



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

**Oral history interview with Harold Lehman,
1997 Mar. 28**

**Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a
grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National
Park Service.**

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Harold Lehman on March 28, 1997. The interview took place in New York, NY, and was conducted by Stephen Polcari for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

STEPHEN POLCARI: So you first went to school here [New York], and you had your first artistic experiences and educational experiences here. Were your parents interested in art?

HAROLD LEHMAN: No. My mother was a dress designer. But-

MR. POLCARI: What day-when were you born? What year was it?

MR. LEHMAN: October 2, 1913. But if you refer to the catalogue of that Pacific Dreams show you'll see a false date. They have me born 1914 which made me of course one year younger and that much more of a prodigy.

MR. POLCARI: Well, I'd like to knock one year off. That's fair.

MR. LEHMAN: But in my case, I could use every year because of the work that I did. But in any case, that's how it started, October 2, 1913. And at 16 I'm a...

MR. POLCARI: That's right. You grew up where? In Brooklyn, the Lower East Side?

MR. LEHMAN: No, I was in 67th Street-

MR. POLCARI: West side?

MR. LEHMAN: West side. I was in Brooklyn, several locations in Brooklyn. And then, in the Bronx. As a matter of fact, I was living in the Bronx, at the time I left for California. So there was a lot of peripatetic-

MR. POLCARI: Wanderings in the city. Did you work at all as a young boy?

MR. LEHMAN: Well, I went to school all the time. I did artwork. Do you mean work in art?

MR. POLCARI: No, in general.

MR. LEHMAN: No, no, I was just in school. But outside of school I did a lot of extra-curricular artwork on my own. Sculpture.

MR. POLCARI: So you became interested in art as a very young boy.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, yes.

MR. POLCARI: So how old do you think you were?

MR. LEHMAN: I was fifteen. Fifteen when I did my most sculpture. And well, I don't have the examples but I do have photographs of them. They were copies of casts, of Greek casts, copies of Greek casts. One a bust of Dante, a very well known bust of Dante. They were incredibly well done. They were not to be believed. You'll see the photograph and you won't believe it.

MR. POLCARI: Did you have art classes in high school? That's what got you-

MR. LEHMAN: The art classes had no bearing on sculpture, no relation to sculpture. They were mainly drawing and design and that sort of thing. Sculpture I did strictly on my own. A matter of fact I started the whole idea of sculpture in a boy's class in New York.

MR. POLCARI: Uh huh. You mean that was a summer activity or something? (Laughs)

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, right. Where you could select your own activity, you know. I met this young sculptor, a professional sculptor who was hired as a counselor, an art counselor.

MR. POLCARI: Do you remember his name?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, his name was Max Maikowski. How could you forget the name Max Maikowski? And he was strictly an academic, technically oriented sculptor. I mean, he knew all the techniques; he could do them very well. He wasn't too creative, but that's not what you needed then, you know. You had to learn technique, the materials and tools and that sort of thing. And I did. And I learned them very well. In fact after that first summer in that camp, when I came back to New York, I continued a relationship with him and he brought me to a very big and well known studio on 23rd Street. Yes 23rd Street. And that studio-his teacher was enlarging monumental sculpture, from a small model to a full size for monuments that were distributed throughout the country by very well known sculptors. And when I first came into this place-the studio itself was about three stories high, just an open studio-and I see these enormous sculptures. You know, very academic stuff.

MR. POLCARI: Do you remember the people?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, well it was run by and owned by a Frenchman named Jean de Laffiere. Another easy name to remember Jean de Laffiere, and he is the one who really gave me a great grounding in plaster casting and handling the clay and plaster, not carving. And also enlarging. I used to help with the enlarging of these things.

MR. POLCARI: They had machines, calipers-

MR. LEHMAN: Pointing machines. Pointing machines: they would-well, I can't show the machine.

MR. POLCARI: Yes, I remember. Rodin-

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, they all used them. This was a method that went right back to the Renaissance in Italy. And the French of course were great users of this because they did so much monumental sculpture, especially Rodin as you mentioned. And so I was fully familiar with all the materials, tools and procedures in sculpture. By the time I was sixteen-I went to California. Within the space of a year, in other words. But I had done my first sculpture from life, a portrait, while I was still in high school. And in fact was a student in high school who I kept after school hours in order to do this bust.

MR. POLCARI: Was it a boy or a girl?

MR. LEHMAN: It was a girl!

MR. POLCARI: Excellent!

MR. LEHMAN: Why would I want to call a boy for?

MR. POLCARI: True.

MR. LEHMAN: I could tell you something about that too!

MR. POLCARI: Yes?

MR. LEHMAN: Is the machine interested?

MR. POLCARI: Yes, the machine is always interested. This person is long gone. You may say anything you want.

MR. LEHMAN: In any case, this was a very beautiful girl and she was a quintessential twenties girl. Flapper type, you know. With her hair ending in points. She posed after hours, as I say. And she sat in a beach chair, one of these sling chairs, you know, a canvas beach chair and I had this improvised stand. And we were in the backroom, in the closet of the art room, rather intimate surroundings, and I had to set up the clay, and I made this sculpture, and I took my time about it.

MR. POLCARI: Understandably. You don't want to rush these things.

MR. LEHMAN: And the odd part of it was, after that moment, that girl-I never had any sex experience-but this girl really had me smitten. First of all, she was lying there before me, and I was busy at work doing her head, and suddenly I feel this nudge on my leg. She decided to, I guess, add to the seriousness of the session by simply taking advantage of the situation. But, she nudged me, very, very, obviously with her thigh. I felt this wave going right through me.

MR. POLCARI: Yes, yes as a young boy, you must have.

MR. LEHMAN: Going right through me. I sort of froze a little with my modeling tool and tinkered around the mouth or something. But I ignored the pressure and that was the first time I missed the opportunity to have a real sex experience.

MR. POLCARI: Well I hope you made up for that later.

MR. LEHMAN: Not with her!

MR. POLCARI: Excellent. Excellent. Well, see, art is very rewarding.

MR. LEHMAN: The point is I was totally devoted to the arts and-

MR. POLCARI: You were working at the school all the time doing sculpture-

MR. LEHMAN: And down at the studio that I told you about and then when I finished this clay head in the high school, I took a cab all the way down to 23rd Street with the head, to cast it. Because it was in clay. And that was my first clay head that I cast in plaster. And I still remember. I brought the head home first, in the Bronx. I made the mold on my own in the kitchen, and of course it was my

first experience with a plaster head, I mean casting the head, so the plaster went all over the place, in the kitchen, and so on.

MR. POLCARI: Mom must have been upset.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh boy, was she ever. Well, I never did that again. But I did take a mold and it was the mold that I took downtown to the studio and there's where I made the final casting with the help and supervision of Jean de Laffiere. And he thought the head was something fantastic and he urged me to do some more work. So I started at the studio. And then one day, I came down to do some work and there was this big overbearing, wild looking sculptor, working on a monument. It turned out to be a fellow by the name of Rutolo. I don't know if you heard the name.

MR. POLCARI: Oh Rutolo? A critic?

MR. LEHMAN: No, no, He was a sculptor. A very well known academic sculptor, a church sculptor, did angels and things of that nature. And he incidentally founded the Leonardo da Vinci art school in New Jersey. But he was working there on this big angel, in plastilene, and de Laffiere introduced me to him. He said, 'Look, look at our young sculptor here. His friends all call him a genius. Everyone thinks he's a genius.' He liked to make situations, de Laffiere, a rather mischievous man. In any case, without stopping, he looked at me and said, 'Oh, you're a genius, huh!' And he pulls out an envelope, a business envelope, he thrust it at me, he said, 'Draw my portrait.' I said, 'What?' He said, 'Draw my portrait.' So, I took the envelope and I had a fountain pen and he kept working, he didn't pose. He just kept working, and I walked around and did his portrait on the envelope. In ink, a line drawing in ink, no pencil preliminary, just a direct drawing. And I did it in just a few minutes. When I was finished he stopped, came over to take a look at it, and he looked at it and he didn't say one word and he handed me back the envelope. And then he went back to work.

MR. POLCARI: I guess you quieted him down. You silenced him. Excellent.

MR. LEHMAN: That was some of the experiences that I had-

MR. POLCARI: Welcome to the art world!

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, right, right. But it took me some time to realize that this fellow was no real judge of art. But in any case, these old experiences had value. As you say, he introduced me to elements of the art world and they talk about a bonding process with artists and procedures, the whole atmosphere of art-and art production. So, it was a good beginning.

MR. POLCARI: So you did this in your adolescence, and then you went to California.

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, one last thing. As sort of a post-script. The sculpture that I did of this girl, the casting-when I went to California, I gave her the head. I gave her the head. Now, to get the head, she had to come down to the studio. Her father who was a pretty well-to-do guy-he had brought us all down in a cab and he collected the sculpture and then he brought us all up to the Algonquin Hotel for lunch. A very elaborate lunch. I'd never been to such a hotel; I'd never had such a lunch, see. You know there was the round table-

MR. POLCARI: Yes the Algonquin.

MR. LEHMAN: And afterwards, then I was to escort his daughter home. He lived in Washington Heights. So to do that, we took the trip out in the bus-double deckers, the top of the double decker so we could [inaudible]. Now that was fine. And we got on this bus and I had only had twenty cents.

You put a dime in the little machine you know. So, I was a big Capitalist spender, so I put two dimes in the machine and I brought her home. And then when I left her, I had to go all the way back to the Bronx. How the hell was I going to manage this. So I ended up walking all the way home from Washington Heights.

MR. POLCARI: That will teach you about gallantry.

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, you're right. I never did that again. I avoided all double decker buses.

MR. POLCARI: Yes, one paid the price, even then. So you had about two, three years experience here in the city before-what prompted the move to California?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, my father was living out there. They were divorced, my parents. So my father sent two tickets to the family and any two who wanted to come out-there were five of us. Any two who wanted to come out-he didn't specify. And I grabbed one of them and one of my brothers grabbed the other. And that's how I happened to come out. And it was on the Twentieth Century Limited on the Santa Fe Chief-

MR. POLCARI: Excellent, first class all the way. How long did it take?

MR. LEHMAN: Four days and four nights. And it was a wonderful experience. I enjoyed every minute of it.

MR. POLCARI: That might have been one of the great moments in travel.

MR. LEHMAN: So that's how I happened to go to California.

MR. POLCARI: So you ended up in Southern California.

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, in LA.

MR. POLCARI: And you still went to school. Was it Manual?

MR. LEHMAN: Manual Arts, that's where I registered immediately, within a couple of days after my arrival. I don't remember how I was steered to Manual Arts but in any case, that's where I went. I think someone I knew there, a relative, did recommend it as a good art school, as a place that teaches art in the regular high school system.

MR. POLCARI: Manual was distinctive for that? The arts?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, I don't know how you'd compare it with a high school of art here in New York now, but it was something similar to it. However, there were so many varieties of activities in this school beside the art. However, it happened that the art department was considered first-rate as a high school and the head of the art department was a really inspiring figure. A fellow named Schwankovsky. Frederick J.-I don't want to give you all his names or I'll be here from now until noon-Frederick J. Schwankovsky. He called himself Schwany. To everyone he was Schwany. So Schwany and I hit it off immediately, see. And as a matter of fact, before I left that school I made a sculpture of Schwany, a volute, a life-sized volute-if you have any material here on Pollock-I mean the book by O'Connor, he refers to my sculpture in Volume III. In the biographical section of the-

MR. POLCARI: Yes, I have that.

MR. LEHMAN: But not here?

MR. POLCARI: No, not in the office.

MR. LEHMAN: Alright. He has that sculpture in there. And in return, Schwany did a portrait of me in watercolor. He was a rather well known watercolorist. That was his medium, watercolor.

MR. POLCARI: What was his style like?

MR. LEHMAN: Very academic.

MR. POLCARI: Very traditional.

MR. LEHMAN: Very traditional.

MR. POLCARI: This was very early in America.

MR. LEHMAN: Well that's true. But he was very alert to movements abroad. He knew about the Cubists and the specialists-

MR. POLCARI: Did he talk about them in class?

MR. LEHMAN: No, not much-no, no. He talked privately to us in his office. You know, it was all very one-on-one. Nothing formal whatsoever. He'd be in his shirtsleeves and feet up on his desk. Sometimes he'd be puffing on a cigar.

MR. POLCARI: California hasn't changed much, that informality.

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, right. But the atmosphere there was very open and very free.

MR. POLCARI: You're talking about his class?

MR. LEHMAN: I'm talking about, not that school, I'm talking about Schwany. The school itself was straight-laced and rigid. That is that people who ran the place and the heads of the different departments were a totally different breed. I had a run-in with two of them, as a matter of fact and was thrown out of the school.

MR. POLCARI: You too?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, me too.

MR. POLCARI: (laughs) Yes, it was a traditional high school, with a strong emphasis. And there was actually the-well go ahead, I don't want to put words in your mouth but it was artistic, the people in art from the arts

MR. LEHMAN: Well, the ones in the art department were all very, very free and easy and liberal in their approach to teaching. You'd think that they-

MR. POLCARI: What were some of the exercises?

MR. LEHMAN: There were no exercises. You were basically on your own. But of course, still they had models for example, drawing-

MR. POLCARI: Figure drawing?

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, but not nude. Figure drawing. But, now here's a side item: Schwany arranged though to have nude classes, that is classes with a nude model in a different high school, outside of Manual Arts. I believe it was the L.A. High School. In the evening, you had nude models posing and I went to several of these, see, with Philip Guston. And Phil and I were a team. Basically we were together constantly. Best of friends.

MR. POLCARI: Best of friends. Phil was in high school with you-

MR. LEHMAN: In high school-

MR. POLCARI: And then Pollock came-

MR. LEHMAN: No, no, Jack and Phil were there when I arrived. They were already there.

MR. POLCARI: This was a great high school class.

MR. LEHMAN: Wait a minute-and one other, Tolegian, Manuel Tolegian. You're familiar with that name from Pollock. Alright. All three were there when I arrived then the four of us quickly became a group. We used to go to each other's houses all the time. Tolegian had his house very near the school and I had my room-I had a furnished room-near the school also. So after school, we'd go to Tolegian's place because he had a big backyard with fruit trees and so on and he had a little shack set up in the back where he drew and he invited us to come and draw there. So we would go back to his house and then as it happened, I played the harmonica. In New York I learned to play the harmonica. In fact I was with a boy's band-I even played over WEA, the first radio station. So I was pretty good at it and when I started high school at Manual Arts and they found out that I played the harmonica, they were all crazy about it, because they wanted to know how to play the harmonica. That is how Pollock first started playing the harmonica-

MR. POLCARI: Uh, huh-

MR. LEHMAN: With me. I taught him and Tolegian in Tolegian's backyard. Not Guston, he wasn't that interested. But, that's another additional facet of this relationship-music.

MR. POLCARI: So you all palled around together.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh absolutely.

MR. POLCARI: And this was like sophomore, junior year in high school.

MR. LEHMAN: Junior, senior. Going into senior year. Because I was only there a year and a half. The last part of the junior and the senior year. And I was a year younger than Pollock and Guston so they were a little ahead in the school. And they left while I was still in high school. And when Phil left, he competed for the art scholarship to Otis Art Institute, which is given each year, one to a boy, one to a girl-

MR. POLCARI: Even then-

MR. LEHMAN: Given to high school graduates. And the following year, I received that same scholarship in sculpture from Otis Art Institute.

