?" "No," he said, "Frankly, I didn't." "Well," I said, "You should have. You would have gotten another picture of Tom Parker."

PETER POLLACK: I don't think John understands the center movement. Explain it, Eddie.

HOLGER CAHILL: The community art centers, which Pete can explain to you much better than I can because he was working with one of them, he started one in the South side. The negro section of Chicago. And we had a great many of the negro centers in the South. Well, anyway, we had a great many negro centers then in just those months between December 1935 and say, April 1936. And I said, "Jake, you should have looked into that." And then I went down there on a Sunday where Jake Baker and some others were playing tennis and on the side-lines of these courts I ran into Floyd Dell, an old time novelist from a period of, say, the teens. He wrote a thing called Mooncap. He was quite an intelligent fellow, and I said to him, "Floyd, did you when you were down through the South" -- he'd been sent all through the South and I knew he'd been down there, too -- "did you run into any of the federal art centers?" "Oh, no," he said. And then he said, "As a matter of fact, they wouldn't have interested me very much since I've seen the work of Kelly Fitzpatrick." Well, that was enough for me, because I knew all about Kelly Fitzpatrick. I didn't take it up any further. I said to myself, "What a dope you are."

PETER POLLACK: What's the reference? I didn't know Kelly Fitzpatrick.

HOLGER CAHILL: I'll tell you who Kelly Fitzpatrick was. So when I got away from him and Jake and all the others I went, I called New York. I called Anne Goldthwaite who came from Alabama, she was an assistant to David Rosen, remember, she was a good painter. I said, "Anne, I've been talking to a man and he is very excited about the work of Kelly Fitzpatrick. In my book he is a second rate academician. What do you think about it, Anne?" "Oh," she said, "he's a little better than that, but not much." That had driven him crazy, so he couldn't see anything else, this Floyd Dell, which showed that he didn't know what the hell he was talking about. He didn't know anything. Well, this was the thing that we had to go up against all the time.

JOHN MORSE: You mentioned, and I'd like a little more information for the record, about these community centers. You, Peter Pollack, you ran one? You organized one?

HOLGER CAHILL: Why don't you turn off the machine.

PETER POLLACK: Let it sit, because the center movement I think we can talk about. All we want to do is make a few remarks for the record. This was to us the most essential thing because it was bringing art into the communities. It was bringing art into communities that never saw art. All sorts of sentimental stories about people walking across the mountains with no shoes, going to see an "oil paintin"' because they heard that there was "an oil paintin"' to be seen in the Tennessee hills, which probably is true, it's no story. But it was more essential than that. It wasn't just sentimental stories. I became interested because I had had a gallery and had shown a group of negro artists and it wasn't because of any political motivation, but out of the fact that I believed that these chaps had tremendous talents. And they were, they were damn talented. But in '38 I took the challenge of building a center and the toughest one to build was the one on the South Side, among the negroes.

JOHN MORSE: You did this on your own?

PETER POLLACK: No, I was working for this great sum of money that he paid me, $175 a month.

JOHN MORSE: You did this as commission, so to speak?

PETER POLLACK: No, I was on the project. I came on the project as a supervisor, same as the rest of us. During

the period, too, they were having me allocate pictures and working with the public, arranging exhibitions, and a lot of other things until the center was built. But you see, none of us took any money at the center. We organized the people. We talked, we came with open hands, he said, "Here, build yourself a building. We'll supply you with exhibitions and artists who will teach. We will supply you with a director, we will supply you with a staff of people who will run this thing for you. It's your structure and it's your property. You own it. But you must feel that you want it. We can't go and build it for you, or pay rent for you." Well, within a short time, we ran an Artists and Models Ball, and we ran a second one, and we went out and I was lecturing 12 times a day. I was on radio, TV, and all the rest of it, trying to raise funds, and always letting somebody else pick up the money. Mr. Abernathy, who was a coal merchant, he took the money, and then when we had a few thousand dollars we bought a building. And we put out something like 65 people who were living in this rat-infested hovel, this beautiful four-story structure which was once owned by Comiskey, who owned the White Sox Park -- put them out and built the most beautiful center in the entire city. Well, everybody of consequence, from Dan Rich, who was the director of the Institute, to up and down the art world came and flocked around us, and wanted to see what we were doing and they were only too glad to come on our board and support us.

JOHN MORSE: What has happened to the center now?

PETER POLLACK: It still. exists. It's still there. It does some work. I just got a letter --it's been years since I've been there. I left in 1942 when I went overseas and I have not been to a negro affair since because I'm interested in art, not negro affairs. If I had stayed there I'd have become a professional negro, as it were, carrying a banner for the negro, and I didn't want to do that. I wanted to stay in the art world.

JOHN MORSE: About how many of the art centers that were established during the great years, about how many of them are still flourishing today? Do you have any idea?

HOLGER CAHILL: That's hard to know. That's a project in itself. There were 103 altogether, that we founded all over the country.

PETER POLLACK: Some of them -- I know Salem, Oregon, still exists.

HOLGER CAHILL: Salem, Oregon. Sioux City.

PETER POLLACK: The one in Des Moines grew out of an art center.

HOLGER CAHILL: The one on the south side of Chicago.

PETER POLLACK: The one in Harrisburg.

JOHN MORSE: It would be interesting though, to find out exactly what happened.

HOLGER CAHILL: ... an inter-racial center.

PETER POLLACK: Oh, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis.

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, the Walker Art Center was founded...

PETER POLLACK: Now it's the Walker Center, I think it's called.

HOLGER CAHILL: But the thing is that in St. Louis, which is right on the edge of the Confederate states, you know, they have an inter-racial center, with negro and whites working together. And they have negro supervisors and white supervisors. I went down there several times. It was taken over by the city as an example of inter-racial collaboration. It's still there. The city took it over after the WPA took its hands off, you see.

PETER POLLACK: You had dedicated, altruistic people in those days, and John, that's the thing that made the projects what they are. You had human beings who were involved with preservation of culture and the development of the people of America, and this was true -- and this was not Communism, this was not Communist-infested people. These were idealistic human beings who really wanted to produce something lasting.

JOHN MORSE: Eddie, if one were to, as I told you earlier, really make a whole study of the New Deal and the arts, how would you break it down? We've talked chiefly about painting and sculpture, but whom should I go to see about the writers project.

PETER POLLACK: Or the Index of American Design.

JOHN MORSE: Yes, the Index, for example. Were they your jurisdiction?

PETER POLLACK: Who conceived that idea, Eddie?

HOLGER CAHILL: That was basically conceived by Romana Javitz.

JOHN MORSE: Of the New York Public Library?

HOLGER CAHILL: Picture Collection of the New York Public Library. Romana can tell you, she conceived it and Ruth Reeves, who was the supervisor of the New York project. She took the idea, but she could never write it up and it was finally written by Romana. When the project was over I went around to try to find out -- you see, I had written an introduction to a book published by Macmillan under the auspices of the National Gallery, and I went around to try and find out exactly who did what there. Now, Ruth Reeves claims that she did everything on the project, not only the idea, but also the project technique of recording. Now you know, that's where she made a mistake with me, because I knew exactly who had devised those recordings. Those recordings came from the work of a man named Smith, who had been the recorder of Egyptian textiles for the Boston Museum, and he had an assistant, Suzanne, she's up there, she's written a book about recordings -Suzanne Chapman.

JOHN MORSE: What do you mean by recordings?

HOLGER CAHILL: You take a textile and you make a drawing out of it.

PETER POLLACK: A facsimile drawing, but it's done by-freehand, watercolor freehand.

HOLGER CAHILL: That technique was devised by Smith, who recorded the textiles for the Boston Museum. That is, made drawings of them. Then) started to dig up, and I found that the original idea really came from Romana Javitz. I went up to see Javitz and I tried to get her and Ruth together to talk about it, and Ruth never showed up at any of these appointments. So I said to hell with it, if she doesn't want to show up. So I just said it was Romana in this introduction of mine.

JOHN MORSE: Are these recordings, or drawings, as you call them, they are the ones that are now on deposit at the National Gallery in Washington?

