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Oral history interview with F. Wynn Graham,  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with F. Wynn Graham on July 22, 1965. The interview took place at Plaza Escalante in Albuquerque, NM, and was conducted by Sylvia Loomis as part of the New Deal and the Art's project for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

SYLVIA LOOMIS: This is an interview with Miss F. Wynn Graham, Plaza Escalante, 414 1/2 Central, S.E., Albuquerque, on July 22, 1965. The interviewer is Mrs. Sylvia Loomis of the Santa Fe office of the Archives of American Art, and the subject to be discussed is Miss Graham's participation in the Federal Art Project in New York City during the 1930's and 40's. But first, Miss Graham, would you tell us something about your background, where you were born and where you received your art education?

F. WYNN GRAHAM: I was born in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. My art education began in Detroit, Michigan at the Wicker Art School. And from there I went to New York and to the Art Students League.

MS. LOOMIS: When did you go?

MS. GRAHAM: Oh, it was the early 30's when I went to New York. And I later studied lithography at the Harlem Art Center-

MS. LOOMIS: Oh!

MS. GRAHAM: -because there was a very fine printer up there and we were allowed to study up there.

MS. LOOMIS: With whom did you study at the League?

MS. GRAHAM: At the League, Mr. von Schlegel, and the croquis class, of course, which has no instructor. And at the Harlem Art center we had Jan Bowles, he was considered at that time an excellent teacher and printer of lithography. And from that kind of printing I became interested in serigraphy, which was just being developed at that time.

MS. LOOMIS: Did you know Gwendolyn Bennett up at the Harlem Art Center? She was the director of it for a long time.

MS. GRAHAM: No, I can't say that I did. No, I don't remember that name.

MS. LOOMIS: Well, what were you doing at the time you became involved in the Project?

MS. GRAHAM: I had been ill for a year or two and I was still studying art-I think we always continue being students so I was still studying-and at the time that the PWA Project began, I was still ill and hadn't really applied for that until just about the time it was finishing, and WPA was beginning.

MS. LOOMIS: So that meant early in '35?

MS. GRAHAM: I guess that's about when it was.

MS. LOOMIS: That's when PWAP ended-I think, in January '35 and then the WPA started soon after that.

MS. GRAHAM: I guess so. I remember, if I'm correct, I applied for both on the same day. I think we went, several of us, to PWAP which was at the Whitney Museum on 8th Street at the time. I remember Mrs. Juliana Force was head of that.

MS. LOOMIS: Oh, that's a name I've been trying to get. Several people have spoken about her.

MS. GRAHAM: Is that so? Yes, it just came to me. Since I've spoken with you about this several names have come back to me that I haven't thought of for years. And I think it was Mr. Lew Ross, who was quite a good painter and teacher, who recommended that I should apply. He said, "Obviously you're a painter and financially you need this." I still felt almost too much of a student but he felt that I-I had exhibited, I'd been exhibiting in juried shows.

MS. LOOMIS: Where had you exhibited?

MS. GRAHAM: Oh, in Detroit in the Annual Museum Show there, and-I've forgotten- nothing too important, perhaps, beyond the annual Michigan Show, which of course was student work. We thought it was quite a big thing anyhow.

MS. LOOMIS: What medium were you working in then?

MS. GRAHAM: I began studying in oil, but I think my first accepted work was watercolor. I had switched to watercolor, and then from watercolor into tempera. I felt that my early successes were more in tempera than in oil, even though I had begun studying oil. Then from there into the print medium. And I had studied fresco, but physically that was a little bit rough for me.

MS. LOOMIS: What was your first assignment, do you remember?

MS. GRAHAM: On the Project?

MS. LOOMIS: Yes.

MS. GRAHAM: I was assigned to a mural group that was, let me see, we were working at Textile High School. There were four mural groups there at the time, and the supervisor of our group-the head of that group-was Paul Lawlor. And then there was another group. I think Moses Soyer had a group. And I'm just trying to think who else. There were four. And from there I transferred to-there was an opening to do a children's mural at the Queens Public Library, the children's room, and that interested me very much. So I did a sketch for that, did the sketches and the details and they were accepted by the committee. I had a little controversy with Mr. Jonas Lee about a horse or a mule or donkey, he wanted to know what it was. I wasn't quite sure myself, you know, I didn't think the children would mind. So then Harry Knight was a supervisor of-I'm not sure exactly his position-but he was able to transfer me to the easel project. I thought I might like that better. Well, my real reason for transferring from the children's project-it wasn't really because of Mr. Lee-it was because at that time they had decided we weren't going to be allowed an assistant, and I felt a huge room for one person who weighed ninety-five pounds or so was just too much physically. I didn't see how I could manage scaffolds or anything else. So when he gave me this opportunity I thought the easel project sounded delightful. And I did oils in the beginning then occasionally I used to take back an oil and give them a couple of watercolor or temperas, because I would go in and if they hadn't been allocated after a certain length of time I would give them a choice of other work because I really wanted to see the things allocated. So we sometimes made trades, you know.

