



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Louis Schanker,
circa 1963

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Louis Schanker on or about 1963. The interview was conducted by Dr. Harlan Phillips for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Louis Schanker and Dr. Harlan Phillips have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I think probably a good way to get into this is to...how a city fellow developed an interest in art initially; why an artist--you?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. Well, I don't know why I'm an artist. I started when I was sixteen.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I just felt like...I don't know...I tell you it was very funny. Some people have different ideas. Someone said to me just the other day as a matter of fact, "We heard you started to paint because your sister bought you a Christmas present, a paint box." And I said, "Well, the paintbox is okay; there was a paintbox but my sister didn't buy me, my older sister didn't buy me a Christmas present. I bought my brother, my older brother, a Christmas present when I was fifteen." And I said, "He liked to draw a little bit, as a matter of fact he was very good--at that time he was going to City College--and I was about fifteen and a half I think. I didn't know what I wanted to do, an artist, I never.... You know, my idea of an artist was a nice pansy kind of a guy paints, you know, paints, and I was too gruff for that kind of stuff, see, and I'd been working on farms and so anyway.... And I was working at the time, fifteen and a half, and I didn't care for college or high school much. As long as I graduated from public school it was fine. But anyhow, I had some experience with...so I said, well, I'll buy my brother...I saw a little set in the window, a little wooden box set, you know, with those two camel's hair brushes and pictures to color.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And this was a long time ago before they had the kind they have now. So I brought it to him and he looked at it and he said, "Ah, I don't want this thing." I said, "Well, if you don't want it, maybe I can try it." That's how I got started. I started to paint those little things, then immediately got interested. That's the way I got into it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You did get interested?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Very much so because then I started going to the Metropolitan, which I never was before, and I started copying Rembrandt paintings and then at sixteen I went to Cooper Union at night and worked in the daytime. I went to the art school at Cooper Union.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Then they had night art school; they didn't have it--just for men....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: There was no what they have today, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: So I went there for three years till I got to the life drawing class. I got tired of drawing from casts; for three years you draw from casts before they allow you to go into life drawing classes. Just like everything else, just as soon as I graduated into the life drawing class, I said, "To hell with it!" I'm going to quit my job and see if I can't paint full time in the daytime." And so I went down to the Educational Alliance which gave me a range from nine in the morning till eight or ten at night if I wanted to be there. Well, I couldn't be there that long because I had to get a job. So I worked from nine, ten in the morning till about five, six in the afternoon painting, you know, and drawing. And I got a job at night; I got a job at night at a soda fountain.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Which kept you alive.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Which kept me going enough, just enough. And I got my own studio; I had my own studio by the time I was eighteen down on East Broadway.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh!

LOUIS SCHANKER: One of those old, old rat studios for ten dollars a month but a nice skylight. And no heat and no hot water, you know, those old real attic skylights. And for years I went there, you know, with the Soyers and Chaim Gross and Adolph Gottlieb, I think, came later. Peter Blume was there at the time. We were all working there.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And then that was about all the art training I had. I was at the Art Students League for a while. I gave that up quick.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. At Cooper Union were there any teachers that were helpful? Sometimes they kick open a window, sometimes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, no, not.... Well, Starkweather, a man by the name of Starkweather, he's dead now--I don't know whether you know the name?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And he was a nice, pansy--I don't know whether you want me to put this in or not. Well, he was a nice, a nice man, and he had a Sunday painting class which he got students from his class to come to a Sunday painting class--so also it gave him a living. So I went there at night and Starkweather was very strict about drawing the cast, you know, eyes and ears and a nose, then you graduated to heads, and then the third year you graduated to the whole figure, Greek figures or Michelangelo figures. And I'd done them; I'd done my stint on that in charcoal, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And I got something from him, sure. You always get something from someone, you know, no matter if he's good at...I mean if he's a teacher you get something.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And I wanted to get something so I got it. So I used to go to his Sunday painting classes; he had about eight or ten people there, students of his. And I used to paint there on Sundays. That was my....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Extra-curricular.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, yes. Part of the...you know, I wanted to learn how to paint too and he was teaching painting. They didn't teach painting at Cooper Union. It was just life drawing classes as far as I can remember. And there were no day classes for men, you know, it was all engineering school or drafting school. In the daytime there were no art classes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No.

LOUIS SCHANKER: It was just that night class.

HARLAN PHILLIPS:

LOUIS SCHANKER: That's right. But later on they had commercial art; they had commercial art where they had mixed classes. I even did that. I took a commercial art course and I worked for a commercial artist for a year and I gave that up because that wasn't my medium you know. So I gave that up.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, when you made the...decided to go to Cooper Union night classes and the Sunday stint extra, what were you going to do, just become an artist? I mean what were the alternatives for you?

LOUIS SCHANKER: What do you mean alternatives?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, you have to put groceries on the table. You have to...?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, I worked. I wasn't married.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes, but how did you relate...?

LOUIS SCHANKER: I wasn't living with my family. I had my own place, see.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: So I worked at night and I had a job and it fed me; it paid my rent, paid my art materials. And then I left everything and went traveling for about two and a half, no, about two years as a hobo, and.... I went down during the Sparks Circus in Macon, Georgia. And I traveled with the circus for about six or eight months. Sparks is no longer in existence. It was a small circus. Do you remember it, the name? They used to play in Queens.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right!

LOUIS SCHANKER: And we used to come up...I remember we went all the way up to Maine. I left home, you know, owing and everything, and I got down to Sparks Circus, the first stop is Long Island--Queens--and I called up my family and I just said, "I'm at the circus, goodbye," you know and of course they were very angry and I don't blame them because I just left home and left my mother and family. My father I think had died then. So I just got on Sparks Circus and then traveled up to Queens and then from Queens we hit all the little towns in New Hampshire and Vermont, Maine. Then from Maine we went out West all the way out to Minnesota and we all played all those small towns there. We came up through the South too, you know; we played all the Southern small towns, anything under 5,000 was our deal. Then I joined the Barnum and Bailey Circus not for too long. I got out to the West Coast; then I worked in the wheat fields in the old days when they didn't have threshing combines like today, they had horses.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh, man! That's a....

LOUIS SCHANKER: It was hard work.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Look, it's a ball-busting job even on a cool day with a thresher.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. Well, and the hot...well, I tell you it was good. I was big enough to take it; I was a big man, you know, I was about my height now.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: When was this--in the '20's?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. '21.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: '21.

LOUIS SCHANKER: 1920, '21, '22.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And then I came back.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You didn't do any art during this period?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes, I drew, but I don't know where the hell the stuff is today, you know. I made lots of drawings, you know--how much chance--you get up at 5:00 in the morning. I took care of horses so I had to take the horses and drive them into the camping grounds and you put up your stakes and then you feed the horses and then you ate. I had to feed the horses first and clean them and get them ready for the parade. Ten-thirty there was a parade. The calliopes and all that and then. you know. in the afternoon you had two performances and you had to get the horses cleaned, so you hadn't much time. But I did a little drawing, and no painting. And it's 1924....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But what a way to see the country!

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. Well, I really saw it. And then after I quit that I was all broke for a while. I quit the circus and got a job in North Dakota, Minot, North Dakota, in the wheatfields and we followed that all the way up into Canada, you know, a threshing team. We worked with a threshing...like gypsies, we lived like gypsies.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That could be interesting. That's some job.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, then I came back and I started to really, you know, work seriously painting and got another studio...by that time my studio was gone so I got another studio.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: A good bit of this I suspect is a kind of acquaintanceship that one has in the arts, you know--who you see, who you go with.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, you see, as a matter of fact in those days the people I knew were Moses Soyer, Edgar Soyer, Isaac Soyer, Chaim Gross, you know, those people I don't know who all and see... still....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: But that's what it was. Then around 1930, I....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, in the '20's did you have an extra job to keep yourself going in the late '20's when you got back from the wheatfields?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes, I went back to...I got a night job. I always ate well--soda fountain, you could always eat at a soda fountain, so I never had to worry about my food. And I was held up once in Brooklyn. I worked in Bedford section, on Bedford Avenue in Brooklyn, and just before we were closing we were held up and they took all my fourteen bucks. Well, actually they didn't hurt us; they just came in with guns and that was that. That was just before 1929, right after, you know, the big market....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, did you get a chance to show in the '20's then you got back?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, I was showing at--I forgot the name of the gallery--it was a city gallery and I forgot the name of it. We had a city gallery in those days. We don't have it today. Right? We had a little city gallery that was run by the city. And I showed in group shows.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You did show in group shows?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Oh, yes. Yes. Well, I had a show. I showed at Marie Harriman Gallery in 1929, 1930; there was a big kind of a competition show. And at that time I was still painting realistically so I had painted a portrait of my niece who was five at that time and so I entered it like anybody else. I don't know how many, five hundred people, at the and I was picked so there was, I think, twenty of us that were picked out of that group, and I was one of them. So I had my reproduction in the paper and at that time I signed my name "A. Louis" so no one knew me, see. It's still A. Louis. So that was the first time I had a reproduction in--I think it was Jewell at the time--in the New York times on Sunday. And then the Marie Harriman Gallery sort of closed up afterwards. Walt Kuhn was the big guiding light of that gallery.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: So that was nice. I got picked, you know, in the show. And then after that I showed in some, you know, various group shows but I had my first show in '33 but in between then I'd been to Paris. I went to Paris in 1931.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You went to Paris in '31?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. On the money I'd saved. I did save some money. Don't ask me how but....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Look, nine-cent bread.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. Well....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: In part, yes. Nine-cent bread.

LOUIS SCHANKER: But, you know, the salaries were commensurate with, you know, the kind of job you had but....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It went a little further.

LOUIS SCHANKER: It did. Well, I...you know it was--you had to pay for models--well in those times you didn't pay for models; you'd use your girl friends.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Did you frequent the Whitney Club?

LOUIS SCHANKER: No. I heard of the Whitney Club but I wasn't--again there was an "in" group. I wasn't in it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I wondered about that.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I wasn't in it. I knew Soyer was in it and a few of other guys were in it but I was never in it. At that time I was beginning to break away from pure realism already, you see, and so, you know, you didn't belong to something. But I did...my first show at the Whitney was 1936. That's the first time they accepted my work. I was with Paul Godsoe. He had a gallery; he called it Gallery Secession and all the guys who are in it now are showing around still except a few guys--Milton Avery, for instance, and there was Rothko in it, Gottlieb in it and

the same kind of a group.... We were the same group. Chuck Batzoff was in it. I don't know whether you know him.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And that was during the WPA days already.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Well, what about artists organizations in the '20's, groups that got together, talked about aesthetics, talked about literature, poetry--were you in on this?

LOUIS SCHANKER: No.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You didn't care?

LOUIS SCHANKER: No. I was a complete individualist. The only thing--in the '20's I was...well, you see, I didn't have time. You see, I don't know what those other guys did for a living but I know I had to work. Like I'd go to work at 7:00 in the evening and then I'd come home around 2:00 and then by that time--2:00--I'd usually go to sleep and get up around ten and start working in the studio and that was it. There are different people.... I met lots of people from the National Academy. There were a lot of parties going on, you know, that kind of stuff, but don't forget it was during Prohibition and I was doing my share of drinking like everybody else so I guess a lot of these guys who I knew maybe didn't drink that much so I went around with guys who drank more, you know, and enjoyed myself, so I had my, you know, enjoyment. But I did know...there's no one that sticks out in my mind that I could really say there was any group because it wasn't until the '30's that you had the groups.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: You know, after the WPA got started.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I just wondered if there were any antecedent groups, you know. There may not have been.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, there was the Eight but they were, you know, Sloan and that group; they were out of my milieu because they were much older. And I guess if I cared for their work I might have been in with them but I probably didn't care for their work that much.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: What about--what's his name--Hamilton Easter Field? And his school?

