



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

**Oral history interview with Edward L. Loper,
1964 Mar. 26**

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Edward Loper on March 26, 1964. The interview took place in Wilmington, DE, and was conducted by Richard Doud for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

RICHARD DOUD: I'd like to start it, if it's alright with you, with just a general discussion with your background before the WPA. Tell us a little bit about yourself.

EDWARD LOPER: Well, I was formerly in high school, just finished high school and I started working on various kinds of labor jobs because at that time there was no work to get. I had not done too well so we weren't able to be on, what they called at that time, Relief. So, finally my wife gave up the idea of trying to make it by ourselves and she went up to see about some form of help and while there she met a lady and they were discussing...they needed people for art projects and at that time I hadn't done anything more than what you do in high school, normal training in schools and she told this woman, whoever it was, that I had painted. So, they said to send him in..."rather than giving him a job on relief, we'll give him a job on something we need." So, I went in and I saw a woman named Lillian Sellinkoff who was secretary for Miss Jeanette Eckman. She took me in to see Miss Eckman and we discussed it and Miss Eckman was quite a liberal person and she said if I thought I could do the job, she'd like to try me on it. So, I started working under a man named David Reyam. At that time WPA art project, writer's, and musicians was at 13th and Market Street in an old house there, three story, quite a large house. I started work there on the third floor. There were two other fellas who were uncle and nephew named Towers and another fella named Fraser who was also working. They were trying to do plates of objects that were used by early Americans in their homes. They were doing these drawings as accurately as they could but they had not had too much training in art also. About the same as I had and therefore we could only draw well and model, and do a little bit more with the paint than average youngsters could do who had gone to high school or art school. The man that was in charge was David Reyam. He had formerly been with DuPont but he had retired and they wouldn't hire him back because he was too old, and insurance and things, they couldn't hire him back anymore. So, he was in charge of the part that we were working on which was the Index of American Design. Our supervisor over Reyam was a man named Paar. I think it was Paar.

RICHARD DOUD: Russell Paar?

EDWARD LOPER: Russell Paar.

RICHARD DOUD: Yes.

EDWARD LOPER: So, he would come up from Washington and he would look at the things that are being done. One of the first things they were doing when I first got there was a silver strainer made by Ben Franklin and they were having all kinds of ideas on how to do it. They were told at first that you mustn't use black and you must do it in color. There was no way for these fellas to understand that the color existed in silver. They thought of silver generally as the way it was one in pamphlets, for sale in the magazines. So, they worked on these different pieces and finally they sent another fella in there to help a lot. He had studied in Europe and he had a lot of art knowledge because he

had been to art school all over the world I suppose. His name was Gordon Saltar. Saltar started explaining to us how to do these things in terms of color. He had lots of experience at it. So, we got so, that later, the project, as it grew, got so that the fellas were able to do these things exquisitely well. They did just beautiful jobs. After Saltar came along other fellas came in from the Wilmington Art schools. One named John Swientochowski, Francis Jennings, Russ Macklin, one named Bill Edwards, Sam Ford...who else? Sam Fineman. Well, then we were put in another building which was at 10th and West. We moved from the old building and this gave us more room to work in and we had more help. Then a couple of women came. One named Hukill and another named Regina Hender. So they worked there also. It became quite a large project. Around this time I had been doing a lot of painting on my own of paintings, of pictures and I had been learning as much from these fellas who had gone to art schools as they knew and I was working every day on my own after work. We would work from 9 until 1:30. From that time on I would go outdoors and paint pictures. Walter Pyle who was in charge of the easel painting project and under him there were other people such as Edward Grant who is now with DuPont; Bayard Berndt who is part owner of Hardcastles Art Store and a girl named Caroline Smith...was her name at that time. They worked on the easel project and they were doing mural paintings and such for buildings. Walter asked me, Walter Pyle asked me would I like to come on this project and work. So, I went on his project, on the easel painting project, and I would stay home at my house - you could call it a studio I suppose - I painted mostly outdoors at this time. I was painting local scenes throughout the whole area especially on the East Side and this type of thing. These things evidently are all in buildings all around. Once in a while I hear about some of them. A girls school that used to be at Marshallton, Havencruse School. They now are up at Woodshaven School, in the office up there. A few of them are in office buildings. I heard the other day that there was one at the Welfare Departments main office and a few other places. Some of the fellas did mural paintings. A fella named John Mall from Middletown did a mural, a fisherman to be used in the dining hall over Ferris Industrial School. After it was finished, we went over and also learned a few tricks about how to install a mural by putting damar varnish and white lead paint together, painting the back of the canvas and then pushing it against the wall and then using rollers and rolling it the next four or five hours.

