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Oral history interview with Boris Gorelick, 1964 May 20

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

Transcript

Interview

BG: BORIS GORELICK
BH: BETTY HOAG

BH: Mr. Gorelick, we're very happy to have your record of the Federal Arts Project work which you did in Washington, D.C. and New York.

BG: Thank you very much, Mrs. Hoag. I'm very pleased to be here tonight. I'm especially pleased since I think it's a most propitious occasion. I'm mindful of the current interest in poverty and, this goes back about thirty years to a very similar period in American history. And it's very likely a significant thing that a survey such as this is being conducted at this time. Hopefully, it will throw some light and a little fire into the survey of the present situation.

BH: I'm sure it will. And we'll go back and talk about that in a few minutes. But first I would like to ask you a bit a bout yourself and your own work. Where were you born and when, if you care to tell us?

BG: Well, I was born in 1912 in Russia.

BH: What part of Russia?

BG: Oh, as far as I know it was the south of Russia. I came when I was a year old, and we have lived in the United States all of my life, most of the time in New York, where I was raised and received my education and have been living here for the last eighteen years in California.

BH: Did you always want art, was it an art education that you took?

BG: Yes, my education was primarily in the field of art and design, and I have been in the art field all of my life, not as a practicing easel painter but in the art field as a teacher, mural designer, industrial designer, etc.

BH: Did you go to school in New York?

BG: Yes, I went to the National Academy of Design, to the Art Students League and Columbia University.

BH: Did you have any teachers that you feel particularly influenced you there?

BG: My first teacher, of whom I think very frequently and very kindly, was Frank C. Kirk.

BH: Which school was . . . ?

BG: This was a relationship which was on a personal level, and in a way he was my mentor and benefactor. As an artist himself, he took great interest in me. Later, that is when I was still a child, I studied with Nicolai Fechin and Sergei Soudeikine. These were very well know names at the time and subsequently became very prominent. And at the National Academy of Design with Leon Kroll, Sidney Dickinson and others I've forgotten.

BH: Thank you. And you studied with Hugh Breckenridge, is that correct?

BG: I also studied with Hugh Breckenridge, Arthur Covey, and Carl Anderson. Later, I won the Tiffany Scholarship and went to the Tiffany estate at Oyster Bay, Long Island, and also to Yaddo in Saratoga Springs.

BH: These are both a little like Huntington Hartford, I understand.

BG: Yes.

BH: Heavenly retreats and places to study.

BG: Yes.

BH: A wonderful experience to have at that time.

BG: Yes, they came at a very good time, too.

BH: Well, this was just about the time the Depression was starting probably, wasn't it?

BG: During the very beginning of the Depression as a matter of fact. And it was these summers that gave me the where with all to survive the rest of the year.

BH: It was about this time you became one of the founders of the Artists' Union. You were telling me a while ago about conditions in New York at this time. Would you mind repeating that for the tape?

BG: As I mentioned before, we're talking about a period in American history that has to a very large degree been overlooked and perhaps been forgotten. And it's very well to go back to that period because it was a period of great privation, hunger stalked the country, and that's not putting it dramatically, but that's a fact. Millions of people were involved in very desperate circumstances, and the professions were down the drain because they were at the bottom of the economic ladder, especially the art profession.

BH: People thought they really didn't need the artist; art was about the last thing they thought they needed, probably.

BG: No, no, they didn't. They had nothing else, and they certainly didn't need any aesthetic reminders that they had a heritage or anything of the sort. Art was overlooked completely, and since all of the economic tensions and pressures were crushing, the artists suffered especially under this kind of privation. And because there was no provision whatever for the artist, the artists sought amongst themselves to find a way of solving this particular problem. And taking the example from other organizations and groups that were fighting for some kind of recognition or means of surviving, they also formed organizations which subsequently became the Artists' Union.

BH: You mentioned that on March 6, 1932, there was a great uprising in the square in New York.

BG: I didn't say it was an uprising. I said it was a demonstration which was possibly the first time that unemployed people demanded recognition.

BH: Were these all artists? I didn't quite understand.

BG: No, this was the populous of New York that was unemployed. They were called the Unemployment Council which was just formed at that time, and they came to Union Square which was a meeting place in New York, and it was the first time that unemployment and privation was placed on the immediate agenda for consideration.