LOUIS SCHANKER: I never heard of him. I never heard of Hamilton Easter Field.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That doesn't surprise me. Of course your hours were pretty well used up.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, did you get to the point where you made a sale of a painting?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, yes, now you bring me that . The first painting I sold was a student show when I was at the Alliance yet. I was nineteen and we had a big student show from the Educational Alliance at the old Anderson Galleries on 57th Street and Park Avenue. And someone--they told me I sold my painting for 25 bucks, you know. All right it's a first painting. My father who wanted me, if I was going to be an artist, wanted me to be a commercial artist to make money. He really was gasping and so was I. Twenty-five dollars in those days was a lot of money and to even sell a picture.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And another thing. I sold a piece of sculpture too when I was at the Alliance. You see, I was doing sculpture; in those days you could do sculpture. I don't know who was teaching sculpture there but I studied etching with Aurbach Levy and I studied sculpture with some man I don't remember any more but, see, I was doing sculpture at the same time then as I was doing painting. There's a very early head of mine over there, that oak head. That's all my early sculpture over there. And the second one from the right from the wall, see, that's an unfinished piece of oak, that I carved in that time. That's a long time ago. Some of those are in the '30's, those sculptures there. So I was doing sculpture at the same time. This woman came to me and she said, "I'd like to have you do a sculpture, a head of my boy." I said, "Well, I work; I'm working in Plastilene" like everybody else. I wasn't working in stone or wood; I couldn't afford it, you know. You had to buy stone, you had to buy wood. I suppose I could if I wanted to really but I suppose I was still interested in painting. And I painted portraits and nudes and, you know, there's only so much you can do; you do six days a week or five days a week at the Alliance, you know, straight every day. So I said, "Well, I'll do one; I don't know whether you'll like it." She said, "Well, I saw what you're doing and maybe you could do a head of my boy" who was five or six. So that's where I got a few bucks too, not a...he... So I made a head, you know. He was a pretty little boy so I made it, you

know. I don't have a photograph even of it. So she liked it, which surprised me. So she said, "How much is it?" I said, "Well..." you know I asked a lot of money--I said, "Seventy-five dollars." And she nearly dropped to the floor; because I should have made that thing before but you don't do those things, make the price before. So I said, "Well, it'll cost me forty dollars to have it cast." See, I didn't know much about casting then. If you want to get a good job done, get a man to cast it and forty dollars of course...all I'm getting is thirty-five dollars." She said, "Well, that's fair enough." So that was also during my student days. That's about all I can remember about it. And then I sold a few things, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Here and there, yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Not....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: How about the drawings? Did you have an outlet for your drawings?

LOUIS SCHANKER: No. Well, I drew a lot but I never really showed some.... You know, I never showed that much in the first place because, you know, it wasn't like it is today; when you're twenty-one you have a show at Knoedler's or Marlborough. It wasn't like that at all. In those days before you'd get into a gallery outside the, you know, City Gallery, you just couldn't get in, you know. I was still a student--let's put it--I call myself a student; I still am one in a way because I'm always, you know, moving around. But I showed at one gallery in those days, the Morton Gallery; I don't know whether you ever heard of that. It's a long time ago.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: It was called the City Art Centre that was the gallery--no, not the City Art Centre--it was some Art Centre-- not the City Art Centre because that...later. I can't remember the name of that gallery which the City had, you know. Everybody had a chance to exhibit there. So anyhow I showed some drawings.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Did you by any...?

LOUIS SCHANKER: I showed some drawings and, oh, yes, I sold one to J. P. Morgan through the City Art Gallery--it wasn't the City--a drawing. That was in the Thirties. That's right, way before --no--the Twenties, way before I went to Europe. I still don't know what the hell the drawing was about now; it was a nude, I think. So, you know, it comes back, you know....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, he had a fascination for him....

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, I was surprised when they told me it went to. P. Morgan Collection, you know. I don't know where the hell it is today but....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, he was a great collector of what he thought was pornographic, you know. He had a marvelous pornographic library.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, I have my own pornographic drawings but I never show those. I showed at the Walker Art Centre; I had a big, big one-man show when I taught in '59 at the University of Minnesota--the University of Minnesota was connected sort of with it and I taught graduate school there for one season--three months--and I had a show there and that time I was doing figures again, '59 you know, from all my abstract paintings I went to figures again for one year. And I had a show up there and the curator came around and I said, "You know what that one is?" and he said, "Well, it looks like a nice painting but I don't know what it is." " Well," I said, "it's a man and woman making love." And he nearly dropped dead and the next day he said, "You don't mind if I take it down?" I said, "Well, I mind in a way." He said, "Why?" I said, "It's a good painting. You liked it, didn't you?" He said, "Yes, I liked it but now that you tell me what it is and I can see it," he said, "we're having the Board of Trustees meeting up here tomorrow night and," he said, "you know..." I said, "Well, take it down. If it's going to mean your job, take it down." You know, I just couldn't be that kind of stoic and say, "No, it's got to be there," you know, "the hell with the Board of Trustees." I had enough there; I had about forty paintings. So...pornography. Every artist has done it, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh sure. Sure. What about the Weitzel Peoples Art Guild which was a place where artists could gather and show their work? Not a gallery but Modern American artists that were finding it tough in the Twenties?

LOUIS SCHANKER: I was in Woodstock in '27. And there was a little group there. I used to show up there in the galleries they had there. Then Woodstock was really an artist's playground. It isn't any more; it's a tourist playground.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It's a tourist playground, yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: But it was very nice then and I showed there and I met more people there and I met...I can't

even think of the names but I met more painters there and the early Woodstock group of painters and I can't think of their names offhand. But you probably will remember maybe if you... Speicher was there...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Speicher was there.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And some of the other names I can't remember--quite a few--they'll come. And this sculptor who just died a couple of years ago, an old man, he was there. Archipenko was there in '27, a big school there in '27, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I saw him once or twice. I didn't go to any school. I just painted; I was on my own. I quit school so I don't have any master that I was working with, not one.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No. What turned you away from realism?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, I guess I got tired of painting portraits and still lifes and you do so many and they all looked...well, fairly good and you like them but evidently it wasn't enough. It was just like how I turned from painting to sculpture again. I started sculpture even before I started painting actually, you know, and I was doing them together you see. But I think it was in the milieu at that time, you know. There was Cezanne coming up, really coming over here. and Picasso beginning to come over here and just about then when I went to Paris I started.... I was still doing realistic things in Paris and then towards the end of my time in Paris I started to break away. That was in '32. By the time I came back to America I was completely changed to abstract painting, semi-abstract painting; it was figurative. I still used figures but I was doing it in an abstract way, not purely abstract, that came much later.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Like those. Oh, before those. I started...well, my '36 was a sort of semi-abstract painting made at the piano but it was done in a semi-abstract way. And from then on I went further and further away from the figures. By '41 I was doing completely abstract paintings, '42, something like that. Well, like the one at WNYC is not really an abstract thing; it's sort of semi-abstract. It's a musical theme for the WNYC wall so I used musical...I didn't use any figures, just musical symbols and shapes. And at that time Byron Browne was there and, who else? There was Stuart Davis had one there and one or two others.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But '29 was a bad year and yet by '31 you'd gone to Paris.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. Well, I didn't have any money in the stock market.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You didn't lose, yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: But I always could get a job, see, and I saved up; I think I saved up maybe \$500. Well, that lasted me for pretty near a year. Ten dollars a week I lived on in Paris and that included my studio, my paints, my food--the models were for free. I didn't have any trouble getting free models and that was it. So I lived on about ten dollars a week. It was a toss-up whether I should take the subway in those days, which cost three cents, or whether I should have a drink of beer, so I usually ended up by having a beer and walk home.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And walk home. Yes. I know the impulse well.

LOUIS SCHANKER: So I was young and I could walk and there was no problem. But those were rough days, it's true, but....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Not.... Yes, but it was the way in which you....

LOUIS SCHANKER: I could always get a job; I never had any trouble getting a job.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, was that typical of artists generally--that they worked on other...?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. Most everyone I knew had a...was doing something else. I mean they had to.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: They were working part-time or full-time and then painting when they could. I mean most of the guys I knew. I don't know, maybe some of them actually didn't. Their parents had money or left some money or, you know, things like that. But....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And lofts were available, you know.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, yes, there were plenty of lofts available. I had a loft and I had an apartment on Hester Street and I had an apartment on Tenth Street. It was always ten or fifteen dollars a month, you know, bedbugs, cockroaches....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: The works.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes, the works there but it was a place where you could....cold water flats, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure, yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And so you managed, you managed. And, you know, I don't know... soda jerking isn't a bad job because you make tips, and that's a little extra.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: On the side. Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Are you tired? Do you want to sit down?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No, no, no, no, no.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Get a chair over there.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: What about Paris itself?

LOUIS SCHANKER: What about Paris...?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You took certain things with you for sure--interest in sculpture, interest in painting.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, I just took my paintings to Paris; I didn't do any sculpture.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You didn't in Paris?

LOUIS SCHANKER: No, I didn't do anything but paint and draw, lots of watercolors and oils.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. What about the language barrier? Did you find it...or were there a lot of Americans?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, there were a lot of Americans there. You usually find your own group and then you don't wander too much. I didn't. Some friends of mine--Max Spivak who was also around that time--he hasn't shown around much but he does a lot of mosaic murals here and there. I didn't meet him there but he was there at the same time and quite a few other artists were there at the same time who I meet now and say they were there. "Well, where were you?" I was there at the Dome at, you know, the Rotonde and places like that. So I got mixed up with Englishmen and Americans.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And I didn't have any trouble with the French. I didn't know the French language but I didn't have any trouble with it. I never even got a card of identity while I was there; I never even bothered going to the police. I was there for over a year. So it was all right. And then where I stayed in the beginning was a French home, a pension. I stayed for about two weeks until I got my bearing and I learned a few words and then I got this place. Someone was going away for the year, or eight months, and they had a studio to rent. And I got another skylight studio, very nice one, outside of Paris. But you know you can always point. You could always say "a beer." It's pretty near the same way, you know. Or cognac, you know. I mean there's no problem.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: In terms of people I've talked with, I don't know any more resourceful group than artists, even if you have to point--"look"....

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. Yes. I'd go to a restaurant, you know, where the prix-fixe'd dinners in American money was twenty-four cents in those days, that was a good dinner--twenty-four cents with a bottle of wine. And if I didn't know what they had, then I used to look at someone else's plate--you do it today too; you go into a restaurant and you see somebody....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Like that.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes, it looks good, you know. And then I went to...when I was really down and I had very little money--ten dollars was little enough but, when I was short that week--I used to go to the Jewish section, see, and the Jewish section they also had yeshivah, you know, where the Jewish Hebrew schools are. I went to Hebrew school when I was a kid, see; my parents were very orthodox. So I could speak Yiddish. Well, that was no problem, see. I could go there and for two cents you got bowl of soup and for four cents you got a little piece of

boiled beef, you know, and so you could make out. So I didn't have to go to them when I'd feel flush; I'd go to a prix-fixe'd dinner for twenty-four cents, you see. Then you make out.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure you do.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I made out. And I was in Italy. I was thrown off the train for breaking a window when I was drunk on the train. And you make out, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh yes, you pick yourself up and find your bearings.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Sure. You're arrested and "where's your passport?" And my passport was with a friend and they said "Okay." They Didn't bother me. I went and got the passport. The next day we got the train and we went to Florence for a couple of weeks, my last trip before I came home.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Did you see much art while you were in Paris?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Oh yes. I used to go to the Louvre practically every day and that was it, the Louvre I mean, in those days.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, that's a history of art.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I went to all the art shows, you know, and we had groups. I don't think I exhibited in Paris at all, why I don't know, but I guess I wasn't in that crowd either. But there weren't that many galleries and the French weren't interested in American art in those days.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Not at all!

LOUIS SCHANKER: They didn't want to show anything unless you came from New York with a big reputation, you know; you just didn't show there. And Calder was there in the '20's; I think John was there I think in the '20's. And I don't remember their...you know. So I met with a certain group who came back. I, you know, met the National Academy boys who won the prize and I used to see them over there and portrait painters and we'd go around that way. It was exciting; we had a good time. I never did go out into the country much which I'm sorry about because I just didn't have enough money either to go to the country, to take trains and go visiting. And then I suppose the language barrier held me back; if you go to the country and something else happens.... It's like here. If you go up to Vermont you're in another world, you know. They don't speak the same language and they're different, you know. They're just as nice or nicer but the point is that they, you know, they're so ingrown that any outsiders, you know, unless you come during the tourist season here when they're all open for business--any outsiders just don't belong and you have a hard time.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh, and how!

LOUIS SCHANKER: I know that. yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: France is the only place that I know where you can walk thirty miles and go through two different dialects and understand....

