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*Archives of American Art*

Oral history interview with Mark Voris, 1965  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Mark Voris on February 11, 1965. The interview took place in Tucson, Arizona, and was conducted by Sylvia Loomis for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Interview

SYLVIA LOOMIS: First, Mr. Voris, would you tell us something about yourself; where you were born and where you received your art education?

MARK VORIS: I was born in Franklin, Indiana. Started college there and came to Arizona in 1925, and entered the University and continued through the University almost to graduation, but not quite. The reason being that I had made the acquaintance of Paul Daugherty, the painter who used to be rather well known with whom I worked for a period of about three years. The last year of which, after I had left school, I spent full time working with him assuming that this was an opportunity I might not have at another time and place, so I took the opportunity. And it was only much later that I finally got my degree from the University here.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Did you major in art when you were there?

MARK VORIS: Yes. And I had a small amount of work at the Art Institute in Chicago. I actually was engaged in dual activity for several years, practice in commercial art. I thought I would be a printer, was manager of a print shop in town and I was designing and executing advertising of different sorts, photo-engraving shop, and on my own in the community. At the same time, I was spending as much time as I could on printing and so in quite a large respect I was taught by experience which one did in those days quite frequently.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. Did you have any commercial art training in your courses at the University?

MARK VORIS: No. This was my own office - digging it out through experience.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. So your training was in fine arts?

MARK VORIS: It was. Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And then with Paul Daugherty, who was a practicing artist?

MARK VORIS: Right.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, what were you doing at the time the Federal Arts project came along?

MARK VORIS: I was trying to eke out a living at commercial art. It was very difficult, in fact. Business was very poor and very few people were doing anything, so I can recall working for ten hours a day for two or three dollars just to get along.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Those were difficult times, all right. And how did you get involved in it?

MARK VORIS: This was through an intimate friend of mine who was in an administrative position in the WPA, but not connected with the Federal Art Project at all. She evidently had been contacted as to who might be supervisor of work for the State and I was contacted through her.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What is her name?

MARK VORIS: Her name is Louise Norton.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I haven't come across that name -- it doesn't seem to have a connection.

MARK VORIS: No. No direct connection with the project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: You said something about Gus Baumann of Santa Fe being involved.

MARK VORIS: That was in the Public Works of Art Project, and how I happened to get pointed out for that one. I have no recollection, unless it was through the same person, I don't know. Incidentally, Louise Norton was with the WPA, when the Federal Art Project was started in Tucson in Arizona. At the time she was some sort of an officer with the WPA and I cannot say exactly what it was, but on this other project PWAP -- I had known her in college

and she pointed me out.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Do you remember what you did on that project?

MARK VORIS: I did landscape painting.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And that was more or less under Gus Baumann's direction?

MARK VORIS: Right.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Did he come down here to see you?

MARK VORIS: He came down periodically and was thus involved here.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Do you remember about how many artists were involved here at the time?

MARK VORIS: I only know of one, Lucy Drake Marlowe, and if I recall what she was doing was painting portraits of the then president of the University, Dr. Homer Shantz and some few previous presidents. Possibly some of them are still living, I am not certain of this, but I imagine others were involved.

SILVIA LOOMIS: But that's the only one?

MARK VORIS: That's the only other person I am certain was on the Project then.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Do you have any sort of vague ideas of whether there were others besides the two of you?

MARK VORIS: Well, it's very vague. I have an idea there must have been one or two others, but ---

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Did you know Mrs. Colton?

MARK VORIS: I know the name, but I did not know her.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: She was on that same committee with Gus Baumann - the PWAP - with John Gaw Meem and Jess Nusbaum. Mrs. Colton was in Arizona at some point, but that might have been a little later, I don't know. I tried to interview her, but she's ill now, I wasn't able to.

MARK VORIS: Is she up in northern Arizona?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: She's near Flagstaff.

MARK VORIS: Yes, I thought I had identified her with that vicinity.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Her husband, Frank, is still with the Museum there but she is in the hospital and not well enough to be seen. Well, then what happened after that? Did this go into the WPA?

