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Oral history interview with Edward Landon,
1975 Apr. 17-May 28

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Edward Landon on April 17, 1975. The interview was conducted in Lexon, VT by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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

Interview

ROBERT BROWN: This is an interview April 17, 1975 in Lexon, Vermont of Edward Landon. And I would like you to begin, if you could give some recollection of your growing up in Hartford Connecticut and your family. Anything before what became your career.

EDWARD LANDON: Well I left school when I was 15, high school, and went to Hartford Art School. My marks, I guess, in high school weren't so good and I wasn't interested anyway, and it worked out just as well.

MR. BROWN: Was it the Hartford Art School that worked out?

MR. LANDON: Yes.

MR. BROWN: What did you intend to do at that time when you were 15 years old when you started art school?

MR. LANDON: Well I was interested in all kinds of creative things. The theatre, books and pictures, everything. And fortunately, in Hartford, I got in with a group of people who were doing amateur theatricals and eventually marionettes. I carved the heads and sewed the clothes and manipulated the marionettes and we went around Connecticut giving performances.

MR. BROWN: This was in the twenties. 1926 or 1927?

MR. LANDON: Yes. And then I got the itch to go to Greenwich Village in New York. And I went down there when I was seventeen or eighteen. And I rented a one room place down on Commerce Street in the Village. It so happens that my wife happened to be living across the street a little further down at the same time. But I didn't meet her until twenty-five years later or something like that.

MR. BROWN: What attracted you to Greenwich Village?

MR. LANDON: You know the romantic ideas involved and the people and the art and artists.

MR. BROWN: What training had you had when you went down there?

MR. LANDON: Well when I went down there after high school and I went to the Arts Students League at night. I had a job during the day. I worked in an insurance company down there and then I worked in a lampshade factory. And I worked--I didn't object to working there, you know.

MR. BROWN: You went to the League as much as you could?

MR. LANDON: Yes.

MR. BROWN: What did you particularly study there?

MR. LANDON: I wanted to study figure drawing. That was my main thing. The rest I thought I could do myself, you know. Painting, water color, and anything else I felt I could do.

MR. BROWN: Did you know you needed formal training in figure drawing?

MR. LANDON: Yes, sure. I don't use it now but of course I think drawing is the basis. Drawing shows and everything that you do. I don't see how you can avoid it.

MR. BROWN: And you felt drawing the human figure was challenging?

MR. LANDON: Yes, I think that's seems to be the basis of all kinds of training. One was supposed to do that.

MR. BROWN: What was the teaching like in figure drawing?

MR. LANDON: Well -

MR. BROWN: Was this George Bridgman?

MR. LANDON: Yes, I had him. I had somebody else. Later on I went to the Art Students League again. I wanted more training in drawing and [inaudible] was the teacher then and I liked his approach and his style at that time. And so I went to Mexico in '39. But I am getting ahead of myself here. So 1930 I got married and moved to Springfield, Massachusetts.

MR. BROWN: Did you get a job there?

MR. LANDON: No, I was working then. I went back to Hartford. In '29 I lost my job and had no way of living and I went back to Hartford to see what I could do there. And I went back to the people I had been working with, before the group who was interested in marionettes and so on, and I worked with him. We were going to do some very large marionettes for the theater in New York. It was Roxie's then. I think it is called Radio City Music Hall now, but it was called Roxie's then. We did some gigantic marionettes but the Depression really got bad in '31 and '32. I met my wife in Hartford and she lived in Springfield and married her and moved up to Springfield.

MR. BROWN: Did she go to Hartford?

MR. LANDON: Yes, she was an art teacher. And I commuted to Hartford from Springfield for the work. And I painted in Springfield. I exhibited in the Springfield Art League shows.

MR. BROWN: Was it quite an active art center at that time?

MR. LANDON: Certainly it - yes, it was an active period any way what with the Artist Union and the Artist Congress and all of these things going on, it was a very active period. Looking through these things just reminded me of the tremendous life in the art world existed in the thirties. You've heard this before I'm sure, about the art projects and so on, what a stimulus it was.

MR. BROWN: Even before you got into those groups in the 1930's you began exhibiting in national group shows?

MR. LANDON: Yes.

MR. BROWN: You were still quite young, nineteen or so? But what sort of shows were these? What sort of groups? Were these invitational shows or what?

MR. LANDON: Looking at these old catalogs they bring back things to me that I completely forgotten and I can't remember anything like that. It was so many years ago. These things went out of my mind and other things become important to you and you don't remember these things.

MR. BROWN: Were those things of that importance to you? You got into great shows?

MR. LANDON: Yes, I guess so. Connecticut Academy and things like that. But I noticed in one of the catalogs of the Springfield Art League, on the jury selection where Georgia O'Keeffe, I think Louie Lozowick, and someone else well known - and have them come to Springfield. And I had forgotten that. I met O'Keeffe there. And we went to Taos, New Mexico for one summer and O'Keeffe was there and Paul Strand. A lot of people I can't even remember now.

MR. BROWN: You were fairly close with them?

MR. LANDON: Just knowing them and knowing their work was a very exciting and stimulating thing. And then during the '30's, Gertrude Stein came to Springfield and I met her there. And she came to Springfield to be in the United States for the first performance of *Four Saints in Three Acts* in Hartford. Of course I saw that in Hartford. And all of these things were going on. It was just a wonderful period and artists were cooperative. While we were competitive too there was a genuine feeling of wanting to help each other, I really do. It even went on into the National Serigraph Society. I think the same thing existed there. We carried it right up into the '50s.

MR. BROWN: Why do you think you were so cooperative?

MR. LANDON: Well we had a new idea of serigraphs and serigraphy. And we were all trying to get this thing on the map and we succeeded; we certainly did. We got it into dictionaries and accepted as a fine print medium. It was very difficult in the beginning. Many places wouldn't accept serigraphs. We felt there was something there and that they were good and it was an American idea and it should be accepted as an American print medium.

MR. BROWN: What was the opposition of accepting?

MR. LANDON: Well they thought it was a crude commercial way of printing that had nothing to do with art. But actually it is the only American print medium. The only one.

MR. BROWN: What sort of things were you doing then in painting and in your early silk screens which you began in the mid thirties?

MR. LANDON: Well, the earliest ones were - there was this dichotomy between feeling I should be doing something that had a social significance and what I really wanted to do which was exploring abstract ideas and trying to express them but it wasn't easy.

MR. BROWN: Both had their day during the thirties?

MR. LANDON: Yes, sure. Then of course I got a scholarship from the Solomon Guggenheim for non-objective-- when Hilla Rebay was the director of the Museum of Non-Objective Art so I really went into non-objective painting.

MR. BROWN: This was 1939?

MR. LANDON: Yes. Then I went back to New York and I was there when the draft started but I was turned down because I had stomach trouble. And all through the war I worked there.

MR. BROWN: Back in the thirties you did several things for a living. You built furniture and you also did picture framing. Of course you continued doing these things. But did you have any training or did you teach yourself?

MR. LANDON: No, I taught myself. I never had the nerve to go into any picture framing place for someone to show me how to make picture frames. I just don't have that--

MR. BROWN: You must have had quite an analytical ability then to be able to take them apart and look at them.

MR. LANDON: Well I don't know it is also the question of the right tools; mitre vise and saws and things. And I did all without those things at first. But I taught myself and I finally wrote a book on picture frames which it was the only book at the time published on picture framing. It went into several editions and it was reprinted by another publisher.

MR. BROWN: Was there a great deal of ignorance about proper framing?

MR. LANDON: Well framers kept these secrets. They wouldn't tell anybody how to do something. And now of course you can get all the material you want but at the time you really couldn't get the material. And I wrote this for artists who wanted to do their own frames. Even how to construct molding so that they wouldn't have to buy expensive molding. An altruistic idea but it was successful.

MR. BROWN: When did the book come out?

MR. LANDON: '46; just after the war. I wrote it during the war.

MR. BROWN: In '33 you began working as an easel painter in the Massachusetts Federal Art Project of the WPA.

MR. LANDON: That's right.