BH: And you were there when it happened?

BG: No, I wasn't there, but I was quite aware of this fact.

BH: And it was a direct result of that, that the Artists' Union was formed in New York?

BG: Well, this was the beginning of a process of awareness, shall we say, and eventually organization, and eventually the formation of the Artists' Union. It was not one of the first organizations, but it was the first amongst the cultural workers and subsequently played a very leading and very important role in, for one thing, bringing about recognition of the responsibility of government to the artist per se and also the need for unity amongst the artists for their own survival.

BH: This was probably one of the first things that caused the Treasury Department to start their relief program.

BG: Exactly, exactly.

BH: The following year, that would have been in 1933 . . .

BG: Yes, it followed very shortly thereafter. Some provision had to be made, and the problem was of such critical nature that thinking went into the projects, and some of the artist were employed. However, this did not solve the problem because it only affected a small percentage, a portion of those in need. Also, the Treasury setup was one of professional artists being given jobs on the basis of merit.

BH: Yes, these were competitions usually, and then given as a result of not winning a competition but submitting something so good that they were given another one to do, wasn't it?

BG: Yes.

BH: Were you active in that part of it at all?

BG: Well, I was on the lithograph project which began at that time.

BH: Under the Treasury Department?

BG: Yes, under the Treasury Department. I worked on that, and later when it was transferred into the WPA projects, I was on the WPA project right from the very beginning too.

BH: In New York?

BG: In New York City, yes. And remained on the project for some time. Eventually, I was sent to Phoenix, Arizona, to set up the Phoenix School of Art and Design, and stayed away for about a year or so.

BH: Was this one of the WPA schools for the public?

BG: Yes, this was under the WPA jurisdiction.

BH: Do you remember what years those were, about '34 and '35 or later?

BG: Oh, I think it was '35 and '36.

BH: Did you work on any of the murals that were done during the WPA project?

BG: Yes, I worked on them, but I worked on a team. We did murals for synagogues, churches and also did a number of stained glass windows for the Holy Cross Church.

BH: In what city was this?

BG: In New York, on 42nd Street. And on several high school murals on Riker's Island. I did a mural for the chief county hospital, Kings County.

BH: How many men were working on these projects? Well, I suppose it was different on all these different things?

BG: Yes, these were assorted projects. There were three or four or five people working on some of these things.

BH: Someone told me the other day that your worked with Ben Shahn on the Washington, D.C., mural. Is that correct?

BG: No, I didn't. I knew him, knew he was doing the job, but I didn't work directly with him on the job. I worked with Michael Loew. I worked with Guglielmi on several things, and I worked by myself on a number of these projects.

BH: Did you work on any of the mural projects in Phoenix?

BG: No. I was organizing the school at that time.

BH: And you didn't do any here in Los Angeles? I guess you weren't here.

BG: No. During the time that I was at the Phoenix Art Center, I came here to California and met with Danysh [phon. sp.], with Mr. Wright. They were the heads of the California project, and I had occasion to meet them. But in Phoenix, my association was with Mr. Lew Davis, Mr. Curtis, Mr. Newberg. I don't remember too many names actually of that period.

BH: Mr. Wright, I believe, was in charge of seven Western states, wasn't he?

BG: That's right.

BH: I believe he had to go around and okay everything when it was all done or something of this kind.

BG: Well, he was here in Los Angeles. Mr. Danysh came to Phoenix, and I subsequently also met with him here in Los Angeles. He was the field representative of the Federal Art Project. So I had occasion to meet with him here in California as well.

BH: Well, again let's come back to the Federal Project with some questions, but first I want to finish what happened to you after this time. Did you teach in New York?

BG: Yes, I taught on occasions in New York.

BH: Were you in the war first?

BG: No, I was here in California during the war. I came to California in 1942, the latter part of '42, and have been here since that time. That was at the beginning of the war. When I came here, I was placed in Lockheed because of my industrial design background and spent most of the war years working for Lockheed and the Hughes Corporation. After the war, in '45, I went into the movie industry in the animation field and worked as a designer for UPA and subsequently worked in the animation industry for many years. I am still, as a matter of fact, employed by a movie studio.

BH: At UPA?

BG: No, not UPA, just Playhouse Films; it's another organization.

BH: You teach at Otis Art Institute?

BG: Yes.

BH: This is your main occupation now, isn't it?

