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Oral history interview with Philip C. Curtis, 1965 March 31

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Philip C. Curtis on March 31, 1965. The interview took place in Scottsdale, Arizona, and was conducted by Sylvia Glidden Loomis for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's New Deal and the Arts project.

The original transcript was edited. In 2022 the Archives created a more verbatim transcript. Additional information from the original transcript that seemed relevant was added in brackets and given an -Ed. attribution. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

SYLVIA LOOMIS: This is an interview with Mr. Philip C. Curtis. 109 Cattle Track Road, Scottsdale, Arizona on March 31, 1965. The interviewer is Mrs. Sylvia Loomis of the Santa Fe office of the Archives of American Art. And the subject to be discussed is Mr. Curtis' work as director of the Federal Art Project in Arizona during the 1930s. But before we discuss this, Mr. Curtis would you tell us something about yourself—where you were born and where you received your art education?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yes, I was born in Michigan. Started a law career and found that I wanted to be a painter. And while I was there, I found several people who were painting. And they told me the nature of the schools at the time, and I asked them where I should go. And they said, well, the only place to go is to Yale. So, I went to Yale Fine Arts School from there, after a year of law. And I was there until 1935.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: At which time I went to New York.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: You mean you were studying all this time?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yes, and the WPA Project was going. I got a job with them as supervisor on the mural project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: And I was there, I guess, a year. And the Project director, Ms. McMahon, had an additional request for a director in Phoenix, to start an art center.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: And I was interested so they sent me out here. And I—well, I was first sent to North Carolina where they started several of these art centers. And it was the new thing at the time and—but the program was a good one, and they wanted to get the thing started in a lot of cultural backwards spots across the country.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Where was this—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: They started in North Carolina.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What town, do you remember?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Winston—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Salem. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Winston-Salem.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Winston-Salem.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, Chapel Hill was where I—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —was centered, for several weeks. And there was in Greensboro—there were three, I think, all together.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: One was a Negro center and the other two weren't. And they had just started. They were in operation for less than a year. So, I got an idea of what had been done. Then I came directly out here.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What was the nature of the center? Were they classes and galleries?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, the whole thing was to stimulate all kinds of art activity in the community. And set a basis for a permanent art center or museum.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Do you know if any of them continued after—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: I know that this one did. [Laughs.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, but you don't know what happened to the one in—[Cross talk.]

PHILIP C. CURTIS: I went to Des Moines after here and I had some work on that, and that one continued, that's a museum. I know there are others but—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: I don't know first-hand.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: That was the idea to do this. And the nature of the organization was the WPA would provide personnel. And—the supervising personnel. Then the local relief would comb through their files and get artists that were available.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: And they would be allowed to work there if they wished to. And then the money was supposed to be raised by the community.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Like for the building and the fixtures necessary.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Materials too?

[00:05:01]

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, materials. And so, to get this thing started, it was necessary to have a board as all museums have now. We did then of course. There was a local board that had an interest in this kind of thing. And the continuation of it. Well, so we had this board and I think Mark Voris had already done that part of it, to organize and get this thing started.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Wasn't he in Tucson at the time?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, he was going around the state. [Cross talk.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I know he was acting director for the whole state.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, and there were other little things going on in the state. There weren't so many artists here, at that time. But there were a few of them. So, after this thing was opened, we had to do a lot of building, you know, decorate and [inaudible]. And then we had the classes and we had lots of exhibitions. And lectures.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What was the building?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, it was a sort of a social center, a health center, like—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Community center, kind of thing?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, it was. No, it was owned by one of the big families here, Mrs. Heard. She built it for one of her projects, maybe a blood bank or a similar thing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: It never became a blood bank, but it had that kind of potential.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, is that the site of the Heard Museum today?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: No, it isn't. No, it's still there on North Seventh Street, no, not North. East Seventh Street and Adams.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I see. Before I forget it, I want to ask you about your experience in New York.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA GLIDDEN LOOMIS: How many—you were a supervisor there?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, I was assistant supervisor.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. How many—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: On the mural project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How many artists did you have?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, I guess there were several hundred in this mural section of the Project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Which included all types of people. A few of them were top artists that did the designing and painting of the mural. They had a lot of assistants. [Cross talk.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you remember the names of any of them?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, I remember Eric Mose and I remember, no—well just about all of the painters that survived as painters were on the Project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Mural painters, let's see.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, if you don't remember, they probably weren't outstanding.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, they didn't become outstanding mural painters.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: There wasn't any need for murals before [laughs]—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —or since. You know?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: But they're all painters. Well, I remember one of the Soyers was one of them.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yeah.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: I could probably think of the name if had the time.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, don't worry about it. It's not that important. But you say, they were easel painters that turned mural painters?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So, did they work mostly on the oil panels?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Some of them did fresco. [Inaudible.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: They did do frescos?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Where did they find out about fresco?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: I don't remember, but that had already been started, and they were very skilled at it, I do remember that.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, is there anything—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: There were some of the Mexican artists that came—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, I was going to say, wasn't Orozco there? Or Rivera?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Rivera, no, he was there but he didn't have anything to do with the Project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No, I know but—[Cross talk.]

