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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Burgoyne Diller,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Burgoyne Diller on October 2, 1964. The interview took place in Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, and was conducted by Harlan Phillips for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You know, this whole period of the WPA and more particularly the New York WPA is a kind of atmosphere that has to be recreated. In a way, it's the circumstances under which what took place, took place. Now I don't know - - as a point of departure before we get to you personally - - what do you remember about the atmosphere in New York as '29 went into the '30s, so far as the artists were concerned, and more particularly the modern artists? What the heck was life like - you know, opportunity like? Chance? Galleries? Interests? Market? Any of this strike a receptive chord?

BURGOYNE DILLER: Probably too many chords at the same time.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well

BURGOYNE DILLER: You name it. I mean, for instance, one thing that certainly characterized the period was lack of work, lack of money just to get the necessities of life. I mean, you learned to eat practically nothing so you could buy a tube of paint, and so on and so forth. You had a little part time job, or you'd pick up all sorts of crazy things in order to exist. It seemed to be true of all the artists. Whatever markets there had been prior to, probably 1928, '27, I mean, seemed to be thoroughly dried up. The galleries - - there wasn't the number of galleries we have today - - and if you happened to be concerned at all about the contemporary movements in art at the time, which then, of course, were Cubism and so on, why there was absolutely no place to show your work. Then, of course, you had the opposite of what you have today, to show representational painting. Then we had this problem again with abstract painting. Where would you show it? You were terribly fortunate to be shown any place, which is really, you know, the thing that brought the American Abstract Artists into being, so that cooperatively they might be able to finance a place to have a show once a year and that sort of thing. It was a very necessary thing.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: After all, your so-called big institutions that were supposed to have done so much for the artists, you know, in the past, the Museum of Modern Art, and so on - - I don't think they had a prohibition against showing American abstract painters, but they didn't show them. They showed very, very few of them.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: I know that the artists at that time, the abstract painters, they petitioned them to let the American Abstract Artists have a show there and so on, and they insisted that it would lower the Museum standards unless the Museum could select the work itself and present it as they wished to present it, which would bring it back to the situation the American Abstract Artists already had, because they certainly had no choice then of anyplace to exhibit. I am confronted at the moment with the fact that they presented the work to a larger audience, and that is probably a functioning institution.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Was there - from what you've said, there wasn't much in the way of interest in things American so far as the modern movement was concerned.

BURGOYNE DILLER: You mean in things or people?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: In art in the '20s and as it approached the '30s what is it - the collector was interested in foreign things of a modern kind. Even the Modern Museum was interested in foreign works of a modern kind.

BURGOYNE DILLER: That's right. And I think the prevalent thing at the time certainly was that if a person had money, they went to Europe to buy paintings.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: To such an extent that I know one artist in particular -- you know, he married an American girl. He was selling very well, doing very interesting work and selling very well and most of his sales, however, were to Americans who went to Paris. He married an American girl. He went to Virginia to live, had a beautiful

studio; said it was the most wonderful setup he ever had in his life to work, and he worked hard, but he never sold a painting during the time he was here. I saw him just before he was leaving to return to Europe, and he said that he just gave up, that he'd been here almost two years, had sold absolutely nothing. He said "Now if I go back, I know I will sell to Americans again." He did. I received a card from him later on. He said, "As I told you, the Americans are buying my paintings again." You can imagine what an American artist was doing who couldn't retreat to Europe - his situation. I mean this prevailed. There was not only no financial interest, but there was even -- such a scant interest in the work itself, aside from supporting it. As I said, you were very, very fortunate to show your work.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes, but I think, you know, this impulse - it goes away back, the desire on the part of the non-traditional artist to get together with other non-traditional artists to hold a show of their work partly because the dealers were not interested. The Brooklyn Museum, once in a while, would have a show of what were then called modern things, a Dana at Newark would have a show, Max Weber, for example, but Max Weber was what? Nothing in the '20s - in terms of a market, or interest on the part of Americans for his work. Dana saw something in it. The fellow who was running the Brooklyn Museum catered to a developmental approach, you know.

BURGOYNE DILLER: What was his name? Yutes?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I believe so, although I ...

BURGOYNE DILLER: I remember Yutes mainly as the person I think I knew in the '30s there, and I think one of the things that he did as director, he protested against the 200 steps to go up into the entrance of the Museum, and he demanded that they remove the steps. After all, they had been placed there pretty much as a barrier to keep the common person from coming in and spoiling the works of art. He insisted that the stairs be taken away and an entrance made at the ground level so people could come in. He had faith.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. But no more so than Dana, who insisted that the museum be right in the center of town, be part of the life of the place. Or his interest in collecting gadgets from the five-and-ten cent store, or glass that you could purchase, the common, ordinary things, and having shows of this kind of design which was within the knowledge, comprehension, appreciation of people. Not the catering to those who had an alleged taste in an Old Master, but the broad sweep of things. I suspect the modern movement was, you know, part of this broad sweep to encompass something American. I don't know whether you got any pleasure out of the fact that the nation as a whole in '29, and thereafter, '30 and '31, finally caught up with the position that the modern artist had been in all through the '20s, when our economic system fell on its back. There was some problem about what to do in the way of projects. You can't compete with industry. You have to find an area that is somehow, some way safe, you know, from competing with industry, so public buildings, like post offices, schools, courthouses and the like began to be talked about, because this is one way in which the government could convey both interest and create work. Somewhere along the line -- and I don't know how or why -- well, there had been a series of things, the FERA, for example, but this wasn't art for itself, and an artist in those days in the FERA could be employed in almost any way, whether it was road building, you know, they didn't make a distinction. Then I suspect people like Baker and others saw a way to alter FERA to include CWA, the Civil Works Administration, which included within it some opportunity for artists under Edward Bruce, I believe, the Public Works of Art Project. All by way of background as to, you know, where does that artist fit in society when he's hungry, and since society is on its back, what can we do. Well, in a way this is a funding problem. In New York itself there was a thing called, I think, the Gibson Committee, do you remember it?

BURGOYNE DILLER: That's right. They set up a committee exactly for the New York City area, and it was aimed toward the employment of artists.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: And it didn't go on too long, but I mean at least it was starting something.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It was a seed.

BURGOYNE DILLER: But the remnants of that were picked up by, I think it was, TRAP.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: The Whitney Museum was the center from which -- the Whitney and their associated directors and the other people they selected acted as the committee to pass on work. That was an extraordinary thing in the sense that the artists selected by them were given a schedule for working in their own studios based on the artist's own production. In other words, if the artist said, "Well I spend three months painting a painting," or six months or whatever, and it was a reasonable statement, they'd accept this as the time schedule for him to bring in a work. Now at that time there were very few abstract painters. I happened to be one of the abstract painters that were in that group, the original group. I think Gorky and Stuart Davis and I'm not sure who

else, but there were not very many at the time. Then that of course went out of existence.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure.

BURGOYNE DILLER: The only thing carried on from that was a series of mural competitions that they started for buildings in the City of New York. It was - the painter's name was Eric Most. He had won one of the awards for the Roberts High School. I'd been dropped from the project as others, the other easel painters had, for some period of time. Then I was invited to work with him to act as an assistant or whatever, to help him with the mural. But because they had received funds, I believe they were funds, that were either carried for them to complete these mural jobs, or nearly complete these mural jobs, which was later taken up by the beginning of the Art Project as such and finished, terminated. So that I was working with him when the larger program started under WPA or rather, pardon me, the Federal Art Program.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Then I was moved from there to the Federal Art Program at the initiation of that when they first started building it up, you know, when it first really got going. I went there as a mural supervisor.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. I wondered, you know, and again by way of seeds and background and aid, what function and role did the College Art Association play with reference to local artists? Any at all?

BURGOYNE DILLER: Well, the College Art Association had been, through Mrs. Audrey McMahon, I think, mainly, had been tremendously interested in the potentiality of these either city, state, or federally-operated programs assisting the artists.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Because the problem of unemployment, you see of artists as such would be brought very sharply to their attention because so many of the colleges throughout the country employed the few artists that were employed, you see, as art historians, or whatever. The College Art Association had always maintained an employment bureau for art historians and art teachers and so on. They had a magazine which heralded the possibility. I think they did a great deal. The Association really was an important factor particularly when unemployed artists came to Federal attention and because, as I said, the Federal Art Program. The first offices were at the College Art Association.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And it did, I think, several things - Mrs. McMahon, whose interest is long and deep in the field, plus the fact that the lack of a place to show one's work encouraged the College Art Association also to have shows where people could show their work, or to support shows.

BURGOYNE DILLER: They organized circulating exhibitions that went around the country. I know that in that early period I had been invited one time to select the work for a very modern sort of show of the Constructivist painters and the style and so on, which was organized later and sent around as a circulating exhibition. They really did try to bring to the general attention the work of contemporaries.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. What about the Whitney Museum and more particularly Mrs. Force, who was, I guess as the name implies, its driving force?

BURGOYNE DILLER: She was. I was never really acquainted with her. Naturally I met her, but my contact with her was very slight, although I did know, as any other artist who had been around New York knew, that she was the one that really was the motivating force toward a great deal of our activities, probably activities that are culminating now in the growth they have experienced.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But isn't this another source of interest in what was called in the 20s the modern art movement?

BURGOYNE DILLER: I think the Whitney Museum at that time was not as concerned about the -- there again, you have to draw a line about what you mean, "contemporary art," and "modern art," "abstract painting" and so on. The Whitney was, I think, more concerned with what they would call the American artists. Now that might be in the more familiar terms of the American scene painter, or probably partially socially-aware artist of the time who was talking, you know, making statements and so on. But mostly, I believe, the American Scene painter. I think if you were to look back in the catalogues of that period, you would recognize some fine painters. I mean Hopper and heaven knows who else, that have done rather outstanding things. But there was a very slight encouragement there of abstract painting, or anything of the sort. Stuart Davis was there, you know, included always because I think probably it was his good fortune to be with Mrs. Halpert and the fact that the group that she had was the group that was very much appreciated by the people at the Whitney.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: And therefore Stuart was more or less included with them. Then too, Stuart Davis always did have a little signature of the American Scene, you know, a work or a gas tank or something of that sort, so it made him more acceptable in a sense.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: What you're saying then is that the Whitney was more selective in its support, or its encouragement than the College Art Association would be?

BURGOYNE DILLER: I think the College Art Association had a more general educational viewpoint of work and probably a more objective viewpoint, while the Whitney Museum, as you said, had a more selective viewpoint because it was considered the American museum, and they were trying to more or less build that up as strongly as they could. But the attitude toward what was American was a pretty sharply defined line. As I said, I think you could express it best by saying the American Scene sort of painting.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. When the Federal -- the WPA I think was announced in June, the latter part of June in the summer of '35. Hopkins

BURGOYNE DILLER: The WPA, now are you referring to all the Federal Art Program?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I'm thinking of the WPA and within it the Federal Art Program Number 1, which is the subject really of our interest, but Hopkins was present in New York and the names of the people who were going to head up the four projects were announced in the press with certain regional directors allegedly chosen throughout the country. For example, the announcement of Eddie Cahill for the arts, for the subsection Federal Art Project Number One, and then there was Henry Alsberg and

BURGOYNE DILLER: Hallie Flanagan.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Hallie Flanagan and Sokolov in music, so that suddenly -- I say "suddenly," but the Gibson Committee, to some extent the Whitney, the College Art Association and various state and city projects had already indicated some need in the arts, in the creative arts. Nonetheless, this is like a front page indication that the Federal government had discovered that "artists" including musicians, writers, actors, actresses, artists were also to be aided in the sense of a project. It wasn't entirely clear the nature of the project. How did you first become aware of the existence of this? You have indicated, I think, that you were on something which seemed to have continuity in itself, and they just changed sort of headings.

BURGOYNE DILLER: That's right, as I said, I was on the TRAP. After a lapse of a few months, I was asked to be an assistant to Eric Most on the mural, which was a carryover, and then that was picked up for completion by the beginning of the Federal Art Program. But in the meantime, I was asked to work in the office as a supervisor, so it was a rather continuous thing.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. How did -- well, you know, had you given thought, or was there discussion among artist friends of yours as to the nature of this new WPA, or no?

BURGOYNE DILLER: I think that in a way there had been a lot of discussion. Particularly the artists had started organizing in order to demand assistance. Mainly at the time for the city and so on, and there was also the feeling that the State should enter into it and then finally suddenly that the Federal Government should enter into it, so it was something just building up, something that hadn't reached any kind of maturity in its demand, but still the demand was there, and it was vocal.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. I think this is a feature that's often overlooked, namely: that artists, for example, who can be as ruggedly individualistic as any creatures in the United States were finding somehow through union organization a collective power which each individual artist could not exercise. Starting with the City, the Artists union marches on City Hall, the effort to get a local art gallery operating and you know, functioning under artists themselves, this kind of thing -- like having a vested interest in breathing and making it substantial through organization of other like-minded people, as a collective force, but heck, collectivity was in the nation as a whole as something new, unionization of the automobile industry and the steel industry was going on at the same time, so collective organization must have been in the air.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Collective seems to be a term of accomplishment in a sense. Actually, I think that what happened was for the first time there was an association of artists, and by that I mean mutual association because of mutual needs. For the first time artists were talking together in large groups so that there was a possibility for arriving at opinions that were mutually heard. And God knows there are differences of opinion, but on the whole they were united by one very simple, basic thing. They needed to eat. Don't forget those times were not -- you're not thinking of art as much. Of course, the artist always did. He'd probably starve to death still wanting to paint a picture, but on the other hand, your primary concern was how do you feed yourself, how do

you feed your family, and the artist was possibly in some senses considered the least employable, perhaps because of their eccentricities, or whatever you want to call the name for it. As a matter of fact, I found during that period that the artist was probably the most self-reliant, self-sufficient individual in the City of New York. You had some of your top-management people standing on a corner selling apples, but somehow or other artist had so many accomplishments, craft accomplishments and related things that he could do, that he somehow or other survived. However, this did not keep the total specter of the wolf from the door, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure.

