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Oral history interview with Dong
Kingman, 1965 Jan. 12

Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by
a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Dong Kingman on January 12, 1965. The interview took place at 21 West 58th Street, New York, NY, and was conducted by Harlan B. 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: I'd like to, you know, do this autobiographically really.

DONG KINGMAN: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And see it in personal terms as you saw it unfold. Perhaps a good way to begin is to, oh, ask you to kind of describe the atmosphere in San Francisco or on the West Coast in, oh, say, '29 through '33 and '34, what the prospects were, what the alternatives were for you, where you wanted to go, what you had to go with, what the times looked like. Most of this is the kind of information that vanishes, because nobody bothers to jot it down. But it's in the air, you know, and it conditions largely, accidentally, in a lot of ways, [what it is we do and think about -Ed.] So, what was the West Coast like? What was San Francisco like? What were the prospects?

DONG KINGMAN: You'd rather have me start it before I get to the so-called WPA—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

DONG KINGMAN: —Art Project? So, I was born in Oakland, California.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

DONG KINGMAN: 1911, under Chinese parents. My father had a little store—dry good store, sells hats and shoes. He makes little pajamas in the back just for actual friends.

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

DONG KINGMAN: And I was born there in the Chinatown of Oakland, California. Well, I remember the early day, because, you know, usually—then, by 1916, my father thought—the World War I, it started in Europe.

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

DONG KINGMAN: And he thinks we want to get involved. We, I mean, America. So, he decided to pack up the whole family, my older brother, I, and my sister, I think my brother. There's four children at those—in those days, 1916. Packed up and going back to China. When we arrive in Hong Kong, my father decided to start a little business there, a dry goods store. Now, I don't want to get this too far ahead, but I just want to tell you my formal education was all in Hong Kong. Spent 13 years there in Hong Kong.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Ah.

DONG KINGMAN: Of course, first, when I returned to Hong Kong in 1916, I was only five years old. I was already in kindergarten in Oakland. It was a school called Lincoln School. In fact, that's one school—they have a special class for Chinese students. So, I was in kindergarten. But when I was five years old and the family all packed up and go back to China, in Hong Kong in 1916, there was no kindergarten. So, I stopped school [laughs] until about eight or nine years old.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

DONG KINGMAN: And that time, I go right into the Chinese school to study Chinese. And after about five or six years there—the Hong Kong, being a British colony, and the school will—you can—one half school in English, one half is in Chinese, so, I went to both. But when—I—finally, I went to school. When I say finally, the last few years, about 1925 or '26, I studied with a teacher at a school called Lingnan, L-I—L-I-N-G-N-A-N, Lingnan, in Hong Kong.

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

DONG KINGMAN: It's a very famous school in those days and even today, [but Red -Ed.] China took over. The Lingnan—I went to school, but the headmaster of this primary school was a young painter, just came from Paris. He was studying painting over there.

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

DONG KINGMAN: And when he came home, he had kind of a new rule. He bought a number of reproductions of Picasso, Matisse, which is—nobody have seen. So, I was fascinated. [I had been painting since I was five years old. -Ed.] I began to sketch with a pencil and brushes. So, through this teacher, I have learned more, just learning painting, by just the theory from him, than anybody.

[00:05:15]

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

DONG KINGMAN: By 19—and so, I was continuing studying. In about 1928 or 1929, I was interested in architecture. So, in Hong Kong, I went to a place to study, which is instead of a college, they will take up apprenticeships.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

DONG KINGMAN: I went there for three months. And over there, I learned how to write the letter of alphabet, [laughs] *A, B, C, D*.

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

DONG KINGMAN: After three months, I said—I said, "Forget it." [They laugh.] By 1929 I decided to return to United States, because, you see, my citizenship—my father thought maybe after 10 to 12 years, we'd come back here and start on my own. Then we returned to Oakland, California. I continued painting. But the first couple years, it was much too hard, because everything [was new -Ed.]. Then I got married in 1929.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [Dong Kingman laughs.] You picked a great time to come back, didn't you?

DONG KINGMAN: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And—

DONG KINGMAN: Well—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —just one thing—did the family encourage painting?

DONG KINGMAN: No. When I was younger—when I was studying with this particular teacher, he—after I studied with him for a couple years—his name, by the way, is Ceto Wai, W-A-I. But since he's passed away—he was a wonderful teacher.

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

DONG KINGMAN: He taught me a lot of things. But at the same time, he said, "Dong, go back to your father's business. Just forget this [area -Ed.]. Just learning to paint is a lazy man's work." So, I wasn't listening too closely. But my folks, who—from a very poor farmer—my father started at nothing and gradually grew up. He was a laundryman. He was—he was a laundryman in Chicago many years back.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

DONG KINGMAN: So, he felt money is important. So [every cent he could cache he would work harder -Ed.] to create—you know, to get—to make your money.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: So, I was just a boy, which is just—to them, it's nothing. Pardon me a moment, turn this thing off. Or else—[inaudible] [Walks away from recorder, returns.] Then realizing, that that doesn't mean anything, because I was child, if I think back to those days, you always have a tendency to argue with your family. So if they encouraged me maybe I [they laugh] might never had a chance to paint. But on the contrary, it was something I really enjoyed to do. I was—I missed it a great deal when I returned to the United States in 1929. And I—immediately, I went in to work for my older brother. At that time, he owns a factory—

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

DONG KINGMAN: —makes underwear, Hoover [ph] jacket. No, not Hoover [ph] jacket. The—you know, the butcher in those days, they had one of those aprons.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

DONG KINGMAN: And you wrap it around the hole.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right.

DONG KINGMAN: They called it a Hoover [ph] jacket or something.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

DONG KINGMAN: And I make some of those things. But actually, I don't design it. Just very simple, take out a pattern, and you cut it. So I was a pattern cutter for this factory, because they figure I—you know, artistic thinking [in the way of line and -Ed.] things. First you take a jacket, you know, those white things?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: It's shaped like a coat. But if a man gave me a size like 35 or 34 [and he says, "I need a dozen -Ed.] of 46." I'd get in trouble, because unless you've got a size of 46—so, [we used to just enlarge it -Ed.] [they laugh] but then the sleeve holder becomes smaller—too small. Everything got to be—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: —equivalent to the size. Anyway, we did a whole bunch of that stuff and it was all sent back because nothing was correct. But I missed painting, but my brother—my older brother who runs the factory, after about three, four months—he had already lived in the United States for quite a few years.