MARK VORIS: I don't know if there was a direct transition or not, I can't recall the amount of time that must have intervened between the end of that project. And as I recall it did end there in this locality, it ended completely before the WPA Art Project was started.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

MARK VORIS: About the amount of time between, I do not recall.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, it was very brief. Actually only a matter of two or three months and some people went directly from one to the other. An administrative change was the main thing that took place. They changed the nature of this committee because not enough people were being employed under the PWAP standards that existed then and the WPA was started to employ more people. That was the primary purpose then. If they were artists and some good art would come out of it that was fine, but that was secondary. And, I think, the PWAP was just the reverse, or that is my understanding of it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, you said that you were the acting supervisor on this project?

MARK VORIS: Right.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And what were your duties in that? Do you remember?

MARK VORIS: From the outset there had already been, appointed, or placed on payroll, some artists in the area, in the state. I was given those names and made contact with them, and discussed their probable work, nature of

their work, and then subsequently there were additions to that group and here again my mind is completely at fault. I can't give you the original number nor those who came on a little later, but essentially the group remained pretty much as it developed early in the Project throughout, oh - approximately two years, I think. The artists worked mainly in our own studios, with a few exceptions.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How many of these were easel painters?

MARK VORIS: I would say two-thirds, and here again, I am not sure - perhaps there were fifteen artists involved - and about two-thirds of those.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What other types of work were done on the project?

MARK VORIS: There was one metalsmith, who was doing objects in beaten copper - in one instance for a newly designed, or, I believe, a student union building or at least for student use at Tempe, (Arizona). Then there was another man - employed here in Tucson, who was working at the Museum on campus, and was doing life-size figures of Indians, in characteristic poses and positions. This was a man who was adept at decorative panels cast in bronze for buildings - this type of work. He was a technician for the artists doing this piece of work.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What happened to these large pieces that he did?

MARK VORIS: I actually haven't been through all of the museum in recent years so some of them may still be present there.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, is that right?

MARK VORIS: I understand that they are very lifelike figures.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Is that here?

MARK VORIS: It's right here on campus. One of these was, I believe, a Yaqui Indian. As a matter of fact, he used a Yaqui Indian as a model.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Do you know his name?

MARK VORIS: He was a man who was then in his early 30's from California.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Were these ever cast in bronze?

MARK VORIS: These were not cast in bronze, these were done in plaster, or cast in plaster and then polychromed and actually had human hair - like a wax museum.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, were there any other kinds of art activities?

MARK VORIS: In sculpture down in Bisbee there was Phillips Sanderson, who then moved into the Phoenix area during the project's life, and remained in that area, actually after the project was over and most of the time was involved in studio production. Quite a number of his commissions were for the Valley National Banks - their branch banks.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That was after the project, you mean?

MARK VORIS: Yes, that was following the project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, do you remember anything else about the people who worked on it or the type of thing they did, or anything in connection with it?

MARK VORIS: Well, Lew Davis, who is living up in the Scottsdale area at the present time and is still painting and has attained quite a reputation in recent years, was working in Jerome, I recall, in the basement of - no - in a hotel, in Jerome. It was a live town at the time. He was doing painting, he did some very handsome things, while on the art project. Eugene Upton was an illustrator and he was working in Wickenburg at the time, and I am vague about what he produced for the project, but he had to do with a lot of cooperative effort as I recall, between the Writer's Project and something they had compiled.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That Guide to Arizona?

MARK VORIS: Yes, the Guide to Arizona, I guess, they did those ---

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Those State Guide Books.

MARK VORIS: I believe he did some work for that book. At any rate it was in his field of black and white illustration. There was another illustrator, in the Phoenix area who was on a small citrus ranch. The citrus business was very poor, so he was employed on the Art Project to do some watercolors that were characteristic of the area. Other workers in the Phoenix area were several painters, John Leiper, Gustave Baumgartner, a young man named Berdell Tinney - just out of school, actually - and a sculptress, whose name I can't recall, and about three other painters - women. David Swaine was an elderly gentleman and had done some work in the Theatre, scene painting, if I recall, a long time resident painter in the Phoenix area. Then Mr. Phillip Curtis came out from the New York area, and I believe he had already had contact with or had been employed by the Art Project. He came to the Phoenix area and an art center was established in Phoenix. It was the WPA, Art Project Art Center, and in that center some of the artists employed were teaching adult classes and children's classes. Exhibitions were held - a variety of kinds. I can recall one of them being set up as a comparative show of home furnishing and design using juxtaposition of the Victorian era generally, as it occurred in interior decoration in this country, and contemporary design, including all the little kitchen gadgets and all the other things that went along with it. It created quite a controversy right away, a little bit offensive to some of the people who grew up in Victorian homes and thought there was some fun poking involved. And actually, there wasn't, it was a good thing - this juxtaposition and it aroused interest because of that.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Whatever happened with that exhibition, do you know?