BURGOYNE DILLER: The next day what are you going to eat and how do you buy a tube of paint? All right. They all have this need. They get together and they talk about it, and if they talk about that, they can't help themselves because they're made that way, they also talk about art. Then they start having battles about art, and at that time, you know, the terrific thing was that on one hand you had a strong development of the social scene painter, you know, "If you're painting abstractions, you're painting in an ivory tower" and, you know, "You're not relating yourself to society." Your abstract painter was saying "Well, of course, if you're just a social-scene painter, you're just another medium of communication but a bad painting probably," and so on. Do you know that's the first time in history that artists in these numbers ever came together?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: If before in any period artists came together, they came together out of one culture, one tradition, in Greece, or wherever it might have been, but there you had people from all over the world representing every culture, representing every viewpoint and united on the basis of art.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. I think that's a feature of the period, you know, which is often overlooked. For example, there have been -- oh, in the past, 1910, 1895 -- a group of artists who disagreed, you know, with the dominant group of artists who were picking shows, or put on juries and so on, and they delivered a kind of manifesto of deviation from them and, you know, these are important names in American art. There was a question of aesthetics. "I'm not getting a good hearing on my work," this kind of thing. But here in the 30s, it's a wholly different kind of proposition. It's the identification of an artist as also a human being in an industrial society and seemingly no place, no niche in it for him....

BURGOYNE DILLER: And he was firmly convinced that the work he did had a place in society.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Was important to society, was important to the cultural development of America, but he's the last one that society would think of supporting unless he happened to be a mechanic who would do what they wanted him to do....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: If he's a good decorator, or if he's a good illustrator, or painted what they thought to dictate was good art then they could use -- and I mean probably literally use him, but the painter felt he had a more important, more basic social and cultural relationship than this, and he felt he had as much right certainly to work, to produce his work as a ditch digger did that had to dig a ditch....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Even if he couldn't get as much pay for doing it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But how are we -- you know, this gathering of these individualistic, creative, aesthetic people - artists, this is a gradual thing, an assertion, this common voice, or talking about a common problem impelled by a need, or the discovery that one had an empty stomach, that it had been empty all through the 20s, in effect. Although, you know, something else you said strikes a chord because in talking with Davis, as an example, all during the 20s while his art didn't sell in the sense that selling is, somehow, somewhere some persons, some group of people, somehow he was able to keep going, namely on whatever it was that attracted his insight that he wanted to do, the main line of his own thinking and expression and development.

BURGOYNE DILLER: In other words, somebody would buy a painting, or he'd have a teaching job, or something would come along that would keep him and sustain him.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: This was true of most of the painters of, let's say, his caliber. I mean like Gorky. I never knew of Gorky working at a laboring job. Gorky always said there was someone who wanted to study with him who could pay him a little bit, and he taught at the Grand Central School of Art. He had a class there and, as I

said, just had a person here and there that really thought his work was outstanding and worth investing in, of course, investment was so little at the time, but it was enough to pay the rent once in a while and keep far enough ahead and eat and maybe even have a drink once in a while...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. But then when the nation as a whole collapsed the possibilities of sustaining oneself grew less and less, I gather...

BURGOYNE DILLER: Oh, certainly ...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: So that hunger propelled a group to develop as distinct from an individual like Gorky or Davis. You know, instead of themselves being able to keep themselves sustained, they confronted a kind of emptiness as everybody was shot, everybody finally joined the artists in wondering as to what tomorrow was going to bring...

BURGOYNE DILLER: Not only wondering about what tomorrow was going to bring, but realizing full well when you got up in the morning, "How am I going to feed my family during the day?" It was a very stark and very real problem and I think that other artists probably had the experience that I did -- you know, getting out of college back in '27, the end of '27, this period of decline really started. I was in the Midwest, but it was this sort of thing, I went to Buffalo and I got a job. I was there for probably two weeks, and they laid off a hundred people, and I naturally. I was the last taken on. I got a job trimming windows, and they dropped half the crew after I was there three weeks. I got a job in a silk screen place, and again I lasted a few weeks, and then they cut back the force. It was like snowballing down the hill. Finally, just by sheer pull, political pull -- you can believe this or not -- I got a job as a porter in the Buffalo post office. You know what that meant; that meant swabbing the decks and shoveling coal, washing windows, and the only reason I didn't clean the latrines was because - well, you have partners, and my partner was afraid to do windows on the outside and so he cleaned the latrines while I did the windows on the outside. But this is typical of the artist. I landed in New York City. I wanted to go to the Leagues. I had no money, but I did get a scholarship to the League. What did I do? I went to the little restaurants and painted signs for them in exchange for meals. You went through such a variety of funny, ingenuous ways of trying to live.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: In short, you, like many of the others, had a preparation for survival through the multiplicity of things that you turned your hand to of necessity.

BURGOYNE DILLER: And frankly any other artists I knew had to do the same thing so the result is we became multi-talented. The dangerous thing of course -- jack of all trades and master of none. In other words, our mastery of one, the one we wanted, was rather elusive, because how could you spend time doing it when you had to spend time getting enough to survive ...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Just to survive ...

BURGOYNE DILLER: I thought I was terribly fortunate because I had a scholarship. Then I got a scholarship job at the League, and I sold paints in the little store for a few years there. It was only an afternoon job but, you know, that was money. It wasn't much, but believe me, it was a lot compared to most of the artists that I was friendly with at the time. So it was a question of most of us just pitching in together, and sometimes we'd have one pot of soup for ten. Sometimes hardly enough for one. It's crazy, but it was wonderful.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. But the

BURGOYNE DILLER: I think, as a matter of fact, there's something that's unforgettable about that period. There was a wonderful sense of belonging to something, even if it was an underprivileged and downhearted time. You just weren't a stranger. Now we've reverted back again to the days when the artists rarely meet. If they do, it's under such artificial circumstances, and they're so infested with hangers-on, and it becomes, you know, a battle of cliches. Everything else in the world except the very vital, fundamental issues that you were confronted with then that made you sleep together...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: A complete change.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Because then it was a matter of survival, but, as I say, it was exciting. I cannot look back on it and say, "here, this was a time of pain." God knows, there were problems, there was unhappiness, there were many things, but underlying it was something that maybe in a sense you lose contact with in such a false environment as the city, or a farmer might have in the farm, his attachment to the soil and things that grow, that sort of thing -- I think something kind of rather fundamental, and somehow or other you were aware of it. We were all aware of it. Our differences between ourselves aesthetically -- well, they degenerated into a kind of quibble unless they were being utilized for political reasons. In other words, you could be a very academic painter. I could be a very abstract painter. We could get along fine. The only time we had a pitched battle was if you decided that painting had to be directed only towards the Marxian function of propaganda, or something of

the sort, and I had the unholy attitude of art for art's sake, you know. Then of course we'd become terribly involved. This is what happened in the Artist's Union, the Artist's Congress, those organizations, but as I said, there was such a basic thing to hold them that no matter how much they would quarrel with each other, they still had to hold together, or else they'd be lost...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Well is there an ingredient in this coming together, the fact that they had a common employer, the Government. How did they look upon that?

BURGOYNE DILLER: I think that the coming together started before the government stepped in because I still remember hanging paintings on the fence in Washington Square when men like Vernon Porter and some others organized -- they got the City's permission for the artists to sell works on Washington Square. Now that was the beginning of these Washington Square shows, but believe me, at that time you had all the name artists hanging their wares on Washington Square and hoping against hope, you know, that they'd sell anything for anything, any price...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: And as I said, there you had the beginning of a kind of cooperative spirit and the necessity for cooperation before your projects came into existence. I think your first sign of it was actually in the Washington Square shows. Then afterwards the committee from the Washington Square shows -- well, I remember one name more distinctly, Vernon Porter, but there were others. Then rather than just drop it at that point, you see, they'd go to restaurants and to hotels and theaters and try to organize shows for artists because they had a long list of them, you know, that had hung at the Washington Square show. Every once in a while, you know, you'd get a little note asking if you wanted to show in the Roxy, because they were able to show fifty canvasses up there for a week, or two weeks, or in a little restaurant down in the Village, you know, or in a restaurant up town, and so on. This was something that really worked, and I think it was one of the things that again was a strong motivating force in bringing into existence the concept of a government, city, state or federal that recognized not only need, but the necessity to provide some form of work, or at least space to show, or some way for the artist to survive.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. So that these more formal organizations, like the Artists Union, and the Artists Congress were extensions of this. The scene changed too, but extensions of this early coming together, identification of interest and need.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Yes, as they became more formalized in their demands and also in the possibilities of that sort of assistance.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. That is, as the direction pointed toward government as the source of funds, you know, to sustain artists, it meant a more formal organization to -- well, you know, rates of pay, sick leaves, etc, etc, etc, etc, etc. where unionization was a kind of feeling that was abroad in the land anyway -- well, from '32 on. Up until that time you know, unionization was looked upon as something to war against. Actually it wasn't decided that you could really join something fruitfully until about 1936, when the Supreme Court said you could do it, you know.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Yes. Before that you were either a Communist, or IWW, or something of the sort.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, whatever the organization was, you were a whole host of other things except what ...

BURGOYNE DILLER: Improper.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Of course, because it was a thorn that had to be dealt with. But what were the circumstances where you were asked to become part of the office force of the organization? What was the felt need? How was the federal art program organized so that they could see the necessity for supervisory assistance?

BURGOYNE DILLER: Apparently, New York City had been voted a certain amount, or rather, granted a certain amount of money. A certain budgetary limitation was set up, but the funds would become available. Now understand, this means money to be spent. Therefore, you had to have people working to earn that money, and this comes to putting people to work. When I was called in there, it was an extraordinary situation because the thing had been just started in that past month or so, and what we were doing -- our job was to put people to work. But we had a doublefold responsibility. You can't put people to work at nothing. The only thing you could do immediately was to say, "Well here, try experimenting with some mural ideas," if you felt the man was capable of this work. You see, the work was submitted to a committee, and it was decided whether he could be an easel painter. Now that's easy. We all can paint, you see. Or a sculptor, you know -- "go off and prepare some sketches for a sculpture." You could put them to work immediately, but in a division like the mural division or architectural sculpture, it was a different thing, because we had to get the sponsorship of public institutions in order to assign anything. Those people we felt were more immediately able to start developing projects we

assigned to just general thinking about the things, about the mural, because don't forget, very few men had had the opportunity of working on walls. We felt that if they just exercised a little bit until we could find them a sponsor, you see, why we'd be that much up on the game. I know that in my case it was a question of spending half the day, you know, on the committee, accepting the artists, enrolling them and assigning them to what I thought was reasonable that would help in the total picture that was developing. Then the other half or more of your time was spent in going out to city agencies and talking with people in public libraries and so on and having them request a mural. Now the commitment at the time on their part was really that they would have the mural. They could order a mural through the head of the department, through their agency and, as in the high school, for instance, if they were a grade school or a high school, or whatever, you'd have to go through the Board of Education and have the Board of Education make the request. But the original request came from the school itself. So we'd have to talk to the school principals and so on and say, "Well here, we've looked at your building, and we think there's an opportunity of having a mural in the auditorium, or in the hallways or something. It might be appropriate, and if you'd be interested and if they were, why we'd develop it from there. As fast as we could get these institutions committed to the sponsorship, then we could assign artists to make tentative sketches for the job. It was a problem really of, as I said -- we had to have men at work in order to use the money that had been designated for the area and for the activity. If you didn't have it, of course, the funds would probably be withdrawn. It was an impossible sort of task, but one that you thought you had to do something about. I think that in most cases it wasn't too difficult to secure sponsorship of high schools and libraries. I mean it took some considerable amount of talking perhaps and so on, but once they realized that this was something that was within their own discretionary powers, and that the work would be subject to their complete approval, they didn't feel too great a hesitancy about ordering, or becoming sponsors. I think the greatest threat to their acceptance would have been that work could have been put in there over their own decision of what they wanted. This couldn't be. By the way, this was a tremendous source of newspaper comment. You know the headlines in papers like the Journal-American and other papers, particularly the Journal-American, was anti-New Deal and so on, but you know these murals were being rammed down the public's throat and a communist mural had been torn down off the wall because it had these Red symbols in it and so on and so on. This was foisted down the taxpayer's throat and so on and so on. As a matter of fact, it didn't happen. It was silly because the thing that they charged was the Red Star of the Soviet Republic was the rear end of a Shell Gas truck that had a red star on it, you know the gas station has ...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: I mean it turned out more or less like that. But you see, we could never get equal publicity for facts such as the method for getting a mural into a high school in terms of who approved it, and how little chance you'd have of ramming anything down their throat. The only thing that you could possibly do was probably get a better artist to do the job than they might have selected...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

BURGOYNE DILLER: A man who had some formal concern with the work and really had something to give other than just the picture, the scene, or whatever. I'm expressing it in very silly terms, perhaps but, let me give you an instance of one of the high schools that the statement had been made that this was a mural rammed down their throats, you know, and so on. The principal requested a mural. They requested a mural. There was a regular form made up. He passed that on to the Board of Architects. They would only approve -- this is of the school system -- they would approve it only in architectural terms within these architectural limitations. It was then passed to the Board of Superintendents of the New York City school system. If they approved -- this was only preliminary sketches -- they were passed on to the Board of Education. Now if the Board of Education approved, it was then submitted to the New York City Art Commission. If the New York City Art Commission approved, it was given preliminary approval, which meant you had permission to start work. The work would have to be viewed by the New York City Art Commissioner periodically to make certain that it was the same thing as presented in the original sketch form. Now when the mural was completed, you still had no right to the mural because when the mural was completed, the principal had to make out another form requesting final approval of the mural. It then went to the Board of Architects for their final approval. It then went to the Board of Superintendents for their approval. It then went to the Board of Education for their approval. It then went back to the New York City Art Commission for their final approval and the mural was in. Now if through that barricade you could ram an idea, or anything else in there, down the throats of the innocent taxpaying public, I'd like to know how the hell it could be done!