PHILIP C. CURTIS: I guess he must have had some impact.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: It was about that time I know.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Because I remember—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —the one he did in Rockefeller Center that had the—a great deal of controversy about it.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, is there anything else that you remember particularly about the New York period?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, it was a very exciting period because, as I said, most of the artists that were recognized at that time as artists were on the Project. And it was a difficult period to sell a painting. And they were mostly on relief.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: And I think most of the painters that were on that Project continued to become rather successful. [Inaudible.]

[00:10:04]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes, well it certainly was the base for the whole American art movement.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And it accomplished a great deal, I think, for the future of art in America.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: They established at that time.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, it was a chance for—for me, it was a chance to meet a lot of painters

that were painting in a contemporary manner at the time which I wasn't prepared for really, coming out of Yale. Where they have a Beaux-Arts approach to art. The last artist they recognized was Ruben [ph], you know. [They laugh.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That's some quite time back, yeah, hardly a contemporary.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: So I was very pleased to see what was going on in New York.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How did you feel about coming out to Phoenix?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, I had this arthritis then and the doctor thought that [inaudible] come out, otherwise I guess I wouldn't have come.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How many artists did you have in Phoenix?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Out here?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Oh, I don't think there was ever more than 10 or 11.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And were these all easel painters?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yes. No, they weren't. There were sculptors and—most of them were easel painters, though.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Were there any other projects such as this? Wood working—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Oh yes, we had a lot of projects going. Sanderson [ph], for instance, was a pretty skilled designer. And there was another young architect that was on the Project. And so, we took over a couple of building in the state college, which is now a university.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: At Tempe?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: And decorated the whole thing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Furniture and drapes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: The whole business.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: When did that start?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: That was '37, I guess.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mr. Wardell spoke about that yesterday. So that was sort of an ongoing thing, but he didn't get into it until 1939 I think it was.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Or '40. So, I didn't know when it had started, but it started under you then?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Now, in addition to being the director of this art center, you were also the director of the entire state Project, weren't you?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, not for a while.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Mark Voris continued as director for at least a year, maybe more.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, is that right?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: But this project—whatever it was that was going on in Phoenix was my project and he was over me but—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That lasted about a year, right?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: I would guess that, yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: But from then until you resigned, you were the director of the whole state, weren't you?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, what did you do with the Index of American Design?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, we tried to do something. There wasn't enough material here.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: At least we couldn't find it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: We got some things together which weren't approved. [Laughs.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: We had one old lady that could do the work and—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was that Ms. Johnson, Elizabeth Johnson?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: No, I don't think that was her name.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No, maybe not.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Maybe there are two old ladies. [They laugh.] They were very good at that, but we couldn't supply them with the real material that they wanted.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And of that sculpture project that Mr. Wardell spoke of, I think Mr. Voris did too, of the Father Kino shrines—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —did you—did that start with you?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: When you were director?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, [inaudible] and I think Mark was still involved.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: He was the state director then.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, we did two of them. There was going to be a lot of them, but I don't know what happened.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, I think he told me there was a series of about 12.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, there was supposed to have been but only two of them are finished.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, is that right?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh. This is a little mystery that I've been trailing from Tucson to Phoenix to Scottsdale.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, it was a good idea but—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Didn't [inaudible] work out—[Cross talk.]

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —it had to combine with two or three other projects.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: We did our part, but I forgot who it was that was responsible for building the shrine itself. You know, [phone ringing] a lot of work. Excuse me.