MR. POLCARI: This is a very distinguished roster here, yes.

MR. LEHMAN: Yes. So, I don't want to get ahead of myself but-Jack Pollock was in the clay modeling class with me mainly, not drawing, mainly clay modeling. That's where he focused his energies.

MR. POLCARI: Yes, he was interested in being a sculptor.

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, that was his first love and first ambition. And he did the clay-modeling figures-in order to fire them, not casting.

MR. POLCARI: Small little things. Figurative or abstract?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, small, quite small, abstract-that was the first indication, you know, of the feeling that he had for the abstract. In other words, he couldn't follow through and carry through a modeled figure in any kind of reasonably realistic fashion, you see. It would have a feeling for the figure but not be particularized. And in fact he left many unfinished pieces around. And the art teacher, the modeling class teacher would come to me and say Harold, 'Why don't you get after Jack to finish some of these figures, and fire them?' Because there was this clay lying around and they were unfired. But this never happened-he never finished anything.

MR. POLCARI: So, he just experimented with that-

MR. LEHMAN: Well, I wouldn't say that-well if you want to put it that way. He was expressing himself, put it that way. He was expressing himself at the moment, and the moment the expression was fulfilled, as far as he was concerned he was finished. And lost interest. Went on to something else. And incidentally, this is to me and maybe to you, the most interesting part of this whole experience. When I came out from New York, I brought with me, of course, my knowledge of casting, and working in plaster. And so, what I did, in this modeling class, was to do sculpture that I cast. They had never seen any casting done before; they knew nothing about it. So I did a large head of Lincoln, I remember in February, it had to be around his birthday, in 1931. I did this life-sized head. In clay. And then I cast it. I made the mold. I cast it right there in the class. Everybody crowded around me to see this. And I finished the cast. As it happened there was an open school week at one point. And teachers came from all over the city from different schools, different art departments. So there were several teachers from Hollywood High School and L.A. High School coming around and they saw this sculpture. And they saw that I had made this casting and three of them came to me and in whispers ask me to leave Manual and come to their high school. They would make it worth my while. Tried to get me to switch schools. Because they wanted to learn the casting technique and have it done in their art class.

MR. POLCARI: That's really sort of a major league rating.

MR. LEHMAN: Baseball player right-

MR. POLCARI: You should've had contracts. (Laughs)

MR. LEHMAN: But of course it didn't happen.

MR. POLCARI: But that was 1931. So you were there. I know that Pollock had left in '30.

MR. LEHMAN: It had to be late '30..

MR. POLCARI: Yes it was late 30. Guston, what was he interested in? Was he interested in the sculpture at all?

MR. LEHMAN: No, not at all. Just painting and drawing.

MR. POLCARI: Painting and drawing.

MR. LEHMAN: He always was. He worked after school hours. He did part time work with a relative, I think, in the fur business. Because I remember he even drove a car and that was really fantastic. He started driving a car. He used to drive me around to the beach and back, to the museums and so on. I thought that was fantastic: here's a guy driving this Model T Ford.

MR. POLCARI: Yes, that's very early especially for a young boy. That's California.

MR. LEHMAN: Well I just couldn't understand how he'd get his feet around all the pedals and the gas gauge up above on the wheel, and the spark. You had to work two of these things, or three of these pedals at the same time-and the wheel. A lot of coordination.

MR. POLCARI: Well, I've never driven one of those. I don't know.

MR. LEHMAN: Well I wouldn't touch it, until later, when I got a Model A.

MR. POLCARI: You said he drove you to museums. Did you visit museums regularly?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yeah.

MR. POLCARI: All over the place?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, yeah. The L.A. Museum mainly-

MR. POLCARI: The four of you-

MR. LEHMAN: No, no, we didn't go with the gang. Guston and I together. Sometimes there would be also Kadish.

MR. POLCARI: Rueben Kadish-

MR. LEHMAN: He was not in the school. He was in another school across town. But he became part of the group through a very interesting circumstance which you may already know about. It's been already written in the books. Kadish had some problem with his own school. He was being thrown out for unruly political activities.

MR. POLCARI: Well, what a bunch, all of you got expelled!

MR. LEHMAN: So, I don't know exactly how this happened, but Guston, got wind of this-I think there was something in the papers about it. Guston got wind of this and called him. And they got together. And later, when Jack had this problem, he brought Jack into it and then the three of them got together. Now, Guston was never thrown out of school. But what he did do is he participated in a broadside, a sort of leaflet, that they drew up. I'm talking about Jack now, and Phil-

MR. POLCARI: And Manuel-

MR. LEHMAN: And Manuel. Manual High School-attacking the school's administration for

reactionary attitudes.

MR. POLCARI: This will win you points.

MR. LEHMAN: And that is what is lead to Jack being thrown out.

MR. POLCARI: (Laughs) Expelled yes. I think he criticized sports, the emphasis on sports.

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, that's it. Over emphasis on sports and not enough on art. And he was politely asked to leave. Well the head of the art department, Schwany, came into the picture and he spoke up for him. And he got him reinstated under certain conditions. And henceforth after that, Jack's only obligation to the school was to appear at art classes and not stay for the regular curriculum.

MR. POLCARI: Ideal-

MR. LEHMAN: Exactly. Ideal. And when I was thrown out. It was the same exact thing. It was a little later. But he went to the staff at the school, the principle, the vice-principle and so on, and he spoke up for me and he got me reinstated as well.

MR. POLCARI: Good guy.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, he was a fantastic guy. I couldn't believe a man like that would appear in a public school.

MR. POLCARI: Well that's a comment about public schools.

MR. LEHMAN: But in L.A. In any case, he was a life-saver there.

MR. POLCARI: So you were all personally friendly with him even at the-

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, we went out to museums with him. We went out to Ojai also. The religious-

MR. POLCARI: I wanted to bring this question up.

MR. LEHMAN: The question of Ojai?

MR. POLCARI: Ojai and-

MR. LEHMAN: Krishnamurti?

MR. POLCARI: Yeah, Krishnamurti. He was a proselytizer?

MR. LEHMAN: He was a prophecy. He used to bring the guys to Ojai when they had gatherings with Krishnamurti visiting. He was very young himself at the time in his twenties. He went out on the weekend, and he'd go all over and back again. And to the Arenberg collection of art.

MR. POLCARI: Which was where?

MR. LEHMAN: That was in the Huntington Beach.

MR. POLCARI: In Huntington.

MR. LEHMAN: In Huntington, the Arenberg collection. That was the first absolutely direct contact I

had with modern painting and sculpture (cubism) and so on while I was in high school.

MR. POLCARI: Did you alone go, or did everyone go?

MR. LEHMAN: No, I went with Guston because he had the car.

MR. POLCARI: Very important. But Pollock didn't go and Kadish didn't go?

MR. LEHMAN: Pollock may have gone at another date, but he didn't go at the time that I went, and Kadish either.

MR. POLCARI: To get back to this philosophy in Krishnamurti. So you were also introduced to the ideas at that time?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yeah

MR. POLCARI: And became familiar?

MR. LEHMAN: I read Light on the Path; I read Bhagavad-Gita; all while I was in high school-and several others as well-and there was also one other. In any case those were the two main ones, the Bhagavad-Gita was the first one-the bible of Hinduism; and the Light on the Path was the first book of Krishnamurti. And that was the one that Schwany brought to the school and introduced to me. In fact, he lent me his copy. Well, I wasn't too impressed, let's put it that way. It just doesn't do it for me that the idea that spirituality as a thing. I might tell you that I was an atheist right from the beginning-a born atheist. Not by experiences alone, but it's logical thought. How could a god commit all the massacres? All the murders, all of the misery and horror that has gone on through human history in the era I'm familiar with: World War I, the depression, well the depression was only starting then, but the misery that was everywhere. What sort of a god would commit such a thing? To me it just didn't exist, it didn't make sense. It's all a simple fraud perpetrated on the common people. By common I mean the people that had no power, no ability to take care of themselves. They depended on others for basic needs. They were exploited right and left, but I don't have to go into that now. Anyway, so that contributed to my political feelings as well.

MR. POLCARI: Did the Krishnamurti take with any of the others that you know? Did any others have any interest outside of Schwany?

MR. LEHMAN: No interest, I don't think so at all. Matter of fact, after one session, that's what I remember, I didn't have to much to say, and he stopped and asked a question, and I got up and I said, 'Mr. Krishnamurti tell me, have you ever been in love?' That was my question. I wanted to know, did he ever love a woman? He is always talking about love in all these lectures, have you ever loved a woman? He passed on that by saying, 'Well, his love has been through all mankind, all humankind.' At that time mankind was a generous term, it applies to everything. But he would not answer the rest of it, if he ever had an affair with a woman, but you see my thinking in other words?

MR. POLCARI: Hard-nosed I think the term is?

MR. LEHMAN: Not really. Intelligent and lovely. I mean here is a man, incomplete without a woman.

MR. POLCARI: I read that somewhere-

MR. LEHMAN: There are many such occasions when I had to think about-not exclusively so, but they were calling into question the whole idea of spirituality has associated with a God, capital G,

and why one God? Of course the Jews started with one God, and coming from a Jewish background, I should have been implicated with any sort of heritage part of my essential being. And I had gone through synagogue early when I was a boy, and I was even bar mitzvah and that sort of thing. It made no sense to me whatsoever, and I was a twin, had a twin brother, not for long though, he died at the age 70. He had no interest in art. That is, he was a practitioner. Although, he was actually very interested in art. He essentially had a scientific bend in terms of psychology. He became a psychologist. We used to have great discussions and arguments about psychology of art and dynamics of art.

MR. POLCARI: Were his ideas about it with a Freudian or-

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah. And I argued against that. I read Freud also at that time.

MR. POLCARI: At the time when you were in high school?

MR. LEHMAN: Right after high school, I read just about everything printed; anything I could get my hands on. I didn't go to college. I went directly into art school, the art institute.

MR. POLCARI: People didn't go to college then, they went to art school.

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah sure, that was the normal thing if you were going to study art, why go to college-you're going to perfect your art education. So that's what most of us did, Guston never went to college to either. Kadish went to junior college and that's all, only junior college. As far as educating myself into literature and other things that you would take in college, I did that on my own, and also as a group. In fact there were several others, other writers in the group, and a musician. We used to meet at each other's houses every Sunday, for a literary discussion. What we would do is we would talk about a particular classic book, anything you wanted: psychology, literature, fiction, whatever. And make a report. One person would undertake to write a report on this book and bring it in the following week to the group. This is how we educated ourselves.

MR. POLCARI: This was the group from the Manual?

MR. LEHMAN: Combined the Manual Arts group with others from up the street, our friends, intellectual friends, people who had ambitions to be writers, musicians, composers, and theater, people in the theater.

MR. POLCARI: Do you remember anything you read?

MR. LEHMAN: Vividly, I wrote a review of Plato's Republic, I read the entire Republic for my report and I gave that to the group the following week and basically I attacked the book and the whole idea of the Republic because he wanted to exclude artists from his republic.

MR. POLCARI: Yes I know. They were subversive then, too.

MR. LEHMAN: But I was supposed to be against Plato.

MR. POLCARI: Fair is fair.

MR. LEHMAN: Anytime you read any review about Plato, even today, you will find that point always come to the fore, about how they relate him to fascism. It's just ridiculous. Well, because it's elite-the republic of the elite, basically. But why not art elite? Because art was an emotional thing and did not involve the mind. It is only the mind, excellences of the mind, that is allowed into the Republic.

MR. POLCARI: Yes I know, well that is characteristic about Western intellectualism.

MR. LEHMAN: Well the point is that I latched onto this book, I read it, then wrote this review about it, and although there was a hell of a lot more than attacking him on the art question-obviously the Republic is an enormously significant work.

MR. POLCARI: So what else did you read?

MR. LEHMAN: Well, not for reviews, but I read so many other contemporary books, for example, *Hunger* by Newt Hanson, a novel a very emotionally intensive book at the time. *Under Fire*, by Henri Barbusse.

MR. POLCARI: Ah, yes I know that book, the experience of World War I.

MR. LEHMAN: That's right, *Under Fire*. Also, the *World's Illusion* [sic] by Norman [Angell], *The Great Illusion, 1913*, the last name escapes me, a very famous book, and the whole burden of the book is that the war accomplished nothing, and it was an attack on World War I, which of course fit right into our own thinking at the time. Norman? It'll come to me. But right now, that was his first name, Norman, and it's called *World's Illusion* that's one of them. So many books on psychology, for example the Gestalt group. Are you familiar with the Gestalt psychology?

MR. POLCARI: Yeah. That early, you were reading that?

MR. LEHMAN: I read all four of the leading Gestalters, the one who invented the name and who invented the school of Gestalt psychology. Kurt Koffka, Bruno Peterman, Wilhelm...well there were four of them, well two is good enough. They were the most important ones. Peterman and Koffka.

MR. POLCARI: You read Freud did you read any Jung at that time?

MR. LEHMAN: No, I never read any Jung, but Freud yes, *Reductions in Psychoanalysis*, and a little later on he wrote the analysis of Leonardo da Vinci, the psychosexual study of Leonardo da Vinci, but that was a little later. There were several other early works that I also read, of Freud, and also Debbing. I got the book on Pat Debbing, my brother got it for me, he gave me this one. And then there was Roman Meland Michelangelo, and the Modern Library series, there were many books in that series-The Brothers Karamozov, and...

TAPE 1 - SIDE B

MR. LEHMAN: ...right, on modern art, and then they wrote another book called, not *Confusing a Nation*, but something in that sense, what it was, was an attack on the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, in which he showed by example, by quotes, how the encyclopedia was prejudiced and slanted towards British writers and British thoughts in just about every subject. That was an odd book to read, but he was famous for his writing on art, which was in the early 1900s about 1910-1915, and of course he was the brother of [inaudible-Catalalobright or McThalobright?]. So I was very familiar with that too.

MR. POLCARI: Anybody else, Cheney or-

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yes, Sheldon Cheney, it was called the *Primer of Modern Art*. I read that book too. I remember the very first page, it showed a picture, a photo, a reproduction of Kokoscka self-portrait on the first page, and said, 'This is an example of modern art.' And then he went on to explain why it was good. Then he went on to write another on called *Expressionism*. There were basically two

Sheldon Cheney books. Then there was another one, before I lose my memory let me tell you about it: Apples and Madonnas by E.J. Bluet. You know that book?

MR. POLCARI: No.

MR. LEHMAN: Very famous book. What it was, was an appreciation of the impressionists, especially Cézanne, that's the point of the apples in the title of the Madonnas was Raphael. So in his book, the first sentence is quote 'An apple by Cézanne is worth a thousand Madonnas by Raphael.'

MR. POLCARI: A provocative sentence.

MR. LEHMAN: Then he went on to explore and prove it artistically it's worth more, not that it's important in art.

MR. POLCARI: These were supportive of modernism that was very elementary in America.

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, right. I also read some books on academic art before that, before I knew about modern art. A book by Laredo Taft on American sculpture, my focus was American sculpture when I first started. So I read some things on that too.

MR. POLCARI: Was there a fellow named Russell?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh! Russell, yes, don't get me started!

MR. POLCARI: The first book I ever read on art!

MR. LEHMAN: But you're not that old, I don't know where you got a Russell.

MR. POLCARI: I was fifteen years old, it was many years ago.

MR. LEHMAN: Let me tell you something, Russell was the most stupid mind in the history of criticism of art in America. I still have an article he wrote after the Armory Show, 1913 Armory Show, it's a classic.