BG: No, no, no. My main occupation at the moment is working for Playhouse Films. But I have courses which I teach at Otis Art Institute.

BH: Are these design courses that you're teaching?

BG: Advanced drawing and painting classes and design classes.

BH: We would love to hear more about some of the Project work in detail.

BG: Just let me say one thing about the work that I have done. As I mentioned, I have worked in the industrial design field and have also worked as a mural artist and designer and have done a number of murals for prominent architectural firms, such as Pierera and Luckman, Robert Browt.

BH: Are these mostly commercial buildings or homes?

BG: Yes, the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco is one of them and the Beverly-Wilshire Hotel, the Huddle Restaurants, the Gardena Club, the Home of Imagination, Flamingo Hotel.

BH: Well, that is very interesting.

BG: Well, that just covers the mural painting involvement.

BH: You said that you did lithography in New York, and that this was something new in the country at that time?

BG: Yes, I did do lithography at that time. As a matter of fact, it was rather a major interest of mine mainly because lithography as an art, was rather a dead art until it was resurrected, so to speak, during that period. And its main motivation was to make an effective, multi-processed, reproductive process available to the artist so that he could make drawings and reproduce them and sell them for a very nominal fee.

BH: Oh, how interesting. Because of the Depression this was a quick source of getting something for a small investment?

BG: Exactly. And so the Project became quite interested in developing this as an art form, and whereas it had not been popular for some . . . .

BH: Hundreds of years?

BG: No, not hundreds, but about seventy years or so, or from the time of Daumier anyway. It suddenly became a very living art again, and many people traced their early beginnings in drawing and painting, I would say, to their involvement in the lithography projects. And many famous artists were on the lithography project at that time, and their work was shown, exhibited, sold, displayed all over the country, and eventually it became a rather accepted medium for working.

BH: This was obviously one of the very good contributions of the federal projects then, because (I don't know whether this started in New York and spread west, or whether it was general over the country) Mr. Feitelson told me that here in Los Angeles during the Project period, every artist had to work in lithography. They had to contribute at least one. And if, as you say, you had well-known, or at least, very competent, good artists teaching this, it must have been a great help to younger and more immature artists who really learned from

them.

BG: Yes, they had a number of specialists in the field. One of them was Mr. Millard, who was a very well-known printer. There were others who gave their talent and knowledge and developed lithography as an important part of the art field at this time. I don't know how many artists were involved in this thing, but I would saypossibly a hundred artists in New York were on the Project at one time or another. They were given stones and all the supplies necessary and did very marvelous things.

BH: And since these were the property of the government at the end of the Project, I believe they were given to public institutions, libraries, and schools?

BG: Yes, they were either sold or distributed to the libraries, galleries, schools, archives. They had quite a wide range of distribution for these works of art, and many eventually wound up in rather important collections. I know the Metropolitan Museum, the Whitney Museum, most of the major museums had representations of these work. I hope they are still maintaining them.

BH: Well, I'm sure they do. Can you think of any other good things that came out of this period for the artists? Other than being fed?

BG: The entire WPA period was a very wonderful experience, really, for the artist because, not only did it serve as a means of livelihood for them, but also gave them an opportunity to work in their own field, which was possibly the most critical contribution for them. It maintained their art; it maintained their connection with art; it sustained them during the time that they were young and maturing; and it also gave a wonderful platform for them to articulate through their art whatever was important to them. And it was a period in which significant things were articulated. Many important contributions to American art were made then, and the Americans attitudes were begun at that time. We can trace the American School (the recent American school, the contemporary American School) to that period. As a matter of fact, many of the current luminaries in the art world got their early beginnings during this period, and certainly would not be active today had they not had the opportunity to remain in the field of art at that time when they were young.

BH: Did you see the exhibit at Pomona a couple of months ago?

BG: No, I didn't.

BH: This was WPA artists, all from the New York scene, a "before and after" show. I think there were eighteen of them. It was really quite wonderful; and it was amazing the number of names which are well known to us today who were active.

BG: I'm sure they must have had Ben Shahn, and Philip Guston, and Jackson Pollock?

BH: Yes.

BG: Stuart Davis?

BG: Yes.

BH: Arshile Gorky?

BG: Right.

BH: These are all names of people who were on the Project at that time, many of them that I got onto the Project.