MR. BROWN: Were you enrolled, or did approach them, or how did this come about?

MR. LANDON: Well there were a group of artists in Springfield and the director of the museum, I think, was approached. And he knew of these people working so I think he recommended various people. So I think that's how it came about. I think Marian Hughes was the supervisor at that time.

MR. BROWN: Did you thrive under it, do you feel?

MR. LANDON: Yes, I liked it. Of course it's one of those things that probably should have been handled differently because it put a little pressure on the artist to keep producing. I think artists have periods of production and periods of fallow. And this idea of keep turning out work, do a certain amount of work each week, and then come around and see what you've done--

MR. BROWN: Like a piece work system - manufacturing.

MR. LANDON: Sure. I don't think it's a good idea to give an artist full support. I really don't. I think that they should be given certain basic expenses or some sort of support should be provided but not all of it.

MR. BROWN: Were you given full support?

MR. LANDON: No, but at that time it was very – but to get, what was it, \$18.50 a week; it was very good.

MR. BROWN: The amount was almost like full support?

MR. LANDON: Sure. Sure. \$18.50 was all right. I paid \$15 a month rent so it was all right.

MR. BROWN: Then you were on the WPA for how long? Were you on it very long?

MR. LANDON: Until it became a full relief thing and then I couldn't qualify for it.

MR. BROWN: Because you were making a similar income.

MR. LANDON: Yes, and my wife was employed at that time as a teacher.

MR. BROWN: And it was also about that time when you went to the Artists Union?

MR. LANDON: Yes.

MR. BROWN: You became president of the Western Massachusetts Chapter in 1934?

MR. LANDON: Yes, I got the artists in Springfield and around that area to join the union.

MR. BROWN: How did you hear about it? Did someone approach you?

MR. LANDON: Well I knew all these people in New York. I'd been in New York. I think I mentioned last time you were here I mentioned that I wanted to join the artist union in New York. I didn't think at the time of organizing something here, but they told me it would be better if I organized something. I got another local – it's not so funny to talk about--

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible] performing arts. You just said that you think that they shouldn't be wholly subsidized.

MR. LANDON: There were all these contradictions of course. I just have rights, but it doesn't fall into the same category as an assembly line worker; the kind of protection that an assembly line workers needs. So I don't think you can call it a union in that sense. I think a cooperative society is a much better thing instead of something with union. How can you work that out?

MR. BROWN: Did you at that point attempt to try to work out fair price?

MR. LANDON: Well what we wanted were rentals for exhibitions and things of that sort. I forget now what our aims and purposes were used, probably the rhetoric that was used in any union speech didn't have too much relation –

MR. BROWN: Were you pretty angry then?

MR. LANDON: I'm sure. I'm sure of it.

MR. BROWN: What affect do you think you had in say the Springfield area?

MR. LANDON: Certainly most of these artists had never considered anything like that or never heard of – so it was – I had to put it on the basis of we were going to hold exhibitions and then they were interested. They were interested.

MR. BROWN: Was there in that area an overlay of conservative artists?

MR. LANDON: Oh yeah.

MR. BROWN: That wouldn't have much to do with WPA or the union?

MR. LANDON: When they were on WPA they liked it all right, but they were very conservative.

MR. BROWN: Did you have any particular friends among artists at this time in New York or in New York state or western Massachusetts?

MR. LANDON: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Could you mention some of them?

MR. LANDON: At the time I knew Elizabeth Olds, and Harry Gottlieb and Elizabeth McCausland. Many of the artists in New York.

MR. BROWN: Any of the older artists?

MR. LANDON: Soon I became interested in the American group of artists - the O'Keeffe's and Dove and Marin--those people. And they were handled by Alfred Stieglitz at Gallery 291.

MR. BROWN: 291.

MR. LANDON: So I went there and I won a prize in the Springfield Art League Show for a painting. So I took the money and went down to Stieglitz and bought a Marin drawing. At that time it was very interesting having these things. It was all very stimulating too - this group of painters--and I particularly liked Dove's work. During the '30s I corresponded with Dove and asked if I could come up and see him in - I think he was in Geneva.

MR. BROWN: Were you in New York then?

MR. LANDON: Yes, and I went up and stayed with him. That was in early spring and then the following summer, I went up to Geneva and worked because I was with him a great deal, he and his wife.

MR. BROWN: Did you had quite an exchange of ideas?

MR. LANDON: Well he was older than I was of course and I looked on him as a master.

MR. BROWN: Was he a very obliging person, sharing?

MR. LANDON: Very, kind and gentle and helpful, so it was a good experience. These things are all wonderful.

MR. BROWN: So the spirit of cooperation extended across generations among artists at that time.

MR. LANDON: Yes, sure.

MR. BROWN: Elizabeth McCausland was based in Springfield.

MR. LANDON: Yes, she was.

MR. BROWN: Were you closely associated with her?

MR. LANDON: Yes.

MR. BROWN: What was she like then? What was she trying to do?

MR. LANDON: She was really trying to advance knowledge of art I think. And bring knowledge of these people like Dove and O'Keeffe and so on to a wider audience at that time. I think she did a very good job. She was very liberal and always willing to accept new ideas.

MR. BROWN: She wrote for the paper the *Springfield Republican*?

MR. LANDON: The *Springfield Daily Republican*, yes.

MR. BROWN: Her ideas had broader impact -

MR. LANDON: I think so. And she went to New York. She was associated with Berenice Abbott, a photographer. I was friendly with Abbott; I have a lot of her photographs. I exchanged some framing for a photograph. I did this with other artists too.

MR. BROWN: You went in '38 or so back to the Art Students League?

MR. LANDON: Yes.

MR. BROWN: That's when you studied with Josh Sharla John? And then you went in '39 to Mexico. You were particularly interested in the modern Mexican mural work?

MR. LANDON: Yes.

MR. BROWN: What attracted you to it when you got there?

MR. LANDON: Well, I studied with Manny. And I don't know whether it was really necessary to study with somebody, but it was a new way of seeing things.

MR. BROWN: Did you sort of work alongside him?

MR. LANDON: Yes. I carried on my own ideas and he gave me criticism. That about what it amounted to.

MR. BROWN: What was he doing at that point? Did he have commissions he was doing?

MR. LANDON: No, he was just doing teaching at that time.

MR. BROWN: Was he in Mexico City?

MR. LANDON: Yes.

MR. BROWN: And the year before, in '38, in New York, in the New York art project, you got involved with others who were interested in silk screen printing.

MR. LANDON: Oh yes, that's when I first heard of it.

MR. BROWN: Who brought this to your attention?

MR. LANDON: McCausland knew Gottlieb [Harry Gottlieb] and he was on this project and they were talking about it so she told me about this thing. So I went down to New York. I went down every once and so often and I met Gottlieb talked about it and got excited about it. I came back to Springfield and started working on my own. I didn't know anything about it really except that you used silk stretched on a frame. So I brought a piece of silk and stretched it on a frame and tried to force the paint through this tightly woven silk and it turned into a real mess. I found out there was a actually a silk screen course. But I tried to do this on my own too.

MR. BROWN: Did you become happy with the -

MR. LANDON: Oh yes.

MR. BROWN: Did you iron out -

MR. LANDON: Yes, soon as I knew what to do and watched - and then I went in and saw what Gottlieb - what they were doing. Then I went back to New York and I even rented a room in their apartment and stayed there for a while.

MR. BROWN: What is it that particularly attracted you to silk screening?

MR. LANDON: Well the - I loved prints anyway. I couldn't get the equipment to do etchings and blocks and so on. And this made it possible for me to do prints at home without having a lot of expensive equipment. The first thing of course it made it possible. The second thing is I used color and I could produce prints which I liked to do. It was a satisfying medium all the way around.

MR. BROWN: Was color an important thing to you -

MR. LANDON: Yes, when I was painting. I think it just sort of came sort of naturally and that's what I really devoted myself to all during the '40's.

MR. BROWN: And with respect to color during that time and place what did it hold for you in your art? Did you try manipulating it?