MR. POLCARI: Yes it is, a classic.

MR. LEHMAN: Let's forget about Russell. The point is, is that I had read just about everything in those days.

MR. POLCARI: So this group was very active? You would discuss things?

MR. LEHMAN: We would have arguments, we would discuss things constantly, but also lots of agreement. Phil and I were like tweetledee and tweetledum you might say. In a sense, we behaved in the manner of Picasso and Braque-that kind of a relationship. When he would do a painting, I would be at his house giving him criticism, and suggesting ways to improve his painting. He would try and do the same with me, but we would also accept. We had a very good collegial relationship, and it went on for years, even after we finished and came to New York.

MR. POLCARI: Did you read the literary people like Eliot and Pound?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yes, they were our literary bibles of that day when we were that young and started reading modern literature, it was of course Hound and Horn, it was Transition, that was big magazine-Transition magazine. Are you familiar with it?

MR. POLCARI: Yes.

MR. LEHMAN: Well Transition was the magazine. That magazine published the very last words in modern literature and they reproduced also cubist paintings and things of that nature. So, the writer friends of ours were always keeping us supplied with the latest issues of Transition and Hound and Horn and there were a couple of others, LeBow, but that was out of print then, but I got some back numbers, and Creative Art, also back numbered. As far as literature is concerned, we did read Ezra Pound and T.S Eliot, and of course James Joyce-he was the greatest. To me, James Joyce was the writer. I read everything I could get my hands on. In fact, while we were in L.A., Faber and Faber published sections from Joyce's Finnegans Wake, which he called Work in Progress, at the time, and as they came out I grabbed them from Stanley Rose bookshop in Hollywood. I'll go on to Stanley Rose later. That is where you got all the latest literary publications from Europe. Now, Faber and Faber published these sections and T.S Eliot was an editor at Faber and Faber and he saw that James Joyce had the sections printed and one of them was 'Annalibia Purivel' and the second was 'Having Children Everywhere.' One represented the female principal, and the other, the male principal, and I had both of them, both of these Faber and Faber booklets.

MR. POLCARI: I would love them to come to the archive.

MR. LEHMAN: You bet you would; maybe somebody will buy them! They're very rare! Anyway that will give you a notion of the atmosphere.

MR. POLCARI: Did you read any anthropologists?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, as a matter a fact

MR. POLCARI: Mead?

MR. LEHMAN: No, No. Not before Margaret Mead. What's his name again?

MR. POLCARI: Franz Boas?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, Franz Boas is right.

MR. POLCARI: And Tyler [sic James] Frazer?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yeah, it is funny that name was just about to pop out of my mouth. Why? Because he wrote that Golden Bough and-

MR. POLCARI: That's right-one volume in 1922.

MR. LEHMAN: I read that book, the Golden Bough. I may still have it. I remember reading it; I was fascinated by that book. Now who else?

MR. POLCARI: There was Benedict, of course, at that time; and there were a lot of people writing on anthropology in contemporary civilization. I cant remember the name, can't call it up.

MR. LEHMAN: A woman?

MR. POLCARI: No. A famous Architecture critic, urban designer critic, you know the name. You would recognize the name.[Lewis Mumford]

MR. LEHMAN: There's Joseph Irvin, you don't mean him though?

MR. POLCARI: No.

MR. LEHMAN: Joseph Irvin is famous; he was a famous architectural designer. But, let me think who you could be referring to. Is that the era of Frank Lloyd Wright?

MR. POLCARI: Yeah, twenties, thirties, forties, a very famous fellow, just died a few years ago.

MR. LEHMAN: Lewis Mumford?

MR. POLCARI: Mumford?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yes, definitely, I read a lot of Lewis Mumford. *The Architecture City* is one book.

MR. POLCARI: That's Right. *On the Human Condition* is another; there are lots of them.

MR. LEHMAN: Architecture City was the big one at the time. In which he was talking town planning. And he also a very forward looking theorist, politically, as well he was a socialist.

MR. POLCARI: You young men, it was all young men, were there any women?

MR. LEHMAN: We weren't even twenty-two or three yet.

MR. POLCARI: Right, but it was all men, no women?

MR. LEHMAN: No, only girlfriends, but they didn't count.

MR. POLCARI: Be careful Howard, we'll get thirty years in Leavenworth if we get through this. So basically you educated yourself?

MR. LEHMAN: Exactly.

MR. POLCARI: In the group? Which was a great tradition before college and the post war and the G.I. Bill. So we return to Manual High school. This education is going on after school: philosophy, art, in the school, and then you win the scholarship to Otis. When was that '32?

MR. LEHMAN: That was 1931.

MR. POLCARI: '31?

MR. LEHMAN: Through 1932. Basically was a sculpture scholarship. Now you want to know anything about the sculpture experience?

MR. POLCARI: Yeah, certainly.

MR. LEHMAN: Well first the teachers there. One was George Stanley, young, he was the one who made the original Academy Award Oscar. He made the Oscar. The second sculptor, an older man, was a very academic sculptor, maybe that's why I have a block on his name! No, forgive me, he was a very good man. He also did the MacArthur Memorial at Defee Park. Very imposing. Ah, Vernon, Roger Noble Vernon. This is a little aside, but do you know how I recalled the name Vernon at this moment? Because I have a boiler in my house, a gas boiler, that is named Vernon because it was named by Vernon Boiler Company and it went kaplooney, since this past month I had to have it replaced, and so I noticed the name Vernon-so t here is the connection-who knows where these things come from? So it was Roger Noble Vernon.

MR. POLCARI: And they were your teachers?

MR. LEHMAN: They were the ones in sculpture.

MR. POLCARI: And what were they like? One was academic?

MR. LEHMAN: He did the Trojans, a well-known sculpture, still there, the Trojan for University of Southern California, that's their symbol-the Trojan. He did the monument, and it's called the Trojan. And in fact I was there while he did it. I was in his studio. He asked me to come and work in his studio while I was in Otis to do my own private work and help around his studio which I did. He did that sculpture and he also did, later on, the MacArthur memorial monument. In the sculpture class, I was mainly on my own again. I wasn't entirely a novice, I had already had a lot of experience in modeling and in casting. Basically what I did in Otis also was to add to it my carvings-stone carvings. I started stone carvings in Otis as well as modeling. I did several pieces, and as I said I was there for one year only and at the end of the year I received a sculpture prize from Otis Art Institute, the first prize of a sculpture, and they had an exhibit at the Los Angeles Museum, and that's how I got the prize, I won first for a particular sculpture of mine.

MR. POLCARI: Do you remember the sculpture?

MR. LEHMAN: Do I remember it!? That sculpture happened to be one of the best sculptures that you could see in the twentieth century, and I'm not kidding. I have it now in bronze. Now, I cast it in bronze, only a few years ago. I kept the sculpture with me all these years, in plaster. Now I have it in bronze, and I believe it is one of the best sculptures, regardless of the use of the sculpture. When you see it you can decide for yourself. It is called The Prophet. It is a full figure. It is a small sculpture, I didn't have the facilities there. I never exhibited it after Los Angeles, never exhibited in New York. It was not a permanent material.

MR. POLCARI: Why did you choose to subject the prophet?

MR. LEHMAN: Why did one do anything? I was fascinated and imbued by Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel. Another phase, that we haven't even mentioned are influences, the things we really were interested in as young artists in L.A. The entire Renaissance was our main interest.

MR. POLCARI: Could you find much on exhibit in L.A.? The museums were pretty young at that time.

MR. LEHMAN: Well we did. The only real museum was the Los Angeles County Museum and they didn't have much of anything, not first rate work. They did have some Oriental stuff which was fascinating and great. Great Chinese carvings. That fascinated me too. You see this sculpture, The Prophet, you'll see a myriad of influences in this thing. You'll see Michelangelo, you'll see El Greco, and you'll see Chinese sculpture all combined into one, but inseparable. No point talking about a work of art. You must see it. At least I could tell you where it originated you might say. You say the word prophet-why would I think of a prophet? Well, at that time I was very fascinated by the Sistine Chapel and Michelangelo and the ceiling in particular. You had the prophets and the sibyls running around the base of the design. At that time, at the Stanley Rose gallery, I found some publications that had recently come from Europe, called the 'Tel' editions. I don't know if you're familiar with them. They were large format black and white reproductions of art-of different artists. Each folder, there were separate reproductions about 20 to a folder, or 32 to a folder.

MR. POLCARI: The great names in art history?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, they were all the greats. These still are the finest. Why? Because they are photos of Euro reproductions. They were not [inaudible Benze?]. These were photos of Europe, which are the finest kind of Black and white you could get to. I found them at Stanley Rose and I bought the Michelangelo ceiling and the Michelangelo Last Judgment, each a separate folders. I made copies of several reproductions, especially of the ceiling. I was really bowled over by the Michelangelos. In fact I considered myself Michelangeloesque in my approach to art; and this sculpture shows it, and so does all my early work. Guston and Kadish also were very very enmeshed in the Renaissance.

MR. POLCARI: So Modernism, Modern Art, was all catholic, universe and everything?

MR. LEHMAN: Absolutely.

MR. POLCARI: Rather than simply Picasso and Matisse-

MR. LEHMAN: Absolutely, absolutely. In fact that word, catholic, I always used that myself, advocating what an artist should be: catholic in his judgment and in his taste, and not to paint himself into a corner with one theory, or one school of art. So, that possibly had some connections with making this figure, The Prophet. I did another one, which was called Moses and this was a very powerful figure. I did that in Burnham Studio. Unfortunately I don't have anything of that, except a photograph. I do have a photograph of it. Again, it has a Michelangelo influence in it.

MR. POLCARI: Did you see any so-called primitive art?

MR. LEHMAN: Like African.

MR. POLCARI: African, Indian?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, Indian. There was one teacher at Otis who was gung-ho for Indian sculpture. His own work was practically a duplicate of Indian Sculpture of the middle ages. I can't recall his name.

MR. POLCARI: Middle Ages? I'm thinking Native American.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, that kind of Indian! I'm talking about Indian from India, not Native American. That came later when I found a book in the Museum of Natural History-

MR. POLCARI: With Pollock?

MR. LEHMAN: I was with Pollock all the time at the Museum of Natural History and we were fascinated by the totem poles and the carvings of the Northwest Indian, Canadian Indians, as well of course the Mexicans: Aztecs and Mayans. To get back to where we were in L.A., there were Chinese, they were called primitives in those days, but I don't recall any primitive sculptures in the museum in that period, or any other place that showed them. There may have been a few on display at the Stendahl Gallery, a private gallery. You familiar with it?

MR. POLCARI: No.

MR. LEHMAN: There were two big galleries in L.A. There was the Dalzell Hatfield gallery and the Stendahl gallery. Dalzell Hatfield mainly sold Contemporary American and Stendahl, European, as well as American. It was Stendahl in fact who gave Philip his first show in L.A., a one-man show. When I first met the [inaudible] actually-

MR. POLCARI: At the Stendahl?

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah he gave a tour. He invited the local artists to come and join with him, in forming a group of painters. He was going to have us all do frescoes, and he was going to teach professional technique to young artists. It was called a bloc of painters. Immediately gathered together and did that. Guston, Kadish, myself.

MR. POLCARI: Not Pollock?

MR. LEHMAN: No, He was already gone. He went to New York.

MR. POLCARI: How about Tolegian? He was gone, too?

MR. LEHMAN: He went with Pollock. He and Pollock were a pair basically. They traveled around the rails in crates and so on to New York and back to L.A. and back to New York. But, in L.A. it was just the three of us. Kadish, myself, and Guston.

MR. POLCARI: And Siqueiros was doing a mural around that time?

MR. LEHMAN: 1932 he was brought in to teach fresco at Chouinard Art School, and he did this outdoor fresco. At the Chouinard Art School, in the courtyard. I was having [inaudible] around the corner, in the Westside park. So now he was just across the Westside Park on the North and I was on the South at my place, and I was going to Otis at the time, and Otis was between the two streets, so everything was all centered. Guston came over one day, 'Come on let's go see what's going on Chouinard-Kadish is there and he's doing this fresco.' 'Fine' and we went over there and saw this thing.

MR. POLCARI: Tropical America.

MR. LEHMAN: No.

MR. POLCARI: No?

MR. LEHMAN: Don't get ahead of yourself.

MR. POLCARI: Okay.

MR. LEHMAN: This was actually an agitator giving a speech to the workers, with his hand up waving and the other hand had Karl Marx' Kapital and he was raving to the workers about capitalism, and that's on the scaffold behind him in paint. He painted the scaffold with the workers on the scaffold listening intently to what's going on, and on the side of the worker giving the talk was a woman and a child and another figure. That was just too much for Chenard-they covered up the picture. Then Siqueiros got this call to do this fresco down in Arbera Street, and that's another outdoor fresco, but much bigger, wider. He decided to do this thing about American exploiting the Mexican worker-it was to be called Tropical America and that's what he did there, and I remember that vividly. I watched him paint on that.

MR. POLCARI: But you knew him by then?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yeah. That's when I first met [inaudible]. After the one man show which came after the frescoes we formed this group, and it met in the garage of a house that was rented by a fellow Mexican artist named Luis Arenal, you may know that name.

MR. POLCARI: Yes.

MR. LEHMAN: Because, Siqueiros later married Arenal's sister, Angelica Arenal, whose house is why Angelica was married at the time, not disclosed, she was married to some milkman, an American. But he had at his disposal; we had at our disposal this shed, which we used for the fresco paintings. So we all got together every chance we could and we constructed these frames for the frescoes and the frames were about four by six feet, they had to be able to be handled, they were done in cement, and they were very heavy. Each painting was hardly able to be lifted. We learned how to construct these things up to the finished surface of the fresco paintings. And we painted these things in a group—we each had our own sets of the paint—but we painted them together along the wall. We would line one up after another. And each of us had a subject to paint, in fact we had two subjects to paint. One was the exploitation of labor by capital in America, and the other was the persecution of the Blacks, or at that time whom we called the Negro in America: those two subjects. So we each painted frescoes on each one of those subjects. I did too.

MR. POLCARI: And this was to go in Tropical?

MR. LEHMAN: No, no, no. That had nothing to do with Tropical America. This was on our own, after he had invited us to form a group to paint frescoes. We had already finished Tropical America.

MR. POLCARI: Oh, okay.

MR. LEHMAN: We had already finished Tropical America.

MR. POLCARI: But you were watching it, and then watched it?

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah. So that of course instigated us to come and form this group, and we were eager to get going and do it because we all wanted to be mural painters.

MR. POLCARI: Yes. This was about '32?

MR. LEHMAN: No, this was '33 now. '32 was when he did the Tropical America. '33 was when we formed the group. I still have a card, a linoleum card done by Arenal, which he announces the Bloc of Painters Exhibit. The first exhibit at the John Reed Club, but that's a little ahead. We did these frescoes, and were now planning to exhibit them, and it was arranged that it would be exhibited at the John Reed Club in Hollywood. A truck came and took them up to the location, and this was on a Friday. The exhibit was supposed to start on a Saturday. Friday night I get a phone call, it might have been Kadish. I get a phone call, and the voice says 'Harold, don't bother to come to John Reed tomorrow, there won't be any exhibit.' 'Why?' I ask. 'Because they're all destroyed. The frescoes have been destroyed by the Red Squad.' Sure enough, I went up to see and there they were laying all over the floor.

MR. POLCARI: All broken up to cement.