[00:10:04]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

DONG KINGMAN: And he [decided to sell the place -Ed.] and go back to Hong Kong, to start a larger factory. So, I—then the factory had been sold, and I discovered right next to the factory in Oakland, California, there was a Chinese chop suey joint, or house [laughs], called [Ten Sen—not Ten Sen—Ten Luv Cafe -Ed.].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Huh?

DONG KINGMAN: Ten Luv Café. I worked for this woman as a dishwasher. And because I was married and I expected to have a child so soon—in fact, my older boy was born in 1936. No, other way around, that's my second boy. '30—1930 when my first child was born. I think when I worked in this restaurant—later on, I bought it for \$75, because this lady also after ran it for six months, and she packed up and go to China too. Somehow—at the time, I was working for one dollar a day, that means about \$30 a month. Then, somehow, I bought the restaurant for \$75, and partnered with a cook—Chinese cook.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

DONG KINGMAN: And him and I run this thing. Now, the reason I explain this to you because, at that time, I—because I run the restaurant, then I felt I—in afternoon, I was able to go out and study painting again, because it—you know, I don't work now. So, I went to an art school and studied painting—began to pick up the painting again.

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

DONG KINGMAN: But in Chinatown of Oakland in those days, there's all around us totally is gambling joints. Every house is a gambling house. Somehow, Chinatown, all—everybody's gambling. Either a large syndicate, or a small one, or a bookie.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: And [they're thick -Ed.], you know, except—you know, we are the restaurant people. [Laughs.] So, all of the people who come to with us mostly are gamblers. And because we're right off of the corner of Seventh Street and Webster Street.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

DONG KINGMAN: And the Seventh Street somehow is the crossroad at the highway. If you—if you—there's like a miniature highway—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: —going through it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: And a lot of time, big truck driver get off the highway and come eat chop suey joint. [Laughs.] Just a small place.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

DONG KINGMAN: Then very soon I would set up an easel in the back. And if customer come, I serve them whatever they want, I go back to painting. And I remember a couple times, I had forgotten my hand was so dirty and a customer walked right out and said ["Say, how can you run a restaurant where you have paint on your hands?" -Ed.] [Laughs.] I'd forgotten all about it. So, this place didn't do very well. After about six months, we went bankrupt. [They laugh.] So, after that, I felt there's a whole Chinatown that I owed money, you know, a few dollars here and there. And realizing, I lost face in Chinatown. People, you know—I couldn't repay them.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: So, I decided one of the most important things—it's a turning point actually in my profession, because I decided to go back to study English in school, because I never had a chance in the beginning.

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

DONG KINGMAN: When I returned, I'd go right to work. Also, I took a job as a houseboy for some American people. I didn't really immediately learn the home life of American people. At first, it's very different to me, because I had Chinese parents. But gradually, I learned that. Then later on, about 1932—remember, this is all during the Depression—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: —because when I was running the restaurant, I remembered one day, we looked out the window and everybody was so excited, because Roosevelt got in. And everybody [thought now you can -Ed.] drink beer, whenever you want. And, you know, prohibition's out, you see?

[00:15:01]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: And you run a restaurant, see, now, that's the greatest thing that could happen to you, because you're really going to have business. [Laughs.] There's a new look to it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: But the reasons I moved to the—to a major city, because in Oakland just—you know, like in Brooklyn. So we moved over to San Francisco. And, of course, I continued working for American family as a houseboy, which, credit to the family, they treat me pretty nicely. But I felt—in those days—your first few years especially, you feel the American people are really—have no interest in you. You're just a little Chinese [inaudible], and you stay in Chinatown.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: And [if you didn't make a go of it -Ed.] yourself, the first thing you can get out of it is to be—maybe become one of the top men in a bookie joint, you know? [Laughs.] So, they are—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: [Inaudible.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: There's not much hope, because all around the world, my cousins and nephews are driving with large car, because they go all out and collect laundry.

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

DONG KINGMAN: And the gambling syndicate, and they are the major industry. And yet, I've seen people that got killed right in front of our eyes because a guy don't pay off. You know, the Filipinos, Japanese come to this Chinatown in Oakland.

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

DONG KINGMAN: And one time, I remember clearly, right opposite our street, you look out the—outside, there was a Filipino say, You've got to pay me. You have my—here's my ticket. I won the number. You owe me 500. And then, [these men keep -Ed.] yelling all over the street, dealing—you know, yelling in the top of the voice. And finally, after the sun goes down, a guy took him to the corner and shoot him. [Laughs.] And that's an—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: —actual thing.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: And remember, when I first here arrived, we arrived in San Francisco. Oh, I mean, arrived in America, about 19—in April.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: And by June, [I had to stay -Ed.] a whole month in the immigration—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right.

DONG KINGMAN: —of the Angel Island to prove this is the same child that left 1916 and now returning in 1929, because a lot of phony things going on. But it turned out, everybody said, "Oh, it must be the same boy." And so, that sort of gave me a funny taste in my mouth, because when you arrive, immediately you're realizing—well, my mother always tells me, "Watch out for the policemen. Those people are against you," because we didn't realizing that China has a gambling joint and all the policemen have got a payoff, because when you don't pay up, usually they beat you up. And I remember in Fourth of July—and my brother would set up firecracker in the—on the terrain of a—in a back end of the room and sell to the people, which is completely against the law. [Laughs.] He was running crooked [laughs] firecracker. So—and we paid off a couple of policemen, because they were trying to, you

know, put us in jail. And [that sort of got things -Ed.] the wrong way. So, that's why—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: —when I—it was in Sunday when I run the restaurant. And I knew I was losing face—losing face in Chinatown. The best thing is to move away from this town. And I also, I [also away from -Ed.] the Chinese people. This just give me a wonderful start.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: I remember, in about 1934, I begin to work at a family, which is—they have three sons and one daughter. I mean, three sons, one daughter. It's six in the family. I didn't do any cooking, but I will have to wash the breakfast dishes, and go to school during the day, then come back in afternoon. Then, later on, I didn't continue to go to school. So, I would work longer hours for them to pay me a little more money.