MS. LOOMIS: Is that right?

MS. GRAHAM: Yes. And I had a pretty good record of allocation but probably because I did that.

MS. LOOMIS: Do you know where your things were allocated?

MS. GRAHAM: Yes, I had periodically taken records and-well, they were in the, let me see, hospitals, and Queens College, various colleges and hospitals and that sort of thing; some high schools, I suppose, but I did make a record and try to keep it up to date now and again. Yes.

MS. LOOMIS: Most artists didn't know what happened to their work.

MS. GRAHAM: No, but I was interested. For some reason we were told that if we cared to find out, we could find out whether our work had been chosen. It was interesting.

MS. LOOMIS: Do you remember, when you were transferred to the easel project, if you had to submit your work to a jury or to a supervisor or committee, or anything?

MS. GRAHAM: No, we were given three weeks for a watercolor or gouache, and six weeks for an oil. And of course we would take it in and discuss it with our supervisors, and that was-

MS. LOOMIS: But I mean at the time you were accepted on the easel project?

MS. GRAHAM: No, I believe not, I think I was just given a straight transfer by Mr. Knight, who knew my work, of course, and knew that I had done a good deal of easel work.

MS. LOOMIS: A transfer. Yes. And what was his title? Do you remember that?

MS. GRAHAM: That's what I'm trying to remember, but he was sort of assistant to Mrs. McMahon.

MS. LOOMIS: Yes. And also-

MS. GRAHAM: And there was another man at the same time who was an assistant and I just can't think of his name. I mean there were two or three perhaps, but Harry Knight was the one who was my direct contact with Mrs. McMahan.

MS. LOOMIS: How long were you on the easel project?

MS. GRAHAM: Well, for the bulk of the time, and I'm not sure how long in years, but until the project finished, which was about in '39, wasn't it?

MS. LOOMIS: I think it was a little later, just before the war started.

MS. GRAHAM: Was it? About '40 then.

MS. LOOMIS: Yes, I think it was. Well, did you do any silk screen work on the project?

MS. GRAHAM: No, I didn't. I didn't ask to be transferred to that but, let me see how that came about. I knew they were doing experiments and I think I told you the other day that I knew this chap, Tony Velonis-a young artist who had worked in his brother's commercial shop-and it is my understanding, at any rate, that he had decided that he knew lithography and he got the idea for combining lithography with silk screen- Anthony Velonis.

MS. LOOMIS: How is that last name spelled?

MS. GRAHAM: V-e-l-o-n-i-s. And the person who worked closely with him in developing that was Hy Warsicker [?], although Tony, I believe, had begun it. And I know they did a lot of experiments on the Project but I hadn't asked to be transferred, as that was the period when I was studying lithography in Harlem. I was still on the project but I was working in classes with it, we were permitted to. And I heard about this serigraph experimental work and there was a group that began working in an old loft on 10th Street. I was part of that group. And out of our group, which was not officially of course, connected with WPA, we began the National Serigraph Society. We at first called it the Silk Screen Group, The Silk Screen Group. And the reason the name was changed was because there was too much confusion with commercial silk screen and certain museums, and, I believe, New York State- which was going to give us some kind of educational subsidy-they and galleries and museums said that we should have a name that sounded more like fine arts, which was what it was.

MS. LOOMIS: Yes. Now at what point did you become interested in union activity?

MS. GRAHAM: Well, perhaps very shortly after getting on the project. Now, I'm not sure that there was even an Arts Union before the Project. I imagine there was not.

MS. LOOMIS: I don't think so.

MS. GRAHAM: And very early in the working period we were all aware, I suppose, of the organization of the Artists Union, which later became United American Artists.

MS. LOOMIS: What about the Artists Congress?

MS. GRAHAM: I was not very active with that group.

MS. LOOMIS: Wasn't that first?

MS. GRAHAM: I believe there were delegates from Artists Unions who were part of Artists Congress. I may have-

MS. LOOMIS: Well, which came first? Do you remember that?

MS. GRAHAM: Artists Union came first, the United American Artists. And I guess as a member of the Union I must have been a member of it, but I wasn't active enough to be able to really tell you much about the Artists Congress.

MS. LOOMIS: What were some of the problems that made it necessary for the artists to organize?