MR. LEHMAN: Today that would be a wonderful an exhibit at the Whitney Museum. That's exactly the sort of thing they would feature. Those shards and different pieces with sulfur are a mint of money; but they were nothing but a pile of junk. So we sued the Red Squad, the Police, for this action, and they took the thing to court. And we had one among us in our group, an older fellow who had come from New York. He was appointed spokesman for us, because he was mature, and he had a coat, a regular suit, so he could appear as a witness, and make a nice impression; he was an artist. So they put him on the stand, and the opposing lawyers, the ones for the police, started to accuse him. He had photographs of all the frescoes. So this independent lawyer had the photos in

his hand and would present them one after the other to our witness saying, 'How much is this fresco worth?' The witness would give a price, and he would go on to a second and a third, until he got through all twelve, he got through all of them. When he got through with the photos, he wouldn't lay them aside on the table, he simply put them underneath the pile. Now, he got to the end, but the first one came up again, and he presented them all over again to our witness, and 'How much is this fresco worth?' Our witness now gives a different sum. Whereas the first time, he said the painting was worth three-hundred dollars, this time he would say five-hundred dollars. 'Oh?' said the defense lawyer, 'I thought it was worth only three-hundred dollars, that's what you said a moment ago, and it was in the transcript. He was demolished as an expert witness and the case was thrown at. And what was the judgment of the court? It was a judge and no jury. And the judge said that he dismissed the case because he felt that these frescoes were destroyed by parties unknown, possibly the artists themselves for the publicity. That was the verdict.

MR. POLCARI: [laughter] They didn't have any evidence of the police?

MR. LEHMAN: Nobody saw it.

MR. POLCARI: No one saw it?

MR. LEHMAN: They did it at night, in the middle of the night. They raided the place. There is a postscript to this. The leading art critic of the Los Angeles Times, Ralph Emilian, wrote an article about this in which he talks about communist propaganda in art. And the burden of this article was that no matter how good a painting is, if it is propaganda for communism, it does not deserve to exist. This is an art critic writing! I have that article; and you will have that in your archives, if you don't already. It's a notorious article. That was the episode of the Red Squad and our frescoes.

MR. POLCARI: Siqueiros must have heard about it?

MR. LEHMAN: I think Siqueiros was gone by then.

MR. POLCARI: Gone by then. He resurfaced-

MR. LEHMAN: Because he never showed up there. Yes, he was gone by then. He didn't go back to New York, he went back to Mexico, and then eventually to Argentina, when he painted that big barrel vault fresco, but that's another story.

MR. POLCARI: Oh yes, the experimental-

MR. LEHMAN: A Passive Exercise, it was called, but you should know that through this exhibit.

MR. POLCARI: Returning to his Tropical America, you saw this with your friends, Kadish-

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, all together we saw that together.

MR. POLCARI: In joining the bloc, was Guston a member?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yes.

MR. POLCARI: And Kadish?

MR. LEHMAN: Absolutely.

MR. POLCARI: And the others had gone east. Did Siqueiros ever say anything about Tropical

America besides the exploitation of Latin America by the American? It has a lot of abstract imagery in it.

MR. LEHMAN: Not really.

MR. POLCARI: Well the forest-

MR. LEHMAN: It is symbolic you could say, he has the soldiers mounted on columns. A soldier holding a gun pointing toward the American Eagle, the American Eagle as a symbol sitting on top the crucified Indian next to him, Mexican laborer Indian on a crucifix. And symbols of old Aztec or Mayan culture-the sculptures that were shown strewn around the landscape, demolished-structure, temples, and these were the leading of the temples. And the top of the jungle. You have the jungle forms weaving in and out and around, but basically that's the subject matter. The center which was the crucified Indian on the left, on the right the Mexican soldier aiming his gun towards the center, and the symbols of culture which were destroyed by capitalism.

MR. POLCARI: In the West?

MR. LEHMAN: Well capital exploitation, basically. He invoked all the time capitalism exploiting labor. The Mexican oilfields were all owned by American companies-Standard Oil and others-and they're the ones who exploited the Mexican economy.

MR. POLCARI: Well I think they nationalized them at some point.

MR. LEHMAN: Well now they are sure, they were nationalized by President Cardenas in the thirties-later, much later on.

MR. POLCARI: To get back to this fresco, there were some panels up above-

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, hieroglyphic panels. Mexican hieroglyphics. They may or may not mean something. I never got the sense of that-he might of copied them from actual hieroglyphics, but that's what they were. That was what established them as part of the temple, and the ancient Mexican culture, because the columns between which this Cucuspapad, were definitely a column taken from a temple in either Iotioakam, or one of the other, I can't recall which Mexican temple.

MR. POLCARI: So quite a symbolic program, this piece?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yeah.

MR. POLCARI: You know they're restoring it.

MR. LEHMAN: Beg your Pardon?

MR. POLCARI: There's an active program to restore it, that fresco.

MR. LEHMAN: I bet it has been going on for twenty years or more.

MR. POLCARI: The Getty is involved now.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh really?

MR. POLCARI: Yeah

MR. LEHMAN: Well that's news to me.

MR. POLCARI: And Irene Henner who you met.

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah.

MR. POLCARI: So much of it is faded, and basically they're really repainting it.

MR. LEHMAN: Irene told me about this, and the last time I was out in California was 1990. I went down to see it, and it was covered by polyethylene film, plastic film covered the entire thing, and it was a ruin.

MR. POLCARI: Yes it's a ruin, it will always be a ruin.

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah.

MR. POLCARI: I think they are going to put up some kind of exhibition, explanation, or something. It will be modest. The guy that faded, what was his material?

MR. LEHMAN: It was cement. It was glucco on cement. No, actually it was fresco, he used some other material besides straight fresco, there were pigments see, different. It was bound to fade. It was an experimental fresco for one thing, and it was attacked constantly by people: scratches, things thrown at it and so on, not a very popular painting.

MR. POLCARI: Do you know if Pollock and others like Tolegian, and when people went to New York, they came back to view it probably-

MR. LEHMAN: I don't recall. Pollock may have done so very early on in the thirties. Yeah, because it was still intact. But they refused admission to see it-they used to have an open staircase, right up the building onto the roof. They had a building that had a one level roof and then a raised wall with the fresco, and then the roof of the second part of the building. And they closed off the entry so that you could not get up to the roof to view it. However you could see it from a distance, and I would imagine that there was an opening in the doorway, but only for those who had access to it, not the general public. Funny thing, this calls to mind that one day when I was down there-Alvera Street in the neighborhood-to see this fresco again, I wandered around on Alvera street, there was a little bookshop there that I went in, this was soon after it was completed. I bought my very first art book in Lipton bookshop on Alvera street, and what were they? A little pocket book, one on Cézanne, and the other one on Daumier. Those were my first two purchases: Daumier and Cézanne. They're still two of my best artistic interests-both of them very much, especially Paul Cézanne.

MR. POLCARI: Well you should see the show in Philadelphia.

MR. LEHMAN: Well I want to. You going down some time? I'll go with you.

MR. POLCARI: I haven't gone down yet...I don't know when.

MR. LEHMAN: You haven't gone?

MR. POLCARI: No. It's supposed to be very nice, but it's hard to get tickets to, but once you go-

MR. LEHMAN: But you have to make an advanced reservation?

MR. POLCARI: Yeah, you have to give the number.

MR. LEHMAN: It's a hell of a chore and a nuisance. I wouldn't be intending to stay. I would go and come back the same day. In New York, you organize your time schedule precisely, but that's another story.

MR. POLCARI: Lets get back to Otis and the bloc. So you finished a year there. Did you get a degree?

MR. LEHMAN: No, those were the old days, nothing was so formal in those days. I never heard of a degree from an art school until years later after the Bill of Rights-the GI Bill of Rights-that's when you got degrees, because they wanted to see proof of your attendance and training. There was no degree. But, hell, I received a first prize in sculpture, but that would be sufficient evidence of having been there.

MR. POLCARI: So you were there '33-'34?

MR. LEHMAN: No I was there '31-'32.

MR. POLCARI: Ah huh

MR. LEHMAN: '33 then I was with DeCaro doing the frescoes, and also my own work, my own painting. In fact my very first finished painting, I did in 1933, in March, in the middle of all this other activity and it was called The Landlady. That painting became famous throughout California. Why? Because I submitted it to the Fourteenth Annual Exhibit of Painting and Sculpture at the L.A. Museum, and it won the second prize-my first painting. It was attacked immediately by all the reactionary and conservative forces in the L.A. art world, and it was reproduced-not in color-in the Los Angeles Times who had a big review of the exhibit because of this commotion that was created. Some people called it a masterpiece, others called it a disgrace and that sort of thing, you know.

MR. POLCARI: Excellent!

MR. LEHMAN: Well I say I became famous. Immediately, I got solicitations from museums and galleries to show it throughout California, which I did, and it traveled.

MR. POLCARI: Good.

MR. LEHMAN: And so my name became quite well-known, much better known than Guston's or anyone else's through all my exhibiting in California. Shortly afterwards in 1933 having done additional work, Philip Guston and I had a joint exhibit, a two-man show, at the Stanley Rose Gallery in Hollywood. And this is something I want to emphasize-that we had this two man show, because no book that I have ever seen on Guston acknowledges that he had a two-man show with me at Stanley Rose. What they do say, or claim, is that he had a one-man show in 1931, which is absolutely absurd. In 1931 he had no work done, no paintings either, and was just getting out of high school. So where do they come off having that statement and that assertion? Someone had to start the ball.

MR. POLCARI: This is the point of these interviews.

MR. LEHMAN: That's right! This is a correction. I hope that will tape.

MR. POLCARI: Yes.

MR. LEHMAN: Let me tell you something, that is also repeated in the book on Guston by Robert Storr at the Museum of Modern Art. I tried to correct him by writing to him. I never received a word from him, never a phone call, never an acknowledgment that he ever received any communication from me. So for all I know he doesn't even know it to this way. Maybe he never got the communication, but whatever, the point is it's in his book. How did he get it? He got it through Dore Ashton, because all the biographical material is simply clipped from Dore Ashton, lifted it from her and he says so in his introduction. There's no original research, but he was in a hurry to get into the paintings which interested him. It was obvious. Not only that, none of the books say the same thing.

MR. POLCARI: Sometimes these dates get into literature, and people just do that: they repeat them, and it becomes a standard thing.

MR. LEHMAN: Where would this canard have come from? This is of a one-man show that didn't exist, and the elimination of the two-man show that did exist.

MR. POLCARI: Maybe Phil told Dore Ashton that and that was-

MR. LEHMAN: Well Phil's memory may have become a little foggy later in life. I don't know, but it was too late to talk to Phil about it because he had already died in 1980 when I discovered all this. And Dore Ashton's book-she couldn't have written it without me. And I have five letters from her saying so, and her acknowledgments as well, and her notes in the back. The point is, she got material from me, and she got correct material. Not just through my memory, I have documentation of everything I say, and I showed it to her, and I made copies and sent them to her, but there's no excuse because I have a review of this show by Arthur Millier, from the Los Angeles Times, and I sent her that review, and it has a bold date right across the top of the page.

MR. POLCARI: I think you showed it to me.

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah.

MR. POLCARI: Well I hope this material comes to the archives.

MR. LEHMAN: Sure it will come to the archives. What I want is to just...

Tape 2 Side A

MR. LEHMAN: ...modern art that is, as affected in Picasso and the modern movement of art. But the thing that people don't seem to realize is that artists, American artists, were backed into a corner by Picasso, and Matisse and the French School. And they couldn't go anywhere without actually respecting both Picasso and Matisse and the Realism and the rest of it, but in that day they're showing themselves as clones of these movements and these artists rather than being themselves. So the only way to get away from that, and assert themselves is to plow that over and start over. Basically it's a starting over.

MR. POLCARI: Abstract expressionism, yes. Well the idea that this all cold war stock and they painted it...

MR. LEHMAN: That's no consideration at all. I knew all about this years ago when it was first compounded by Massac, you know Massac?

MR. POLCARI: Kozlov.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh Kozlov, well there were two of them, Massac and Kozlov.

MR. POLCARI: In the seventies.

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah in the seventies. It's called 'Abstract Expressionism and the Cold War;' and I have the article. It was sent to me by Herbert, Frank Herbert; and he was talking about that. I wrote to him in the same vain. That's baloney.

MR. POLCARI: I think it's baloney, and I think it's vicious anti-Americanism posing as history. It is really 'Oh, the Americans sold out to the cold war and that kind of stuff.'

MR. LEHMAN: There are intellectuals and writers that just love to muddy the waters with theory. Matter of fact, long ago I had a theory I called a 'triptocana.' One of these things I wrote was if it is a theory it's wrong, period. And what is a theory? A theory is something 36 inches long, which when used as a measure always gives the same answer: one yard.

MR. POLCARI: I think I just eliminated much art writing of the last twenty-five years, Harold. Yes, I think that's true. Theories are self-predictable-

MR. LEHMAN: My point is that it allows for no further expansion of anything.

MR. POLCARI: That's right. Most people just use it and agree with 90 percent of it without thinking about it. They just adopt it whole art. There's a lot of that in intellectual art.

MR. LEHMAN: I have another one. This is a little poem I wrote: 'Art which goes right to the root of things, uproot to dissertation and theories which now comes back'-I can't remember, I have it written down, I don't remember all of it-

[Pause]

MR. LEHMAN: This is the theory, especially the way I wrote it, the format. Art which goes right through the root of the thing uproots the weed and dissertation which-

[Pause]

MR. LEHMAN: Sheep went on bleeding 'Baaah'

MR. POLCARI: Now when you remember write it down here.

MR. LEHMAN: I'll get it for you. Anyway-

MR. POLCARI: Let's go back to where we were before, this is tape 2, and the beginning side A, on June 20, 1996, Harold Lehman and Stephen Polcari. We were just finishing talking about your years at Otis and working with Siqueiros in the early thirties- what happened after Otis in this period that you did these murals that were destroyed? Did you start thinking about coming to New York at that point?

MR. LEHMAN: Not yet. No. After that I buckled down to my own work, painting.

MR. POLCARI: Well you became a painter though?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yes.

MR. POLCARI: That's a change, but why?

MR. LEHMAN: I had no facilities for sculpture for one thing. I had no real studio, after Otis and [inaudible]. I became interested in painting. After all, my friends were all painters; not a single one of them was a sculptor for one thing. Besides, my vision and my feeling was for expression in every phase of art, not only in sculpture. Yet, I had the opportunity in my surroundings to do painting much more so than sculpture, so I concentrated on it. As I told you I did this one painting, the first painting of my landlady, she really was my landlady. She was a fantastic caricature of a landlady-that's why it made such a fuss, that painting. It was a life-size painting too.

MR. POLCARI: So it was so well received.

MR. LEHMAN: Very well received

MR. POLCARI: So encouraging

MR. LEHMAN: I have to give you a highlight about that. It was so well received that when Guston and I had a two man show later that same year at Stanley Rose gallery, that painting was one of my exhibits in this show. The consequence: I received a call from Stanley Rose saying that he had a buyer for my painting. Now remember this was a prize winning painting, and now I'm famous throughout the state at that time. I said, 'well good, tell me about it.' He says, 'well, he's a Hollywood producer and writer, and his name is Dudley Nicholls.' Very famous writer of the day, Dudley Nicholls. I said, 'Great.' He says, 'Why don't you come on up and we'll talk about it.' So okay, I went up to the gallery. He wasn't there Dudley Nicholls, but Stanley Rose was, and he said, 'You know Harold, he wants the painting very much, but he doesn't want to pay the price, all he wants to pay is fifty dollars.' I had that painting, a prize-winning painting priced at one-hundred dollars, in those days that was a large sum. one-hundred dollars. That son-of-a-bitch wanted to cut me down to fifty dollars! So, I told him to go to hell, in those words.