LOUIS SCHANKER: That's right.into that in Spain.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh yes, terrible in those terms. Just awful; but you get along.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I lived in Spain for a year, in Mallorca.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: When was this?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Right afterwards.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right after '29?"

LOUIS SCHANKER: '33. And I painted there.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: What's the difference in atmosphere in Spain and Paris?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Oh, it's quite, very... quite different. The people are much softer and they'd give you the shirt off their back. They don't have to know you. This doesn't happen in Paris, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh heavens, no!

LOUIS SCHANKER: Oh, it's fantastic. They go out of their way to help you. If you're riding along and you have a

flat, you have a hundred people around you putting on that flat for you, changing the tire, and you don't do a thing, you just sit there. And you go to the cafe and then they all come in for a drink and you're just sitting, you know, you just let them do it. They won't let you touch it. It's fantastic. It happened to us once, twice in a very small...near Saragossa. We were in the car and we had a flat and they said, "We fix," you know. I knew Spanish a little bit so we could talk a little bit by that time. And they said, "You go in the cafe and have coffee," and so we went over there and drank cognac and coffee or whatever they had. And they fixed the whole thing and they came back and said, "Fini," and we offered them money and they wouldn't take it. And I don't think that could happen in Paris or in France.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Lose an arm and a leg.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I don't know. But they were...I call the Spanish very simpatico. I was there when they had a president, see, in '33 that was just before Franco, the civil war. HARLAN PHILLIPS; Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And it was terrific.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: How was it for painting?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Oh, beautiful. Oh, beautiful for painting.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Was it?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. Yes. Just beautiful country. Mallorca is very nice and very few Americans there at that time.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But isn't it religiously oriented?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, yes, but the men are not interested. The men...I've seen.... This is a fact, in Mallorca I was in the town of Palencia which is a small town near the Mediterranean and we had rented a house there and they have the holy days when they come through, you know. They walk through with all the banners and everything; it's just the little kids and women. And the men stand on the side and spit at the priests, actually spit, you know, and their wives are walking in the parade. The men had nothing to do with the church there when I was there. They never went to church. The women are the only ones that go to church.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: How about their art? Did you sample it? most of it is cathedral-oriented, or at least....

LOUIS SCHANKER: well, yes, the old stuff....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: You're talking about...?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Oh yes. The Prado is fantastic. I lived in Madrid for a month and I lived in Barcelona.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh boy!

LOUIS SCHANKER: And I went to Toledo and stayed a while there and I met a friend of mine. I said, "Oh! Frank O'Hara"--Fred O'Hara, not the Frank O'Hara from the Modern Museum; it's Fred O'Hara. Well, he still had some money from the Paris days and I met him--one very nice guy I met in '31, an American painter, and this was in '33 I met him in Toledo. I said, "What are you doing here?" He said, "Well, I got myself a place here and it's cheaper than Paris." I said, "How cheap is it?" He said, "Well I got a loft studio here in Toledo and it cost me two dollars a month, and I got a maid who does my work and also sleeps me for a dollar a month." I don't want to talk about money. And that's how inexpensive it was in Toledo, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Now...I was just back there in '63; my wife and I went there. We took three months off and I had a sabbatical from college where I was teaching and I didn't feel like painting. It was right after the show and I just felt dead on painting so I just thought, what the heck, I'll get out of here. I've got a sabbatical, so let's go. So we went to Rome and Sicily, went all through... and Greece. We ended up--not ended up--but we were in Toledo and it was horrible. You couldn't walk through the streets. And this was Easter week, maybe that was the reason. They were so crowded with tourists. I'm talking about a thirty-year cycle, exactly thirty years. It was in 1933 when we were in Toledo the first time and it was barren, you know, I mean people lived in Toledo and that was all. There were no tourists or nothing, a few artists. And we went back there and we were disgusted. I still wanted to see the beautiful painting, which I like; I remembered it for thirty years, that "The Burial of Count

Orgaz" which in is a little cathedral, Saint Tomas, I think it was. And it's still there. You know, it was taken out during the civil war and they took it off the wall and England had it during the civil war; it was one of the things they saved. It's back there again; it's just as beautiful as ever. God! That thing just lasts and lasts and lasts, take it off the wall, put it back on. It's so beautiful. But there are a hundred and fifty people there, you know. When I was there, there were two. You know, people also go down to the big cathedrals in there to see the jewels; there is a fabulous collection of jewels, you know, rubies, diamonds and all that kind of stuff the Church gets, owns. And that's where the people go to see. I couldn't care less. But it was very nice seeing that "Burial of Count Orgaz." And our driver happened to be a very interesting fellow--this was in '63 I'm talking about. He said, "I'll take you to some private places where no ones goes." I said, "That's for us," my wife and I. So he took us to a big palace which was a private home made into a museum. They had El Grecos and El Grecos; I'm telling you, you never saw anything like it. And then on the way back to Madrid he took us to this little church. It's half this size, the church, and it's a nothing, you know. It's not--and the most beautiful little, not a little, but you know El Grecos this big made for this particular church. I mean he painted for this church; they weren't moved in there. It was wonderful. What we missed in thirty....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: What you missed in '33?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. Well, you know, we saw them. So it was very nice. Sicily was very nice, you know, all through Sicily. We took a car and drove all through Sicily. And Rome was beautiful. It was just three months so you can't see everything.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But in '33 you took whatever you had picked up in the way of greater freedom in Paris and moved it to Spain. What did Spain add in terms of your own vision and thinking about things? Anything?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. It was a different kind of a mood. And my paintings show that.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Really?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. Well, I had a show at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Madrid and it went along very well; I didn't see it because I had to leave it there with somebody who said they were going to get me a show. And they put up my show over there--oils and watercolors. And quite different mood; entirely different. But it was also semi-realistic then; by that time I had gone away from it, you know. I was doing figures, square heads and things like that. When you get over to the house I'll show you a couple of early prints of that period that I did later. I have a lot of prints here but to go through them all, you know.... But it's a different period, a different thing.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I painted the people around there; I'd go to a concert in those little towns and you'd come home with impressions and I'd make a painting. And I got to know the carpenter who was a sculptor. And again there was a language barrier but we got along. I don't know, we could just about barely get things so he invited us to his house and I saw some beautiful primitive paintings and he said, "Those are my father's." I said, "I'd like to buy some." "No, they're not for sale." and you know, I couldn't do anything about it. But he had some beautiful...his own primitive sculpture, see. So I said, "This one I like." I said, "How much is it?" And he made all the...in those days you couldn't go to a store and buy a chair; you went to the carpenter to have a chair made. And if you had a bed you had your bed made and anything you had to have in the house you had made, see, because it's very primitive there. They have no water in the houses. There's only the center of the Square is where all the people go with their big jugs to get water.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: At the well, yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And so I said, "Well...." By that time I was painting sort of semi-abstractly; I had still lifes, you know, and all sorts of stuff somewhat in the style of Braque and Gris. I was influenced by those painters. So I said, "Well, come over to lunch at our house." So he came over and the postmaster of the town came over and his family; there were about eight in the family. I said, "God, I don't know how to cook for eight people." So the landlord, who rented us our house--see, we had this big nice house right in the country there--I said to him, I said, "_____ you come over for lunch too." He said, "I come over; I'll cook your lunch." I said, "Oh, that's wonderful." Because he was a cook; he had been a cook in a fancy house, you know, and then he had retired. So he came over and you only cook on charcoal; you have nothing else to cook with, you know. You have a little charcoal thing like you do in Mexico now....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

LOUIS SCHANKER: You've been to Mexico?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

LOUIS SCHANKER: So you have to keep fanning it like this and all our meals were cooked on that. So he cooked the whole meal for eight and then when he didn't have enough room in it, he went outside and made a fire, you know, outside the house because they have these stone houses. He made a little fire and cooked some other things out there so we had a marvelous meal, and it was very nice. And then out of a clear sky the carpenter said, "Mi gusto--I like that picture," you know. It was a little still life very abstractly painted, broken up tones.... I said, "All right, I want..." I should have said I want that painting of his old man's but I said, "I want that sculpture." He said, "Okay." I told him "I'll give you a painting," so we bargained. There was a bargain. Isn't it marvelous? And my former wife has that sculpture. Like a dope I left it with her. I'd like to have had it. Olive wood, they carve mostly in olive wood because that's a hard wood. Those trees grow for a thousand years.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure. Sure. Well, you met Spanish artists then?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Very few.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Very few?

LOUIS SCHANKER: No, that's a strange thing. (Or) They're the same thing.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: He was a carpenter and also...?

LOUIS SCHANKER: He was a carpenter--well, he did sculpture, you know, like.... Well, I like to use wood so he'd carve a head or a figure. I'm sorry I didn't get more; I could have but then you always have to figure on the problem of carrying things and one thing and another so.... In those days we had just enough money to keep us going too, never had much money. But it was all right. So it was very nice there.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Oh yes! Well, you added not a little to your scenery and scene from what New York had been.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, you got the impressions, you know; it was very good.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You certainly expanded the East Side of New York, didn't you, with the trips around the country, first with the circus...

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: ...up to Canada with the wheat....

LOUIS SCHANKER: I wouldn't give it up for anything.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Or trade it! No. No.

LOUIS SCHANKER: It was a nice, good, experience all through.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, in '33 you came back to the States?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Then I came back to the States.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, that wasn't a good year, was it?

LOUIS SCHANKER: That was a bad year. Never had jobs, looking for work. So, I had some kind of--I don't remember what kind of job. Oh, actually I didn't get a job right away. I heard about the Federal Art Project--what did they call that one, the one from Washington? It wasn't WPA.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: PWAP?

LOUIS SCHANKER: PWAP, and I got it through Mrs. Force, through the Whitney Museum. And I got a job making a big painting, so I made a sort of--I had to do a little bit realistic there because they weren't accepting abstract things. I think everyone that was on it... I think--I can't think of the men--but there were a lot of men on it. As you know, there were quite a few men on it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I did that and then I got onto the WPA. And I had my first show in '33; that's right. That's what happened when I came back; I had a show of the work still on Contemporary Arts gallery--not the contemporaries but the Contemporary Arts.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: This is the work that was done abroad?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. Work I had done abroad. They were more or less abstract--in fact, they.... Well no, there were a few things I had done here too but most of the things I had done abroad. Yes, that was '33, the end of '33.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, did you run into Harry Knight at the...?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Oh, yes, Harry Knight and Fred Knight, his brother. I knew him very well. Harry Knight was at the College Art Association.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Do you know him?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. But hadn't he gone over...?

LOUIS SCHANKER: His wife was my assistant on the WPA. She helped me work on the WNYC mural. She was with me. She wasn't married to him at that time.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No. Well, wasn't he part of Mrs. Force's group at the...under the PWAP?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. Yes, that's right. And then he went to work for Mrs. McMahon at the College Art Association...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

LOUIS SCHANKER: ...but first he was with Mrs. Force, I think.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Lloyd Rollins.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Lloyd Rollins, yes, yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You said that you had to do a little bit more realistically for the painting. Was this because a suggestion was made or your own?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes, it was more or less a suggestion that I...I kind of figured that. Well, I think it was partly theirs and partly my idea that, you know...so I painted a big street scene, you know, New York with the elevateds and all that. And I don't know where the hell it is. I wouldn't want to see it; it was so good. But it kept me going for a while.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And then I got, as I say....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That only lasted for a short while.

LOUIS SCHANKER: A very short while. I only had one commission on that. I don't know how long it took.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: By this time artists' organizations had appeared on the scene.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You know, they lobbied not a little in front of the Whitney Museum--Mrs. Force.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Because I suspect...well, this is a question of funds and it wasn't, I think, designedly to begin with sufficient funds to handle all the artists. It was a...wasn't it?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes, that's right, but it wasn't the WPA yet, was it?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, I don't know what that first was because you see I wasn't here then. This was '33 I'm talking about, late '33, and I wasn't involved in any of those things because I still kept by myself and I was always.... I got involved later; I think there was the Artists Union. That came out of the WPA.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And we did a lot of picketing all over the place.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But the scene had changed by then.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. And then '36, well, by that time we had founded a group called "The Ten."