[00:20:02]

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

DONG KINGMAN: But I continued to work for the family, and they treat me like part of their family instead of a—we're used to the idea of a servant in China. It's really a servant. You know, you—these people are very kind, very nice. In fact, by 1935, I had an exhibition for the first time. It turned out to be most successful. Just overnight, I was turned into just a major painter as a watercolorist. Because in those days, 1935, nobody used watercolor. They thought it was a mysterious medium.

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

DONG KINGMAN: And another thing they didn't think much of. Today it's much more a major medium. I mean, it's a more important medium than early days. Because my Chinese background—because I learned painting from Hong Kong, or from China, and it sort of give me a better start, because I could use brushes, because I can write Chinese characters. It helps me [a great deal. Later on I'll show you some of those clippings that I saved. -Ed.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Where was the [show held -Ed.]? Was it at a local gallery in San Fran—

DONG KINGMAN: No. There's a place called The Arts Center.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

DONG KINGMAN: The Arts Center—it is a group of artists get together. And we all belong to it as a membership. I think mostly those days are the young painters.

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

DONG KINGMAN: [A few of them are established -Ed.] San Francisco painters. And also, the woman who runs it is most enthusiastic, because she would rather not take any money. Well, maybe a little money to keep the gallery going. What happened is if you pay \$15 a year for a membership fee—

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

DONG KINGMAN: —you're entitled to get one exhibition.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh.

DONG KINGMAN: And then, if anything is sold, you only take 10 percent. But it's really an artist's idea.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

DONG KINGMAN: So, when it opened—I didn't start it. This was started before me.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. But it was an opportunity for you.

DONG KINGMAN: Yes. This—but the major critic in San Francisco had great interest to this group. And they will pay a lot of attention to it. Now, in those days, there's not so many art

galleries. And in those days, maybe they just have [Gump's or Corvassier -Ed.]. And there were—there were two art galleries only. And the artists themselves start this thing.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. To have a place to show.

DONG KINGMAN: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: And my—so, I felt this was my opportunity, because my first one-man show actually—I—they wouldn't give me a one-man show, because nobody heard of me. So, they gave me half—[of two rooms -Ed.] they gave me one room. The other room an exhibition of a woman who was quite well-known. So, it's a—it's half the show is mine. The other half is a normal exhibition, which is the old member there and has been named and established. But somehow, the critic come, and they saw this. He immediately gave me a tremendous help, write-up. And it must be—I got to look at that—look back to it. It must be '35.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And this was all in watercolor?

DONG KINGMAN: Yeah, because I only paint watercolor. And then, maybe two-three months later or maybe even two-three weeks later, [inaudible] Art Project opened. Art Project only started—

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

DONG KINGMAN: —but somehow it's small. All of a sudden we're really going to go into it now. We're going to hire so many artists painting. If anybody know how to paint—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: —you have any enthusiastic at all—any enthusiasm at all, they will take you.

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

DONG KINGMAN: So, I was one of the fellows [to keep in mind. "Gee why don't you go and see these people?" I didn't know what they were talking about but everybody—all the artists I know were talking about. -Ed.]

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

DONG KINGMAN: And I went in, a guy talked to me. He said, Yes? Oh, I heard about you. Said, You're the watercolors. You're the one who paints watercolors." Fine. Now, we [want to put you in this relief -Ed.].

[00:25:02]

I think in those days they paid \$80 for the family. "Now, every day, you come and sign in. And just to use the watercolor and paint paper, you go back to your studio and paint eight hours. And I want you to concentrate only in watercolor." Now, that's Mr. Allen [ph] or somebody. I've forgotten.

I worked for them—one of the longest WPA Project worker. For maybe the whole time, five years. And every day, I was painting. And through the Project itself, we were given a chance to develop something, because then, immediately, [inaudible] give you a chance to really study this medium, and also sort of give you a chance to not worry about making a living, and at the same time, try to paint.

Now, I realize in the beginning—I don't know how long this Project going to last, or maybe they don't take me very long. So, I work this Project as well as for this family, because of my—I was a houseboy then. And I carried on with them, the Project together for almost a year or two. Finally, I had to quit, because it was—can't do two at the same time. But that was—I know it was against the law, because after you go there for relief, that mean you have no job. [They laugh.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: It seems you enjoyed the notion of getting the opportunity to paint.

DONG KINGMAN: Exactly. The WPA Project is the most wonderful thing ever happened to the ones who were really enthusiastic about painting. And it just happened that period of painting was much more exciting. And this period—now, this period churned out a lot of junk to me, you know, a lot of abstract, non-objective—there's nothing really very exciting about. But this period from the WPA, there was some very constructive work being done, because there was none of this—none of this so-called non-objective painting. Either you knew how to paint or you're working under Bufano, or somebody, on another project.

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

DONG KINGMAN: Now, I was [lucky in that -Ed.] I think probably they want me to prove my point in the watercolor medium, because I was always one of two who had it in this category, because some were saying to just do lithographs, some would do oil painting, but there are too many painting oil painting. And there are some that worked on the sculpture department. But I was one who more or less concentrate, which is good, until I concentrate so much and finally [I went to them, and said "How about letting me do a little mural?" -Ed.] [Laughs.] So, they gave me a man to help me for about six months. I did a mural in the—I guess—I don't know if we still have it or not, in San Francisco in a kind of a nursery in Chinatown. I have some photographs on that.

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

DONG KINGMAN: Can I stop for a little?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh, sure.

DONG KINGMAN: Yeah. I need to have a glass of water. [Side conversation.]