MR. POLCARI: Well collectors haven't changed a great deal.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh god no. No matter how rich apparently, this guy was loaded. Anyway that's an interesting side about the thing. The painting stayed with me. Now, I continued working, building toward a one-man show. Meanwhile I had many exhibits grouped with-oh, this is a whole new phase now. Post-surrealist we'll talk about, you know about them I'm sure.

MR. POLCARI: Uh huh.

MR. LEHMAN: Feitelson, Helen Lundberg.

MR. POLCARI: Yeah.

MR. LEHMAN: So at the same time I was doing all these other things. I was working with Feitelson doing drawings from light and compositions and so on. Both in his home and in his school-they had a class in Pasadena. I used to go out there with Phil Guston and Kadish, Levine as well. Eventually, Feitelson latched on to surrealist theory. His whole work then took on a completely new slant. He had been doing Renaissance size painting. That's one of the things that I didn't mention. One of the impetuses to focus on Renaissance art was Feitelson.

MR. POLCARI: Why Feitelson?

MR. LEHMAN: Feitelson was the chief 'practitioner' of the Renaissance aesthetic in Southern California. He was the chief influence for Renaissance art-he and F. McDonald Wright were the two big names in Southern California-

MR. POLCARI: You were only thirty?

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah. So there were two wings, two schools. McDonald Wright as you know, a synchromist, invented-he and Morgan Russell invented synchromism. And, Feitelson, had been in Paris and then New York and was originally very gung-ho with Cézanne, and so on. Then he lapsed back into neo-classicism, and that was his big thing. Neo-Classicism. He was particularly interested in for example, the Le Nain brothers. You know their work?

MR. POLCARI: Oh yes.

MR. LEHMAN: Very fine painters-but they're essentially realists, but classical realists. So Le Nain and also the Fontainebleau school, French school of Fontainebleau, which was a particular thing too in drawing the nude and painting the nude. Oddball-

MR. POLCARI: Combination, for Southern California in the 1930s.

MR. LEHMAN: But his own work showed that, he had the Le Nain and he had the Fontainebleau, and then Tintoretto. Tintoretto was a big name in those days, Tintoretto and Michelangelo.

MR. POLCARI: No Titian?

MR. LEHMAN: No, no Titian. We liked these artists for composition. When we were studying composition with Feitelson, and he would always bring out Veronese and Titian, for composition. Not the paintings...

MR. POLCARI: Oh Veronese.

MR. LEHMAN: Veronese. Oh, he's great a great artist.

MR. POLCARI: Oh yes, he's wonderful.

MR. LEHMAN: I think of him the best. Even though Titian is fantas-what's the point, they're all great. But Veronese and his perfection and so on, and his dazzling use of color. These were the things that were influencing Feitelson when I first knew him: Renaissance, but not too much Italian Renaissance, although he talked a lot about it of course. In any case, he went from there to the Surrealist approach, and he formed a group of all of us who worked with him and he called us the Post-Surrealist. He came out with a manifesto written by his girlfriend Helen Lundberg.

MR. POLCARI: He came out with it, but she wrote it?

MR. LEHMAN: Well, two of them, let's say. She wrote it, but under his aegis.

MR. POLCARI: That's right. The kind of surrealism that was influential was Dali, yes?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, exactly. There was a reason for that. In 1934 Dali had his first exhibit in America, in the U.S. There was a lot of publicity all over the place about Dali's surrealism. That is the particular expression of surrealism that reached us first in a very prominent matter. Since then, he wrote a book, Dali, a small little pocket book, which I also bought and found at the Stanley Rose

Gallery. It was called Concepts of the Irrational. You know the book?

MR. POLCARI: Mm hmm.

MR. LEHMAN: I still have that book, Concepts of the Irrational. I poured over that book and he had some very fine things in it. At that time we all liked very much what he was doing then, because it had that practical form in the subject matter. The form was well painted, Renaissance style. So he formed the group and we started trying to develop our art and our composition along those lines, and we had exhibits every so often, showing what we were doing. I was part of the group and part of the exhibit every time. At the time of the two-man show with Guston there was none of that, there was nothing Surrealist, just our own work, basically Classical, both Guston and myself. Guston started being very much into Picasso and his figure paintings, figure studies. So after that show then I continued working, but this time, with Feitelson School as part of it and so did Guston, we were very much a part of it. There were several exhibits, maybe two or three a year. Don't forget now, we were approaching 1935. These exhibits I just alluded to are the ones, post-surrealist so basically 1934, but they went into 1935.

MR. POLCARI: So Guston got some of the Surrealism too at this time?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yes.

MR. POLCARI: And, that seemed to be the latest in from Paris, I guess.

MR. LEHMAN: Seemed to be what?

MR. POLCARI: The latest in from Paris.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, exactly.

MR. POLCARI: So you had [inaudible] and the Renaissance tradition and Dali who were trying to make things out of this?

MR. LEHMAN: Right, coalesce, make the whole thing coalesce. But not the Siqueiros thing, that had no—you couldn't have shit. You couldn't make a statement with Siquieros' approach to Surrealism, because Siqueiros' thing dealt with positive literary ideas. Political ideas if you will, but not so much a Surrealist, but that would be obscured in a Surrealist approach to the subject, otherwise it's not surrealist. We had already read, as I told you, the books on psychology by Freud and by the Gestalt School. The Gestalt school was particularly apropos in relation to post-surrealism. The figure in brown and the transformation of form from one into another and so on

MR. POLCARI: Did Dali ever come to-

MR. LEHMAN: He was not there when we were there at that time.

MR. POLCARI: Because Walt Disney got interested right away.

MR. LEHMAN: Later on

MR. POLCARI: Later and after-

MR. LEHMAN: Yes. When he made that film-

MR. POLCARI: Fantasia

MR. LEHMAN: No, another one. What the heck was it? He didn't make the film, I'm talking about the work he did for a film by Hitchcock.

MR. POLCARI: Oh yes, that was '46.

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, much later, I don't mean Psycho.

MR. POLCARI: No, I know it's the one you mean. There's a Daliesque section to it.

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah right.

MR. POLCARI: The name will come to mind any second.

MR. LEHMAN: Mine too. But that was much later, but you have to remember that in that period, 1934, was when Guston and Kadish left and went to Mexico. So I was alone-out of the group, the trio-I was just there alone. The funny thing is that Arthur Millier, then, wrote an article about his latest work in Mexico. You've got the three young artists, he didn't mention names: It is said that on a foundation set up by a communist party in Mexico, studying Mexico with Siqueiros, and doing frescoes-He meant me, of course I had no part of it. He was so off base it was just incredible.

MR. POLCARI: So his article about Kadish and Guston working with Siqueiros. I forget where that...

MR. LEHMAN: And Morelia.

MR. POLCARI: Morelia

MR. POLCARI: Michoacán, Morelia Michoacán (?)

MR. LEHMAN: Siqueiros was out of the wall there, and so, wrote me regularly from Morelia, describing his progress-the progress with the frescoes and so on.

MR. POLCARI: Do you have these letters?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, the originals!

MR. POLCARI: Lovely.

MR. LEHMAN: I have the originals with I am going to present. I already have given copies to writers on Phil. Dore Ashton, I gave her some copies which she...you have the machine on so I have to watch my words...but she used my letters without giving me full credit. In any case the letters had been utilized, but not too much.

MR. POLCARI: Well there's always more.

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, no one had ever quoted them verbatim, the whole letters. So, I have these-

[Pause]

MR. LEHMAN: ...what he was doing was telling me about his experience with Mexico as well as this painting, and his progress with fresco. And after he finished it Time magazine published a full article about it, that was sent to Time by a third party who wouldn't have been from Mexico-a writer who became a well-known critic in Los Angeles (you may know his name). But he was one of the crowd up in L.A., a quiet fellow, but a writer, so quiet that I've forgotten his name. There's a block; I'm trying

to remember the name. He was basically Kadish's friend. He incidentally also was a very close friend of Dore Ashton's, in fact they toured Europe together I believe, I'll get the name in a minute.

MR. POLCARI: Not Ada Junkers?

MR. LEHMAN: What about it?

MR. POLCARI: I'm just trying to-

MR. LEHMAN: No no no. I know the name so well, but it's one of those blocks I guess. I usually don't block names out, but I haven't had occasion to think of him for so long. I don't want to waste your tape time, so go on to something else.

MR. POLCARI: So these years they're there, you're working in learning Surrealism in Southern California, and the romance of Mexico must be very strong at this time, as it was in American-

MR. LEHMAN: It certainly was.

MR. POLCARI: [inaudible]

MR. LEHMAN: Yes. I wouldn't go myself, because there were other things that I was concerned about, as well as personal things, but I didn't go. I kept on painting my own stuff. That happens all the time. I left for New York for a one-man show, I think.

MR. POLCARI: At which gallery?

MR. LEHMAN: J. Zeisman. You know the gallery?

MR. POLCARI: No

MR. LEHMAN: Well, J. Zeisman was also a bookshop, and a very very famous one, not so much a gallery, but the bookshop. He published D.H. Lawrence. I think later became one of the executors of Frida Lawrence's estate. But it was a big, in downtown Los Angeles, not Hollywood. So I had a one-man show there, and that was in 1935, around May.

MR. POLCARI: So your career is developing well. You've done a well-known painting, over here you're having several one-man shows.

MR. LEHMAN: More than one well known, I didn't mention...well go on.

MR. POLCARI: You're in artistic circles, ever expanding, things are well developing in your art career at this time.

MR. LEHMAN: Considering the economic situation of this time, I had no real income.

MR. POLCARI: That's right. The government programs happened.

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, although we were on that first government program, the PWAP., Public Works of Art Project, but that's another phase that we haven't mentioned yet.

MR. POLCARI: That's 1934 isn't it?

MR. LEHMAN: No, well, no, 1933 it started and went into 1934. 1933. Balancing all these apples at

the same time. We were commissioned to do a joint mural: Guston, Kadish, and myself. Along with an older artist, who was a supposed expert at the trough of art historic frescoes, they had given us this whole commission-The Frank Riggins Trade School in Los Angeles-and we quickly drew up a design for the first wall. I have photographs of that completed wall. I did half the wall and Guston and Kadish and this other fellow combined on the other half. One half was mine and the other half was those three. What happened is that this guy from New York, this older man, he brought with him a technique that he learned from Benton, and that is tempera. We were going to do this mural in tempera, not fresco. We didn't know anything much about tempera, the technique. So he established a groundwork from cooking up the glue, you had to melt the glue and mix it with whiting and make a gesso. So we started to do that, and we applied it to the wall, and then we started painting with wood, finished it whole, and my god did we finish it, suddenly we came in one day and there were strips of paint falling off the wall. So the administrators came down, the technical experts, there wasn't much technical expert in those days, but they saw that this was impossible, so they stopped our whole project. And they took the wall away from us and they gave it to a newer [inaudible] Leo Katz. You know the name?

MR. POLCARI: I know the name. Don't know much about him, but-

MR. LEHMAN: I'll make the connection here. Leo Katz was just finishing the first addition to a fresco in Babner. Frescoes are also there, Leo Katz was an assistant. When he was finished he came to L.A. So now he was in L.A. and he had the experience in fresco, and also he had the whole effort and mythos of Mexican lore. So they gave him the wall to do, and they put us all under his wing as assistants, but not the older fellow, just the three of us, Guston, Kadish, and myself, we were now his assistants. And he started doing designs for this thing, and he assigned certain subjects to us to work up, which we did on all basically Mexican mythology, the Aztec and Mayan art. And we were to do pre-copies of ancient Mayan sculptures and Aztec sculptures and incorporate them in his designs. So we did some of that. But then Kadish started to say to me, 'Why should we do this guy's work, let him do his own damn work.' And so instead of doing nice work which he was capable of, decent work, he screwed it all up and did very amateur drawing, and he got Guston to buy into the idea too. So this Katz came along one day and he saw these full size cartoons. He couldn't understand it, and says, 'Where is this coming from, you fellows didn't do this, did you?' 'Yeah, sure, we did those.' 'Well that's not good at all.' Meanwhile I was parting away and gradually I would start lousing the thing up. So he went to the administration and complained about us sabotaging his fresco, so they called us down for a hearing. And we had the hearing, and they were all lined up, Merle Armiduke, you heard the name? Merle Armiduke.

MR. POLCARI: He's a critic.

MR. LEHMAN: That was much later. Merle Armiduke was the head of the whole project in Los Angeles.

MR. POLCARI: Ah ha.

MR. LEHMAN: And the Public Works of Art Project, he was the head of it. He was also the head of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, but that's another story. That's the music side of it, I haven't even got into. Merle Armiduke was sitting there in the middle of the board, and accused us of doing this. And then he comes out with a flat accusation. He thinks that it's time to amputate, they're going to 'amputate' the three of us then and there from the project. Well then they associated with the Feitelson, his influence, and Feitelson was not very friendly, as was Katz or with any of those others. So there was art politics working all the time, but in any case we were finished with the project. So now I had no project and no real income, and I was working for my one-man show, and I figured

when I got through with that then I'd probably leave, by that time they had gone to Mexico. It was after that they went to Mexico.

MR. POLCARI: So your friends were simply disappearing. Pollock left; Kadish and Guston had gone to Mexico.

MR. LEHMAN: Right, I was isolated. Except that Feitelson and Lundberg, and that reached their point of no return too, because Feitelson then picks a fight with us, and with me professionally because he felt that we were no longer interested in his theories, which is true. We were already banned on his Post-Surrealist ethic, thinking it was very, how should I say it, very closed, very shallow, it didn't offer a field of real expression. It was very repetitious for one thing. There it is about the theory and thirty-six inches long. They wouldn't go an inch outside of it. Otherwise you're a traitor. So that they were playing on us on that, and they were arranging another post surrealist show for San Francisco, to which I was not invited, but this was after my first one-man show which was in May of '35, and they were going to have this show, I believe the same month or a month after, and in any case I had already made plans to return to New York. Among other things, I had personal reasons: my girlfriend had left. I had a girlfriend for two or three years in L.A. Finally she left and went to New York to become a dancer with Martha Graham.

MR. POLCARI: What was her name?

MR. LEHMAN: Her name was Thelma. Thelma Babbitt. And she was the one in my large painting called, Portrait of the Dancer Self-Constructor. If you have that magazine, which has a color print, Art in America in January. Do you have it here?

MR. POLCARI: This January Art in America.

MR. LEHMAN: I heard about it. Yes this past January Art in America. There was a big review of the entire show with a color print of my painting.

MR. POLCARI: I don't remember that at all.

MR. LEHMAN: Well I told you about it. But you don't have a-

MR. POLCARI: I don't have a subscription, we don't get it here. I'll have to check it at MoMA.

MR. LEHMAN: Do you have one on the premises?

MR. POLCARI: No.

MR. LEHMAN: Anyway. Thelma Babbitt.

MR. POLCARI: Thelma, so she was one of the early dancers with Graham?