MR. LANDON: Color has come to mean more to me now than it did then. I liked color but I didn't have any ideas as such about it and now I am trying for really emotional effects with color and working with these new things.

MR. BROWN: When you moved into silk screen and printing, did you still do some paintings in the '40's?

MR. LANDON: I don't think I did very much. No, I think I devoted myself entirely to printing and I didn't think of doing painting. I did a lot of water color studies and sketches and drawings.

MR. BROWN: Were you still deviating between [inaudible] or social protest?

MR. LANDON: Not at that time. I did sometimes more realistic things and other times more abstract things. But it wasn't connected with any social or -

MR. BROWN: Even though you were still an active member of the union, the artists congress -

MR. LANDON: I have always been interested in economics and social problems. These are things I'll always

have I think.

MR. BROWN: You were still somewhat disgruntled and unhappy about the state of society--

MR. LANDON: Sure.

MR. BROWN: As you -

MR. LANDON: I still am.

MR. BROWN: Were you ever actively involved in political movements when you were in New York in the late thirties or early '40s?

MR. LANDON: Like every other artist, yes. But your ideas change. Someone said you don't get mellow when you get older, you just molder - probably that's what happened. As I mentioned before about saving the last copy of prints or something terribly important it makes you sound so vain. I loved the saying about artists, "But why are you so modest, you're not that good."

MR. BROWN: Did you feel like you wanted to clutch to some evidence of what you had done? A modest pack rat instinct?

MR. LANDON: Yes.

MR. BROWN: A couple of times in the early '30's and '40's you initiated shows in the Springfield Museum.

MR. LANDON: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: Opening exhibitions.

MR. LANDON: Oh, I didn't initiate that. I was working in the museum. I had a job there for a while and I helped hang the pictures.

MR. BROWN: And in '40 you initiated the exhibition of silk screens in the Springfield Museum.

MR. LANDON: Yes. And then I worked on that artist union show I think was the first national art union show in Springfield.

MR. BROWN: And did you work very closely with the director?

MR. LANDON: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Were they quite sympathetic, first to the new technique of silk screening and, second, for your role in artist movements?

MR. LANDON: Well yes.

MR. LANDON: Yes in the thirties it was a very open period. One could, if they had ideas,--I think directors at that time - museum directors of that time were really concerned about pushing new ideas into the museum instead of--I feel today they are just out for prestige. They just want to put on very, very important exhibitions to be able to get another bigger job or something like that. I think it's all prestige now instead of some real exciting thing that comes along.

MR. BROWN: But even inside the Springfield Museum, in terms of the collecting there, it was really quite conservative. And exhibiting, at that time, was quite open-minded.

MR. LANDON: Yes, well I think Marvo was probably more liberal than succeeding directors.

MR. BROWN: What was his background? Had he ever been a painter?

MR. LANDON: Gee, I don't know. I just ran across his name a few months ago--and I had never heard of him after he left the museum. I heard that he was a Quaker and that he did some ambulance work during the war or something like that. That's the only thing I heard about him. I don't know, I don't think was a painter, no.

MR. BROWN: You moved to New York in '41. Why, you decided that Springfield no longer held any--

MR. LANDON: Well, no, I got a divorce and I wanted to leave the whole thing and start something new; a new life.

MR. BROWN: Did you go back so some of your old associates there in New York when you moved?

MR. LANDON: Yes, I got a room as I said with Gottlieb and stayed with him for a while until I could get a place of my own. Then I became involved in the whole silk screen-- it was a silk screen group and then it began the National Serigraph Society and that took all of my efforts. And I was exhibition secretary so I assembled all these shows and cleaned the mats, and packed the pictures, and routed them out to various museums and so on. It was a very active thing. So I got a little stipend for that from the society, but compared to the work that I put in it was nothing. But besides that I sold prints and then I had a few commercial jobs. A little job now and then doing Christmas cards, or a poster, or something like that. All of these things kept me going.

MR. BROWN: By this time was the silk screen more or less accepted?

MR. LANDON: Yes. Well later on in the '40s it was and then of course I was able to do teaching and lecturing.

MR. BROWN: Where? Informally or in the art league or the students league?

MR. LANDON: No, no, no, I didn't teach there. I taught at [inaudible] in New York at 92nd Street. And at the National Serigraph Society we had regular classes. Then I had a lot of private pupils. I had a pupil from Chile, and from Sweden, and several American pupils. I had somebody from England. So it was very interesting.

MR. BROWN: Did you enjoy teaching?

MR. LANDON: I liked it. I liked to teach, yes.

MR. BROWN: You had taught before in Springfield?

MR. LANDON: Well I had given some lectures. I organized a group of people doing silk screen and showed them all how to do it after I found out really how to do it. So I suppose that is teaching in a way.

MR. BROWN: How did you teach? Can you describe your approach to teaching that time in New York? How did you go about it?

MR. LANDON: Well I drew up a regular program of teaching, what to start with--the fundamentals as usual--and I think I tried to stress the care of materials. I don't think that they stressed that enough in books on the subject. And about really cleaning up when you are through and that sort of thing. To take care of materials so that you don't waste them. I think that was my - you had to be so careful in the thirties not to waste things. But it is a good thing to learn because it makes it easier for you later on.

MR. BROWN: When you where teaching did you move into the dealing of the student's expressive potential or creative potential?

MR. LANDON: Well of course you have to accept what they can do. I didn't try to change--no, I didn't try to do that at all. I tried to work within what they could do and I didn't try to make them do--or criticize them too much. I just corrected any technical errors that's all. I wouldn't try to influence them.

MR. BROWN: You had not been influenced yourself by your teachers had you? By in large they let you have full rein.

MR. LANDON: Yes, I think so.

MR. BROWN: So passed on this low profile teaching?

MR. LANDON: Yes. I think that's the really important thing in teaching. Excuse me.

MR. BROWN: This is a second interview with Edward Landon in western Vermont. It's May 28th, 1975. Mr. Landon, you mentioned the first time we interviewed, your painting in the '30s. You mentioned your painting abstractly. And then of course you got, in 1939, a scholarship for nonobjective painting from the Sullivan-Guggenheim Foundation. I wanted to ask before we leave the '30s, the acceptance--was there wide acceptance of abstract painting, as far as you knew then?

MR. LANDON: Oh, no.

MR. BROWN: Were you an exception in being able to have these scholarships? Or was Guggenheim particularly seeking out such as you?

MR. LANDON: No. I think--they didn't seek out anybody. Especially they--you applied for something you knew that might be available, that's all, a grant that might be available and of course in the '30s everyone was looking for some kind of support.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. LANDON: But yes, that's the way it worked.

MR. BROWN: Had you exhibited your abstract paintings?

MR. LANDON: No, no. This was a scholarship.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. LANDON: But they--so it was for study and for work.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. LANDON: And they did exhibit some of the things in the then Museum of Nonobjective Art, when Hilla Rebay was the curator.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. LANDON: But I had started out with very realistic sorts of things and spent every summer when it was nice to go out and sketch, almost every day in the summertime. So I did a lot of watercolors and paintings. And then gradually, as I became acquainted with more advanced work, I became more interested in it.

But there was a very nice thing that happened, I think I just recalled it. After I heard of this silkscreen method of making prints, I had heard that you stretch some silk on a frame and drew on it and printed. And so I--someone told me about that verbally, didn't show me anything.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. LANDON: So I went home and I bought silk in the department store and stretched it on a frame and tried to force the paint through it.

MR. BROWN: Yes. Didn't probably work.

MR. LANDON: It didn't work. And eventually, I found out what you did use, the proper materials and so on. And when I did, of course, I got very excited about it and told the artists I had known in Springfield and around there about it. And they thought it was a wonderful idea, so I started a little class in the garage, the garage where I lived.

MR. BROWN: In Springfield?

MR. LANDON: Yeah. And it was all the artists working together. There was no idea of--you know, I didn't get paid for it.

MR. BROWN: It wasn't a master and pupil.