[00:15:00]

SYLVIA GLIDDEN LOOMIS: Probably Mr. Voris, I think, was the first one to tell me about this series. And I think he said that there were 12. Maybe that's what the intention was—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, it was when he left, yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Then Mr. Wardell said yesterday that he thought there were 12 altogether but only two were remaining and the rest had been vandalized.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Oh, that may [inaudible]. See, we made two pieces of sculpture. And they were supposed to be reproduced, you know, several times.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Not a new—not 12 different ones. [Cross talk.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, I see. Oh.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: But there wasn't enough money involved in this thing to pay for even material.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: So, it was one of those things that didn't materialize.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, it was nice—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Two of them did get out and then I saw one of them with the head off [laughs].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, really? Oh, Mr. Wardell spoke about one that's below Tumacácori, and he said every time he goes by, there are fresh flowers there that the Indians had brought by.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: I know. Yeah, that's true.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So, well, maybe we found out the whole story finally about Father Kino.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well now, what other projects do you remember?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, the big concentration was the rt center itself, and then doing these things for the college over here. Like the furniture and the drapes, took over the supervision of a very large drapery—a weaving project that was part of another WPA program. So, we designed and controlled the physical appearance of a lot of the material they did. And oh my God, they wove a drape big enough for a theater.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Is that right?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: The curtain, a theater curtain. It was very beautiful and part of this building [inaudible].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: We had—well, we were very useful to the college. We could help the local artists by giving them shows in the art center. We sent exhibitions around the state to the different schools, and we had quite an impact, just the thing we were trying the hardest on was the art center. It became a little bit more than a local art center and—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mr. Wardell spoke about some of these traveling exhibits.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Came from other parts of the country.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Oh yes, that was—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: The circulated shows.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Circulated from Washington, yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah. That's true. We did also have exhibits that we could get together here. We did that.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What other activities were there in the gallery besides exhibitions and classes? Was there anything else?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, class—lectures.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Lectures.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: We had—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Did you have visiting lecturers—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yes, we had—[Cross talk.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —or were they just ones on the staff?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, there was several people who came through from the East. And were hired as lecturers. And—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And what kind of classes did you have?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: The biggest successes was with the children. We had about 300 to 400 kids a week in that. Then there were the adult classes which usually met at night.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What subjects do you remember?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, painting and sculpture.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, those were the only two? [Inaudible]—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: We started a mosaic project and we were going to decorate a fountain that was in front of the courthouse.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: But I left before it was finished and I don't think that it ever really was finished.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, it was just a start any way. Trying out a medium we thought might be useful in Arizona. I know it was never put up but I don't know what became of it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: It was finished, the panels [ph] were finished. [Inaudible.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Now, Mr. Wardell spoke about the murals at the state college in Tempe.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And then, I think there was three there.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

[00:20:04]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Was there any others that were done?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, Mark Voris was going to do one and he designed it to be in the Tumacácori Mission, for Father Kino. I don't remember what happened to it, I know he did design it but—I don't know. Did he mention it?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I don't remember that. This was several weeks ago that I was—[Cross talk.] [Inaudible.]

PHILIP C. CURTIS: I'm afraid it's one of those things that never got [inaudible]—[Cross talk.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Installed?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Install—well, I don't think he even painted it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: We had to wait on the National Park Service. I don't think they were too enthused about the thing. And they were supposed to put up quite a bit of money.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, that's under the direction of the National Park Service now, isn't it? [Cross talk].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: [Inaudible.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I know I visited there a couple—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: But the local director wanted it. The local whatever you call it—the curator maybe.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: He wanted it. But he didn't get that.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So, what did you do after you left the Project? Why did you leave?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, just before I left, they had a big—was it a World's Fair in San Francisco?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: There were in New York during the '30s sometime, I don't remember just when.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, anyway, one of the big museums there wanted a show. It was a World's Fair, of course it was. And they were having—they wanted a show of what was being done in WPA, and they took over—not the Legion of Honor but the other—

[Cross talk.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Cow Palace?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: No. There's another one [laughs].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. [Laughs.] I don't know.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: All right, well we took the whole building over and I was in charge of putting the art center's story in that. That was sort of helpful because it jelled all the ideas that we'd been working on around the country. I had help from others, of course.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Did each state have a separate exhibit?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: No, not necessarily each state. But they selected material here and there.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: With different or—you know, it had some—some peculiar quality they wanted to show. So that's what we did here. I guess up until that time, the art center idea hadn't been explored very much by local communities. But, it started to open things up a little bit.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh. You know what year that was?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Oh, I think it was '39.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh yes, that's right. Because that's just before you got out.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah. Well, I left here, I was sort of steamed up about this art center idea. I wanted to go some other place and have a little different experience in that same program. And they were—they wanted a supervisor of a craft program, in Iowa, which I took. And they were also starting an art center there. [Being on that (ph)] a little bit. And then I was going to—I was particularly interested in exhibition techniques, and then I was on my way to Harvard [laughs]. But I did get there, just before the war started.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, what happened to your center in San Francisco?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, that was just an exhibit. The last one of the summer.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, I see. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So where was it that you wanted to set up another?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, I wanted to get in the art center program.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh. [Inaudible.]

