



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Henri
Marceau, 1964 September 11

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Henri Marceau on September 11, 1964. The interview took place in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and was conducted by Richard Keith Doud 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.

This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. The original transcript was edited. In 2022 the Archives retranscribed the original audio and attempted to create a verbatim transcript. Additional information from the original transcript has been added in brackets and given an -Ed. attribution.

Interview

RICHARD K. DOUD: This is an interview with Henri Marceau at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, September 11, 1964.

[Recorder stops, restarts.]

RICHARD K. DOUD: Mr. Marceau, if you would, I'd appreciate your giving us some idea of your own background in the arts and your experiences perhaps prior to your association with the Philadelphia Museum, and Mr. Kimball, who was regional director of this area. No dates if they don't come to mind. Just a general picture of what you were doing prior to that time.

HENRI MARCEAU: Well I'm very glad to. I'll start with my university training. And I was an architectural student at the Columbia University Architectural School. Graduated in 1920 and took competition for the Rome prize. I placed second in the first try and I tried again the second year and won the award. That gave me the privilege of studying at the American Academy in Rome for three years from 1922 to '25. And while there, I had an opportunity to broaden my outlook in architecture naturally, but also to visit the galleries in Italy and France and all over Europe at leisure and with a definite purpose in mind, actually, of informing myself on the sister arts and arts that I would be dealing with in connection with architecture.

At the termination of that time, I had gotten a position at the University of Pennsylvania as an assistant professor in the School of Fine Arts, teaching design and elements of architecture and history of architecture. In that, I tried to give the students what I considered something that had been missed in my own education: a broader outlook on the broad field of art, rather than just cleaving to architecture alone—

RICHARD K. DOUD: Sure.

HENRI MARCEAU: —and tried to suggest that they visit museums and consider that architecture was not their sole business to know about.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Yeah.

HENRI MARCEAU: To be well-rounded they had to know other things as well. Just after arriving in Philadelphia, I of course had known that the Johnson Collection existed here, and I went down to the Johnson House on South Broad Street and was interested in making studies of color, really. I was working to see if it could be of use to me in my teaching, you see. And so, I spent considerable time down there. Became friend with the—friendly with the curator there, whose name was Hamilton Bell. He was the first curator of the Johnson Collection, after it had been turned over to the city and opened as a public museum. And, well, after months of exchanging ideas and discussing certain pictures and so forth and so on, he said to me suddenly one day, quite unexpectedly, Would you look to come down and help me down here, do some research work, or— help me in running the collection? I said, Well, I would, very much. I find this very interesting.

So, I went down on a part-time kind of a basis and continued, of course, my university work. And this went on for [a matter of six months or -Ed.] so. We're talking of the fall of '25—fall or spring—fall of '25 and spring of '26. And then Hamilton Bell, after a matter of six months

or so, was taken ill, was taken off to the hospital. And we all thought it was a matter of temporary illness and so forth, but he stayed there and stayed there. And he was advanced in years. And actually he never returned. He died. And so, I was left with a collection in my hands to carry on as a stop-gap, you might say—

[00:05:03]

RICHARD K. DOUD: Yeah.

HENRI MARCEAU: —in the situation. And then the question arose whether I would like the position permanently as the curator of the collection. I said I would. So, this brought on a question of whether I would continue at the university and do this too. Clearly, this was not easy to do.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRI MARCEAU: Then, one Sunday afternoon, Fiske Kimball and his wife called on my wife and me downtown, and came in after a concert to make a call, and over the course of the conversation he said, Would you like to join the staff at the museum? And I said, Well, I said, That sounds very interesting. I said, I'd have to discuss this with the dean of the School of Fine Arts and see what he feels about it, and with the people at the Johnson Collection and see what they feel about it. And he said, Well, I've done that already. [Laughs.] He said, As far as they're concerned, they're perfectly happy to have you do what I'm asking you to do—or offering you—if that is what you want. So, that's the way it was, and I came out here in the fall of—October '28, and I've been here ever since. I started in with a title that they had at that time, called Curator of Fine Arts because they had curator—they had no sculpture curator.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRI MARCEAU: And this would sort of subsume the whole field, you see. And then, later on, the title was changed to Curator of Paintings. And then I got to be Chief of the Division of Paintings and Sculpture and so forth. And in due course became assistant director, and then associate director, and then when Fiske died, I was appointed in his place. And here I am today. [Laughs.]

RICHARD K. DOUD: Well, it's quite an interesting and varied background. How old were you when you took over as the Curator of Fine Arts here?