MR. LANDON: No. It was--we were all working together. But I knew about it, and they didn't. So I would show them and together we did things. So they turned out some prints and it was a nice cooperative thing. And that's what I wish I'd seen more of later.

MR. BROWN: Were these silkscreens nonobjective?

MR. LANDON: No.

MR. BROWN: This was before?

MR. LANDON: No, they weren't strictly nonobjective, but they were--

MR. BROWN: Simplifications?

MR. LANDON: Yes and abstract in a general way.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. Well, in the time that you were going out sketching and doing watercolors, during the '30s, were those works pretty representational?

MR. LANDON: Yes, yes they were.

MR. BROWN: Did you think that was sufficient at the time?

MR. LANDON: At the time, yes, yes. But--

MR. BROWN: What happened?

MR. LANDON: That was pretty early in the '30s. You know, that was '30 to '32. But in 1933 and around there, I--you know, Elizabeth McCausland and--incidentally, William Rogers--Sir William T. Rogers was the critic on the other paper in Springfield, the art critic. And he became--he left Springfield also and became the art editor of the Associated Press. So we had people who--

MR. BROWN: Yes, people of considerable talent.

MR. LANDON: Yes. They were really--it was a small town, but very advanced, so I became acquainted with things. Then I think I mentioned that Gertrude Stein came here after.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. LANDON: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Did you think at that time, when you thought quietly or deeply about it, that Springfield perhaps had real potential to become a major art center?

MR. LANDON: No. No, I didn't. See, there was an art organization there, the Springfield Art League, which had existed for a number of years before I came there. And they only gradually began accepting work that was a little--little more advanced than the traditional painting. And now I'm sure that they are much more--but at that time, there were just a few pieces in the show every year that were a little different.

One time I managed to--I was asked to serve on the jury--not jury selection, but to--on the committee to select a jury for the show. So I tried. I saw that Max Weber and a couple of other people who were advanced got in on the jury, so we got a little free exhibition.

MR. BROWN: Did the people accept that in Springfield?

MR. LANDON: Yeah, I think so. The whole thing was gradually opening up there was no point to keeping it so closed.

MR. BROWN: Would an art critic such as a person like Elizabeth McCausland--you had--the local people who were made aware of things; the advanced sort.

MR. LANDON: Yes. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: How well did you know her?

MR. LANDON: Very well, yes. Very well.

MR. BROWN: What was she like? Could you describe her? How was she to be around?

MR. LANDON: Oh, she had a great deal of perception and saw the quality. And many people were not really accepted at that time. And of course, she was intensely interested in the American group of Dove and Hartley and O'Keeffe and Maurer and those people, and photographers Paul Strand and Bernie Sabbath and people like that. And I knew Bernie Sabbath well, too. And I have a lot of her photographs.

So that it was a good thing for--especially for a young person like I was then to become acquainted with this sort of thing. And through her, I knew Dove. And went up to visit him. And I told you.

MR. BROWN: Well, this group was a very congenial group, weren't they?

MR. LANDON: Yes, I think so.

MR. BROWN: Among themselves.

MR. LANDON: They had a lot of feeling for each other.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. LANDON: And the reason I mentioned that, again, is because I've just finished a painting and I realize what I owe to Dove, you know?

MR. BROWN: Particularly, what?

MR. LANDON: Well, he had such an outlook on life that was also happy, really, basically. It was a happy outlook and could see humor in so many things in nature, you know, a cheerful sort of outlook. And I was working on this thing, and you know--moon. And I was feeling, I'm sure, exactly what he felt about a moon or any other natural thing. I like that feeling. And *Time* magazine just had an article about Dove,

MR. BROWN: That confirmed some of your thoughts?

MR. LANDON: Yes. Well, yes.

MR. BROWN: As a young person in the Depression, Dove's attitudes must have been marvelous to you.

MR. LANDON: Yes. Well, he had given up--this article says he had given up 12,000--in 1909 he was earning \$12,000 as an illustrator. He gave it up to become--he gave it up to devote himself to painting. Most of the illustrators intend to paint someday--

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. LANDON:--and they never give up this beautiful money that comes in, you know. It's very hard to do that, I should imagine. If I had the same thing I might have found it very difficult. So he lived in a very poor farmhouse with no light [no electric light], but kept producing these beautiful pictures. That's a very satisfying thing.

MR. BROWN: What did he have to assist him? Were there certain collectors and dealers?

MR. LANDON: Of course, Stieglitz did what he could to--

MR. BROWN: Did you know Stieglitz? Or did you get to know him at that time?

MR. LANDON: I knew him, but not well.

MR. BROWN: Was he a pleasant person to work with?

MR. LANDON: He tended to be irascible with everybody, but he was nice enough.

MR. BROWN: You also were in Taos for some of these same people one summer.

MR. LANDON: Yes, yes.

MR. BROWN: What were they like? What was it like for you out there? I know you told me you went out to study in 1930--in the '30s at Taos. But did these people -

MR. LANDON: Well, I didn't--

MR. BROWN:--relax, or did they work just as intensely out there?

MR. LANDON: Yeah. I went out there to paint, to do pictures, you know. Took materials for later pictures and so on. It was an artist colony really. I think all artists gravitate towards the artist colonies, you know, at some time or other. After a while you don't need it. But certainly when you're young, you do need this--

MR. BROWN: What did you need when you were young, from an artist colony?

MR. LANDON: Well, a sense of community, I guess, a sense of feeling of part of it. I think, well I speak for myself, I felt I was always separated from wherever I am. And I don't believe I belong anywhere. I feel I have a right to be anywhere, but I don't belong - in a particular place or any real roots. I guess it doesn't matter to me because I feel perfectly comfortable about it.

MR. BROWN: You talked last time and just again how about your early work with silkscreen. And you fairly soon got into experimentation with that. By the early '40s you say here, about 1942, you began making experiments. Would you describe that, or explain?

MR. LANDON: Well, yes. There were things like experimenting with sensitized silk. That's putting a photographic solution in the glue and sensitizing the silk, then exposing various objects on the screen to light and washing out the part that wasn't hardened by the light, and printing. They weren't photographic screens in the sense that you use a camera to photograph something and then make a stencil from the negative of the thing. It was a direct thing, again. And we all started to keep that purist attitude toward making screens, that you work directly on the screen. You do it yourself.

MR. BROWN: Who do you mean by "we" at this time, at this point?

MR. LANDON: Well, I think people were seriously working in serigraphy.

MR. BROWN: You were still a pretty small group in the early '40s?

MR. LANDON: We had--no, then a lot of New York--people from New York--working on it, too. So there were quite a lot of people working seriously at this medium and I think developing it, so it worked out all right.

MR. BROWN: Did you work closely with these people?

MR. LANDON: Yes. Well, we were always phoning each other new ideas that we had. And there was a really cooperative feeling about it.

MR. BROWN: Who did you find that you especially were close to then?

MR. LANDON: Well, there was a chap who died that -- Henry Mark that -- he wasn't well known. But I think probably died too young to develop something. I can't think of names offhand.

MR. BROWN: You mentioned, I think last time, Harry Gottlieb?

MR. LANDON: Well, he was--yes, he was one from the '40s.

MR. BROWN: Was it at this point that you--that the National Serigraph Society was formed?

MR. LANDON: Yes. It was first a silkscreen group, and then changed the name to National Serigraph Society.

MR. BROWN: Why did it change the name? It sounds more--

MR. LANDON: Well, there was actually a lot of confusion, you know. Silkscreen--when we did silkscreens, people thought they were standing screens. You've probably heard this before. They were printed on silk or--there were all kinds of confusions.

MR. BROWN: Did they know what a serigraph was?

MR. LANDON: Well--put out so much literature on serigraphy, the word "serigraphy," we finally got it accepted by every dictionary.

MR. BROWN: What was the purpose of the group later, the society?

MR. LANDON: Well, to provide an exhibiting service for artists and to develop new ways of doing prints, that sort of thing.

MR. BROWN: Through the '40s you--well, you mentioned last time the putting down of silkscreen as an art medium.

MR. LANDON: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Did that continue or did the attitude fairly quickly change?