PHILIP C. CURTIS: And find a place where I might become director.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: And stay for a period of years. But the reason, I guess, I wanted to do that was like a lot of others at that time, you couldn't earn any money painting. And this seemed to be a way to make a living and stay in the field. And I thought I was going to live forever, and was always going to paint. But I kept putting it off. So, when the war started, I was sidetracked like a lot of people. After the war, I made up my mind that this museum work was fine, but I wanted to paint. So, I started, and I've been painting since then.

[00:25:22]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And where was this? Did you come back here?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, I came back here.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, you did? Did you come to Scottsdale, at that time?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And you've been here ever since?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: [Inaudible.] Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What was Scottsdale like at that time?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Oh, very small. About 300 people.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, how many were artists?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, Lew Davis and Phillips Sanderson [ph] were people I knew here. And I guess there were a few others but—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: They had started a craft project of their own. Lew's wife, Matio [ph] was doing pottery and Sanderson was doing wood carvings, things of that sort, and they had shops in Scottsdale. Well, I guess it was more or less their activity that sort of drew winter visitors to the area. That started—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —the interest in Scottsdale.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Is that right?

PHILIP CAMPBELL CURTIS: And Llyod Kiva [Lloyd Henri Kiva New] came. That's right. He was one of the big deals in that movement. But we all worked together on this WPA program and [inaudible] some sort of an extension of our interest in that.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Was there a gallery then?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, not really, no.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Just individual studios?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: The art center was still running though.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: It never stopped.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And what did that develop into?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Into a museum.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Not the Heard Museum?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: No.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: The Phoenix Art Museum?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, that's—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: And the same key people [inaudible] who were on the original board are still on the board. And so, it has been a very successful thing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, how long did it remain in those quarters?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, I don't know. Wardell would probably—it's Wardell?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Wardell.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Wardell probably—didn't he tell you that?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I don't know. I think he did tell me something about it but I don't remember.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: They moved sometime, in the same area before the museum is now [inaudible] an old house.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That's right. Oh yes, he told me—[Cross talk.]

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —much better location.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —about going into a barn.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, there was a barn there at first.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That was the art center that was after the WPA phase—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —and then—but I don't think I asked him how long they remained in the barn.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well probably not very long because they got this old house on the same property.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: As I understand it. At least they had it when I came back, and they had been there for some time.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: When was the present museum bought or built?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Oh, it was somewhere about four years ago.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Four years ago, that's all?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Something like that. They're now building the last wing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. That's the reason I couldn't get in there this morning. [Cross talk.]

PHILIP C. CURTIS: That's the reason. It'll be completed next year.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I was disappointed not to see it.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: It's a very nice museum.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Under the beginnings we made—back in that time, we knew the land had been given to the city for this library and little theater and the art museum. So, some of our board were very anxious to, you know, take leadership in that—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —development. Walter Vinson [ph] was president of our group. And a leading influence in the art development here in Phoenix. And he and I were trying to get Frank Lloyd Wright to do the designs for the whole thing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: But by the time I got back there, he said it had got out of control. [Laughs.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: But the strange part was that one of his students did it. So, it has a nice—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, it's a very attractive building.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I was glad to see the exterior, but I'm sorry not to see the interior of it and to see what had been accomplished. Because Mr. Wardell said that in the days of the WPA there was nothing of that sort—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: No, there wasn't.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —in Phoenix or even in most of Arizona.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: No.

[00:30:07]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Had the Indian Museum, a couple of [inaudible].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: He also spoke about the work that was done with Odd Halseth.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, there was a lot. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: The archeological work, but they did the art end of it.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And he showed me some of these silk screen prints that—[Cross talk.] [Inaudible.] Oh, you keep those, I have some more. Well was that—was that work done, too, under your direction, or did that come later?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: What?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: The silk-screen reproductions of the Indian designs and the—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Let's see, I guess—I don't remember. It must have been later.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, that was the Hohokam—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —Indian excavations that Mr. Halseth was doing.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah. Well, I remember something about it, but I guess I didn't have much to do with it