HARLAN PHILLIPS: There are more checks and balances in that process than there are in our Federal system. I gather that, you know, in finding wall space as in a school, I would assume that one of your tasks would be to actually find wall space, to survey it ...

BURGOYNE DILLER: That's right.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: ... as to whether it would or would not be adaptable to a task at which you might employ an

artist.

BURGOYNE DILLER: That's right. You had the first task of actually seeing whether the wall space really made sense, whether there was any rhyme or reason for decoration being there. Then of course you had to select the artist that you thought would be most competent to execute the work. And it couldn't be made into a competitive thing, as TRAP, for instance, as our post office murals were, you know on a competition basis because this thing had to move along once you got started, and there were so many possible jobs that it wasn't like the post offices were, where there'd be one in a whole region and maybe a hundred artists competing for it, you see what I mean?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure.

BURGOYNE DILLER: There were plenty of available spaces. Now I don't mean it was easy to convince these people that they should have a mural, or whatever, I mean, some of them of course wanted to have hearing after hearing to discuss it, and then they'd have to cover themselves. They had within their own family, you know, they'd have their Art Chairman and some of the other people in the school, you know, go into lengthy debates about the subject matter and so on and so on. By the time we got the sponsorship sometimes there could be quite a delay. This meant that you had to hit five places to make sure you'd have one next week to assign to an artist. Then as fast as you could assign the artists, then you could assign the assistant, start assigning assistants, probably one first just to help the artist gather data. Most of the murals involved subject matter that needed research and so on. They could start doing research, and whatever, and then a little later, why you might assign more if it were a large job, you know, because then you have the actual job of setting up big wall space.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. But, you know, the draft, the original drawing...

BURGOYNE DILLER: Yes....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: This was on the basis of research?

BURGOYNE DILLER: It was on the basis of an artist being given the subject matter by the school and doing as much research as possible -- I mean by that doing a thorough job of research and then we presenting that to the principal of the school again to make sure this was a thoughtful statement of the thing the principal wanted done. In other words, the scene below, whatever it was. So the result is it called for quite a bit of consultation between the artist and the principal before it started out on that long siege of approvals.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure.

BURGOYNE DILLER: And most of the principals were cooperative; not only cooperative, but some went to great lengths to aid in the research because in some subjects it was rather difficult. They asked some of their teachers, you know, specialists who'd be more specialized in fields, to assist and so on. On the whole, the sponsors were really quite cooperative, but you see these -- the majority, as I said -- but this isn't the kind of thing that makes news.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It's always the ...

BURGOYNE DILLER: The thing that makes news is the one who uncovered the fact that a mural being done in the music room of this high school was done by a young woman who had worked on a mural with Diego Rivera, and when they found that out, that, as far as they were concerned, made her a Communist. It was a fresco. It was half-finished, and it was torn down by orders of the principal. Now he had no authority to do this because he should have gone to the New York City Art Commission, and it should have gone back through the process, because in the mural itself, the girl had taken ancient musical instruments and painted a frieze around the music room. Even then no one claimed that there was one iota of leftist or any other kind of commentary, or any kind of commentary, except it might have been an improvisation built up on musical instruments. No charge was made like that at all, but he had found out through "a good soul" that this girl had worked on a mural with Diego Rivera. Now she had worked with him, I know, because she was concerned with the fresco process and most of the frescos, all frescos being done, most of them anyway, were being done in Mexico where there was a sort of renaissance of fresco painting. She had deliberately gone down to try to work with Diego Rivera because he was doing frescos, and she could actually work on the job. What her political viewpoints were, I have no idea. All I know is she was doing a job for us, and there wasn't one iota of anything there that the most reactionary person could possibly protest as far as the motif of the thing, or the coloring, or anything at all. These are the things that you read about. You didn't read about the other hundred jobs. We had 125 going on at one time, but you read about this on the front page, but not of the other 124. You know it was very unfair. You know you said -- when I started talking about approvals and so on -- originally you made a statement, you know, about what happened at that period, you know, where this thing was growing. Well, it was like a mushroom. We worked day and night and weekends and, believe me, we were not well-paid for it, but we thought it was the most wonderful thing that

could be happening. We were enthusiastic and were ready and willing to do anything. It was a madhouse. I had somebody sent to me to act as a supervisor and, as it happened, he was rather elderly. He came and he said, "Mr. Diller, I was sent to you to possibly act as a supervisor. I'm So-and-so and I've had, you know, certain background." He started to talk about that, and I said, "Oh, you did! That's fine. The only thing I'm concerned with: See that desk. We have no secretaries. We have no typists. We just have bare desks with stacks of paper on them three feet high." You know, everything was out - that was our file for the time being. And so I said to him, "Look at that desk. If you can't find something to do, I don't need you; but if you can, I love you." He went over and got to work. Afterwards he told someone else that he thought it was so wonderful, that I was a young man and he was an elderly man, and he had gone there terribly frightened just because of his age that he'd probably be relegated to the wastebasket, you know, and he wound up useful, and he said it was so wonderful you know that I made that statement. All I could think of was "Wonderful, hell! I needed help desperately. I was drowning in papers and people." I told you it was wonderfully exciting time.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Tell me this. How much direction, if I can use the word, did you receive from Washington?

BURGOYNE DILLER: Well, we had fairly regular visits from Eddie Cahill. They were more or less non-directive directives. I think they were things that had to do with the budget, number employed, and that sort of thing, and he bore the brunt every time he came to town. The Artists Union and the Artists Congress were laying in wait for him to clobber him, you know, about more jobs and more money and so on and so on. But as far as the work was concerned, I think that the only thing I felt constrained by -- I was personally very much interested in abstract painting and so on. They felt that there was no place for it at the time because they felt that the project should be a popular problem and, while they didn't attempt to invalidate, or question the validity of the work at the time abstract art had no place, because in a way you did have a great problem of building up public sympathy and understanding and a demand on the part of the public for the work. But outside of that -- and conversations that you'd have, you know, when you'd get together, probably after your meetings, which were, as I said, more budgetary than anything else, probably you'd get together and you'd have a drink or two and talk. At that time it was probably, on his part, a recital of some of the things that were being done in the rest of the country. Some things he was more enthusiastic about than other things. But then we had our opinion. We might probably differ with him very much and we told him so, and there was no problem.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, the process you ...

BURGOYNE DILLER: When I started assigning abstract things, and we had a number of very representational works, I felt certainly these people should have a voice, too. It was more difficult getting it, but I mean if I had ten jobs going, I could afford to start one that might be aesthetically a little questionable to some people. And on the other hand, you could say that while Cahill didn't greet them with any degree of enthusiasm because he was still primarily concerned with creating a demand for the project on a more general basis, on the other hand, I say I survived. He never hit me. He didn't fire me.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No. But the process you describe whereby one got acceptance of a mural would tend to preclude interference or direction from Washington. You had to negotiate with the principal to begin with...

BURGOYNE DILLER: That's right.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And so other than saying that you might have told him this story, or taken this point of view, it's inconceivable that Cahill, you know, would have an opinion except an over-all effort to get it accepted with public support, but the detail of whatever was worked out had to be worked out by you, it would seem to me.

BURGOYNE DILLER: If he had preferred to steer the thing completely, I think he would have been in an impossible situation, as you say, because it was beyond him, as it was beyond us to do something we might have preferred. In the case of Cahill, he was much too intelligent, however, to not recognize this fact, and I'm sure that when he talked very enthusiastically about some of the painters -- well, I remember some of the ones he was very, very enthusiastic about were some of the Chicago painters. He had a feeling, you know, that Chicago was sort of the middle of this country, and they had a sort of a -- oh, a sort of a Mexican-inspired renaissance of mural painting in Chicago doing frescos and so on and so on, and I think that he felt that it was a healthy and growing sort of thing. Since the work was, as I said, representational and more popular this would probably have a great impact, but he didn't say that we had to be aware of this, or that we had to concern ourselves with this. He was expressing a personal enthusiasm, a personal belief and, as I said, we argued it, or denied it, or whatever, but there was no pressure exerted on us under him. As I said, I believe the man is essentially intelligent enough not to. First, he was aesthetically aware enough not to want to impose his will, which is the most important thing perhaps. As a politician, he was aware of the fact that he couldn't direct these things completely and that some way or other a happy medium had to be found between the desire of an artist to do a good thing, a fine thing, and the thing that people would ask for. Believe me, it's a very precarious sort of thing. Under the circumstances, why, as I said, the wolves are all around howling. If it wasn't somebody from the extreme left, it was somebody from the extreme right, or if it wasn't them, it was a neurotic old maid, or

something else, you know, setting up a storm about something -- well, just, say, obscenity of artists in general. You'd be surprised at the idea, you know, artists being let loose in a school where children were attending school. This had unsalutary features.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, you know, there was no precedent for this really. There wasn't any precedent for setting up and floating this idea and making it walk. How you really go about doing it, you know. You're bound to step on toes you didn't even know were there ...

BURGOYNE DILLER: That's true.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure. Quite apart from the political interest of certain newspapers, the Mirror, the Journal-American, others who were anti-Administration and were using the Art Project as an indication of wastage and so on, you know. They were selling a wholly different idea. The only difficulty is they put theirs out in a huge paper, and you couldn't compete on those terms. You still had to deal with the principal, the Board of Education, etc. etc., who themselves, I think, showed a rather large antipathy with that kind of pressure, don't you?

BURGOYNE DILLER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That there would be a public spirit or whatever it is, this feeling of necessity even operated on Boards of Education where they could see the needs of this in human terms and at the same time aesthetic terms for the school and within those limits allow employment which but for this process would not exist at all. So I think, you know, in a way they deserve a kind of nod for not being sensitive to the

BURGOYNE DILLER: I think they deserve that because they were in a delicate position in relation to the running of the schools where even a penny spent on something that wasn't an absolute necessity could be challenged.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure.

BURGOYNE DILLER: And also if an idea were to be put on a wall, I think we were in a period then of the beginning of probably one of the most difficult periods in America as far as thinking was concerned. Thinking was becoming dangerous as such. They themselves were timid about jeopardizing their own careers because after all, maybe these people, these artists, do these things, do you see what I mean?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Don't forget this was a period of great fear from the Dies Committee and McCarthy and so on. That's why these organizations gained such power in repudiating the work of a man, or something of the sort, because of suspected association, or whatever else it may be. It's like the murals that were condemned -- like one mural torn down off the wall, as I said, absolutely unjustified as far as a careful analysis of the work was concerned -- simply because somebody saw a Red Star and so on and carried it back to his American Legion Post, got the Post up in arms about it, and made such a furor that they ordered the thing torn down. Now, it was groundless, but the action took place so fast. I think that what happened there probably could be, I think, typified in a situation where you had the Post demand that a certain mural be stopped and taken down in another high school. I just couldn't see any reason, but this man came to the project with a committee from the Post. He was extremely vocal. The other two men just sort of sat there. I have the feeling that he came bearing the Post's authority, of the veterans, you see, so you had to listen, and I listened very carefully. I brought out some photographs to speak to him about it, you know, to indicate "What? Will you please tell?" The charges he made were so ludicrous it was funny! I said then that the only thing I could do would be to take it into consideration, to take it up with some other people, and I said, "If possible, your Post. Nothing would be done very quickly." By that I meant nothing was going to be done that would matter, if we didn't come to a decision within two or three days, or a week or whatever. So a couple of days later I went to the Post. I went in, and I met the commander of the post who happened to be a very innocent sort of person. I told him who I was, and I told him what had happened. I had photographs and things there, and I asked him, I said, "Do you know this man carries the authority of your post? Do you know what he said?" He said, "Oh, yes. He said so and so and so and so." I said, "Fine. You do know that. Do you know what he means when he says that? Have you looked, have you checked?" "Well, no. After all, that man is perfectly competent." I said, "Is he? Let's just get together here. Here's some material." Finally he called a couple of other officers over. They went over the material. When they got through, they were so disgusted and embarrassed, and finally he said to me, "Look, I'm terribly sorry. That guy's a pain in the neck anyway. He's always off screaming about something." I said, "Well, it's a fine place to put him on the Americanization Committee in times like this, in difficulties like this, and then have him carry the authority of your Post." The result was I never saw or heard from the little man again.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That's interesting. In the mural field what kind of pressure did you get from the Society of American Mural Painters, which, I think, is a New York City organization.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Oh, I think the Society of Mural Painters -- after all, they had pretty much control of all the

big murals that were being given out in the State buildings and for City buildings and so on and so on, and they had things so thoroughly tied up. I think they were so infinitely superior to us they didn't give a damn.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: They didn't care.

