Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Joseph Hirsch, 1965

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

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Joseph Hirsch in 1965. The interview was conducted by Harlan Phillips for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's New Deal and the Arts project.

Poor audio throughout parts of the interview led to words and phrases being inaudible; the original transcript was used to clarify passages. Additional relevant information from the original transcript has been added in brackets with an –Ed. attribution. The current transcript is the result of a combination of the original transcript created and edited in the 1960s, a verbatim transcript created in 2021 from the digitized sound recording, and an audit of the 2021 transcript compared to the original transcript using the digitized sound recording as reference.

Interview

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Let me turn it on and come by way of center field to get started. I think perhaps the rapier way to get into this period of the '30s is to go back and pick up, oh, some estimate of place, time, atmosphere, spirit of the late '20s, so far as you are concerned, personally. What were you doing? Uh, what were the prospects? How were you functioning?

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Will I hear this, by the way?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I'll play it back to you.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: I don't mean today, but—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: You'll get it back in a transcript.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Well, in the late '20s, I was being—just arithmetical—I was being a teenager. I was barely out of—I finished high school and entered art school and wasn't thinking about much except which direction to go. The fact that I was—had kept on scribbling and—as most kids start to do, but they stop—I had the idea that I would end up—I was drifting toward image-making, but I hadn't painted as a teenager.

I don't think I did any painting until I was about 20. It was about my third year in art school. For a while, it was a toss-up; I was very interested in music and still am. I play—I guess I play every day. And for a while, there was a little bit of a seesaw between—but in the late '20s, I suppose the one decisive thing that happened was that I was—I found myself the recipient of a municipal scholarship to what is now called the Philadelphia College of Art, which was then called the Pennsylvania Museum's School of Industrial Art. And the head of the art department in Central High School in Philadelphia had filled out an application that I had not known of and submitted my name, and I was a recipient of this Philadelphia's city scholarship to the—a four-year scholarship to this school.

And that tipped me away from college. My father, who was a doctor, had gone—as many doctors did in those days had gone from high school to medical school. So, he wasn't—he didn't have any set ideas on the need for a college education. But I had more or less been oriented toward college, and I had filled out one or two vague forms for—I think Amherst was one. But when this scholarship came through, I decided to give it a try.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOSEPH HIRSCH: So, that was about the one decisive event that happened in the late '20s.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: You must have made some impression on the head of the art department at Central High School for him to fill out the—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: That's right. But this, I imagine—well, I'll know from some of your questions

at any rate—this isn't—aren't you interested—will you be interested in the general landscape of the '30s? Not only as seen through my eyes, but you're not interested in the details of my biography, are you?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I think it makes it a sense of importance when someone comes to read this to get more than a—you know, just you begin in the '30s and terminate when the Art Project terminates. Some substance of—I think it helps in the way in which you look at the '30s. If you begin in personal terms, you begin to see it in personal terms.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: So, that almost everyone who has commented—I've must have done 100 anyway.

The interesting thing is that they all differ, in some cases quite markedly, about the role and their role in the Art Projects as they develop.

[00:05:11]

Now, I get this is viewed from the present, 1965, looking back, what, 30 years. You know. So, it's a retrospective interpretation from the start. Somehow to get back into the thinking, if you can pick up personal threads, biographical threads, and think consciously autobiographically is— there's at least some effort to bridge those 30 years.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: So, when I asked you what you were doing in the '20s and what the alternatives were, as you saw them, it is an effort to give an estimate of that time, place, set of circumstances. It's almost as though the '30s have yet to appear. And to place you in it from the point of view of growth and development, of what alternatives were, how you felt about society working its mysterious and elusive skill at molding and shaping. This is all that's in the air, you know. And I think illuminating. I hope so.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: When you speak of the Arts Project—this is just an aside—are you referring to the graphic arts project? Or do you mean the theater—the Federal Theatre Project and the music and the other—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: The whole government program?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Well, the Pennsy—the art—I was not a New Yorker until 1940, or '41. So, that when I was on the Project, which was briefly compared to some of the artists who were there from the very inception, when it—what was it before it was PWA?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: It was there was the PWAP, I think.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Yes, that's right. And then WPA.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Then the WPA.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Well, I was on it pretty much at the end. I think 1938. I don't—'37 or '38. I was on it when I married. And everybody who was active, it seems to me now—and then it seemed to me—that anyone—most of the people who are active in the world—at least in my—the world of painting was part of the Federal Project. Certainly the majority were. I don't know if this is so statistically, but a great, great many people were. Do you know enough about the—do you know where—did the Project start simultaneously, all over, or were there

some lead programs, and then it spread—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I think the PWAP was designed and announced on December 8, 1933. At that point, the country was divided up into 17 regions, each with its head. I know in New York Mrs. Force, the Whitney Museum—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Yes. Juliana.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —was its headquarters. How—you know, I'm making the assumption that because it emerged this way in New York, I know that in the District of Columbia, Duncan Phillips and others were headed it up there, so that there was a kind of combined effort through the Treasury Department then.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Was he the administrator, Phillips, in the Washington area?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: In Washington, yeah. Ned Bruce, who was the secretary of the—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Yes, I remember.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —whole thing. Under the Civil Works Administration, which was an offshoot of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, to give a different standing.

[Cross talk.]

JOSEPH HIRSCH: [Inaudible], that's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And the basic—yeah. And the basic purpose, as I understand the PWAP was, frankly, the adornment of public buildings, in some way. It was short-lived. It ran from, oh, December 8 through late March of '34. A very short period of time. The funds that they had were of a minimum nature. Again, I may be reading into a national scene what it is I've learned about the New York City Project. But people were chosen, they were picked for certain specific things, whether it be sculpture or easel paintings, or murals. The murals were done—started anyway.

[00:10:00]

But the CWA [Civil Works Administration] was tied in with an effort on the part of certain Washington administrators to work into our national understanding a minimum wage. And they did so: 25¢ an hour. This occasioned of great dismay on the part of Southern senators, because outside the art field, sharecroppers were leaving the sharecropping farms and going to the cities for work at 25¢ an hour, thus making it necessary for President Roosevelt to find some way to terminate the CWA because most of his political power was in the Southern senators. So, it was short-lived.