[Audio break.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Inaudible.] Did you get—I mean, were you allowed, when you were painting watercolors, to do just what you wanted to do? Was there any—well, what was in the air then? What sort of statement were you making in the watercolors?

DONG KINGMAN: It seemed—in those days, my watercolors, it painted more in a—in a much more simpler manner. This is some of the watercolors I did—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh.

DONG KINGMAN: —in that period. They're much different a style than today.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

DONG KINGMAN: I had a feeling some of these pictures was—actually belonged to the WPA, because I took pictures of almost everything. I—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: You did?

DONG KINGMAN: —I had a photographer take this for me. So, this group happened to be—recently, some woman asked me the picture I did in this period. And that's all around—between '38 and '40, somewhere around there.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And these are local scenes?

DONG KINGMAN: Yeah, all San Francisco scenes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: All San Francisco local scenes.

DONG KINGMAN: Except this one. It's Sacramento.

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

DONG KINGMAN: You see, through the WPA Project also helped me in many respects besides developing my technique of painting. It gave me a chance to continue painting. Also, it started me as an art instructor—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh.

[00:30:12]

DONG KINGMAN: —because I never had the courage as a teacher. One day, I think our head of our Project called me. He said, "We need an art instructor for once a week up in Sacramento." And he said, "Are you willing to go up there, making a, you know, few extra dollars?" So, I immediately said, "Great, I will take it." So, I began to went up there and take the class outdoor sketching. It was a small class, maybe six or eight people. But that's how I started, because without that, probably I never would have start as an instructor. You see, afterwards, I continued to teach at this class for about a year or so—

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

DONG KINGMAN: —until I find that I can't just do both. Then I went into a local school in San Francisco asked me—as a teacher there. But I never took a full-time teaching job, because watercolor, they didn't think important of. But until I moved back to New York after the war, then I start teaching at Columbia University.

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

DONG KINGMAN: I taught there almost 12 years, as well as Hunter College. But that started me. And also, after '41, which is almost to the end of the Project, I always painted watercolor. In fact, at that time, everybody has transferred into defense project. But I insist I don't want to go into that, because I want to continue painting. But to my own good luck, I won two years in Guggenheim Fellowship.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh.

DONG KINGMAN: So, I followed it right through. That's how I came to New York in '41 or '42.

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

DONG KINGMAN: And I started exhibition here and finally find it very successful. So, I—since after the war, I moved into New York. But because my station during the war in Washington, D.C., so it gave me a chance to visit New York quite often. So, in the—in the early days in San Francisco when I started it, when I begin to develop a name—which the WPA Project themselves, the people who handle it—it had wonderful people. Cahill probably passed away. You know who he is.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you meet him?

DONG KINGMAN: Yes. We met him afterwards. He would select the painting and different outstanding people and exhibit them all over the world. Now, back in 1937, I was included in an exhibition in Paris. And I just looked it up a moment ago. I saw this write-up. Because of that, in 1938, I—my picture goes into the Metropolitan Museum collection because of WPA.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

DONG KINGMAN: And they continued traveling. But I didn't know all these things until I came east much later, because in those days, it's like everything else. The eastern painter who lives in New York, they always dominated the country. And Ben Shahn and the group over here usually dominated the group. That doesn't mean they do the major work.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

DONG KINGMAN: See, that—if you have a man who really enthusiastic, if he was lucky, he might get ahead and come to it, because every little project, there was always a few outstanding men at it. But I guess it's all confined to all the major cities. Like, even Los Angeles is not as good as San Francisco.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: You see, during this period, I was—I find most people worked on the Art Project very lazy.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh, really?

DONG KINGMAN: And they really—you think back on, there's so much money being wasted.

[00:35:02]

But that is not important. It's—the only important thing is what you accomplish, get out of this, because at the time I got this thing, I realizing the greatest thing can happen to me, because I will never have this opportunity to go—able to do it. For instance, after the war, I can get a G.I. bill to go study, but that's not equivalent to the same thing.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

DONG KINGMAN: The artist cannot go to school to study. Art is not the same thing. It cannot be helped by a G.I. bill.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: That's interesting.

DONG KINGMAN: Because what you get out of this von Hoffman's [ph] school, you might as well forget it, because he—there's just—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: —there's the G.I. people came out of it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: And the—in any—today, I've seen a painter come out of G.I.—which [is something someday you ought to do a -Ed.] project on that. It is—it would be most interesting to find out how many still paint non-objective [laughs], because it's a period [inaudible].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. Yes.

DONG KINGMAN: The reason some of the major painters in San Francisco, like Erfield [ph], they're already teaching at an art school. They also worked in the Project. Only a few men did not work on it. It's like Bill Goa [ph].

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

DONG KINGMAN: I don't know if you've heard of him. But he may have did some, but he was having a major job teaching. He was the head of the art department. And he was quite successful. So, anybody with—the—you know, after you're an established painter and you sell a few things, you have quite a few art collectors interested in your work. So, it's not necessary to go into relief—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

DONG KINGMAN: —because it's quite a letdown.

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

DONG KINGMAN: During this period, there's one man in San Francisco—I'm sure anybody [would give you a long story about him. Let him talk and -Ed.] he will tell you: Albert Bender.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Huh.

DONG KINGMAN: You've heard of this man?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

DONG KINGMAN: Well, he's an insurance man and sort of kind of a one-man project. Buying pictures from artists—contemporary artists. He usually buys paintings from young painters. It's a—it's almost the luckiest thing if you run into him on the street any time in the day. He always says, "Here's a \$50 down payment. Paint me another picture." [Laughs.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: That kind of thing.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: And he was a man who—so, during the Art Project, the atmosphere around me anyway, it is quite interesting. There's few art collectors who—because when you start building up, if you start really concentrating on painting—and I continued to do exhibition since then—

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

DONG KINGMAN: —because I felt this was the most important outlet—continue exhibiting. And over the WPA, it helps me—more than anything, by 1941, *LIFE* magazine did a feature story on me from California. Just to give you an idea to depict this man. And then, Albert Bender—I told you before, he buys from me every month almost. So, by the time—then he had an idea. [He never buys for himself, he said. He gives it to a museum, and in that way establishes the name. In fact, he gave one of my paintings to the Museum of Modern Art. They never look at my things. -Ed.] [They laugh.] [They figure that I'm way off their course. -Ed.] [Harlan B. Phillips laughs.]