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —[inaudible].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: He—he was very much interested in that, and I think it [inaudible].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: He probably carried that thing through.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, uh-huh [affirmative]. Well, I—so I wasn't sure, on some of these projects, whether they were started under you and he continued them—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —or whether they were things that developed—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —after you left.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah. I've never met him.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, is that right?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: I didn't know he was in town—other than knowing [inaudible].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, he's now the director of the Parks and Recreation Department for Maricopa County.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And so he's carried a good deal, this craftwork experience into this—new job of his and apparently it's a very exciting program.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah. Well, so many of the things that were started and tried then, did continue with [inaudible]—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —and developments there—must be interesting, you know—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —throughout the country that left a mark.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, where—you said that you had exhibited recently in New York.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, in [Knoedler -Ed.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, mm-hmm [affirmative]. What other exhibits have you had?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, my first show was here in the Phoenix Museum. About four or five years ago. And as a matter of fact, they gave me another one—[and these are the catalogs -Ed.] [inaudible] and [inaudible] three years ago.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Very glad to have those. Those are extremely attractive.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah. Well, so, I'm just getting a real late start in painting. but I do have a gallery now in New York. [Inaudible.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Now what is a medium that you use?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Oil.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Is it oil?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What is that glaze?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: I use a glazing medium. It's as heavy as varnish.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: And oil.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, what would—what would you say was a response of the people in this region to the WPA Art Projects?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, the people that were on our board were the leading citizens [of the day (ph)]. And they were pretty sold on it. We got a lot of help from the newspapers. They got—well, there were a number of people outside of the—this little area that didn't like the WPA and they didn't like the whole idea.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: There was some resistance to it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What form did it take?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Oh, just running it down when—in petty ways, you know, there was among the—some of the artists there was a little feeling of [inaudible] as I remember—there was an annoyance, you know, more the—it wasn't constructive, that's all—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —and—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Were these artists ones that were making a good enough living so that they —

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Some of them were.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —didn't need it?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

[00:35:02]

PHILIP C. CURTIS: And—well, it wasn't a question of their wanting to be on the Project, but they —well, I don't remember the incidents well enough to know—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —what the resistance was. But we—our idea, and the board's idea was, to get

the thing started as a continuing project—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —which was later developed into a museum. And we did that, so it must have been all right.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, I got the idea from Mr. Wardell that the city responded very—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, the city—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —wholeheartedly to it, and—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: They did, yeah, there were leaders on—opposition leaders that, you know, could themselves caused a little—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —friction. Personality cases [ph].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: You said that all the—there'd be long waiting lists of the students that wanted to come into the art classes and couldn't cause there just weren't the facilities—[Cross-talk.]

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah. [Inaudible.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That, of course, was at the end of the Project, so during the beginning of it, you were the one that had to—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —break down the resistance—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —I suppose.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah. Well, we kept hammering at the newspapers and sending the stories and many of them got in, but I guess that most people in the city felt that the thing a was going program.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Did you have any cutbacks in personnel during the time you were there?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Not too many, no.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: No, as a matter of fact, we kept adding and they helped add if there is any way that we could. [Inaudible.] We got it up as high as 30 people on the Project. They weren't—I think maybe six of them were artists. The rest were helpers, in lower classifications.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Did you have artists in other parts of the state?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: There were a few, but they—well, some of—I remember one was [in Wickenburg (ph)], he did landscape painting and sent them in, you know, periodically. [Inaudible] required.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: But most of them seemed to be here in Maricopa County.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. There weren't any other art centers anywhere.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: No, no. No, there wouldn't be any basis for them to be there in the beginning, you see? There wasn't any way we—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, what about Tucson?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Tucson was—there were some there, but I don't think that they—well they never started an art center. And I don't know why that didn't develop over there.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: There were a number of artists and they used to come up to the art center in Phoenix quite often to see what we were doing. There were several that were teaching, in either the university or in high school.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: And they—I think that was the reason that they already had jobs.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I mean, were they paid by WPA?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: No.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: During that time?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Oh no. No, they were—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: This was—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —in the public school system. Or the—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —state university. They had an art department.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative], yes.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: [Inaudible.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, I knew they did cause I—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: A good one.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —a great many—I think about 200 WPA prints in their collection at the art gallery there.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And all—from all different parts of the country, but then there were quite a—there a few from Arizona. And some from New Mexico, too.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And then another thing that I discovered while I was there—well Mr. Voris told me about these wood carvings by Pat Barela [Patrociño Barela], who was the Taos wood-carver.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, uh-huh [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And that was one thing we were curious about, what had happened to all these wood carvings that he—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —he was very prolific.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And Mr. Steadman [ph], the present director, didn't even know what they were. They hadn't even cataloged them.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: But Voris spoke about them and I went down and saw them—recognized them, of course, immediately.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: 13 of them. So apparently there was some—there was enough of a repository—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —so that the art director in New Mexico, Vernon Hunter felt that this was a proper place to—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —send some of these wood carvings.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So, they had that collection and the prints but that was about all I could find in Tucson, that related to the WPA.