BURGOYNE DILLER: I think that they really cared, but they wouldn't lower themselves. I think there were a few contacts here and there, because, after all, a lot of their people were becoming unemployed. But I'm sure that in a sense though, as a group, probably the controlling group of it were as anti-WPA as anybody else was that were successful business people.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Yes. You mentioned the name of an architect before who ought to go in here somewhere as one of those who aided and abetted the development of the abstract, and that's Lescaze.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Yes. That was in the early days, the very early days of the project, and when I had assigned certain artists as assistants to other artists with whom they would be most compatible, we still had the problem of finding places for more abstract paintings, and Lescaze, Rene Lescaze, was the architect for the Williamsburg housing project. We got together at one point, and I told him that I thought that we had some fine abstract painters and they should have walls to work on. It stuck at the time in pictures and scenes in history that the rooms they would be working in would be playrooms and general public areas that would be so informal rather, and limited really in space and without the housing project having a personal theme that they wanted to foster, we could probably have these abstract painters do things that would be very decorative, very colorful and probably people moving into this housing project might need that touch of color and decoration around, something to give a little life and gaiety to these rather bleak buildings. There was not much that Lescaze could do in terms of decoration because all the money went into building space, you see. He was very enthusiastic about it, and he really - you could imagine from his viewpoint, he had a problem in convincing the authorities that be that this was a worthwhile project. It culminated in our having most of the men I had available at the time being assigned to jobs. It worked out quite well, except I think that -- well, the exception has nothing to do with the doing, or anything of the sort, but like in those early housing projects I doubt if there is very much left of the murals that were painted. As I said, it's pretty close quarters and a lot of people are -- I think that was one of the earliest and biggest housing developments, experiments sort of, in town. The next fairly large project that came about was the -- well, I had a supervisor named Yuchenko who had a very good contact with the people at WNYC, because he had been very much interested in some of the work they had been doing in the broadcasting station field. We got together a good many times. Finally I managed, without too much difficulty, to convince Novak and others there, who were quite excited about the idea, of having more contemporary works in the broadcasting studios, that it would be more fitting, and so on. Of course, don't forget, it's a city institution and even in WNYC, you did not go down and paint murals. The station had to request the murals, that went to the architects for the City and then that went to the -- well, I think it came under the Commissioner of Docks at the time. I believe it's the Commissioner of Docks, so it had to go to him for approval. Then he had to submit it to the New York City Art Commission and they gave you permission to begin, as I told you before in the case of schools, and then back down again. So, again, it wasn't foisting abstract work down the public's throat either ...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No.

BURGOYNE DILLER: It still had to go through the City itself and the City departments and the New York City Art Commission. But you know there was an extraordinary man on that New York City Art Commission that did an awful lot in many ways for the art programs. His name was Ernest Pachano. He was a remarkable man. He was a very, very academic painter, who did murals in several banks in New York City and so on, and he was then way in his 70s. He was in his 70s then, but I had to pick him up and take him around to these mural projects periodically, every couple of weeks or so, or every week, or whatever time he could possibly take off, and he'd view them for the Art Commission. To show you in a way what type of person he was. One day there were five murals I wanted him to view because they were getting along, and he was supposed to see the different stages of work. One of them was Phil Guston; another was Brooks, James Brooks; another was Seymour Fogel; and there were a couple of others. Well, you know, we went up where the artists lived, of course in a very shabby loft you know, in a shabby building on a shabby street. This is what they could afford, or they couldn't afford it, but somehow or other they managed it, so we'd trudge up these winding staircases to get up to the loft and view the work and talk with the artist. Then back down, and we'd get in the car and go on to the next one. We went to three of them. Finally Pachano said, "Mr. Diller, do you mind? I don't feel well. Would you mind if we went back to my house instead of seeing the other two things today?" I said, "No, not at all." Well at his age, and he did, he looked ill, you know, I was very concerned about his health. "For heaven's sake, why didn't you tell me before!" "No, no, no," he said, "let's get in and go back to my house." We drove up to his house which was in the 70s, and he invited me up and he asked the maid he had to bring in a rare bottle of brandy. It was very ceremoniously poured, and he sat there sniffing it. After a little bit he said, "You know I feel much better now." "Do you know why I felt sick? You know when I was a young man I had a mediocre talent. I learned technically how to do this kind of illustration. For a very mediocre talent I lived a beautiful life. I got well paid, more than well paid for anything and everything I ever did. I have met wonderful people. I have had enough money to associate with

them, to do things nicely, but today, just as many days as I've gone out with you, I've gone up into the dirtiest holes in the wall to see the work of young artists. I'd see one. Then I saw two. Then I saw three and I never had the talent that they've got in their fingertips, and here they are living on absolute marginal living. They don't know where the next meal is coming from, practically no possibility in the world of having a job, you know, of using their work. It's enough to make me feel absolutely sick at my stomach. Now this is a tremendous person who could say something like that and mean it. He was extremely helpful in the Art Commission because at the time the Mayor was designating the Art Commissioner and the other appointees -- you know, there was a sculptor member, a painter member, an architect, and so on and so on. The result was that they were rather academic people and some of them represented the good societies - art, mural, sculpture societies in New York. They were just not too concerned about the kind of work that these young people were doing, but he was a very strong force in his quiet little way.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I know that in WNYC, for example, Davis has a mural...

BURGOYNE DILLER: That's right.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You know, and it's in his tradition. Getting that accepted, you know, the request that comes from the Station and spins up that stream of possible veto power. It took persuasion and at least, you know, another eye or a different sense than the traditional one even to entertain the possibility of a Davis mural in the Radio Station. I don't know whether it created any fuss, or not. Davis himself didn't say, except that it is one of his murals, but I can see the difficulty which you as a person who had to go out and get sponsorship, or enlist sponsorship, would confront. With your own interest in the more modern, abstract paintings, having a fellow like Pachano was

BURGOYNE DILLER: Well, I think there were -- you see, again, there were just enough people around like Commissioner McKenzie who was Commissioner of Docks. Dealing with a man like that -- it was a pleasure. Here's a man whose whole background as far as art activities, or interest were concerned was rather pedestrian, but I mean a man, an extremely intelligent person, who was well aware that there were many worlds that he wasn't an authority on because he happened to be Commissioner of Docks, or something of the sort. The result was, I feel, that if he believed you were a sound person, were honest, and if he considered you were expert in your field, he would grant you the benefit of the doubt and be willing to support it. I give you a very, very good case of this. Ferdinand Leger wanted to paint -- above all wanted to have a mural in America. He'd never had one in Europe, and they thought there was a wonderful possibility of his doing something in America. No one at the time seemed to take it upon themselves -- private industry or anything of the sort, you know, or whatever. The corporations didn't have the interest they have now in these things, because, you know, they're assets now because they're pretty good advertising, pretty cheap advertising ...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: So that Leger apparently was unable to obtain that thing, but through discussions with James Johnson Sweeney, who was then at the Modern Museum, and Bonnet. There was a Miss Bonnet who had some liaison with the French Government - had contact - Therese Bonnet, I think, and one or two others. They got in contact with the Project as a possibility, so that after their discussions with Audrey McMahan, who thoroughly approved of the idea that something might be done on the Project, it was turned over to me to see if it would be possible. You see, we couldn't employ him as an artist on the Project either as relief, or non-relief because he was not a citizen. But on the other hand we'd have an excuse for using him because of his name and so on, and the fact that a good many American artists might like to work with him on a mural, you see, so it would give them employment. We decided that it would work if we could find a place where we could do a job that would employ a group of American artists that might take the same theme that he would take. In other words, if there were enough panels or positions for murals, that he could collaborate with them, and he could more or less establish a theme and then they could do whatever variations on that theme that they pleased, you see. It might make an extremely interesting project. Well, it was so exciting to all of us, you know, to do it, and dealing with Leger was a very great pleasure, and we got a group of artists to work with him. He came down to the studio area we had at the time, office and studio area. He worked with these artists. Then he drew lots at his own studio, the place where he was staying, until finally we developed this series of sketches for this mural for a position, a place that had been suggested somewhere along the line, that maybe the French Line pier would be good. Well, it was a natural, you know, for Leger to do in collaboration with American artists, to do decorations for the French Line pier. Then a Monsieur de l'Encllet was contacted, who was head of the French Steamship Lines. The reason he had to be contacted was because they would have to be sponsors, because they were leasing the pier from the City of New York, but we could do the work in the pier if it became a permanent part of the pier, do you see? Because it was a city-owned structure. Again it looked -- a Frenchman you know and so on, that a man like that would certainly be very excited. Mr. de l'Encllet was as cold and non-committal as a man could be in all the preliminary work. When we had all of the work finished finally, we got to the presentation sketches. I made an appointment at de l'Encllet's office for Leger and myself to come up and show them the preliminary sketches, which could be submitted by him then to the Art Commission, or the Commissioner of

Docks rather and then to the Art Commission. I had already shown them to the Commissioner of Docks, and he had gone along with it. He said, "Well they certainly are going to be bright and cheerful. I think it would be a wonderful thing to have in the pier." As I said, he wasn't concerned about their being abstract paintings or any other sort, because they were sea forms that were rather developed, you know, of all the motifs that Leger had established. Well, I brought the sketches with Leger. I went with Leger to de l'Enclet's office. After cooling our heels for at least three quarters of an hour, we were finally admitted to the royal presence. I introduced Mr. de l'Enclet to Leger, and he said, "I know that man," and he started off a tirade in French. I was able to read a bit of French. I could understand it, you know, to a certain extent if you spoke carefully, but this was a torrent. I could get enough of the conversation to know what was going on. Then Leger pops up, and he starts. De l'Enclet had practically told him, "Well, you damn worker, you! You communist!" And so on and so on, and he really insulted Leger to no end. Leger naturally was terrifically indignant about the thing, and so I finally walked over and picked up the sketches, and I said, "Well, Mr. de l'Enclet, thanks for your French courtesy!" I said, "Leger, I don't think there is any reason to stay here any longer." We picked up and walked out. That was the end of that project. Yes, you got involved in some funny things in the project days, some extraordinary people.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure. What a strange kind of a mess that was. Tell me, so far as the New York office itself was concerned, I mean apart from you as a supervisor, a field man, an inspector, in a way, how much rationale did the Project obtain locally in New York from its own leader, Mrs. McMahan?

BURGOYNE DILLER: You mean in terms of aesthetic direction?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Direction, yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Mrs. McMahan was extremely broad in her viewpoint. I think that she only concurred with Cahill in the attitude in the beginning that they had to be wary of trying to introduce certain abstract forms and so on because it might militate against the employment. But on the other hand, when I did start to place people she certainly went along with it and would have supported me in doing it because she didn't object certainly not to the idea of the work. She was rather glad it could be done. You see, as the thing developed and there were so many murals going on, as I said, if you take a ratio of one out of ten, or one out of twenty, who is going to criticize it, because they're still valid works. They could be called decoration, if nothing else. They didn't have to be called art or anything -- you know, abstract or anything. So you know the name was a dangerous thing. I found in other places that we introduced abstract work just simply by calling it, talking to their committees about the decoration, if you avoided the word "art", they were very happy.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I'll be darned.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Of course, if you introduced the word art then you were in for it, you see!

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Then I suspect that her problem....

BURGOYNE DILLER: In other words they were people that didn't know anything about art, but they knew what they liked. But on the other hand they were much freer in their choice of decoration.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Well, that's a subjective thing anyway. Well, I suspect in terms of what you initially said that you had so much funds allotted and those funds had to be spent for salaries for unemployed artists that could be employed on a public project.

BURGOYNE DILLER: That's right.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: The more projects you had, the happier she would be in the sense of maintaining the flow of funds which had been made available, an administrative problem as distinct from a selective one as to whether they should be square, or round, or circular, or otherwise. She let that go.

BURGOYNE DILLER: That's right. She didn't let it go. She was interested. She was concerned with it, but she didn't use authority to try to dictate it in any fashion. I mean there were things that were done. On the other hand, which she considered were rottenly academic. As works of art she considered them nothing, but on the other hand, they were in places where those people wanted those things and they performed a certain kind of function.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: And so as a matter of fact, if you just thought well they're illustrations for these people and for this particular group, and so on -- again, it's like calling abstract art just decoration. Call the other -- well, it's just illustration, and let it go at that. Why argue about it's being art? Although, as I said, she was thoroughly upset a few times. She thought the thing was getting too trite and so on. She had a real concern about it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Which is good.