HENRI MARCEAU: Oh dear, I was towards 30, I guess. On that order. 31, 32.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Are you a native of this area?

HENRI MARCEAU: No. No, I was born in Richmond, Virginia and lived my early childhood [in New York. But these jobs that I'm talking about -Ed.] here in Philadelphia were the first and only jobs I've had in my whole life. [Laughs.]

RICHARD K. DOUD: I see. Well, I think you've done a fine job with them, nonetheless. Could you give me some sort of an idea of what the situation of the arts or artists was in the 1930s. Around 1933—late '33—when the first Public Works of Art Project was inaugurated. Just how bad were things in this area?

HENRI MARCEAU: Well, as you know very well, the lot of the practicing artist, at best, is never terribly exciting or promising financially.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Yes. Yes.

HENRI MARCEAU: Is that right? I think that this situation has changed recently, when the price scale of paintings on the market has gone from a couple of thousand dollars to [\$]20,000 or [\$]30,000, you see. When Mr. Hans Hofmann sells a painting for [\$]20, [\$]25,000. Stuart Davis used to sell paintings for [\$]35,000 and so on.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Yeah.

HENRI MARCEAU: It was different there, in the '30s as you say. And they were talking, artists in Philadelphia, not in terms of thousands of dollars, but hundreds of dollars, you see. And sales were few. There weren't that many galleries—active galleries to display their works of

art in Philadelphia. And the result was that when the Wall Street crash came and was followed by Depression years, the artists were among the first to feel the squeeze, very, very definitely and seriously, you see. And I knew many of them—were friends of mine—and I knew first-hand that they were having a hand-to-mouth existence. And so that the advent of the program to help artists, in addition to all the other help that was given to other fields of endeavor, was a most welcome thing to them, and to all of us who are interested in the artists. And I think it saved their lives. I mean, it actually, literally, saved them and their families from destitution. I mean, they were really in a bad state.

[00:10:25]

RICHARD K. DOUD: Well, the Public Works of Art Project was a rather limited thing. It was, as I understand, pretty much a competition-type program. Did it really offer that much—I'm talking about the first program—did it really offer much to Philadelphians? I mean, were there that many people in Philadelphia who qualified for the various competitions?

HENRI MARCEAU: Well, yes. The—I think they did. There were. One of the problems that we had, of course, in—as men in charge of the program here, Fiske and I—he had asked me to help—was to determine who was eligible for this help. In other words, we didn't want to see the help go to people who were Sunday painters—

RICHARD K. DOUD: Yes.

HENRI MARCEAU: —and not really concerned with art as a matter of making a livelihood, you see. So that the amateur was ruled out. We tried to set up some rules that would enable us to judge: Is a man qualified? Is he not qualified? And we had certain things that seemed to us to be reasonable. Has this man had formal training in a recognized art school? How far did he go in that? Did he finish? What were his awards?

RICHARD K. DOUD: Yes.

HENRI MARCEAU: And so forth and so on. Did he get a [inaudible] scholarship or what? Did he study abroad? In other words, was he a formed man and artist coming out of an art school? Did he—what was his exhibition record? Did he have a dealer? What—where his works? Were they owned privately, or in public museums? In other words, we tried to establish a level of performance and excellence that would differentiate between a practicing artist and the layman, you see.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Certainly.

HENRI MARCEAU: And there were quite a number who qualified in that category: graduates of the Academy of Fine Arts who were living here and working—painters and sculptors and printmakers and so forth. And I think we—by applying those standards, we got a very good group of men together. Then, of course, to supplement that, we asked them to bring in some work, and a group of us forming a jury went around and tried to decide whether the work matched the experience and the training and so forth. And together we made a package and said, This man is eligible. This man, we think, is not. And he'd better find help some other place, and so forth and so on. This was intended to make the most of the jobs available, you see. And not squander the money where it wasn't needed.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Since this early program was not classified as a relief program, did you people take into consideration the need of the individual—the financial need?

HENRI MARCEAU: We did.

RICHARD K. DOUD: You did.

HENRI MARCEAU: Yeah.

RICHARD K. DOUD: I see.

HENRI MARCEAU: We did. We—I think all of us at the time saw that this thing was going to be—not going to be over in a few months, you know.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Yes.

HENRI MARCEAU: And I think that we realized that it was important to help those who

needed it most. And those who couldn't get along or didn't have private means or anything, they were not eligible.

RICHARD K. DOUD: I see.

HENRI MARCEAU: We didn't consider them to be eligible.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Mr. Kimball was, I understand, the regional director though—probably through the PWAP Treasury Relief Project, and also the beginning of the Section of the Fine Arts competition, and this sort of thing.