MS. GRAHAM: Well, of course, it was organized strictly for economic reasons. Apparently, there were firings on the Project and I can't give you specific information about how often this happened, but there were these so-called "pink slips" and they seemed to be given out without any particular rhyme or reason, I mean they weren't given to people for poor work, or lack of good work, or anything of that sort, they were just given to artists who would be thrown off the Project and who would have no means of living. So the organization, I guess, was primarily for that purpose, to protect the jobs if possible, to be considered a union, although officially, of course, we were not a union, as such, like the C.I.O. or A.F.L. Now the C.I.O. did for a time have us as part of their organization but apparently our problems were so different from large organized labor that they didn't really

want to be bothered with us at all.

MS. LOOMIS: Well, I noticed in some of that material from your husband, Mr. Greenfield, that there was quite a good deal having to do with the United Office and Professional Workers of the C.I.O-

MS. GRAHAM: Yes.

MS. LOOMIS: -So they must have been together at some point.

MS. GRAHAM: We were together-we were members of C.I.O. for some time-but it seemed as though our problems were not quite in line with the problems of other branches of C.I.O, so that while we were members I'm not sure that it was too beneficial to either group.

MS. LOOMIS: In fact, this union that I was speaking to you about-that I was a member of -was the United Federal Workers of America, of the C.I.O. And, of course, it was a different classification rather than an industrial worker, but the Federal employees also had this C.I.O. union.

MS. GRAHAM: Well, I suppose that material will show exactly how long we were affiliated, and certainly it sounded like a good idea, but as I recall, our problems seemed to be very different from those in industry and I think the association was terminated before the United American Artists disbanded. I rather think so. I'm not clear on that point any more, it's such a long time ago.

MS. LOOMIS: Well, of course the fact that there were cutbacks in the Federal funds that were allocated to these various projects would mean that certain employees would just have to be dismissed.

MS. GRAHAM: Automatically, yes, regardless of whether they were union members or not.

MS. LOOMIS: -which would not be the case of industry, I mean where a worker might have seniority or something else that would allow him to keep his job even if there were cutbacks. So I was curious to know by what standards an employee could be dismissed if it were necessary, if the money just wasn't there.

MS. GRAHAM: Well, if the money wasn't there they simply did get their pink slips, but on at least two occasions that I remember the artists protested as a body and they were reinstated. I suppose additional funds were allocated.

MS. LOOMIS: Were these a part of some of those mass demonstrations that took place at the time of the cutbacks?

MS. GRAHAM: Yes, they were. I remember one, when the Whitney Museum was still down on 8th Street and I was part of the delegation that went in to see Mrs. Force, and of course, being part of that group, I knew all the artists very well and there wasn't an anarchist or a person with a bomb in the group. In fact, many of the members of the delegation had work in the museum. Nonetheless the newspapers did carry headlines that the artists were - I don't know - "attacking" the Whitney Museum, which was, of course, a fallacy because, as I say, they were artists who work had been shown, and was frequently shown in the museum, so they meant no harm to the museum. They simply did want to see Mrs. Force. This must have been still on PWAP, on that project, which was probably being terminated. And, of course, no harm was done to anything in the museum; there never was any intention to do harm.

MS. LOOMIS: Of course not, no.

MS. GRAHAM: But the newspapers, of course, made quite a good story out of it and it sounded as though the artists were not being respectful of art work, which of course they were.

MS. LOOMIS: Well, it was unusual during those days to think of the artist as being organized in any way. It was always the individual artist up until that point.

MS. GRAHAM: Yes, this was very unusual and of course it must have been very near the beginning of the Federal project. The Project was certainly beneficial to most of us- particularly the younger artists-because it was a wonderful chance to associate with the more experienced painters and to know what was going on in the art world, and we were given opportunities to exhibit that we might not have known about otherwise.

MS. LOOMIS: Did the artists feel that they were discriminated against more than other groups during this period? I mean, when there were layoffs?

MS. GRAHAM: I don't believe so. I think that it was more or less a general thing, writers were at that time laid off and probably a certain percentage of actors, and so on. I don't believe the artists felt they were discriminated against.

MS. LOOMIS: What were some of the problems that confronted the artists, other than this one of being afraid that they might lose their job-I mean as far as functioning as artists during that period?

MS. GRAHAM: Well, I don't know what problems other artists had. I can't say that I had any outside of my not particularly liking working with the first mural group. The simple reason for that was that the head of that particular mural was a Yale art student who seemed to be more interested -- at least we felt, some of us -- more interested in the technique of doing the thing than in the original ideas that we might come up with. And I don't think he particularly liked young women artists on the project. So that somehow or other it seemed to me I would function better on a private project, which is what I took later. But I don't know of any special problems that artists had. I felt that it was very fair timing to give us three weeks for a gouache. In fact, I did many during the three weeks and sometimes gave them a choice. I would take down more than one if I felt that there were two or three that might very well fit in. And the time was very good so far as I know.