Whatever the reason and they may be, you know, even more, complex than I've indicated. But out of this there was an opportunity, as of the winter of '33, '34, for artists to work. Now, I don't know how it was set up in Philadelphia, whether it was a region in itself, whether it was headed up at the Academy, I don't know.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Well, Mary Curran headed it for a while. C-U-double R-A-N. I think she headed the Pennsylvania Project, I think. While Harrisburg is the capital, I think it was administered in Philadelphia. But I really don't remember how artists got onto the program or how I got onto the program. I suppose I filled out a form. I suppose that it was chosen on the basis—on some—using some standards, that was the art of the choice made of this or that painter or sculptor or graphic artist. Mary Curran was very, very much in charge of that office. And my recollection is that it was largely her discretion—at her discretion. I don't know how the—but the fact that it was a program that helped a lot of people [inaudible] of course. But I think I may have made applications sooner had I not been in Europe. In 1935 I was awarded a Woolley Fellowship. Harriet Hale Woolley, I think it's the sister of the woman who was president of Holyoke College, Mary Woolley. It was administered by the Institute of International Education, I think—I think it still exists. And in 1935, I went to Paris for a year and at the end of that year, where I stayed in the Cité universitaire [Cité internationale universitaire de Paris]—do you know that part [of Paris, Fondation des Etats Unis –Ed.]?

At the end of the year, I came home by way of the Orient, [took a freight boat from –Ed.] Marseilles to Yokohama, and then from there to California. Two Swedish—two Norwegian

freighters. On the first of which I read *War and Peace*, it's a 46-day trip with stop-offs. But when I got home at the end of 1936, and I think it was probably late the following year in '37 that I found myself on—or I was on the Pennsylvania Project. Although it was late, I believe the mural I did in Benjamin Franklin High School—I think it was the first state mural, the first mural done in the state. It was, I would say, '38.

Many more murals were done elsewhere. Pennsylvania, I think, lagged behind a little. A lot of murals were done in California. A lot were done. I'm not sure of this, just guessing, but the mural that I did I believe is still in existence. It was called—was referred to in some news stories as the first mural in Pennsylvania. [I'm not sure –Ed.]—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Inaudible.] And how much background had you had in the murals? Was it part of the training [inaudible] that you had?[00:15:08]

I don't want that to sound like a curveball.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: No, I—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I have a feeling that whatever else the WPA may have done was the grand opportunity to do the kind of work which an artist without the WPA might not have had the opportunity to do without a mural, a large mural, you know. And there were materials available in generating opportunity, [it may be one of those –Ed.] keys, not only to keep the skills alive but to create—challenge artists, a frank period of experimentation. I don't know whether this—that's why I asked the question as to how much background you had in murals and painting murals, but did it represent a challenge [inaudible].

JOSEPH HIRSCH: I hadn't had much [inaudible]. [Side conversation] Oh, hello. [Inaudible.] I'd done a number of murals. And I guess with the exception of things I did, getting out of art school just to earn some money, decorating taverns [and stuff –Ed.]], I had done some—I had had some mural experience. But I think that if statistically most of the people engaged in the Art Projects did not do murals, certainly, statistically the minority of painters painted murals—and I don't know this is true—It seems that there was a tendency to turn toward the wall because it was a public program. And the walls in public places, viewed by the eyes of the public, seen in public, the tendency was not to have the program try to produce easel paintings as much as murals—easel paintings are dispersed. I think the most permanent [inaudible—or the most permanent record of the work produced is in the murals, I think in San Francisco at the inside of Coit Tower, for example, it's on the top of Telegraph Hill. Do you know it?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: That's all there. There are many all over the [inaudible]. The surest record of what the artists did the Project was, I think, is still on the walls of the buildings, the public buildings. So, with the tendency to commission a painter to paint a mural was sort of a natural. I was very impressed to hear about it after the first tour through small towns, with a group of paintings and sculpture by projects, with WPA artists. [People would come and look –Ed.], people who had never ever seen an original work [of sculpture. They would look at a head and they would ask, "Is it stuffed?" And –Ed.] "What is it for?" They would look at [*objets d'art* and wonder –Ed.] what function they had. And I think that the mural in the post office did not [inaudible] make people say, "What is this for?" The narration of this historical event or the declaration of this big war or [inaudible] history [inaudible].

[Cross talk.] [Inaudible.]

I think the reason I did a mural was because the Project was oriented toward public painting. The paintings in public, to be seen in public.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I suspect that in the painting of the mural for Benjamin Franklin High School did necessitate a certain negotiation? Did Benjamin Franklin High School have to be a sponsor. Wasn't that the one ingredient?

[00:20:05]

JOSEPH HIRSCH: The financial sponsor? I think they may have paid for materials, I'm not sure.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: I think there was a collaboration. Perhaps the paint and the canvas was paid for by the Board of Education—[and the work was paid—the installations and the work done by the muralist was paid for by the Project –Ed]. I believe it was that.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Yes, they had to request to sponsor a mural. Yes. Nothing was—I'd like to—nothing was imposed on recipients.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, was there a mural division in the WPA organization in Philadelphia?

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Yes. I believe there was a mural program.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: As I said before, I don't think it was as active or as elaborate as the one in California. I had the impression that there were more—quantitatively more murals painted during the Project than in Pennsylvania.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Did you—you didn't have to negotiate with the Benjamin Franklin High School, did you?

JOSEPH HIRSCH: I did not make a transaction. When you say negotiate, what do you mean?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, assuming that there's wall space available for a mural, I would think that the—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: I believe the sketch. A sketch was submitted, yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And in the sense that this was a kind of tandem project in which the WPA was interested and would furnish the technique and skill and the artists, and the school would furnish the wall space and would furnish, I guess—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Maybe it had something to do with the choice of the artists, too? Because I was an alumnus of that school.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Yes, this I wondered about, yes. –Ed.]