HARLAN PHILLIPS: The Ten?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes, "The Nine Who Were Ten." They always did that; they gave us a writeup in the papers-- "The Nine Who Were Ten." We could never get a tenth member so we used to always...we always had a visiting member, you know, for just one year. And that was around 1936. And Bolotowsky and Joe Saloman and Balcomb Greene and Adolph Gottlieb and Mark Rothko, Bazov, Ben-Zion, they were all in the group. Then we changed, you know, some guy would say, oh, to the hell with it, and drop out, but it was a group that we had shows every year. The Montrose Gallery gave us a big show and then this guy, collector, who was a big sculptor, antique man on 57th Street--I can't think of his name, he had a big gallery and he used to show, sell, mostly privately.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Was this Rosenberg?

LOUIS SCHANKER: No, not Rosenberg. He's opposite Rosenberg. The name will come to me I suppose, one of these days. Well, we talked to him. There was--what's his name--God, I don't know these names--I can't think of it. I'm getting too old; they come in time.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. But this was a group for purposes of shows?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Of show, yes, just to show. Well, we had our own ideology more or less of everybody goes his own way; we had abstract painters, realistic painters, you know, just painters. I mean it was all a mixed group but we all felt that as a group we could stay together. Everybody's painting was individual enough to show and no one showed, no one painted like the next guy or something like that, so each was off on his own individual tangent. And we went around I don't know for how long, five or six years. And we picketed the Whitney Museum. I made the poster for it; we called it "The Whitney Dissenters." I don't know whether you remember that. Well, we were a group and we picketed the gallery. And I know it was, because I had a painting at the Whitney Museum that year. And Bolotowsky had a painting that year and yet we picketed it because we felt...I made a print of it, you know, a poster, a four-color poster that we pushed around here and there. We printed ourselves; I printed it myself. We felt that the Whitney wasn't showing enough modern paintings. They were still in the old Ashcan School of painting, you know. You know who they were showing and all they had, they had me and Bolotowsky who wasn't really that abstract yet but he was going that way, and they had some abstract painters there but they hadn't had enough. So we got out and picketed the Museum.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: "The Whitney Dissenters."

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. And there was all ten of us, nine of us who...I don't know if it did any good--inevitably the time came when they had to, the artists, they showed nothing but abstract paintings, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I think I saw three realistic paintings at this Whitney show, the last one, I mean old-timers like Raphael Soyer and one or two others, but the rest all just the other way so we didn't really have to do anything about it. Well, then they had a big picket line among the American abstract artists, American abstract artists, for quite a while we had a big group there and we picketed the Modern Museum for the same reason, that--maybe it wasn't the same reason--I don't know what the hell the reason was. Oh, I think...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: They were catering too much to foreigners.

LOUIS SCHANKER: To Europe, that's it. You probably got that from someone else, too, I'm sure. They were. That was the reason. I remember that big picket line.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes, sure. Oh yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: But the organizations...there was... the only one I know of is the John Reid Club which was artists' and writers' organizations, sort of on the left side. And then when the Artists Union came along, they absorbed the John Reid Club.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And so the Artists Union was actually a place where most of the artists in it were on WPA, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And there were always pickets....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: When you finished the commission for the PWAP, what was available to you?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, then I don't think anything except I got on the WPA.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: The WPA, let's see....

LOUIS SCHANKER: That started around '34. I got on in '35 I think.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well....

LOUIS SCHANKER: I don't remember.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. It began...it was announced I think in June of '35. But this...let's see, the PWAP was announced in December of '33 and they closed it down in, oh, mid-April although the announcement was mid-March. So from '34...unless it was the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration. Audrey McMahon got into it somewhere.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: The Mayor's Committee, the Mayor's Poster Committee....

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. LaGuardia The Mayor's Committee got in and then Audrey McMahon got in it and I think her husband Philip McMahon helped because I think he was a university professor at NYU.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And she kept that with an iron fist, boy, I can tell you. She really....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Did you know her? Go ahead, go sit down, you're getting tired. Go ahead. I'll pull up a chair.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Here, sit here, this is a good chair. That's the captain's chair--can you reach...?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh, yes. This is fine. This is fine. So after the PWAP it's a little bit.... You know, you might have gotten an extra job here or there, but you don't remember too clearly what went on?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, I don't really remember. Let me see, it was the end of '33 when we came home. My show must have been in '34, see.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: The first one-man show I had was at the Contemporary Arts, Miss Francis, who is still around I think. And I think that was '34 because we came back the end of '33, I think, November or December. I know it was a very rough crossing; I think me and the captain were the only ones who didn't get sick. Oh, it was just a

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Was it?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Oh! Jesus! Well, it was that time of the year.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, I guess that was about as bad a winter as we've had in the nation too in...on the East Coast.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I don't remember--maybe it was....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That winter was miserable.

LOUIS SCHANKER: It was...I never saw anything on the boat like that, you know; everybody was sick. Oh, I never saw anybody for three days on that boat, the first three or four days. And we went over on a freighter, the old--I forgot the name of the boat--the Motomar? Something like that, a Spanish freighter we took from Brooklyn and it took fifteen days; it was like a lake all the way over, that Paris trip. It went all the way to Barcelona. And that boat later was one of the boats used by the Spanish Civil War people, the leftists I think they--or the rightists--I don't know which one got the boat and used it for a battleship, that same boat three years later. So I don't remember exactly what happened between '34...we made out--I don't know how we made out.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Well, were the groups you spoke about, were they formed in '34, "The Nine?"

LOUIS SCHANKER: "The Ten." "The Ten" was formed around '35 or '36. And that's the time we were showing also at the Gallery Secession.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

LOUIS SCHANKER: That's when I was showing there.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: The Godso Gallery.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Well, that's a later....

LOUIS SCHANKER: "The Ten."

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. I was wondering whether in '34 any group emerged?

LOUIS SCHANKER: I can't remember. Outside of our Ten I can't remember. Because the AA--the American Abstract artists come later. If I can remember fairly well, it came later.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, the John Reid Club had continuity and I gather that the Whitney Museum Club had continuity too.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, a very interesting thing, a lot of guys who were in the Whitney Club were in the John Reid Club....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

LOUIS SCHANKER: It was a very revolutionary kind of group then.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. It's where excitement was.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, the excitement was there but, as I said, I never took part in these things much; I mean I don't know why, I just didn't. I guess I was too busy painting and working instead of talking. I never was a talker like I'm talking like this. I never talked like this that much. But I remember when I lived in Brooklyn in '37 a lot of the artists who were around there at the time, painters, you know, I knew...well, they'd call at my house and then we'd meet upstairs and look at some paintings and they'd all say, "Well, let's go out for a cup of coffee," and I would never go out for a cup of coffee. I mean my time was too valuable because I had a job, you know, one thing and another, and I wanted to do my own work, you know. When you work for the WPA at that time, why you were doing something for the WPA but then you wanted to do what you wanted to do besides.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Because...a mural that you have to do research or whatever you have to do and you had an assistant do part of it but that was one job and then I had to keep that separate, see. And then I....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Well, the WPA gave you opportunity to paint, you know.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, it gave me opportunity to paint what I wanted to paint myself, I mean, you see, now if you did a mural, you had to have it pass through three different censors like, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: How did you like that process?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, fortunately we had Burgoyne Diller was on it and he was a very modern painter and he fought for the abstract painters and I remember when guys like Jackson Pollock on the project and his wife Lee Krasner--that was before they were married--was on the project and Jackson Pollock could never get any of his things through even with Burgoyne Diller fighting for him. I mean it was, you know, quite a job and it was rough. But he kept at it. And a lot of other guys, see, and I did too. So sometimes I'd bring in sketches and they said, "Well..." you know, they don't like this or, you know, it's...judged by our peers and they were painters too; they were trying to paint. I don't know--Diller, for instance, and some of those guys who had supervisor jobs--I don't know when they painted. And Burgoyne Diller was a good painter.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: See, I've known him for a long time, and before the Project I knew him. I don't know. But we grew up, that's all.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, when you got on the WPA did you...in the mural division, is that where you began?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Had you done murals before?

LOUIS SCHANKER: A few. As a matter of fact, I did a--I didn't call them murals--a big painting. I left one in my house in Mallorca. And I had this photograph which I wrote on the back of it myself; I said a picture of me painting--and I don't know who took the photograph--and I showed it to my wife and she said, "Oh, that's a nice picture, I want to have it." All right, so I gave it to her. It says on the back that Louie Schanker painting on the wall here for posterity. When we leave God knows what's going to happen to it and who knows what it is, you know; it may disappear. You know, those walls, the way they're made, and I just painted right on the walls. But then I made a few...then I studied fresco painting a lot.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Did you?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Here or...?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Here. Over there I looked at frescoes in Europe but I didn't really study there but studied...I did fresco painting here and Rico LeBrun was one I worked with at that time and we had this American artists school on 14th Street and I was teaching fresco painting there and I had done a few, see, so by the time, you know, I wanted to do murals and I felt I could be freer doing murals than if I did easel paintings because easel paintings, they still, you know, you painted an easel picture and if they didn't like it.... Well, you know, if you changed it or...well, do another one and you just felt you had to kowtow somehow or other, I don't know way, but you did. So I didn't want to have any of that. But a mural painting I felt, well, if I did certain things and it doesn't only pass the arts here, the committee on WPA, but it also has to pass the city Arts Committee, you know, the Mayor's Art committee, you know, so I felt much freer that way. I did a whole series of circus panels for the Ponset Beach Children's Hospital. And that was abstract ones too, semi-abstract, you know, in broken color; I mean you could see the clowns, you could see the monkeys and all that. But I enjoyed doing them. As a matter of fact at that time that's the way I more or less was painting anyhow so really it didn't, you know, it didn't bother me. I couldn't do this and go into another style but even if it sounds like...well, he's doing one thing for one thing, and one thing--you know, it isn't true at all became I was painting the same way but there are certain things I could paint on an easel painting I knew I couldn't get across, you know. I mean you have to be a little more definite. So I did a series of eleven panels. They probably disappeared, because I think during the War the United States Army or Navy took over the Ponset Beach Hospital for the nurses and the soldiers and everything because this was a nice little hospital up on Ponset Beach for children, TB for, you know, TB children. And I did a series of big panels to liven up the place.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. There was no problem getting them accepted?

LOUIS SCHANKER: But by that time...no, I had no problem....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Wasn't Lou Block in charge of that hospital?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. That's right. Diller was the whole...overall...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Lou was in the....

LOUIS SCHANKER: No, he was under McMahon and all that.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And I guess Lou Block was one section. It all comes back to me now. I'd forgotten all this. You bring back...you bring up the names and I'll talk--you talk, I'll listen.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No, but this is something which an artist had never confronted before, to negotiate an idea for a mural, for example, where you exhibit sketches and it's subjected to....

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, it's always been that way.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes, but I mean by and large an artist would reach the point where he could thumb his nose and say to hell with it, you know, who wants to be bothered with the aggravation?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Like Rivera did with that Rockefeller mural, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: To hell with it and he could paint another one.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: How much influence did he have--the Mexican school?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Very little on me. I never...I liked Orozco very much but I don't think I was influenced by them at all, even though I like them. I was influenced in the '30's I think more by Rouault.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Rouault?

LOUIS SCHANKER: And Braque, Picasso, and when I was in Paris I was influenced by Cezanne more or less. I painted a lot of paintings, you know, in that kind of color schemes, something like that. Well, that's about the time I started doing woodcuts too, '35.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: We'll get into woodcuts. What about...did you work in your studio when you were on the mural?

LOUIS SCHANKER: I always worked in my studio...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You did?

LOUIS SCHANKER: ...except I think for the big mural I did for--no, no--the two murals I did--WNYC mural I did there, it's 22 feet long.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. So I had two new assistants and, you know, I had to work out there and you had all the people going back and forth. It was interesting because we finally got an article in the paper called "The Kibitzers Club," you know that article?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: It's all about my mural, see. Because I said..you know, someone came up to interview me--and this guy Harry Knight's wife was there and someone else. I had an assistant--Sid Gotcliff, I think at that time--and I said, "Let's call it The Kibitzers Club. What the hell, It's as good a name as any. People come along and they kid us; it's an act. I kid right back." so, you know, what have we got.... And then the World's Fair one is also too big. That was sixteen feet, that was for the Medical Building. I don't know what happened to that one. It was also very abstract. I don't even have pictures of it any more. I don't know what.... The other ones I did in my studio because they were on panels, you see, they were moveable panels, I could do them. Some were eleven feet long but they were on panels, two panels or three panels, and I could do whatever I wanted--and on canvases, see, so there was no problem.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Did you have visits from--what was that fellow, Ernest Pechota--come to your studio?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes, I think so. Yes. You got all the names. You must have gotten them from all these guys you were talking to.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Diller said Pechota represented a school that had all but gone.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And yet he was open to conviction.