MS. LOOMIS: Did you have more time on an oil?

MS. GRAHAM: Yes, we had six weeks on an oil. And that's adequate. Of course, the old masters worked for years on one painting, but I think that if one can put in six weeks of full days, and doesn't have to worry about making a living somewhere else, he ought to come up with a very professional sort of oil, a completed work.

MS. LOOMIS: So you didn't feel that the restriction of time was any limitation on your creativity?

MS. GRAHAM: No, I thought it was excellent. So far as I'm concerned it was adequate time. I think it was very good and we were given our materials, which was wonderful. There was no problem about getting whatever materials you required.

MS. LOOMIS: Do you remember how much you earned during that time -- what the paycheck was -- approximately?

MS. GRAHAM: Yes. I think it was \$24 a week at that time. And the head of the supply department that I remember best and who seemed to be there most of the time, was David Smith, who is now, as you know, such a well-known sculptor -- he does these huge metal sculptures.

MS. LOOMIS: Oh yes.

MS. GRAHAM: David Smith. And I used to get my materials usually from David. No problem.

MS. LOOMIS: So he was doing that sort of work instead of sculpture?

MS. GRAHAM: Well, he must have been doing sculpture-

MS. LOOMIS: On his own?

MS. GRAHAM: On his own, because he was exhibiting and working at that time. But he was always to be found in the supply department during the hours when we were allowed to get materials.

MS. LOOMIS: Who are some of the artists that you were associated with that you believe really got their start during those days?

MS. GRAHAM: Well, there were so many it would be almost impossible to tell you which ones. Of course, the more famous ones would be Jackson Pollock, for one thing. I don't know where he got his start, but he certainly got a lot of development during that time and this was before he was at all known for his very special type of work. I think that de Kooning was on the project at that time, Willem de Kooning; and one person with whom I enjoyed my association around there -- I'm not sure of his particular title -- was Philip Evergood, who gave me a lot of help and advice, I know. At one time he came out to my studio to see what I was doing beyond what they got down there, to give me advice, and he was very, very helpful.

MS. LOOMIS: Was he a supervisor?

MS. GRAHAM: He was a supervisor, not in the sense that some of the others were, but I think at one period he went around to the various studios to see whether he could help and what we were doing, how much we were doing, whether we were good judges of our work and giving our best work.

MS. LOOMIS: This wasn't in a critical sort of way?

MS. GRAHAM: No, it was really very helpful. Of course, I've always admired Evergood's work and I certainly did enjoy having him look over other work that I had in the studio and tell me what he thought, what his ideas were. Jack Tworkov was on the project at the time, he's been shown a good deal in the last few years.

MS. LOOMIS: And Soyers?

MS. GRAHAM: And the Soyers, yes. I knew Moses very well. I didn't know Raphael as well, although they looked a great deal alike at the time, and I used to speak to both of them. But Moses was also very helpful to me. In fact, it was through Moses Soyer that I became part of the Five Woman Group, which showed at the A.C.A. Gallery. That was our first Five Woman Show. Now Bee Ribak Mandelman, whom you know, was part of that group.

MS. LOOMIS: Was this after the project or during?

MS. GRAHAM: It was during the project. I'm not sure what year, or it may have been in '40 or '41 immediately after, I'm not sure now. But we had quite a good success, I'd say, with that group and we could have continued as a group, but somehow our ideas became somewhat divergent, because some of us were concentrating perhaps more on prints than others, and one or two moved away. Doris Meltzer, who later became director of the National Serigraph Society, also was a member of that group.

MS. LOOMIS: Who were the other two?

MS. GRAHAM: Mickey Hammer, who made quite a success with Pennsylvania Dutch design. She moved to Bucks County and she and her husband did a great deal of that. And, oh dear, I'll try to remember the last member - I can picture her, but I can't think of her name for the moment.

MS. LOOMIS: That's all right. Well, it's interesting to know about these groups that developed from this.

MS. GRAHAM: Yes, our association with other artists, as I said before, was so helpful I feel that that's one thing we lack now -- particularly in an area like New Mexico -- is a closer association of all the artists in the area. Somehow we don't see each other as much in large numbers as we should.

MS. LOOMIS: I've heard that from several that they-

MS. GRAHAM: Yes, one feels isolated.

MS. LOOMIS: -don't get together as they did during that period regularly.

MS. GRAHAM: No. It was marvelous because we had many lectures and group exhibitions, there was always something that was of interest, like good lectures, round tables, discussions, and group shows.

MS. LOOMIS: Were these sponsored by the project, or by the union, or somebody else?