HOLGER CAHILL: That's right.

PETER POLLACK: You know, these are superb drawings. And again, you had to find a particular kind of a talent that could copy every thread in a piece of tapestry, or a piece of weaving, and the exact color, and you see these things and the reproduction is just incredibly accurate.

JOHN MORSE: I remember them very clearly. Now what about the writers project, Eddie? To whom should I go for an interview about the writers project?

HOLGER CAHILL: They had two directors, or three. The first director was Henry Alsberg, who was fired, I think in 1939. Then John Newsome, who lasted until the beginning of the war when he resigned to become a Captain in the Army, or something like that. The third writer was Colby, I can't remember his first name. I basically appointed him at the end there, because Newsome felt so bitter about the fact that I had been chosen over him to become the general director of all the projects. I begged him to come, but he wouldn't do it, so I chose Colby. Colby was a good man. He wrote a book about Alaska. He was sent up there to write a book about that.

JOHN MORSE: This was the project that produced all the WPA state guides?

HOLGER CAHILL: That's right.

JOHN MORSE: Now what about Roy Stryker and his amazing photographs that illustrated some of those guides?

HOLGER CAHILL: That was a different project. That was FSA.

PETER POLLACK: Farm Security Administration. I wrote a chapter about him in my book. You simply ought to get a tape on Roy, because this is one of the extraordinary people of our day.

JOHN MORSE: Well, apparently it was a collaboration between your two departments too.

PETER POLLACK: No.

HOLGER CAHILL: No.

JOHN MORSE: Well, wait. The writers project used the photographs that...

PETER POLLACK: Oh, so did a lot of other publishers. This was in the Archives, this was in the file, you could take

it. You Have Seen Their Faces, no, that's not

HOLGER CAHILL: You Have Seen Their Faces.

PETER POLLACK: Those are photographs by Margaret Bourke-White, and Erskine Caldwell, her husband, did the writing.

HOLGER CAHILL: Was he married to Margaret Bourke White?

PETER POLLACK: He was at the time, surely. But Twelve Mil/ion Black Voices with Dick Wright and photographs taken from the FSA. Archibald MacLeish's book with pictures from the FSA. Oh, there were a number of books that were taken and made by private publishers.

JOHN MORSE: Where are those photographs now?

PETER POLLACK: In the Library of Congress.

JOHN MORSE: Some of them were deposited with the New York Public Library, too.

PETER POLLACK: Well, no reason why they shouldn't if the negatives can make a number of prints. I have a number of prints myself and there's a lot of prints I saw up at the Eastman House up in Rochester. But Roy Stryker really was another one of these dedicated people, who is a professor here at New York University and went down with Rex Tugwell. Remember the name?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, he was under Rex.

PETER POLLACK: He and. Rex did a book together.

JOHN MORSE: What about the theater project?

HOLGER CAHILL: Hallie Flanagan. She would be the best person to go and see about that, or somebody that she directs you to. I can give you her address, I've got it here somewhere.

JOHN MORSE: She is in New York somewhere?

HOLGER CAHILL: She is up in Poughkeepsie. She was head of theater for Vassar and then she went up to Smith later, but toward the end there she developed Parkinson's disease and she's not very well. She lives at, I think I have got her address here and I can find it for you.

JOHN MORSE: All right. These are the main areas, are they not? Painting and sculpture, which we have discussed; easel painting and murals, but there again, however, the murals were also under another administration.

HOLGER CAHILL: No, that was another segment there. You see, we had a big mural project. And as a matter of fact, we had a good training set up for mural painters, because most of the very good mural painters came right out of our project.

PETER POLLACK: Gus Dalstrom is a good example.

HOLGER CAHILL: Sure, Gus Dalstrom in Chicago, or Philip Guston in New York. All these people. These had been brought out under the Federal Art Project.

PETER POLLACK: Well, explain, Eddie. You could take an old school and Eddie's projects could send an artist in for the cost of the materials, to go and do a fresco or a canvas painting, or do a mural. The other one was the Treasury Department, only new buildings, had a certain amount of money put aside which was spent for decor. And they hired artists.

JOHN MORSE: And that was called what?

PETER POLLACK: That was called the Federal Art and Treasury Buildings.

HOLGER CAHILL: It was under the Section of Fine Arts.

JOHN MORSE: Under the WPA, let me repeat this, in addition to what you told us about painting and sculpture, under your supervision was also theater, Hallie Flanagan.

HOLGER CAHILL: No, that was later.

PETER POLLACK: This is when he was closing the projects.

HOLGER CAHILL: When the thing began there were four directors. There was myself for arts, and there was Henry Alsberg for writing, Hallie Flanagan for theater, and Nikolai Sokoloff for music. And then there grew out of them some other directors, for instance, under writing there was a fellow by the name of Evans who later became Librarian of Congress and later became ....

JOHN MORSE: Yes, he wrote those interminable letters.

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, and also became the head of culture for UNESCO. He really was a prime dope, when you come down to it.

PETER POLLACK: But now you understand, John, so we have these four different projects. Eddie was in charge of one.

JOHN MORSE: In charge of one, and the other three, then, were theater, music, and writing?

PETER POLLACK: Right. And writing did its own guidebooks and theater did

JOHN MORSE: Well really, to pursue the subject thoroughly, I should interview the other three people.

PETER POLLACK: Precisely.

HOLGER CAHILL: Certainly. This is a very good idea. Go up and see Hallie Flanagan. But you see, the point is that with writing, Henry Alsberg really didn't publish most of those books. It was Newsome that did most of that. He's dead. And Colby is somewhere. You can get hold of him. He wrote a book, something about The Big Secret, and he wouldn't be too hard to find.

PETER POLLACK: Colby what?

HOLGER CAHILL: Something Colby.

JOHN MORSE: You don't recall his first name. And music, the things we haven't discussed at all.

HOLGER CAHILL: Nikolai Sokoloff

PETER POLLACK: And then there's that music critic on the West Coast, he's in Los Angeles.

JOHN MORSE: Frankenstein?

PETER POLLACK: No, no. That's San Francisco. Frankenstein knows a lot too. What is that other chap's name? I can't think of his name at the moment. Don't forget, whenever you do the music you must get to see Isler Soloman. He's in Indianapolis.

[BEGIN TAPE TWO]

JOHN MORSE: This is a continuation of the interview with Mr. Holger Cahill, the head of the former WPA Art Project, for the Archives of American Art. The place is 12 East 8th Street, Mr. Cahill's apartment. The date is April 15, 1960, and the interviewer in John D. Morse. Mr. Cahill, what impressed me very much the last time we spoke was the number of exceptionally outstanding painters of today who were on the project. I did not know, for example, that Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock... Now tell me about Jackson Pollock.

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, you're quite right in saying, Mr. Morse, about the number of leaders of American art, that is of American art today, the art that has impressed Europe terrifically, and who've been shown all over the world. It was very great. And Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, of course, were among them. The curious thing about Willem de Kooning was that he was not an American citizen, and this, I think, is one of the things that we can put down to the generosity of Uncle Sam. That he allowed aliens to work on the program until finally Congress got mad and said you can't hire them anymore.

JOHN MORSE: Well, how was that problem resolved?

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, it was resolved by a resolution of Congress. I never saw the thing myself, but we were ordered not to have any more aliens on the project, and Bill de Kooning, who was on the project -- By the way, Bill de Kooning last spring, he is in a very different situation now than he was in those days, when he was struggling for $24 a week on the project. He sold out an entire exhibition at the Janis Gallery. And the story is that every one of those pictures was sold for $14,000. They were large paintings.

JOHN MORSE: $14,000 a piece?

HOLGER CAHILL: $14,000 a piece.

JOHN MORSE: That's quite a step up from the project and the days of $24 a week.

HOLGER CAHILL: I should say so, and of course Jackson Pollock's paintings -- of course, poor Jackson is dead. The latest sales that I have heard of his mentioned is one to the Metropolitan for $30,000.