JOSEPH HIRSCH: And I think that the recipients of the post offices or high schools—schools, think they had—I think all the buildings, which were public buildings, I think—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: —exclusively. I'm sure they had some say, not only—I know they had a say in the kind of work or the content of the work, but perhaps in my instance, I think one reason I was chosen is because of the fact that I was an alumnus of that high school, which, when I went there it was called Central High School, which gave a degree, [believe it or not –Ed.], but later was—is now called Benjamin Franklin High School. And this mural was put up in the classroom of the most venerated, if not the oldest, teacher there, Johnny Snyder [ph], who taught mathematics, and he was a great football enthusiast, and the mural of the football mural. It had nothing to do with the history of Philadelphia nor the scholarship for the school. It was a rather successful mural, one long panel, and it was—I don't—I don't know what the cumulative effect, if any, was on students, but it was the width of the room, placed above the blackboard.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Was it done in the school or—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: It was done up in—it was done in the school on canvas, up in the observatory. That's the one high school—it used to be a city college—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: —which had had an observatory. We studied astronomy, in addition to other college courses there. And it was done upon the very top floor underneath the dome of

the—the astronomical dome. I don't know if—Philadelphia has changed very much, I'm not sure the building is still there. But it was done in the school and then installed. And it was up there for many years. I don't know where it is now if the building has been razed. And I think it has. I don't know where the mural is now. But isn't it your impression that the majority of mural paintings done on the Project are still extant?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: In post offices and in libraries?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Yes, this is true, although a good—some percentage of them, of course, have been, you know, with the growth of cities and so on—with the growth of cities—

[Cross talk.] [Inaudible.]

[00:25:08]

–certain buildings have been destroyed, and certain murals have been destroyed. Where no one was really asked—the question never emerged as to what to do with the murals. I know this happened in New Jersey. Michael Lenson painted a mural—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: I remember the name, Michael Lenson.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, which was—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: New Yorker.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, he's out in New Jersey now, but—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: And this was in the metropolitan area?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Yeah. And one or two other areas, like the Gorky mural for the Newark Airport. Nobody knows where it is. Of course, that's all changed. You know, the face of a city grows, buildings are torn down, and nobody thinks about what to do with what's there.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Are you old enough to remember the Project [inaudible]?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No, I was a kid. I was still in school. I graduated in '37. I remember certain atmospheric [things about it –Ed.]. Everybody seemed to be in the same boat. It was kind of—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: [$]23.80 a week. I remember that—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: I remember that figure.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: The pleasures were smaller. You had to roll your own.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: I got married on that [$]23.80 a week.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: That takes courage.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: I don't know what it would be now, that is relative to purchasing [power –Ed.]. It was just about—it was almost enough. Not quite, but almost.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, did you get on the easel project too?

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Yes. Most of the work I did was easel painting.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: I don't think they were compartmented so rigidly that you were on one and never—if a mural had to be done—except for most of the paintings that I did, with the exception of the football mural, all the paintings I did were easel paintings. And one of them—one picture I did is now in the Metropolitan, another picture at the University of Oklahoma, I'm told. And there's been dispersal around, I'm pretty sure. What was the name of the

project of recorded Americana details of old—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: The Index of American Design.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Yes. Did Knott at the Metropolitan acquire, either on a long-term loan or permanently, a great mass of the wealth?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Let's see. Ben Knott.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Ben Knott, yes, [of Philadelphia –Ed.].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: How [is the poor fellow? Gee, I saw him on the street –Ed.]—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: He, I think, died recently.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Oh.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I talked to him about a year ago. He had charge of making the final selection of what was to become—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: He moved to New York.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. And it was at that time, I think, the collection area was the Metropolitan. But then I think the decision was made to give the Index of American Design in total [ph]—at least what he selected—to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, where it is now.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: The National Gallery

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: The National Gallery, yes. It's marvelous to work.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Extraordinary [inaudible].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Well, what—how much of whatever existed in terms of atmosphere in the '30s worked its way into your easel painting?

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Oh, a lot. Constantly. You couldn't help—the picture that I mentioned, which is at the Metropolitan, it's a pastel, and it's called *Air Raid*. It was even described to me by someone—I didn't remember it, I had to go up and look at the photograph, and then I remembered. It's a pastel drawing of a man wearing a Spanish beret, and therefore presumably Spanish, with a bandage on his head looking up. It was just a head, looking up with not much expression, and a beret.

[00:30:02]

And this was done, needless to say, during the Spanish Civil War. It was done sometime between July of 1936 and April of 1939, I think. Now that—what was happening worked its way into my paintings. The picture at Norman—Norman, Oklahoma—is a picture of three sandwich men, sign—sign-bearing men, isolated, you know, in the frame by snow, standing over a sidewalk grill from which presumably some heat comes up. But they're grouped over this grill with snow, and the angularity of the signs—was that the name? Sign—sandwich men? [*Street Scene*] The angularity of the signs, which covered most of their bodies, gave it a kind of phony modernism, I suppose. I'd like to see that again. I did have a slide of it somewhere [inaudible] been able to find it. But I'm told that that is—it somehow got into the collection of the University of Oklahoma. The history of—I guess the greatest dispersal of the paintings was the auction that took place was—why do I think of Texas? Didn't—was it the University of Texas or did the Dallas Museum receiving a grant they dispersed them—I think a big group went to somewhere in Texas. Do you know to what I'm referring to?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, it's very—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: They are easel paintings, not murals.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: This varied. I think the—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: The government surplus. That's what it was.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right. But Mildred Holtzauer was sent up to a warehouse in Chicago, which became a collection point for the various Projects throughout the country. And there she dispersed not a little of the paintings. This would have been in 1943, I believe, as a kind of terminal thing. There was a warehouse in New York, where the canvas was sold by the pound. Used canvas, it was called. And certain parties bought it up to—oh, it was insulation around plumbing pipe. You know? Well, times have changed, space was necessary for defense. Here was an area, what to do with what's there because we can use it for something else. I mean, you know, the demands imposed upon organization is different than treasure. So, it was being sold by the pound here in the city. I think in part, Mildred Holtzauer's job was to prevent that from occurring in other areas, so that the University of Indiana has a fine collection of WPA art. Yes, it would receive some tax-free, a school, a state university, could receive—could be the recipient. Other universities made a—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Wasn't the government the seller? Wasn't that the way [inaudible]—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, but the allocation is the word that's used. A place to house it, you know.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: That word was used during the Projects themselves.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Yeah. So, that, you know, the government as a salesman, selling this art I don't think occurred. It was where space was needed for something else, and the government declared certain canvas as surplus and therefore sold it by the pound. Someone else may have realized its value as art and resold it, for all I know. I don't know exactly what happened here in the city. But some astute junk dealer picked it up by the pound, and he had these [laughs] canvases, and you were—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: You're quite right. I'm confusing this with a canceled State Department exhibition, I think. Of which—there was a sale at far less than the going price, at minimal prices. And I think educational institutes were given preference and they got—and I think the University of Texas, I'm not sure of this—got quite a number of things.