MS. GRAHAM: No, they were sometimes, I imagine, sponsored by the union, but very often I think galleries approached us. For instance, we had a twin show let us say, with Hudson Walker and the A.C.A. Gallery. Now they said they would like to have joint shows for young artists, running simultaneously. And of course we couldn't work and if it was chosen for one gallery you also had something in the other. Now this kind of thing couldn't have happened if they hadn't known where to find us, you see. And then we also had an exhibition out at, oh, I think May's Department Store in Brooklyn, which doesn't sound very important but the director of the Brooklyn Museum came over, and the director of the Modern Museum -- and I knew him pretty well -- important people came to it, but only because we were getting enough publicity as a group of young, union artists, and offered us other opportunities.

MS. LOOMIS: But this approach was through the union itself?

MS. GRAHAM: Yes, I'm quite sure that many of them were, maybe not officially, but it was because there were groups of artists together that these things could be organized. That was really true. We had many forums during those days and many lectures. And I'm not sure but what the Treasury Department watercolor competition wasn't fostered because there were still active groups of artists. I don't know whether you know about that. There was an announcement that the Treasury Department would buy 300 watercolors, and they did, and there were 5,000 submitted from which they chose 300.

MS. LOOMIS: And this was from all over the country?

MS. GRAHAM: Yes. It was nationwide and there never has been, so far as I know, before or since, any such public competition which was paid for by the government, and this, of course, had nothing to do with WPA. It was national funds on an open competition basis. It was very nice.

MS. LOOMIS: Well, I knew that they quite often had these open competitions for murals, where sketches would be submitted, but I didn't know anything about the watercolors.

MS. GRAHAM: Yes. They did for watercolors, strangely enough. They haven't done it since. And of course these

watercolors got marvelous publicity because they were shipped to all the name museums in the country for about a year and then placed in government buildings. I know mine went to the Marie Carvel, Louisiana Hospital for Lepers. So they were not to be seen publicly since then. But it was nice to know that they went to where there were ill people. And there were other things of that nature happening at that time where there seemed to be so much more activity nationwide, not necessarily stemming from WPA but I think inspired by the activity there.

MS. LOOMIS: Yes. How do you think your work on the project affected your career as an artist?

MS. GRAHAM: Well, to me it was a great opportunity for development and I don't know what would have happened to many of us if we hadn't had that many years at a time when we were young when it was very important for us to be able to work without -- well, it wasn't a great deal of money, but without worrying about-

MS. LOOMIS: Subsistence?

MS. GRAHAM: Yes. Finances. You could live on it, not well, but you could live because for one thing you didn't buy your materials, this was for food, doctor bills and rent, such as it was.

MS. LOOMIS: Well, how do you think the work of the project -- not only the WPA and the PWAP -- affected the general public in terms of greater appreciation of art?

MS. GRAHAM: Oh, I do think that it made them aware, much more aware of living art and artists, and I think somehow America has become a great deal more art-conscious and I certainly think this was a contributing factor. The museums and galleries constantly have more and more and more visitors, as we know, and I'm sure it was a great educational force. And the teaching project must have been a marvelous thing for laymen, to be able to go to these classes. I guess it was -- in my opinion -- I would say it would be the greatest force in America during this century, and I imagine this could be proven in one way or another.

MS. LOOMIS: I think it probably could.

MS. GRAHAM: Yes. A great force.

MS. LOOMIS: Because the art center at the time I went to school was Paris, but I don't think now that the young artist feels that it's necessary to go to Paris in order to be in the swim of things.

MS. GRAHAM: No, it's necessary to go to Paris to visit museums and I've done that, but I didn't study actively there, I mean I worked there but I didn't go to any art schools. I felt I'd passed that period where it would have any -- it's always good to study, but I don't think it could change one's approach, the main thing is just to work and see what you can see.

MS. LOOMIS: Yes. What did you do after you left the project?

MS. GRAHAM: Well, after leaving the project, although I didn't study textile design -- hadn't ever studied anything but fine arts -- I had an opportunity to visit a textile design studio in New York, a very good one. Lena Langer had this studio and it was considered excellent, and she was always willing to give fine artists an opportunity to try to do textile design, which was very good because although technically we had to learn a good deal about how to do things with printing I think we came in with somewhat fresher ideas than people trained in textile design. So I began working with Lena in this studio and then later free lanced in dress fabric and scarf design and some drapery and upholstery fabric, not as much of that as scarves and dress fabrics. And I felt that was, too, pretty good training because my method of working -- at least as a free-lancer -- was to do the kind of thing I wanted to do, and take it around in my little folio, and if people like it, very good, and if they didn't of course, I didn't get to sell it. So it was still a very creative thing, much more so than doing things perhaps to somebody else's specifications. I did those for a number of years -- in fact, right until the time I came to Albuquerque.

MS. LOOMIS: When was that?