MARK VORIS: There was quite an effort actually to do some educating with that exhibit, but the reaction to a glass brick wall, for instance, at that time was...

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Thirty years ago, I can imagine!

MARK VORIS: So this was constructed, actually, inside the gallery. It wasn't large, I suppose about thirty by fifty feet.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well now, as the Assistant Supervisor, did you work for the entire state?

MARK VORIS: I worked for the entire state, and Mr. Curtis was distinctly for the Art Center at the outset.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: But were your headquarters always here in Tucson?

MARK VORIS: My headquarters were in Tucson, but then since the concentration of the effort was so logically in Phoenix, I would have had to move to continue, so actually I requested that they turn this post over to Curtis, inasmuch as he lived there and in charge of the Center itself.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, I see, and it being the capitol of the state, it would be logical.

MARK VORIS: Right.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, did you continue to do anything more for the project after Mr. Curtis took over?

MARK VORIS: I continued for a short period of time on the Project, during the changeover, just as a worker on the project - just a matter of a few months. How long, I don't recall.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And what did you do then? Did you paint during that time?

MARK VORIS: I just painted, just painted.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And turned in your paintings?

MARK VORIS: Right.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How did you like the job as administrator - as project supervisor?

MARK VORIS: Well, I enjoyed it. There was a considerable amount of travel which wasn't always the most convenient thing - or the most convenient time - but it brought me in contact with these other people in the state. I thought that was the most valuable aspect of it and, you know, it was the serious aspect of it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What were the communities where you had to go?

MARK VORIS: Oh, Bisbee, Jerome, Wickenburg and Phoenix and Tucson. Of course in the Phoenix area some people were out in the rural sections, outside the city limits ---

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Was Scottsdale one of them?

MARK VORIS: Let's see, at that time I don't think anybody was in Scottsdale.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: It wasn't as much of an art center then as it is now?

MARK VORIS: No! No!

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That's all happened within the last 30 years, I think.

MARK VORIS: Very much so. It was just a crossroads then.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I haven't been there yet. I expect to go there soon. Well, what was the reaction of the various people who were employed on the project?

MARK VORIS: Next, I'm sure that most of them felt this was a marvelous opportunity to continue in their art, whereas otherwise they would have had to abandon it entirely. And really, they expressed to me some real gratitude for this kind of help. In some cases I think it was fairly clear that they adjusted to the income without the sense of gratitude for being able to pursue their art without pointing fingers at anyone.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: They felt the world owed them a living?

MARK VORIS: I think so!

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

MARK VORIS: The production level was pretty low in those cases.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I imagine so. Was there a philosophy behind this? Would you say there was a left-wing philosophy behind it or was it just an individual matter that they felt this way?

MARK VORIS: As far as I know, it was individual.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

MARK VORIS: Maybe production would never have been great, under any circumstances, so it was a convenient excuse. The fact that they were getting some subsistence - that was just signing a piece of paper, you see.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, yes, for a person in that state of mind, but generally the people I have talked with didn't seem to feel that way about it but were more conscious of a feeling of gratitude, or the opportunity to go on with their painting rather than to go to something else.

MARK VORIS: On a percentage basis, I would think that about 80% of them were of the state of mind - they were grateful..

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I'm glad to have you tell me the proportions of those who were.

MARK VORIS: I think that I was impressed with the other attitude because it surprised me.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

MARK VORIS: It looms large in my memory because of the surprise element - I thought all of them would be very grateful for an opportunity to live and do what they wished to do.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Did you say that you were involved for about two years?

MARK VORIS: I think it was about two years, yes.

MARK VORIS: The WPA started in 1935 and the PWAP was the year before, 1934. So it was about two years that you were a WPA supervisor?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

MARK VORIS: That would be until 1937. Do you know anything about what happened on the project after you left it?