JOHN MORSE: Yes, so I've heard. Well, did he actually begin his style of painting by which we know him now on the project?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, he did, and that story that I've just talked with the supervisor that I remembered, Burgoyne Diller, and I called him up and I said, "Diller, I think I remember you telling me about how you and some supervisors went to see Jackson Pollock because he hadn't registered in with the project for some time. It seemed to be a mixed up situation." He said, "Well, it wasn't supervisors. It was 1, personally, that did it. I went to see him. And the thing came about in this way. I was supervisor on the mural project at that time, but Jackson was on the easel project."

JOHN MORSE: You're quoting Diller now?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, this is what Diller said. "And one day Philip Guston" -- Philip Guston is another of these leaders, that's another great name that's come out of the project -

JOHN MORSE: Philip Guston. Another member of the project?

HOLGER CAHILL: "Came to see me and said, shall we start looking into the situation of Jackson Pollock, because he seems to be in a bad psychological frame of mind and the only person that he will talk to from the project" -- didn't seem to like the project people very much --"'And the only one that he will talk to is you, Diller,' he said. 'I'll talk to Diller."' So Guston said that the thing is that he isn't painting as he used to. He's just throwing paint all over the place. And at that time Guston hadn't made his change over into contemporary art and I think he may have been a little bit questionable about -- questioning about some of the things that Jackson Pollock was doing. Well anyway, Diller went to see Jackson, and he found his early examples of that abstract expressionist style, or the American action painting, or whatever you want to call it. Of course, the British say "American-type painting," and Diller said, "Why don't you bring them in?" "Oh no," he said, "I won't have anything to do with that." But he was a poor boy. Twenty-four dollars a week meant a great deal to him at that time. So, he says, "Diller, I picked out some things that I though would pass all right with the project people." And I said, "Bring those in will you, Jackson?" And he picked out some things that were presented to the then-supervisor of the easel project, a fellow by the name of Lloyd Rollins, who had formerly been the director of the Dallas Museum. A very strange man, as you may know. And anyway, Rollins says, "Yes, okay." And Jackson went right on the project again.

JOHN MORSE: In other words, as you say the so-called action painting of Jackson Pollock was accepted by the project.

HOLGER CAHILL: Was accepted by the project. The beginning of it, see, it wasn't -- it didn't have the perfection of Jackson's latest work. I have a book here. A book that my wife threw together at the Museum of Modern Art. It may be in these Twelve Americans. See if I can...

JOHN MORSE: That's your wife, Dorothy Miller?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, my wife's Dorothy Miller. This is Philip Guston that I spoke to you about. That brought Jackson to the -- this is his work, but that was a much later development. A development of the last ten years, whereas this thing with Jackson took place in the thirties, just at the edge of the forties. Now, there must be some other things of Jackson's here that I can show you.

JOHN MORSE: This, of course, is one of the catalogues of one of your wife's exhibitions of young Americans.

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes.

JOHN MORSE: What year is this one?

HOLGER CAHILL: That's Twelve Americans. This is Fifteen Americans.

JOHN MORSE: Twelve Americans.

HOLGER CAHILL: Oh, this is where Jackson Pollock is. Now I wanted to show you these later works of Pollock's

that had a certain great perfection about them. And those early works of his that Diller brought around for the project were ....

[INTERRUPTION]

JOHN MORSE: We continue with this interview with Mr. Holger Cahill, aided now by Mr. Peter Pollack, who was an associate of Mr. Cahill's on the project and who is familiar with all of his activities. We are speaking of Jackson Pollock.

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, as I was saying to you, Mr. Morse, Jackson Pollock's early work didn't have the perfection of the things that were sold, say, to the Metropolitan and various other places for $30,000 and up, and I understand that his wife holds many other things valued as highly as that which she will not sell to anybody but a museum.

JOHN MORSE: But in this catalogue you have here in front of you dated 1952, one of your wife's exhibitions, was this Thirteen Americans? Twelve? How many for that year?

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, the is called Fifteen Americans.

JOHN MORSE: Fifteen Americans. There is Jackson Pollock full-fledged.

HOLGER CAHILL: This is very close to the end of his career. He was killed at 44.

JOHN MORSE: But was this the kind of work that he did on the project? That he began doing?

HOLGER CAHILL: He began doing what people called his spaghetti jobs, of the more stringy things like this, you see. But not with the perfection and the terrific energy that was in these.

PETER POLLACK: Eddie, wasn't he a student of Tom Benton at one time?

HOLGER CAHILL: Of course he was. Now, as Mr. Pollack has pointed out, Peter has pointed out, Jackson Pollock was a pupil of Thomas Benton, and he says that when he first came on the project, he was doing those brown soupy things of Benton's, and that went on for some time. Oh, for more than a year or two, and then suddenly Jackson didn't show up. And Diller, urged by Philip Guston, went down to see Jackson at his studio, and as Philip had said to him, he saw a lot of pieces and a lot of throwing around of paint, as Guston said, and he said, "Why haven't you shown up at the project? What's wrong, what's wrong?" "Oh," he says, "I can't work for you any more, you wouldn't want these things anyway. Nobody wants these things of mine." Jackson was in a rather bad psychological state about the whole thing. And Diller said he picked out three or four things there, and he said, "Bring these to the project." And the supervisor of the project, as I said to you, was Lloyd Rollins, formerly director of the Dallas Museum. And he thought these were fine and accepted them. From that time on Jackson went on and developed his style and his great leap into the forefront of American painting didn't take place until after the project was ended, which was in 1943.

JOHN MORSE: Excuse me, about what year was this that he submitted these paintings, in what we now know as his style?

HOLGER CAHILL: It was in the late thirties or early forties. I should have asked Diller just what year it was, but it was somewhere around the time of the World's Fair.

JOHN MORSE: 1939?

HOLGER CAHILL: Because at that time, there was also another man who is in the forefront of American painting, who was on the project in those days. That's Willem de Kooning.

JOHN MORSE: De Kooning, yes.

HOLGER CAHILL: And although Diller didn't give me the year, his mention of de Kooning and the fact that he had to leave the project because Congress had passed a law saying that no aliens could be hired, sort of gives me a clue to the date. And Jackson brought in these things, and then of course he made his great step forward, after these years of apprenticeship, you might say, in this new style on the project. In Peggy Guggenheim's exhibitions at the Art of This Century Gallery which she had on 57th Street.

PETER POLLACK: Well, she bought his things.

HOLGER CAHILL: She bought his things, yes.

PETER POLLACK: And showed them.

HOLGER CAHILL: And showed them. And there is no question that Jackson Pollock spearheaded the so-called abstract expressionism, or American action painting, or American type painting, as they say in England, or tachism [phon. sp.1, as they say in France. Various other names for it, and he was the spearhead.

[Interruption]

PETER POLLACK: First I'd like to ask, Eddie, you were writing on American art, if I remember correctly, before you were ever put on the art project?

HOLGER CAHILL: Oh, yes.

PETER POLLACK: You were with the Newark Museum?

HOLGER CAHILL: That's true.

PETER POLLACK: And you were selected because of your background?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, perhaps this might be as good a time as any to tell that, my own background, and my reaction. You see, I refused the project when I was first offered it.

PETER POLLACK: Really?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes.

PETER POLLACK: Why?

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, because I wanted to go back to writing. I didn't want to get tangled up in this.

PETER POLLACK: We must, for the record, we must say, Eddie, I know three of his books. Three darn good novels.

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, I wrote, oh hell, I wrote a lot of books on American painting in, for instance, the sculpture in the Museum of Modern Art. American Sources of Modern Art, American folk art, Museum of Modern Art

JOHN MORSE: All these before the project?

HOLGER CAHILL: All those were before the project. I wrote about... Then I wrote a monograph on Max Weber and another monograph on "Pop" Hart, and Lloyd Goodrich was kind enough to say afterwards that the book I wrote on Weber, which carried him only to 1930, because that was the year that I wrote the book in, and he said that it was the most perfect monograph on American artists that he knew anything about.

PETER POLLACK: Is that so?

JOHN MORSE: Very fine praise.

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes.

JOHN MORSE: And was Goodrich himself ever connected with the project?

HOLGER CAHILL: No, he was connected with the PWA, because he was working for Mrs. Force then.