[00:40:00]

PHILIP C. CURTIS: There was one artist here that [laughs] I was very proud of.. He was a young kid at that time, and he just wanted to paint just something fierce, you know, he'd been studying a little before then, and then when the Depression came, he qualified very easily [laughs]—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —he was on the Project. And he never had any contact with any mature [ph] painters until then. And he—he had some physical disability, he had to hold his hand in order to support it while he painted.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh. What was his name?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: John Leeper.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: And he continued painting and now he's a very well-known painter in California.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: And a good one, a fine painter.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, well I—Mr. Wardell spoke about him, but I didn't know about this disability —

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: — he had, but he did—in fact, he did some murals.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yes, he did a mural. [Inaudible.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And quite a few easel paintings.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, yeah. But there are—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That's nice.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —at that time it was—his painting improved a lot, his color sense was kind of gloomy.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, [inaudible].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, it wasn't good color. But he became a beautiful painter, you know.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. There was another artist that Mr. Wardell spoke about

that—Polish name.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, Golembeski [ph].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Golembeski [ph], yes. Did you know him, too?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yes, he was on the Project. He was—he was very talented and he had a great disability. He was paralyzed as the result of an accident. One side of his body was—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, that's what—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: He had to switch from [inaudible] left-hand.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Wardell said he started—had to learn all over again, with his left hand.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I saw some—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: We helped a little, you know, [inaudible]. He is—he came in the other day, [inaudible] saw him the other day.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, is that right?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Is he still in this area?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, he's on an Indian reservation. Navajo.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh. What town?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: He told me, but I don't remember. Window Rock.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, I see. That's the center. What's he doing?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, his wife is teaching, and it's very hard to talk to him 'cause he still can't talk very well.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, is that right?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: So, I—I couldn't get much out of him except that he's still drawing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, are there any other comments that you'd like to make about that period?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: You felt it gave art a push in this area?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yes, oh yes. Most definitely, yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: It something that couldn't happen I guess any other way except in this Depression situation. But I think it was well—the money and effort was pretty well used.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: I don't know whether [inaudible] another government program could do anything now or not. Artists are doing pretty well today.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, do you—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: So much better than they've ever done [inaudible].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, do you think that it made the average person more art conscious?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Oh yeah. Well, it got it out of New York, you know? It was pretty much located in New York. So, there is a wave of museums being built all over the country. And that's good. Now it's—well I don't know, I'd like to know how many of these little art centers continue. Maybe somebody in the project would—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, that's, of course, one of the things we're trying to do in this survey.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: See if we can find out the beginnings of some—I know there's one—it's a small museum, in New Mexico, in Roswell.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Which was built with WPA funds—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, that's what it was, mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —and it sort of died down movement after the war. But it was there, and it was revived and now it's in an excellent little museum —

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —and it definitely started with the WPA.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So, if this survey being a nationwide thing—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —probably find out from interviews such as this—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —about the centers that started and the interest that started during that period, and some that flourished in one way in another, or in some cases, died out.

[00:45:07]

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, do you think that it also affected the shift of the art world itself from Paris to this country?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, well, it must have had some bearing on it. The whole shift is probably more complicated than that, but—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —it did give American art a real boost at that time, and it had never had it before.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No, no. Well, I know when I went to school if you didn't go to Paris, you weren't an artist.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: That's true, yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Comparatively recently as that.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And—but I don't think there's that feeling anymore with the young artist [inaudible].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: No, no there isn't—very little of it. As a matter of fact, when I was getting ready for an exhibit, somebody said I should have my first show in—one place that was