RICHARD DOUD: I think that mural is still in place, incidently. I talked to the director out at the school some time ago and he said that there was a mural still there in case I wanted to see it.

EDWARD LOPER: Yes.

RICHARD DOUD: I think it must be the same one.

EDWARD LOPER: Now, John Mall worked here and also down in Middletown. He did what was called, at that time, a new technique (it's quite ordinary) called scratch out. They would take this scratch board and they'd paint it black and then it was scratched through it like a reverse sort of an etching look.

RICHARD DOUD: That was a new technique at the time?

EDWARD LOPER: Around that time it was a new technique.

RICHARD DOUD: Hum, I didn't know that. On this easel painting thing there are a couple of things that came to mind. You said that you painted a good bit outdoors or at home. When you were working on the Index of American Design, were you required to be in a certain office for a certain number of hours?

EDWARD LOPER: Yeh, yeh. We were required to be in the office at 9 o'clock and we worked

without a lunch of course because it would be silly to take a lunch. Until one thirty. 9 to 1:30.

RICHARD DOUD: That's five days a week?

EDWARD LOPER: Five days a week, yes.

RICHARD DOUD: Then you were on your own?

EDWARD LOPER: That's all the hours we did at that thing was five days a week. The salary at first was 19.00 (19.20) per week and by the time we stopped it was \$39.20 every two weeks. I forget what exactly it was at first. It was...43...? I don't remember exactly but the salary was quite low but as we stayed and went up to more and better positions, the salary also went up.

RICHARD DOUD: Was easel painting considered a promotion from the Index?

EDWARD LOPER: Easel painting was definitely a promotion.

RICHARD DOUD: It was?

EDWARD LOPER: Yes. The Index, it was...well you were tied down to the office all the time. With easel painting you painted as much as you wanted. In fact, you painted more but you were doing something more exciting you see.

RICHARD DOUD: Sure. Nobody told you what to do?

EDWARD LOPER: Nobody said what to do or how to do, just go and paint.

RICHARD DOUD: Did you have a certain amount of work to be done in a certain length of time?

EDWARD LOPER: Well, I usually tried to have - or I thought it would be - I tried to have a painting probably every two weeks. I tried to.

RICHARD DOUD: I see.

EDWARD LOPER: That was awful fast painting. In fact I always have painted fast. I still paint fast when I paint. I may work on things like what I have here. I may work over and over and over. I started this last summer and worked on it. I don't work on it regularly. I work on it when things bother me. At that time I didn't have the knowledge to know what bothered me or...

RICHARD DOUD: Nothing bothered you?

EDWARD LOPER: Yes. When the picture was painted, I thought it was painted. Of course today when the picture is painted it doesn't mean it's painted at all. It means its ready for painting, as long as it stays in sight it is changing, it never stops.

RICHARD DOUD: You said, I think, that Walter Pyle was head of the easel painting group?

EDWARD LOPER: Yes.

RICHARD DOUD: What relation was he to Howard Pyle?

EDWARD LOPER: He was Howard Pyle's nephew. Howard Pyle's sister was his mother. She was also an illustrator named Ellen Pyle. She did Saturday Evening Post covers, you know, at that time.

RICHARD DOUD: Did Walter Pyle sort of carry on the Pyle tradition or Pyle way of doing things?

EDWARD LOPER: He didn't want to be an artist first. It was almost forced on him. The family insisted. They insisted he go to art school, they insisted that he do this. He actually told me he'd rather have been an engineer. This is what his interest was.

RICHARD DOUD: Is that right.

EDWARD LOPER: Yeh.

RICHARD DOUD: That's unusual. It usually works the other way around. The engineer wishes he could be an artist. On the Index of American Design were you assigned an object to do?

EDWARD LOPER: Yes. David Reyam and usually Saltar would go out on these trips with a camera and they had a fella who is now a leading photographer, Willard Stewart. They used to go out and they would have these places found all over state and they would photograph these things and make detailed sections of things and the large one. Then they'd bring that back...they would have notes on what the color was and what happened to the color and description of what was the situation about it. We would take the photographs which usually were inaccurate in perspective because photography by having to be so close things would be out of perspective and out of shape. We would have to line them up on the board and then we would run perspective lines by a longer perspective, put them in the kind of perspective that was possible to look correct on paper by itself and redo them. You'd have to redraw them correctly using the photograph as a basis.