But I think this Project itself helps many people get enthusiastic about it. Now, I was most enthusiastic. And I painted, concentrated, six hours a day. And very soon I find myself—you cannot paint anymore, because it doesn't—like a punch clock.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

DONG KINGMAN: Because I live around the corner from the Art Project.

In those day, the Art Project was on Jackson Street between Montgomery and Sansome.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

[00:40:09]

DONG KINGMAN: In fact, right at the corner of Hotaling Place. It was Jackson and Hotaling Place, that's where the Art Project is.

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

DONG KINGMAN: They took the old barn, or an old building. And they just occupy it. My studio was number 15 Hotaling Place. So, I just had to go over that way. But that is my studio right behind a café called The Black Cat. [Laughs.] Which is where all the characters hang out. And if we had any discussion [on art, we'd go over there -Ed.] and talk it over, because it's a—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: It's the place to talk.

DONG KINGMAN: Yeah. [They laugh.] In those days, you know, Saroyan, and Steinbeck, and Orson Welles, [inaudible]. You know, they hang—you know, go around that way. [Orson Welles didn't eat but they'd get to be hanging -Ed.] around The Black Cat. That's the typical place for artists and models.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

DONG KINGMAN: It was right on the waterfront. You know San Francisco?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh, yes. Yes.

DONG KINGMAN: But my apartment it's up in the hill in the—oh, above Chinatown. So, every day, I used to walk down, go to work in my studio.

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

DONG KINGMAN: And that's why I mentioned Puccinelli. He and I have a studio together. He works in sculpture.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

DONG KINGMAN: And I work—in fact, I rent the studio from him. He was in the Art Project. He did a lot of things for WPA, some very exciting things. He—then I am realizing—no, the Project themselves realizing, men don't have to paint eight hours a day, and punch clock

every day. So, they said, All right. Your punch clock—well, not actually punch clock. Just report to us how many hours you worked this week. And somehow we can go anywhere. And that's what made some people very lazy. Some [of them, for months, would go on vacation, build a house, or something. -Ed.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: But I never got into the point I was lazy, except I become—in the afternoon, I usually spend a couple hours playing chess. And I became a chess bum, so I quit that. [Harlan B. Phillips laughs.] Because, you know, the more and more you play—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: It's a marvelous game. [They laugh.]

DONG KINGMAN: But in San Francisco, there was a chess club.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

DONG KINGMAN: It belonged to a library. I forgot the name. Mechanic Library [The Mechanics' Institute].

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

DONG KINGMAN: Very famous, the Mechanic Library. And it's a private library that people rent books out, not like a public library.

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

DONG KINGMAN: But on the fourth floor there, there's a little room which said only for member only. But it got a beautiful chess set. And that—all the chess people concentrate in this room all day long. It opened from ten [a.m.] to ten [p.m.]. So, I—at that period, I was fascinated by chess game. So, I spent part of time, with the WPA paying my money, I was playing chess over there. [They laugh.] Because I just cannot paint.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: And I realized if I concentrate six hours a day on watercolor, I can paint a dozen watercolors a week.

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

DONG KINGMAN: Then the head of Project would say, Too many. We don't know what to do with them. Why don't you paint two a week? And then, let us select the one we like and just concentrate one watercolor a week. That's enough. This is a great thing, because I paint a series of pictures, then by the end of the month, I just give them four pictures. But then they would select the best. That's why I had the exhibition—

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

DONG KINGMAN: —around the country and around the world.

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

DONG KINGMAN: Now, there's a tendency—some of the painters would give their worst piece of work to the WPA and save the best for themselves. [That's also their own fault. -Ed.] You see, the enthusiasm is entirely up to the individual.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

DONG KINGMAN: And it is why—in fact, the WPA is so important to the painter. When the WPA was closed, even the art cent had to close. Somehow or other the whole thing fell apart. Either the artists got too lazy, and [there were no -Ed.] newcomers in that period—

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

[00:45:00]

DONG KINGMAN: —and all the women who run the art center had moved away to New York. Because it's just my impression this was all falling apart. The WPA—no, in fact, when the

WPA was running, all the artists somehow produced less work. And then, they don't have exciting exhibition going on. So, it was sort of kind of a letdown in that period. And that was—shows very—a very clueless statement. I think it was written up many times in critics—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: —about this part.

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

DONG KINGMAN: And the arts center falling apart. Since then.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, when you painted a series of pictures, was it on the basis of sketches that you made around the town or memories of things that you saw?

DONG KINGMAN: Well, every painter has a different theory of painting. Now, I grew up painting. I's just go out—I always go to the location.

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

DONG KINGMAN: Then I found a subject I liked. I would set up my easel and paint it right there.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right here?

DONG KINGMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And gradually, I find out maybe the color of the sky is not what I want. Then I saved that until I returned to studio and put down what I like. Or sometimes, I make a study, which is obviously not a location, not a place I can really do a picture from.

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

DONG KINGMAN: So, I paint it from study.

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

DONG KINGMAN: But always from location, and complete the picture when I return to the studio.

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

DONG KINGMAN: And I always painted watercolor, because, as I told you, when I bought the restaurant, and I went to a school in Oakland to study. In fact, there was a Japanese customer who came to my restaurant—

[END OF TRACK AAA_kingma65_4807_r.]

DONG KINGMAN: [He said, "You should take up painting. There's a school up here and I think you've got the enthusiasm. -Ed.] It was down here on 14th Street." I was on Seventh Street. There's a school up there.

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

DONG KINGMAN: So one afternoon I nearly went down 14th Street and I turned right. And I saw a large school. It turned out to be a commercial arts school. Since I had very limited English in those days [or even today -Ed.]. So I went there to study for six months. Of course, I only can take an afternoon course.