HENRI MARCEAU: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD K. DOUD: Am I correct in assuming that he was not the—at least not the titular head of the WPA Federal Project. Was that Mary Curran?

HENRI MARCEAU: Mary Curran, yes. But even Mary Curran, you see, leaned very heavily on the—on us.

RICHARD K. DOUD: I'm sure she would, yes.

[00:15:00]

HENRI MARCEAU: [Laughs.] For advice. And for—to help formulate the program and keep it on the right track, you see. And so, we were in and out of Mary Curran's gallery all through the program. And she had had her little gallery of contemporary art, which had been the only little bright light, you might say, shining in Philadelphia, where living artists could display their works without being charged a tremendous amount in gallery fees, you see.

RICHARD K. DOUD: This probably had a lot to do with her being selected to head up the program.

HENRI MARCEAU: It did. No question about it, because she was—knew all the artists. They were all friends of hers. And she knew their work and she knew what their circumstances were. And she was the perfect person to put in charge of that.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Now I believe she was followed by a man from New York named Knotts [sic] [Ben Knott]. Is that—

HENRI MARCEAU: Ben Knotts [sic]. That's right. Ben Knotts [sic] came, and then, let's see, in 1933, the Johnson Collection was moved out here to the museum. That left the Johnson House vacant. And we thought that by this time, the Project had gotten quite a head of steam. They had not only sculptors, but they had people who—wood-carvers and, you know, frame makers and so forth to take care of all the details of the Project. They needed more space, and Mary Curran's gallery was tiny. So, there was an empty house that had plenty of large rooms, you know, could serve as galleries, so that an arrangement was made to move in there. That was made available, I think, on a rent-free basis. I'm not sure, but I think it was.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRI MARCEAU: And that's where Ben Knotts [sic] took over, or at least was in charge of that whole operation, which was very large. I don't know how many—I don't remember how many people were employed or were part of it.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Quite a lot.

HENRI MARCEAU: But it was crawling with people. [Laughs.]

RICHARD K. DOUD: Could you give us some idea of some of the problems that were faced by you and Mr. Kimball and possibly by the directors or the administrators of the Federal Art Project. I'm thinking of financial, social, political type problems now. What was going on in Philadelphia that made it, perhaps unique an area or a city? What particular problems did you have?

HENRI MARCEAU: Well, we had one problem, I think, that had to do with what was then known as the Artists' Union. Did you run across that in your studies? [Laughs.]

RICHARD K. DOUD: I've run across an artist union in Cleveland that [inaudible] a very big problem.

HENRI MARCEAU: Yeah. Well, this was a problem because for some reason or another they had, in their membership, a lot of the people that I'm talking about, who were on the Project and who were known to us. And then they had a lot among their membership who were artists by self-appointment, a little bit, you know? [Laughs.]

RICHARD K. DOUD: Yes.

HENRI MARCEAU: But they seemed to be the most vocal in their reactions to anything we did. And they were a bit of a gadfly on the back of everybody down here, constantly complaining and screaming that we were unfair in our handling the situation, and that this person shouldn't have been on, that person should have been on, and so forth and so on. And this didn't—never got out of hand, but it was a source of worry and irritation to all of us who were trying to do something that, after all, we had nothing to gain personally in the matter. We were just trying to help. And I know that I felt, and I think Fiske felt, that it was taking unfair advantage of somebody who was trying to help the community.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Yes.

HENRI MARCEAU: And this was the main thing that was difficult, and it was aided and abetted by—that left-wing group of the Artists' Union was aided and abetted by people who for some reason or other didn't care much about the museum and thought that we were getting into something we shouldn't have gotten into, and you know all this sort of thing.

[00:20:08]

RICHARD K. DOUD: Well, this is a tired question, I suppose, but was there a very strong left feeling in the art union?

HENRI MARCEAU: Well, yes there was. The left and all of this—all of these problems were created, I felt, by that left-wing of the group. It was sort of something you could never put your finger on exactly, naming names or anything, but you knew it existed. And there were certain individuals that we definitely knew were definitely against everything and what their thinking was I don't know that. But I did feel that there was that element, because it was not rational, it didn't take into account what had been done and what had been accomplished and make a balance of it, which I think would have been a favorable balance.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Yes.

HENRI MARCEAU: But if you look at it and want to find fault, the balance can be unfair, depending on how you work it out.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Did you have any problems with minority groups? I know that a city this size does have its problems.