RICHARD DOUD: Do you know what happened to...I think that there were a lot of objects rendered that we not accepted ultimately to be saved with the major group now at the National Gallery. Did you know what happened to these rejects? Were you given back any of the things you did?

EDWARD LOPER: No. They were all sent to Washington, everything. Everything was sent to Washington and then they would select out of that obviously because there would be repeats made and they probably didn't want to have a repeat of the same situation. They worked here for the most part trying to find the things that wouldn't be found anywhere else. They tried. Now, it is possible that they did the same thing that New York was doing or New Jersey was doing. I can't say.

RICHARD DOUD: I don't want to throw back in you teeth anything you might have told me before but I did bring along some of these names you mentioned. I wanted to ask you about what happened to some of these people. Mr Reyam is dead I think.

EDWARD LOPER: Yeh, he's dead, yes.

RICHARD DOUD: What about Andy Doragh?

EDWARD LOPER: Andy Doragh was around not long ago. We saw him some where...he is still in this section of the country. I don't know exactly where.

RICHARD DOUD: You don't know if he is still working in the arts?

EDWARD LOPER: I don't see his name in painting at all. He is never in exhibitions. I never hear of him showing anything. So, evidently he isn't involved in painting.

RICHARD DOUD: It seems to me, I've seen some very nice line drawings of architecture or

something that he did for...

EDWARD LOPER: He might have...done that sort of thing.

RICHARD DOUD: Some publications years ago.

EDWARD LOPER: There was another fella who was of good interest named Bill White.

RICHARD DOUD: Bill White, I've not seen him. Mr Saltar has mentioned his name and...

EDWARD LOPER: Yeh. He was a bit unusual. He was sort of what people call a character. He'd wear a heavy overcoat almost in the middle of summer, you know, one of those fellas.

RICHARD DOUD: Yeh, an artist's artist.

EDWARD LOPER: Yehhh..

RICHARD DOUD: Well I should like to see Mr. White if I could get him to talk at all, he would be quite interesting fella.

EDWARD LOPER: Yeh. Francis Jennings, last I heard his wife was running a travel agency in Philadelphia and I have seen paintings by him lately. He paints abstract expressionist type of paintings. Evidently he wouldn't be too hard to find through Artists Equity. I think he was a member of Artists Equity in Philadelphia. Macklin disappeared completely as far as I know. Earnest Towers, I think last I heard was with DuPont. He was doing some work for them. A fella named Frazier who was on there when I first went on, he's doing work in California now and he's a booking agent for classical musicians. He was a musician at that time also but he didn't do music on the project.

RICHARD DOUD: He worked as an artist?

EDWARD LOPER: He worked as an artist, yes, but he was a pianist.

RICHARD DOUD: Was Gordon Saltar the first what you might call professional painter on the group?

EDWARD LOPER: Ahhh....he was the first professional painter of that, of that type. Not necessarily the first professional painter because some of the fellas who had gone to art school were also professionals, I suppose. If you say a professional is someone who makes part of their living from painting.

RICHARD DOUD: Yes.

EDWARD LOPER: There was a fella painting downstairs who also had studied all over Europe. What the heck was his name. Oh heck. I saw him the other day. He worked for Hardcastle. Oh heck. He came up to me and told me about Loper. He says he was the first person to teach Loper how to paint. Ha ha ha. He didn't know me. Ha ha ha.

RICHARD DOUD: Ha ha. He was telling you?

EDWARD LOPER: Yeh.

RICHARD DOUD: Ha ha

EDWARD LOPER: He was in the insane asylum for a while. I can't think of his name.

RICHARD DOUD: I have...

EDWARD LOPER: Martin LeMotte.

RICHARD DOUD: I don't have his name.

EDWARD LOPER: Martin LeMotte. He works for Hardcastle. You can get in touch with him there. There was a man named Leon DeVallinger whose son is the head of the Archives of Delaware.

RICHARD DOUD: I've met the son.

EDWARD LOPER: Well, his father was on the project also.

RICHARD DOUD: In the art project?