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

DONG KINGMAN: And the course I liked most is outdoor sketching on Friday afternoon. So I get my oil painting set and painted. And finally my teacher called me there after six weeks or so and said, You know, I don't think you know how to paint pictures. He said, It's useless, you just don't understand. I don't know what I can do for you. There's nothing I can do for you because you really don't understand this thing. So I was very upset. So since then I never painted oil.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Really?

DONG KINGMAN: And then I said, oh, maybe I go home and I think it over. So I went home, and I remember in Hong Kong I studied watercolor. But this same teacher the next week, he said, You know, you really got a feeling. This same teacher—this same man who really gave me the encouragement. But this just happened within a week. But since then, I never painted oil.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

DONG KINGMAN: Because I started to learn to paint oil—oil painting so called—in Hong Kong with the other teacher.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: You know, with Ceto Wai, the Chinese teacher—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: —who went to Paris. Now, it turned out to be Mr. Fox. I went to a school called Fox and Morgan.

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

DONG KINGMAN: In Oakland, on 14th Street. It turned out to be a commercial art school. And Mr. Fox is an Australian, from Sydney. And he was a guy who tells me all these things, and it turned out he was a very unstable kind of fellow. He paints a few things but he's really not very good. Now I understand he's back in Sydney tends to—have a farm and some sheep. [Laughs.] That's what I heard.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: Well, he was a good man. And he suggested this. And that sort of carried me into the 1935. And I just continued working in this medium. And even when the exhibition was open, he would hit it right there. Now today, if a mural goes up, there's nothing that can be new today. Unless you're doing Pop art. Even that is nothing new.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

DONG KINGMAN: But in those days, a man paints watercolors and everybody thinks that is the greatest—[to know how to paint -Ed.] in this medium. You see, that kind of thing.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: Today, yeah, everybody knows how to paint watercolors.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Hm.

DONG KINGMAN: But I will say—I think if you look into the whole WPA Project, there's so much waste.

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

DONG KINGMAN: Yeah. Those people I know, after a while, they went into another thing. I know a couple friend tried everything. [Laughs.] [Finally they went to build -Ed.] a highway. [They laugh.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Let me throw out some names of people.

DONG KINGMAN: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: How about—did you run into William Gasket?

DONG KINGMAN: No. By the way, he is, in fact, head of my project. He is the one who fascinated by my watercolor. In fact—that's the name who insists: This man must paint watercolor. Because he was fascinated by Chinese art.

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

DONG KINGMAN: In fact, in some respect, when I paint a picture for him, when I try to pass

him, he often would say, I can't take this picture because your washes is too—it doesn't control right. In other words, he always referred to how the Chinese control the washed how beautifully. So he rejected some of my pictures when I didn't control them right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Hm.

DONG KINGMAN: And yet, we used some of the best watercolor paper so there wouldn't be much problem. But he was—Gaskin, I think, he started as a teacher or something. And he was fascinated by oriental art. I don't know if he's still living or not. [Inaudible.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No, I don't believe he is. I don't believe he is.

DONG KINGMAN: No.

[00:05:00]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: But the other person who was head of the—

DONG KINGMAN: Allen.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, there was another one. Joseph Danysh.

DONG KINGMAN: Yeah. Have you talked to him?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: He's still alive. Out in Carmel, I believe.

DONG KINGMAN: Carmel? I saw him. I'd forgotten his name. Yeah. Tall man with a moustache.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Hm.

DONG KINGMAN: He wasn't really on the top job. I think he was on maybe a mural or something. Yeah. I believe I saw him recently.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: There's another fella who, you know—

DONG KINGMAN: Yeah, I don't have much impression of him, because he—I—he didn't handle me directly.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

DONG KINGMAN: You see, Gaskin was—handled me directly. He did all the graphic art.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: And Allen is over all.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

DONG KINGMAN: And that's how I know.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Hm. Well do you remember Urban Neininger?

DONG KINGMAN: Yeah. Maybe Neininger is the fellow with the tall—with the moustache.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I always thought that Joseph Danysh was like a West Coast—

DONG KINGMAN: Oh, yeah. No, Joe Danysh, I never—I don't know him very well. No, pardon me, I made a mistake.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: Now I know who you meant. A young man.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Hm.

DONG KINGMAN: He was come from Macy's. That's an older guy.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: [Inaudible] he's a top man.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

DONG KINGMAN: He [was head of seven states -Ed.], but he didn't last very long.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

DONG KINGMAN: He didn't last through the whole thing. But the other guy—what's his name?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Joseph Allen was under him.

DONG KINGMAN: No, but—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And Gaskin—and then Urban Neiningger, I think —

DONG KINGMAN: Neiningger is the one.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: He was a supervisor.

DONG KINGMAN: Yeah, Neiningger is a guy I know. This is the man—I saw him.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: He lives in town.

DONG KINGMAN: Yeah, that's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: 19th Street.

DONG KINGMAN: Yeah. I can't think of his name. But the other guy who worked for Macy's. Then, I don't know. He quit.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: To go into something else. But Neiningger is a very fine man. He was always very quiet. He stuttered when he talked. And a lot of those men, after a while, come East. And you didn't hear of them anymore.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Hm. Well did you bump into people like Clay Spohn?

DONG KINGMAN: Yeah, I saw him about three or four years ago.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Hm.

DONG KINGMAN: And—but he's only one of the painter.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right.

DONG KINGMAN: But recently I don't know what he does.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: From the way you described your own time on the Project, you didn't see many of these people anyway, did you?

DONG KINGMAN: Oh, yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: In The Black Cat, maybe.

DONG KINGMAN: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Like Beth Cunningham?

DONG KINGMAN: Yes. See his wife, Marian Cunningham.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

DONG KINGMAN: She died.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

DONG KINGMAN: But Ben is in the East, isn't he?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, he is. He's on Carmine Street here in New York.

