



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Henry
Adams La Farge, circa 1965

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Henry Adams La Farge circa 1965. The interview took place at 4 East 53rd Street, New York, New York 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

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: You mean [inaudible].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Inaudible] talked to him over a three-year period.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Did people talk to people—did you talk to people?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, but I talked to him—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Oh, I see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —some 70-some hours, something like that.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Well, that would be very interesting.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: It was a lot of fun.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: [Inaudible] talk with him.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Well, the period of the '30s ought to be recreated in art terms. So far as you remember, what was the art market in the '30s? How was the '20s turned into the '30s?

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: I don't know very much about it except that there was terrific change just after the war from what it was before.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: There was?

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: That's more recent, though. Is this the Second World War?

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: But prior to that, and in the '30s, there was—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: I don't know what happened. I just don't know.

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

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: I mean, the difference is that there were very few galleries [in New York, compared to what there were -Ed.] after the war.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: That was the difference.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: The market opened up in terms of the number of new galleries that appeared, until we have what today—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Well, yeah, there were the old galleries. There were standard old galleries. And that's still going like Knoedler and Wildenstein. Dozens of new galleries spawned up right after the war.

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

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Well, it was quite significant.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: It sure is. In terms of the market, it certainly is.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Well, no, I'm telling you what's going on in the country.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: In interests?

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: And that artistic [activity -Ed.].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. How did you—well, there weren't—artists were having difficulties in the '30s for sure. And there were a number of programs which were presented to—in part, to aid them through that difficult period in the '30s, and in part to take advantage of some American definition to decorate public buildings since the Mexican mural school had been so successful itself. And there was some problem—some question as to whether we also could, you know, develop such as a school. There was George Biddle thinking about this and writing about this. And I suspect that with Bruce also thinking and writing about that. When did you—where did you meet Edward Bruce?

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: I didn't meet him until I went to Washington.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Until you went to Washington?

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: I'm—my contact there was with Olin Dows. An old friend of mine. And he was an artist—he was a kind of—good kind of a brother of mine who was also an artist, who entered the—one of those competitions and won the competition.

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

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: That was my only contact with him.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: In the beginning?

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: I never had known Mr. Bruce before.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. What time did you go down to Washington and what was the purpose there?

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Well, I was called down there to join the staff.

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

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Olin Dows got me to come down. I was, at the time, at the graduate school at Harvard in—

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

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: —the history of art.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: In the history of art? What was he—what was he looking for in the way of staff in Washington?

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Well, he knew me and he knew that I was interested and knew of my contacts with the art world. My brother and my father were both artists.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: And he thought I'd be a useful person to have around.

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

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: [I was familiar with the process of mural painting -Ed.], and though I didn't know many artists, I knew something about creative work.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What did you find in the terms of a office when you arrived in Washington?

[00:05:00]

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Well, as I remember, we went right into the—into the big federal warehouse, I think it was, down—I can't remember the address. It was down—it was the Treasury warehouse, I think—

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

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: —down near the Potomac.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Was it—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: And there was a lot of space there. We had a lot of space.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: It kind of [inaudible].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Was it at this time that you met Mr. Bruce?

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yep.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yeah, this is when I first met him.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: What sort of impression did you have of him?

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Well, I thought he was very—a very great enthusiast. And I couldn't quite make him out at first. He was—he seemed to me mostly enthusiasm and a rather limited outlook. He seemed to find his way around the people in Washington, senators and Morgenthau, and had a way of pushing through, getting appropriations and that kind of thing.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: I had never seen any of his paintings. I didn't know anything about him. He was just kind of a new personality to me. I admired his push and enthusiasm.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: He was a rather strange combination, though, a lawyer that had a—you know, a long career, a businessman—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yeah. Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —and he was a lobbyist who did know his way around. And he also had this interest in art. I don't know, factors came together, I suspect, which, you know, provided the setting for—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —the kind of talent that he had. And—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Well, he was an—he was an [amateur in my view of painting. He was an amateur in the same sense that Winston Churchill was an amateur. -Ed.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: A very active man, who suddenly seen something in painting and got interested in it. I think he went and done paintings in the West, I think, or basically, he'd been—I think he'd been in the Philippines [inaudible].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. He had also spent some time in Italy too—also. And [inaudible], you know—you know, I think he turned his back on business interests which somehow somewhat collapsed.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And while he was able to come out of the business interests unscarred, nonetheless, he turned his head to painting. And then, I—just, you know, convenience, chance, happenstance, he was asked to represent the Philippine government to—in the Philippine Island Independence Bill—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —and was the lobbyist for that. So, he was on the scene when the earlier—the PWAP Program under the Civil Works Administration and the Treasury Department was established. I think that, in a way, provided the—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Well, that was before my time.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: I didn't get down there until later.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: But I think, in a way, it was the background in which the other became a kind of continuum. Was Forbes Watson on the scene too?