EDWARD LOPER: Yeh in the art project. He was doing large boards of some kind, putting little decorations all over them. I don't know quite what it was. I don't remember but he was there. There was a man, Lausett Rogers who owned quite an estate. Now, how he was on there I'll never know because he owned this very, very large mansion. Roger's Road in the outskirts of Wilmington was named sort of after his family grouping and they owned this mansion so I don't know. There are a certain percentage of people that could be there regardless of being needy.

RICHARD DOUD: Yes. That's right. I think 10 percent in most states didn't need to be certified as needy at the time.

EDWARD LOPER: Yeh, well he was also there.

RICHARD DOUD: Was he there as a painter or as an administrator?

EDWARD LOPER: As a painter. He did something...I think he was painting from the very beginning when he came on.

RICHARD DOUD: Did you know a Robert Young by any chance?

EDWARD LOPER: No. I don't know.

RICHARD DOUD: I just have the name down with Index here behind it. I don't know what...

EDWARD LOPER: There might have been. I can think of a young fella who worked with us and he was quite thin and one Saturday, or one Friday he went home and on Monday we had heard that he had died. It might have been he.

RICHARD DOUD: It might have been because I have in question marks here "Died of malnutrition."

EDWARD LOPER: Oh my God, it might be the one, yes.

RICHARD DOUD: I don't even know where I got this information.

EDWARD LOPER: He went home on a Saturday, on a Friday afternoon and next Monday we heard he had died over the weekend.

RICHARD DOUD: That's terrible.

EDWARD LOPER: Yeh, that must be the one. I couldn't think of his name anymore.

RICHARD DOUD: How did you get off the project then, once you got on it?

EDWARD LOPER: Oh, people were starting to find jobs a little bit at a time and there was always the worry about is the project going to get it's next appropriation and then they were starting to ask people did they want to learn to be in different fields. Some fellas were asking, they wanted to be welders. I guess they knew the war was coming and had already known what this deal...what was happening. And so you begin to notice that this was going on and I was painting one night looking at a doorway of a building, Allied Kid Company, and was watching these men do a kind of work with lights shining down on them. So I made a painting there and the man who was in charge of the whole company at that time, named Saul Kuhn, he saw me and he says...we got to talking and he says, "How would you like to work for me?" I said, "Oh, I wouldn't mind it." So, I left the job and at the time I was making \$24.00 per week there and I took a job working for Allied for \$20.00 per week with the idea that within six months my salary would go up to 29.50 per week.

RICHARD DOUD: Oh my.

EDWARD LOPER: Yeh. Ha ha. In six months that's what the salary would be. So, I left the project then. This was in...19...1940 or "41. I was there in 1941 at Allied Can. I probably left sometime in 1940. I decided I would make out better if I painted for myself and get a job and work.

RICHARD DOUD: Wel...

EDWARD LOPER: Although I did take a little disadvantage in doing it.

RICHARD DOUD: A slight cut.

EDWARD LOPER: Yeh, a slight cut.

RICHARD DOUD: How did you get back to art then?

EDWARD LOPER: Well, I never stopped. I kept right on painting. I'd work at the factory until 3 o'clock in the afternoon everyday and at that time I was a little younger and I'd go out everyday when I finished work at the factory. We worked from 7 to 3. I'd go home get my paints, go out and work until dark. I worked every day, every day, every day. I kept on painting and then there was art shows and I'd send to art shows and get a prize here and a prize there and it was working out pretty well. Then when I started getting involved with teaching...one of the men who worked at Allied asked be if I would come over to his house and teach a class in their basement. So, I went over and I helped those people for a while and then I was invited to YMHA to take a class down there. So, I took a class there. Then I opened a class on the top floor of Allied Kids main office and I had classes there. Slowly the classes grew and I was working at the factory at the same time and teaching at the same time along with it unit finally I had a show in Philadelphia of about 35 paintings and everything was sold out the first day. Then I had another show about a year later and about 3/4 of them sold. The dealer suggested I quit working and just paint. So, I was crazy enough to try it. Ha ha ha. Sometimes I wished I'd gone back to the factory, but anyway slowly the classes got to be more important and the selling of pictures got less and less and less. I'm really a teacher rather than a painter anymore.

RICHARD DOUD: What do you feel is personally the biggest change say in your painting for Mr Pyle

on the easel Project?