LOUIS SCHANKER: He was, yes. They could get him around, yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. And it's nice to have someone strategically placed.

LOUIS SCHANKER: That's right, yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It's a power game.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Sure. Diller was very good. Without that we would have had a rough time there. Of course in easel painting I never was on...I never did any easel painting; I never wanted to do any easel painting. I wanted to do it for myself; I didn't want, you know.... Well, by that time I started doing murals. I also started doing my first color woodcuts, you see. That was in '35.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: What opened up that for you?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, it's like an enemium, like you ask me why do I do this and that. You have 24 hours a

day and you sleep 8 and the rest of the time you work. That's why I didn't see too many groups. I never went out too much and I don't have many friends, I mean people I go out with, very few. I mean I stay here all the time and not miss anybody because I don't have anyone to miss. You know, once in a while I have to get to New York to see a gang so I go to an opening and meet all the old-timers, you know, and we chew the fat for ten minutes and that's it and then you've had it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: But real close, you know, buddy-buddies I don't have them like I know some of the artists have. I know some of the artists must see each other every day in New York and I can reel off a dozen or two dozen names, you see. And I see them in East Hampton, the same group, and they've got to see each other like these housewives in a way and they've got to talk to them on the phone or they've got to see each other every day or else it isn't a good day. All right. So I can't do that; I'm not that much of a talker ordinarily, I mean. I like to work and I have to have time for my work and I've got to be by myself and that's it. But I do know what goes on with most... a lot of the artists. I do know that they, you know, that they...all the time. And so they're different.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. What about a fellow by the name of...?

LOUIS SCHANKER: I wish I had a drink here. We'll go over to the house later and have a drink.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: What about the fellow who was the head of the print-graphics division--Floethe, Richard Floethe? Is that a name to you? Not at all?

LOUIS SCHANKER: George Peck.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: George Peck was, yes....

LOUIS SCHANKER: He was the head of it as far as I remember.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. But this was early...George Peck wasn't he?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. Well, they called me in, see, and they asked me if I'd get in on the graphics division after I got myself this reputation of doing color woodcuts and I was getting in all the shows; I was selling everything I had and, you know, not really selling everything I had...I couldn't, of course, I couldn't be on WPA, but I mean I was getting in all the shows and all that kind of stuff. I think no one was doing color woodcuts--Hy Warsegar.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Hy Warsegar.

LOUIS SCHANKER: He was the one who told you about me and he and--gee, there's another name--the guy was doing silk screens....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Tony Velonis.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. Yes. And they weren't doing color woodcuts on the project. So they asked me if I'd come in and start doing some color woodcuts for the project and I think I was part--I was there part--Werner Dravis--as part....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Dravis?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Do you know him at all?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: He was I think one of the supervisors on the graphics project at one time. I wasn't the first to do color woodcuts; it just seemed that nobody was doing color woodcuts like I was doing them in the sense that everybody was doing black and white and they were doing color silk screens. But I never liked...anyhow, I didn't want to bother. It was too mechanical for me; I didn't care for it. Not that they're not good. They're just as good I guess, valid, as anything else but I wasn't interested in it. So you see I was having, well, a fair amount of success in those days showing woodcuts.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Brooklyn Museum put on a show....

LOUIS SCHANKER: They gave me my first big show in '43.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. But even earlier.

LOUIS SCHANKER: They bought some of my things. Sneven bought some of my things in '37 for the Museum.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes, because Warsegar began to pick up on some kind of shows he could have; I don't know where, you know, in the colored problem.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: In printmaking.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Because apparently this was an area where some of the younger kids got in and you know they began to experiment and I suspect the WPA lent itself to experimentation.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, yes, that's why, especially in the graphics, you see, because they could do more. And that's why they asked me to come in. So I went on leave, on absence, from the mural department over there and I did probably about 15 prints in color, you see.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: What kind of shop did they have, a good one?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, I did mine home.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You did it at home anyway?

LOUIS SCHANKER: I printed all mine by hand. The problem with me, I didn't want to be any part of a shop, you know. The lithographs and etching, well, they'd go home and do their work and have a printer print it. And they had an old woodblock press, I think, there, but I wasn't interested in that; I liked to do them by hand. So that's what I did. And Schneven saw some of my prints the first time and Zigrosser saw some of my first prints...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Zigrosser, that's another name.

LOUIS SCHANKER: ...and he wouldn't believe me when I brought out my color print and he said it was hand colored. I said it isn't hand colored; this is printed and registered in ten colors. And he nearly dropped dead. He said, "I don't believe it." I said, "Are you calling me a liar?" He said, "No, I'm not calling you a liar but I don't see how it's possible." I said, "Well, the Japanese did it in fifty colors." He said, "Well, I know the Japanese did it but we haven't had anybody do it here." I said, "I'll bring you up the blocks." God, I said.... So I had to bring him up the blocks and show him how I registered it, a very crude way of registering. Of course I just started and I knew the Japanese way of registering color blocks but I didn't want to go through that whole process so I did it my own way. And he believed me.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. But ten colors. It's novel.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, no one was doing it, see, no one was doing it. In color and silk screen, yes, but no one was doing colored woodcuts like that. And one of my first ones was ten colors. And I sold them out and I sold about two different variations of those. I keep one for myself, thank God. I have it here somewhere. But you probably have some....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And of course all museums in New York, in the United States, have them and they have my own besides the WPA ones, you know, but they have a lot of my own. The Modern Museum has about twenty. The Public Library has about thirty prints.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, did you get into the instruction side on the graphics?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Not at WPA.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But this was a new process. Didn't anybody want to pick your brain as to how...?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Oh, sure. I started to teach at the New School. And then I taught there for quite a while. I taught graphics and painting, see. Oh, they picked my brains and then they--all right--don't worry. What the hell? I started an awful lot of guys on this WPA thing, I mean this graphics in color.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, you know, a lot of kids would come along without sufficient funds to buy the equipment. Here WPA at least made it available.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. All the materials were there.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Not to use it was a real sin.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes, that's right. But you see they could, you know, they could do anything that wanted, it was a very free medium. They could use color in a different way and get a certain kind of textures and, you know, all that kind of stuff. It's unlimited actually for prints and they have it now in etching. You can do things in etching which they never did before, like the way they bite an etching now to make it almost a relief prints. It's nothing new but, you know, in abstract work the tendency is much wider.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Don't you have the feeling that the developments in the graphic field came at this point partly because there was available materials, you know, it sort of quickened the pace?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, maybe, but you see, it didn't come...not because I was doing it before. They even had a graphics division, you see.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right. Right.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Oh, later on it became...let's say for the lazy guys it was very good because they could do a woodcut in a day and I suppose it would take six weeks to do--man, I shouldn't say this off the cuff....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No, but this happened. Look, I know this happened.

LOUIS SCHANKER: The lazy guys, you know, they could...you could do a woodcut in a day and a half or two days and then you have the rest of the four months to.... Well, in a way it was all right--it was six weeks, you had six weeks, you know. It happened in easel painting too. It didn't happen in murals; it couldn't happen in murals because murals you had to produce a painting on a wall; it had to be a certain dimension, it had to be seen by lots and lots of people, you know, but for the easel painting you could.... Maybe I was a dope; maybe I should have gone to easel painting and just painted one for them and the rest for myself.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. I think a lot of that went on, but that's not....

LOUIS SCHANKER: But that was all right; I mean they were still producing, that's the point.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: There was the problem of what to do with the work when it was completed.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: you couldn't allocate everything that an artist was going to do.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You know, you had to put some limitation somewhere.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: As it was, they had a storehouse of material which....

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. Well, it's true, some artists take six weeks--six to eight weeks--to do a painting; not everybody does a painting in a day, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Or three days or a week, you know. It's all right. But I never felt bad about these things, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh no.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Because I think the artists deserve whatever they can get, you know. I mean, what the hell, they're still underdogs; they'll always be the underdogs except in today's fashion, which is quite a different thing. But when you're in one year and you're out the next, you know, and that kind of stuff goes on.... Well, I don't know....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Does the name--what's his name--Colonel Somervell...?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Oh, yes!

HARLAN PHILLIPS: The way you say that...?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, he doesn't sound good, the name. I mean I think we had a lot of trouble with him and I

think he was always wanted to cut out the projects....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Quota reduction, yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Everybody--reduction--reduction--pink slips, you know, this and that.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And so he doesn't have a good reputation as far as I'm concerned and I don't think he got much of a good reputation with any of the artists who were working. Don't forget, they all had to be on relief. You couldn't be on the project unless you were on relief so you got twenty-three dollars a week, I mean, you know, a man with a family, it would be better if he wasn't on the project and got relief.... The way it is today, for instance, you get more relief. Of course...well, prices of everything have gone up but it wasn't a hell of a lot of dough....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No.

LOUIS SCHANKER: If you had to live on twenty-three dollars a week...I mean it was really something.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. And then to have to fight him and his economics, his quota reductions, which were....

LOUIS SCHANKER: And he wasn't interested in art.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: He couldn't care less.

LOUIS SCHANKER: He couldn't care less and he couldn't care whether you ever painted another picture in your life or whether any art was in existence except the war hero statues. I mean you know....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Well, he was a fact of life that the Artists Union....

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes, the Artists Union fought him tooth and nail.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: They sort of put Audrey McMahan in between, you know...she didn't have a very easy time with the Artists Union on one side and Somervell on the other.

LOUIS SCHANKER: She chose it. No one forced her into it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I think she did very well to balance between those two forces, don't you?

LOUIS SCHANKER: She did very well.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: She was a good...when she believed in something she wanted to put it through and then she could be something else.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But of course this was a time in which women weren't looked upon as administrators.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Were beginning to be.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Frances Perkins, you know.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. And there was Juliana Force.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure there was. She'd been a kind of....

LOUIS SCHANKER: come up then

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. But you know, to administer a big program like Audrey McMahan was doing was an novel wrinkle to--for Somervell, he probably never could understand why a woman would come in as administrator.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. That's right. I don't know his relationship with the WPA in relation to McMahan.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I think he was the overall administrator...

LOUIS SCHANKER: Under Perkins?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: ...for the Eastern Region.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Oh! Under Perkins probably--Frances Perkins. Well, she was Secretary of what?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Of...she was Secretary of Labor.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Of Labor, that's right.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Somervell was under Colonel Harrington who took over from...oh, God, I can't even remember his name now--a friend of Roosevelt's from New York who was former president of the New York Tuberculosis Association. Oh, God--Harry Hopkins!

LOUIS SCHANKER: Harry Hopkins.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. And he was the first boss, you know.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Harry Hopkins.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And then Harrington, who was a military man--of course, most of the WPA was on road building and dock construction and so on.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I remember Byron Browne having to go out before he could get on WPA as an artist, he was washing statues, you know, that big statue--one of them was that big statue on 14th Street in the Square, a big round thing. He was cleaning it. And before I got on murals I got on teaching, I forgot even about that you see now. That's the way I got on the WPA. I couldn't get on the Art Project. I got on the Art Project into teaching. I taught at the Lenox Hill Settlement.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I'll be damned! That was an early thing--Lincoln Rothschild, I think.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Lincoln Rothschild! That's right! See, so that was around '35. And that's the only way I got on it after the PWAP or whatever it was--Public Works of Art Project which was the first one under Juliana Force.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

LOUIS SCHANKER: So I taught there for a while. I taught, you know....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Kids?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. We had a three-section thing there. I was teaching them one thing, someone was teaching them drama, and someone was teaching other things. I was teaching them how to design the sets, you know, that was mine. And it was very good; it was interesting because we had the kids working on all the things--not just, you know, in art schools for children you just let them do what they want. Well, we let them do what they wanted; I have some marvelous pictures that I got from these kinds, you know, some of these circus scenes and things like that. But see we staged--we had a three-man team--it was one woman and myself and I can't remember the name of the other. And one showed them how to make the puppets or the little things for the play; the other one showed them how to dress it; and I would show them what designs to make, you know, decor for the wall, color schemes. And the kids were working in three different things, you know, simultaneously. And then you had an idea what kids could do, puppets; they did the puppets better so we got them to do the puppets. So it really was very nice, very creative kind of a thing.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: But, God, I didn't want--I didn't want to be inside so long to teach. I wanted to be in my studio to work, you know. So it was one of the things I got. It was my "in," yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: This was the entrance, yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: That's right. And Harry Knight was I think was--it took a little time.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I talked with someone yesterday who had the same kind of entrance before she got on the easel project--Bena Meyer--had taught in a settlement school, you know. Well, I mean this was just a...pass this way.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. That's right. And then I'd have...some guy would say, "Oh, Shank," he said, "I'm tired of this teaching job. Can't you get me on to your mural project?" And I said, "Well, I don't know whether I can. I can put in for you if I need one. If they say I don't need one, you know..." So this was going on. I finally got him on. He was so happy. He got off the teaching project then he could be a mural assistant, you know. All that kind of stuff. Well, they were very hectic days in the '30's. It was still a big Ashcan School. That lasted a long, long time. But I imagine I painted a few of the potboilers myself.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, you had the emergence of the American abstract painters.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, yes, that's right. And that was a big, big group. It still is a big group. There's Holcomb Greene, Bertha Greene, George L. K. Morris, oh, just a few--Charles Shore....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, was George Morris--he wasn't on the...?