BH: Oh, really.

BG: Yes.

BH: I wish you'd tell us about some of them and what you remember about the organization.

BG: Well, my connection with the Project and with that entire period goes back to the time when the Artists' Union was formed in New York which was, as I mentioned before, in the middle of 1934, toward the latter part of 1934. This Artists' Union was patterned after the unemployment councils which were rather active at that period but performed in the area of the artists. It gave an opportunity to the artist to band together, to form a pressure group of the kind to bring their plight to whatever governmental agencies were critical in that area.

BH: Did the state step in before the federal government in helping them, do you remember? Because California had some emergency measures here for artists before the federal government entered the picture.

BG: I think there were community efforts made even prior to the national government because the pressures were on the local area at the very beginning. It subsequently snowballed into a national phenomenon, of course. And the Artists' Union, along with other organizations became national in scope. It started in New York with possibly twenty-five or thirty people.

BH: That few?

BG: Yes, a very small group. But it quickly grew into an organization of about fifteen hundred to two thousand people with auxiliary groups which included women as separate sympathetic groups, students, young students in the art field who also became members of auxiliary groups supporting the Artists' Union.

BH: Were you an official in this of some kind?

BG: I was president of the Union over a period of three years, and from the very beginning was one of the organizers and an official of this Union, during which time, of course, I got to know most of the artists in New York. Of course, with many I have maintained fairly close relationship. But most of the well-known artists came through the ranks of the Union and into the ranks of the WPA setup and subsequently into the art world to prominence.

BH: Who were some of the ones that you knew?

BG: Oh, I was active with men like Stuart Davis, Arshile Gorky, Jackson Pollock, Ben Shahn, Bernarda Bryson, Philip Guston, Seymour Fogel, Phil Bard, Max Spivak, just to name a few. There were many others who came through like Reginald Marsh, and most everybody, the Soyer brothers.

BH: S-O-Y-E-R?

BG: Yes, Arnold Blanch, Doris Lee, Adolph Dehn . . . .

BH: A roster of all the artists in America.

BG: Most. Harry Sternberg, Tully Filmus, most all the artists who are practicing today came through here.

BH: When these were organized into the WPA groups there, were you active in the group which decided what part they were to be active in? That is, the Projects were all divided up into different kinds of things; did you tell the artists what they were going to do? How did they organize? How did this work?

BG: You mean, how did the artist get into the division they participated in?

BH: Yes, in the work they ended up in doing for the government?

BG: Well, there was selection there. If they wanted to be active in the lithography division, they applied to that particular department.

BH: They weren't appointed to it? They could designate where they wanted to be working?

BG: Most everybody selected the area in which he wanted to function. For example, we even had a division for artist's models.

BH: Oh, really.

BG: And there was a dance division. Most any aspect of the social activity of the community was represented on the Project. There were carpenters, there were sculptors, there were craftsmen, there were painters, there were lettermen, poster men, mural artists, fine artists, easel painters, portrait painters. Everybody was represented in a different phase of this Project. In most instances, one's own preference would dictate where one would eventually operate. In some instances, though, there was little room for these people, and there was much effort needed to get them taken care of. In some cases, if they couldn't get on the Project, we'd get them on "home relief." But, effort was made to give them some kind of livelihood, which was the really critical consideration at that time.

BH: I have been interested in talking to people who worked on murals in this area, asking them about the influence of Diego Rivera and Jose Clemente Orozco, who had been working down here in San Francisco. And of course, Rivera was in New York, or had been shortly before that. Did you feel that from an artistic standpoint he influenced the work that the artists did?

BG: Yes, Rivera had a tremendous influence on many of the mural painters at that time. Seymour Fogel, for example, was a student of Mr. Rivera during that period. As a matter of fact, he worked as an assistant of his on

the Radio City job and got his first mural training from him. I remember very well Rivera's stay in New York. As a cultural force in New York, he made rather a significant contribution to the general ferment that was going on there. Shortly thereafter, Alfaro Siqueiros visited New York and also came as a very prominent Mexican artist; he also contributed greatly to the general cultural climate of the period. By all means, I would say that they left their mark on the period and also on the thinking of that period. I should say this in retrospect. My memory of that whole period is one of fondness.

BH: Is it really?