[00:35:08]

But the disparate—but the man who whoever, it was in whatever small town when the first traveling exhibition went out in the state of Pennsylvania and looked at the head—a bronze head and wanted to know if it was stuffed and what it was for, I thought of that question when you said some of the canvases were wrapped around pipes. That's a purpose. The whole functionless, the whole lack of defined purpose for the fine arts, of course, makes this question [asked in the small town –Ed.] just an echo of the old, old question—what was the function or the purpose?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. I think there's—in this first place, the Project was looked upon as a federal project, as distinct from a state-oriented project. Well, there was in existence in each state, an organization under the old FERA, which handled employment. But the Federal Project Number One—which was the art, music, drama, and writing—they couldn't get their hands on it. It was directed from Washington. I suspect that was the only such project that were directed from Washington. And so, it's set up a separate kind of organization that functioned in Philadelphia [inaudible]—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: The FERA. Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: With Audrey McMahon, for example.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And she was a kind of—what—put it this way, the existing organization which did control the state funds did not control the art funds. She did. And there was a certain estrangement between bureaucratic thinking and Audrey McMahon.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Fine.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: So, [she was –Ed.] to the good. Someone very astute wrote this, made it a federal project so that state political thinkers who—you know, "Paint my wall, yeah, I

want it white." [Laughs.] They have a house painting attitude toward the fine arts. You know, it was too much of a problem for education. But ultimately, when it was a question of what to do with the surplus, you can see that the bureaucrats—that kind of thinking reemerged because Audrey McMahon was nowhere around. And you saw it as surplus. It's a different kind of category of thinking.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Certainly is. She tipped me off about this Woolley Fellowship, which I applied for, and I had applied for a Prix de Rome. And I met her in Philadelphia.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Audrey McMahon?

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Yes, she was looking at—she was visiting Lessing Rosenwald, who lives in the suburbs of Philadelphia. And a friend of Lessing Rosenwald and a friend of mine were there. We met her at the same time. And when she asked me what I was doing and I mentioned the Prix de Rome she immediately suggested this other fellowship. No, but she had quite—even in Pennsylvania we heard that the New York Project was administered by—well, Mrs. Force and Mrs. McMahon. Women make good administrators, sometimes. We envied the New York artists.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh, did you?

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Yes. Because—not only because it was a more active program but because of people like Juliana Force and Audrey McMahon. Did one—did Mrs. McMahon succeed Mrs. Force?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mrs. Force was head of the PWAP.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: That's right. And then—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And was centered at the Whitney, and it was subject to not a little criticism because of the organized nature of New York City artists and the Artists' Union.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Yes, so I heard.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: The choice of artists was a discretionary thing under this program, which was a limited program, with a limited amount of funds. It was not designed as a relief program. It was designed as a decoration of public buildings through the Treasury Department. And it was short-lived, and they had a limited amount of funds, while the Union thought that it ought to be spread further. So, they made the street in front of the Whitney Museum ring with picket signs and so on. A kind of experience which Mrs. Force had never had to face before.

[00:40:03]

JOSEPH HIRSCH: I remember.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And got a little ugly at times. Well, she was properly named, and liked to have her organized approach to things unfold.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: [Laughs.] Properly named.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.] So, that when the WPA came along, Audrey McMahon, who had functioned quite early in New York in the college artists associations, and also in the Gibson Committee, which was an even earlier one, she had continuity. And she simply fell heir to the WPA when it was announced. I suspect that Mrs. Force's attitude, having had the experience with the PWAP, was to avoid it like the plague. You know, I would normally think—I've no reason to suppose it, but they are they were both quite dominant people, Mrs. Force and Mrs. McMahon. And I suspect in part that the struggle was the struggle of the two personalities and their clash, I'm sure.

But I wondered—you know, New York was periodically torn to bits with picket lines, Stuart Davis, Max Spivak, and others, and the Union, talking about wage scales and so on. Well, this was a fluid period, an experimental period, we were high centered economically. And I suspect the artists had the sense of being part of the human race, since everyone was in the same boat. And organization was in the air. I think the first sit-in in the country was right here in Colonel Somervell's office, on behalf of art teachers.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: He was head of the entire Project, wasn't he?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. Yes, yeah. I wondered, in terms of the kind of turmoil that was here present in New York, whether anything like this was visited in Philadelphia.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: There were people—well, Philadelphia—there is brotherly love which rears its head occasionally in Philadelphia, and disputes were less acrid and less frequent in Philadelphia. There were less artists involved. Many Philadelphia artists had moved to New York. But it was evident in Philadelphia—this turmoil was evident in Philadelphia, on a smaller scale, to a lesser extent. Mary Curran was thought of by many people as autocratic, which she did not deny. She was an unlazy person, and whether she showed favoritism or not, I don't know. But there are always, I suppose, legitimate beefs when some people are chosen, and some are not. But the picket lines—the picket lines outside the Whitney Museum—that kind of thing on a well-organized basis didn't take place in Philadelphia. Do you think—do you remember the image—that is the anti-image of the WPA worker? It was a man leaning on a shovel.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Do you remember that?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right. This—you know if you put that image in its context, the manner in which the WPA emerged was like an overnight affair. June of '35, it was announced. There was some difficulty getting agreement through the senators as to who would head up the various state organizations. The organization wasn't filled until about October. So, you have that period of time that lapses. But then there was a question of—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: In October, I had just arrived in Paris to begin that year at the Woolley Fellowship.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: And so, I missed—I was out of the picture.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: But it's designing, you see, it was to get funds into their hands. Get a check to them by Thanksgiving, worry about what they're going to do later on. Well, we had all kinds of road-building schemes and no tools. You know, raking leaves, one rake, other men standing around. Well, this became an item of comment in the press, but the press never asked the question, How many rakes do you have? How do you staff—it was a desperate period.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:45:04]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Here in the city, longshoremen were invading the A&P with their wives, and simply taking food off the shelves. I don't know any clerk in a store like this is going to risk, you know, disputing this with longshoremen, or a group of them. Out in Iowa, there were the farm mortgage riots, where farmers would stand around with shotguns. And when there was a forced sale of a farm, they would buy the farm for the farmer who owned it for a dollar, simply because they went to these mortgage sales with a loaded shotgun.