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Oh, yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Inaudible.] He's quite a person. What sort of impressions do you have of him?

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Well, he was very known and connected [with Mrs. Whitney in developing the Whitney Museum -Ed.] and all that. And [had been the editor of a very distinguished magazine -Ed.]. And he knew his way around. His knowledge was quite a wide knowledge of all the—[a very wide knowledge of art -Ed.]—

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

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: —European art [inaudible] about that. He was [such a dynamo. He was a -Ed.] knowledgeable lender [ph]. He knew what it was all about. He was indispensable. [I would consider him so -Ed.]—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: —more than anybody else. Mr. Rowan was a curious person [and something entirely new in -Ed.] my life. [He was a midwesterner and had gone to -Ed.] Iowa, had done some quite extraordinary art there. He was very, very energetic in pushing things through also—he was the executive.

[00:10:24]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: He had his hand in everything, because he was able to implement rather vague ideas. Bruce had these great ideas and Rowan and Forbes Watson were able to implement them.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure. Make them walk.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: [Inaudible.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. That's almost always the case. How did the three of them get along together?

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Well, Forbes was a—was a rather ironic person. He was—I think they got along pretty well together. Forbes got into arguments pretty much. But Bruce had a way of pushing things through where he wanted. He wanted something, he'd push it through.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Concept of power.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yeah. Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. I would—I would think it would be interesting to have a concept of power, have to deal with a walking research laboratory like Watson was in the field of art.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Well, he wasn't researching—he'd done his research. He knew it all already.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: [Had it at his fingertips. -Ed.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: At his fingertips, but he was a walking mass of information.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Pretty much.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: I mean, he had limitations. But he was—yeah, he knew the American artists [inaudible]. And of course, Rowan was digging up new and young artists all around him. Some of them were good, some of them weren't so good.

The limitations of the program, I think, were the—just like any program, it was programmatic. And they had an idea [inaudible] that they decided to do. And it was—it had an artificial side, which was highly criticized at the time, but I think that in looking back on it, it was—it was the first time that there were sort public consciousness about American possibilities of culture. [I think that was the big thing, even though it was limited -Ed.] But I think it did a lot of good to turn people's minds towards what artists can represent.

[HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: What was the attitude of the office generally toward the straight relief program under Cahill?

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: The relief program?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yea, what was the attitude of Watson, Bruce, and to the extent that you can recall, Rowen towards this? -Ed.]

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: [Well, it was -Ed.] a very intelligent approach, the two percent on buildings. They had to watch out pretty carefully that they got that two percent. And they usually did where they wanted it, and they put the thing through, that was the very thing that they were able to do it. A tremendous amount of work [was done -Ed.].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. How—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: [Inaudible.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: How effective was Admiral Peoples [ph] who was the—I guess, the buildings and the grounds or—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: I don't know much about Peoples [ph]. [Inaudible.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: What function did you provide when you finally were in the office itself?

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Well, I was an underling, just was there helping out, sitting in on some juries, and every now and then contacting an artist, following up details [inaudible]. And in some cases, I was a jury member. I went on trips to inspect a project, that kind of thing.

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

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: I initiated some projects. The thing that amused me was a reminiscence I have of a jury I sat in on right there at the—in Washington. Where I didn't—I differed from some of the others—or most of the others. One of them turned to me and said, "Well, that's your personal opinion," which was a rather funny thing to say to a jury member.

[00:15:20]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: [After all, the function of a jury member is to express just that. Apparently I was out of step. -Ed.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: In exercising the discretion of a juror, you were called [for so doing - Ed.].

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.] That is amusing. So, how—the jury system worked pretty favorably, didn't it, in terms of—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: In terms of their objectives, yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: But it was a wholesale operation. And as I said, that kind of thing has its weaknesses. It was a wholesale operation. It had to be rammed through—they had all this money and all this opportunity for work and it was hard for us to get the artists. There were artists around but, it's a little like doing things on a wholesale basis and certain percentages is good work. Maybe five percent and 10 percent is excellent work, and that's what you're going for. So, once you've engaged an artist, you have to go along with it and if the thing doesn't turn out to be a great work of artists it's there. That's the way it went.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Yeah.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: That's the feeling I had about it. [Inaudible] was it was a great operation. And the objective was to get as much work done as possible.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: He did voice, however, some—you know, some concern about standards, it's you feeling, if I understand the wholesale operation, was it's spreading rather thinly, you know, because so much was undertaken at once.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: All within a certain very limited time. And it would have to be done—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: I mean, the thing was setup. And, of course, we did get good artists, [we got quite a number of good artists. Some of them were better than others. -Some who were considered very good artists then have not held up, and other have held up, and of course, there's been a change of taste. But it's interesting to see that some of the artists that have turned to -Ed.] the modern abstractions were already operating then in another mold, were considered good artists.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: And that's an interest [aspect of this -Ed.].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Well, was much thought given or receptivity given to the more modern things?