HENRI MARCEAU: No. No, we didn't. We didn't. We had—there was one thing that was extremely interesting and I think Mary Curran should take a good deal of credit for it, Fiske, and everyone concerned with the operation. We had Sam Brown, who was a Colored artist, a very nice boy, and he was on the Project and did excellent work. We had a young Japanese student who was born in Japan but studied here—Onaga, you know.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Yes.

HENRI MARCEAU: And we had Christian, Jews, the race thing, the religious thing, had no bearing at all whatsoever. It was just entirely a matter of ability. And if the man had ability and was a serious artist and we felt would be hurt by not being part of the Project, we put him on.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Well, I've been encouraged in most of the conversations I've had with administrators that at no time did the government or any major political party try to dictate to the local administrators the type of things to be done or the styles to be followed. Is this true?

HENRI MARCEAU: That is absolutely true. Absolutely true. And as a matter of fact, that has been true of the city administration here, so far as the museum is concerned. I mean, they

don't come in and say push over do this, do that and so forth and so on. They give us a very substantial appropriation each year, and that's it. I mean, this is—then it's our job to run it. And I think as far as the city people are concerned, they had nothing to say. I think the state, the federal government, there were no directives coming out: You should do that, you shouldn't do that, you shouldn't do the other. The whole tone of the program was set here locally, and I gather it was that way in other places.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Seems to have been. We've been talking pretty much about Philadelphia, so far. Could you give me some idea of what was going on artistically in the rest of Eastern Pennsylvania? I think Mr. Kimball's area of responsibility ended at the Susquehanna River or something like that.

HENRI MARCEAU: Yeah.

RICHARD K. DOUD: What was going on upstate? [Inaudible] like—

HENRI MARCEAU: Well, we didn't have too much contact with that, upstate. We had, it seems to me, one sculptor who lived up in Aliquippa [ph]. That's outside of Pittsburgh someplace. And I think he did work up there in stonecutting. There was another man who lived up—oh, way back in Bucks County. And I think he was part of it. I don't recall any large group of people in the western part of the state. Now, whether they were taken over by—there was a Project in Pittsburgh, wasn't there?

RICHARD K. DOUD: Yes.

HENRI MARCEAU: Yeah. Whether they were taken over in the Pittsburgh area, I don't know. But it seems to me that this was mostly the Philadelphia and immediate environs here.

[00:25:00]

RICHARD K. DOUD: What about—excuse me—what about the New Jersey area? Were your people also more or less supervising southern New Jersey or—

HENRI MARCEAU: No, no.

RICHARD K. DOUD: —did that fall under someone else?

HENRI MARCEAU: No. It didn't come—that didn't come under our jurisdiction as I remember, at all. Now, where that was headed up, whether it was in Trenton or elsewhere, I don't know.

RICHARD K. DOUD: It was a strange situation. I guess in several states they have a metropolitan area and the rest of the state sort of floats away.

HENRI MARCEAU: Yeah.

RICHARD K. DOUD: And of course, the Newark area, and New York—

HENRI MARCEAU: Well, you see, I think that has changed a good deal now with the widespread interest in the arts and the tremendous increase in the number of people practicing in the arts, you find that decentralization has taken place since that time. I think, before that, the artists tended to gravitate to the centers of big population.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Certainly.

HENRI MARCEAU: And—hoping that there would be a way of finding a living, you see. And as a matter of fact, there was a—has always been—a tendency for some Philadelphia artists to leave the Philadelphia area and go to New York, you know—

RICHARD K. DOUD: Yes.

HENRI MARCEAU: —as the biggest magnet to attract success. So that we found that all through the—this century, as a matter of fact, you take—[Charles] Sheeler started here, you know, and all of those men who were working on the Philadelphia press were all over in New York.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Yes.

HENRI MARCEAU: And Charlie Demuth [ph] and, you know. They were all Pennsylvanians, and all Philadelphians associated with, mostly, the Academy of Fine Arts.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Yes. You mentioned that the interest in art has more or less spread away from the major cities. Can you assess the value of the WPA community art centers in this movement? Is it possible to determine how much of a part they played in perhaps making the rest of the country conscious of the arts, or appreciative of the arts?

HENRI MARCEAU: Well, I think that it's hard to pinpoint it exactly. Certainly it, I think, had an effect on bringing art and artists to the attention of the lay public. I think of an area like the Santa Fe area, you know, where Vernon Hunter—do you know that name at all?

RICHARD K. DOUD: Yes.