MARK VORIS: Very little except that the center continued until I assumed they folded up the whole thing. It was under very able direction, which was Curtis. By the way, he not only directed the Center and its activities, but entreated the people of Phoenix to contribute the necessary amount of money for materials, and for renting the space, but, as a matter of fact, there was no rent there, it was donated by a then Phoenix old-time resident, Mrs.

Dwight B. Gurd, who owned the building and was quite a philanthropist.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mr. Curtis is still living, isn't he?

MARK VORIS: He's still living and has recently had a show at Woodward's - a big New York show, I guess.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I had written him a letter, after I had heard from you, but fortunately I hadn't sent it, as I didn't make the trip to Phoenix as I had planned, so I still have it. I will write him again and see if he is available. Maybe I can pick up more from him what happened in the center.

MARK VORIS: He can give you the full story of the center, I am sure. At the time he was there, he did a series of cast stone figures of Fra Marco di Nisa, I believe, that were to go in little natural stone cairn-like shrines, placed along the route of his travels through this area. And they were handsome little figures. They were simple, strong, beautiful statues, about three feet tall, I believe, and they were placed on small triangular pedestals with these little shrines. Unfortunately, the local residents did not always appreciate them. and they were destroyed by them.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, what a shame!

MARK VORIS: They were very nice. Well, he is a painter, he demonstrated that he was quite an able sculptor.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, isn't that too bad that they aren't standing anymore. Well, what type of painting did you do?

MARK VORIS: My painting has almost all been landscape, going more and more to the abstract. During Project days it was very free sort of landscape.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I suppose you were able to do just as you wanted to - to experiment in different styles of painting?

MARK VORIS: Nothing was restricted.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Your painting was first during PWAP under Baumann, and then, I suppose, during the time you were supervisor, then you weren't able to paint?

MARK VORIS: No, I wasn't contributing then.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Then you would be doing a different type of work. Well, do you feel that you had an opportunity to develop during this time?

MARK VORIS: Yes, I think so. During the wandering periods when I was actually painting for project, that was an opportunity I couldn't have indulged in, due to the fact that I was involved in the commercial art field, and so this was a great thing. I think that one of the very nice things that came out of the whole thing, for all of us in the state was getting to know one another, incidentally, and we probably wouldn't have except with the local areas. Out of that came a group, called the Arizona Painters and Sculptors, and this was in being with varying degrees of aliveness, for five or six years, I should say, following the project days, and it was quite a stimulus to both of these communities - Phoenix and Tucson. As a peripheral result of our get-together, we had exhibitions and many discussions of tremendously widening effect, and I am convinced that it never would have happened not for many, many years, if it hadn't been for the project. We all got together, at times.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How many were in it?

MARK VORIS: Well, at the time I would say that, with the few additions who came to that group, all told, there were 25 people throughout the state.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: An where did you meet?

MARK VORIS: We met in Phoenix, or Tucson, or some point in-between.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. Well, that was nice, and I agree that this is one of the good things that happened from the project in these states outside of large cities, where they, of course, had their own art groups already. I know this also happened in New Mexico, to some extent there were already the Taos and Santa Fe groups, they didn't get together much, and many people have said that there was more spirit of camaraderie during that time that there ever was before or since. They miss it; they would like to have had something that would be sort of focal point of their interests now. Now they never seem to get together on anything, even though they do have an art association. Did this continue on after the first five or six years?

MARK VORIS: No. No. It died a natural death. These things seem to cycle a little bit, just gradually.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I can find out from Mr. Curtis when I talk to him about what happened to the Art Center.

MARK VORIS: Well, that had no life of itself after the project. Of course, the Fine Arts Association of Phoenix and the subsequent growth of the Community Art Center there, it may have been a big important factor there. It may have had an original impetus in this art center. I am inclined to suspect that it is true. But the continuity I can't place for you.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I know one of the things they attempted to do, in many communities was to start an art center, the WPA would start one there, and then have it continue hoping that the city or some other local agency would take it up when the government was through. But the only one in New Mexico was down at Roswell. The building there was built with WPA funds and was started but then died down. Then through Paul Horgan and some anonymous donor to the museum, it got another shot in the art, and now it is a very flourishing museum. It started with the WPA, but I think the war had something to do with its dying down. Everything went down then.

MARK VORIS: It sure did.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: If there had been the opportunity to have these things continue, I think they would have gone on.