MS. GRAHAM: I came to Albuquerque -- well, I came down here originally nine or ten years ago but went back to New York for two or three years for short trips to sell and show a few more textile designs, because that kind of work can't be sold in Albuquerque, since there aren't any printing houses here, you know, that will just buy the paper design. So I haven't done it now for probably six or seven years. But during that time I hadn't given up my sketching and silk screen printing, and I had also studied with Philip Evergood, studied oil, some more oil work with him, but I will say you can't do textile design and do as much painting as you would without that. It's a very strenuous business doing textile design because one is in competition with the big studios in New York and it really keeps you moving to do it. But it's quite fascinating work. I liked it, but I still prefer my fine arts. And of course, now that's what I'm concentrating on, painting and printing.

MS. LOOMIS: How long did you study with Philip Evergood?

MS. GRAHAM: I really just studied with Philip formally for a few months, and I got a lot out of it because I think he freed me of a lot of inhibitions. That's what was his greatest contribution as a teacher, I think. He would let his students -- insist that his students -- just open up and do whatever they felt like doing and not worry about the results but get things out of your system. And that's what I got out of it, I think. I like his work very much because there is a certain imaginative quality to it.

MS. LOOMIS: Very much so.

MS. GRAHAM: They may be realistic in one sense but they're highly imaginative and symbolic in another. So that was perhaps the last formal training I've had in working alone.

MS. LOOMIS: Do you remember when that was?

MS. GRAHAM: That must have been eight or ten years ago.

MS. LOOMIS: Oh! As recent as that?

MS. GRAHAM: I think not over ten years ago because I was doing some textile design at the time. Well, I may be a little wrong on my dates but it couldn't be too long ago. And since coming to Albuquerque, of course, I've just been working alone. I've gone to various groups here where we had models and I've worked without criticism -- whenever we have a life group that is organized I'm very happy to go to it, but we don't always manage to keep one going.

MS. LOOMIS: Well, I see you've continued to exhibit a lot because there are about thirty various galleries and museums and so forth that you have exhibited in.

MS. GRAHAM: Yes, I have. I don't ship around the country now as I used to, but I do exhibit at Santa Fe when the opportunity presents itself, with the library here. But shipping around the country is, oh, sort of a problem when one is out here.

MS. LOOMIS: Are there many outlets here in Albuquerque for your work?

MS. GRAHAM: No, I wouldn't say there are. Albuquerque doesn't have a lot of outlets. In fact, it's the complaint of a lot of the artists here that, for instance, sculpture, which is so expensive to ship, there is very little opportunity to exhibit sculpture. I've done a little of it myself but that part of it isn't worrying me now about shipping it around. But when I first came here we still had the National Serigraph Society and we would send our prints back there and they got shipped around the country and around the world through the National Serigraph group. But for the last couple of years we haven't had that. And there is a Western Serigraph Society that I must join out in California, but I haven't joined it because -- well, when we had our own group, that was the original group in the country and we liked to remain with it.

MS. LOOMIS: Would that be just a chapter, or would it be a separate organization?

MS. GRAHAM: No, that's a totally separate organization, and I think it may have begun while we still had the National - I believe it did - but it wasn't part of it. It was a separate group. And they're doing very nice work in shipping around a good deal. So, at least for prints that's one good outlet, and I must join that. I hope to.

MS. LOOMIS: Are you connected with the Artists Guild?

MS. GRAHAM: No. I had inquired about the Artists Guild here, but for some reason I didn't feel that it would be too beneficial to join it from my point of view.

MS. LOOMIS: Is there a group in Albuquerque?

MS. GRAHAM: There is, but the Artists Guild-oh, you mean the national group?

MS. LOOMIS: Yes.

MS. GRAHAM: Oh no. I haven't joined it because when my friends became active in that -- it's another group I was thinking of at the moment -- when my friends became active in that I guess I was just too busy being a textile designer, and didn't take the trouble to join but I really should, although they haven't been able to get an active chapter going in Albuquerque. If I join, I think I would still just join the national group. Now they did begin it here, but you don't hear a thing about it. And the person who was organizing it is not in Albuquerque so that I don't even know whether a group exists here right now. It was Bill Howard who had spoken to me about it, but then he's teaching in some college this year and isn't in Albuquerque, you see.

MS. LOOMIS: Well, Chuzo Tamatzo in Santa Fe is very active in it.

MS. GRAHAM: Is he? I might join the Santa Fe group then rather than the New York group. I have friends who have told me that it might be of some benefit even though I am not in New York.

MS. LOOMIS: And I think that he said that the Guild grew out of the Artists Union and the Artists Congress.

MS. GRAHAM: It probably did. It probably did. As I say, I was just too busy with textile design and merely keeping up my activity with the National Serigraph group and was just careless about joining it then. I do know there are benefits to be had, but until we get an active group in Albuquerque, I'm not sure how beneficial it would be, really. Perhaps I should look into that.