EDWARD LOPER: Well at that time, fellas like Saltar and Sam Ford and LeMotte. They said that Matisse was a wall paper decorator because they had no concept of what real art was about. They had the American concept of art. Everybody in America was pretty good, Winslow Homer was God practically and Thomas Aikens a genius. They had no idea that real artists were living at this time such as Matisse, Picasso and Brach Ranault were all alive and these people were real artists. Sam Fineman and I used to talk a lot about art and Sam who had been to art school but couldn't paint very well. He had more knowledge of what art was about. He said, "Never listen to these fellas, they don't know about art. They know how to make pictures. They've been to art schools and that's all they know." We would go to art shows and I'd begin to get interested in finding out what is it about art? Then I began to study the work of these different artists. I would go up to Philadelphia on Saturdays and walk from the train station over to the museum and study a painters work all day and then come home. This way I learned. I mean, you learn to paint by studying what's in museums. You don't learn by yourself.

RICHARD DOUD: Yeh. You can paint all your life and still not learn anything about it.

EDWARD LOPER: Then, I kept reading and people would suggest somebody who they say is wonderful. I would study it as much as I could and slowly begin to get some sort of an idea of what it was about. My favorites had started off. The first man I ever thought was any good and I had fallen in love with was N.C. Wyeth, the illustrator. Then later I began to realize that this wasn't art, this was illustrating and I began to get interested in the man Corot. I thought Corot was just terrific but of course I like the very bad Corots because I had already liked the bad illustrating. Then slowly I got involved in studying the work of the Ash'Can School because these fellas said that this is a bunch of artists that are real artists and this is American art. I got involved in studying that and then they came along with such a genius as John Stuart Curry, Grant Wood, and Tom Benton and they say "This is art." So, I studied this and I found out later this is pure junk wasting time and money and slowly you begin to study different men. Finally my last period on the WPA...I got interested in the work of George Bellows who was a step above the rest of them but he actually is an illustrator and not a real artist. Then after I left WPA, I got interested in such things as Rouault and slowly I thought Picasso was just terrible. I thought how can anybody like such junk? Then I begin to see what was going on I got into Picasso and then on to Matisse and Renoir and worked my way through different painters. Studying them one at a time I guess. There was a time I studied Van Gogh who I thought was a genius and today I like Van Gogh as a painter but I realize he wasn't really a genius. Now I'm studying philosophy and art. This is the first time I've been studying art. I go to the Barnes Foundation. This is the first studying I've ever really done where I had anybody to teach me.

RICHARD DOUD: It seems to me that you have done a remarkable job if this is your first schooling as such.

EDWARD LOPER: Yeh. I wouldn't recommend this kind of way. I'm most grateful to the WPA and what it did for me. I mean, I remind people today of the painters in America, most of the good ones came off of WPA and they weren't the ones that the public was in love with because the public loved always junk. They always did and they never will change. It's impossible.

RICHARD DOUD: Do you think this is just one aspect of the public that they don't know....

EDWARD LOPER: No. I think it is because they have no concept that art is self expression and they think that art is a matter of skill. the more skillful a painter looks the more important he looks.

Especially if he paints the kind of thing that they can identify themselves with. A certain kind of scenery will always satisfy a certain segment of the public and they begin to identify with it and therefore they can bring into play their background of experiences such as I remember my grandfather who used to have an old wagon like that, see? This makes them think well, this is something personal to me. They don't look at the painting with the idea that art is expression of how a human being living in this world learning how to see, which is a learned process that you are not born with, you learn it over the years, reacts a certain way to given situations under given conditions. When reacting that way you bring into action you reactions to the world based on the traditions of art, see. This is a different thing.

RICHARD DOUD: You wouldn't, though, on the other hand, say that someone who can strike this responsive chord in a great number of people is necessarily bad simply because he does this.

EDWARD LOPER: No. What you say about it is; all kinds of painting are good. It's good for something but when you say it you say "What is it good for?" Now, the painter who paints the picture that is responsive that way, he is good for bringing out this kind of a response in people but that doesn't make it a work of art. It's good for what it's good for. The illustrator what he does is good. It's good for the selling of a product. It is good for reminding people of some part of the story. Letting them know...putting it in pictorial terms for them. But, that has nothing to do with the art within the picture. The art in the picture is based on background of experience brought to play in such a way that that person painting the picture uses every part of his personality in it and being. Such as, intellectually you react a certain way but your intellect and you emotions are so closely tied that its hard to tell which is which.