MR. LANDON: I think, through our efforts, it changed and became an accepted thing, yes. I think it changed fairly rapidly. The most resistance was from other artist groups like various printmakers groups, who tended to look down on serigraphy which was foolish.

MR. BROWN: Why do you suppose they resisted?

MR. LANDON: Well, there was still a great deal at that time of traditional printmaking. And of course, we broke new ground, I think, with this medium. And now, of course, everything is called a print, you know, whether it's actually a print or not. Now I think they've gone too far the other way. I really like experimentation and all. Now there have been experiments making intaglio prints by various methods you know, welding things to a plate and printing with it. Those things are good, but when it comes--when they start, like -- the latest catalog of the Boston printmakers, and they start showing prints made with photo-engravings, I don't consider this traditional printmaking. I think they're going too far away from actually hand--the hand of the artist.

MR. BROWN: Even when you were using the photo-sensitized color, it was your manipulation that produced the result.

MR. LANDON: Yes, absolutely. We made the screen. There was no mechanical thing involved in it. It was all hand.

MR. BROWN: Certainly not--the results would be different than you could get by another--

MR. LANDON: Yes. I didn't pursue it because I wanted to work with my hands directly on--

MR. BROWN: You exhibited several times during the thirties and now again with the National Serigraph Society a penchant, it seems, for organizing. Here you were, you were exhibition secretary, which got you into the--what did you, go to the shows?

MR. LANDON: Yeah. Well, I like to do those things.

MR. BROWN: You like to do that?

MR. LANDON: Yes. And in the '50s--if I can just jump to the '50s there--

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. LANDON: I got together a lot of shows for the United States Information Service through the National Serigraph Society. We made up several exhibitions of prints and display cases showing the materials used in making them. I did all those. I made all those, about ten exhibitions. They went to places like [inaudible], Saigon, and places--India, Indochina. Where they are now, I don't know.

MR. BROWN: [Laughter]

MR. LANDON: But that's where I sent them because I labeled the cases, too.

MR. BROWN: Why did you--you say you liked to do it.

MR. LANDON: Um-hm.

MR. BROWN: Why do you think--what useful role--because you were a busy artist--was there in taking the time to--

MR. LANDON: Well, of course, I didn't do it for money, but I did get paid for it, making the cases and everything. But it was obvious that you couldn't do it for nothing. So as I said, I earned money doing various things, and this was a way of doing something I liked and earning money at the same time. So I didn't see anything wrong with that.

Besides, I was compulsively organized before. I've done away with some of that, but I still like order very much. And when it comes to making up a display or something, I get a kick out of organizing something. I don't want to organize people, really. But organizing toward an end is a good thing for everybody.

MR. BROWN: Right. Well, another thing, wasn't the exhibitions of serigraphs a major way of promoting it?

MR. LANDON: Yes. Sure.

MR. BROWN: Having people seeing it, liking it, accepting it, or learning to accept it?

MR. LANDON: Yes. It all worked together like that.

MR. BROWN: So you had an in-stable of--the society, did you have a terrific variety of artists?

MR. LANDON: Yes, yes. Every kind of thing; every degree.

MR. BROWN: You must have attracted a number of people who just clung to the coattails and didn't have too much ability themselves, as it became more popular.

MR. LANDON: Well, let's put it this way. That many artists like to try different things. And they get excited for a very short time about something and then drop it. So we did have members who were there for--who were not really--

MR. LANDON: Yes. Well, serigraphy, of course, has been exploited by commercial interests, too. And they use the term "original serigraphic silkscreen" and that sort of thing when they're advertising prints sold by department stores and franchises and so on.

I recently--someone recently sent me a catalog of a rather well-known artist who produced enormous editions--editions of 300 so-called serigraphs. And they are about 25 inches by 30 inches, and 28 inches by 35 inches, very big serigraphs, very big prints, and many colors, as you can see from the reproductions of them. And this is--each selling for \$300--and a picture of the artist on the cover of this folder, and he's wearing this spotless white jacket with the latest style and holding what appears to be brushes in one hand and a big cigar in his mouth in the other. And I can tell you that you can't do serigraphs with a white jacket on.

MR. BROWN: [Laughter]

MR. LANDON: But this was--you see him. He looked like a prosperous jetsetter rather than a--but the physical labor of turning out 300--and there was a list, so it must have been at least 50 of these prints--different kinds. There were tennis players and hockey players and all kinds of sports figures. And I think--he found these sports things--these sports ideas were good sellers, so he turned out more.

But the physical labor of turning out 300 prints in many colors is so enormous in that size that he could not possibly have done any of this modeled work himself, you see. So it's a commercial venture. And that's what a lot of it has degenerated into.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. LANDON: But that's nothing to be concerned about because this has happened with other things, too. Lithography, for instance, actually started--silkscreen started out as a commercial medium for doing counter cards and ads and posters and things. And fine arts possibilities were seen in this medium, which is perfectly all right. The same thing happened in lithography. We started out the medium for producing music, and the fine arts possibilities were seen in it, later on.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. LANDON: But a great deal of terrible work was turned out in lithography, but nobody thinks of a lithograph as a thing less in the fine print medium than any other medium. And this is what will happen with silkscreen and with serigraphy, too. So there's nothing to be--I have friends who are very concerned when they see the commercial outfit using the term "serigraphy." But I don't think it's a concern.

MR. BROWN: Did this become a problem fairly early in the--

MR. LANDON: No, it's only fairly recently. When? After serigraphy had been accepted, then the commercial interest saw a possibility for it. So it's unfortunate people pay \$300 for one of these things, which is nothing but a large poster, really.

MR. BROWN: Very mechanically put together.

MR. LANDON: Printed in a print shop.

MR. BROWN: A print shop, yeah.

MR. LANDON: And he signs it and numbers it, and that's all--it's really a fraud in that sense.

[END OF REEL 1 SIDE A.]

MR. BROWN: This is the second reel of the interview with Edward Landon. Connected with what you were just saying, do you feel, and how has it affected the serigraphy, the big-name New York painters and, sometimes, sculptors turning to serigraphy?

MR. LANDON: Well, yes.

MR. BROWN: And producing it in fairly large quantity, at least at very high prices.

MR. LANDON: Well, I don't think the--that's really very much of a problem or anything. That isn't as widespread. What I was trying to bring out was that there are certain commercial interests who - the ones you have just mentioned, where--are done by galleries, produced by galleries, really. And they have a certain standing.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. LANDON: But the ones I was talking about are really commercial ventures. They're just designed to--not to forward the artist's name, but to sell as many as possible.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. LANDON: I think things have changed so drastically in the last 20 years, with the development of color photography, for instance. I was looking through a magazine and saw--this is a remarkable painting of a group of people on the way to Mecca or something. And incredibly this highly realistic thing. When you look longer, it couldn't possibly be a painting. There was too much in it, so--it was a color photograph.

So today, the--and then there's this photo-realism now in painting. But today, the paintings look like color photographs, and the color photographs look like paintings. And in the long run, I think the color photographs

will be more valuable because they're not really--you're not really developing something or trying an idea. What you're doing is using a medium that is [inaudible] mechanical, color photography, and it's attempting to imitate this in paint. And when you translate from one medium to another, it doesn't work, doesn't make sense, artistic sense.

It's like trying to talk about print quality. It's such an elusive thing. But it's there. I mean, all the great prints that have ever been produced have this quality. Otherwise, they would not be accepted as works of art. They have to have that quality. And I don't think that most of the things done today really have this quality. Most of the print field--very rarely do you see what I feel will eventually prove to be a work of art in the print field now.

MR. BROWN: Could you describe what you think a print quality is?

MR. LANDON: Well, I think it's a scrupulous tension or an integrity of--and a respect for the material you're working with, metal or wood or stencil or whatever it happens to be. But to try to find the quality that that particular thing has--now, there are copper plates rather than wood. You have this tremendous difference, but both in the same field. They're both graphic arts. But to find that real quality is what, I think, is called print quality.