MS. LOOMIS: When we were talking a few minutes ago about the Five Woman Group you said that you had finally remembered the name of the other one.

MS. GRAHAM: Oh yes! Yes! The fifth member was Selma Gugan and so far as I know about Selma she's still active, and a good working artist.

MS. LOOMIS: Is she in New York?

MS. GRAHAM: She's in New York, yes. You see, Beatrice Mandelman, of course, as you know, is in Taos; I'm here in Albuquerque; Mickey Hammer is in Pennsylvania; and I think the only two left in New York would be Doris Meltzer, who was chairman of the group and later president, and Selma Gugan. Everybody is still in the arts field in some manner or other.

MS. LOOMIS: Do you remember any more names of the artists that you were associated with?

MS. GRAHAM: Well, Dora Kaminsky, who is up in Taos; and of course Lou [Ribak]; and, well, Tamatzo; and there are a couple of others in Santa Fe or Taos -- well, Chuck Barrows is in Santa Fe-

MS. LOOMIS: Yes, I noticed that he was a member of the Serigraph Society-

MS. GRAHAM: Yes, he was quite active in the Serigraph-

MS. LOOMIS: -and I wondered if he was the same Charles Barrows that I interviewed in Santa Fe.

MS. GRAHAM: Yes, it is, Charles Barrows. I've seen him up in Santa Fe, he seems to be doing very well there. And, well, there are a couple of others, I just can't think of their names. There aren't too many in Albuquerque. In fact, I don't know of anybody else at the moment that I knew in New York.

MS. LOOMIS: Well, there are some that were on the project out here-

MS. GRAHAM: They were on the project here, yes, but not from our New York group so far as I know. Well, these names keep coming back to one but -- well, there were members around the organization at that time -- Ad Reinhardt, let's see, was in the group; well, Ben Shahn, of course, was very-

MS. LOOMIS: Was he active in the union?

MS. GRAHAM: Yes, he was around a good deal at the time. He seemed to be very much interested in photography as well as fine arts at that time; and of course, David Smith; and there are a few others-

MS. LOOMIS: Jacob Lawrence, I think you mentioned-

MS. GRAHAM: Yes, Jacob Lawrence -- he was quite active at the time. And there are so many others I just will have to think about it.

MS. LOOMIS: What was the administration attitude-?

MS. GRAHAM: Did I mention Dora Kaminsky?

MS. LOOMIS: Yes.

MS. GRAHAM: I knew her quite well at that time. Yes.

MS. LOOMIS: What was the attitude of the WPA administrators towards the union?

MS. GRAHAM: Well, I guess they felt we were a necessary evil, but we never seemed to have any real difficulty with them. They knew we existed and they knew why we existed and I don't believe there was any real problem.

Perhaps they might have preferred that we weren't organized because it didn't seem quite the thing for artists to do, perhaps. At that time it seemed like a new idea, and it was new to us, too.

MS. LOOMIS: Yes. Well, did they seem to resent the fact that you would come with problems to them or did they try to work them out?

MS. GRAHAM: They always seemed to try to work them out. In the very beginning, I think Mrs. Force, with her PWA group, was unhappy about them, but I really didn't know her well at the time. I was on one committee that went to see her, and I think she misunderstood the purpose for which the artists were seeing her simply to lay their problems in front of someone who could do something for them. But I think maybe-

[interruption for telephone call]

MS. LOOMIS: When the telephone rang and we were interrupted, we were talking about your going as a member of this committee to see Mrs. Force, who was then the administrator for the PWAP. Would you tell us more about that meeting?

MS. GRAHAM: Well, yes, it was very shocking to see the way this group of delegates were received in the museum. There were detectives stationed all the way up the stairs, two or three flights, whatever it was to Mrs. Force's office, and we were -- to use this expression -- we were "frisked" by the detectives as though we might have concealed weapons, and of course, there couldn't have been a more peaceful group of artists go to see Mrs. Force. And she was apparently frightened. She seemed very much frightened of us while we were there and, of course, there was no intent to do anything but just tell her our problems, and make sure that the project would go on and that artists would be hired for the work. I'm not sure just what the occasion was except that there perhaps had been a threat of firing or some firing. So we were treated as criminals, although we had no such intent. And then when we left the building there were mounted policemen on the street. Of course, there were perhaps hundreds of people, artists, on the street and I know that I was personally threatened by a policeman with a billy club and I surely couldn't have looked like an anarchist at that time. I had not been too long out of the hospital and I must have looked pretty pale and peaceful. But at any rate I was threatened. And this was the most amazing treatment I had ever been part of. And the newspaper carried the story in a rather lurid form, too. They didn't help the situation, they made it sound as though the artists went there with evil intent, which they had not done. And so far as Mrs. McMahon was concerned, who was later the director - I believe the term was - of the New York project, the WPA project, she was always quite receptive to our delegations, although there was one very famous sit-in strike in the Daily New Building on East 42nd Street. And I was part of that because we marched there without knowing that it was going to be an overnight thing, and we went into building where there was a director -- now that was not Mrs. McMahon -- there a male director in that building and once we got in there and he seemed to be very unsympathetic to the artists' demands that pink slips be rescinded - a great many artists had received the slips at that time - well, it was just decided that we would stay until he would listen. And unfortunately that was an overnight affair because the artists stayed and they were not given any hearing until the following day -- sometime I imagine, around noon the next day. And that is about the worst experience I can remember. I don't know whose fault it was, I don't know the man's name. But he didn't seem to be very sympathetic, and at that time the project was being cut back very drastically.