RICHARD DOUD: Certainly. You can't divorce the two.

EDWARD LOPER: Yes. Now, when you are able to look at a picture or a painting I'll say and that painting by it's nature has a certain kind of a quality such as it may have a delicacy. It may have a certain kind of a quality of light such as a shimmer to the light. It may have a certain kind of richness of color. This painting by it's nature whether it's right side up or wrong side up, this will exist. But, if the painting is such that when you do turn it upside down it's an upside down picture and you don't feel these qualities of shimmer, of glow, of depth of unity, of flowing unities. This then is purely picture making. This is what people actually like. They can't divorce the two. I mean, Renoir by his nature had a luminous soupy looking paint. The paint is liquidity. It has that kind of a luminosity. It has a certain kind of glow of light. Light in his picture has a flickering flow in his painting. It has spontaneous brush stroke, a certain kind of quality of its own. Now when you turn it upside down it will still maintain these qualities but if you turn a painting by Norman Rockwell upside down (I'm giving the worst possible example) it had no qualities other than the sign post of saying what the picture is. When it is turned upside down it has no qualities of art, of it's own because the people then are upside down and the painting by its nature has no sparkle or glow or flickering of light. You see the difference.

RICHARD DOUD: As you said, it is just an upside down picture. Well, you mentioned a while ago that you felt greatly indebted to the WPA art project.

EDWARD LOPER: Yes, because without the WPA I would never have painted, you see.

RICHARD DOUD: Any idea what you would have done?

EDWARD LOPER: No...I would have probably been a laborer. I can't think of anything I might have done. I wasn't stupid but at that time every job that I had gotten was decided mostly by my color. an

example of that; I took a job working, carrying, trying to get coal out of coal cars on the railroad. You would take the coals and break it and chop it with a crow bar to loosen it in the winter, you know. Ice was all mixed up in it and to get it to go through the hopper and then you had to load it on to the truck. Well, we did that on this job. I did that and got it into the truck and then at that time every colored person that worked on the truck would jump up on top of the coal and ride to where the coal was being taken and they'd hop off, put it in the cellar and hop back into the truck. Well, to me it didn't make sense. The fella driving the truck was sitting inside - was warm - so when I got through I got in the cab. They fired me. So you see this is what happened. There was no opportunity. It was impossible for any opportunities to exist and nobody was interested in you if you were colored. You just didn't have an opportunity. There was none. There was going to be none. It was impossible.

RICHARD DOUD: Do you feel that there was any...

EDWARD LOPER: Oh and another thing, while on the WPA because these other fellas had had no much knowledge about the world in having lived in other countries and such, they were a different kind of relationship than there was by meeting people who worked on other kinds of work. I mean, their intellect was more acute. I mean they were more atoned to what was going on not only here but throughout the world and therefore he could make different kind of friends. Then your discussions day by day were intellectual. When I first got there...to me I couldn't understand what they were talking about.

RICHARD DOUD: Sure.

EDWARD LOPER: They were so far ahead of me in knowledge. So, what else is there to do? Start reading! What am I going to do? Be stupid all the time? So, I read and read and read. At least I would have some knowledge of what these people are talking about.

RICHARD DOUD: Did you feel that there was in any sense discrimination on the WPA.

EDWARD LOPER: No. Not on the art project. The only time I felt discrimination is when they would have a party. Then they would have a party at some restaurant. Well, I couldn't go. Of course Mr Reyam who was nice but stupid, he would want to bring me some of the food but I didn't want the food. This I didn't want. Of course he was very nice and he was an old man but he couldn't conceive that I wouldn't appreciate this. Because how else could you do it? This is how colored people had always been treated and why not now? Other than that.... But the fellas like Walter Pyle and Eddie Grant never any. Or Saltar, none of these fellas had any....Or the fellas who went to art school. We all hung around together. We'd go to Phillie. We'd go out and paint together and such. It was the first time I had had a situation where I didn't feel discrimination - here on the job.

RICHARD DOUD: I sort of wondered because I was talking with a lady who had been director of one of the WPA art galleries in Fairfax, Virginia and she was talking about one of the children's art classes that she had conducted during the thirties and I very innocently asked if it was exclusively a white children's class and she...you know...in Fairfax in the thirties it was just no two ways about it. Either....