MR. BROWN: In these magazines that are printed today, do you see the integrity is not there? I mean, as you mentioned, photo-realism--

MR. LANDON: Well, I think today artists don't try to work out a theory or an idea in the way they did in the past. Like [inaudible] was and that sort of thing, or the surrealists. They try to work out an idea or a theory.

Now, the critics advance an idea and say, "Wouldn't it be interesting if some artist were to work this out?" So the critics and the galleries are working out the theories, and the artists are furnishing the commodity.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah. Right.

MR. LANDON: That's where we come into the commodity.

MR. BROWN: Yes, the commodity.

MR. LANDON: Then--yes.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. LANDON: So--

MR. BROWN: The art, when it has its integrity, you don't think is a commodity.

MR. LANDON: No. I personally--I don't feel that way. You see--I'm not trying to--I don't really think of myself as better--or a fine artist, or whatever you want to call it. But when I do something, the--getting the idea has such a magic about it. What you're trying to do is present this magic that you feel, but you can't do it. And I don't think anybody can do it. I really don't. Many people approach it more and probably much better than I can. But I feel it just as much. That's what I'm trying to say. And I think all real--or all people who are genuinely interested in doing creative work have this feeling. There's a certain magic.

And I think when you talk to another artist, they both can see what you mean immediately, you know, almost without words. And if you can get some of that across, then the picture is successful. At least it's successful for you. And so if you've done this, then you're finished with it. That's the way I feel. I've finished with something once I've done it. And I like to look at it for a while, but then I get tired of it and put it in the attic. But--they don't sell very often, but, you know, it's nice when they do sell. But that really is not basically the purpose; it cannot be. Because I have tried too often to do Christmas cards and things on order. And I find it extremely difficult to do anything like that. I can do something of my own, but I can't--

MR. BROWN: You say at least an artist know when materials and his imagination and his excitement mesh together?

MR. LANDON: Yes.

MR. BROWN: But do you think other people can know that, too?

MR. LANDON: I think they see it, yes.

MR. BROWN: Yes?

MR. LANDON: Oh, yes. Other people than artists, sure. Oh, sure.

MR. BROWN: Examples like the commercialized silkscreen or the photo-realistic oil or acrylic painting, you don't see it as meshing together?

MR. LANDON: That's right. Sure. See, another thing is that I do a tremendous amount of drawing and preparatory color sketches and arrangements and everything else. And I throw it all away because I have the idea of them, and I carry it out. Now, it may be good or bad, that doesn't matter, but as far as I can go with that idea. So I'm through with that, too, and I'm through with all the sketches and everything else.

And the same thing with when I do a print. It's--after I've finished with it, it's like somebody else did it. I enjoy looking at it, but it's finished for me.

MR. BROWN: Really. So the essential process for you then is the process?

MR. LANDON: The doing, the doing of it.

MR. BROWN: The creating?

MR. LANDON: The doing of it, the doing of it.

MR. BROWN: For example, the sketches, the drawings for a painting are simply preliminary steps.

MR. LANDON: They're not--yeah.

MR. BROWN: And you wouldn't want to refer back to them because that would be simply borrowing formulas for what we discussed earlier.

MR. LANDON: Sure. It's not important. And, see, I'm always impressed with this Ruault, the painter Ruault, who made sure before he died to destroy everything he thought had no importance, you know, and only left those things which are damn good paintings, you know?

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. Have you known other artists who actually could profit by referring back to earlier studies?

MR. LANDON: Oh, very likely. I'm just saying that's the way I work.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. LANDON: Everybody is different. There's nothing to do--the right thing to do or not.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible] your one goal - the process is more important, you stressed throughout the importance of actually doing something carrying it out completely yourself, which is--can become a problem, or has in modern times, in printmaking. I gather you also--

MR. LANDON: I assume you're referring to printing lithographs and so on.

MR. BROWN: Yes, or just generally. You've referred to it in several ways.

MR. LANDON: Yes.

MR. BROWN: The importance is a virtue and a necessity for good works to be created.

MR. LANDON: I'm sure I gave that impression. I realize that in some mechanical ways you can't--you have to have help with certain things. Now, if I were to attempt a large print, larger than my usual size, which are fairly small, I'm physically not able at this time to handle a large squeegee. But I could do the screen. I could make the screen. It wouldn't be any--there would be nothing wrong with somebody coming in and handling the squeegee for me, the same way - or running an etching press if I ink the plate, that sort of thing.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm, um-hm.

MR. LANDON: So the mechanical part of printing is not--I don't feel has anything further to do with the art.

MR. BROWN: And also connected somewhat with this is the feeling I had gotten that you believe it's important and you tried to learn things on your own, rather than going for tutelage.

MR. LANDON: Yes, exactly.

MR. BROWN: From the--was there a certain pride or even virtue in your mind--

MR. LANDON: Well, there was also a certain shyness, too.

MR. BROWN: Yes. You were?

MR. LANDON: I mean, I was much more shy than I am now.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. LANDON: And I hesitated to take somebody's time.

MR. BROWN: But was there, when you were a youth--was there any--were you possibly resistant to having to learn something that excited you from someone else?

MR. LANDON: Well, I think I got a kick out of doing it myself. I think I--I never thought about it before. But now that you mention it, I think that I enjoyed it. I enjoyed getting as much information as I could from books or something else and trying to help myself. Yeah, I think that's true.

MR. BROWN: For example, in the '30s when you were young, with Dove and with some of those other figures, you didn't run to them and ask them this, that, and the other?

MR. LANDON: No.

MR. BROWN: This might happen that they would come by and look at your work and later comment about it.

MR. LANDON: Yes. That's right.

MR. BROWN: But you mainly learned from your own ability and perceived in your own work short comings or breakthroughs.

MR. LANDON: I think I can say that, yes. I think that is true.

MR. BROWN: This must have in your case developed in you more and more sense of strength and ability on your own.

MR. LANDON: Well, it's making me feel much more reliant upon my own ability to do something, yes. For instance, I think I mentioned I do other things to earn money. And I have--a young person would say, "I have a friend who wants to learn book binding. Can they come over and watch you for awhile?" Well, that's--I'm not a book binder in that sense. I do it to earn some money. And I haven't got time to have somebody come around and sit here when--and I may want to stop in the middle of something and work out an idea for a picture that I have. I can't--so I have to turn that sort of thing down.

On the other hand, if someone, a young artist I talked to who was really seriously interested in serigraphy--"Could I come over sometime? I'm really interested"--I would like to have them come over. I would like to talk and help--because I got a letter the other day from somebody up at the art museum, wants to come here.

MR. BROWN: Would you let them sit by while you work? Or rather, you'd take some time out specially?

MR. LANDON: Well, if I took time out it would have to be on the basis of teaching. [Inaudible] I'd be glad to talk.

MR. BROWN: The book binding, the printmaking, were these - have these become for you art forms or art processes?

MR. LANDON: Yes. That's what I'm doing today. But I've done other things. I just developed a whole series of--I might have mentioned this before, but I do also have a series of covering address books and boxes and wastebaskets and the old engravings that I dug up on Fourth Avenue. And they were very successful. I must have made thousands of little boxes for stamps and cigarettes and gloves and everything else, for places like Serendipity in New York carrying them [inaudible]. I loved--then that peters out, you see. So I had go to something else.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. LANDON: But now I do the book binding in place of all those boxes.

MR. BROWN: It petered out for you, or the marketability?

MR. LANDON: Well, the market, I think.

MR. BROWN: When you're doing such things, is it a creative leaning for you? Is it at all like that?

MR. LANDON: I think so. And I do it--I guess I have to say I try to do with the prints is--I'm never interested in

producing large editions. I didn't do something ridiculous like print five and call it a day. But because this is foolish to do five. But my edition is rarely more than 25 or 30, 35, which is a small, reasonable edition.

Of course, it invariably happened that I would have a very – an idea that I liked, which is personally very appealing to me. I carried it out in prints, in a print. And I'm thinking, well, this is not going to be popular, but I like the way it's working. So I do a small edition, 12 or 15 or 20. And invariably, that would be the one that would sell out [inaudible]. It always happens this way. Sometimes you have an idea--well, this looks like--gee, I think it's a cheerful, nice thing. I still have a lot of those, you know.