MR. LEHMAN: Right, I don't know if you'd find her name listed there, or whatever stage name, but whatever, she did come here to be in the group. She was a very good dancer, and she was my girlfriend for over two years in L.A. And I did this large painting mainly of her. And that became very well known, very well known painting. That traveled all through California as well, and it was featured in articles by Millier and so on.

MR. POLCARI: She left to become...Martha Graham was very well known in the mid-thirties already?

MR. LEHMAN: Absolutely, oh my god yes. She was already well known since 1929. I have a copy of Vanity Fair magazine with a first page print, black and white, of her in a dance pose, extremely good photograph.

MR. POLCARI: I know she was very famous very early.

MR. LEHMAN: That's what put her on the map. Dancing with the shrouds.

MR. POLCARI: I know the work, I have written about it.

MR. LEHMAN: Not Errand into The Maze?

MR. POLCARI: No that was later, uh, Lamentations.

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, right.

MR. POLCARI: That was called Lamentations. Okay, so she left-

MR. LEHMAN: By then, I had felt that I had gone as far as I could go in L.A., and besides, I was bored there now. L.A. was no place for an artist I thought. The atmosphere was just dead. If you didn't like eucalyptus trees and a burning sun day after day you didn't belong in L.A. And I always say that about the sun.

MR. POLCARI: Spoken like a good New Yorker, I recognize the sentiment.

MR. LEHMAN: So that's my romance story. [inaudible] I left in August to go back to New York.

MR. POLCARI: '36 or '35?

MR. LEHMAN: No, '35. August '35 is when I came to New York. Also there were so many other things that could be mentioned. I still got two articles by Thomas Craven, you know the name I'm assuming?

MR. POLCARI: Uh huh.

MR. LEHMAN: Thomas Craven. These articles are two of the most vicious attacks on modern art that you could imagine by a critic. Basically they were attacking surrealism. When Dali had his first show. 1934, these articles were printed in the L.A. Times. And one was attacking the one-man show of Dali, and the second was an attack on the Museum of Modern Art for its show of fantastic art and Dada and Surrealism.

MR. POLCARI: 1936?

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah.

MR. POLCARI: Not 1937?

MR. LEHMAN: '35 I believe, no '36. Those were the two. They were connected. They were linked. It was an attack on modern art essentially. Of course you know who Craven was. He was the big champion of the American Theme School. So this was the atmosphere of L.A. as well as before that there was a big editorial in the Los Angeles Herald Express which featured a photograph of a Picasso Bone Serieuse Nude, called Bather, and supposedly it was a sculptural looking thing. Very-

MR. POLCARI: Yes I know.

MR. LEHMAN: It attacked it. The editorial was attacking this as an example of modern art. What is the world coming to when famous museums can show such travesties and outrageous objects such as this? What are the new generations of artists thinking? The point is the atmosphere in L.A. of the day-

MR. POLCARI: Was Philistine.

MR. LEHMAN: Exactly Philistine. I have that clipping incidentally. That brilliant article. I have the original clipping. You don't have it? What the hell just happened to all this stuff? I'll give you the stuff and you're going to go bury it away.

MR. POLCARI: No, no, no. I will take a look at it.

MR. LEHMAN: Do you catalog anything?

MR. POLCARI: No, we catalog everything, and we microfilm it, and if the collection is big enough we might do a finders aid.

MR. LEHMAN: Do you index anything?

MR. POLCARI: I don't want to discuss it here.

[Pause]

MR. POLCARI: Basically your early years acculturation and education, this period of the thirties before your move back to New York. So you were only there a few years. You came out as a young boy and a sculptor and in this time you've matured enormously.

MR. LEHMAN: Let me tell you. I think you oughta put this down: I came out in 1930 as a high school student, and when I left five years later, 1935, I was in Who's Who in American Art.

MR. POLCARI: There you are. American land of opportunity!

MR. LEHMAN: The first edition. But there are not now, because I stopped filling in now any biography years later.

MR. POLCARI: So you are off to New York on the train?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh no, I went in style. They used to advertise in the newspapers trips back east. These private cars were taking passengers at a price. Large private cars. So, I read one of these and I arranged to go back to New York in one of these private cars. A big luxurious private car. It was a five day trip, and it was really uncomfortable, but still that was how I got back there. I [inaudible] my luggage. Meanwhile I had arranged with an art supplier to make big crates to put all my paintings and important books and clippings and personal property and so on and ship it back to New York. It was incredible the amount of things I was able to bring back to New York: sculptures as well as paintings and so on and so on. I was able to arrange for that. I didn't mention when talking about my early days and my arrival to L.A. how Jackson Pollock was the one who got me a room, where I stayed most of the time I was in Manual Art.

MR. POLCARI: So you struck up a friendship with him right away?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh god immediately. I had been living in Hollywood and that was one of the conflicts I had in high school, the fact that I was in Hollywood, and I had to go all the way to South L.A. to go to school. So, I had a problem getting there on time. It was Jack who found this place for me, and how come? Because he had a girlfriend, his first mention of a girlfriend named Bertha Pacifico.

MR. POLCARI: Alright.

MR. LEHMAN: She was living a block away from her sister, and her sister had a big house where she lent out one or two rooms. There was a student in the school who said he was going back east. So Jackson who had knew him very well, told me about this room that was going to be available and brought me over there and that's how I got some footing.

MR. POLCARI: This is Pollock's girlfriend?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes.

MR. POLCARI: It was a good relationship as we would say nowadays? Were they close?

MR. LEHMAN: I don't know how good it was, I mean it wasn't very shall we say satisfactory.

MR. POLCARI: On Jackson's part?

MR. LEHMAN: For Jackson. I don't think there's really any question marks here. He used to come around and do sketches and so on.

MR. POLCARI: Come around to?

MR. LEHMAN: To our house. We had a piano in the house and this girl Bertha was studying piano and she was a pretty good pianist for a young girl, and the first one I heard play Gershwin's 'Rhapsody in Blue', the piano part, not the orchestra part, but she played Gershwin. But he used to come and listen to her play piano, to her house, and he used to visit with me when he did. So we had a good close relationship there. We used to go to the museum and the galleries and whatever, was available and downtown to the bookshops. He went with me to the bookshops in L.A., we had some very good bookshops, where we browsed through art catalogs and art portfolios from Europe. One day we began in one of these shops, and he came over to me and said, 'Hey Harold, look what I got here.' We had two volumes of pullouts, reproductions of Rembrandt, full-size mostly black and white, a couple of color. Very fine photos of reproductions also, and in German, two of them. He said, 'You want them, take them, you have them. Don't you want them?' I said, 'No, no, go ahead.' So I bought the both of them, 25 cents for each portfolio. I still have them; they came back east with me. So that's the sort of relationship with had, it was very personal and very close and very camaraderie.

MR. POLCARI: So you would look at books, as well as shows and things?

MR. LEHMAN: Absolutely. That's why I bought a lot of those books I mentioned to you.

MR. POLCARI: Do you know the name of the bookstore?

MR. LEHMAN: The bookstore I couldn't remember, no. It was down on that Spring Street or Broadway. There was a couple of these bookshops, they were used bookstores.

MR. POLCARI: You're talking about in the city, New York.

MR. LEHMAN: No no. I'm talking about L.A.!

MR. POLCARI: Spring and Broadway?

MR. LEHMAN: The same streets in L.A.

MR. POLCARI: Exactly the same streets!

MR. LEHMAN: That's right. Well in New York the bookshops were on Fourth Avenue, and I transferred to them when I got to New York. In any case, that's where I got most of the books that I did buy. I wouldn't go to any regular retail bookshops, they were too expensive.

[Pause]

MR. POLCARI: ...you set up there, and then you finally come to New York.

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah

MR. POLCARI: Let me make the switch now because we're about to go over.

MR. LEHMAN: I might tell you when last thing: if you wanted to know the address, this is interesting. The address that I left from-that I did most of my painting in-was 448 South Grandview, it was one block from Otis Art Institute. And the reason I mentioned this because today, Otis Art Institute has now swallowed up that address and is located in exactly that spot that I had had. The last time I went to L.A. I looked up that old location. There was Otis Art Institute on that location. And I had gone to Otis Institute.

MR. POLCARI: It is very thriving.

MR. LEHMAN: I'll say! It's immense. But here, when I went there, it was a private little hacienda that had been the home of General Harrison Grey Otis-that's why it was Otis Art Institute. Descendants gave it over for art school purposes.

MR. POLCARI: Was he a civil war general?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes.

MR. POLCARI: Ah ha.

MR. LEHMAN: Harrison Grey Otis. Civil war, not the Spanish American War, there was the only one of the two it could be. Yeah definitely. So that was very interesting, and then he had trees going all over the property. It was all very informal. I'm talking about Otis now. The studios were simply made over Mexican style, or hacienda style rooms with a skylight put into it. The atmosphere was very nice.

MR. POLCARI: Sounds very lovely.

MR. LEHMAN: It was. But the newer art school that I could make out was a factory. Just like art schools today are. And then beside there are no art schools, it's mostly university and college art school.

MR. POLCARI: Much more elaborate in a lot of ways then that's why there's even more theory than ever.

[Pause]

MR. POLCARI:...No one else did those art schools of your group, just yourself, right? Guston didn't go?

MR. LEHMAN: No, he went to Otis Art Institute.

MR. POLCARI: Oh that's right.

MR. LEHMAN: But he got a scholarship before I did. The same scholarship, about a year before. I believe that Kadish might have been at Otis for a little while too, but not when I was there. I'm not sure about Kadish, but Guston and I yes.

MR. POLCARI: Why don't we end this side of the tape?

Tape 2, Side B

MR. LEHMAN: ...I was going down to the Village. That's where I was headed, there was an apartment I was headed for that my sister had, on west 11th street, 207 west 11th. Good memory.

MR. POLCARI: You have an excellent memory.

MR. LEHMAN: 207 West 11th street, right in the heart of the Village. I got out there, there was nobody home so I had to get the key from the landlord. I let myself in. Eventually, my sister showed up. I got established there for a few weeks, got settled. But very soon after that, in a few weeks, we moved to a location that had more room in it, and especially one that I could do some work in.

MR. POLCARI: You mentioned the pronoun 'we'.

MR. LEHMAN: My sisters and I. We had a whole floor in Washington Place, 85 Washington Place. It was right next to the 6th Avenue El. It was the top floor, walk up. That's where I stayed for the time I had my second Siqueiros experience. This is now 1935. In 1936, the American Arts Congress opened in New York. Do you want to ask questions?

MR. POLCARI: I do want to go back, one moment, to your trip across country. Did anything strike you? You just drove around with the dustbowl, depression, what was traffic like? What kind of people? Did you get a sense of American distress? What were the sights and sounds in particular?

MR. LEHMAN: We stayed to the main room all the time, it would be Lincoln Highway.

MR. POLCARI: Was that Route 66?

MR. LEHMAN: No Lincoln Highway I recall, but that's Route 1-Lincoln Highway-wasn't it?

MR. POLCARI: I don't know.

MR. LEHMAN: But, whatever, we didn't get off the main road, that's the main thing, so I didn't have much time to explore, besides I wasn't driving; I was a passenger. And the main reason we stopped was simply to eat and go to the bathroom. We drove day and night.

MR. POLCARI: That's normal. You got to 50 miles an hour or something?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh that was speeding.

MR. POLCARI: Yeah I know.

MR. LEHMAN: You can imagine five days and see how long it takes, driving day and night. I tell you, the one real experience that impressed me mightily was driving across the Mojave Desert, because we left very early in the morning, before dawn. We hit the Mojave Desert, just as the first rays of the sun got up to strike the range, the mountain range behind the Mojave Desert. We looked behind us and see this golden streak along the whole range, and gradually that golden streak got lower and lower and lower and meanwhile we picked out the violets, mauves, oranges, and blues along the mountain range and that was a most impressive sight. I've never seen anything like that. So that really is the one image that sticks in my memory: going across the Mojave Desert and that color when the sun struck that mountain range. It was almost symbolic.

MR. POLCARI: It was beautiful, purple mountain majesty. It's a beautiful country-

MR. LEHMAN: Incidentally, one thing I never mentioned and this is something that is unusual. I was a great student of American History in those days as well. As matter of fact, my two major subjects, two of the four in California, one was English and the other was History. And when I got out of grade school, junior high school, I received the English medal, as the best student of the school in English. My twin brother received the History medal. We were the Medal Family.

MR. POLCARI: Yes, yes yes.

MR. LEHMAN: In any case I had a lot of history that I knew about America. I could relate different places to different events. In turn to different artistic events, like the paintings of Thomas Eakins, Winslow Homer in particular, the American school before I was knowledgeable about any European history of art. Well that's another phase. So crossing the country gave a good deal of experiences without a doubt, but experiences I would take on the fly. I couldn't get out and explore, look around, because the guy who was driving the car had to be in New York by a certain date.

MR. POLCARI: So you had to go lickity split.

MR. LEHMAN: I was just a passenger.

MR. POLCARI: Were you the only passenger?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh no, there were three other passengers.

MR. POLCARI: Must have been uncomfortable.

MR. LEHMAN: Not very comfortable, I must say-all the luggage. But we finally made it though.

MR. POLCARI: And you settled into the Village and got a place. How did the Village strike you?

MR. LEHMAN: Very very fascinating, interesting. I knew about the Village. The first thing I did was look up this sculptor who first introduced me to the art and that was Maikowsky, I told you about him. Max Maikowsky. Even before that, the first I did was look up Jackson Pollock. I had his address, and he was on 8th street.

MR. POLCARI: Yes.

MR. LEHMAN: He and Tolegian also lived in the Village. The two of them-we immediately got together within a day or so of my arrival. We got together, and, as I say, this was the end of August.

Now, around September I moved into this place in Washington Place-this new flat, 85 Washington Place-where I had a nice amount of room to put my works up and to work, and the first thing I did was to apply for a job at the Federal Art Project, again the PWAP. I did that and I was accepted. The only thing I had to do was show them photographs of the work I had done in L.A. The head of the project was Lou Grock, the head of the mural division, who was very eager to get me on to the project and get the mural work started. So there was no problem there when I got on to it.

MR. POLCARI: But this was the W.P.A.

MR. LEHMAN: No, PWA You've got some of the alphabetic things-you had the PWAP., the Public Works of Art Project, and you had the just the PWA, Public Works of Art, then you had the CWA, the Civil Works Administration, and later on the WPA

MR. POLCARI: The WPA

MR. LEHMAN: Works Progress Administration.

MR. POLCARI: That's the most famous.

MR. LEHMAN: Yes.

MR. POLCARI: And the others were smaller.

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, because they didn't last very long. They were always turning the movements over into something else because, for one thing, you had a lot of trouble in congress and a lot of cessation and activity, intermittent cessation when they would stop all activity while the fate was being settled in congress and they were getting new appropriations. Then you'd get the appropriations and they'd start it up again. They had an eighteen month rule, it was called. If you were on the project for eighteen months you were automatically taken off, fired, and you had to apply all over again just like a new applicant to get on it again. That happened to me, happened to Pollock and so on. So, I went to Pollock right way. We reestablished old ties, and Tolegian as well. In no time at all, the Washington Square Outdoor Show was scheduled to take place at the end of September, and I had all this work from L.A. I had the friends, Tolegian, and Jack, several others who he had introduced me to, who in turn knew the organizers of this outdoor show; and at that time it was not as it is today where you can have anybody come in and throw a bunch of chromos up against the wall and sell them. Not there. You had to pass jury, and it was like a professional exhibit for artists who had no galleries in the depression a way to sell their works. So they gave me a wall, and it was probably the best wall in the show. Do you know the Jumble Shop? The Jumble Shop?