EDWARD LOPER: That was it. I taught...oh...I did for a while go out and teach also. I taught at the Boy's industrial school and the girls Industrial school under WPA. I was teaching classes you know, so that is part of where the training for teaching came along also.

RICHARD DOUD: You actually taught on the project?

EDWARD LOPER: Yes.

RICHARD DOUD: There is something else I'd like to get your opinion on. There has been a certain amount of talk recently and actually a bill in congress somewhere in a subcommittee for the establishment of a national foundation of art and a national council on arts with the idea in mind to more or less subsidize art at least at a certain level. What do you think about government sponsorship again?

EDWARD LOPER: Yeh...I think it is essential. I think it is. I think it should be arranged as close to what the WPA art project was as possible. There are people who I think should be on like that 10 percent who are not necessarily needy. I think the youngsters who are going to be valuable in art, if they are going to be able to paint they are going to have to be subsidized for maybe ten years, five years anyway while they get some sort of a basis of painting. No culture has ever been known too much by it's automobiles is makes, you know. I mean...what we know about previous generations or previous cultural and civilizations is because of their arts or their laws. They have been the contributing thing not what...how easy a man could live. These are the things that are important. I think we are missing the boat by not letting these youngsters get a better chance, by all means.

RICHARD DOUD: You actually feel that the WPA art projects would be a good guide to follow in something like this..?

EDWARD LOPER: Yeh, I think it should be.

RICHARD DOUD: Do you feel that the political situation is perhaps enough different now that this wouldn't work? I mean, do you think there would be a danger of any interference by state or local government?

EDWARD LOPER: I think the government, the people who run the government would have no business in it. I think it should be put into the hands of the administration of special kind of men. I'm against poor men in government. I think it should be in the hands of very, very wealthy men or men who have always had access to money. I would say a man like Harriman or Ruckerfeller because these men know something about what art is about. They've developed over the years by association a certain given amount of taste. A man like Eisenhower would have been the worst possible thing that could have happened if he was to be involved in it.

RICHARD DOUD: I see.

EDWARD LOPER: Because he had no taste. He has no knowledge of what art is about. He would have chosen..a good example: when we were sending an exhibition to San Paulo, Brazil about three or four years ago...when Eisenhower was still in office. They asked America to send its contribution there like they did all the countries of the world. Well, Wyeth wanted to send illustrations. Well, it happened that we had men like Harriman and Ruckerfeller and other men who heard about it right away. Rather than let the government send it, they got the money and picked the pictures and sent them. That made us stop looking like fools. We would have been looking like fools in the whole deal.

RICHARD DOUD: Ha ha Yeh.

EDWARD LOPER: And at that time our painters in America are the leading abstract expressionists painters in the world and with him sending illustrations it would have made us look like pure fools. The government would look like a fool. Same thing with Russia. They have good abstract and very

modern painters in Russia. But, you see, the government don't like these kinds of painters because they don't do what the public likes. They are artists, they can't. If you are a decent artist of any kind you cannot turn out what the public is going to like because you've got to be ahead of your time in order to be what artists would be interested in.

RICHARD DOUD: Yeh.

EDWARD LOPER: First of all the public hears about abstract. Abstractions like Picasso was doing in 1914 the public is just beginning to know. They think they are painted this year. They don't know that these things are fifty years old. This is the danger of the public. A good example I was using for a certain kind of painter is that the public loves and buys and they tell them how wonderful they are. They are geniuses. They are wonderful. Rogers and Hammerstein made a lot of money. They were turning out something that the public would appreciate, that the public likes but you would not speak the name of Rogers and Hammerstein at the same time you say the word Bach or Beethoven. But, the public would buy Hamerstein faster than they would buy Bach or Beethoven. The kind of thing they like in painting is exactly the same thing. They like the painter who is going to please them, not the painter that has quality and you can't blame them. To understand or even appreciate painting, you've got to have a way to study it. You've got to understand the background of what painting is about.

RICHARD DOUD: Don't you think part of the trouble too along the same line is that modern painting or let's say (I hate to use the term avant garde) but it presents a challenge and so many people don't like to be challenged.

EDWARD LOPER: Alright. They don't want to have to go through the study of worrying...that's right, it's too much work. They don't want to do that. It's too much trouble. They want to be pleased. The same as they are pleased by music. How many people really like the very avant garde classical music?

RICHARD DOUD: Not many.