MR. BROWN: It's pretty hard to know who's buying.

MR. LANDON: Yes. You don't know why people go for certain things.

MR. BROWN: Those things that you have printed more of, did you usually print because you thought people would want them? Or do you remember?

MR. LANDON: No. When you're working with it and the idea, it looks like it might be a popular print.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. LANDON: That's what you think. I can honestly say I don't think that it will sell. You know, I really don't.

MR. BROWN: But what would lead you as to run off, say, 12 rather than 35? It's a lot more work than to be doing 35.

MR. LANDON: Not necessarily. I usually did 20--I'd say 20–25 to 35, somewhere in there. And so it was normal to do that. Whether I thought it was a popular idea or not or a way of doing something or the colors were particularly attractive or something like that.

MR. BROWN: Were you still in the process of creation, as far as you were concerned, when you were doing the prints, printing them?

MR. LANDON: You know, when I worked out an idea, I worked it out pretty carefully. And I used to have a set of screens so that I would make all the stencils--I didn't use very many colors, four or five colors. But I'd do four or five screens, print it, and what I didn't like, I would go back and change the screen so I'd know exactly what I was going to do, and then I would print the thing. So I knew exactly what would happen.

Most people print a color and wash out the screen, and then do another drawing, print another color. If they make a mistake, they have to go back and print still another color to correct something. But I did all my corrections before I printed.

MR. BROWN: So that was really much more in control.

MR. LANDON: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: You could trace the source.

MR. LANDON: I knew what would happen. So I could alter a color to correct it.

MR. BROWN: You--in 1950–51 you went to Norway on a Fulbright Fellowship. Was this for--was it as a tourist, as an artist tourist, or to study?

MR. LANDON: No, it was a research grant. I was interested in Scandinavian--in early Scandinavian design, Viking [inaudible].

MR. BROWN: This was a longstanding interest?

MR. LANDON: Yes. Yes, I'd had that. And there, of course, I could see the actual objects, the actual things.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. LANDON: Not much had been done about it in this country. And I have an honorary membership – an honorary something from the American Scandinavian Foundation. So when I came back, I did a portfolio of the Viking, or pre-Viking things and then published under their auspices.

MR. BROWN: A representation of them, or--

MR. LANDON: Yeah. I did a silkscreen portfolio. It was just in one color, black on gray.

MR. BROWN: You say you hadn't like commissions, but was this an exception? Was this something you wanted to do?

MR. LANDON: Oh, oh, oh, well, I worked that out for myself. I did what I wanted in it. No one told me that I had to include certain things.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. LANDON: I did exactly what I wanted.

MR. BROWN: During that year in Norway, did you travel around?

MR. LANDON: Yes. I went on a tour of Europe.

MR. BROWN: What sort of a routine did you follow? Museums or--

MR. LANDON: Yes. I went to Europe, to France, and Denmark and Sweden, and all around. And I gave demonstrations and lectures in Sweden, besides several in Norway. And I had exhibitions there and I organized some exhibitions. And artists were producing serigraphs by the time I left there.

MR. BROWN: Where they hadn't before?

MR. LANDON: No, no.

MR. BROWN: You mentioned already that you were an innovator in France also.

MR. LANDON: Yes.

MR. BROWN: But the same happened in Scandinavia?

MR. LANDON: Yes.

MR. BROWN: What was the--could you compare that with the reception, say, in the late '30s in America?

MR. LANDON: Well, it was a very--they were very--yes. They was a great deal of interest and acceptance of new ideas and so on.

MR. BROWN: They esteemed the American examples, didn't they? Whereas the Americans in the '30s wouldn't have had too much, other than commercial work, to look at.

MR. LANDON: That's true. That's true.

MR. BROWN: Did you find that they did it differently than the Americans? Did you immediately see the approach or the use of a medium different?

MR. LANDON: Yeah. Well, of course--yeah. That's because they're Norwegians, and they're not Americans, you know?

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. LANDON: I was put in touch with someone on one of the newspaper. So through the newspaper, someone was alerted to the fact that I was there in Oslo and looking for artists, because I had these prints with me and I wanted to show them to them. So a commercial silk screening house in Oslo got in touch with me. He had seen this thing and he wanted to see me because he was curious about what had been done in the medium since he was only doing posters and things like that.

And so I showed him. And through him I got in touch with the artist organizations in Oslo. But I also did some work for him while I was there. He wanted a calendar, and he let me do what I wanted. So I did a calendar for him--that's just the cover picture. It was an abstraction--have a calendar fastened on the bottom, you know--printed it in his shop.

MR. BROWN: How was your work? What forms were found in your work at that time? Were you [inaudible] in color particularly or other aspects?

MR. LANDON: At that time, I think modern music was very--I found it very exciting. And it would stimulate ideas. I think that was--ballet, macabre sort of thing, that I tried to bring out in prints.

MR. BROWN: Was there anything overt or some very subtle emotional content?

MR. LANDON: Yeah. I think it was emotional.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. LANDON: And I know this--I just got the proof from *Who's Who in American Arts*, you know, that I'm supposed to send back with changes and so on. This year for the first time they're asking for a statement about my--about artists' technique and ideas or theory. You get one line, that's all, a very short line.

MR. BROWN: Is that by the publisher--

MR. LANDON: Of course, my first reaction is, well, I think it's silly for an artist to talk about their theories, because how can you explain, to talk. Words will never bring across what is involved. It simply cannot be done. That's why I'm always suspicious about the very profound art writing, critics writing about art.

So, all I could say was that I tried to avoid--I tried to avoid so-called movements in art. I'm sure I've been influenced by them. But I don't take any art magazines or I never see the--rarely see the *Art Times*, *Art Page*. And I only run across articles connected with art once in awhile. But I make no effort to find out what's going on at the moment and try to give myself just--work along each day that works out.

Of course, I have prolonged periods, like I think every creative person does, of not doing any creative work. And then I can go to town on frames and things like that; woodworking.

MR. BROWN: I think I asked earlier, but when you're making frames, is this a creative thing for you or simply--

MR. LANDON: Well, I've done so many of them, you know.

MR. BROWN: Is just the assembling needed, useful things?

MR. LANDON: Yes. But I try to do as nice a job as I can. Of course, I've done it now since 1930, so it's a long time.

MR. BROWN: You continued as an officer in the Serigraph Society until '56. In the early '50s you were an editor of the *Serigraph Quarterly*.

MR. LANDON: That's right.

MR. BROWN: What did that involve? Lots of publicizing and getting in touch with many artists?

MR. LANDON: Yes. I had to write to them and ask them for--to write up their own biography and send pictures. And we had some technical things in there, too, every so often. I tried to make it a useful thing for other serigraphers.

MR. BROWN: Did you notice by the '50s any change in the purpose of the society? Were different types of people coming onboard for reasons that you hadn't--that hadn't existed before?

MR. LANDON: No, I don't think so. I think we had more--it tended, I think, at that time--one of the artists went out to the West Coast, for instance. And he started the National Serigraph Society or the National Serigraph Association of the West Coast or something, out there, you see. And it sort of began to spread out. And then the medium was so widely used by that time that the reason for it no longer existed. It would be like having just a society of etchers only.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. So that the society then began petering out?

MR. LANDON: Yes. You have to have the--you have to have more of a broader spectrum of prints. You can't just--

MR. BROWN: Yes. Did the new importance or coming to the foreground of the abstract expressionism have any effect on you?

MR. LANDON: Not on me. But I know that we had some prints that certainly showed it.

MR. BROWN: Sure. Did you, through this period also, as today, were--stayed away from movements?

MR. LANDON: Yes, I did, even in New York.

MR. BROWN: Even in New York? And you were in New York until '57 when you came to--you only came to Vermont then, right?

MR. LANDON: Yes. Or we had got the place in '52, but didn't move until '57-'58. But in New York, the only

reason I saw an art magazine was to get the addresses for exhibition places, the places where I was showing.