MR. POLCARI: No.

MR. LEHMAN: Well the Jumble Shop was a famous place inside a literary hangout, in the Village, on MacDougal street. Right around from the Jumble shop and MacDougal Street was MacDougal Alley. And MacDougal Alley was even more famous, because many famous writers, names I can't recall, but it was a famous place. So on MacDougal Alley they had this wall, very neat painted, black. They put my work on this black wall, right up near the Jumble Shop, so people eating there could look out the windows and see the exhibit. And that was a highly successful event. I got a lot of notice in that show-

MR. POLCARI: Did you get criticism?

MR. LEHMAN: Written up in the Herald Tribune, in the New York Times, and in certain magazines,

and some very interesting happenings. Let me tell you about this: you didn't know who would show up these events of course. One day someone stopped by my work, and I had a portfolio of drawings and so on and paintings. And this man, short fellow, very distinguished looking, he looked through these drawings, and he picked one out, happened to be a self-portrait that I had done in Los Angeles, and he says, 'I'd like to have this, how much is it?' I gave him the price, and he says, 'Ok. I got it.' I was about to give it to him, and he says, 'Oh by the way, it's a lithograph isn't it?' I said, 'No it's an original drawing.' He says, 'What? Take it back.' And he hands it back to me and says, 'I don't buy drawings, I only buy lithographs.' And he continued and said, 'I'm organizing an exhibit in my gallery of artist's lithographs self-portraits. Lithographs of artists, but self-portraits only and I'd like to have this for the show. Now it turned out that he was Elmer Adler, who was the nephew of the owner of the New York Times, who had a very exclusive print shop and gallery in the New York Times building. It was called, 'The Pinson Printers.' Ever hear of them? Very exclusive, very first class, top flight gallery of rare, rare books and rare prints, and he collected all these things from artists self-portraits. So he asked me would I be willing to make a lithograph of this self-portrait. And he would put it in his show. I said, 'Ok, sure.' So, I did. I made a lithograph of this drawing and he did put it in his show. That was the one lithograph that was singled out and reproduced in the New York Times from the show.

MR. POLCARI: So you had instant success right away.

MR. LEHMAN: Right away.

MR. POLCARI: Pretty good, you transcribed it from coast to coast. This is good. Can you describe the style of that guy?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, it's hard to describe it. It's realist, but it's expressionist. Realist-expressionist, emotional realism. Something of that nature. I never put a word on it myself. Well I'll give you an illustration if you want the name. At the same time, well a little later there was an exhibit at the Municipal Art Gallery on 53rd street near the Museum of Modern Art, there's Municipal Art Gallery right down the street, and they had exhibits of artists, on the project, project artists, of their own work. Not project work, their own creative work: publicity on display of creative work by their own people, who didn't have galleries, professional galleries. So we formed a group: Pollock, myself, Guston, Kadish, the crowd, Tolegian, as well as a number of other Americans that we became friendly with and knew in the same circles: Study D, and Bruce Mitchell, and a guy McCoy, but these were mostly brought in by Pollock. Pollock had a brawl with Stanley McCoy.

MR. POLCARI: Stanley McCoy. Pollock wasn't friends with him?

MR. LEHMAN: No, he wasn't hardly with us at all. He was never on the WPA, not here, he may have been in Detroit. In any case, our group was given one room to ourselves in this Municipal Art Gallery show. And that was written up, and the one painting that was singled out in the review, was my Self-Portrait: a painting that I did in L.A., a small painting which was reproduced in the Pacific Dreams catalog, small size, just as an identification thing, but that painting was singled out in reproduction, not reproduction, but in the critical article. You asked about manner. The reason I mentioned this is that the critic says that, 'Self-Portrait by Harold Lehman, somewhat old Flemish in manner.' [laughs] 'Somewhat old Flemish!' These people with the silly attribution or assertion. This was done right from a mirror as close as I could make it, 'Old Flemish in manner', and it actually is a classical painting if you look at it. You'll see Ingres. If you want to mention Ingres okay, but not Old Flemish. The litho self-portrait, however, was entirely different, was really very expressionist and dramatic, dramatic and expressionist. So I did the litho, and it was commented on by Huxtable, who was the New York Times critic, the chief critic of the day. You know the name?

MR. POLCARI: Oh yes.

MR. LEHMAN: Alright, then you know. He had an interest, so he wrote it up, and then it had a serious bit of reviewing. So that self-portrait's been around on the pages. In addition, when the New York Project-the Federal Art Project-decided to put out a book on the art and the writing of Federal Art Project people, they asked for contributions to the book. So they asked me to contribute something for it, so I gave them my lithograph. They clip it and put it on, reproduce it as the first litho in the book. When the book was reviewed in the New York Times, as it was, my litho to illustrate book, in the review.

MR. POLCARI: Do you have a copy of this book?

MR. LEHMAN: I do.

MR. POLCARI: Excellent.

MR. LEHMAN: The book I have, and the review I have, you could have that too.

MR. POLCARI: This is valuable. It's hard to get good reproductions of the-

MR. LEHMAN: And I have the original litho of course, but you don't collect original art-

MR. POLCARI: We do actually, we collect works on paper basically.

MR. LEHMAN: But that's not paper. So that takes us through the earliest exhibits in New York. Meanwhile I was now doing-

MR. POLCARI: You're bringing all your California material-

MR. LEHMAN: All California material. Meanwhile I had started doing designs for murals for the New York Federal Art Project. Now do you want to start with that?

MR. POLCARI: I think so-why don't we do that, or do you want to do the workshop?

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, wait a minute now, the New York Workshop.

MR. POLCARI: We were going to get to Siqueiros, and then we got distracted.

MR. LEHMAN: Well I mentioned that the American Artist Congress was scheduled for meeting in 1936, and it did. The convention was held and I was at all these meetings. Siqueiros-

MR. POLCARI: What were they meeting about?

MR. LEHMAN: They were meeting about the condition of art in America and in Mexico, which was actually the condition of art under capitalism, and the U.S.A. Basically it came down to that: what was being done by the artist, and what was being done for the artist. It was not essentially an aesthetic gathering at [inaudible] or about aesthetics, not that, because it included every variety of artist, from Stewart Davis, then a very important member of the American Artist Congress, and he was an abstractor, and, he was a gung-ho socialist if not a communist. I don't want to accuse anybody there, but I know he was very progressive.

MR. POLCARI: Progressive.

MR. LEHMAN: That's the word we always use-very progressive, and he was one of the organizers and one of the chief of writers on the congress. He was a good writer too. In any case, Siqueiros was here for the Congress. He used to come and visit with a very old friend-another artist-a woman who was also active very politically, her name was Naomi Robinson. I told you about that name before. No one seems to know that name any longer. She was very active and she was very close to Siqueiros and to me, and to the movement that went on in those days. She had an apartment at Bank Street. I went up to her apartment, and that's when I first saw Siqueiros on his return here, and we renewed old ties and so on. It was there that Siqueiros talked to me about wanting to establish a workshop in New York. Because I had this experience with him in L.A, and he was on familiar ground with me. I said, 'That's fine with me, I like the idea.' But this time it was to explore new materials, not frescos. New mechanical, reproductive, and chemical materials that were produced by the great industrial U.S.A.

MR. POLCARI: Why did he want to?

MR. LEHMAN: Because it was the latest thing in production in industrial materials, and he thought that modern artists should be familiar with the latest in industrial production.

MR. POLCARI: It would be useful for his art?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yes, absolutely. He was very concerned about having it as a weapon, using it as a weapon in his art. Because he had established in Argentina using new materials, polyethylene, instead of fresco, and it had an association with nitrocellulose. That's basically what it is: nitrocellulose base paint and enamel and lacquer. This is a base

MR. POLCARI: Mm hmm.

MR. LEHMAN: Until he started experimenting with it he was eager to do these works now; and especially the public use of art, big banners, floats, and big demonstration pieces and things of that nature for parades, gatherings, conventions, meetings. Not particularly for exhibit, never mentioned exhibit. That was fine with me. He had a group of Mexicans up with him already come to the Congress.

MR. POLCARI: He was actually a dominant character in the Congress?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, he was. In fact, he was the head of the Mexican delegation. There is a photograph of him with his delegation, including Orozco in that photo in Heilburg's book. You have Heilburg's book?

MR. POLCARI: I do have Heilburg's book.

MR. LEHMAN: Mexican Murals and Essays that's where you'll find the photo, the American Artist Congress showing all the Mexicans. All the Mexicans that you see were the group that helped on the workshop, and we got this place at 5 West 14th Street, that's a corner building, it's no longer there. It's been torn down. 5 West 14th Street, and I got there a bunch of the Americans from the project to come up and organize this thing and get it started, which we did. This shop was a loft of course, and the owner of the building refused to rent it to a Mexican. The Mexicans went first to try to get it, but he refused to rent it. So I put down the lease on my name. The lease to that shop was in my name.

MR. POLCARI: Was it discrimination, or was it-

MR. LEHMAN: Sure! He didn't want any Mexicans; he didn't know anything about the Mexicans. He wanted some kind of assurance that they would take care of so they would pay the rent on time. Americans at least had social security numbers, and also they were employed. But rent was cheap enough, I think thirty dollars a month. Then we had to get materials together, and where were we going to get that? David Mayer on Union Square was the store for supplies, not the nitrocellular paint but of everything else like mechanical equipment. One such, called the cut-all, I told you about. In fact, that cut-all was rented from David Mayer, and that's what was used to cut out all the forms for the appliqué painting that we did. The one that's at the Museum of Modern Art was cut out with this cut-all, the one I'm talking about. I have that cut-all in my possession now, that same cut-all.

MR. POLCARI: That would be lovely also to the archive.

MR. LEHMAN: You mean you could have that? You could use it?

MR. POLCARI: Absolutely! It's an artifact.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, is it ever! It's yours!

MR. POLCARI: Okay.

MR. LEHMAN: Write down these things, before I forget them, well you've got it on tape. Anyway, I have the cut-all. We learned how to use, we taught ourselves how to use a cut-all, and Jackson Pollock used the cut-all. That's mainly what he did, things of that nature in the shop, he never did any painting, never.

MR. POLCARI: He did sort of mechanical things?

MR. LEHMAN: Well that sort of thing. He would lay in paint, yes, he would lay in flat colors, dribble paint, dribble different colors before the groundwork, before finishing a subject.

MR. POLCARI: He'd dribble on-

MR. LEHMAN: What we did is that we punctured the-let me not get ahead of myself-first I haven't got the paint. What are we going to do about the paint? I discovered that these paints, the manufacturers and distributors right here in New York by Valentine Paint Company on 175th street in Manhattan right under the overpass. So Siqueiros and I took a cab up there to Valentine Paint Company. We went through their entire supply, and we selected all the colors, and we got core cans, core cans, of all colors, including the primers, the dark brown primers, and full supply of colors.

MR. POLCARI: This is the nitro-

MR. LEHMAN: Nitrobalspar paint The base is nitrocellulose, but their trade name is Nitrobalspar. They were automotive lacquers, that's what they're made for basically. That's what this company, the manufacturer, automobile paint. That's what it was: Nitrobalspar Auto Paint. So we got a full supply and brought them back to the shop. The first thing we did is punctured holes, we didn't open them up, we punctured holes in the lid, punctured holes in all of them, and then we started dribbling the paint onto big 8 x 12 feet plywood panels on the floor. First we had to put a ground coat on, and that was done just by painting it on.

MR. POLCARI: With what kind of paint?

MR. LEHMAN: The same thing. Those were compatible, and then we start dribbling the colors.

MR. POLCARI: But why dribble it on the floor?

MR. LEHMAN: On the panels.

MR. POLCARI: On the panels?

MR. LEHMAN: Because we wanted to see how it behaved when we poured thinner on it. Siqueiros had already had the experience of using some of the stuff and he saw the possibilities through the pouring thing that what happened is that thinner would dissolve the paint, and as it dissolved the paint it would create completely new structures, forms, in the paint itself that would take on shapes that were recognizable: realistic shapes.

MR. POLCARI: Like collective suicide is like that.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yeah, a lot of that. That's how we did it. We thought about doing that. It then perforated onto all the work that we turned out at the shop as well. And Pollock was in on that, he saw that, he did that. There's no question that that is where he got the whole idea of dripping paint.

MR. POLCARI: Yes.

MR. LEHMAN: And pouring the paint. It's beyond doubt or argument, and these other idiots come along and say, 'Miro had some painting where he dripped.' Of course everybody has dripped something, but only to prove a given respect then probably move on to something else, didn't make a fetish of it or a career of it. But later these writers come along and try to establish a connection between Pollock's dripping and somebody else. Even what's his name, Hans Hofmann, has said he drips on some paintings of his. So what? The real foundation and basis of the thing was Siqueiros' experimental workshop.

MR. POLCARI: So if you would pour these things on the floor with the Nitrobal-

MR. LEHMAN: Cellophane. One person would pour a color, another person would pour a color, then a third would come along with a thinner. The thinner is what would activate the paint. We wouldn't get to let the paint dry.

MR. POLCARI: That would make it spread-

MR. LEHMAN: Spread, mixing with all the other colors.

MR. POLCARI: Metamorphose-

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, mix in with other colors. And create an entire structure, specific structure of forms and colors.

MR. POLCARI: But these were all abstract, so they became suggestive-

MR. LEHMAN: We'd pick out forms from the abstraction.

MR. POLCARI: And then you cut them out with the machine?

MR. LEHMAN: Well no no no. This was something else now. The cutting out had to do with the actual shapes, the dimensions, the dimensional shape. It had nothing to do with the pouring. The pouring had to do with the surface of things. There was no real relation between those shapes that were cut out and the forms as they were formed. There sometimes, of course you would go over

and then you would do another thing with a square gun to bring out forms and things. That was another adjunct to the whole process: the spray gun. We learned how to use that too.

MR. POLCARI: And that was same paint you used in the spray gun?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, same paint, cellulose paint, like the belspar, lacquer in other words, yes. We had a compressor which we rented from Mayer, and we had different size spray guns from the larger ones to the extremely small ones that held only a tiny little cup, a very fine detail.

MR. POLCARI: Now the assistants did this, you did this, Jackson did this, did Siqueiros do some of this too?

MR. LEHMAN: Some of what?

MR. POLCARI: The actual pouring himself.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, he delighted in that too.

MR. POLCARI: And his Mexican assistants too?

MR. LEHMAN: Everybody.

MR. POLCARI: How many people were in the workshop?

MR. LEHMAN: The workshop must have been about 15, close to 15. Not all together, because don't forget all these people outside the Mexicans worked on the project. They came when they were not working on the project, either after hours or on weekends or when there was a lull in their own work; some were easel painters so they didn't have to report mural site like I did. I would say close to 15 artists there.

MR. POLCARI: This included-

MR. LEHMAN: This included the Mexicans.

MR. POLCARI: Included the Mexicans, Axel Horn?

MR. LEHMAN: Axel Horr. H-O-R-R-. He had changed it to Horn. A woman, Carla Mahl, M-A-H-L-. She changed her name to Moore, Clara Moore. You might have heard the name.

MR. POLCARI: So McCoy.

MR. LEHMAN: McCoy, and Jackson Pollock.

MR. POLCARI: And Jackson Pollock.

MR. LEHMAN: And Louie Serstadt, he was a well-known painter at the time. There were a couple of young artists who later became established professionals, I'm trying to remember their names. Well I don't remember every name I ever heard of.