BG: Yes, because I think it was one of the most stimulating periods that I've personally lived through. And, I think it was also one of the most stimulating periods of any time in American history that I personally have viewed. And it was tremendously interesting; it was culturally exciting; and it was an intellectual climate that I wish could be duplicated again. There was ferment; there was curiosity; there was agitation; there was activity; there was interest; and there was freedom of thought. And, it represented a very vital period in American history. Unfortunately it's rather a forgotten period, but possibly some day perspective will be brought to bear on this thing, and it will regain its stature in our history as part of a heritage that we have.

BH: That's why I think the Archives want to get this material now; they're grasping for this picture.

BG: Yes, I think it's very important.

BH: I think probably one reason you feel so fond of it is because whenever people have an adversity and face something together, they become closer, and probably this happened then.

BG: Oh, yes. It certainly brought about great friendships, a feeling of oneness, camaraderie. It established a pattern which could have been a very healthy pattern for developing an art form and developing a significant contribution to the cultural life of the people. It subsequently shattered and splintered and dispersed itself, but during that time, it served as the backbone for bringing a lot of people together in a common purpose.

BH: What were some of the other influences? I mean, who were other men who you think influenced it particularly at this time in New York? Were there any other strong personalities that helped with the work that was done there that you can think of?

BG: Well, a significant development and this is a progression, I would say was the emergence in 1936 of the American Artists Congress, which was formed at the congress that was held at the New School for Social Research in February, 1936.

BH: What was the Congress?

BG: This was an extension of the general activity of the artists. It went beyond the program of the Union, which was in the economic field primarily, and went into the realm of ideas.

BH: As subject matter, you mean?

BG: No, it allied the artists with large movements of people for art freedoms. The main program of the Artists Congress at that time was, as express in their manifesto, to fight against war and Fascism, which at that time was beginning to burgeon out. And, I think that for the time and for the period they displayed remarkable insight and laid the foundation for a tremendously important attitude on the part of most artists at that time who allied themselves with this movement. Some of the founders were Stuart Davis, Lewis Mumford, Rockwell Kent, and many other very prominent people who spoke at this conference. Really, I think that it brought about, as I said before, the unity of artists with other sections of the population in a very necessary struggle. And it was certainly timely because very shortly thereafter the Spanish situation become a critical proving ground for Fascism, unfortunately. And Guernica, as you say, shortly thereafter . . . .

BH: Sort of work up the country, and then it wasn't long until the end of all the WPA.

BG: I think the WPA lasted for a short period of time actually, altogether possibly three or four years, and large portions of that time were cut down to just a token kind of representation.

BH: It's amazing that it was such a short length of time, yet we have decorated buildings all over the country to show for it!

BG: Oh, yes. There was a tremendous amount of activity. The art production of the period is actually unparalleled; thousands of paintings, many thousands of pieces of sculpture, many thousands of lithographs, etchings, prints, posters.

BH: Easel paintings.

BG: Easel paintings, every kind of art expressionism was produced and circulated during that period. Not to mention the schools that had tremendous turnout, student bodies which would dwarf any kind of school today in the art field. And these were running simultaneously all over the country.

BH: And these schools were so important, too, for people who were not artists who took classes all over the country. The artists were able to instruct them in understanding the trends art was taking at the time. I think many people who had no pretensions of ever becoming artists did learn to keep up with the art world.

BG: There was a need for all kinds of extension classes and therapy classes. Also, people were looking for some avenue of aesthetic fulfillment, and this was a fine way of offering them a possibility or participating. It was a great adventure.

BH: You mentioned knowing both Ben Shahn and his wife, and since they're so important in the Archives, I wonder if you have any memories of them that you would like to put on the tape, anything of interest that would add to our remembrance of him.

BG: Well, of course I knew both of them for possibly several years during that period of ferment we're talking about, during which time they were rather active on a number of committees. Bernarda Bryson herself was on the editorial board for a while of the Art Front magazine, which was the official organ of the Artists' Union. And so, too, Ben Shahn was on various committees involved in one or other phase of art activities at that time. I believe he was working on his mural at Riker's Island at the time and had done a series on Sacco and Vanzetti, as I remember. Was always the serious artist, and was seriously involved in bringing about a successful project.

BH: I've always felt that he caught the spirit of it more than anyone else. I think when you visualize the period, you see it through what he left us, you see the figures as he painted them.