Well, this, I think, threw a certain amount of fear into, oh, Washington, D.C. that something has to be done and quickly, i.e., the WPA. This is a way in which spending funds could be meted out to people who were in a desperate situation and do it immediately.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: I don't think that the average—the symbol that was in the national consciousness, such as it was, of the WPA worker in the arts was of someone not working, leaning on his paintbrush instead of his shovel. It probably spilled over, and I'm sure there were cartoons in some newspapers, but in general, it pertained to the road builders and the agri—to the—well, literally, as you say, the man—the man leaning on his rake, because there were no other—the men not working because there were no tools. I don't think that the disparagement with which some people spoke of the Project had to do with the fact that the artists were not active. My impression, that may be wishful, was that there was great activity in the theater. And is that not your—is that not the fact?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. Yeah.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Do you remember a rather thick paperback book, which appeared—the New York World's Fair was in 1939. Wasn't there a guidebook to New York, written—done by the Project and done by—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh, its a marvelous thing.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: —writers. It was full of everything. I like to think that that was done in many cities. Do you know that it was?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh, yes. I think that every state had a guidebook.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Guidebook.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And depending upon the—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Done by writers on the federal payroll.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right. Right. And depending upon the astuteness of the head of the state project, various sectional guidebooks within the state were made. Or the city of Dubuque has a guidebook, for example. It's a marvelous little thing. Or eastern Iowa, you know, and chambers of commerce, partly because there was never any foresight on the part of Congress to decide publication rights, royalty. It was an open question. Suddenly you had a book, and if you could get a chamber of commerce to support the publication of the guidebook to Dubuque, you had work for writers. You know? Plus, the cover, design, and so on for the Art Project. But this happened, depending upon the state supervisors' astuteness. And certainly, we had publications, I think ultimately, for every state in the Union. South Dakota, I think 500 copies were published. It's one of the rarest items there is in the guidebook series.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: In South Dakota?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: 500 copies of the guidebook to South Dakota.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: And that was it?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: That was it.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: No subsequent printings?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And those are treasured. Those are rare things. But this happened. I think probably more criticism of the Art Project took place in New York City. I know the—in the public press, *the Mirror* was quite critical of artists. But that you know, periodically there—the stereotypes, the Greenwich Village, the amorality, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And apparently, that reporter first went around to the artists who—some of the artists who were working on the WPA and said he wanted to write some story. And would they talked to him? And they did only to have whatever it is they said appeared in a garbled version and in an orientation which they would deny. So, this was a picket line in front of *the Mirror,* an invasion of *the Mirror* office to get to speak to the reporter, or whoever was responsible. Activity, you know.

[00:50:07]

But I don't—I'm not sure that Congress was ever pleased, as a national policy, with the WPA because it certainly kept cutting down the funds. It was almost always a deficiency appropriation as to this thing from an overall program. And I don't know whether people in Philadelphia had to meet the pink slip approach or the quarter reduction problem. Well, this occasioned numerous forays into general—or Colonel Somervell's office, on the part of the organized—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: They were awful words, those two little—"pink slip."

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Weren't they?

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Oh, they were awful words. I remember that. I think some of this—the recollection of some of this bad taste left in the mouths of writers and artists may be in part

responsible for some of the lack of enthusiasm for a federal program now. That is a permanent federal program. There are reservations that lots of artists have. I spoke to one painter recently who couldn't imagine anything worse than having Everett Dirksen pass on his paintings, that is before they were—I don't know the kind of federal subsidy now would not have—won't resemble the public works projects, obviously. The WPA, rather.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: But some of this is called the yahoo mentality. Perhaps it was *the New York Mirror* that published a page of—I think I remember something by Kuniyoshi and Karl Zerbe —]—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOSEPH HIRSCH: —with the caption's underneath. Sneering captions. I think *the New York Mirror*—I don't think this was the national—I'd like I like to think that this wasn't the national attitude.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, in talking with the people in Washington or some of those that administered the Project, they found that California papers, for example, would include a story from some other section in the country, critical of the WPA, but the kind of story that could not be checked. And that outside of New York, which was quite critical from time to time of what was going on, you know—all under those old rubrics, the crazy waste of public funds, whatever that means. But it was just—it was just impossible to catch up on all the canards that were made because they were—California papers would publish something from out of the California state. And the general public who read this—I'm not sure that the public was in tune, one way or another. They got an education, like your man who asked is the head stuffed. You know, he got an education in a way. Through tours, through the whole art center movement that spread, basically, through the South and up through the Midwest.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Is it your feeling that there was general malalignment of the writers and artists and sculptors, writers and painters, et cetera? There were very few sculptors, by the way.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Is it your impression that the general malalignment was—was it general? Was it widespread?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I think—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: I mean, was the man—was it like the man leaning on the shovel?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No. That was a lot of work being done—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: It might be—I suppose if I were a congressman—which I can't—really can't imagine—but I might be more critical of someone not building a road than not painting a picture. In other words, laziness. The laziness on the part of people who are building roads could be more disastrous, that is from the congressman's point of view, than laziness in a studio.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOSEPH HIRSCH: The tangible, visible usefulness of a road compared to the questionable function of paintings would make it, I suppose, more of a crime to shirk roadbuilding than picture painting. I guess the outcry would be normal—and more, of course, much more—many more dollars were spent for federal roadbuilding than picture painting.