BURGOYNE DILLER: What's that?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Which is good; namely, you have a sympathetic response for a program and its consequence, which is what she had.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Well, I think you had a person there that was more concerned about art, and about the artist and while she herself could function in the political sense, or administrative sense and political sense and she did, her main concern I think, after all, was being editor of Parnassus you know, the College Art Magazine, being associated with that, and in the past had been connected with other social and art activities. But she was very well-equipped for that sort of thing and had so much more than a straight administrative person without technical knowledge, or insight into what the problem of the artist might be.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: You see, it took understanding. We had this demand from outside to have time clocks and also at one point a demand to have the artists work in studios on the premises. Well, this is ridiculous. An artist might have a shabby little room, a dirty little room, but he's pinned some things on the wall, and he lives there, and it's his environment, and this is what he works from. But to bring him in to a commercial building and give him a little section in the corner and say, "Now paint from nine to four," or something of the sort! Yet this is the thing that they were constantly trying to impose upon us. Now the time-keeping things. She had under her administration, of course, your purely administrative personnel, I mean the man who took care of the business. You had the man who took care of the time-keeping, your time-keeping division, and so on; and you had your other technical divisions. Under these were the actual division related to the art. She had to be the intermediary within her own department and above, you see, correlate these things, because if a timekeeper came in and said, "I found so and so asleep," -- when they insisted on having the timekeepers check easel painters -- "I went there five days and he was sound asleep at three o'clock in the afternoon." The timekeeper's recommendation was that he be dismissed, you see. Then possibly they'd get thoroughly upset and go up to administrative headquarters and try to get their authority to wield a bigger stick about these artists that were sloughing off. Well, of course, somehow or other it invariably happened that the artist who was asleep at three o'clock on the five days he called there was a guy who works all night, and who probably was one of the best painters we had on the project. Now I could understand it. In my own case I know damn well I might be asleep at three o'clock. Maybe I worked till six in the morning if I was painting at that particular time. I did. I painted half the night -- you know, when you get through with this other sort of business. But she had to understand this, too. The only way you could understand it was to know the artists personally, and to know his aims, what his limitations were, understand him as a human being, which purely administratively isn't being done in any organization; however, it's necessary.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I wondered what her relationship was to the over-all ...

BURGOYNE DILLER: Am I getting shrill. With this damn tape here you find yourself talking ----

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I don't know.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Or is it just.....?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It's fun. You've got some good insight into it, too, as you would necessarily have, having gone through the experience. It's rubbed off. It's in you. And, as I think you pointed out, this is a period which you haven't seen since, nor did it exist before. Just this kind of flavor. Understanding, for one thing. But there was introduced, I think, in New York -- well the first man was Iron Pants Johnson, wasn't he?

BURGOYNE DILLER: Oh! Yes. Hugh Johnson.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Who at that particular time had been having not a few personal difficulties on the national scene. But he was followed by a military figure, an engineer.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Brean Somerville.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Who in his own field is, you know, second to none, but here in this particular instance he had a pretty bad press, a pretty bad press in the sense that his announcements seemed to be highly arbitrary, namely, you were going to pare down the lists of artists by some thirty percent cut...

BURGOYNE DILLER: That's right.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Now he may have been under instructions from Washington ...

BURGOYNE DILLER: Somerville -- I think I had some understanding of the man in a way, the man, because of the past. The attitude that the general WPA administration had, that side of it, with Hugh Johnson and then followed by Somerville, but mainly generated through Johnson's offices was that the Art Programs on the whole were hotbeds of Communist activity, that they really were impediments to the WPA administration in their bigger programs, because all of the scare heads came from the art programs.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I see.

BURGOYNE DILLER: And don't forget that your art programs -- the theater, and writing, and music, and art -- these are the things people write about. No matter what is going on in the other programs, who heard of it?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: These became scare heads and, as a matter of fact, there was a good deal of very leftist activity, you know, tremendous upheaval in thinking and feeling. It was country-wide, but these were vocal people. Instead of their understanding that this represented most of the scareheads, most of the statements that they protested against were what? The statement of a small group of people, a very small group of people. They weren't the body of people that were the art projects. You found, however, this tremendous prejudice that they had. Now as far as they were concerned, when the Federal Art Program ceased and the WPA took it over directly, in other words, when the Art Program was no longer sort of a separate unit, but came under the aegis of the local administration, no longer under Washington. We were under really the WPA administration, and their first thought, of course, was to clean out these projects, you see. Well, now their idea of cleaning out a project could be arbitrary dismissals, or refusals to grant certain things that might be needed. Do you see what I mean? They certainly couldn't execute any discretion in terms of who to hire or who to fire. We still had to do that, but there was enormous prejudice. It was an uphill fight constantly. At that time -- do you remember the artists were having sitdown strikes and all that sort of thing. This was, of course, to the WPA administration something that was an impossible thorn in their side. Look, it was a problem for them, but on the other hand, this is the way things were going in that day and age. Today they wouldn't think so much of it, you know. We've been conditioned to these things. They do happen even in polite groups...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure they do.

BURGOYNE DILLER: The point is though -- well, in that time you had such a stirring up of feeling and that's the time, too, when your Dies Committee had started, and so on -- the things they call "witchhunts" and all the terms that were used. You know these terms that you got so tired of -- I mean on both sides of the fence you get tired of the terms that were used. The thing was, though, that when Somerville took over, he wanted to run a clean project, of course, but he did it by making demands on Mrs. McMahon. She had to bear the brunt pretty much of explaining what the project was doing and so on and so on and so on. But to her, I know it presented a rather cold, forbidding wall. She couldn't break through him, but she could keep a kind of face with him. She had to if she was going to keep getting the funds for the project and to maintain it and its facilities. This condition went on for some time. One of the first -- I think one of the first breakthroughs was the opening of La Guardia Airport, which is now North Beach Airport. I had something to do with that because Mrs. McMahon called me one day and said that Colonel Somerville had rather a problem. The airport was supposed to open up in about five weeks, I think it was, five or six weeks, and apparently some of the Army men he had designated, because he believed in Army men and Army discipline, to plan and get the decorations ready to open this up with a very festive air, had fallen down so completely there was not only nothing ready, but there wasn't even a good plan. As a last, rather desperate thing he called on "Miss Dirty Little Project" to see if they could do it. Mrs. McMahon said that she had arranged a meeting for me to meet with him. I, at the time -- let's see, at that time I was still -- yes, head of the Mural Division. Was I? Yes. After that, I became the assistant technical director, but anyway I was to meet with him and to talk over the situation. Well I met with the man and, believe me, he was polite, but it was a very grim sort of demonstration of the problem he had, and with a sort of feeling that, you know, "this is something if we can do it, it will be wonderful; if we can't, we're going to be so dead it isn't going to be funny." I knew better than to make any silly promises, or anything of the sort. I also had an idea what we needed so I laid down a lot of conditions, things I needed from his departments. "If I call up and I want lumber for this, if I want something for that, and so on, I want to know which department I can get them from, who I'd contact in your administration to get them from, and I'd want them quick, because you know how little time there is left." "Oh, yes, any one of these things." When we got through talking he said, "Well, you seem to have grasped the situation." I said, "Well, I hope you grasped the demands that I have made." We can do it, but, by God, it's going to take a lot of cooperation from your people, and personally I don't think they're up to it." That wasn't good. But he looked, and he said, "I promise you that if one of my men does not come through, deliver, don't wait -- because you can't afford the time -- call me." I said, "Fine!" Well, we got together and really we scampered around. Imagine, you know you have miles of things for pennants and banners. I had the sculpture shops upside down. The only thing we could figure out to do quick was maybe make twenty-foot high propellers or something and stick them up in front of the main platform to stand on, and so on. But where do you get bunting and banners and so on? So Yuchenko had been in a lot of City departments so he just went from City Department to

City Department. We enlisted a few assistants for him, and they were going into every warehouse in the City just to find out any place that had bunting and stuff, because we didn't design first and then decide what we needed. We had them bring in the stuff, and we'd design it after we got it, do you see? And so you'd start something very loosely and keep filling in. Well, it ended up I was out there. I was out there all night, as a matter of fact, but about six o'clock in the morning -- and by the way, I called Somerville about ten times about his very efficient and disciplined officers. I had to, you know, material that was supposed to come in, they'd say, "Well it will be there tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow," and at the end of the week it still wasn't there, and no call from them, nothing. He kept his promise, boy, he just bing! Like that, and, by God, the next day I'd get the material, or that day, if possible. But he drove in with his retinue. I was sitting in front of the main platform looking at the final wires being hooked up, and all that sort of thing. We had crews of his men and others naturally to do all this sort of thing, you know, you had to get riggers, or whatever. He drove up with his staff, got out, did a real military inspection, you know, saw me sitting out there so he walked out there. He said, "Well?" I said, "It's finished." "Swell." He walked away. Well, you know that man was the most cooperative person in the world after that. I don't mean that I altered his attitude toward the project as a whole. It was a part of the alteration process, because I know McMahon in her dealing with him had done several very difficult jobs for him and others, you know what I mean, had worked, but this was sort of something his -- you know, this was one of the big things, and I was just lucky enough to be able to do it, because it helped us. It helped us enormously. To try to sit in judgement on that man -- you take a thoroughly military, disciplined man, and you can see that there is a black and there's a white and there's a very little gray area up in the middle, very little. It's hard for that man to give. I saw him give, because he realized at least that the argument was reasonable. It made sense and he accepted it, and he backed me up on it. I really had quite an admiration of the man. I think first he was a brilliant man, and I think he was very badly miscast by being put in a job like that. I think "Iron Pants," he deserved it, but I don't think Somerville did. He was a man I liked. He had his disciplines and his way of life. Probably we differed. But, as I said, sometimes I'd rather have to deal with a person when you know exactly what you're dealing with, and you know darn well that if he said he would back you on this you're going to be backed. There's going to be no backtracking. You could get a job done. This is very important. As I said, I think he gradually gained a little more understanding of the project, probably the nature of the thing, the nature of the artists that he was dealing with there, because in time problems, timekeeping problems and things like that, why he'd carry out the order because he was supposed to carry the order, but, as I said, he was intelligent enough to realize that if we told him, "Now, look, we have a situation here. An artist might have painted twelve hours, and he's sleeping when the timekeeper gets there. This is silly, isn't it? He's only being paid to work four hours." He'd accept it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: That's not easy for a man to accept.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No. I suspect a good bit of the sit-in demonstrations that took place in his office were a consequence of real failure of communication and understanding on both sides...

BURGOYNE DILLER: On both sides, and also on the fact, don't forget, that if Somerville, or any other administrator there had an order, "Your budget is going to be so much." That was the amount of money he had to deal with, if he passed it down the line, he said, "You have to drop a hundred people," you'd drop a hundred people. We'd get sit-ins. He'd get sit-ins, and in Washington they'd protest.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Don't forget these things were regulated ultimately by the very arbitrary thing of Congress and its appropriation of funds and just how far you could go with those funds.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure. And Congress had been enraged by the "One-third of the Nation," that play put on by the theater project which quoted some of the Senators accurately, it turns out, not to their advantage -- you know, the living theater, and it made it touch and go with Congress. But Hopkins had always seemed to have been able to keep most of this catcalling from Congress, and so on.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Who?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Hopkins, Harry Hopkins ... at arm's length.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Harry Hopkins was really -- I met him once and very briefly, but I did come in very close contact with a lot of people who, in turn, were very closely associated with him, and the man was practically a myth, a legend in his own time, because I don't know anyone that knew him personally who could credit him with wrong motivation about anything he did. I think the man had a temper and a sense of things that was extraordinary, and I think that he had a very happy ability of communicating this, because I have never seen such enthusiastic people as worked for him. As I said, when we were talking before, people were not paid in any monetary terms, or even in recognition perhaps, but damn it all, they had to get it done because he seemed to epitomize what they all really wanted -- to do something. I don't mean just do good, or you'll have an unholy

feeling that you must be good to your fellow man or anything. It's just that this is a human activity we're in and we're building something. It's a creative thing and it's still wonderful. I always distrust the man who says he's doing it for his fellow man. I'm just talking about people that were expressing no self-concern for their time or for their efforts, or thoughts. They were just all out to bring about the thing, to make it work. As I said, he seemed to inspire that. I don't know. Have you talked to any of the people that have been close to him at all?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: They generally have the simple way of conveying what the philosophy of it was -- to employ people.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Yes, but I mean their own reaction to him.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It may be because Hopkins was replaced by Colonel Harrington, a military man in the Engineers Corps, and juxtaposing the two impulses to the advantage of Hopkins and the disadvantage of Harrington, and I have no brief one way or another for Harrington. He was again in a different tradition. He's unique, too, and he's entitled even to his limitations.

BURGOYNE DILLER: That's right.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But happily to float this program, it had the kind of man at its head who was anxious, as I think Roosevelt was anxious, to get out on the tracks and get it moving and leave to time to worry about what kind of work was being done, you know. Initially it was, what, "Get a check in their hands by Thanksgiving," you know, that's a different impulse than to say, "Well, you have to work from nine to five and punch a clock."

BURGOYNE DILLER: In a sense, you know, it's the most discredited term in the world, but there was a kind of idealism ...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes indeed.

BURGOYNE DILLER: The kind of idealism that you're actually practicing and not talking about.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right. Nobody gave it a tag. It just grew.

BURGOYNE DILLER: There was no price on it. It was just something there.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: There's no question of the fact that it emanated from the malleability of Roosevelt to the human situations around about him. I mean, I felt that rather than that it was his specific idea, he could become aware of it ...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: And relate it somehow or other to a total kind of thinking.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And I think also Hopkins had an attitude toward Congress which enabled him to deal with Congress and protect, you know, the WPA as a whole; whereas Harrington's tradition when he took over was one of a deferential attitude toward Congress and therefore a kind of timidity.