BG: He was definitely a product of that time and also a wonderful chronicler of that period. As you say, possibly even more so than many others, but also, he was a little older than some of the others.

BH: Was he?

BG: And possibly more mature and could function more readily in that period.

BH: See through the meaning of things and try to express them?

BG: I think so.

BH: He's certainly a fine artist. the works he left are beautiful.

BG: Yes, Bernarda Bryson was on the lithograph project at that time.

BH: Oh, was she?

BG: And she was a fine lithographer.

BH: Was she teaching as well as producing lithographs?

BG: I don't remember if she was a teacher or not. I know that she was on the lithographic project, though. This I do remember. Arshile Gorky at that time was also taken on the Project. He was in a desperate situation. He was living on 16th Street near Union Square at the time, had a studio there. He was practically penniless, and it was in sheer desperation that effort was made to get him on the Project, which we finally did. And, believe me, it helped keep him alive for that period of time.

BH: What did he do on the Project? Do you remember the kinds of things?

BG: No, I don't know the kind of things he did. I remember the kind of painting he was doing. I don't know what he did on the Project, though. Although I think that he (like most everyone else) submitted one or two drawings or paintings every month to the Project, which was the Project assignment.

BH: Oh, I see.

BG: In other words, one worked at home and at the end of the month brought in one's quota of drawings and paintings. And of course you drew a check every week, which wasn't very much, but it helped to keep you alive.

BH: I didn't realize the artists worked at home. I thought that probably they had rented a building and worked together.

BG: No, in most instances, they worked at home by themselves and submitted the work at a given time.

BH: Did they have exhibits of work that was done, for instance, lithographs?

BG: Constantly.

BH: Oh, did they?

BG: Constantly. There were exhibits that were organized and circulated all during the time of the Projects were in operation. Not only prints but paintings and sketches for murals and class work that was done in art classes being conducted at that time in different community centers. Things like that.

BH: Were these well received by the public?

BG: They were extremely well received. Tens of thousands of people came to these things.

BH: Isn't that marvelous!

BG: The kind of response that you don't have today.It was a renaissance in American culture, and the response was fantastic. There was a tremendous involvement of the average, ordinary person with the art currents at that time. There was a bond, I would say, between people and artists, which was quite an unusual situation.

BH: I think one of the wonderful things was that the subject matter was so often things that people could understand. It certainly made us conscious of our American heritage. We no longer felt we had to turn back to the Renaissance to call it "art."

BG: Yes. There was a concept. The subject matter, as you say, was tied very closely with the aspirations of the people at that time; and also, to a very large degree, it reflected the nature of their condition, and grew out of that current period and was very closely allied to the spirit of the time. The struggle, the forward-looking outlook of the people, etc.: art reflected this.

BH: And I believe, in fact I know, that many of these shows traveled in the country. I talked to one artist who had been in Kansas, which was an isolated part of the country, certainly, from an artistic standpoint, at least where he was.

BG: Who was that?

BH: Charles Rogers. He's up at Huntington Hartford now.

BG: Because there's a Miron Sokole who was in Kansas.

BH: Rogers was completely isolated from the art world. He mentioned the fact that the traveling shows came, and he was able to realize what was going on in other parts of the country and that must have been multiplied over hundreds and hundreds of times. And that must have been a marvelous thing for the country to know what artists were doing in other places too.

BG: It was. Part of the project was to send people to different areas. Artists like Jim Lechay, Miron Sokole, and many other rather well-known New York artists were sent to outlying areas to set up schools and participate in different small community art enterprises. They acted as emissaries.

BH: You might say that our melting pot was bubbling!

BG: It was.

BH: That was an interesting thing.

BG: I was just thinking about some of the other people who became rather well known who were also around at that time. Men like Gus Limbach, Gus Peck, and I mentioned Jim Lechay and Miron Sokole. I can't just think of another name. I can't remember them all.

BH: Some of the other ones that you just told me were Ted Gillien [phon. sp.], Joseph Vogel, Kuniyoshi, Walter Quirt.

BG: James Guy . . . .

BH: Siporin, Balcomb Greene, Harry Sternberg . . . .

BG: Joe Solman . . . .

BH: Joe Jones . . . .

BG: Joe Solman was a very important man.

BH: And Max Weber.

BG: Max Weber, by all means.