[00:55:05]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Certainly. Yeah.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: It was—it was just a drop in the WPA bucket, wasn't it? The arts program.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: I mean literally a small, small percentage.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Very small. But you know, it's also indicative, I think, of the kind of society in which we live. And where your commitments lay. Congress could not itself become involved in a production enterprise, a corporate structure, where there were existing vested interests. It couldn't compete. What could it do? It could build public buildings, it could build public roads, and it could support the arts. Alleged to be safe, non-interfering with the economic life of a nation. But gee, when you support the arts—drama, writing, music, and art—these are the explosive parts that are filled with the idea. Exciting, experimental, and necessarily, I suspect that the congressman's idea of what a good painting was was a good portrait of me. You know, therefore, he—and everyone is a great art critic, you know. The same with the writers, although Henry Alsberg ran that pretty, pretty carefully. You know, but take Hallie Flanagan and the drama, the marvelous things that were being done of an experimental nature, like the Living Newspaper. *One-third of a Nation*—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Well, Houseman and Welles were involved in that, weren't they?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Orson Welles and John Houseman?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Right. But here she was quoting senators correctly on various public issues, and they didn't like it.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Isn't it extraordinary the number of women you've mentioned. Mildred Holtzauer, and Hallie Flanagan, and Audrey McMahon, Juliana Force.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Well, you put that in its context. How many administrators did we have who were women? Frances Perkins—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Francis Perkins, Secretary of Labor.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right. And you have others where this was a new field for them. And action is a function of interest. Audrey McMahon, and the way you describe Miss Curran, same thing, action being a function of interest, she knew how to run—or at least manage.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Do you know that Representative [George Anthony] Dondero was in Congress at the time that the Projects were operating, or not? I think that follows. I think that was in the '40s.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. Yes, it is in the '40s. He's from Michigan. Detroit, I think. Dondero. Oh, you mean his tirade in the [inaudible]—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Yes, it was several years after the cessation, was it not?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, it was a retrospective interpretation of what had happened in the '30s.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: His vituperation escape—it—thinking—I was going to say it *depassed* me, because I speak French with my wife—[inaudible] *depassed*. I don't know, it's over my head. I don't understand this point. Even from his perspective, I don't know what he gained by these attacks. I'm told that he was put up to it by some more con—one or two of the more conservative academic—organizations of academic painters and sculptors, which may have been case, supplied him with information. But it was not connected with the Project, as I remember. Is that your recollection?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. But I mean, his—there's a certain element of sour grapes that crept into the older old-line groups. And while it was never really put into words—take a fellow like Ernest Pechota [ph], here in New York, was marvelous, and he certainly represented the old conservative school. He was on the board, he went around, saw all the work that was going on—I got a big thrill and charged out of it, you know. You know, preferment is a strange thing.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Was Dondero from Detroit?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I believe so.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Because Detroit, I think, had quite a number of mural—federal WPA murals.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. But you know, shortly after his—his commentary, the Congress in—oh, '39, at the time of the building of The World's Fair, they passed the law, expressly excluding the federal drama project [Federal Theatre Project] from receiving any funds. Closed it up tight.

[01:00:07]

And in the same law, they passed the discretion for management of the Federal Art Projects back to the state. So, they don't—well they, in effect, nipped it in the bud. And this was quite true in Michigan, where the Art Project suddenly got involved in furniture manufacturing, drapery, interior decoration, as distinct from fine art. Wait, that's bad. Don't let me say that. What I'm saying is that there were so many people who were unemployed, who could be taught how to build furniture, that the remnants of the Art Project were converted into a furniture manufacturing center. And they also handled draperies through the women's sewing circle group.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Was it still under federal subsidy?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, but the artists would design the furniture, the artists would design the drapery. And these were placed in—what was the coming thing that—USO. Remember USO throughout the nation?

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: They needed furniture of some kind, they needed decoration of some kind. And this was used by the remnants of the WPA. They just converted it from a state point of view.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: When did the projects finish?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I think they terminated effectively, probably as—as the freewheeling exciting, spontaneous things they were, probably in '38. They continued on—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: In name.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: In name, and, of course, the economy. Our thinking turned from self-concern to awareness of Hitler and Mussolini. A debate that was nationwide between the America First Committee and the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, that took over. And our thoughts went elsewhere. And this was sort of—the handwriting was on the wall '38, '39. But I think it wasn't terminated as the WPA until '43. And then it was made part of the—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: While we were at war.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, it was—what was left of it was converted into public works, connected with the defense, you know, new buildings, workers home. The whole of Hartford, Connecticut, one section of it. Enormous buildings, yeah.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Rapid building.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. But as a fine art thing, or as a shot in the arm for creative people, that terminated, I think, in '38. And this varies. For example, here in the city, the artists themselves aided in the termination because the organization that grew up through—you know, after a period of spontaneity in which they argued about all kinds of things, a certain faction that splintered left seized control. And the very moment you introduce control, the individuality of the artist forces him to go out the door. They don't want to be a part of it. So, if your interest was organization and control, you ceased, in effect, to be an artist.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: You said one thing which struck me about 20 minutes ago, but just now, you reminded me of it by speaking—using the special shot in the arm. Medically, that can afford great relief from malady or from pain. But you said that they—were you speaking of the projects in their entirety as not being a form of relief or the mural painting? You said that they weren't a form of relief so much as they were a program for the decoration of public buildings.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, I think the distinction is drawn there as the one that can be

drawn between the PWAP, which was for adornment—

JOESPH HIRSCH: [Inaudible.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —of public buildings, first.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: I see.

[Cross talk.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Inaudible.]

JOSEPH HIRSCH: You were distinguishing that from the WPA. I see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Which was a question of need and emergency.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Yes, that it certainly was.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: I see. I misunderstood you. I thought you were referring to the mural program—the WPA mural program—as being a public building adornment more than relief.