BURGOYNE DILLER: You know, I think you've got something there. In that field, however, I think that a person who was much more in Washington, do you see, would be more aware of the actual working relationships that came about -- Cahill particularly of course -- in a sense of what was happening in Washington. On our level it was just, as I said, that we were rather constantly in contact with people from Washington and therefore we felt we were aware of what was going on. At least you felt the temper of the activity that was going along and you felt a certain kind of hope as long as there was a spokesman like Cahill there, or the ones more immediately concerned to us than Hopkins. However we were hard-pressed enough without worrying about the operation in Congress too. We were working at -- what's that awful term? Grass roots level, or something of the sort. There were things concerning the Project though about which I think somebody should certainly have some point to make. You know, it raises its ugly head again in terms of this last World's Fair. Commissioner Moses who sometimes, I feel sure, confuses himself with Moses in his, you know, negation of the art, art shows, exhibitions and so on and so on. Whatever his reason may have been in this last instance, to me it's no different than his cooperation with the Projects. Do you know sculptors were working in the parks? We had some darned good sculptors. We didn't use sculptors at the parks. He permitted them to wash monuments.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: He would not have any of that awful WPA stuff. There are a few little playground figures and one or two other things. He was so thoroughly convinced that art lived and died with the Beaux Arts Academy in

the days when he was at Yale that he just didn't believe that anything else was anything except anti-art, or anti-God, I'm not sure which. So that there was no work, and what a tremendous field there was for ...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sculpture.

BURGOYNE DILLER: For sculpture.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure.

BURGOYNE DILLER: And you see, I think the problem of the sculptor then, as today, is in relation to a media. Take an artists -- well, if he has a stick, or something he can draw with, somehow or other he can make a go of it. He can use house paints if he can't get regular paints and so on. What does a sculptor do? He was a material that is probably large and expensive, and he has to have a place to work in. He has to have tools to work with, and he has to have a place probably for it to be placed. You can stack up a hundred paintings, but it's not so easy to stack up a hundred pieces of sculpture, if he can get the materials to do it and the place to do it in and so on. But here with this tremendous acreage we've got in New York City and other areas around here. No. Why? Commissioner Moses, I try to appreciate what the other guy does. I think the man probably has done a formidable job of accomplishing -- well a kind of miracle in terms of public highways -- in recreation areas and so on, but he took the authority that he did in determining that these people couldn't work, because that's what it amounted to. I think he really should not have had that privilege. And there was no way - he was much too far from the men to circumvent his authority. I think it was criminal.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: He's a very disagreeable public servant, but a very good public servant.

BURGOYNE DILLER: I think he's a very good public servant, but I think that he's one of these people that should have been put in a position of -- do you remember I spoke to you about Beatrice Windsor?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Who was at the Newark Museum?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: She had been a disciple of Dana and so on. I told you also that we were presenting this Gorky ...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I think we ought to go into that. This is ...

BURGOYNE DILLER: I'm making this point in relation to Commissioner Moses. We made rather an elaborate model of the work to be done for the Gorky mural in Newark Airport. I wanted the presentation, I had a staff of architects, do you see, that as soon as we'd get a mural location we'd send them out and have them make drawings of the walls, scale, and so on and so on. In those locations where we felt it would probably be an advantage to the artist we'd have scale models built either slight ones, or sometimes more impressive ones depending on the kind of committee we had to present them to and the problem involved. We did a rather good one for Gorky's presentation of the Newark Airport mural to the Art Commission of the City of Newark, particularly after the fiasco with the Floyd Bennett job. Beatrice Windsor was the one that really sponsored it there. We had on the day of presentation the meeting of the Art Commission. They seemed to be rather elderly gentlemen. I'm sure they were of some prestige socially and economically. I'm sure that they fit into the upper echelons of Newark society and so on, rather cool, forbidding characters. I mean they were the kind of people you would see sitting in the windows at the Princeton Club, or the Yale Club, some of the old members spend their declining years that way. Well, of course, when we presented the mural, I deliberately presented it as a decoration so they wouldn't quibble about art. But one of them, probably brighter than the rest, said, "Well, that's abstract art, isn't it?" That unleashed the devil. They started, of course, a triage of questions and cross-questions, and accusations and statement about modern art. This went on probably for half an hour among themselves. They didn't wait for answers. Finally Beatrice Windsor who is socially, I believe, their level and probably economically, too, and of their vintage, and understood them very well, intervened. That was a grande dame, you know. She could be very demanding herself, so finally she banged on the table, she said, "Gentlemen, I'm amazed at you!! Sitting here talking about something you know nothing whatsoever about. You're talking about art and giving your opinions. Who cares for your opinions! Now you have a gentleman here that's presenting this and you won't even let him express an opinion and he is an expert!" She said, "You know one thing I've learned from Charles Dana? One thing. Be intelligent enough to find out who is an expert and then rely on his judgement, particularly if you know nothing about it yourself. No I'd like to have you vote on this." She then said, "Mr. Diller, do you like it?" I said, "I think it's handsome." "Gentlemen, will you vote on this?" Believe me, they were so deflated they just sat and said, "Well, it's all right." Isn't it wonderful -- the people you meet?"

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Beatrice Windsor. She was really something.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, did you have direct dealings with Moses?

BURGOYNE DILLER: No. No, mainly by some of his delegates. His young Yale men that he had. Pardon me for the antipathy toward Yale.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Be my guest.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Don't forget he was a hangover from the good old Beaux Arts -- the Academy up there. I think that they won the Prix de Rome and everything else. They had it in the bag and it was represented to me at the time and in retrospect as a vicious barrier to any kind of art development whatsoever.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Yale today, I must say, is quite a different place as far as art is concerned. They've had Albers up there and others. I was even the visiting art critic there one year myself. I can't very well condemn it now.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: For the sculptors he didn't give opportunity where he might have.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Well, I would say he gave no opportunity except to monument carvers, or if there was something else done I wish somebody would tell me. I've seen what little was done.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I think you're right initially in terms of the impulse which Harry Hopkins as leader gave as bulwark against rumblings in Congress that were even apparent in the very early days when it came to appropriations. This is coupled, I think, in Washington with the fact that Harold Ickes was supposed to come up with the PWA and build public buildings only he was spending his time trying to draft a contract which would prevent politicians from getting their hands on public funds, so that Hopkins was sort of thrown into the breach to get people employed under this WPA, and as such he had -- well such skill with Congress, you know, in a sense of not running with his hat in his hand. It may be just that, whereas Harrington's whole background was related to Congress as the source of everything, and therefore you had to court Congress.

BURGOYNE DILLER Harrington was connected with the Army Engineering ...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Which meant that he was in constant awareness of the necessity of a certain kind of relationship with Congress ...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure.

BURGOYNE DILLER: And Congress would necessarily be on the defensive knowing full well what he was out for ...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure. This might also help explain some of Somerville's early action, which appeared certainly in the press, certainly to those who were on the receiving end as some inhuman kind of thing, like the arbitrary numbers game he played, a hundred going to be dropped off the Project next week, 39 percent cut the following month, you know, this kind of thing, which was enough to enrage artists and, you know, with their organization this became a pressure, a sit-in. He had to be -- what? He had to be taught, in effect ...

BURGOYNE DILLER: Well, in effect he did because, despite what I said about not thoroughly disapproving of Somerville, as a human being, being able to admire certain qualities the man had, really fine qualities, at the same time in a situation like that you cannot be a military commander issuing orders and expect these orders are going to be carried out, you know without question, because we were not in the Army.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

BURGOYNE DILLER: And the artists, or the laborer was not in the Army....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

BURGOYNE DILLER: He anticipated certainly that any kind of reaction to his order should be in relation to Army discipline. It's very difficult for a man who was born, bred, you know, was bred into this thing, educated into this thing, to understand that there's another way of life, and that you can't talk to the lowest character in quite the terms that you can even talk to your colonels, if you're a general in the Army.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

BURGOYNE DILLER: They wouldn't take it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: They just won't take it.

BURGOYNE DILLER: And there's no reason why they should.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No. And this I think is an aspect of WPA that appears in the press somewhat to the discredit of the WPA because this again is news, because it makes for conflict, but the reason for the conflict is this last thing, "I'm a human being after all and you're not going to treat me this way!" For example, I've had any number of statements about the manner in which Somerville held a hearing even when he met with a delegation. It would be one at a time, and that one would be dismissed. Well, you know, you sit around a table ...

BURGOYNE DILLER: He was really arbitrary.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. And you break open a bottle of wine and come to some kind of agreement carefully in a friendly way instead of making it an arbitrary thing. But, you know, New York presented perhaps the most difficult problem of all, wouldn't you say?

BURGOYNE DILLER: Well, I don't know of any place in this country that could compare with it because we had more -- well, first there were more people involved, furthermore more kinds of people involved, further more viewpoints involved, and I mean each one of them strong enough to be heard, to be vocal. But in the smaller areas you might have a little clash with the artists group or something of the sort, but not in these formidable terms, where you're talking all of a sudden with, you know, fifteen hundred, two thousand people. It isn't a question of the twenty people as it is out here who are artists, you know, and they can split into two or three little groups in the smaller areas, but here it was -- well, it was really vicious in a way. I mean not by intent, except I do think that there was a kind of viciousness employed unfortunately by those people who get into authority. They get into administrative authority, and they can be rather ruthless because they have little or no understanding, and that's why, you see, in the case of Somerville relying on some of his military men, Captain So-and-so and Captain So-and-so and Lieutenant So-and-so, or Colonel So-and-so, you see there again you had some nasty little sadistic bastards that simply would give you, could give anybody a rough time for doing right, much less what they didn't consider was right.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

BURGOYNE DILLER: They were such limited little people who were completely unaware of the arts, or literature, or anything else. But how do you deal with men like that? You don't.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You don't.

BURGOYNE DILLER: To them, the timekeeper's word should carry authority, and you should be docked at the time he said you weren't working when you were supposed to be working. If you didn't concur in that, you were a damned Communist. Believe me, we had it thrown in our face rather continuously on things that made the accusations so irrelevant that it could be funny if it weren't so tragic.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Well, you know, he employed a Major to go around and, oh, get reports on the quality of the work done on the easel painters...

BURGOYNE DILLER: Where did you hear this?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, there was an item in the New York Times that a Major So-and-so was going to be employed expressly to visit the easel painters where they were painting in their homes and assess the quality of work done. Well now, I ask you!

BURGOYNE DILLER: Do you know that's something that probably was so unimportant to me at the time because it's so impossible that I don't even remember it ...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Just reading it in the press ...

BURGOYNE DILLER: I remember the sieges of their trying to exert timekeeping pressure, regular hours and so on, and also desiring the artists to come and work in a building and so on, which was at the end of the Projects, all of that, but -- I have no question of the fact that they liked to do that...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I think this was the projection of an idea.

BURGOYNE DILLER: You see, along the way -- I don't know whether Audrey McMahan, or Audrey McMahan working with Cahill had worked out some sort of scheme to ease the pressure on us, of the aggravation that we acting as the arbitrator of the aesthetic quality totally, and that particularly for the people in the easel division,

the sculpture division, print division, and so on, where of course you didn't have the immediate sponsor relationship. The murals were sponsored, accepted and in a sense sponsored, after they came into being. Then we relied on committees within the Project to pass on the work, whether a person would continue to be employed at that work, print-making, easel painting, or whatever, and accept his work and so on. Then, as I said, it had to be brought outside the project. Therefore McMahon, as I said -- I know there was a lot of discussion. There were so many discussions about so many things that it's hard really to reconstruct them, but I do know that I had little to do with it. I think that it probably was McMahon and either Cahill or whoever who worked up, developed an idea of having an appointed committee of well-known artists, or something of the sort who would hold a regular meeting and pass upon the works, on the quality of works. Now this was probably at that same time in order to counter the other thing that was done, to prevent the protest that an Army rank of private could qualify a man to be a judge of painting. It would be easy enough to argue against that, but on the other hand you had to have something to substitute for it, and you couldn't go back to the state where we had adequate personnel, so therefore they had to go outside of the Project to a more objective opinion then, having people that could be designated by the mayor, could be designated by artists organization, or by art organizations or whatever that were willing to serve in that rather horrible capacity of passing on the work. I say "horrible" because I think it's an awful thing for an artist to sit in judgment which might affect another artist's job if you liked his work or not.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That's right.

BURGOYNE DILLER: We were willing to do it because it meant -- well, without that we could have worse.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Do you know, or did the origin of the school for design pass through the office.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Which school for design?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: In New York City.

BURGOYNE DILLER: What one are you talking about?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It was one that was established under the WPA.