BH: What was he doing on the Project? Did you know him well?

BG: Well, I don't know if Max Weber was on the Project. But Max Weber was very active in the American Artists Congress. He was one of the founders and one of the main people involved in that whole movement, as a matter of fact. An extremely articulate, learned, scholarly man (literally a poet, in his general outlook and everything else), he was marvelous. I have very wonderful memories of him. And he was a big name at that time, as of course he still is.

BH: Still is. Well, it's nice to know that he was that kind of man too, as well as being a great artist.

BG: Yes, he was a wonderful human being. Well, what other area can we get in to?

BH: We'll wrap it up. You mentioned the Art Front magazine. Could you tell me a little bit about it?

BG: Yes, as I stated before, the Art Front magazine was the official publication of the Artists' Union. But it had a broader scope, really, than just being an art organ of the Artists' Union. It was a broad cultural publication for which many very prominent people, international names from Man Ray to Leger, would write. And I think that it would be of tremendous value to you if you could possibly get some of these publications and make a study of them because they cover a period of some possibly two-and-a-half or three years during this very important period that we're talking about. And, they reflected very closely the day-by-day activities both on the economic front and also on the cultural front.

BH: Were these monthly or weekly, do you remember?

BG: This was a monthly magazine.

BH: Is it the kind of thing the Library might have, do you suppose? Were they distributed all over the country?

BG: They were sold all over the country.

BH: Well, they probably have them in one of our libraries here, then.

BG: They had a fairly wide circulation. Of course, the magazine was sustained by the artists themselves: they had no financial backing, probably very frequently had difficulty being published. But it was a very important document of that period.

BH: Was it illustrated, or could they afford it? They probably couldn't.

BG: It was illustrated by the artists themselves, and they had some very fine drawings and illustrations by very prominent people. As a matter of fact, I have a copy or two here that I brought to show you to give you an idea. I only saved one or two copies for myself. And if I can show it to you at this point . . . .

BH: Oh good. I would love to see it. This is the magazine that you said that Mrs. Bryson was the editor of?

BG: Mrs. Shahn. She wasn't the editor, she was one of the contributing editors.

BH: Mrs. Shahn, yes. I see. Well, this is wonderful.

BG: She was on the editorial board for a period, as were many other very prominent people.

BH: Another artist you mentioned who was there then was Michael Loew, he and is very prominent in New York today. What was his part in the Project, that you remember?

BG: Michael Loew worked on stained glass windows at that time, although he does nothing of that nature at this period. But he was involved in mural design and in stained glass windows. I worked with him as a matter of fact, on several.

BH: Where did you do stained glass windows?

BG: We did them for churches and public institutions.

BH: Do you remember the names of any of the churches?

BG: Yes, Holy Cross Church is one of them. I can't think of any others. I worked with him on two; I don't remember the other: I know where it is, but I don't remember the name of it.

BH: Was this just a design, or did you actually complete the installation?

BG: Oh, we actually did the stained glass.

BH: They were leaded?

BG: They were leaded. We did some imitation and some actual leaded windows.

BH: How can you imitate lead?

BG: There's a procedure.

BH: With wood partitions and . . . ?

BG: No, no, no, no. With putty which forms dividers, and then we painted the plate glass with paint. I can tell you the name of the paint, as a matter of fact: Campanella colors.

BH: And it looks just like the real thing.

BG: And you couldn't tell the difference at two feet.

BH: Well, what is the difference? Does it not wear?

BG: Well, it's just one large sheet of glass which was simulated for stained glass. We couldn't afford to heat the glass and bake the glass, etc., or import pieces of glass.

BH: How rich were the colors could you get with this? Anything approximating the European cathedrals?

BG: A marvelous spectrum of colors.

BH: Really.

BG: You couldn't tell that it wasn't a real stained glass window.

BH: Was this an invention of yours and Mr. Loew's, do you remember?

BG: No, just a commercial product we utilized on specific occasions, but it was adapted to this particular project. Many fine pieces of art were done in this fashion.

BH: How interesting. Do you remember any of the other men who worked on that window?

BG: I can't remember.

BH: Well, Mr. Gorelick, this has been a very interesting evening, and I thank you so much for talking to me. I hope that we will continue this in a week or two when we have some more material to talk over.

BG: Fine. Thank you very much. I enjoyed it very much too.