PETER POLLACK: Juliana Force at the museum. PWA, Public Works Administration.

HOLGER CAHILL: The Public Works of Art Project which was the Public Works Administration.

JOHN MORSE: As Eddie explained the other day, these both were still under Harry Hopkins, and both supported by the government, but they were separate projects altogether.

HOLGER CAHILL: The source of money for all these projects was Harry Hopkins.

PETER POLLACK: Well, you were saying that your background was You were with the Newark Museum. You were writing catalogues and books and monographs on artists and then Harry Hopkins approached you. Was that it?

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, the thing was, it was fairly more complicated than that, because so many more things happened. My first museum job was at the Newark Museum in which I did publicity for the museum and I wrote a lot of their printed material. The announcements attributed to Mr. Dana were practically all written by me. For a period of seven, let's see, from 1922 to 1929 I was at the Newark Museum, and I put on a great many shows of especially more modern artists selected from the Society of Independent Artists. I was also doing some work for

the Independents because I was connected with them for a long time and I used to run a series of the most fantastic publicity stunts that were connected with that exhibition, such as, for instance, there was one, the ghost artist, and there was one about the famous so-called Inje, Inje, which John Baur at the Whitney Museum wrote about ....

PETER POLLACK: Well, explain that as long as you've made reference to it. What was Inje, Inje?

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, Inje, Inje, it's too long a story to go into, it was based on my seeing a story by a man who was an FRGS, which means a Fellow of the Royal Geographic Society. But I didn't know that a Fellow of the Geographical Society could just be a paid member. It had nothing to do with his scientific standing. Whether this man was a good one or not, I don't know, because I've never seen the book since, but it was about a tribe in South America among the wilder primitives who had only two words in their language, which were eked out by looks, gestures, words, and so forth. And they were the Inje Inje Tribe.

PETER POLLACK: Well, it's a hoax, isn't it?

HOLGER CAHILL: No, it wasn't a hoax. It was written. It was in the book.

PETER POLLACK: But that doesn't mean it's true just because it was written.

HOLGER CAHILL: No, it isn't. But then I said to myself, this would be a very fine, what would be a fine business for just the two elements in an aesthetic program and I started the thing off on that and I gathered together a whole bunch of artists there in, around ' 19 and '20, thereabouts, among them was Mark Tobey and several writers like Malcolm Cowley, and the poet Art Johns were mixed up in it and I had always expected to publish a magazine, but I was poor at that time, and the first thing I knew I had a wife and a kid on my shoulders and I just had to give it up and go to work. But it has always stuck in the memory of many people. For instance, Mark Tobey thought it was one of the most important things that ever hit him in his life.

PETER POLLACK: Which is, Inje, Inje? The fact that you can express anything in two words?

HOLGER CAHILL: No, oh, no. That this Inje, Inje movement, I mean he went up to his studio and he wrote on the wall in great letters, on the plaster wall: AMERICAN ART BORN, THANKSGIVING 1919.

JOHN MORSE: Well, Mr. Cahill, returning to the matter of joining the project, what finally persuaded you that this was the thing to do?

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, you see, I had worked in the museum for nine years. Then I had worked in connection with various exhibitions, such as the Atlantic City Exhibition and then later the exhibition sponsored by Mayor LaGuardia held at the Rockefeller Center and another one, the famous Five Miles of Art, which was run under the auspices of the Salons of America. All you had to do was pay a dollar, or something like that, and your picture would be accepted. Just like the French did.

PETER POLLACK: Tell me this, Eddie. Was there much difficulty in selling the abstract artists to the project with your politicians and your patrons?

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, I can answer that, but let me finish this other thing. I'll answer that for you very simply. Then in 1932, let's see, three years after I left Newark, the Museum of Modern Art approached me and said that Alfred Barr would have to go to Europe for a year's leave and would I come to the museum and take his place for one exhibition, this one, American Painting and Sculpture, and that was the first exhibition I did for the Museum of Modern Art in 1932. I stayed there through the rest of the year and I ran this show and those other two shows there. I ran five shows all together. And then, when I left the Museum of Modern Art, I wanted to go back to writing, that's what I wanted to do. That was the thing that I had on my mind. And when in 1935 I got these calls from Washington, I remember I went up, I was doing some research, and I went up to the Public Library and I came back about one o'clock to the place where I was living in the Rhinelander Building, which has been torn down now, you know, the Rhinelander Terrace. The woman who owned the house said to me, she said, "Mr. Cahill, for God's sake, Washington has called you at least fifteen times since nine o'clock this morning." "Well," I said, "well, they've probably caught up with me, I guess I'd better report in." So I called up and I got this breathless request. "We want you to come down here for a consultation on the American Art Project." And I said, "Well, good God, I don't know anything about that. I haven't been closely in touch with those things, the PWA and ERA and whatnot." "Well, will you come down and talk about it?" "Well," I said, "sure I will." They said, "We'll pay your fare." As a matter of fact, my fare was never paid. It wasn't the government's fault, it was the man who was in charge. A very gentle fellow, but he was a bit drunk and just never did anything about it. So I went down to Washington and had lunch with these people and talked vaguely about this and that and then one person took me aside after we came away from lunch and said, "Look." I had been rather severe in my criticism. I thought it best to tell them, give them, as they say in Australia, the dinkum oil, that is the plain bottom truth on the thing. And this person called me and said, "Now don't be so severe about these things. You know why they

called you down here." I said, "What the hell, I don't know anything about that. I don't know why they called me down here." "Oh," she said, "they want you to take over the project." I said, "No. Listen, don't tell Dorothy. I'm going to get right back and going to get the hell out of here." And I did. Right after lunch I beat it. I went to see Jake Baker and talked with him for a while, and as I sat in his office -- he was Harry Hopkin's assistant, Jacob Baker -- and he asked me about myself and my ideas, and he asked me what I would do if I was running a project like that. And I said, "Well, please understand me, Mr. Baker, I don't want to take any such project in my charge." "Well," he said, "What would you do?" "Well," I said, "I'll tell you this story. I have just come from a trip to the South and I stopped in Chattanooga where I met some people who knew the great old Southern harmony singers, which I think are very remarkable, the music." Did you ever hear of those Southern singers?

PETER POLLACK: No. I don't know them.

HOLGER CAHILL: Oh, boy. They're really something. And I was taken there by an old man and his son. The son was working as an artist, working for a moving picture theater and he made some rather nice pictures that I saw for the ads of motion pictures. And he said to me, "Well," he said, "I wish I could learn more about painting, about art, but," he says, "I can't. There are no pictures here that can help me in any way." This was in Chattanooga. And I said, "Yes, that's true. You'd have to go at least five hundred miles, go to Washington or go to St. Louis or something like that. Those would be the nearest places where you could really look at pictures that would give you something." So I said to Baker, "I would like to put up centers where you could help people like that." Well, that struck his imagination. So anyhow, he was interested in that. And then I walked out of his office.

JOHN MORSE: This, then, was really...