LOUIS SCHANKER: No, no. I'm talking about the American abstract artists group. No, he wasn't on it. But I mean this was the group. Gallatin was in there in American abstract painting. And it was a nice group of painters. And then I decided--well, I got out, you know. I stay so long like that. But....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, look, it kept artists going with a certain amount of continuity, didn't it?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Oh yes, it helped out those artists who really wanted to be artists; it helped an awful lot...who could never.... Some of them would have fallen by the wayside.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure.

LOUIS SCHANKER: That's right. I know for part of those guys it was very good. Oh, it was good for me too. I don't know whether I would have fallen by the wayside; I don't think so because I always could find something to do. If I wanted to paint, I could always find something to do, see.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But you had that momentum of the earlier experience.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes, I did all those years and so you know a lot of guys have fallen by the wayside.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I see men around who were painters in those days and they're not painters now and they got families or children you know what and they're still painting I suppose in a way but maybe not exhibiting or what, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Oh, it was a big stimulus for the arts. Not only the artists but the Writers Project and the Theatre Project and the Dance Project, all those things, marvelous.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Did you get in scenic design for the Theatre Project?

LOUIS SCHANKER: No. No, I never got into that.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I wondered whether there was much in the way of cross-fertilization between projects.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, I really don't know. All I know, the only thing I got...I had to belong to the scenic painters union in order to do the mural art at the World's Fair. Then I took a leave of absence for a few weeks after I did the WPA World's Fair. I had another job out there for the federal building out there, which was private, you know, from the Federal Government. And von Wyck was there and so I worked with him during that thing. So I took a leave of absence from the.... And then of course towards the end when the War started, that was the end of the WPA and I became a supervisor, which I hated till this day.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You became a supervisor?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. I don't know why but for some reason or other, I don't know what it was, I just...you know, the War came along and no one was doing any painting. I mean everything was done for civil defense, you see. So I didn't want to do any Civil Defense posters or anything and I gave up, you know, working in the office. I did work in the office there. I had a job there, you know, and Burgoyne Diller and McMahon were the big heads there and we were doing all these CD, Civil Defense, posters, you know, and things like that. That's what it ended up as.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And this friend of mine, Max Spivak, I think was the last supervisor on the project just before it closed. He's another guy probably can tell you a lot--Spivak.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. I've got him on my list.

LOUIS SCHANKER: You have?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Oh, he can tell you much more than I do; he's more talkative than I am. He's voluble. Oh, he's really terrific. You'll need three reels for him.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But you saw that the handwriting was on the wall so far as the Project was concerned?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. Oh....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: What about the change in spirit? Was there any? From the early days, like '34, '35, '36?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Oh yes! The spirit at the WPA?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: A complete change. Sure. And then, you know--then later on everybody saw their paintings from the WPA being sold by the pound on Canal Street. Did anyone tell you that?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes!

LOUIS SCHANKER: So that was it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: You know, everybody's pictures--people went down there and got Milton Averys, got this and that and I never bothered with it because I wasn't interested in going down and picking up somebody else's pictures but this is what happened. So the whole thing, you know, went down the drain.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: So I quit there; I quit even the supervisor...I couldn't take that too long. I wasn't cut out for being a supervisor, be a boss, and I probably was a lousy boss, you know. I think some of the guys hate me till this day, you know. And, well, they have a right maybe, or not; I don't know. Well, I was doing my job and, you know, you had someone above you pushing you and they had someone above them pushing them; you've got to get the stuff out, you know, it was in wartime. And I said to hell with all this so I gave it up.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Was this 1940?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. '40 or '41.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: '41, yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: About the end.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: So I...nothing. Here I am.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Then you paint.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, I painted and my woodcuts.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Show--exhibit.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. But you'd already had this other group "The Ten;" you'd had the American Abstract Artists. They all became pressure forces for...?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. For abstract painting or for pushing; the abstract painters didn't...wasn't any kind of militant organization. Neither was "The Ten." It was just that once we picketed. I think it helped a little bit getting more abstract painters in existence; I think it helped.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh yes. It kicks open a window somewhere.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. It helped a little bit I'm sure because you know even ten people...it's a small picket line but....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: What's the phrase--you're never discovered until you ring the bell and this was knocking on the door.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. That's the way. Of course, the big thing in those days was the Artists Union for the artists, the Writers union and the dance and, I don't know, all different kinds of unions. But....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Wasn't unionization and organization in the air as part of the period?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes, sure.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure. The artists had the first sit-in strike.

LOUIS SCHANKER: That's right.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: They kept--what is his name--Harold Stein in his office overnight.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Artists teachers I think.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Artists teachers I think.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And models I think it was. Teachers and models.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I remember a group of guys were arrested once for picketing and they were called in front of the judge and they gave names.... When this guy said, 'What's your name?' one guy said, "I'm Paul Cezanne." Another one said, "I'm Picasso," and another one said, "I'm Michelangelo." They all gave artists' names, never gave their right names.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: What did you think of the commentary in the press about the WPA? Was there any reaction?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, sure there was a lot of pro and a lot of con, you know. Offhand, I couldn't say. I don't remember.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Because I know there was one series in the New York Mirror which was miserable. And I think the Artists Union...

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, it would be there.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: ... with Davis and Shahn and someone else went up and interviewed the writer....

LOUIS SCHANKER: Is that so?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Got him out in the hall and, you know, spoke their little piece and that was it.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Did they beat him up?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, that wouldn't do much good with the Mirror I don't think.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Or the News either.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, there were pros and cons--one--if they were all against it before, you know, they all came out later as the greatest thing that ever happened to the art world in the United States, the greatest boon to art. But at that time I don't think they felt that way about it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I must say I got quite a few write-ups, you know, over a period of years on my murals. They were reproduced, you know, in the Times. They gave quite a big thing; I think there was a whole group of mine and Stuart Davis...the one we did for WNYC was a whole page in the Sunday Section of the Times. You may have seen it--and they gave a good account of it. Jewell was helpful.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I think.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. And then I had a double page spread by Jewell I think too in the Sunday magazine section of my mural that I did at Ponset Beach, and it was very good.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Not me only, it was mine and there was somebody else's, you know, but a double page spread and this happened during the time we were in there. Emily Genauer used to give us quite favorable reviews.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: She was also good.

LOUIS SCHANKER: She was very good.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And there was a guy by the name of Klein on the Post....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Klein?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Do you remember Klein? I think his name was Klein. He was an art critic on the Post--Jerome Klein.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Jerome Klein.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Of course he was always for the...and you know I've gotten write-ups from him...the WPA. So I think the Times as a whole was fairly good about it, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And the world-Telegram was good, you know, I think. I'm just trying to remember from things that I saw, you know. As a whole they thought the, you know, the mural project of course I think was the one they liked best, you know. You know graphics doesn't take as much space or as much publicity as paintings. So....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But the world changes....

LOUIS SCHANKER: Those were rough times, sure, you know, sometimes you're out there and you hate to have to tell people you meet, you know, you're on the WPA and afterwards they meet and they say, "What? You don't look like you're starving." I'd say, "I don't have to be starving. I eat fairly well. I'm not there because I'm starving--because I want to do a job and I want to do a mural, or I want to do something on the walls." What chance have you got? You haven't any other chance. Because you know private property or private industry now has done an awful lot of murals you know and I think that came out of it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure.

LOUIS SCHANKER: All the bank paintings and banks and big buildings and all that.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I think they saw the possibilities there and the said, well, why not. It might have helped.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure. Yes. What about sculpture? Did you do sculpture in the '30's?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes, I did sculpture in the '30's but for myself.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: This was one in the '30's--those two up there on top.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: The two on the top?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. I even had a piece of sculpture--one of my sculptures--instead of a painting at the Whitney Museum one year. I called up Henry Moore

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forgot to invite me this year." You know I didn't usually do that but I was so mad because I was invited every year for a while, and he said, " Oh, gee, Louie," he said, "it's too late for painting." I said, "How about a piece of sculpture?" He said, "Well, all right. I think we got room for sculpture." Because he didn't have room for paintings anymore. so I had a piece of sculpture. I push it a little bit once in a while.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. But the notion of cleaning--what was it in the early days, a fellow who was cleaning a statue...?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes, well, that happened to a lot of artists.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: That's what....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That's the way I think they initially began using sculptors to clean existing sculpture.

LOUIS SCHANKER: That's right, yes. That's right. Byron Brown was a sculptor-painter at that time. He was doing more painting than sculpture but he was you know, fairly well-known, like all of us at that time--well-known. I mean he was showing around, you know. Oh, there were a lot of guys who were doing that kind of work. And maybe some of the guys preferred it. I don't know. I can't tell.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No. No.

LOUIS SCHANKER: It's kind of hard.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: You know they said, "What the hell, should I paint certain kind of pictures I don't like to paint?" Maybe, you know, something like that, you know. Because in the early '30's they really were very censorious--what's the word--censorship. They really, you know, you had to... had to sort of toe the line on certain things, I think especially on the easel project.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, I think they had the notion, didn't they, that if we did something acceptable the project might continue?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, yes. One reason....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: If you slap peoples' sensibilities...?

LOUIS SCHANKER: That's true, you see, especially easel pictures; you couldn't allocate lots of easel pictures to high schools where you wanted them because the principal had the say--the principal either liked it or, if he didn't like it, he wouldn't take it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

LOUIS SCHANKER: So if most of them were rejected then you would have a problem.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That was the handwriting on the wall.

LOUIS SCHANKER: That's right.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: All you had to do was a beach scene with water and you were in.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes, more or less, you know, so you knocked one off.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, did you have occasion to...I guess they had an allocations division, didn't they?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Oh, yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Wasn't Lloyd Rollins in there?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Lloyd Rollins was on it and then later on this guy Godso was on it too.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I forget what job he had on it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But that was the problem of, you know, finding....

LOUIS SCHANKER: Allocation

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Then they had...well, the other mural projects were the PWAP, that was different; that was where you had to send your...the post office project; that wasn't WPA....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No.

LOUIS SCHANKER: That was....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Edward Bruce.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Edward Bruce, the Treasury Department.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Treasury Department, yes. Public Works Administration or something like that. PWAP.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But even, you know...well what impressed me or impresses me in retrospect is people like Diller, for example, turned out to be good negotiators and good administrators.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. A very honest guy...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: ...very honest and he was always interested in the artists' point of view. That's true. He was a marvelous guy. And I was very glad that we had Diller there. Well, here's another guy probably didn't want to and why he took it I don't know, you see, because I don't think they paid him that much to put in the hours he put in there....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No.

LOUIS SCHANKER: God, he'd be there sometimes until eleven or twelve o'clock at night.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: King Street where the... big place you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. But the notion of keeping it going, you know. For example, Gorky--the mural they had for Gorky at Floyd Bennett Field where LaGuardia said that "if that's art, I'm Tammany Hall."

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Floyd Bennett Field was La Guardia's pet, you know. And here was this mural....