HENRI MARCEAU: Well, Vernon Hunter was there, and I went out this—to see him and to see what he'd been doing. Well he'd gotten down right out into the desert almost, and found a lot of artists who were scrubbing along and there was one Mexican sculptor there that he discovered, you know. And he was an awfully good—Patrociño Barela. I don't know whether you've heard that name. But Pat Barela was a grand fellow, living down in the country making little wood sculptures out of pieces of wood that he found on the—in the countryside. And Vernon Hunter thought he was good and put him on the Project and he turned out some nice things. Now, there's a man that no one in that area would have paid a bit of attention to. But the fact that the Project recognized him and so forth certainly stimulated his friends and their friends to realize, Well, something's going on here. There's an artist. And I think that kind of thing—there were seeds planted all over, certainly.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Yes.

HENRI MARCEAU: And then of course, subsequently, there had been a terrific upsurge in interest in art through, oh, the advent of color photography and color reproductions and big magazines writing stories all the time, you know. And it's ballooned out so that now art is big business and [laughs] it's no longer a long-haired thing.

RICHARD K. DOUD: That's sort of strange that the '30s gave rise to the growth of picture magazines. There's *Life* and *Look* and this sort of thing.

HENRI MARCEAU: That's right.

RICHARD K. DOUD: And another—everything seemed to come forth at about the same time.

[00:30:11]

HENRI MARCEAU: Yeah. Well, the—of course it has to do with mass information, you see. The fact that *Life* magazine can put out weekly editions, and goes out to how many to millions—I don't know what their circulation is, but it's fantastic. And they have been very, I think, enlightened from the very beginning in always having something—some art story of one kind or another. And this gets around. And then the fact that more and more people see reproductions of paintings and—that they can buy and put a frame around and hang on the wall and all that.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Yeah.

HENRI MARCEAU: And I think that the public schools have done a good deal in informing young people in art and bringing them into the museums and so forth. And as they grow up, their children do the same thing. So it's just snowballed. And I've seen it since I've been here.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRI MARCEAU: Since those years. I remember when I first came here at the museum, the building wasn't finished and we had no idea that it would be finished. In fact, if anyone had told me then that we'd be where we are now, where we're practically scraping the bottom of the barrel for space, I would have said, You're crazy. Because, at that time, people couldn't have cared less whether you had a museum or not, you know? Many of them.

RICHARD K. DOUD: That's right. That's right.

HENRI MARCEAU: There were just a very few people here in Philadelphia—some of the old families—collectors like the Widener [ph] group and the Elkins [ph] group, and so forth and so on, who had been collecting pictures and interesting art who heavily supported the museum with their own funds, you see. And the city had not yet grown up to the fact that an art museum was something terribly important. And our appropriations were limited. And as a matter of fact, during the Depression, it went down suddenly from something like 100—and I forget what it was—[\$]150,000 or so, that we got from the City of Philadelphia, now [\$]50,000, to manage the building. And it meant we had to close three days a week, and we went practically into mourning. I mean, you know, [laughs] there was nothing to do. We had to let people go. Some of our staff had to find other jobs and so forth. So that there's been a terrific upsurge of interest— popular interest in art.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRI MARCEAU: And what art means for people and for their lives and so forth and so on. And then the city fathers had realized that this is something that people talk about, not only in Philadelphia but elsewhere. And people come to see these things here, so that they've been extremely generous and helpful.

RICHARD K. DOUD: You were talking about, well, two things, earlier about the art union, and just now about the lack of interest in museums at that time. Do you recall whether or not the press, in general—the local press—was favorable, first towards the institution here, and second, towards what you people were doing as far as administrating a federal Project in the city?

HENRI MARCEAU: There was very little interest. Very little interest in—either in the museum or in the federal Project. This was a matter of planting stories if you could, working awfully hard to get maybe a little stick in the paper announcing that on such and such a day a little exhibition is going to open. You know, this much—practically no photographs of anything because it took too much space, you see. If you could boil down your story to a one-column job, you had chances of getting it in. But if you sent a photograph that needed a two-column or three-column spread, chances are you wouldn't get it.

RICHARD K. DOUD: I see.

HENRI MARCEAU: I mean, this was standard.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRI MARCEAU: And as I remember, we were very much worried about the whole thing, and the museum council here was formed somewhat later than that. We got together and discussed the question of how to get the papers to pay attention to what was going on in the museums. Not only this museum, but the Academy of Fine Arts, and the Franklin Institute, and the Academy of Natural Sciences, and so forth and so on.