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Well, what they thought was modern then, yes. Oh, yes. That was —

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: It was supposed to be the latest thing. And that's a very curious aspect of this whole thing, that it was considered modern, but that was a conception that was at odds with certain artists in New York who came along later who developed abstract things, were completely smothered by this government project.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: How knowledgeable were American artists in the fresco mural field?

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Some of them were very good.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But not wholesale?

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Some were—what's his name? Poor, Henry Varnum Poor, [inaudible] was one of the ones who really knew what he was doing and did some good work.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Excellent work.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Most of them worked on a canvas. And some of them worked in different mediums, [and mediums that -Ed.] have held up pretty well. Very few fresco paintings.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

Well, when the—

[00:20:03]

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: But that's not—that's—it's true that they were—that part of the impetus was from the Mexican school. And that was, in a way, a narrowing [influence of the conception -Ed.] of what it should be. But that was always modified by what the artist thought it should be. I think they picked all the artists that they could've, except a few other unknown artists in New York, hidden away.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, they turned out a rather large body of work—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: --spread around the country.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: I don't know how much of it is remaining. Quite of lot of it remains.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. But they did it in a very short of period of it. What was it? Five years or something. And that wholesale is a word, it had to be by the nature of the thing. Wholesale—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Well, it was rammed through, it was limited on time. Buildings were being put up, and the buildings had to be completed on schedule. And the paintings were started before the building was completed—the building wouldn't complete until the paintings were in, that kind of thing.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. What sort of relationship did the office have with the supervising architect?

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Very close.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Was it a good one?

[Cross talk.]

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: [Inaudible.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Inaudible] a supervising architect like [inaudible]—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Well, we had some squabbles. We had some squabbles, but in general they had friends amongst the architects.

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

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: But it was more of a matter of if an architect—there's always been a curious relationship between painters and architects, because, especially in modern architecture, they didn't like the idea of having any paintings in some cases.

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

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: But since we've been given this program, in many cases, the architects had to give up these spaces, in which they would have preferred to have white walls. Some in very good spaces.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I wondered whether this—you know, this whole program included a kind of educational program for architects, as to the function of decoration.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Architects are very hard [to teach -Ed.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.] Yeah, it was one of the hurdles—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —put it that way.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yeah. But there were some of the architects who are very—I think the—I think the head architect—I forget his name—was very sympathetic with the idea.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Is that Simons [ph]?

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Simons [ph], yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: He went along with it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: But then, he didn't do all the work, he was simply supervisor to s all of these buildings. And they picked—they did—they picked different architects in different parts of the country. And, of course, they had different ideas.

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

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: I mean, there was so much building going on [that they had to get farmed out. It wasn't all government architects by any means. -Ed.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. But did you have the feeling that the—or the thought that Edward Bruce was burning himself out? He had a stroke somewhere along the line.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And I wondered, you know, what is the consequence within the office of that stroke?

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: I don't know. [Inaudible.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I mean, he seems to have been chair-ridden, and then have to rely to a greater extent on others, for the leg efforts.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Well, he had gotten this thing pretty well started by then. Rowan was a dynamo. He also burned himself out. And he pushed things through to the—I should say that Forbes Watson was sort of a balance wheel [ph]. Of course, Olin Dows was a contact man [with political people, the Morgenthau, and all that. I mean he was close to the Roosevelts. -Ed.].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: He was very helpful in that.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How effective were the Morgenthau as this was a Treasury Department program—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Oh, Mrs. Morgenthau was, in fact, the great backer. As I understand it.

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

HENRY ADAMA LA FARGE: She was very charming and cultivated woman, and had a lot to do with being very helpful to the whole program. She was always around.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: How long did you remain with the—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Two years.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Two years? Yeah.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: I don't remember very much about it. It was too many years ago.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, all of 20 years ago.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: And I was—as I said, I wasn't really on the inside. I was there because Olin Dows asked me to come down there. I enjoyed it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: But do you look upon it as a period to a paragraph on American art? It seems to me that, you know, in total [ph], there's been a kind of swan song for the—an approach toward mural painting.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Well, you mean you want me to give a judgement of it, from the point of view now?