EDWARD LOPER: They say...what is it? A tonal music? They say. Who wants it? I mean, who wants to hear this? I mean, they want something that is going to please. I talked to men now and to hear them say...well men whose wives come to class would be discussing and a man would say, "Well, after I get through with business, I don't want to go somewhere and sit up there and worry myself watching a real deep play. When I go to a play in New York, I want to be pleased. I want to have something to make me feel good when I come out." What stupidity. I mean, you feel just as good after you've seen something important but they don't want to go to that trouble. It is too much work. It makes their brain operate. Humans don't want to work with their brains.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, it is sort of sad commentary on the human race, isn't it?

EDWARD LOPER: Well, it's not new. It happened to Rembrandt. It happened to Cezanne. Cezanne was a great artist. Nobody was looking. Rembrandt, they wouldn't even buy his pictures. They wanted him to paint like Van Dyke who was a stinker, you know...in comparison. Rembrandt was doing great things, the other man was turning out things to satisfy the public. Who needs a real important thing? It requires too much of people.

RICHARD DOUD: But, still this is the type of thing that we will be remembered by later on because...

EDWARD LOPER: Yes. But, we are not going to be any worse thought of than the public who didn't

buy Rembrandt.

RICHARD DOUD: That's true.

EDWARD LOPER: You see. I mean, today we look at that public and say, "What stupid fools they were not to buy a Rembrandt." I have a magazine article in 1916. They were selling Sir Joshua Reynolds for \$100,000. Sir Jacob Lawrence I guess his name was for \$175,000. In the same magazine they were selling Rembrandt for \$15,000.

RICHARD DOUD: Oh boy!

EDWARD LOPER: I have it in the room there.

RICHARD DOUD: Isn't that something.

EDWARD LOPER: Yeh. I have it in the room there. In 1916. They also have a portrait of Erasmus for \$2,000 by Hans Holbein and you wouldn't even think of using the work Reynolds and Holbein at the same time. And these people were...they...it is exactly the same today as it was then. It hasn't changed. There are people who have painters picked in America who they pay tremendous money for and it is not worth their money. But, because of the way that you can handle and manipulate the art business you can sell any third rate painter who you can build up to a tremendous personality by magazine articles and newspapers and a hint here and there in the gossip column. You can sell anything.

RICHARD DOUD: It's public relations, it is not art.

EDWARD LOPER: Public relations has nothing to do with art. We are making a study of it all the time, ever week in school.

RICHARD DOUD: Maybe a good federal art project if nothing...if it did nothing but more or less educate people towards the arts could change the whole entire picture of the art buying public.

EDWARD LOPER: Well, we tried to get...we talked to Mrs. Masie who is my instructor at Barnes Foundation, I personally think when she stayed into painting up to 1940, I'll say up to forty...say up to 1950 she is practically, she is an expert, she is the best expert in America. She is the most knowledgeable person of art in the country, maybe in the world. She is that brilliant. She is the most brilliant woman I've ever seen or ever met. Her knowledge of art surpasses everybody living. She was asked to do a television program in Philadelphia on one of the stations. She said, "Not the Inquirer station of course."

RICHARD DOUD: Ha ha ha

EDWARD LOPER: But, she was asked to do this program which would have been able to push knowledge across and...well the Barnes Foundation said, "No." It's such a shame because this would have been pushing it really good, so people would know something of what art is about. This is the best school in the country for the teaching of what art is about. It is just too bad that even there they don't take students from there and push them into positions all over the country lecturing and doing things. This could be part of that program. Take students of Barnes Foundation who are knowledgeable students and let them be talking to the public continuously. It has to be a long series. It would take at least. Well, we've gone since last September....I'd say it would have to be a weekly program and would have to last at least six months.

RICHARD DOUD: It would be a very worthwhile thing.

EDWARD LOPER: Yes.

RICHARD DOUD: Actually it would be a very small expenditure of money to really get this thing out.

EDWARD LOPER: Get this idea across to the people because the children in this country, they have this kind of a basic background to start with will probably produce something of value. We don't know what's coming out of the country at all. The potential is terrific. There are so many skilled children today, so many skilled youngsters but yet the ones with the push are going to get the name in the art...the real artist is not going to get known.

RICHARD DOUD: The age old story. It's not what you know but who you know.

EDWARD LOPER: That's right.

END OF INTERVIEW

Last updated... *September 26, 2002*