[00:35:04]

And we got—we thought we'd ask one of the editors of the newspaper, *the Enquirer*, to come up and talk to us. We put our problem in front of him and said, Now, how can we get stories printed in your paper? We send you releases and nothing happens. And he said, Well, you've got to try to humanize them. You've got to try to make them available and of interest to the man on the street. And he said, I'll tell you an example: If I send a photographer out to say—to make a photograph of a parade, and if he stands and makes the photograph of the parade and soldiers march—I mean, people marching up. He said, This is not news. There are thousands of photographs of that kind of thing. But he said, But a photographer who makes it new, let's say he takes—sees some people standing up and then there's a little girl sitting down on the curb and her father standing there and he takes a shot through the father's legs and shows the little girl and shows the parade in the distance, this is news, you see.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Right. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRI MARCEAU: [Laughs.] And so, he said, You've got to try to send photographs in that have that kind of quality. And then you'll get you'll story over. But he said, Otherwise, if it's just a straight shot, he said, chances are the editor will say, "Put it in the waste basket."

RICHARD K. DOUD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRI MARCEAU: Now, there's a good deal in that. And also, he stressed very seriously, very strongly, the problem of the column spacing of stories. He said, You've got to remember that your story is in competition with hundreds of others that are coming in. And see if you can't get your message over—if you have a photograph, instead of making it in this format, try to get it in that format. Because that can be boiled down to one column. If you make it this format, it won't get in. You see?

RICHARD K. DOUD: Yes.

HENRI MARCEAU: So, all of these things were good things to know. Now that has been very much relaxed since those days. Now they want the [inaudible] photographs. They want the [inaudible]. And sometimes you get a good piece right across the whole Sunday paper, you know, in color. But this didn't happen in the '30s, or even in the early '40s.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Sir, could you give us perhaps a few names of people who should be remembered as working here in the '30s? People who might have benefitted perhaps more than others from working on government art projects.

HENRI MARCEAU: Well—

RICHARD K. DOUD: Some of the outstanding [inaudible]—

HENRI MARCEAU: Well, I think that one come to my mind: J. Wallace Kelly, who was a sculptor and was on the Project and has gone on to continue practicing his art in Philadelphia as a sculptor and as a teacher. We employed him to do some work in the Samuel Memorial, out here on the East River Drive. He did a statue of a plowman there. And he's been—taught at the Academy of Fine Arts. He's taught his own classes and he's taught down at the Fleisher Memorial and has had commissions and sold works of art, exhibited around and been a successful artist, I think.

Jim House [ph] is another one who is a sculptor and still working effectively and has taught—had a good following. Julius Bloch was another one who was one of the older artists at the time. And he's had a very distinguished career and works—we own some of his works here at the Academy of Fine Arts. He's one of the ones that had one of his pictures in the White House.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Yes.

HENRI MARCEAU: You remember that? That Mrs. Roosevelt liked very much. And then Onaga was another one. He's dead. Yoshimatsu Onaga. And he's the one that—I think I told you earlier about his story. We gave him a space to work in the old Johnson stable at the back of the Johnson House, in town, because he wanted to carve a tremendous stone. And there was no place in Johnson House you could put this piece of stone, weighing about seven tons, without having to go down through the floors to the cellar.

[00:40:11]

So, we set him up there, and with this enormous piece of stone, which took quite a bit of doing to get purchased, you see. Requisitioned and purchased and gotten out from some quarry down in Tennessee, I think it was, and then shipped up. So, it was quite a bit to do. So a little bit unheard of. And I think they had to pull wires quite up high in the administration. However, one day, Mrs. Roosevelt came to Philadelphia, and she came especially, among other things, to see—visit Mary Curran's gallery with all the—so, Mary Curran heard about it and sent word out to the artists and said, Quick come next Tuesday. Mrs. Roosevelt's going to be there. We'll put up an exhibition. And well, come and meet her. So, they came, and she received them very graciously. She was a wonderful woman. And when came—when Onaga came by, he was presented. "Mrs. Roosevelt, this is Yoshimatsu Onaga, sculptor." "Oh," she said, "Yes. Onaga. You're the one who wanted that big stone. Did you get it?" How she knew this, I just don't know. I mean it's just this Roosevelt touch, you know.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Yes.

HENRI MARCEAU: And oh, yes, he got it, and so forth and so on. Well, she said, "I hope that you do what you want with it." And so, she couldn't have been—well, of course, he was just in seventh heaven, you know. But she had this personal interest and this amazing ability to call a tune right on the nose, you know. Which the president had too, you know, President

Roosevelt.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What happened ultimately to the—

HENRI MARCEAU: We have it right out here. It's in the courtyard. And Onaga started in, I think it was intended to be a heavier figure, but in the end it got to be quite a slender one [they laugh].