suggested was London. And it was possible [inaudible], but I found out in my own little survey that [inaudible][laughs]—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —the best place was New York, in this country.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: And so, I gave up that.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What do you think about this, the new trends art—Pop art, and Op art?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: There always are new trends. They're always a part of the times in some way or other. Things like Pop art probably won't last very long.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Hope not.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I'm just completely out of sympathy with it myself.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: That's one of the things that I remember we had trouble with here in Phoenix. The shows were—the painting that was sent here on the exhibition schedule wasn't geared to local taste.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, it naturally wouldn't be, you know—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No, of course not.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —there was a great big isolation of—might be one or two people in the whole of Phoenix that had ever seen what was being actually done by the successful artists, the mature artists at that time.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: So that—there was a little—there was a lot of friction on that. [Inaudible.] This isn't painting, this isn't good. You know, it's—you know, it's a waste of money, to foster this kind of painting. And they all—they're all pretty well-known painters then, you know? And I was amazed and surprised, but I got used to the idea that something had to—like that, had to be protected [ph] and then what we did was set up exhibits to try to give some background to what was being done at that time.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, and I suppose with your lectures, too, could help.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, uh-huh[affirmative]. We did a number of shows the kind of relate—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —you know, to present time. And that was rather successful.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Were any of the Phoenix painters very advanced?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, Lew Davis was—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I've never seen his work.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —here when I came. He's a very good painter. Sanderson is a very good sculptor. And Mark Voris was a good artist.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I saw some of his work, but I wouldn't—what I saw was not—well, it was a good deal of subject matter—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —so that there weren't any—none of you were abstract painters at that time.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: No, I guess not, no.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So probably—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: I was doing a sort of thing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: You were, mm-hmm [affirmative]?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: On Sundays [laughs], you know.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Nobody could see you, huh?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, no, I was—well I didn't show that work.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: No.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I could see how that would be quite an educational process for the community, to have these traveling exhibits in—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: [Inaudible] surprised to see, and I wasn't prepared for the [laughs] reaction, in the beginning, you know, I thought that everybody knew about painting, but [inaudible] that's why I was there. [Laughs.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, well, I can see it'd be quite a shock to you—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —after being in New York. I guess it was a shock to me when I came to Santa Fe. I had understood it to be the art center of the Southwest.

[00:50:00]

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And had hoped to get back into the art field again, but oh—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —goodness, they were 50 years behind the times.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: I know.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: As far as I was concerned. And so, all that's changed since I've been there. There are very few artists then—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —who were doing anything that was in the modern tradition.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Contemporary art. So, still isn't very good. In fact, I think Taos has more good artists—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —per square foot than Santa Fe does.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah. Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, do you find opposition to your painting in regard to these—I mean relation to these trends now of Op and Pop art?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: No, I haven't. At least it doesn't come to me. I—there are quite a few of the young painters who are in that area of painting—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —who seem to have a [inaudible] doing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Are there any artists of that type in this area?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, there are?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: [Inaudible.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: [Inaudible] Oh, I guess we must have 20 galleries around here. Have you looked into that?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No, I haven't had a chance to.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, there are a lot.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Of all shades.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, that's why I'd hoped to see the—get into the museum this morning, you know?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So that I could see what type of thing was being done in this area because I haven't been exposed to it at all. I don't think that either Op or Pop have hit Santa Fe. I haven't seen any evidence of it there.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Do you know Raymond Johnson?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: No.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, he's been doing Op art for years.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah, I [inaudible].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: This is a very tricky—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —fool-the-eye kind of business. And he works with polymers a lot. And he's with the University of New Mexico. He has—his gallery is right on campus, part of campus—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —so that he has a permanent gallery there.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And I was just—when I saw him—when I interviewed him and saw his things which was just as though somebody'd done 30 years ago—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —were just the kind of thing they're doing now.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: But it seemed a little tricky to me. I—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, there—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —a good solid painting, I don't, I don't—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Sometimes it'll hurt your eyes. [Laughs.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: It does. You just can't, you know, the vibrations are so terrific that it's uncomfortable.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And of course, those were some of the effects that he was trying to get.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: But I—not my idea of painting.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah. There was one other thing I remember we did.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: We were working at the Indian school. And we—Lloyd New was the man had been sent in to be the art director of that. So, we provided him with a couple of designers and [inaudible] architect one, and [inaudible] they designed a lot of furniture and built [inaudible] an art gallery and in the beginnings of art department—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —made easels and you know—[inaudible] and then the gallery was really rather nice. It gave them a lot of dignity that they didn't have. And [inaudible]. Nice table, nice chair, drapes, and you know, it's rather impressive.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. These are some of the cabinetmakers that—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —you had on the Project?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, that's nice. I didn't know about that before.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: There was enough good design going on in the Project to keep a lot of these wood people busy.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: [Inaudible.] So quite a bit was done there.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. Well, I think you accomplished a great deal in this area.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, [inaudible]. [Cross talk.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: [Inaudible.]