[01:05:00]

Of course, the unblinkable fact is that the people who walk into a post office now and look at a fine mural don't care [laughs] how needy the artist was, or for what reason he was paid, or how much he was paid. They see only what's on the wall. I think it's very important to—as artists, people who were participating, to ask them about these end results, which are now at least in mural form still up in some post offices and some buildings. As it makes—it makes a difference to know. It was the—I think it was Dalton Trumbo, somebody said recently that while you can know much about a man from the work that he produces, the words that he writes, or the images he fashions, there's no reason why you shouldn't know more about him without prying, without threatening him with contempt of Congress. But it does make a difference, he said, and not an invidious one to note that the book about, let's say, capital punishment was written by the judge, or the hangman, or the widow of the man who was hanged. It does make a difference. And why not? I think the idea of this program is very germane. And it certainly has to do with the future.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I don't—you know, I don't think there's any possibility of building on the kind of, oh, those factors which gave rise to the WPA because it'd never existed the same way again, you know. In the first place, there wasn't any precedent for what was being done. It was all worked out in public. Now that with that behind us, you know, the attitude that the artists [buzzing increases] represent one of, you know, uniqueness and individuality, trying to superimpose an organization on it now, of a similar nature, I don't think would work. Because in essence, certainly, so far as the—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: An organization?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, that is to say, to begin now building on—for the future, a kind of government subsidy, it gets down to—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: It would be a superimposition—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right. And they wouldn't, you know—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: It would be superimposed.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Wrong cup of tea. But you see that the—in those days who were the supervisors. They were artists themselves. Who are the administrators? They were artists.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: The majority certainly were.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right. And they had a way of handling each other without getting into the question of style, because other things took over. Since they joined the human race, there was excitement about all manner of social problems, you know, whether it was Social Security, you know. And they could make that separation, that we could do our art, and have

it unaffected, you know, and still, as citizens work affect—

[Telephone ringing. –Ed.]

JOSEPH HIRSCH: May I answer that?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

[Recorder stops, restarts.]

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Should I turn on—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: You can if you like.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: No, would you like?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No, I don't need it. See, I don't think they could ever recreate it again.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: I don't—I don't think that the—an organization could be anything but superimposed, if it were conceived of as an organization. But there are things that writers have in common. And people, I think, particularly writers certainly more than painters today now are starting to find themselves rubbing elbows with other writers, and people are starting to take sides again.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOSEPH HIRSCH: And the question, which is hard— was hardly evident 18 months ago, two years ago, the question of war—especially the Vietnam War—but war— the question of survival and the extraordinary student activity.

[01:10:10]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: I have three sons. One is doing some postgraduate work in film at NYU, and another one is at Columbia, finishing up his senior year at Columbia. And it's maybe because I have sons—two of them are grown up—maybe that's the reason, but I think it's more than just an illusion. Don't you have the impression that the students now are much more active than they were just five years ago, six, seven years ago? Aren't they much more active?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOSEPH HIRSCH: I'm not talking about the handful that burned draft cards. But the thousands who express themselves on campuses.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Well, I like to think that, in a way, this is traceable to the—you know, the aftermath of McCarthy in a way. Partly because of the—oh, you know, when you begin to attempt to define, carefully, what it is, you are and therefore ban anything that doesn't fit the definition. You go a long way toward creating a desert of expression. What is it—the drive for conformity leads to the unanimity of the graveyard. And these—however people feel about various sections of the country, it's reached the point now, where the safety valves are now expression. [You have to have it. –Ed.] And so, they're growing not more bold, they have an interest, and they have—they have an investment in even their own life, it can be as selfish as that, which propels and compels them to begin to talk. Where talk is good, universities. Leadership is where we look for ideas.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: The Korean participant—the Korean War had a lot to do with the power that shortly after it began, McCarthy exerted, I think. The fear of dissent, which in wartime, even the National Council of Churches recently came out and said that any—it seems now that the climate that the mass media is creating would lead one to believe that any form of government—or criticism of the government policy, even mild is—gives comfort to the enemy and is a kind of treason. And the same thing, I think, at the beginning of the Korean War—which is what, '51—certainly must have nurtured the soil in which McCarthy bloomed, flourished.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, we spend a lot of time in the—during the Second World War, in a

program beyond our shores, trying to explain to other peoples what it is we were. We had this program to the population of Italy, for example, radio beams, programs, in an effort to explain what we were. Well, you know, I don't know anyone who can catalog all we are at any given moment. But the very act of attempting to define for a given population what we are is a narrowness, a restriction. And I think this was true during the wartime out of necessity, I can understand. But McCarthy could come along where the government itself has been in the business of defining what it is to other nations, and to then turn that and define to ourselves what we are, and to go back and find all manner of enemies in the context which no longer pertains, which is what he did. But the net effect, so far as universities are concerned, certainly so far as the State Department is concerned, was to introduce where boldness should be. The element of timidity and fear. Why? You've got it just the reverse. McCarthy's gone; he was finally treed by his peers long after it, you know—it was necessary to do this. And then ultimately, along comes another issue in which kids can get involved, [laughs] and I'm happy they're involved.

[01:15:05]

You know that they can—rightly or wrongly, can begin to find some basis for them to stand on, some understanding of what the world is all about. Do it vocally, to share views and debate the system. This is what we are, from as disparate points of view as you can find. I think it's healthy. And I think that that's what I meant by shot in the arm, I think it was healthy for artists to have, given that context, the opportunity to do what they wanted to do most of all, paint. And paint in a way in which there was a group which required conversation. An examination of techniques. Gosh, the experimental manner that they had with the graphic arts, that they had with paints, or how to size a wall, or how to put a canvas on the wall and make it—all of these were consequences of dealing with problems. And you had a collective group of people who were wrestling with these, talking about them, sharing. Sharing, just sharing, you know.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: The carborundum print was discovered during the WPA in Philadelphia by a Negro artist whose name I'll remember in a few minutes. But—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: It was this kind of a period. Yeah.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: The artists—in order to have a union, you have to have people who work or want to work and a legitimate beef. But you also have to have an employer. And the artists had the government as their employer in the [inaudible] project. And the existence of—the appearance of artists' unions in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, and the West Coast, certainly gave—was a result of the fact that there was a clear, visible employer to which the complaints, legitimate or otherwise, were being—I think it's—the organization then was not superimposed. Misery loves company, of course. I don't know that company loves misery. I don't think—do you get from speaking to people who are on the Project—does anybody feel that these were the good old days?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: That's hard. They like certain aspects of it. The spontaneity.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: The *confrerie*, the guild.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right. The comradeship that they had.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: The camaraderie that was alive.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: That was not superimposed.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No, no. It was a free thing. And the notion that they were part of the race, the notion that they've been recognized by the government. You know this is something that therefore had not obtained. It was a—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Well, you think that they were they came together because they were at last recognized? Not because of the fact that they were victims of the same circumstance?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No, because I think of all the people, artists probably have been able to get along better by doing all manner of odd jobs, you know?