RICHARD K. DOUD: Chipping away.

HENRI MARCEAU: After chipping away. But he worked in that stable. And the poor man—I used to go down and see him—there was no heat there. There was a little potbelly stove that we rigged up for him, and he worked in there during the bitterest cold. You'd go down find him all wrapped up with stocking cap and his ears and all covered over with earmuffs and so forth and cutting, and really it was fascinating. Always very jolly.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Well—

HENRI MARCEAU: And see, who else? Oh, there were quite a number, whose names—those were the ones that sort of come immediately to mind.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Wasn't there some attempt at one time to have a portrait of President Roosevelt painted by Mr. Bloch?

HENRI MARCEAU: I think so. And I don't know why that—how that failed to come about. I suppose it was a question of posing time. I don't know. I don't know what the story was. But there was that suggestion that he might do it.

RICHARD K. DOUD: I was wondering whose idea it was.

HENRI MARCEAU: Well, I have an idea. Maybe Mary Curran. [Laughs.] Could be.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Well I'd like to ask you a question. If you don't want to answer it or can't answer it, it's quite all right with me. But I do think it has a certain role in the story of Philadelphia and particularly the troubles and trials and the bad side of it. But I understand that for some time there was a—sort of a feud in the city with a Dr. Barnes. Can you give me some general idea of what it was about, why this thing happened, and what came of it?

HENRI MARCEAU: Well, that story goes back to, I think, the year something like 1922. Long before Fiske Kimball was here in Philadelphia, or I, for that matter. And I think that he, as I remember, exhibited some of his pictures down at the Academy of Fine Arts. They asked him to show them down there. And the City of Philadelphia at the time was not ready to appreciate the value of people like Matisse, or [laughs] you know.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRI MARCEAU: Cubist, post-Cubist things, and so forth and so on. And there was a good deal of criticism—or rather ridicule almost in the press around it and it made him quite mad and so I think that tended to turn him against Philadelphia. Feeling well, you're just casting pearls before swine—

RICHARD K. DOUD: Yes.

[00:45:02]

HENRI MARCEAU: —I mean, I think that kind of a thing. And he seemed to build up a terrific animosity against any established institution that had to do with art. In other words, if you were a museum, why, this was something which he didn't want anything to do with. If you were associated with a museum, you came under the black ball of the institution, you see. And—so that, I think, Fiske when he came here in '25, I think it was, and when this building was opened in '28, he asked Dr. Barnes if he would lend us some pictures to—for the inaugural exhibition, you see, for the opening of the museum. And he got a blistering letter from Dr. Barnes to the effect that he certainly wouldn't think of doing such a thing.

And this went on and on and on and didn't get any better as the years went by. And I think that with the advent of the Art Project and the Artists' Union, a lot of these young students had been students of the Barnes Foundation, you see, so they were more or less under his

influence. And I think probably some of the animosity that was stirred up in the Artists' Union probably was, if not actually invented by [inaudible], at least was allowed to go on with approval, either active approval or tacit approval. In other words, he didn't do anything to stop it, and probably felt that this was one way of sort of undermining the museum and the whole thing.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Was there association—

HENRI MARCEAU: Although some of these—excuse me—some of the men who had been there as students were on the Project, you see.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Yes.

HENRI MARCEAU: But—and they were favorable, actually, to what was going on. But this didn't help the situation in his view, you see, the fact that we had made no difference between the students from his place or from any other place in awarding positions in the program.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Didn't matter at all to him

HENRI MARCEAU: No [laughs].

RICHARD K. DOUD: Was there—

HENRI MARCEAU: But he was a strange individual. He came down to see me at the Johnson Collection—before I was here at the museum—when he was writing his book on French primitives. And we of course had some French primitives in the collection and he said, I'd like to see them. Where are they? They're not on view. I said, No, they're upstairs on storage. But I said, If you will tell me when you want to come, prepared to work, I'll get them for you and make it easy for you. You can look at them front and back, measure them, do whatever you want. So, [inaudible] says, fine. So, he made an engagement and in due course arrived, and I got—I did what I said I would. And he and his assistants spent, oh, I don't know, two, three days maybe, and came back and forth

And then as he was leaving he said, Have you ever seen my collection? And I said no. He said, Would you like to? And I said, Yes, I would, very much. And he said, Well, come out next Sunday. So, I did. I went out with my wife, and we listened to a concert or something then we were given the option to see the collection, and then he invited us again and we went out and then shortly after that I came to join the museum staff. And then I was just written off. [They laugh.] That did it.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Had there been any prior association between Mary Curran and Barnes, before she became—

HENRI MARCEAU: Well, I think as director of the gallery, naturally, she did—I don't know that she ever studied out there, Mary Curran. I doubt it. I'm not sure about that. But—

RICHARD K. DOUD: Somehow, I have the idea that she was sort of caught in the middle of this thing.