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

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Well, I think it started a lot of things. I think it was engulfed by the postwar developments in art. But I think started—in a paradoxical way, it started the great—the great movements that we're now going through, because it gave American artists self-confidence. I think that's the thing that it did. It made them look in on themselves and made us realize what we had and that we had a culture of our own, and all that kind of thing.

And I think that that's carried on. I think what happened after the war that reneged on all this thing going on in the '30s, because we suddenly become aware of world culture. And they've been a little ashamed of what went on in the '30s and before. They're just breaking loose and trying to think in terms of universal concepts within cultures from all over the places rather than only in American culture. And I think that's the great tension that's come about in art now. There's sort of a—in Bruce's day, there was sort of an innocent outlook, purely American.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: American landscape, American scene, American—and it wasn't as politically directed as people try to say it is now. They try to say there were kind of socialistic ideas expressed and all that kind of thing. I don't think that was it at all, I think it was purely going out and [inaudible] American landscape and painting pictures of factories instead of fields, and looking at our country, [in on ourselves -Ed.] I think that was good.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I do too.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, with its termination, the whole scene had really changed with this multi-cultural approach or the [inaudible]—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: [Inaudible.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —world culture.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Young fellows went off to Japan and Europe and all over the place. And they got—they saw what other great artists in other parts of the world—and they came home said, "Look at—look what they've got there." And we looked at what we had, and it looked awfully thin. And I was already—had that feeling when I was in Washington, that it was a little thin, but the validity was that Americans were thinking in terms of themselves rather than imitating Europe. [And that was a good thing. -Ed.]

[00:30:00]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I think that represents, really in a sense, the whole '30s, it was an effort to come to grips with something American.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Because we had fallen, really what we—our economy had become [high-centered -Ed.] and it was time to reexamine.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And we did put [rude hands on our machinery -Ed.], in order to define or get back to something American. This may be related in part to the discovery of the folk art—American folk art in the '20s. You know, this kind of—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Well, the folk art project run by—I forget the name of the man [that did that book -Ed]. That was an excellent thing. That was a specialty. What's the name of the man that did that book? Did reproductions of—beautiful reproductions of all sorts of purely American objects, [inaudible] done, and they've been published. That's—that was a wonderful thing to have done that. It wasn't really creative art, but it made people look at American the way the other artists went out and looked at the landscape.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: And you looked at it, and it opened eyes without trying to look like European art.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right. And it—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: So, that was what Bruce—that was Bruce's idea.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Well, you only remained then two years?

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: That's all.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And then went to—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: I was a pinch hitter.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [But absorbent. -Ed.] I mean, I know—you know, you can't be around Forbes Watson, who is positive and articulate, and not have something under your being as a consequence of the two years' experience. I would suppose, equally, this is true of—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: I think he was limited—or with a limited point of view also. You know, he had been through various stages, and I think he was able to have more perception [ph], because he's been—he'd studied—he'd looked at the Impressionists and Cézanne and those things. And he wrote one of the best articles on Cézanne that's ever been written in the arts—the old *Arts Magazine*. He had done things like that and was—had a real perspective. But I think he was hip [ph] on the American schools. It's [good, it's good. That's

what gave the thing a certain quality. the same [inaudible].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: [And it wasn't bound to last, in those terms. -Ed.] I think—I think that now American artists that are painting are completely American. They've been—they've gone through a bigger experience.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. Well, you know, he has had a great sense of joy and expression with the *Arts Magazine* as its editor.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: The termination of that—the shift of [Whitney -Ed.] emphasis toward a museum and the consequent termination of the *Arts Magazine* was a bitter blow for a man who had spent so much time developing.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yeah, he seemed a little bitter.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Seemed a little bitter. But he, of course—he was the king—he was the thing—the moving force of the Whitney—of the—of the Whitney—the whole Whitney operation. [He had a good deal to do -Ed.] with starting the museum. And I think if it hadn't been for him that it wouldn't have become what it came.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. Yeah. But being in Washington in a—in a kind of government agency—he had written editorials, for example, in the '20s, and good editorials—

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —against government intrusion in the field of creative art.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: And that's why—that's why he had to—that's why he had—was a—at a disadvantage with Bruce. Bruce was completely dedicated.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Yeah. But then, for him to be a part of the show was to speak a language he hadn't really been instructed in.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: The feeling I have is that you can't do anything unless you have certain limitations.

[00:35:00]

If you don't have the zeal for pushing forward unless you're just pointing to one thing, I think that that's one of the things that was good about Bruce and Rowan. They just pushed right ahead, without worrying too much about other points of views or aspects.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: They had a set of blinders.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: Yeah. It helped.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I guess it does if you wanted to get creative. Well, I've used up your 45 minutes.

HENRY ADAMS LA FARGE: It seems I wasn't much help.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I think you were. Thank you so—

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]