PHILIP C. CURTIS: It was a good start, I thought, yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, with so few to work with—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I mean, it wasn't just like these art cities with—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, well—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —hundreds—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —the way we sized it up, we just took our few artists we had and just spread them out as much as we could. And you know, their activities [inaudible] and the impact would be better.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. Well, this survey that is being made by the Archives is for the purpose of finding out just what did happen during those days—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —cause many of the records have been lost, and a good many of the people have gone that were involved in it—

[00:55:03]

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —and that of course, with the war coming right after, why everybody forgot about it.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And so that we just now begin to realize that a great deal was accomplished during that period, it should be reported more fully—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —than it was at the time, or since. So we hope to have this publication out within the next year, or so.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And we'll get a better picture of what happened.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: We had one interesting exhibit. We found a Stradivarius violin, and we looked around, we found a Guarnerius.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: So, we added it. And then we found someone else who repaired violins. So, we had a nice show on just violin. Showed all the steps necessary to make one and it had a lot of history—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh yes.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —of the instrument.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: And it was [laughs]—it was very interesting because there were a lot of fiddlers that lived in the state. And there were all these old-timers that had the beards and [inaudible]—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh yes.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —and they came in with their old fiddles [laughs]—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: —to see this show and to do a little performing [laughs].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, isn't that nice?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: And not just one or two, I guess there were probably 10 of them altogether, who heard of the thing and came in.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Were there any Spanish-Americans?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, they were there, of course. [Cross talk.] Well, that was the kind of activity we wanted to encourage.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, it was a slightly different field—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —but it was sufficiently related—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —to sort of helped pull other people in the community. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you know if there were any theater or dance projects in Arizona? Did you hear of any?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, there was in the college.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, there was, under the WPA?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: No, no.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh. No, I meant WPA.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: No.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: See they, that was part of the Federal—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: No, no.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Art Program. There was a theater, and—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: We didn't have any theater.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —dance, and—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: It wasn't a nucleus [inaudible].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: [Inaudible.]

PHILIP C. CURTIS: [Inaudible.] One building we did over there completely was for the dance groups in the college.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: In the college. Oh yes, I remember the mural.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: We saw the—Mr. Wardell had photographs of that—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —that he let us borrow.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So, we have a pretty good picture of what was—a visual picture, of what was done here.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, there—apparently, there was some music in New Mexico.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, we had a music program.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, you did?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, and a Writers' Project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative], yeah.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Are you going into those—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No, not in to the Writers, and—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Director of that is here, now.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: [Inaudible.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, Ross Santee.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Do you know him?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yeah. I know of him, I've known of him ever since I've been West, but we didn't have his address and I asked Mr. Voris where he was and he gave me an address in Delaware.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, no he's [inaudible]—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mr. Wardell said that—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: He sent me this painting [laughs].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, how nice.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: I see him [inaudible].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Wow. Well, it's nice to know that [we can see him (ph)] tv antenna [Philip C. Curtis laughs.] coming out of his little hut. [Laughs.] Well, I got his new address from Mr. Wardell and it's possible that I will go over to see him because—even though he was the head of the Writers' Project which we are not covering, but he also, for a short time, I understand, between the time you left and Mr. Wardell came on, he sort of administered—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —the Art Project.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And of course, he's—I've always identified him more as an artist than as a writer.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, I know, yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So, it's possible that I will go to interview him.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah. Well, he's—you can find him at the golf course [laughs].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, is that right?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Every day.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I'll have to think ahead of time and make sure—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: If you want to contact him, telephone him to the golf course.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: The caddy house.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, he plays golf all the time?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, he likes golf.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHILIP C. CURTIS: He plays, you know, nine, at least nine holes every day.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Wonderful. Well, we're just about at the end of our tape, so are there—is there anything else you'd like to say before we cut it off?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: No, except that I keep seeing people all over the country that were in the program and they all agree that it was one the finest things that's happened in American art.

[01:00:05]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Good.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: So many of them—it saved so many people, you know, that are now really doing very well. And they wouldn't have been.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, that's what I think was the great accomplishment of the Project, that they allowed artists to go on painting—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —rather than have to go and do something else that would have possibly diverted them to—

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —the point where they never would have gone back to it.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Well, right here probably is the best example of being influenced by—or getting the chance to see what the good artists of the day were doing. [Inaudible] few local artists.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: And they really did develop [inaudible].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Curtis, for your interview and also for your help in tracking down Mr. Davis for me. [Laughs.]

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, no.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I haven't quite pinpointed him yet, but maybe I will, we'll see.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, I'm sure you'll find him.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Was his wife—did you say, was she on the Project, too?

PHILIP C. CURTIS: No, she wasn't.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: But she was a sculptor.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: She's a sculptor. Well, I'll look forward to seeing them and Mr. Sanderson tomorrow.

PHILIP C. CURTIS: Yeah, good.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, thank you again, very much.

[END OF TRACK AAA_curtis65_8487_m.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]