HENRI MARCEAU: Well, I think she was.

[Cross talk.]

RICHARD K. DOUD: [Inaudible.]

HENRI MARCEAU: I think she was. You see, she had the gallery and I think that he was never very friendly to Mary Curran.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Well, I get the impression that—to sort of wrap this up a bit—that you certainly feel, at least at that time, government sponsorship was the answer to the problem of the arts, not only in Philadelphia but probably nationwide.

[00:50:08]

Do you think there's any need for—or any reason for—a government to be interested in the arts today? Not to perhaps sponsor projects such as it did in the '30s, but should it actively

support the various arts.

HENRI MARCEAU: I think so. I think it should. I think that I would hesitate to say that there's any need for government sponsored projects. Certainly not. I think that the artist now has sort of become more or less emancipated, and can see his way financially to making a living and commissions and such. But I think that where the government should come in is to purchase art and use it. This is what I mean: We're constantly being asked to lend, to the federal government, paintings from art galleries to be shown in American embassies abroad, you see. Well, with a few hundred thousand dollars, which would be appropriated by the federal government a year—

RICHARD K. DOUD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRI MARCEAU: —dropped into the national budget of I don't know how many billions, would be peanuts of the smallest order, you see.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Right.

HENRI MARCEAU: And they could do a tremendous amount of work and use these things in American embassies abroad to show American culture. Why should the Philadelphia Museum of Art, let's say, divest itself of pictures that they bought with people who have given money to buy pictures, or who have given pictures to the museum and have the museum suddenly up and lend them to an embassy in Cairo, you know, or in South America, or wherever?

RICHARD K. DOUD: Sure.

HENRI MARCEAU: I mean, this is a national thing. It should be done nationally. And I'm thinking, for instance, the French government, they had for years—I don't know if they have now or not—but they used to buy out of the salons a number of pictures which they sent to provincial museums, you see.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRI MARCEAU: Well, of course, the whole museum situation in France and in most European countries is a matter of national concern. And I think that probably our system is better. Have the cities have their own museums independent of the national government. But where the national government could come in is to serve as a buyer and a collector of works of art by their artists, where it's being done in this country as evidence of American culture.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRI MARCEAU: [Coughs.] Excuse me. [Clears throat.]

RICHARD K. DOUD: Well, as a final question, are you encouraged by the situation—the art situation in Philadelphia and the future arts in this particular [community -Ed.]?

HENRI MARCEAU: Oh yes. Yes. Oh, yes, I think it's going great guns. I think there's a tremendous, tremendous vitality and the Artists' Union has of course has been supplanted by the Artist Equity Association, which, in Philadelphia, has been a very helpful organization. We worked with them on many projects and in a very effective kind of way. And then the city of course has instituted what I consider the most important program of requiring by law the use of one percent of the cost price of any public building to be used for works of art. In other words, if there's a building that's going up, one percent of the contract price has to be set aside for a mural or a piece of sculpture or a fountain with sculpture or whatever. Mosaic, or so forth. And this is a tremendous thing because it has been not only being done by the city but is now being done by industry.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRI MARCEAU: And industry is beginning to feel that it doesn't do them any harm to have a piece of sculpture in front of their building. And it rather enhances it. And this is a breakthrough that I think is very important: making art—turning art into a commodity rather than just something that is way off in left field.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Sounds like sort of an evolution, where we're coming back where it was, perhaps—

HENRI MARCEAU: That's right.

RICHARD DOUD: —300 years ago.

HENRI MARCEAU: That's right. Where it was an essential part of a building, just as a roof is an essential part of a building. They did it. It wasn't something added just by whim.

[00:55:14]

RICHARD K. DOUD: Mr. Marceau, I certainly appreciate your remarks. And if you can think of anything that you'd like to add that we haven't touched on—

HENRI MARCEAU: No, I don't think that I have anything to add. I don't know whether I've answered your questions as you wanted me to answer them, but I [laughs] mean—

RICHARD K. DOUD: It's been a very interesting and [inaudible]—

HENRI MARCEAU: What I've told you is what I believe sincerely, and as well as I can remember what took place.

RICHARD K. DOUD: Well, I want to thank you again very much.

HENRI MARCEAU: Well, you're most welcome.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]