LOUIS SCHANKER: Leger was here too at that time. He was working with Gorky.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Was it the same field?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I think so. Because later Gorky had a variation of the theme for the Newark Airport and the Newark Airport while a group over there weren't, you know, too pleased--a woman who was director of the Newark Museum shamed them into accepting it.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Is that so? I don't remember that.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, you know, this is negotiation.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, Leger worked there too, I think.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I think he came over in '38 or '39 and worked on some of the big projects they gave him.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Well, were you--let's see, some artists from abroad were coming here...?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, a lot of the artists came here. Zadkine came here. All those guys came here. The only

ones who didn't come here were Picasso and Matisse, I think.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And Braque.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: But all the rest of them came here.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And this was in the '30's.

LOUIS SCHANKER: In the '30's. They saw the handwriting on the wall in Europe. And Leger was here until after the war.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And quite a few others.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Mondrian was here, wasn't he?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Mondrian came over. Lou--what's his name-- Holtzman--Harry Holtzman.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: So that these were available too from the point of view of idea.

LOUIS SCHANKER: He brought Mondrian over.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Paid for everything. And got all his paintings when Mondrian died. And all that kind of stuff. So he brought him over just before the war.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And probably a good thing he didn't live too long here but at least he had a place where he could paint--no problem to sell.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Jim Brooks did one for LaGuardia Airport. You know Jim Brooks?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, he was doing nice, good, paintings up there even though it was very realistic sort of thing.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And there were a lot of things around.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh yes. But, you know, to have the variety of people that you have, from Gorky on, or anyone on, and to tailor-make something to fit, you know, this particular talent and have it accepted, was Diller's problem.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, that's right; he had to push, he had to.... I know. I was up in the office sometimes when he really had to push these things through.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: He fought and stood behind them.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Diller was good. But I do know that he had a tough job with Pollock. Pollock was the only one that really I know he had a tough job with.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: But I don't think he was doing murals but he was on the mural project or the easel project, I

don't remember. But I know he was there.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, most of the painters then who were doing, you know, their own work back in their studios or wherever they were painting were experimenting in terms of idea and in an abstract way in the '30's right along with the WPA.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Oh sure! Oh yes! Well, this is what gave them the time to do it, you see. While they were doing easel paintings there they could also, you know, do their own...they were doing their own work, like Milton Avery. He painted the same thing for the--I don't know whether he was on the project or not--I really don't know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I don't think so.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I don't think so. I think he just couldn't do it, you know; he couldn't get on it. Adolph Gottlieb wasn't on either; he didn't need the money.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Frances Avery was on the project.

LOUIS SCHANKER: His wife?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And wasn't there a rule that only one of the family could be on?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Maybe. Maybe. Well, what they did I suppose was live separately.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: In different homes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Till they were found out.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: But no, I don't think Avery was on it but there were some other guys on it. Adolph I know wasn't on it. But I don't know, I think art would not be where it is today if it wasn't for the WPA. God, it sounds like a poem.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: In rhyme.

LOUIS SCHANKER: But it's true, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I think it gave a big momentum to not only the art world but to people who were not artists, who got interested in art. I mean all the adult education projects that were founded in those days, you know, a lot of people would go to art classes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Art centers.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Art centers, you see. And this was a big stimulant. That helped an awful lot. I don't know; I was teaching at the New School all these years after the... you know. In the '40's I started at the New School, in '42, '43, to teach. I started, and I had all kinds of people there, from 18 to 75. And, you know, it was kind of stimulating for them and for me too, both I think. After a while I got tired of it, you know, after I was there sixteen years, so I got tired of... I had to listen to a woman tell me about her--she's in the cockroach killing business you know--for a half hour I tried to tell about her painting. She started telling me about this new thing that came out to kill bugs and then there's a...the doctor and then there's the dentist and the lawyer and you have all kinds of people and the same thing on the WPA--adult education art centers.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I got a little fed up with that. They were picking me too much and I said no, I've got to quit. I taught college--I just couldn't--Bard College. I taught there for fifteen years. And I just figure I don't have much longer to live and I want to be able to do everything I want to do that's possible, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. And judging by the...you know, the... LOUIS SCHANKER; Oh, the variety of things I'm doing--like that paper, see. Now if someone says, "How do you make that?" It's just paper, you know, and I make sculpture out of paper. I don't think it's new; I always say nothing is new. But that's paper dipped in a formula that I made, see. It's white and glue and a few things and it's very...it's like wood, you know, you can feel the stuff--it's hard.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It's hard, yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Like wood. And I get a big kick out of doing it. Then I leave it, see; I do five or six or seven and I go on to something else. But the carving itself is the biggest thing now. It's what I've been doing all these walnut things and I burn my wood there. See, I burn it first and then carve it afterwards. That one there is all burnt in the fireplace, see.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And after it's all charred and everything then I fix it so the charred wood doesn't fall off because it's so easy to fall off. I fix it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Then I carve it. So that's what I had--two years ago, I had a show of that.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: These walnut things, have you had those in the fire?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Not the walnut, no. The black.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: The black? Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: No, I wouldn't--I'm going to burn some walnut but not yet. I'm scared to burn walnut because....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It's gorgeous material, isn't it?

LOUIS SCHANKER: It's nice wood and I don't know what it'll do when it gets black, whether it'll be like this, but it might be something very exciting so I think I'll take a piece and burn it just for the hell of it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: It's Goddamn expensive but...and they're hard to get but I don't mind trying a small piece to see how it works. The trouble is I can't get big pieces like that, see, like that tree there, you know. It's very difficult to get walnut because they're rare.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Walnut trees are going out but oak and black birch--that's black birch. It's a nice kind of wood to burn in the fireplace. And then I have to stand here like--what do you call it--the devil or a blacksmith, you know. I have to keep turning the wood over so it doesn't burn too much and then pull it out with a big iron thing I have there, just pull them out and let them smoke for a while until.... So....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But it's a new technique.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, I think it's--yes--it's kind of interesting sort of....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Look, you know, if you've never done it before, it's the best reason in the world for doing it.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, I burn a lot of wood, you know, in the fireplace and then I started to see certain things coming out and I said, gee, they look good the way they are, you know, and then they wouldn't look good enough and then I started carving them. And you get...well, if you've got a fireplace--or you don't need a fireplace--and you burn wood and after it dies, you know, certain things happen with the wood. It chars in a certain way and sometimes you see animals, figures or just very abstract forms and, you know, so that's how I got started on that. But I get so many things going, you see, and then I just started these paintings on Plexiglas--that's the wax painting on those, you see, and that was only recently and yet I get about ten of those and yet I don't want to show them yet until I have enough and then I want to do a sculpture but I don't want to let the sculpture go so it's kind of a....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sort of a race.

LOUIS SCHANKER: It's a real rat race because I don't have enough time. Now with certain things I even get assistance--help--but I don't want to mass-produce anything so the hell with them, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: But so I will only make so many, you know. But it's a big enjoyment. Like this thing here, balanced like the way it is, see.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: These balls. That's all out of that glue and walnut, see, all these boxes of...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Chips?

LOUIS SCHANKER: ...chips. All my chips I save. I'm a real Scotchman. It's all made out of that stuff, see.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. I like this one, you know, this stump.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Oh yes, that's chestnut. That's an old piece of wood I picked in the woods, you see, just find them around.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. But the, you know, the....

LOUIS SCHANKER: The carving and the grace....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And the way it....

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes, I like this so I leave it the way it is, see. The big hole in the back there was termites started to get...now all these chunks are from our big trees. Like they're cut down when they're dead and we have to cut them up and get them out of the way in the woods. So I get them here, see.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I use them as stands now and if they dry out enough I'll carve them. The trouble is this is white oak; that checks very easily so I don't know whether I'll ever use it for carving or not.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Probably should depend ...you, know, you get...there's something new that comes along all the time.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, it does and, you see, I sit in that chair there and, you know, you just let whatever it is come over your shoulder.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

LOUIS SCHANKER: It isn't inspiration but something has to come, you know. You just sit there and sometimes it doesn't come, sometimes it does come. If it doesn't come the hell with it but, you know, when I'm carving I don't need it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: But it's when sometimes I'm not carving, I'm sitting there and I say what the hell, I know I want to do something and I get a million ideas but I can't formulate one so I get my books full of drawings there and then every once in a while I look through the drawings, you see, and it comes. You just sit and it seeps in. That's all I can say. I don't know what it is. And the same way when I was on 23rd Street before I got married, I...you know, I lived alone on 23rd Street--the same thing happened there. I'd just sit in the studio and some guys have to get plastered and other guys just don't have to get plastered.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Well, it's unique, whatever it is, you know.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, whatever it is, it's there.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: However it comes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: That's right, you can't tell.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But no, to take a stump like that, you know; it's a challenge to get the juxtaposition of the smooth and the finished with the old, you know.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes, it is, yes. And I left it just the way you can go, you can't go any further with it, see.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: For carving, I mean. I was thinking, it's like a big dog with a tail...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right. Right.

LOUIS SCHANKER: ...and I left the tail the way it is and I said it's silly to carve that, there's no point....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right. Because that helps set off the other. It's like extremes, each with their own.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I like to use this old wood. Well, that's really checked pretty bad but it won't check any more, see, that's as far as it'll go.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: So a lot of...there's another piece of chestnut tree, see. It's lying there and I haven't done a thing with it and I don't know whether I'll do anything with it, I don't know. It's just a shame I carved off...I cleaned off the outside, see.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: So I'll leave it there--it's there for a year now and God knows what I'll do with it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh, it may occur someday.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. I just leave it around because I get enough things going, you know, more things than.... Look at this big studio; it's getting all filled up. I even work in this corner now. And that's a plaster thing. I do work in plaster, see....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Behind?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. Right there. and I make the mold out of wood; I carve the wood in reverse like a woodcut.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And I carve in and then I set my plaster in it so that wood is the back, that big gray piece of wood in the back is the reverse of that on the other side is this thing in reverse.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Then I have--this is called "My Old General," this is wood chips I call my fragment pieces.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: That's all wood.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: This is marble, see. I made that too. All marble.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But then it's...this is like using all parts of the....

LOUIS SCHANKER: Of the wood, yes. Using everything.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Making use of it. See, these balls move....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: These are two....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes, that's marvelous.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And there's no wax on this.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: This is just all wood this moves this comes out take this little gadget out here carve all these balls move.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And so this is a sort of a new thing for me.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Have you shown things like this before? You haven't?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes, I've shown but not like this. This is new. See, this is for my next show. See those balls move down below there, revolve right where they are. They're static right there and they can't go up and down any further. Well, a little bit. But they're all carved out of the wood. People say, "Well, how do you get the ball in there like that?" And I said, "I didn't put the balls in there...I put them here." Here, this is one of the...see this moves (demonstrating). This is all shavings from here, you know. This moves. This moves. So I do them. And I get quite a nice big kick out of carving so that's why I'm not doing those so much. I'll do them I know; it's in the back of my mind and there'll come a day when I'll really do a whole bunch of them. That's the way I like to do them. I don't like to do just one; I'll do a whole series.

HARLAN PHILLIPS:

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. That's right. Now these are the plaster pieces. Now these have never been done as far as I know in this way. All right, so I taught it one year in school and a lot of guys are doing it, but I shouldn't have taught it. But that's what you do. You give them everything new. You see this is a relief, you know, paper print is just flat, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

LOUIS SCHANKER: But this comes out in reverse; it's like a negative, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And so this is what happens and all the little lines come out. Isn't that fantastic?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And this is inked on the block. I don't block from this. The block is inked just like you're doing a print so when the ink comes in here it becomes involved with the plaster so it becomes waterproof. I mean this ink won't come off. That's the way it will stay. As I said, I think I did about twenty-five of these but I think I showed two. And I sold them both. But....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: These are nice. It will keep you busy.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I keep myself busy.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No, but I mean when you look up at the paintings there's continuity in painting there and in sculpture too.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, yes, that's important, that's right. It's very important now. I have continuity now but it's not the same thing; I don't keep doing the same things.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No, no.