MR. BROWN: Did you--before you left New York, did you have a particular dealer that you were showing with?

MR. LANDON: Well, I guess I was showing with--well, when I left New York, there was still the Serigraph Society. I still was showing--

MR. BROWN: When you came to Vermont, why did you come?

MR. LANDON: Well, we at that time--we felt that--we came back from Norway. The difference was so great that we could see what we liked and what we didn't like about New York, and they were beginning to change the Village and change New York, and not for the better. And tearing down nice houses in the Village and putting up these ghastly [inaudible] and apartment houses, you know. And so we couldn't stand this any longer. We planned then in '52 was to come here eventually, which we did.

MR. BROWN: You had remarried before you went to Norway?

MR. LANDON: Oh, yes, in '46 or '48 or something.

MR. BROWN: And your wife shared many of your interests?

MR. LANDON: Sure.

MR. BROWN: The--well, in Vermont, what attracted you here?

MR. LANDON: Well--

MR. BROWN: A clean break from a place that you no longer cared for?

MR. LANDON: You know, we had friends here. I think that's why a lot of people think of Vermont because they know somebody living here. But that's about as far as--as different as you could be from New York City.

MR. BROWN: You needed to be on your own, more your own person?

MR. LANDON: Yeah. I think I mentioned, I planned to go to New York regularly to pick up work because I didn't know how much I could do up here. But then I had this operation and I couldn't.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. LANDON: So I had to develop something in Vermont. So I went back to framing, that I had given up temporarily in New York City because I was able to do other things there. I worked for--as a color mixer. I know I mentioned that--at a place that printed perfume bottles and thing like that and silkscreen.

MR. BROWN: When you were in New York.

MR. LANDON: And I mixed colors for those things. And then I worked for a place that did reproductions of paintings. Actually, things from Matisse, from--

MR. BROWN: But here you were--because of your illness you were thrown upon yourself.

MR. LANDON: Yes.

MR. BROWN: You developed more extensively your book binding as well as the framing.

MR. LANDON: Oh, yes. Well, the book binding, as I say, took the place of those boxes and things I used to make. I did make those for awhile in New York here--I mean, in Vermont here.

MR. BROWN: In Vermont.

MR. LANDON: But that petered out.

MR. BROWN: You had been quite active in--an organizer and a joiner until--and then your illness came, and you were suddenly thrown back on an almost opposite [inaudible], weren't you?

MR. LANDON: That's true. That's true. And I kept my membership in the print societies and things like that, where I could send prints with no trouble at all. But, for instance, I didn't join the local art association because I didn't want to get involved with them.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. LANDON: I think even then they were not too accepting of advanced work. So it wouldn't have made much difference.

MR. BROWN: Little bands of conservatives and amateurs?

MR. LANDON: Yes. Yes.

MR. BROWN: That come to Vermont?

MR. LANDON: Yes.

MR. BROWN: As for the fact that you had, you had long periods then when you couldn't work at all.

MR. LANDON: Um-hm.

MR. BROWN: Did you see in your work--have any effect on it? Did it take you a long time to get back to it?

MR. LANDON: This second illness that I had that laid me up for--since '71, about three years I didn't produce very much. Then all of a sudden, I began turning out a lot of work. So I had done quite a lot of work since then. So it seems I've accumulated all the time I was ill, but I didn't do any drawing or anything during that illness.

In the hospital, they knew I was an artist. I tried to keep it quiet because they assume--but they would come in and say, "Why don't you do some art? You want to do some sketching?" You know, it's the thing like you're out in a field or by the seashore and you're painting a picture, and everybody comes around. And they want to see the artist working, you know? That sort of thing. "Are you going to do any sketching?" I had no--of course, I was so sick that I couldn't have done anything anyway. But even when I got a little better, I had no--just hard to do it, until I got up and began moving around again.

MR. BROWN: You were sick for a long time. It affected or it changed, at least, your perception of things? Your intention in your work?

MR. LANDON: Oh, yes. Sure.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. LANDON: You discard a great many things that are unimportant, believe me.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. LANDON: And things that become important to you, you become more sure of. And I think it's a good thing, in a way, because you've got to resolve certain things. Of course you're forced to resolve them. It isn't a question of just sitting down and thinking about them. And that's what happened to me when I got into the chair. I had to figure out what I was going to do. And it's a good thing, in a way, to have to take stock.

MR. BROWN: I see it in most of your recent work, a certain kind of--a kind of spareness.

MR. LANDON: Oh, yeah.

MR. BROWN: You felt--I mean, you just mentioned this--the more important things you put forward, and discarded the nonessential. On the other hand, you said earlier that there's a certain--there's an emotionalism in your work now, whereas, at least much earlier in your experiments in silkscreen, there was quite a concern with technique and material.

MR. LANDON: Um-hm.

MR. BROWN: There is an emotionalism in your work today, isn't there?

MR. LANDON: Well, I think there is. It has that meaning to me.

MR. BROWN: And can you say there are a series of emotions that you primarily express?

MR. LANDON: Well, as I say, as I just said, it's so difficult to talk about painting. I don't see how one can really do this. But this is recent. And the things start to move all around for me. And I find constant problems in it, which I like to see. I mean, not that it isn't resolved for me; it is. But it still has this potential for other things in it.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. LANDON: And I like that. You know, you're going around inside of it, and it may be nothing. I mean, I'm not trying to deal with anything up.

MR. BROWN: Well, you of the essential--you did make it for yourself, as you said earlier.

MR. LANDON: Yes.

MR. BROWN: And it came to this tension, which you said you hoped--you said it has a work with integrity has. It's for you, unresolved. You see it, or at least you can see the struggle that went into it.

MR. LANDON: Yes. I know what it involved. And I did just finish up that one in the corner. And I was thinking, when I finished it, I asked, I want to see what I owed to Dove. And, yeah, I feel it's my thing, you know. I don't think it's an imitation.

MR. BROWN: No.

MR. LANDON: I really don't.

MR. BROWN: As you think back, say, to when you knew Dove, his imagery--some of his--certainly his imagery is known, for example. It must have been especially strong.

MR. LANDON: Yes, yes. Well, his feeling for the kind of forms he used. The slight irregularity.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. LANDON: Very important to him and it's important to me.

MR. BROWN: That was totally his spacing between forms on the plane.

MR. LANDON: Um-hm.

MR. BROWN: And slight variations in the shapes, which caused something to either relate to its neighbor or not.

MR. LANDON: It's a peculiar thing. If you work with a circle in certain--this one over here.

MR. BROWN: This black one [inaudible] the red one.

MR. LANDON: I wanted to make a new regular thing. It remained the regular thing, but it no longer looked like a circle. And I wanted this round form. But I had to go back to a circle. I had made a very irregular thing, and it looked just like another kind of form. It wasn't the circle that I wanted. So it's a very peculiar thing when you--they have a life of their own, maybe, you know?

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. LANDON: You can't--after awhile, you have to work to control it. And so it's not an easy thing. Of course it isn't always successful. I've thrown so much stuff that--you know, 100 times of what I've actually kept.

MR. BROWN: The forms themselves have their own imperatives, right?

MR. LANDON: Sure.

MR. BROWN: And you want to utilize those, those essences of these forms. At the same time, you--

MR. LANDON: At the same time, I want to alter them a little for my own feeling about them. But, as I say, I can't always do that.

MR. BROWN: Can you predict what you'll be doing in the foreseeable future?

MR. LANDON: It's very--

MR. BROWN: It's all about process, right?

MR. LANDON: I'm trying - I find from year to year change it so much that I haven't any idea how--it isn't a steady progression. It seems to be a--I go through phases and periods and so on. And--or they seem to develop themselves. I'm not trying to change something. It just seems to be that way, that's all. At one time I can't seem to get away from circles, you know?

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. LANDON: And next year I'm sure it wouldn't occur to me to use one, you know. That sort of thing.

MR. BROWN: Well, if you were at the point where you could predict your future output, you would be denying what you--what it is you think compels you to work [inaudible].

MR. LANDON: Sure. Sure.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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