MARK VORIS: Yes. Many of the people who were involved, were in service.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, almost all of them, from the project. What did you do after the project?

MARK VORIS: I continued up until Uncle Sam sent me his greetings - that would be 1942, February, March. I continued with my painting and commercial art.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: By that time you were able to get back into the business world again?

MARK VORIS: Right, in commercial art, that is.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And then, how long were you in the service?

MARK VORIS: I was in the service for 42 months, I guess. I came back to Tucson and started in the commercial art business again, office downtown, for a few months, and then came to the University to teach commercial art here.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, commercial art? Is that what you teach now?

MARK VORIS: I teach some commercial art, I also teach other design courses and painting.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And how long has that been.

MARK VORIS: Nineteen years.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, 19 years, that you have been doing this? How do your students react to these modern trends, to pop and op art? Do you have any trouble with that?

MARK VORIS: Actually, no trouble - it hasn't permeated the lower levels. The graduate students are aware of these things, through periodicals and all and so, although, I don't think we have had any pop art people among the students, we have one who is distinctly excited about op art, quite fascinated by it. As a - I would say, a direct result, though, of her observations of the peculiarities of light as seen by visual artists, there is a kind of growth here we don't see elsewhere and light filtering through these has a strange optical effect.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

MARK VORIS: So the connection with op art is not just the matter of expression at the time. Most of these phenomena are pretty well known anyway in the psychology lab.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes, the study of optics has been going on for quite awhile.

MARK VORIS: Whereas it might be quite an exciting thing for anyone not acquainted with op art - except as one observes interesting phenomena in this environment and who applies this to what op art is supposed to be, whatever it is.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I should think a teacher would have a pretty difficult time these days.



MARK VORIS: Well, you strain your talent sometimes, and find it necessary to apply the basic principles involved instead of playing with superficialities. The graduate student quite frequently wants to experiment, but in general I think most of them are willing to be taught.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I think if a student has a good foundation of discipline and knowledge of design and basics of painting, then he has the right to experiment after that point. But it's been used too often as a short-cut to something where the discipline is non-existent.

MARK VORIS: I'm sure it has. I find that the general temperament of the student to be one of wishing to be guided and not straining at the bit to get off on his own little experimentations. This is generally true, and I'm not sure I approve of it! If it's a new indication of a cast of mind when one does not get excited about doing new things, or the unknowns, then I'm worried. A few do get excited about some unknowns, but most of them don't.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I think they should be encouraged at the same time that they are studying the fundamentals, to use this as a jumping-off place for experimenting. Let me see, is there anything we need to cover as far as that phase of your life is concerned? Can you think of anything else which you would like to say about that phase and how it affected the public, generally - and if it had much effect on the public's appreciation of the arts?

MARK VORIS: In this community there was so little that was done for the public, except as the Art Center was involved, that I would say that the impact was little in Phoenix. It quite possibly had an important impact, again back to the development of our own little Art Association group and the Center - I feel very sure this was the exception. As I said, there were many - or at least quite a few - other large gatherings at the Center. The community responded rather well to our invitations to enter into the activities - either as classes, or particular shows, or even the lectures. They were well attended most of the time. So from that respect the main factors speak for themselves. Other than that, I can't say that there was much effect, except as it filtered out into the community.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Do you know what happened to your paintings?

MARK VORIS: I haven't the slightest idea, not the slightest! They were probably sent to whatever central plant there was. There may be a couple of them in the offices on campus here, done under PWAP.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, what about the artists who worked under your supervision? You would know something about the work they did, if it was around?

MARK VORIS: No, because that has handled, as I recall, by the Center, after I was off the project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, the one in Phoenix?

MARK VORIS: These things were gathered together and put in one place, as designated. At least this is my recollection. I don't have any recollection of their disposal.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Didn't send any on to Washington?

MARK VORIS: No.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I know Denver, there was a period where they had to turn out one a week but later they stopped that particular regulation, but my impression was that those were sent on immediately to Washington. Washington had said, we want one a week so they just knocked them out.

MARK VORIS: This may have applied to some areas at that time, but I don't recall that here.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I think it was just a regional thing, because I didn't come across that in New Mexico. It might have been a particular administration interpretation of the regulations. Well, then, were these works of art then allocated from the Center in Phoenix?