MS. LOOMIS: Why was this in the News Building?

MS. GRAHAM: Well, apparently his office was in that building and it was upstairs-

MS. LOOMIS: Oh, I see.

MS. GRAHAM: -and the police, of course, were called and there must have been -- I don't know how many artists were in the building, but as many as could get into that floor, really, and so the police gave out the word that they could not disband us because the floors were not safe, and that there were too many people in there for the safety of the building, and if there was any undue activity the building might collapse. Now this was the old Daily News Building. Now I don't know whether it was true or not, but we all felt somewhat fearful of being there all night and I had never been in an overnight, or any kind of a sit-in strike, until that time, probably never since. But it was quite an exciting affair and was also played up by the newspapers. Nonetheless, these things did help the artist to maintain his job because after this demonstration a great many, if not all, of the artists were rehired, and they badly needed the jobs. At that time they couldn't have found anything else to do.

MS. LOOMIS: Do you remember what period it was in the-?

MS. GRAHAM: This must have been rather late in the days of the project, I imagine the late thirties, wouldn't that be-?

MS. LOOMIS: Probably.

MS. GRAHAM: Must have been '38 or '39 something like that, somewhere not too far, perhaps, before the end of the project and the beginning of the war. Of course, nobody likes war, but I imagine a lot of the artists simply got work in war projects. I know that myself I began studying drafting with an idea of getting a job in drafting, but I unfortunately went to the hospital before I finished the course. That was a period in my life when I couldn't carry out something that required too much energy. I tried to take the course in a hurry, book a double course, and it was too much. But I know I did meet other artists at the time who were studying drafting and allied fields and getting into war work. So I suppose there were a great many of them.

MS. LOOMIS: Well, there have been a great many of them that did go directly from the project right into the war effort.

MS. GRAHAM: Yes, I probably wouldn't have needed too much more training before I would have gotten into the drafting field, but I didn't complete the course later on. I went into this textile design field instead.

MS. LOOMIS: But you do feel that this union activity did help to allow the artists to continue their work, and that probably without it there would have been fewer employed?

MS. GRAHAM: Oh, there surely would have been, because so far as I can remember every time we did go out and protest in great numbers, artists were reinstated. And obviously, without it they would singly not have been able to get back the project. As I say, they were not being dropped from the project because their work wasn't good, it wasn't a question of that, it was evident just that the government would have liked to cut down the funds. I think it was a marvelous thing for American art and I think something similar, without the stigma attached, should be done today for artists. We don't know how many fine potential artists are working perhaps as gas station attendants or sales clerks or something of the sort, and they simply can't survive as artists.

MS. LOOMIS: Even though there is much more interest in art now than there was that time-?

MS. GRAHAM: There is, but the average artist even with a fairly good reputation finds it pretty difficult to live unless he teaches or does something else to make a livelihood. Out of the thousands and thousands very, very few survive on art alone, as you know.

MS. LOOMIS: Yes. Well, this has been extremely interesting and it's a good background for the material that we have purchased from your husband, Mr. Greenfield, telling in still greater detail about the activities of the union. I don't know how much the Archives has gathered of this type of data but yours seems to be very thorough.

MS. GRAHAM: Well, I hope I have added some little bit because I think it was an important period in American art and has perhaps put us on the map as American artists-

MS. LOOMIS: Yes.

MS. GRAHAM: Not individually, I mean as a whole.

MS. LOOMIS: I think so, too. I think it did a great deal to stimulate art in this country and it gave the artists the opportunity to develop something that was strictly their own and not just their interpretation of what was being done in Paris at the time.

MS. GRAHAM: Yes. I think you're quite right. I hope I've added a little bit of information.

MS. LOOMIS: Well, you certainly have, and I thank you very much.

MS. GRAHAM: You're quite welcome. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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