DONG KINGMAN: He [was one of the early men -Ed.], he had a wonderful feeling for design and abstract. And Hilaire Hiler, he's really a jazz musician. [Laughs.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

DONG KINGMAN: That's what he's like.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: But Hilaire was more or less in the kind of—a project. He usually worked on large things, large scale things. There also were a few Chinese painter.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh were there?

DONG KINGMAN: Worked on this Project. One man—Lee [inaudible]. He was wonderful in watercolors, and also lithograph. He and I worked on it for a long time. Either Ki Li Lee [ph] [Chee Chin S. Cheung Lee] or something. And we had a couple guys, but he was one who was most outstanding. He worked the longest.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you get much help in idea and technique from talking with or working with Puccinelli?

[00:10:00]

DONG KINGMAN: Yes. I—actually, in those days, there were a few painters who goes out with me and we paint together. Especially [inaudible] watercolor.

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

DONG KINGMAN: But you don't actually concentrate on one or two. Because they all want to go on their own.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

DONG KINGMAN: But I started with a couple guys and then they all go off by themselves. They don't last very long. Because most of the guys want to go somewhere and hide. [Laughs.] But during the WPA time I never took a long trip or anything, because I always had to stay very close with the Project.

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

DONG KINGMAN: [I think a man who on the Project, the main thing is to be -Ed.] able to concentrate and develop something by yourself. Unless you were on a very large project, you had people around. I had a man named Anderson.

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

DONG KINGMAN: He was assigned under me to work on that mural I showed you. And for about six months, and then he went off back to his own job. See, they had a lot of so-called younger painters or minor painters. And somehow the head of the Project didn't think they're good enough, so they let them just go around and help the other painters. Like Bufano, he had a lot of sculpture—a lot of men work for him. But most of these guys are laborers. They've got strong muscle and chisel, and knock out the granite.

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

DONG KINGMAN: And they might not be—they're more engineer than painter—than sculptors. They're—I don't think they really developed too much. Bufano—I'm sure [he had more young painters who come out really above water on -Ed.] the WPA Project. I'm really wondering why I'm always thankful for this particular period. I would say, without that period, I would—may make it, but it may take another, you know, 25 years. But the opportunity is never there.

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

DONG KINGMAN: This is more concentrated. There's more freedom for the individual.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: When you did the mural did you have to submit sketches of what you planned to do?

DONG KINGMAN: Yes. The important thing is first, just like all the other jobs, you had to submit the idea. Because this being in a nursery—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

DONG KINGMAN: —in the kindergarten. So in the space, and how to use it. And you study all that. But I basically would submit it to—to the WPA Project people. If they like it, I think they can always sell it to the client. Because the client would always more or less say, well, okay, go ahead.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: So this was sponsored work. It had to be, that it is the school had to agree and accept the—

DONG KINGMAN: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. And then, but I think—

DONG KINGMAN: But usually, when we say the sponsor, the school doesn't pay anything.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No, but doesn't it contribute the materials? Some minor cost.

DONG KINGMAN: Don't know. That part never—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: —had any knowledge. I guess so because a man make a [piece of -Ed.] sculpture, they probably, you know, require—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: Have you examined any of the works, any of the painting around?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: You mean out on the West Coast?

DONG KINGMAN: Or [do you know where they are located -Ed.]?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I know where some of them are.

DONG KINGMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, there's the Aquatic Park and the state college. San Francisco State College. There's a hospital. Oh, then there's a high school football—it had a, you know, a wall. Bufano started the relief on the wall. There were a lot of things that came up—

DONG KINGMAN: You see, mostly the artwork, which is stable.

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

[00:15:03]

DONG KINGMAN: Like a piece of sculptor, or a relief, or a mural. They are more or less there.

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

DONG KINGMAN: But I think an easel painting, like mine, probably thrown out because the Republicans get in.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I don't know. You mean what happened to the—all the works?

DONG KINGMAN: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: This I don't know. I know they were—I think the process of allocating

paintings went on all the time to public offices.

DONG KINGMAN: I know I have at least a half dozen picture in the main office of the immigration in San Francisco. I've seen it. But then, since then, the Republicans get in [laughs] and throw away everything. They just saved the frame. [Laughs.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: There's one more story, and this might interest you. 1944, end of '44, I went into the army. And I was in boot camp of Camp Roberts. And I see there was a traveling exhibition, a group show, with one of my pictures for the WPA. And at that time, I was in the camp and there was a little something written up on me. Next morning I found the picture was stolen. [They laugh.] Never got it back. I had a photograph of the picture. [They laugh.] Still remember that thing.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Well, is there—does the name Beatrice Judd Ryan mean anything to you?

DONG KINGMAN: Very familiar—Beatrice Ryan. Oh, I know who she is. She runs an art gallery at the fourth floor of the City of Paris. I guess she's still running it. I've forgotten what was her job in WPA.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I think she was—oh, kind of initial local watchdog in a way. I don't know whether she had—

DONG KINGMAN: Maybe.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —a direct position or not.

DONG KINGMAN: But I think now she's still in San Francisco, isn't she?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

DONG KINGMAN: Is she still running that art gallery? You see I—probably one of the artists you have kept—get very little information out of the relationship in the whole Project functioning. All those people will tell you now how they worked. But—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, you had this single line—

DONG KINGMAN: Yeah, I was one of those painter who only—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And you saw it as an opportunity to—

DONG KINGMAN: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —improve. That put the burden on you, you know?

DONG KINGMAN: You see, most of—of course, a lot of painters are only painting oil painting. And you take George Harris.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: Did anybody interview him?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: This I don't know.

DONG KINGMAN: George Harris is continuing painting in early part. He's a wonderful painter. I think he's still alive in San Francisco. Then later on he becomes one of the—in the graphic—in the oil painting department who helps select pictures.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

DONG KINGMAN: I think he got into a better position later, but basically he's a painter.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: Now I was surprised that that name wasn't included there. Because he was one who sort of kind of helped select the picture. But not in the beginning, he paints. He

also paints on the side. George Harris. He's quite a good painter.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Did you bump into the Howard family?

DONG KINGMAN: No, but the Howard family all moved to New York. Berlandina. Jane Berlandina?