MARK VORIS: No, they were sent to a central allocating or storage point.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

MARK VORIS: No, it seems to me that Denver was involved in this. I believe we were a sub-region for Denver.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, that is right, you were.

MARK VORIS: And I have some recollection that things were sent up there, at one time or another.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, yes, that is true, because Donald Bear was the Regional Director for five states that included Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Utah and Wyoming.

MARK VORIS: For some period of time Donald Bear couldn't get down here - he was pretty busy and we felt pretty much like orphans. We just had directions from Denver.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So as far as you know that was the place where you used to send your work?

MARK VORIS: As far as I remember.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I think that was true, for I remember their saying that paintings in New Mexico were sent to Denver and from there to Washington, so goodness knows whatever happened to them. But there were certain works of art that you said were done for specific places here, such as portraits of the college presidents, and some of this copper work that was done for a special public building?

MARK VORIS: Yes, as a matter of fact we kept those particular things that were for use in designated places, and I think there were about three, if I am not mistaken, no more than that. It was rather slow work and went on for a rather long time.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: When these applicants came to you, did you have much difficulty as far as your own standards were concerned? If they came and said "I am an artist and I want to go on the art project," did you have to take them, or did they have to submit certain basic qualifications?

MARK VORIS: Well, the larger number of people on the project, were already on the project, when I was put in charge and it was a case of someone overseeing them.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So you had to take them as they came?

MARK VORIS: Yes, as they came. There couldn't have been any more than three or four people on the project over whom I had any charge. At the Art Center, I'm quite sure there was some additional personnel at that time. As far as the standards are concerned, I'm sure the standards that were applied here, such as they were, were as political as anything else. It was a case of "You should put this person on because this person had connections," and although he was a good painter, there was no doubt about that, there was the question of production, at least as far as his value was concerned. So, there was that factor involved. We did not have the large number of artists in this area that would be characteristic of California and New Mexico, at least those who were in that state of need. You know, there were some who would like to be on the project...

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, but they couldn't qualify? Well, did you have to have "make-work" projects in order to keep them busy?

MARK VORIS: As a matter of fact, no. The Center was it, in Phoenix, that was the main part of the project. But since the numbers were as small as they were, and except for the individual who was working for the museum, and was just assigned for that purpose, the rest were just painters.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Do you remember how often they were supposed to turn in a painting? Was it on that basis?

MARK VORIS: There were no stipulations handed down to me at all that required me to get a certain number of things done at a certain time. I simply watched the level of production and in some cases goaded a little bit to get things on the road and brought to conclusion, but in general terms it was flexible, and nothing was imposed through me.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That's wonderful, I think apparently they had less restrictions on you than the others.

MARK VORIS: This was the trouble. I think we were sort of lost over in the sticks!

SYLVIA LOOMIS: They sort of lost you! Well, are there any other comments you would like to make about this or anything about trends of art today versus what they were in the 1930's or '40's?

MARK VORIS: That relate to there having been projects?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, either that or not.

MARK VORIS: I think as far as both of those projects were concerned, that they were fine for the art in this country. There is no doubt about that, and it is a well-known thing that many of those painters and sculptors whose work did not have any public notice at that time developed into very valuable people for the nation in the arts in subsequent years. They might never have come to be known otherwise.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Do you want to give some names?

MARK VORIS: Oh, dear me. I have known a good many of them ---

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Pollock was the most famous one.

MARK VORIS: Pollock of course was the most famous, it is true.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I thought you might know some that I didn't.

MARK VORIS: Mostly as it filtered through in the art periodicals, and now I've got them mixed up in my mind with some others. If you're not sure, don't mention names.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, yes, you are correct about that.

MARK VORIS: Some of them have a very strong feeling about that, but it was a genuine opportunity at the time.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Do you agree that the art center of the world has shifted to this country?

MARK VORIS: The indications are that that's true.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I sort of have this theory that if there had not been the stimulus of the Art Project at that particular moment, that we would not have been able to compete as we are doing now - that we do need a broad base in order to have the few at the top who do something original.

MARK VORIS: It's always been my feeling that you have to have a broad base or the peaks don't show. We don't have peaks standing alone.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That's true, yes.