HOLGER CAHILL: I got into the cab and took the train the Washington Station and I was on the Congressional Limited which leaves Washington at four o'clock in the afternoon headed for New York. And there comes up to me a person who had been in one of these conferences and he said, "Why, Mr. Cahill, what are you doing here? Don't you know that an appointment with Mr. Hopkins had been made for you this afternoon?" I said, "Nobody told me that. I don't want the job and there's no use in my taking up Mr. Hopkins' time." Well, this person was stunned. So I came to New York. I remember it was a very windy day and the first person I went to see, I'd heard a good many things about, and this person that was on the train said to me, said, "Well, you know if you don't take this job -- it ,was a person that knew me -"they'll give it to Jonas Lee, President of the National Academy, and that means that nobody but academicians will do anything because you know how sculptures, National Sculpture Society, and all those, handle all those commissions, hands them out to their own members." Well, that shook me a little bit. And I said, "Yes, I guess that's true. Just like a stiletto made out of an icicle." So, when I went to New York I went to see Stuart Davis, who's an old friend of mine. Dorothy was out of town and I went up there. He was living there near 13th Street, I think. And we went across the street to a restaurant. I remember that the wind was blowing through and practically took the table cloths off. And we sat there and talked and I told Stuart about it and he was terribly interested in it. And I said, "Well, suppose that I really were to think of taking such a job as that. I'd like to set up a committee of artists. They could help me on it." I said, "Would you be interested in such a thing?" "Would I be interested?" he said, "I'd be glad, terribly glad." So that, incident after incident, and I said, "Well, I'll call up some people and see what they say about it." So, in the morning, the first thing I did, I called up Dorothy, she was in Nantucket at the time, and I asked her if she would give me some advice about this. She said, "No, you'll have to decide for yourself." And then I asked her, "Would you come down and work with me in Washington?" "No," she said, "I'm better at the Museum of Modern Art. I'll stay there." "Well," I said, "that's too bad." And then I called up Francis Taylor, who was at Worcester, later became director of the Metropolitan, and I asked him about it. And he was one of these people who knew everything about everything and he said, "Oh, yes," he said, "I know all about that. Worst job in the world. There'll be a dead cat coming in the window every five minutes so you'll be lucky if you duck one of them." He said, "You'll never have another friend as long as you live. You'll have certain... Oh, there are so many people, they're all going to hate you." Which of course was silly because they didn't. I always laid that to the generosity of the artists that they would let me get away with it. So Francis said to me, you've got to take the job. 1 said, "Wait a minute, Francis. Here you've been telling me just why I shouldn't take the job so now you come and tell me that I've got to take it." He says, "Sure. An invitation from the government is tantamount to a command." "Well," I said, "not in my book." So I talked to David Rosen. You know him?

JOHN MORSE: Yes.

PETER POLLACK: Yes, he just died.

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, he died. He was 80 years old. And, then it was the next day, Jacob Baker called me up again. He said, "How about it?" I said, "Well, I told you I would give you an answer on Monday." This was, say, about Friday. "Oh," he said, "you can decide right now?" I said, "No, I can't Mr. Baker, and if you have anybody in your mind that you want to take it, please take him, because that would get me out of a very tough decision that I have to make." Well, he hung up, he didn't say anything more. So finally, on Monday he called again. I think he

also called on Saturday, I don't know, because he was absolutely hell-bent for election. And I couldn't understand this very well. I didn't know why the hell he wanted me so much because there were plenty of very good people in the art world. And on Monday when he called me up he asked me, "Well, give me the low down on this thing." And I said, "Mr. Baker, I don't see how I can say no." Well, somehow or another my message was too involved. And he said, "Oh, you're crazy. Don't you realize this is the most important job in American art?" I said, "Did you hear what I said, Mr. Baker?" "Well, what did you say?" I said, "Well, I said that I didn't possibly see how I could say no." "Oh, fine," he said, "come on down right away." Well then, I wondered how in the hell did this happen, all happen. And one of the people that I inherited from the last project, which had been run by Bruce, who had been sent around the country to allocate pictures, or something like that, was a woman named Ann Craton, and she is a sister-in-law of Peter Blume.

JOHN MORSE: The painter.

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, the painter. And Peter Blume had a great reputation, and still has, in the art world. And she said that they'd had some talk about it there and Peter Blume and his wife had both said, get Eddie Cahill. He's just the right man for the job and he's free right now. He isn't doing anything. They knew a great deal about me because I was, you know, I was doing freelance writing, and all that sort of thing. And this had a long range program doing something. So that was, somehow or other, that got-to Baker. That was it, you see. Highly respected artist had said this is the man. And then he jumped at it and my saying "no" you see -- if I'd said "yes" right off, this would have been a different thing. And then he'd say, well, I have to think this over, that I'd wanted the job.

So I took the job and I came down there and the first thing that happened to me in Washington, was the first meal I ate down there gave me a terrible case of enteritis, so my head was woozy, and I didn't know what the hell was the matter with me. And it was hot, terribly hot. And we were in a very hot place, that big auditorium there on 19th Street. And I remember I was sitting there in that office. I didn't have a secretary, I didn't have anything. I didn't even have a typewriter and I was sweating. The sweat was pouring down my face just from the heat, you know, of the place. Washington is one of the hottest holes in the world in mid-summer. And there came into me this wonderful booming, bustling woman, who was connected with some project in Washington. And she said to me, "Well, Mr. Cahill, what are we going to do with all these artists?" And she deposited this pile of letters on my desk from all over the country. I said in a very tired voice, "Well, my dear," I said, "if I ever get a typewriter, and especially if I ever get a stenographer, I'm going to try to answer some of those letters. That's as much as I can say right now." Well, at that time there was an appropriation for this new project, the Federal Art Project Number One, which was to be signed by the president. And this was in, I'd say, about the middle of August, and the president didn't sign that until the first of October. But we had some money from various other projects that we could carry on with, and at that time there was a man by the name of Bruce McClure, who was an assistant to Baker. He was a wonderfully charming fellow, but he was terribly inefficient. And I remember on the 29th of, how many days in September, 30, 30 days hath September, the 30th of September I wanted to go into New York, and I was sore as a boil and I poneyed up about $500 of my own money to fork out to Tom Parker and Edith Holzauer.

PETER POLLACK: You had hired these two people already?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, I'd already hired them and I hadn't heard anything about pay coming to me, and I went into Bruce McClure's office and I cursed him and battered on his desk and I said, "Goddamn your soul, you sons of bitches, here I, you gypped me out of $500 that I've got to pay out to people and I've never heard of a cent coming to me or coming to them. I'm going to tell you, I'm going to walk out of here. I'm going to New York right now and you'll never see me again." Boom. And 1 went out of that place like a thunderbolt. I went to New York and that night, oh, I took Dorothy out and talked with Stuart Davis. Well, the next morning at ten o'clock I got a telephone call from Mildred Holzauer. She said, "Eddie, you'd better come back to Washington right away. The President has signed the fund. We've got five million dollars." It just happened that night, you see.

JOHN MORSE: Five million?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yep.

PETER POLLACK: That was the first money you got?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yep.

PETER POLLACK: And that was supposed to be for the coming year, eh?

HOLGER CAHILL: The coming year. We spent it, a good five million dollars a year.

JOHN MORSE: What were the directives for spending it? Who decided, for example, that an artist should get $94 a month?

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, that's a complicated matter and it can't be answered very quickly. The Treasury directive, the Treasury directors were told how the money should be handled, and fortunately for me and for all the rest of us, we didn't have to handle -- it was not incumbent upon us to handle any of that money. That money was handled by finance men. And I don't know whether finance men are any more honest than anybody else, but I would have been too careless to handle all that money. I would have lost about .... And anyway, this was handled from the finance men at the Treasury in Washington, through the finance men in the state. And they had their talents for that sort of thing. Now when you come to speak of how we hired the artists, it was not a too difficult matter. You had another question back there.

PETER POLLACK: Yes, I asked you a question a long time ago, which comes much better at this moment.

HOLGER CAHILL: What is it? What is it?

PETER POLLACK: When you got this money, were there directives as to the kind of artists that you would hire, meaning could you hire a representational painter or could you hire an abstract painter?

HOLGER CAHILL: The only thing that you ought to live up to was that the person that you hired, in whatever field it was, was of professional standard and that professional standard had to be decided. In the first place, you had a relief administration that handed you those people as being on relief, which meant...

PETER POLLACK: I know, but that's later.

HOLGER CAHILL: No, that was the first thing. That was the first thing. All of those... Hopkins, you see, that whole relief set-up out of Hopkins was a relief administration handled by force account. That is, by timekeeper. And...

PETER POLLACK: You mean in that group there was

HOLGER CAHILL: We asked Hopkins almost immediately to give up a ten percent exemption over and above, which made it possible for us to set up this project, that we could hire good people that we knew about that didn't have to go through the relief channels. And from those people who were made supervisors, we made the supervisors who judged the qualification of the people who asked for the work. Now, we did have some excellent people there and sometimes we would call in people from the outside. Now, for instance, in the state of North Carolina, the place where we first started the art centers, Danny Defenbacher was in charge of the centers down there, but I put a woman who was at that University in Durham -- Duke, Duke, at Durham. Elizabeth Holt. She was over his head. I made her the chief director at one dollar a year. And she was a darn good girl. A very fine woman. And we very often had dollar a year people coming where we didn't think, we weren't sure that our people were up to it. And 1 was never sure of Danny, I could never be quite certain of Danny. And to tell you the truth, I can't be certain of him now.