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

DONG KINGMAN: I don't know that she worked for the WPA that long.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I don't know either.

DONG KINGMAN: No, I don't think so. See, that was the group who sort of was well-established. And maybe Howard—maybe Charlie Howard worked for the WPA. Maybe John Howard did.

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

DONG KINGMAN: But John Howard I know belonged to—he belonged to the art center. And he lived in Carmel. Now this Howard here in town, the husband of Jane Berlandina, is an architect. And the other Howard—there's a wife named Ken [ph]. Etheline Ken [ph].

[00:20:22]

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

DONG KINGMAN: She was in an automobile accident. There was a very famous painter who'd been well established in San Francisco before anything. Stackpole.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Stackpole?

DONG KINGMAN: But he never—I don't think he ever worked in the Project.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No?

DONG KINGMAN: Because he was much well ahead of everybody.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: This allowed you opportunity to develop your own technique and keep it—

DONG KINGMAN: Yeah, well, that is basic.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: That was the greatest. Because it might be, if this project started again, maybe another young painter would not help them. I don't know.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: Very difficult to say. It's just that moment in that time.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

DONG KINGMAN: Now, it just happened I had an exhibition a few months before this thing come up.

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

DONG KINGMAN: And I went there any everybody waiting for me. I think especially, this guy Gaskin?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: He said, Wow, we really need you. [They laugh.] And I was very happy.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Well and, you know, it enabled you to harness your own interests before you were—what—you were buying time in order to do what you wanted to do.

DONG KINGMAN: Because mostly painters today, even the most established painter had a hard time. I don't care how established they are, they just depend on selling their picture. Which is almost impossible. That's another story.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: But are you interviewing mostly—you're all interested in only confined to the area at that time? Not what the artist doing today?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, you know—

DONG KINGMAN: Because that doesn't interest you?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: It isn't that. I wouldn't go quite so far as to say that it doesn't interest me. But if it points to a kind of criticism or some illumination of the WPA period, why, you know, that's fine. Because, well, you have a unique story anyway. Whether you're a good painter, a bad painter, or otherwise, you have your own experience. And the WPA obviously, you know, in terms of the background, just loomed as the great—you know, it's like going around on the merry-go-round and grabbing the ring.

DONG KINGMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But actually that is the best bridge for me, because when I was exhibiting in San Francisco, up to the time 1941, I was hardly able to make a living out of selling pictures.

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

DONG KINGMAN: Until I came east somehow, the opportunity is much greater. And I can ask more money for the pictures.

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

DONG KINGMAN: And also, you get a national name—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: —coming east. But that—without that wouldn't be any—you know, the bridge from that to the Guggenheim fellowship. And of course, into the army that's no help. [Laughs.] But during the time I was in army, I also painted a series of picture for an exhibition. I sold all of them. [They laugh.] That's another part of the story. I was in Washington and I was waiting an order to go to Kunming [ph], because I was in OSS.

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

DONG KINGMAN: So they said, Oh, we don't know what to do, so you just wait. So I said, How about I go out painting? And he said, All right, do what you like, just come back at five before the sundown. [They laugh.] So I was stationed right in the city, so I just ran out in the street and painted. Then I went into a bookshop down there and they exhibit it. I had a lot of fun. Then in the meantime I came up to New York and did a couple of stories for *Fortune* magazine. And also, my dealer said, Oh, why not give exhibition? So I sold everything during the war. During the war, it was a funny period. You hit it right on the head. People buy up everything. But since I came east, it seems like I'm more of an established painter.

[00:25:00]

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

DONG KINGMAN: And then without that bridge, probably never be able to come east to begin with. But yeah, everything helped. Because a painter needs all kind of help no matter where it come from.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

DONG KINGMAN: And even today when I walk into this school on 14th Street, actually I make a wrong turn. A man told me there was a fine arts school, but when I turn right instead of turn left, I went to the commercial arts school. [Laughs.] [I didn't know it -Ed.] I can't read English.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

DONG KINGMAN: In those days. [So I find—and after about six months this Japanese customer –Ed.] comes back and said, Gee, what happened? I said, I don't know. You told me to study. He said, What school? He said, You're in the wrong school. There's a fine arts school on this side, don't you know? Happened on the same street, I find out later.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Those are the accidents, yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: And this teacher, Mr. Fox, I still remember him.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

DONG KINGMAN: And my friend Ceto in Hong Kong, who just got me started.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Well, they—you know, they—in Hong Kong, were you painting in oils or watercolor?

DONG KINGMAN: I was started with oil painting.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: See, there was a different period. When I first went to school, and like all the children do once a week, there was a little drawing class. And in Hong Kong, or in Chinese, you use a brush. You practice drawing the birds and the bamboo, the flowers, with a brush.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

DONG KINGMAN: The landscape. And then soon I went to Lingnan and studied with this teacher, Ceto Wai. And he—European painter. Chinese. But then he must try to teach you the European method. And that basically is oil painting.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

DONG KINGMAN: So you got, you know, oil painting.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

DONG KINGMAN: So I was started with him. So if I was going to learn to paint the European painting, then it must be oil painting.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I see.

DONG KINGMAN: But I never used it too much. When the first two years I return to United States—now, I was—everybody thought there it was a depression, but I don't understand the word. Because I was there, [laughs], arrived without anything, see? [They laugh.] In fact, when I first arrived and the man said, Now, what's your name? Said, Now that won't do. He said, I'll call you Jack. [Laughs.] He doesn't know what to do with me because he couldn't figure out my name. My Chinese name is King Man. And he said Well, that don't do. So, I call you Jack. Because I worked in this factory for this guy who moved in and out.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: He was a good old guy, you know. There's an old joke. A man arrive in Europe and the immigration says, Gee, all right, [laughs] I can't understand this Russian name. Let's get you a name, short name like Jackson. [Laughs.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.] Yeah.

DONG KINGMAN: Then—by the way, can I offer you a drink or something?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Let's turn this off, shall we?

DONG KINGMAN: All right.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]