BURGOYNE DILLER: The laboratory school?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: The Laboratory of Design.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Of Industrial Design.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes, of Industrial Design.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Yes. That started out in the Project and at the time, I had very little or no contact with it except to know it was there and in the beginning initially approving of its functioning as an important part potentially of the Project of getting into fields of industrial design and the field of design generally. It started as a group, but it became in not too great a time a unit that was becoming less productive and more in a sense a unit of a great deal of political dissension. You know there was a terrific strain there. Actually the problem there was to produce, and apparently the political factor became much more important to them than anything else, so the result was that the thing was dropped. Shortly afterwards the ones that had been mainly responsible for starting the project, a small group who really were concerned with industrial design, set up a laboratory school of industrial design outside the project as a continuation, and some of the people became associated with it for a while. I did. They asked me if I would teach a course in design synthesis. There was no pay because they had no money to pay, but they really felt that they should start a design center. Apparently there in the circumstances it couldn't be a political thing for the simple reason that the people who were more involved in the political aspect of it no longer had anything to fight about. They were not going to fight with three other people about, you know, their relationship to the government or anything of the sort because there was none. These people seemed rather extremely honest and intent on doing something, so I volunteered there. I taught one term or two terms, I forget, you know, an evening a week. Paul Riley was there and several others, really very reputable people. Then they wanted me to continue. I was glad to do my bit because I believed in the thing, but at the same time I just couldn't continue beyond that point because the pressure of the Project itself was enormous and besides that I wanted a little time, I was still trying to do my own work. It was impossible but I was still trying.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: What is interesting about the industrial design in the light of what you said earlier about the '20s and the place, the role, the function of the modern artists was an effort to raise the question: is there a place in industry in terms of industrial design for the modern artist?

BURGOYNE DILLER: Well, it depends on what you mean by the modern artist. Well, you know, you have your --

going back to the attitude, for instance, at the Bauhaus in Germany where you had your first really crystallization of an idea that an artist isn't necessarily the person who makes easel paintings, or the sculptor, or whatever, but rather the person who is creating objects that are entering more directly into everyday life, and that these can be extremely effective in their changing, affecting the tastes and so on of people of the average person and this was not, you see, drawing a line of distinction about who is more the artist, or who is the more creative. That is an artificial barrier....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Well of course that brings up the Bauhaus and that's the reason, as I said, for its entrance into the project. It seemed to me at the time that it had a fit place and so on, and had its proper place, but it was mainly because of my knowledge of what they had done at the Bauhaus. Other people who were interested in industrial design, and it seemed quite logical.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Of course, that does not mean that I'm thoroughly in agreement with it at all, because I think there's a great line of distinction between art -- now, this word "art" becomes a vague sort of thing, you know, how are we going to define it really? The commercial artist, or the industrial artist, or the industrial designer. Without saying that the industrial designer is not creative, and how much an artist is, I don't know, but to me they are two different processes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

BURGOYNE DILLER: I think an experience I had with Barr, of the Modern Museum -- you see, during the Navy I was developing training, visual training aids. I was in the Navy, and developing these three-dimensional training devices. I developed several of them. At one time when Barr came to the place to see them, to see the things that were being done, and apparently he saw several things that I had done, and he had thought of them as just very handsome objects. Then when he found out that I had done them, because he had known my painting prior to my being in the Navy, why he was very awed. He thought it was wonderful. I was in the building at the time, so they let him come down into the shop. He came up and congratulated me on these objects and so on and proceeded to tell me that he was quite sure that being involved in this thing in this way, and producing these objects, they were so handsome, they certainly would have an effect upon my painting. Well it's one time I think it was rather nasty because I said, "Well I'll be damned. I know the difference between the two things I'm doing. If you don't, it surprises me." I think that with all due deference to Barr I think that it was a rather silly statement on his part. Or maybe on the other hand, I'm so unmitigatedly single-track-minded that I created a separation there in my own mind, and I just refused to be stimulated by these other kind things he said. Oh, they were good. I didn't brag about my paintings, but, boy, my devices they were extraordinary.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: There's one person you mentioned earlier as being the sort of soul and heart of the Project, Harry Knight, I think he's worth a word perhaps, partly because of what happened to him. He was one of those who was separated from the service on sort of arbitrary terms ...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: He was separated from the service and he was separated also while Somerville was in office, and it was charged by the Dies Committee that he was a risk, or whatever they phrased it at the time. At the time it meant that if there was any sort of an indication or anything that they considered an indication that you were a Communist then you had to be. Apparently, as far as I was able to learn, the one charge against him that they could sustain was the fact that he had signed a petition in a neighborhood for a neighborhood playground and the petition was being circulated by the Young Communists League, I believe, in fine type at the bottom. When it came up and became really an issue, I found out what it was. I knew Harry Knight well enough to know that even then, much younger, Harry was absolutely helpless without his glasses. Harry was also the kind of person that was social enough that if he wasn't working, he would talk all night with somebody, and to have your doorbell ring early in the morning and two cute little neighborhood gals coming in saying, "Look, we want a playground and will you please sign our petition?" Harry, all heart, "What do you mean! You should have a playground, you should have two playgrounds." So he went along with this. Next thing you know it comes up in the Dies Committee thing. As I said, I didn't see this sort of thing happen. I had to assume certain things, but know the man, knowing that he was a socially-minded person and very greatly respected. Also, because of the fact that we were thrown together very closely over a long period of time, I am so sure of the fact that that man was not a Communist that -- he was much too social to commit himself, if you want to put it that way. You see, if he went there, he'd have to take sides, and Harry couldn't bear that, I'm sure. But knowing the man and everything else, when the thing came up I was to replace him, but I never felt more like a funeral in my life. As a matter of fact, I asked for a hearing with Somerville. Now I'd had a couple of experiences with him by that time. He seemed to be willing to work with me, you see, or listen to me, whatever. So I called and asked if I could see him. He said I could. I made an appointment for that afternoon. I went up there, and I told him in substance what I'm telling you. This is where the unseeing side of the man is so manifest. He listened. He said, "Well, I always

liked the man, he always struck me as a very nice person." And so on and so on -- I don't know what "nice" has to do with it, but this is the way he characterized him, that he seemed like a very decent sort of person, "but," I said, "But, here, he did not do anything with any thought." I'm positive he didn't do it because of its relationship to Communism as such." He said, "Well, Mr. Diller, you know what a petition is? You put your name on it, do you not?" I said, "Yes, you do." He said, "Are you in habit of signing something that you have not read? Would you, as an intelligent person, sign something, a contract in effect, without knowing what you're signing, without reading it?" I said, "Well, to appear intelligent I would have to say that I would read it carefully, but I'm sorry to say that in that instance I probably wouldn't have read the little line at the bottom either. I haven't seen it, but from what I understand it's a sneaky thing down at the bottom. It's very possible I wouldn't have read it either, and I have better eyes than Harry has." He said, "But are you in the habit of signing documents?" I said, "Well, if you're going to hold me to that, the only thing I can say is I try to understand what I'm signing." I tried further argument, you know, in the sense of what he was signing for was a playground for the neighborhood, which I didn't think you would dispute, or call communist. "You're only arguing because it was circulated by a communist group." He said, "Would you sign?" You know, it was just "would you sign a paper or contract without knowing what was in it, or reading it thoroughly?" Just like a wall drooping down. You couldn't reach him on any human grounds whatsoever. I said, "Here is one of the -- well, sweetest men -- if you want to call a man that -- that I've ever known in my life. This isn't just a kind of an economic tragedy to a man losing a job. It's a very human tragedy because you're out of luck. You know it's funny, but an awful lot of people are going to cry when they hear this. I don't know how you can even take it on a purely objective basis that "would you sign this piece of paper?" Well I left the office. We didn't even fight. He still maintained a kind of "Well, I think you're a good man, but I think you have the wrong idea here." And what can you do at that point?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But Knight's value to the artists project was ...

BURGOYNE DILLER: He was the kind of person that you couldn't replace, you just couldn't, in any kind of way at all. McMahon was difficult more than once, and we were all difficult in our own ways in our own time. Maybe we did something we shouldn't do, or didn't do something that should have been done, or whatever it may be. We were all difficult there, and somehow or other Harry Knight was always the catalyst that somehow or other quieted the waters again, got things going. You know, you can be very intent on getting a job done. You could be ruthless, or inconsiderate, or thoughtless, or whatever it may be, but, as I said, he had an amazing facility of being able to reconcile these viewpoints and honestly consider your problem. I don't care how difficult it seemed, and to me there were so few of them that it just seemed like the -- well, it's one thing as I remember it as far as I can say it was one of the most awful memories of the project. It was a kind of crucifixion in a way, you know, by a man who is essentially a militaristic-minded person who has to be the way he is to fill the role that he plays, who should never have been put in such a role. That's the tragedy. It's a tragedy, I think it's in the American myth or something that because a man is a general, therefore he can be an expert in all fields, including the humanities. Now I know that General Grant could go up to West Point painted pretty little watercolors, which is rather amazing, you know, and Sheridan, you can see their little watercolors up in their museum. I think it's awfully sweet, but don't tell me that it tempered them very much. Maybe Somerville had one too that I missed, because they all had to have their little touch of art and humanity.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That's a nice thought, that is, the Grant, Sheridan, Somerville contributions to gentleness. But the art of ...

BURGOYNE DILLER: There's just part of the doses that are received to stimulate them. They don't bother to understand them. I don't know if Somerville did do a watercolor, or not. I'd love to see it. But it was odd though that I could understand and respect him, as I said. I think he was a much-abused man in the military sense. I think it's Taylor, and there was another military figure at the time. I can't remember now, rather brilliant men that were not too well used, you know, in their time...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes, yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: In their own role. But you certainly can't find yourself on the same side of the fence with him. When it comes to what an artist is, what an artist is going to do, or what he'd going to do if he does, it's a far cry.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Well, in terms of the work collected that was done at the WPA that was not either allocated or ...

BURGOYNE DILLER: You're talking about the final disposition of work?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Well, you know, after they became the art project as such, as an art project was terminated and became the War Services Project, in which all the artists stopped their easel paintings and mural paintings and all related activities, we set up shops to do posters for the Army and Navy or, in other words, any military

agency, or other governmental agency that was doing necessary war work to employ the artists again, to keep, maintain employment of the artists. So the ones that were easel painters and so on and so on went into the poster shop and made posters, or the silk screen shop, and another area in development of training devices. Also we did things for recruiting purposes, exhibitions, and that sort of thing. Of course we got into that area, then it was just strictly a dying out thing. Numerically it had been dropping and dropping, but we were able to undertake quite a bit of work for the governmental agencies, as I said, on the poster campaigns and so on and so on. But as I said, it was a dying out activity. Now in that period of time, however, when it became that -- McMahon went uptown in the administrative office, a sort of person in charge of all the art projects, you know, through this changing over period. I had charge of the project which had now become the War Services Project under her central direction, and it was pretty much of a cut and dried thing what we had to do, but in the meantime we did have the work that had been rejected over periods of time, work that had been allocated because -- well, people didn't like it, or whatever, and some that was just unmitigatedly bad. Actually the proportion of the total amount of work was very, very small. People can't realize that because we don't have figures on actually the total amount that was projected. For instance, figure these stacks of things, for instance, there were mural sketches that were rejected, but they had to be turned in to the project and we kept them because it was considered government property.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: There were easel paintings that in a lot of cases the only way to determine a person's ability really, you might have a person who brought in things that looked very competent and then assigned him to a painting or two and then find out that he hadn't even painted the ones he had presented. These were things that were impossible to determine.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure.

BURGOYNE DILLER: But then once he started doing his own work so that meant he'd end up with probably a painting or two that were worthless things. Well anyway, whatever the rhymes and reasons, the amount wasn't terrific, although it sounded like a lot because this is the residue of eight or nine years of an accumulative process of whatever was left. Well, during that last year or so we tried. My assistant at that time was Max Spivak and I had Max doing an awful lot of legwork, and other supervisors that still remained on the project going to different public agencies trying to find sponsors. Now sponsorship at this point did not mean that they would have to contribute anything except probably just give space. We disposed of a great many things by getting people in there, or bringing things out to them, things we thought were of a quality that could be easily allocated. But you know then we tried to get a city agency that would say, "Here we can store the stuff here." I had hoped that if we could get a place where we could store, even to have been able to keep things there for ten years, then open it up and see what you have. In retrospect we might find a lot of -- well, they would have found a lot of very, very interesting things.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I've got to put another

END OF TAPE

SESSION 2

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You were indicating that you had this thought about having a place where you could collect this material.

BURGOYNE DILLER: That's right. In other words storage for any period of time and particularly if it could be done under a fairly active basis. However we didn't insist on this in any period. But can you take part of your warehouse, put the work there and let us leave it there for the time being? We found most of the agencies were space-hungry, and there was no one who would take the responsibility. The result is, as I said, we spent a tremendous amount of time trying to get as much of the work as possible allocated. Now this is drawing really to the close as far as I am concerned. I enlisted in the Navy. Then the project was really being terminated. I was asked to do whatever I could to further this allocation program, but in the meantime I had already given rather specific orders to get the stuff assembled in areas and so forth and so on. What they did is take -- well I went then, I left one night -- you know, was in the Navy the next day. Max carried on, but he said they simply came in. They just loaded the stuff in trucks, threw it in trucks, took it out to an old warehouse and dumped the stuff there. Then later I think they had some men come in and bid on it as old canvases, or something of the sort. It was ruthless! It was a horrible thing! Again it's a thing that you have a sense of guilt about and yet we tried desperately to do something about it. Yet there wasn't one city agency that was willing to help and we, after all were an agency going out of existence so there was nothing we could do. We had no power, no authority, no structure. Nothing remained, nothing at all. Records were taken down, as I understand, in a ????? and dumped and so on. There was a quantity of records, though, and it may be of interest to you, a great many of the photographic things were given to the New York City Public Library. I don't know whether they sorted them out,

or catalogued them, or what they've done with them.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I don't either.