JOHN MORSE: Who can?

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, anyway. The qualifications of these people were judged by supervisors who would have to supervise them and be responsible for the work they turned in, and the amount of work for them to turn in was based upon one, the fact that the supervisor kept in touch with them and saw what they were doing and that it was the sort of stuff that we wanted and that they checked up on them for that every once in a while, and for the fact that he come into the project with his work. Now that will give you an example, for instance, of how it was with Jackson Pollock -- he didn't feel that the work he was doing was the kind of work that we wanted. Not until Diller went to see him and assured him that we would want this kind of work did he then dare to come into the project and say okay.

PETER POLLACK: Now a lot of these abstract paintings were not allocated. You realize that, John, don't you?

JOHN MORSE: I was going to ask that. Just what did happen?

HOLGER CAHILL: Now let me tell you the story, answer your question, before I was going to tell you this story. The first place we began to send out these pictures was to these art centers. We burgeoned up these art centers. We had nearly a hundred of them going at the end of the first year.

PETER POLLACK: Eddie, that's the one little thing that I know a little bit about. The art center movement. I worked with it for three and a half, four years.

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, yes, okay. Well anyway, we started an exhibition art center program which was in the charge of Mildred Holzauer. And she made up exhibitions to go to these centers all over the country.

JOHN MORSE: I was about to ask you, Peter Pollack, just, this is where you come in, so to speak. Let's get the workings of it.

PETER POLLACK: Let me explain very, very succinctly this tremendous movement. These were centers that were built in sections of the country where one never saw an original painting. Where there was a total absence of art of any kind. Meaning that you did not have to go to the hills of Carolina and go five hundred miles to see an original painting. You could stay in the slums of the city of Chicago on the south side or the west side or the northwest side and not see anything there either. The schools had no art works of anything to mention and there certainly was no place to see it unless you went down to the Art Institute and a lot of people did not go to the Art Institute. Now the point is, from the directive that Eddie gave out to the states to build art centers, he also sent along what we used to call the "Bible," and the primary directive was, the federal government cannot pay the rent, so you proceed and organize a committee and get enough money so that they -- that is, let them get enough money together so that they will build some kind of a structure or rent some kind of a place. Once you have that done, we can come in with the project's craftsmen, because there were craftsmen as well as painters, and there were carpenters a lot, especially on the Illinois project, where we had been given a directive suddenly to go and hire five hundred people and so a rug making project and a book-making project, bindery, et cetera, poster making project suddenly developed with this new help, which was untrained help. That came later though. But at that time, 1938, when I came to work for the project, this was a tremendous challenge and as I told you the other day, this was a, well, I had to take a tremendous cut in salary because I had to work for the government and it was a full-time job and it was just about twenty percent of what I was making prior to that time. But it was worth it because I felt that here was a tremendous challenge and also be part of a movement that I respected highly. Further, most of my friends, who were artists, and at that time I had an art gallery as well, and I had to close that, were on the projects. So the toughest job of it all was to try and build a center in the very heart of the slum of the city of Chicago, which was the negro neighborhood. Further, several years before I had given negro artists an exhibition. It was a group of negro artists that I knew and I gave them an exhibition in the small gallery that I conducted, which was a print gallery, primarily, because I was interested in printmaking rather than in painting at the time. And I saw some of these talents. After the center was built here came in people who today are internationally known for their painting. Men like Eldzier Cortor, Henry Avery, Charles White, Charlie Davis, Sebree, and Neil who died, et cetera. There were a great number of chaps with tremendous talents. Henry Avery was a chap about six foot two, who was a huge man. He used to sling a sixteen pound sledge hammer killing cattle in the stock yards for a living before he came to work for $94 a month. He was out of work, he was on relief for all those .... He used to paint in this little group, here he is on the projects. Well, what they did from Washington was to send exhibitions to the art centers. Later, in turn, I arranged many exhibitions of negro artists' works and sent them on tour throughout the entire country, throughout the centers of the nation.

JOHN MORSE: That is then, each art center in itself produced exhibitions for other art centers?

PETER POLLACK: Indeed so, indeed so, because, especially this one, which had so many great talents, really fine talents. And so this work, as they brought it in, we had --you see these chaps were working as painters and sculptors, et cetera, at he art project. They were supposed to bring in their painting too, if they were on the easel project. Having been sent to the center they became teachers so many hours per week, but they were still expected to paint. So they brought in their work to the art project and not .... They were given time off for the hours they gave to teaching. These things then were brought in, assembled at the art project and given to the art center. I had them in the art center and was giving them around, having them allocated to various not-for-profit institutions.

JOHN MORSE: Well, this raises a very natural question. Out of all the hundreds, literally thousands of easel paintings that were produced under the project, where are they today?

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, you see, we had as many at one time as a hundred and three art centers. I think that's the highest number we had.

JOHN MORSE: One hundred and three throughout the country?

HOLGER CAHILL: One hundred and three.

JOHN MORSE: In every state?

HOLGER CAHILL: No, they weren't in every state. It all depended upon where we had an artistic population. There were states, for instance like North Dakota, that didn't have any. But Ray Parker, whose art is very well known in New York, he got his first art education in a center in Sioux City, South Dakota. And those are -- evading your question for a minute, John, let me just say this, that the business of the abstract pictures, what the acceptance of those was, is quite readily answered. There was a woman in Oklahoma by the name of Nan Sheets. A great big Oklahoma woman.

PETER POLLACK: She's still there and she's running a big show.

HOLGER CAHILL: Oh, well, she's quite a girl. Well, Nan Sheets, before I ever met her, Tom Parker brought in a

letter to me from her to him, that said, "Tom, the exhibitions that are being sent down here, I'm quite sure that you are not. responsible for them. I know it's that boss of yours, Cahill. He's forcing you to send these things to me and I want you to know that we don't like these things." This was abstract art, you see, more or less abstract. Something that every person wouldn't understand. Within six months that woman was demanding the kind of art that she had protested against six months before.

JOHN MORSE: Who were some of the artists? Did they come from all over?

HOLGER CAHILL: Oh, yes, all over, New York, people from New York.

JOHN MORSE: Stuart Davis?

HOLGER CAHILL: Stuart Davis, anybody. And so that that wasn't too difficult, but the allocation ....

JOHN MORSE: Yes, now back to my question, where are the paintings today?

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, to answer that question I'll simply say that there is only one way to try to find out and that would be in the archives in Washington. We would have to go through thousands of records from all over the states.

PETER POLLACK: Well, I can tell you a little bit about it.

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, I can tell you something about .... When we were finally allocating the things from Chicago, you remember that time when Mildred Holzauer came to Chicago from Washington, and I did and so did Eddie Rowan and you know, the print curator from the Chicago Art Institute.

PETER POLLACK: Schniewind.

HOLGER CAHILL: Schniewind came down there and Schniewind, I and Eddie Rowan, we were the jury and we selected prints, and somebody else was there for the paintings, outside of the projects, and we sent -- you see, Mrs. Roosevelt had said to Florence Kerr, who was technically the administrative head of the project, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could have these paintings from the WPA project to give to the rooms of these girls that work in Washington?" There were hundreds of them, literally thousands. And I realized that a directive that I had cleared with Florence Kerr's legal department and her assistant had been held up for over a month while I was on a trip. And I came back red-headed. Florence Kerr's assistant, he didn't .... He said, "I've told Florence that I can't take this to you, Eddie," he said, "You'll have to take it up with her." He said, "I've told her that you'll tear the roof off the place." I said, "Well, there's no sense in my tearing the roof off the place. But, I will tell her that she's going to be in a hell of a soup if these things aren't allocated right." And I threw a scare into her so she got this thing out right away. But we sent at least... I said, we can give Ed Rowan and his people all the work they want and that hardly begins to touch the work.