MARK VORIS: I was wondering, too, if there wasn't something in the matter of the appetite for art, it got a little bit of a shot in the arm, by having all these virtually free works of art available, and many institutions took advantage of this so I think it is due to this aspect that we grew in the appreciation and use of art in this country. Of course, not to mention that we have pretty bumptious commercial gallery organizational set-up now in this country.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, that was one of the questions I asked you before - what you thought was the public reaction to the projects, and you said that up here there was very little because there were so few involved, but generally throughout the country you do feel that it had an effect on the general populous?

MARK VORIS: I am of that opinion - let's put it that way.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I think so myself, because I was in New York during that period and I know so many wonderful things were being done in the various art projects. There wasn't anything of that sort being done here - in the music or theatre projects was there?

MARK VORIS: No, theatre or music, just the Writer's Project. Under Ross Sautee.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes, is he still living?

MARK VORIS: Yes, I think he is still living. I think back in Rhode Island they have a home.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Did you talk to me about him last night?

MARK VORIS: I don't think I mentioned Ross Sautee to you.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Somebody has since I've been here.

MARK VORIS: He's a writer of western books and illustrates them himself - pictures in black and white.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, I know his works, but I had no idea he was head of the project.

MARK VORIS: He's quite versatile.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: But he's now living in the east?

MARK VORIS: I think so.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: It has been in just the last 24 hours that somebody has talked about him.

MARK VORIS: Over at the museum, perhaps? The Historical Society?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Maybe so. Well, is there anything else? We still have a little more tape. If you've got something else more to say, I would be glad to have it.

MARK VORIS: Well, I didn't really answer the questions you asked about the changes taking place in the art field all these years since the art project. And I still don't know quite what I would say, except that I find it exciting - the changes which seem to be continuing, so very rapidly in every kind of a way. Not that I dislike the change, but I feel so many of them are a strained seeking for novelty. I don't mean honest growth in areas that are untouched, but there is just so much fluff that you can tolerate, you know, after while you begin to be overcome by all this fluff and --

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see, you want some real substance again.

MARK VORIS: You feel like you need some substance again. So, the pendulum swing could be heavily reactionary, I'm convinced of this kind of thing and I feel that this thing has been engendered too much mainly by the commercial galleries, you see, seeking their own ascendancy in their own field, which is highly competitive and, although I understand their problems, to some degree, I am rather sorry that they must have to operate like that. Because I think it is detrimental, really to the honest and clean growth of a pretty important facet of our society.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I have felt that for some time, in fact, even some museums have to some extent, been guilty of publicizing something that was sensational, rather than a good painting. I talked to Fred Barlett, in the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, and I asked him about it, and he said they sometimes have to - just because they have this terrific competition, with all of the other exciting things that are going on, and they still need to get people into the museums and do sometimes stoop to this sensationalism or controversy, just to get people into the museum. There does seem to be something wrong with the method of getting art before the public.

MARK VORIS: I don't have a solution for it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I don't either.

MARK VORIS: Obviously you need the intermediate person, and probably in a commercial situation, if you are to get the job done.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, you need some commercial outlets but to have them call the rules, instead of having the standards of aesthetics that we know are good, be the determining - that is the thing I deplore.

MARK VORIS: Then there is the critic in this picture, of course - I don't mean to say they are always wrong.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No, we all know about the critic! Well I have talked with some of the very good artists up in Taos, who can't even get a place to show their art - galleries in Taos are showing junky things, some of it just trash. When good painters can't find a place to show their paintings it is an unfortunate state, but I am hoping that it is a sort of phase and we will come back to standards that they have been educated on and I think you were, and certainly the artists were of this period that we are discussing. They were artists who had their definite standards, and actually it is a great relief to me to go back to this period. I have been so disgusted with what has been going on for the past ten or fifteen years, that I have stopped going to galleries, and I am sure I missed an occasional good painting, but most of it is not up to the standards I had learned to admire and respect. Well, I am certainly very grateful to you, Mr. Voris, in this interesting interview and to have your ideas, as well as the things that you can recollect from this period.

MARK VORIS: I am happy to be able to do it, and that I was able to transmit some information about this period.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, I think you have covered Arizona very well and by the time I have talked to Mr. Curtis --

MARK VORIS: If you can't, you can talk to Lew David - he will have attitudes, interesting attitudes, I am quite sure.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. Fine, I plan to. In fact I have been told to by Detroit. This is among my instructions. Thank you very much, Mr. Voris.

END OF INTERVIEW

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