LOUIS SCHANKER: It's all variation and mood.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Variation. Right. Anyway, you take a notion you paint.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. Well, you see, painting and this is quite different; you just don't paint it. This has got to be treated and it's hot when you put that on, see, and it's wax and you get to pour it on and so it's another medium and I don't want to do it until I'm sure. I want a couple of days and just do a couple of these, you know, two or three of them if I can do them.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, the '30's were pretty good, weren't they, from the point of view of examining...?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Experimentation?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes, and the materials too.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Oh yes. We had a regular chemical group there, Yanca Cuff--Coofe? I don't know whether you knew him--he was....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yanca Coofe, is he still around?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. He's alive but he's not in arts at all; he's a salesman or something like that. I met him once five years ago for a minute. Do you remember his name?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, the name has come up.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, he was in the chemical department. First he was on the Art Project and then he went into--I don't know who else--who was the head-- but he was the one who made the wax mediums, casein mediums and all these different...knew what you could use. He was the one that helped me put the mural up at WnYC; he and that group decided what kind of...that's canvas pasted on the wall.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: But I painted in casein wax medium, see, and they made me the casein wax medium. I know how to make it but I just wanted to be sure that they knew how to make it, see, so it was a double check. And that thing hasn't cracked one...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Bit.

LOUIS SCHANKER: ...bit, and it's up since '39.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

LOUIS SCHANKER: 25 years, 26 years.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Was David Smith head of materials? I guess he was, wasn't he?

LOUIS SCHANKER: David Smith? He might have had something to do with it, yes. He may have been in it too. But these...Yanka was one of the chemists and, oh, they...you know, all kinds of different mixed mediums and everything like that which was very good, as you say. It worked fine because, you know, it gave guys more chance to experiment.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure.

LOUIS SCHANKER: But I worked...a lot of my paintings were done with casein and wax together. And that's one of them--that one on the wall now is casein wax; it's a marvelous medium. It's as close to fresco as you can get without doing a fresco, see, you know, wet plaster. And then I did a whole series of paintings on paper with casein because it's a terrific medium; it's waterproof, you know. And you can work with it like tempera, you know. Are you a painter?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No.

LOUIS SCHANKER: No?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: A Sunday painter.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, so you paint. There are painters, like Rousseau was a Sunday painter....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Either you paint or you don't paint, you know, the standard amateur and professional. You're a good painter or you're not and whether you're amateur or professional I think the stigmas are pretty awful. You know and then you have to paint, see.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. But there were a lot of problems that came up--walls. What the devil do you do with a wall?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. Well, sometimes you had a wall that was...the plaster was no good; you couldn't paint on the wall so you had to paint--make a big painting on canvas and put the thing up on canvas, you see.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I don't know what this wall was but I did know that...I imagine we tested the wall but anyhow we lined it with white lead and we mounted the whole canvas with white lead on the wall and then we gave it a gesso surface. That was Yanco Coofe's job and the chemists there--they gave the whole surface under my supervision because I know how to do gesso panels too. I had done them, so they gave me a real smooth wall like a billiard ball, you know, real smooth. And then you could paint on that, you know, with very fine brushes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And I really felt I was painting like a fresco. I enjoyed it very much. Got a big kick.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. But they had this service available because they had these problems.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Oh sure. They had to. Yes, they had to have

HARLAN PHILLIPS: They had to learn, you know.

LOUIS SCHANKER: That's right. Yes. It all helped.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure. Sure.

LOUIS SCHANKER: All necessary, as a matter of fact.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I mean they needed it in murals; they didn't need it in easel paintings because everyone painted easel paintings.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Or watercolors or oils or whatever they did. And then they had an expert in lithography--Jacob Friedman.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Jacob Friedman? Right!

LOUIS SCHANKER: He was an old lithographer, a painter. and he hung around with the whole group, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And they got him on to do just the printing, so we had lithographs and stones there. You'd go up there; they'd give you a stone to take home, you know. You do that, you took a stone home or two stones home. You worked on it, you went back and they etched it for you. And, oh yes, it was all really very good.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: That's what I said, a lot of these guys who didn't know anything, all of a sudden, were doing, you know...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: All kinds of....

LOUIS SCHANKER: ...they were graphic men but suppose you were an etcher and you wanted to do a woodcut. So you'd learn how to do a woodcut. It isn't...they weren't teaching it. It wasn't going to school; it was just that, you know, you could do a woodcut and there were technical men there would tell you how to print it and how to do.... And the same with lithographs, how to draw on a stone, you see. Like Picasso draws on stones but he has to go to a technical man to have it printed; he doesn't print it himself. And these technical men said, "Well, I don't think you can do this or you can't do this on the stone, see." So it's the same thing.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Did you bump into Eddie Cahill very often?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Occasionally. Not too often. He was on the...McMahon.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: He was the National Director.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. That's right. Above....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Did you have visits from timekeepers?

LOUIS SCHANKER: I saw Dorothy the other day.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Did you?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. Oh, I had visits from timekeepers, yes. It was all right though; it didn't bother me. I was always home working; they never bothered me. So my assistants were out and they'd say, "Where is my assistant?" "Well, he's doing research." I had one doing a lot of research for me. When I was doing the murals for the Ponset Beach I had to have lots of research on animals and I figured, well, if I'm going to get the canvas and I'm making all these...you know. I had to make all the sketches and everything so I sent him out to the Zoo and so he would go every day to the Zoo and draw animals and then he'd bring me back lots of, you know, clippings from the library. He was very good. So we worked on them. All right. So, ah, some stories I'd better not tell on the tape.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I know Davis had an assistant I think for the WNYC mural.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. We all had assistants.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. He didn't know...Davis had a funny way; he just didn't know how to use an assistant. He didn't want to....

LOUIS SCHANKER: He couldn't.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, I couldn't use assistants really. When you're painting on a wall, they're there to help you get the brushes clean, the brushes, mix your colors. But actually to do the thing, it's the artist's problem; he always has to work it. I had two assistants; they would do research for me, get me things and do things like that. And they learned a lot.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh sure. Sure.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And those people are artists in their own right today; I mean they were artists before that time too, you know, but they couldn't get a job. There were only so many people could do murals on the project. The rest, they wanted to take them on, probably had to take them on as assistants.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. And, if you wanted to learn, this was one way you could learn, as an assistant.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. And you could still have your own integrity as a painter because that's what you were anyhow. you know,...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

LOUIS SCHANKER: ...and you could help, you really could help. So it was good except that some, you know, just hung around. It's like I did this federal thing for the World's Fair and whoever it was came to me and he said, "Louie," he said, "I think I got this thing from the government," you know, it was a federal project--not a project, it was a private....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Commission?

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes, private commission. I said, "Well, that's fine." He said, "Do you want to work with me, to help me paint it?" I said, "Do you want me to?" He said, "Yes. I'd like you to help me paint it." So he said, "The only trouble is my sketches weren't accepted and if you'd do some sketches for me and...." I shouldn't say this here so I'm not giving you any names. "Okay," I said, "I'll do some sketches for you." But actually I couldn't get the job because he had the "in;" I mean you had to have an "in," you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh, yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: In those days I wasn't a politician so I made a certain amount of sketches. I think there were six and they were accepted. So actually...so he put a few changes in it--anyhow it didn't matter whether it was mine on the wall or his on the wall. The point was that we came down to paint it, see, and I in the meantime had finished my WPA mural at the World's Fair for the medical building--Abe Vichinsky is another one, I don't know whether you know that name...?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes, I....

LOUIS SCHANKER: He was doing a mural there too. So I was a member of the Mural Painters Guild they called it; if you paid your ten bucks and they allowed it just for the World's Fair; they allowed artists who had murals, you know, government murals, to be able to paint up there. Otherwise you couldn't do it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

LOUIS SCHANKER: So we got the thing and we started to paint on the wall and the union man came around, the union man, and he said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "We're painting. What does it look like?" "Well," he said, "Have you got your union card?" I said, "Yes, I got my union card." So I showed him my Mural Painters Guild thing. He said, "All right." And then he went up to this other fellow who got the job and he said, "Where's yours?" He said, "I ain't got any." He said, "Well, you can't paint. But I'll fix it up for you. We'll get two men on the job who, you know, will do the painting." He said, "We don't want two men to do the painting. How can you get two house painters, you know, union painters, house painters, to paint on walls?" So he said, "Well, they don't have to paint. It's like the musicians union, all...they don't have to paint, they just sit here and we have to pay them twenty-five dollars a day but then you can paint on the walls, see." So I said, "Well, all right, but how much money are you going to make if you're going to pay me, you know, and then you've got to pay the two guys for doing nothing and then besides me, you know, so what the hell is in it for you?" He said, "Yes," that's all." All

that day I did painting on the wall and he watched, see, and the guy said, "I'm coming around tomorrow with two men." I said, "Well, there's a meeting tonight of the mural Painters Guild and bring up some of your pictures and I'll take you up there and you get...." I said, "Come with me." So I got him into the Mural Painters Guild. So the next day the union man came around. I said, "We don't need you; we got a union card for the Mural Painters Guild." So you see we saved our assistants.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: You couldn't get two guys, you know, house painters, to paint your walls? But that's the way it is; that's the way the union got it. The Musicians Union do it all the time. My wife is in the theatre. Boy, she tells me those people that come there and musicians they do nothing...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

LOUIS SCHANKER: ...while the regular musicians play; then they have eight musicians doing nothing, you know. So they...that's the way it works.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, it's racket--I don't want to...but someone is getting it. How long have you been with those people?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh, I guess about two years and a half.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Did you know Virginia Fields when she was there or had she left by that time?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: She had gone.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Because she was there; I know her from way back. And she's with something else, I don't know--she's with some other art foundation, I think. Well, who runs this Archives of American Art?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: William Woolfenden.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Now what is it, a private organization or...

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: ...or semi-private?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It's in Detroit.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It is a, you know, private organization devoted to archives.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Archives?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes, collection of American archives--of American art.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Archives, you mean art, also theatre?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No, the visual arts.

LOUIS SCHANKER: The visual arts?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Hmm.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Painting, sculpture, things like that?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You know, manuscripts, letters, correspondence, dealer papers, anything they can arrange for.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, how do they make money? I mean, for instance....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, now they have...they make....

LOUIS SCHANKER: Are they in a foundation, or what?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: They run a series of shows of some kind--old motors, you know, and a kind of auction. They

get their funds that way. They do quite well, as a matter of fact. In Detroit. And I think they have regional groups, a membership drive that tends to support them somewhat. And then this particular study of the '30's, it has been sustained by the Ford Foundation. So they, you know, received a grant to see what can be gained in....

LOUIS SCHANKER: Umhmm. Then what they do with it is to put these things in a library...?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right. For scholars....

LOUIS SCHANKER: For scholars, that's what I mean, yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I mean it's not for sale or anything like that?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh me!

LOUIS SCHANKER: Well, I'm trying to get what...you know, what the background is. It's also...in other words, it's a kind of a private and like a foundation thing?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It is like a foundation. It's a tax-exempt group.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Non-profit?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Non-profit association.

LOUIS SCHANKER: And they back it?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And they sustain it.

LOUIS SCHANKER: I see, yes. But they're in another business and they put their...they sustain it?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

LOUIS SCHANKER: They don't make money out of it?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No.

LOUIS SCHANKER: That's what I'm trying to...it's like a foundation in a....

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes, that's right.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And it's dedicated to...?

LOUIS SCHANKER: The visual arts.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right!

LOUIS SCHANKER: Motion pictures?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No. Now, gee, I don't, don't hold me to that. It's possible. But I think their basic interest has been in the painters and sculptors and more particularly in the recent period since the turn of the century. Although they've got, gee, an enormous collection built up of older things too. So, it's like covering a portion of American culture.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes, I understand now. For instance, a scholar or writer wants to write a book about the '30's; he's going to come to you and say, "What have you got on the '30's? I want to write a book. I think the '30's are a very important period, you know." Part of it was theatre and music and the drama in the '30's and then he wants to find out about art so he comes to you?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

LOUIS SCHANKER: My wife is giving all her memorabilia to Boston University. They got her archives up there. So everything she gets; she gets a letter, she gets this, she gets that, she ships off to Boston University. And she and Martin Luther King both. He's up there, too. I mean I think he went there, you see, and they asked him for... God, he must have loads and loads of stuff, that guy.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, we found if you don't...you know, if you don't in the present world take...have an approach toward this, chance comes along and you know it's like selling canvases by the pound.

LOUIS SCHANKER: Yes. Yes. And it disappears.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right. Well, you take the chance....

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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