PETER POLLACK: Which was that? The Treasury Department, Ed Rowan?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, he was the Section of Fine Arts, basically.

PETER POLLACK: In other words, this was going to be for federal buildings?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, for federal buildings.

PETER POLLACK: And this is work given him?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, and we gave them from Chicago.

PETER POLLACK: I know.

HOLGER CAHILL: I don't know how many thousands... thousands of prints and hundreds of easel paintings...

JOHN MORSE: Where are they today? Where are they, for the record?

PETER POLLACK: Let's explain for the record so there'll be no question about it. The directive was to allocate pictures for the mere costs of the materials to not-for-profit institutions: educational, hospitals, hospitals which were run by city, state and federal, not privately owned hospitals even if they were not-for-profit organizations, eh, what else, Eddie? Museums.

HOLGER CAHILL: Anything at all that was tax supported and wasn't a private institution.

PETER POLLACK: And then they could be eligible to receive these things. Thousands and thousands of these

things were actually allocated. And I don't know how much money came back to the government through the allocation of this material. I don't know, John, but I'll say this, when the projects were closing there were still thousands of pictures left over that you simply had to do something with and something had to be done quite drastically.

HOLGER CAHILL: But not to burn them.

PETER POLLACK: No.

JOHN MORSE: Good. They were not burned.

PETER POLLACK: No, not burned. Now, Eddie, you take it from there. What happened to some of these things which were left over? A lot of it was junk, mind you. A lot of it was junk. Some of it was junk. In this directive that Florence Kerr wouldn't sign, was that we shouldn't ask for any kind of a return, get money for it, because the project wasn't going on anymore, anyhow.

PETER POLLACK: And you had no room to store it.

HOLGER CAHILL: We had no room to store it. So she put in her directive, finally, that nothing should be asked, just if it's a tax-supported institution and they say they want it, that's enough. The fact they want it. Give it to them.

JOHN MORSE: Well, has either of you two gentlemen seen in a public building or hospital any one of the pictures that might have been produced?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, yes. The frames were monstrous. I never saw a decent frame come out of the projects. And the frames were so damn dated with their prison gray, or battleship gray that they really ruined the pictures, but there were some darned good pictures that I've seen in buildings and schools and hallways and so on.

JOHN MORSE: About how many pictures, prints and things would you estimate were produced by the project?

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, that goes into the hundreds of thousands.

JOHN MORSE: Hundreds of thousands?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, but prints, or course

PETER POLLACK: Prints was an entire edition. Either twenty-four or thirty-six or forty-eight or

JOHN MORSE: And these prints and paintings are today presumably hanging in public places.

PETER POLLACK: They are hanging, they are hanging. Arid they're not sold. They're not allowed to be sold. They're owned by the government. Given to the people.

HOLGER CAHILL: You can see very fine things at the Museum of Modern Art.

PETER POLLACK: There's a collection there.

HOLGER CAHILL: There's a collection there. There's Jack Levine's famous Feast of Pure Reason, which is probably the best picture he ever painted in some ways.

JOHN MORSE: Was it a project picture?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, of course.

PETER POLLACK: It hangs there?

JOHN MORSE: Hanging in the Museum of Modern Art?

HOLGER CAHILL: It's hanging there now, but shown every so often.

PETER POLLACK: Shown every so often?

JOHN MORSE: It was given to them free?

HOLGER CAHILL: No, it wasn't given to them. It belongs to the Brooklyn Museum because they are tax supported, but they, they're the ones who lent it to the Museum of Modern Art.

PETER POLLACK: Eddie explained that the last time, but let us get this on record so there'll be no question about it. You undoubtedly will be hearing as you interview people about this point, that a lot of the stuff was sold or given away to private people or that is was sold for junk.

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes.

PETER POLLACK: Part of that is true.

HOLGER CAHILL: Part of it is true.

PETER POLLACK: There was a junk man somewhere outside the city of Chicago.

HOLGER CAHILL: I can tell you that story.

PETER POLLACK: And I don't know that story. Would you tell it?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, well, there was a junk man down here, fellow by the name of Roberts. Was down on....

PETER POLLACK: Here in New York.

HOLGER CAHILL: On Lafayette Street somewhere and 1 have a story about that which was written in PM. Life came out with a story and it was a particular phony because it said this is what happened to your 35 million dollars that you spent on these projects. And then they showed these pictures that had been sold for junk. They had been sold by the procurement division, who took over all our property the minute our project was dead, you see. And the paintings were sold for canvas. Eight cents a pound or something like that. And people came into this place and bought it at the auction and then they were resold for a little more money to somebody who knew the good pictures and they were first class pictures all around the place from the project, in these little galleries. And I went down to that Roberts with a girl who was a reporter from PM and I've got that story around here somewhere. And Dorothy can find it if you want to see it. I'll show it to you because that story ....

PETER POLLACK: That's got to go in the record.

HOLGER CAHILL: I wrote a savage letter to Life and] pointed out to them that the artists that they had hired for the Great War job, there were eight or nine of them ....

PETER POLLACK: You know, the artists war correspondents.

HOLGER CAHILL: There were, most of them were from the project.

PETER POLLACK: Why, even the one who was killed on the

HOLGER CAHILL: The first man that was killed on that .... Was a Gaston somebody from Chicago, a very nice Frenchman whom I knew. I really rubbed it into them. And then I called up Bill McCleery, who was the feature editor of PM at that time. He's now connected with the Ladies Home Journal. He's a damn clever fellow. And he sent a very clever girl over to see me by the name of Lillian Ross.

PETER POLLACK: My Lord. That's the Lillian Ross of the New Yorker fame, was she
the girl?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, that's right. She took the pants off Hemingway.

PETER POLLACK: Yes, that's the one with a built-in memory.

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, yes, she's a woman with a built-in memory and she came in to see me. This rather short, plump, Jewish girl wearing dark glasses, and with very little to say and I greeted her in a very friendly way and then we went down to this place and I answered all her questions. And I said to myself, this woman is deeper than she seems to be. And of course, the story that she wrote is a lulu. She made Luce's -- she spent five days pursuing Luce around and he just had to leave town to get rid of her. What a girl. And then later, I remember she wrote a story about Hemingway.

PETER POLLACK: Oh, I remember that story. She took Hemingway apart. And just by his own quotes too. That was the thing.

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, by his own quotes. You see Hemingway thought

PETER POLLACK: Let's not get off on Hemingway.

JOHN MORSE: Yes, after all ....

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, anyway ....

PETER POLLACK: What happened to the material? Now this is one part of it.

JOHN MORSE: What happened to the material? Yes.

PETER POLLACK: These chaps bought the whole thing legally for eight cents a pound.

HOLGER CAHILL: As canvas.

PETER POLLACK: As canvas.

HOLGER CAHILL: We didn't have any more control over that according to government regulations.

PETER POLLACK: This was during the war?

HOLGER CAHILL: This was during the war.

JOHN MORSE: About what year?

HOLGER CAHILL: Any administration that closes -- this must have been an 1944, 45 ....

PETER POLLACK: It was after the projects had closed?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, the projects had closed and the procurement division that had taken over all our assets sold them in various ways.

JOHN MORSE: I see.

PETER POLLACK: Because there was a chap I knew in Chicago who said he'd bought these in a junk shop and he'd paid something like four or five dollars a canvas and he'd bought an Ivan Albright. Now you know what Albright's canvases go for.

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, extraordinary.

JOHN MORSE: I see. So it was the procurement division of the government that sold them?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, according to federal law.

JOHN MORSE: What was the date of the closing of the project?

HOLGER CAHILL: June 1943.

JOHN MORSE: Forty-three?

HOLGER CAHILL: June 30, 1943. The end of the fiscal year '43.

JOHN MORSE: Then the pictures that were not at the time already allocated were put up for sale?

HOLGER CAHILL: No, they weren't put up for sale. They became the property of the procurement division for them to do with what they wanted.