JOSEPH HIRSCH: It's been that way.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And they were resourceful. And they could have—they would have gotten along. But what happened was by, making it a kind of mass movement, I suspect the telescope development, and you share, and maybe this only obtained for maybe the first three years of the Project. And then, you know, the organizations took hold. Whether it was the political organization, or the internal squabble between Stalinists and Trotskyite, or whatever it was. Those—since they stayed longer, they could hold a meeting open forever in a day—they knew how to handle meetings, and other people would get bored. I think it did become a boring aspect for artists after a period of time. And their own individuality was being, in a sense, threatened by the inner machinery of an organization that they didn't want. Well, you know, it's one polarity followed by another. And you are constantly trying to reconcile hot and cold, in a way. And while its fluid and in an unfolding period, it can be very exciting. And in that sense, I think it probably is a good old day.

[01:20:15]

JOSEPH HIRSCH: I agree [inaudible]. In addition, dissent was a healthy, recognized form of expression.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Now dissent, I think, is limited to Supreme Court—that is, it's applauded when some cogent dissent by Supreme Court justices reprinted and appraised. The dissent, in those days, generally regarded as not treason, no. There was more healthy dissent, not sick dissent. In—you know, in the last election, Goldwater and—there were about 50,000 votes cast not for Goldwater and not for Johnson, for a various minor candidates in the Prohibition Party, et cetera, et cetera. And 40 years earlier, when our population was two-thirds of what it was in 1924, not 1964, when Davis and Coolidge—[or the party—Davis, I think—the party Davis campaigned –Ed.] five million votes were cast not for either one of the two major candidates. Five million votes, most of them I think, went to Robert La Follette.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, Wisconsin.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: But there were other candidates, there was a big margin. That was about 17 percent, as I remember—17 percent of the electorate.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yep.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Whereas in 1964, it was less than one percent. But there was much more room for dissent, even though one should think that the camaraderie or the organization of our union would result in more monolithic opinion and less room for individualism.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, I've had those the evenings of the meetings described to me. And —

JOSEPH HIRSCH: What do you mean the evenings of the meetings?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: When they would attend the meeting in the evening.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Writers and artists?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, artists would show up, 400 or so, every once Wednesday. Well, now, they would discuss all kinds of topics.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: And in the late '30s, of course, Spain loomed very, very big.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Certainly.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: We sent—we, the Philadelphia artists, as I remember, sent eight ambulances—or raised the money for eight ambulances. Did everything, had auctions. And it had come into being during the WPA days. But in 1938 and '39, toward the end of the Project was still very active, raising money to buy ambulances and blood, save silver foil. One of the contributors, by the way, was Albert C. Barnes, whose collection was in [Merion, Pennsylvania –Ed.]. [Inaudible.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, I've always thought that the Spanish Civil War is a really good

case in point because the people of ideas, the creative people, really think in terms of their own individual freedom, sense the great loss and essential struggle, and choose that side, which would be more in keeping with their thinking. That is the nature of freedom. We should have been on the side of the Spanish republic, but the Johnson Act, which was our own post-World War One—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Hiram Johnson.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right. Our own post-World War One approach toward foreign affairs prevented us from playing any role, you see, in Spain. These did not prevent us from playing a role in Korea, or does not prevent us now from playing a role in Vietnam.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Big difference.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Isn't it? That's what happens. [Inaudible.]

JOSEPH HIRSCH: What part of the country was he—is he from the Midwest? Hiram Johnson?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: California.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Oh, California? As far from Spain as you can get geographically [in this country –Ed.].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Why when he gave rise to this, the whole question of Spain—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Didn't exist.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Not at all. But then, when you have to apply it, you applied it in such a fashion that it really effectively aided the other side. You know, and this was unfair.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: [Inaudible.]

[01:25:02]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Wait, how do you see the '30s in personal terms, in terms of your own growth? Was it a period in which you [inaudible]—

JOSEPH HIRSCH: Well, in the '30s, I was in my 20s, because I was born in 1910. And I was—yes, I was growing, and I did a picture followed by another picture. The second picture was better than the first. And I like to think that that's so—as a matter of fact, I have to be convinced that it's so and I am now. Otherwise, I think I'd stop. I was talking to Raphael Soyer about this recently , we were talking about some artists who were older than either of us who are still painting. And I'm convinced that he feels, as I would—because we all tend to impugn motives to other people—that he still feels—he's over 80—that his next picture will be better than his past work. [Raphael feels that he can't think that. –Ed.] He is in a rut, by the way, this older man. He hasn't been painting. But I'm not talking about the quality of his work, just his feeling, that the next picture—in the '30s, I was just beginning to paint. I painted my first picture, I suppose, in 1930 or '31.

For the next several years, in '35 and '36, I was in Europe. And I came back in '37. I painted one picture of an old man, a portrait of an old man—a derelict, holding his hat in his hand. My father, who was a genital urologist—[he wasn't a derelict—posed for it –Ed.] and it hangs up in the Boston Museum. And then I went to the Project after that. And right after I got out of the Project, I painted a picture of a white man listening to a Negro. He's [speaking to him very energetically. *Just Two Men*, is the title. –Ed.] And that was at the New York World's Fair in 1919. In 1939. Believe it or not, this picture was chosen.

I think 120,000 public ballots cast for the best painting in the fair. Holger Cahill organized this exhibition. [He died a few years ago. –Ed.] He was married to Dorothy Miller. He organized this exhibition. And it was voted the best painting at the New York World's Fair. A picture of—an unpretty picture of the Negro pounding his fist and a white man listening with long ash on a cigarette. Which was to show that he was absorbed. But it was voted the best painting at the World's—and I immediately had a very snobbish reaction. I thought it must be bad if a lot of people liked it. It wasn't select.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I'm practically at the end here.

JOSEPH HIRSCH: All right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I suspect you may have exhausted—

[END OF TRACK AAA_hirsch65_157_m.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]