BURGOYNE DILLER: But they have almost all of the photographic files. They were turned over to the library. Now that's one place they found for a

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Repository.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Repository, yes. That, of course, would be more easily obtained. Getting to it might be a little awkward ...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well the scene had shifted noticeably from one of concern about American things to preparedness to meet the challenge abroad and, you know, there was a retraining program. Other jobs were opening up. The WPA was coming to a close.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Well, of course, what you're saying is that the conclusion of the Project was that we were getting into the war...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: And people, artists had been going off rather regularly to war jobs -- you know, whether it would be as a draftsman, or whatever it may be. There were lots of related activities. There was employment.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Some of them went into the armed forces. A great many of them, as I said, went into war work of one kind or another. Employment was opening up.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: That's about the size of it. I think that once you started having the kind of money circulated through a period like that, then somehow at least some people started to buy a painting here and there. In that time, the artist really wasn't better off, he thought he was probably.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But there was noticeable change. I think the handwriting was on the wall so far ...

BURGOYNE DILLER: Change in what respect?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: In the atmosphere. That is, our own concern for ourselves, given the breakdown of our economy, had led us into the position of making public works of some kind and putting people to work, employing them. You know, with the advent on the scene of Hitler and Company, the invasion of Poland, the struggle over Britain, it put our own discussions away from self-concern to a definition of what we as Americans would, or would not take. We had two committees. For example, the America First Committee started, and you had, what is it -- the Committee to Aid America by Aiding the Allies. Public discussion changed from whether Roosevelt was leading us into bankruptcy by wasting Federal funds to a discussion of where our interests lay. This is what I mean by the scene shifting. And the WPA, as it had been known in '35, '36, '37, '38 was less attractive, more of an eddy, given this new problem. And as you say, airplanes were being constructed, there was room for draftsmen. There were jobs opening up elsewhere. To be sure, it was again sponsored largely by public funds, which incidentally were not looked upon as wasted, and we spent far more than we spent on the WPA, but the whole atmosphere in America had changed, had shifted. There was some effort, I think, in the Washington headquarters of the WPA to sponsor through the institution of WPA a retraining program. Well, a careful reading of the Act, the piece of legislation that sponsored the program did not include a retraining program. Much of this was picked up by other agencies, you know, and suddenly the need for it was gone. It had to be terminated somehow, some way, and you were in the least few moments in New York City. Mrs. Holzhaur was employed to collect material in Chicago as the last warehouse and allocate it from there, so that it was like a committee in bankruptcy, in effect.

BURGOYNE DILLER: It was.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: ... and that whole spirit to which you referred earlier, you know, as coming up out of the 20s into the 30s, where needs were articulated and discovered, the kind of camaraderie that grew up between artists was rather quickly replaced.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Camaraderie, or more important still, a kind of interaction between artists and artists groups.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: That had not been witnessed before. A kind in interaction, you found you were meeting with people of very greatly different ideas and it was a challenge, a contest. It was arresting.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: But all of them came out with some possible difference in attitude than they had before and probably a little more concern for what the other was doing. [Interhouse communication] But after the dissolution of the Projects and so on there was still more of a meeting of artists than there had been previous to the WPA times. And I think that because of this and because of this association -- well I'm sure the group that later became the Abstract Expressionists and so on were obviously directed from this group because every one of them was a person who had been employed there and had been in contact with each other. Your Artists Union as such didn't continue too much. The Congress certainly didn't, but on the other hand the artists club, the Art Club and so on, groups, particularly the Art Club where a good number of artists and so forth gathered and debated, you know, their position in relation to the world of art and so on. It resulted in the kind of impetus that shaped American painting for the last ten or fifteen years. No matter how you might question its validity, you know, and lasting value -- these trite expressions for evaluating art -- it still had an impact on the rest of the world. People came to America to see paintings. They even came to America to buy paintings...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Which is in contrast to the incident that I mentioned before. The four Frenchmen who had to go back to France to sell American paintings, today might have to come over here and sell a painting to a Frenchman...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Which is wonderful for American art.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure it is.

BURGOYNE DILLER: And the one thing that they had not had before, a really general interest in buying, a buying interest. Believe me, I know the reasons for buying investments and so on and so on, but if it enables an artist to work, this is important, too.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, tell me, the plight of the artists.... [Interruption in tape]

BURGOYNE DILLER: You know, I think that it would be a mighty difficult job to attempt to assess the values of so many things that came out of the projects. You have -- I think we were speaking of it earlier - you had art centers where they didn't have centers of artists, employable artists. You had art centers started in southern localities, in midwestern localities, in western localities where they never had that facility. I, as one of the people born in, you know, in an area that you would think -- well, Battle Creek, Michigan is not far from Detroit and Chicago and so on, but still they had no art gallery or anything of the sort. If you went to a library, the only books you could get would be probably on the English portrait painters, or the English landscape painters. This was art. But in the time of WPA, they were establishing art centers, and these art centers that were initiated by the WPA under sponsorship of the town later became the art centers of the towns, and are now you know rather good sized institutions. They had their genesis there. On the other hand, you had your Index of American Design across the country which probably has salvaged for us some of our past in terms of the handicrafts and things that were brought to this country or initiated in this country, and which would have been lost by now. It was a project that certainly should have been continued. Well, you have so many things. Take the impact of the Theater Project, the stage, of the Writing Project in its way. I mean they all had their impacts and as I said, today if you made a cross-section of artists in this country today who are known, every one of them you could say was salvaged by the Federal Art Programs and the WPA Art Programs, because they were people that probably would not have continued painting, couldn't have continued painting...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Of necessity would not have allowed themselves to continue painting because there was no ...

BURGOYNE DILLER: There was no future in it. Artists were worrying about their futures. I mean they were in circumstances where they were having families, and they had to become employed in some fashion. I think too, you know, you had your artists working in settlement houses -- you know, in the social programs in different cities. They worked in settlement houses and they worked in other places, you know, with children and so on which had some impact on the method of leading children into art activities. Subsequently I mean a lot of these people that worked there became know factors in the development of our school systems, of the type, of the method of teaching. This was, I think, a very fruitful period, and it cost so little, say, in terms of the Project, you know. We got into a war, and it would only take a few days' war to spend the amount of money it took for the

whole eight years or so of the Program. It was a farce, ridiculous.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, I don't know whether it sparked interest in American art, but I suspect that it did, you know...

BURGOYNE DILLER: It certainly did an awful lot to create a more general activity, and I've always had the feeling that art really develops through a kind of general activity. You can have your isolated geniuses, but it's always been somehow or other a product of a kind of ferment.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: When you view this against the 20s, there certainly was a development in the recognition of an American idiom too, in art, something that's recognized, something that spread, broadened in terms of people in community art centers like four community art centers in Utah where they were on the tour for WPA art shows. I don't know what instinctively enters your being, but you get a sense of what's going on, or you know what's in the air that the artist sort of anticipates and puts on a canvas, or represents in some form, or another, but you get a broader sharing of this kind of creativity than we had ever had before. You know, you said about the 20s that the more advanced, or the more modern of the artists didn't have a place to show. Now I don't know -- you know, the two schools that developed, the Socialrealist School and the Regional School that may have developed, also there was some Abstract art that was developed under the WPA. And if nothing else, allowing these skills and techniques to be kept alive and developed through this period is like a seed bed for future development all along. But for this WPA -- you know, well the art world would have been wholly different.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Well, don't forget in relation to the WPA and the artist in terms of his development, that the artist received certainly a minimal wage, but on the other hand, on that minimal wage in that time he could survive, he could rent a little place and buy his food, take care of his little family and, as I said, on a minimum basis, but he could do it. Most of the artists were people who before had been working part time at art. Now for the first time in their lives, here were thousands of them who could work full time at it and, believe me, they did. That's what made this attitude toward time-checking of the artists -- the main trouble was not how to get them started, but how to stop them, if he's an artist, as far as I'm concerned. That really has meaning. Because they'd work seven days a week, and they loved it. It's the only time in history that you could have this number of people full time, fully occupied, as I said, in painting, in sculpture and so on. This is something we did not have before, because then, as after the war, you had again the return to the artist as a part time practitioner. Now today if you were to make a census of employment -- well, put it another way -- if you were to isolate the number of artists who are living on their painting, it would be a tremendously small number, almost like it used to be. The only thing is that, I think, the artist that has been admitted into the fields of education as a teacher, or on somewhat different basis than they had before, you see -- I don't say that WPA affected this directly. It might have had some influence somewhere along the line but this is something I couldn't speak to -- but before that time, you know, a college or university if they employed an artist it was because he had a Normal School degree. If he had his degree, he was qualified as an art teacher. He might have been the biggest pip squeak in the world, you know, a lady china painter in pants, or something, but I mean certainly not an artist. But he had his degree. Do you realize what a short time it has been till now when you have an artist who is considered educationally equal to a normal school graduate? You see, if he spent twenty or thirty years and gained a reputation in his field, he is considered almost as well qualified as a normal school teacher and therefore is employable. There has been a tremendous amount of employment in education because of the acceptance as an artist as a qualified person as an expert in his field. This has provided a great deal of employment. But outside of that, what is there, really? Most artists are still scraping the bottom of the barrel trying to find little occupational things that won't take too much away from their painting, or give them the most time for painting. You know, they try commercial art. Then they find themselves in an unholy rat race where if they're good, they're going to be in demand. If they don't satisfy the demand, the people are not going to wait for six months for them to come back from painting and start doing commercial art again. They just won't employ them again. You know what I mean. People that try to get into seasonal activities, people who are successful designing covers, or whatever, are relatively few that can really sustain a program of working so many months and painting so many months. Then, in the WPA days, you could work because they weren't so greedy that they had to have tremendous amounts of money. They had to have enough to subsist on. They were willing to accept it and very happy to get it. I know I was crazy. Aside from the fact that I got caught. You feel responsibility. I still think I was a sucker. I should have spent those years painting and let somebody else sweat out the bureaucracy.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I wondered what this whole period meant to you in personal terms because you did get pulled in on a -- well, partly public relations, partly negotiating, representing what it meant to you in personal terms when you were spending all this time in -- well maybe it's the atmosphere.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Let's put it this way: for a short time with a few abstract painters I was employed on TRAP. In the WPA program when it was set up with the attitude toward abstract painting, I would not have been acceptable, I couldn't have found my place there unless I was an assistant to somebody on a mural, or something, you see. And I knew, I made it a proved fact. If I did get in there I could get jobs for other abstract painters. You see what I mean! It made it possible and to me -- after all, you can't disassociate, you know, art as

something separate from life and living, and responsibility, after all, what is art? Something that exists in you, a sense of awareness, or something. It was a wonderful opportunity to make it possible to do so and as I said, I tried desperately and no matter how many hours I worked I managed to sweat out a few hours of my own. I didn't stop producing, although God knows I was limited. As I said, this other was not a full time job, it was two full time jobs. You know you'd be at a committee meeting and things that could last till the middle of the night and you'd be expected to be some place at eight o'clock the next morning for another round.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. A constant, steady turmoil. In this period did many of those who were experimenting in the abstract way change their style to become social realists, or more representational, or what?

BURGOYNE DILLER: Very few. Getting the sort of murals that we did for them it wasn't necessary for them because in one sense the more abstract they became the farther removed they became from criticism because then we could just say "It is decoration." So in that sense I didn't find occasion to have anybody temper what they did except, as I said, in the case of Gorky when we first wanted to do one of the first places, one of first jobs we got were I could not go out and ask for, you know, a wall at the time. This was prior to the housing development, prior to WNYC, but it seemed like an airport was a very contemporary activity and a place that could stand a good contemporary painter's work you know. But even then I did temper in that case by having Wyatt David, Stuart Davis's brother, photograph planes and parts and so on, and then having them blown up and then Gorky coordinating them into a design. It certainly had a good deal of formal value, but at the same time it had enough of the objects and particularly, you know, recognizable, discussable by people concerned with aviation and so on. There wasn't too much of a debate on it before we presented it to the Mayor for his approval. Floyd Bennet Airport was his baby. Now I'm repeating myself. Something I shouldn't do.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Not on the tape. That was before.

BURGOYNE DILLER: We felt we really -- the Commissioner of Docks had approved it, everybody had approved it all along the line but then we went to see LaGuardia coming in at the opening of the First Federal Art Gallery in New York City. It was on 39th Street. He came in with a group of his commissioners. It was all very impressive. He stood in front of Gorky's mural sketches and said, "Well, this is Tammany Hall politician." So the Commissioner of Docks called me the next day and he said, "You heard him?" I said, "I did." He said, "Well, you know what that means." I said, "Yes, the project is dead, because of LaGuardia's baby." Then we picked up the pieces and taking the same theme but then discarding the idea of using the photographs at all, but having Gorky utilize the motif, because at the time this was not alien to what he would be interested in doing. He never was completely a non-objective painter though he got really interested in this stuff. Then we made preparation hoping to get a mural at Newark Airport, and it was accepted there. In spite of LaGuardia and we put it up in a more forward-looking environment, in Newark next to that old reactionary situation in New York City.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, you must be exhausted.

BURGOYNE DILLER: Oh, not too -- sometimes I talk too much.

END OF INTERVIEW

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