PETER POLLACK: John, you must recognize this. Let's explain this. I was already gone, but I know something of what happened because it had been started already even before I left. Eddie was closing the projects. The projects were on state control. There then became an order directive from the Army. "We need people who can draw maps." These artists, some of these artists were very good map men. They became map designers, or map makers. Also they wanted to go into silkscreen educational plaques and tremendous prints, which were used in teaching the boys what a machine gun was like, or to break a rifle apart, et cetera. You see, this is the way the projects were used, and talents of the artists were used. This is something they could understand very easily and readily and respect it. Meanwhile the storerooms were bulging with some of the pictures that were left unallocated. That's where they must have been picked up and sent to Washington and sold.

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, I can tell you, I can give you a much sharper clue to what happened here. You see, Audrey McMahon had been the director of this project and she was always suspicious of me and Mildred Holzauer and used to hide a lot of stuff away from us. I knew that, but I didn't pay much attention.

JOHN MORSE: Well, how could she hide it?

HOLGER CAHILL: Oh, she, well, there were store rooms. We couldn't go through all her storerooms and all her rooms of storerooms, you know. 1 had once come down on her here quickly without her knowing anything about it and gone through a whole storeroom there. And gosh, she thought that was an insult that she couldn't endure. But then, she had this storeroom out in Long Island somewhere where most of these things were. The project director had changed from her and she forgot all about it and Diller, he knew nothing about it. And this was just a business of a mouse hiding things and then memory failing, hers. And this was it.

PETER POLLACK: A tremendous cache of pictures out on Long Island and she forgot about it completely?

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, and I broke with Audrey completely about that because when the story came out, 1 didn't know, the story in Life, I called her up and her usband was alive then, McMahon, Professor McMahon, and he said, "Oh, well, you know, she's so busy she can't ...." Now I said, "Look, Mr. McMahon, I'll call your wife when she's home." So I called her up and I talked to her about this thing, about the story in Life and whatnot, and one of her supervisors, this little Rollins who'd been down in Dallas. He had said, "Oh, well, from the looks of those pictures, they're just the sort of pictures that have been selected by Miss Holzauer and Mr. Cahill for the National Exhibition Program, and it must have come from them." Which is nonsense because Mildred was in charge of that place out in Chicago and there wasn't a thing left in the place after she left there. And so I called Audrey up and I told her about it and she said, "Oh, Eddie, you'll have to excuse me, I'm having someone to dinner." I said, "Now, wait a minute, Audrey. You can wait until I tell you just the few things I have to tell you. And I don't want any help from you because you're too goddamn treacherous to ever help anybody. And as I've just told your husband what I think of you in these things, and as I told you in your own home some months ago!" You see I used to really ball the shit out of her. She was a tough woman, the only benefit she had was that she was tough enough to face those big administrators but when you really broke her down as I broke her down, she would become a weeping wreck. Well, anyway, and I said, "I don't want any of your help. I said, "I'm going to answer this thing myself. I'm going to have something to do with it. I don't want any help from you and nothing at all," and I slammed up the receiver and I almost broke the telephone I was so goddamn mad. I have never looked at her, and when she sees me she puts her head down, she knows she's wrong.

PETER POLLACK: What's happened to her?

HOLGER CAHILL: Oh, heavens, she never did anything in the art world. She's doing publicity or something.

PETER POLLACK: Speaking of difficult people, Eddie, in the supervisory capacity, before my time in Illinois there was a woman named Increase Robinson, I remember, who gave back $90,000, who said she could not find enough artists in the city to spend the money. What was that story about?

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, we became rather disturbed about increase Robinson because there -as A matter of fact the upper-shot echelons of the administrative force there in Chicago were very much disturbed by her because, you know, they couldn't answer all these questions from the labor people that came around. And so I sent Tom Parker out there to look her over and we had made up our minds that if we had to change directors in Chicago, a man here in New York, George Thorpe, would be a good man to put in her place. And Tom Parker went out there and he found her and this half-Indian assistant that she had, a strange woman, he didn't find them very cooperative. So, he hadn't known Increase as long as I had, I was a little more gentle with her than he was, so he just sort of said, "Mrs. Robinson, we accept your resignation as of now." And telegraphed for Thorpe and we brought him in there.

PETER POLLACK: And that's all there is to that.

HOLGER CAHILL: That's all there was to it.

JOHN MORSE: Who were some of the other regional directors who either posed problems or produced wonderful results?

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, there are many who produced wonderful results. The whole project personnel at the lower echelons of the project. Some of these regional directors, you see, had been taken over. Increase Robinson was taken over directly from PWAP. She'd been the head of that in Chicago. And she had their ideas. You see this business of quality and the quality ....

PETER POLLACK: And the quality that became practically your academy, wasn't it?

HOLGER CAHILL: Quality was the thing that -- quality is what I say it is. In other words, that was her idea.

JOHN MORSE: Excuse me for interrupting you. The PWAP again is?

PETER POLLACK: Public Works of Art Program, where the other was the Works Progress Administration.

HOLGER CAHILL: And Increase Robinson was standing in the way of hiring a lot of artists which we thought -- I mean for instance, Mitchell Siporin, who is now the head of Brandeis University, Fine Arts Department. He said he was going looking for a job on the project, he couldn't get on. This woman had turned him down, and he showed me some of his drawings of Chicago, Anarchist. They were a wonderful set of drawings.

PETER POLLACK: Sacco and Vanzetti.

HOLGER CAHILL: And he also sent me a copy of a mural design, the Prairie Poet.

PETER POLLACK: That's right. Well he and Millman won a $29,000 mural award.

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, he did. So I wrote back to Siporin and I said, "Your mural looks very good, but I can't tell very well in the small sketch what a thing would be as a mural. However, I must say that your drawings are wonderful. I think they're perfect and I see no reason why you shouldn't be hired." And I wrote to Increase Robinson, and so it took me a long time to get her to hire him. You know, she, there was something wrong with him you know.

PETER POLLACK: Well, sure, there was something wrong with him because he wasn't born on the right side of the tracks. Snobbish kind of a female.

HOLGER CAHILL: Well, she was a snobbish female, but she wasn't anybody particular herself, you know. She was a Polish woman and she used her husband's -- Increase Robinson is a Puritan name.

JOHN MORSE: Now, finally

HOLGER CAHILL: There were various other directors who turned out well, and some who didn't turn out too well. For instance, you take a man named Jo Danysh. Did you ever know him?

JOHN MORSE: No.

HOLGER CAHILL: Jo Danysh was a man who was recommended to me in California and I appointed him there and then I appointed a regional man. And I first began to get suspicious of him that he wasn't so very hot, when I went out there on the case of a woman named Marjorie Hoffman Smith, who was an excellent director in Oregon. I went out there and I had lunch with her and her staff there at a lovely place in Portland, and I looked at the things she'd done and I though they were pretty good. And I remember I said to Danysh, "Look, Jo, for Christ sake, I mean, why haven't you sent me more about this woman? Your reports to me don't give me anything." "Well," he said, "Bosnik" -- we used to kid each other -- he said, "I didn't know what you wanted." And I looked at him and I said, "What the hell kind of a man are you? You have to know what I want before you'll tell me anything. Jesus, this is the source of defeat for me and for anybody connected with it." And Jo, then, you see, he went from one thing into another and the last job I heard he had, he had a job on some kind of arts and crafts thing in; across the bay from San Francisco. Yes. I think we can....

JOHN MORSE: Finally, Eddie, is it safe to assume that most of these wonderful catalogues that your wife Dorothy Miller has prepared over the years for the museum -- I have one in front of me -- she has indicated usually whether or not the people were on the project. Here, for example, Baziotes, Corbett, that she has indicated in these catalogues whether or not the people were on the project.

HOLGER CAHILL: Yes, sure. Let me, I can tell you who these people are. Willem Baziotes was an excellent artist who, he was on the teaching program and he taught in the schools in New York and Brooklyn, I think. And he's with one of the big galleries uptown. He's with Kootz. Kootz has him. Corbett was a teacher at that woman's college, Holyoke ....

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Return to Top of Page

Return to List of Archives of American Art Oral History Interviews

Last updated... *October 10, 2003*