MR. POLCARI: You're doing pretty good.

MR. LEHMAN: It'll come to me.

MR. POLCARI: And this workshop was experimenting, and Siqueiros is experiments because he needed modern paint for the modern era? Modern frescoes.

MR. LEHMAN: Yes. He felt that it was incumbent on him to familiarize himself with the latest in materials so to express the latest ideas in his own revolutionary art. It was always revolutionary, that was his word, revolutionary art. And he wanted revolutionary material. He was also very convinced...

MR. POLCARI: So if you had modern forms, modern hopes, and modern materials-

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, right. I wrote the, I wouldn't call it Manifesto. He and I collaborated on a talk that we gave to the American Artists Union, not the American Arts Congress, but the Artists Union in New York in which we, after we established the workshop, which we asked them to come to the workshop and join us and to do that we explained what we were doing.

MR. POLCARI: Did you demonstrate it?

MR. LEHMAN: No we didn't. Well, the demonstration was at the workshop. Come and see.

MR. POLCARI: You show anything there?

MR. LEHMAN: No, because we didn't do easel paintings. We were doing large public works. We approached enough a couple of blocks away, 'Come and see what we're doing.' In fact it was in the lecture: 'Come and see what we're doing.'

MR. POLCARI: And you wrote that?

MR. LEHMAN: I gave the talk. I actually gave the talk-Siqueiros and I collaborated on preparing it. Because he put it in Spanish and I didn't speak Spanish, and he was very awkward in his English, so I put in shape, in English, but his ideas mainly. So we were a good team. We always got along famously. I always regretted never going back to Mexico to work with him and then on my own of course, but I mean just to go back there and do something important with him.

MR. POLCARI: Well, he was back and forth. What were the dates on this workshop?

MR. LEHMAN: The dates for the shop?

MR. POLCARI: Yeah.

MR. LEHMAN: It was set up in 1936, in the spring of 1936. It actually continued until the Spanish Civil War, but Siqueiros quit to go to Spain. After that it became the Artist Union Workshop. I talked it up in an article in Art Sun, which was put out by the Artists Union. I wrote this article for Art Sun; it was called, 'For an Artists Union Workshop' and I did succeed in getting the Artist Union to establish. Take over our chapter, you might say.

MR. POLCARI: And take over those processes and experiments again?

MR. LEHMAN: Well not really. They took over the shop in order to do revolutionary art work but not so much the processes. But we had a whole new group of artists doing thing when the Artists Union came into us. The others scattered. The Mexicans left with Siqueiros, no longer were the Mexicans, and the others were not that, shall I say, imbued with the same inspiration as Siqueiros was about the use of nitrocellulose.

MR. POLCARI: So there were these technical experiments, and Pollock, who did not know, had seen the frescoes of Siqueiros, and probably Stanley McCoy knew Siqueiros in the West Coast.

MR. LEHMAN: I wasn't aware that he actually did, but Kadish seems to think he did, or says he did.

MR. POLCARI: Kadish knew-

MR. LEHMAN: Well Kadish did know, because Kadish was the first one who approached Siqueiros. So, Kadish was a close friend of Stanley McCoy's too, before I was. That's how I got to know Stanley, through Kadish. Of course Jack I knew on my own through Manual Arts High School. Later on, as we go along, it was Stanley McCoy who became my chief assistant on my own mural, big mural for Rikers Island, and he remained so for two years, and that's how I came to see so much of Jack in that period. Because after working at the island we would come back to Stanley's place which he shared with Jack-

MR. POLCARI: I forget the dates on that.

MR. LEHMAN: The dates are 1938-1940. I started this project in 1936 while I was still doing the Siqueiros stuff and the workshop. It bridged that whole period. Well that's when I was doing the design, and not the actual work on the site. The actual work on the site I started in '37 and finished off and on until 1938. In '38 I started and then went on to finish in 1940.

MR. POLCARI: This is getting lost, I want to finish the shop. So the politics in the shop were obviously a lot of left wing stuff in there: Siqueiros, [skip in tape]..Was Pollock very political?

MR. LEHMAN: Not in an aggressive way. He would turn out to the demonstrations and parades and that sort of thing, and I have photographs of him and Siqueiros right in the middle of one. Because for teaching our floats, we did a big float for it, this Mayday parade, and Pollock worked on it, but he was a member of a shop, so all the shop people were there. Siqueiros and Pollock and another one I didn't mention, very close friend too, one of the Pollock group that dissented originally. I guess my memory is giving out a little.

MR. POLCARI: Jackson?

MR. LEHMAN: No, no.

MR. POLCARI: There was a painter named Jackson.

MR. LEHMAN: No, not Jackson, but he was very good, very close friend of all of us, and he's in the photograph, if you had the book we'd get this name. I'll send those books to you on Pollock.

MR. POLCARI: I have them, but I don't-

MR. LEHMAN: But you don't have them at hand?

MR. POLCARI: So Jackson's relationship with Siqueiros was friendly, but how friendly? Stanley was friendly?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yeah, and Jack-

MR. POLCARI: Acquaintances?

MR. LEHMAN: It wasn't intimate at all, that again is a myth. They'd talk up Jack as though he was

on very very intimate terms with Siqueiros; it wasn't so. And this isn't about a fight under a table. I believe that to be horse manure too. I don't imagine anything of that sort, and I certainly would have known about it if it had happened. We had this party for Siqueiros before he left for Spain, and this is where it was supposed to have happened. I was there, and I saw no such thing happening.

MR. POLCARI: And no one went drinking on the floor or something-

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR. POLCARI: Was Pollock an alcoholic by this time?

MR. LEHMAN: He was. He was.

MR. POLCARI: It was obvious already?

MR. LEHMAN: Off and on.

MR. POLCARI: Even from almost a teenager?

MR. LEHMAN: I had personal experience with that. One day I was in my loft studio. This is around 1940-41. There was a knock on the door, and it was Jack, and he was obviously drunk. I let him in. He came in. He talked around, shoot the breeze, one artist to another and so on, and horseplay and that sort of thing, and then he started to get violent.

MR. POLCARI: He start pushing you, or throwing things-

MR. LEHMAN: He started to get violent, I said, 'What the hell are you doing Jack?' He goes, 'There must be violence! There must be violence!' I said, 'Okay, violence, but not here.' And I threw him out. 'Now get out!' He was absolutely drunk, but before that he had never lifted a finger, never a whisper, or never talked above a whisper to me. We were that close-always very intimate terms and so on.

MR. POLCARI: And he was very informed, and I guess Stanley too, all of you were very informed about modern art.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh absolutely.

MR. POLCARI: Now that you were in New York now, you were let's say au courant.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yeah.

MR. POLCARI: You knew exactly what was happening.

MR. LEHMAN: Absolutely.

MR. POLCARI: And what these issues were, and what the cultural ideas were at the time?

MR. LEHMAN: I would say that, of course.

MR. POLCARI: You were just as informed as basically anybody else, in modern, even though you were working with Siqueiros.

MR. LEHMAN: Siqueiros wasn't my chief interest at all...

Tape 3 Does not exist; conversation continues on.

Tape 4, Side A

MR. LEHMAN: ...So there is an element, the dog element, which has been suggested once arrived from the Picasso's Three Musicians. Also, has a verticality in the Three Musicians and a table and beneath it there's a dog [skip in tape] had been an inspiration to this [skip in tape] this I think there's no doubt about it, if you just take a reproduction of Orozco and compare it

[skip in tape]

MR. POLCARI: The vertical figures around-

MR. LEHMAN: The whole feeling of the thing, the verticality with the horizontal forms and very symmetrical [skip in tape] from one or another source [skip in tape] an Orozco technique, an amalgam, a reconsideration of images based on Picasso [skip in tape] and textured painting it definitely Orozco.

MR. POLCARI: Looking at Pollock's Head'1938-41, Bullhead actually [skip in tape]-What's so Orozcoian about that Man with Night?

MR. LEHMAN: This one? There's no question. The first thing you observe is the plane in which all the figures are [inaudible]. [skip in tape] the passion of the Orozco Dartmouth fresco [skip in tape] Mexican has shown naked and a raid in a group opposite the coming of the [skip in tape] and the Spaniards. I can't remember details of course, but I do [skip in tape]. I wouldn't attempt to [skip in tape] [inaudible] and say what prompted him to put a knife in that figures hand. [skip in tape] It was an afterthought. You simply covered [inaudible] the paintings really, but the way it's painted is just flat brushwork from the hand [skip in tape] all manner of interpretation of these things, a psychological explanation of these forms and these iconographies.

MR. POLCARI: This one, the Bull and Bird you think is-

MR. LEHMAN: Man, Bull and Bird?-

MR. POLCARI: Yes, you think this is Orozco also?

MR. LEHMAN: The method of painting definitely Orozco. You must always understand what is Pollock, what is in here that is strictly Pollock, as if to say it comes out of Pollock, and not simply a copy, imitation, influence of somebody else. He was very impressed by the method of Orozco's painting, the frescoes. Especially that one in Pomona called Prometheus and there's a lot of that echoing in here, the way it's painted I'm talking about, not the imagery, imagery of course this is again a bull's head.

MR. POLCARI: Steer.

MR. LEHMAN: Man, bull-there's the man, there's a bird. Incredible. I don't remember in particular this painting, I don't remember seeing it at his place. You ask the question.

MR. POLCARI: Okay. We probably should begin interview part 2 where we left off.

MR. LEHMAN: Where did we leave off? I was about to leave for New York isn't that it?

MR. POLCARI: No you were in New York. We were talking about the workshop, the workshop and Siqueiros was going off to the Civil War.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh that was 1937 then.

MR. POLCARI: Yes, it was '37.

MR. LEHMAN: How far did we get? Did we talk about the work done in the workshop?

MR. POLCARI: Yes. The techniques and the floats and Pollock's marginal relationships.

MR. LEHMAN: The use of the drip technique and the puddling of the paint and the method that would have impressed him and later his use of drip and glucco enamel. That's what he saw being used at the workshop, no place else. Incidentally, I read recently since I saw you, about others who are claiming the invention of the drip technique as though it's a Great Holy Grail of painting, which it is not.

MR. POLCARI: It's more than a technique.

MR. LEHMAN: Not only that; not even a particularly desiring technique, because it is a limiting technique. You drip painting and you're a Pollock, and what do you do after that?

MR. POLCARI: That's the problem in the Fifties where a lot of artists-

MR. LEHMAN: That was the point: it was overrated and it was overstated.

MR. POLCARI: Too much emphasis on technique. It's like the American emphasis on gimmicks.

MR. LEHMAN: Right. Well, The point is that what the critics, the writers, the dealers, and the collectors and so on a new thing came along to them, to them it was a new thing on the walls of course. It was a completely, how shall I say, a revelation so unlike anything that had ever been seen before. You simply used gravity to throw paint on the floor, the gravity does the work, and then you put it on the wall and it is totally holy. By doing so you've created a sensational, spectacular effect, there is no doubt it. Where is the profundity or the depth?

MR. POLCARI: It became a way of life in the fifties. We're really talking about fifties artists who adapted everybody's difference of a technique was slightly different, they really merged with De Kooning, and they went off and that became abstract expressionism in the fifties, but that's a later thing. Actually lets return now to 1937. The workshop is over here and what happens to yourself? What do you do?

MR. LEHMAN: It really wasn't over. The Siqueiros part was over, but the workshop continued.

MR. POLCARI: Oh yes, that's right.

MR. LEHMAN: In fact at 1937 I wrote an article for Art Sun and the title of the article was, 'For an Artists Union Workshop.' It was based on the experiences I had with Siqueiros and the shop we had set up. I was very [inaudible] the Artists Union had set up a shop of our own. And they did, we did, and it lasted until about 1941, off and on, it wasn't a continuous thing. Off and on, but we offered it-

MR. POLCARI: Independently? Did the Union do anything about it?

MR. LEHMAN: The Union?

MR. POLCARI: Yeah.

MR. LEHMAN: Well, we were all members of the union and I wouldn't say the Union did or didn't do anything. It was just simply members of the Union who did come together and continued the tradition of the workshop and to teach methods of the workshop, and I was very active as well.

MR. POLCARI: How did it handle the politics, say that Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and all those splits, and the excluding of the Union?

MR. LEHMAN: Wait a minute. Molotov-Ribbentrop came along in 1939, and that was Hitler/Stalin pact. They couldn't overtly come out, one way or another, and say we are for the communists or against the communists. Actually it led to a lot of dissention and turmoil in the Union itself among the members, because a lot of people even though they had sympathy with the communist movement who were not actually members of the party. I never was. Although I did so much work that was along progressive lines I was never a member. Siqueiros assumed I was. However, the point is when that happened, the Ribbentrop Molotov thing, a lot of artists defected from the popular front idea. It was basically the popular front thing that the artists were going along with, not exclusively the Communist party. In fact there was always talk about the Communist Cell, the Cell. There were the cells in the Union, but that's what they were. They were not a Communist party fronter or anything like that. Maybe some people thought so, but I knew better because I was in the Union all those years, and I was in the workshop all those years and was close to all the people who were involved. So, speaking for myself alone, when I first heard about this bombshell, I was incensed. I couldn't find harsh enough words to say about Stalin. I use a polite word, harsh.

MR. POLCARI: It was a betrayal of all the stuff they were selling the previous years. They made a pact with a devil. You recognized immediately that it meant war.

MR. LEHMAN: Absolutely. I knew it along right from the beginning. I always distrusted Stalin. I never had any use for him. I despised him in fact compared with Trotsky. Most artists are Trotskyites, they're not Stalinists!

MR. POLCARI: But what did being a Trotskyite mean?

MR. LEHMAN: Being a Trotskyite meant, theoretically and philosophically, simply the permanent revolution. In essence, that's what it amounted to.

MR. POLCARI: Perpetual social change?

MR. LEHMAN: No, permanent revolution means to carry it into all countries. The Communist International came out of that. The permanent revolution was a phrase of Trotsky in which you could never accept bourgeois capitalist orientation or amelioration of condition. That wasn't enough. It had to go all the way to Communist revolution in every country, especially in every developed country. It was an intellectual thing basically, but it just wasn't happening. It was the writers who were Trotskyites-to approach any of the publications' intellectuals, periodicals of the period, the Marxist Quarterly for example, and before Horizon there was some [inaudible] was not literary but it had Trotskyites in it. The Partisan Review had all Trotskyites, and that was the leading vanguard literary publication of the period. So when you asked the question about what the difference is or what it meant-to be a Trotskyite, that's essentially what it meant-to be a follower of Trotsky and his permanent revolution theory.

MR. POLCARI: And what about his ideas about art?

MR. LEHMAN: Well that's different. Trotsky had a very liberal attitude toward art. I don't know how much you know about-

MR. POLCARI: Oh yes, I know about-

MR. LEHMAN: Then you knew that he did not-

MR. POLCARI: Not social realism-

MR. LEHMAN: No, he did not think about putting artists in a straitjacket, and he was definitely for the freedom of the artist.

MR. POLCARI: But this was very appealing-

MR. LEHMAN: What more could you want if you were going to be in a socialist state? Why not want the total freedom for the artist?

MR. POLCARI: That's right. In perpetual revolution destroying capitalism. Sounds ideal.

MR. LEHMAN: The artist would continue to work on his own, but you must remember there was a whole following, a whole grouping that is, in the Soviet Union who was opposed to Trotsky's ideas while he was [inaudible].

MR. POLCARI: Oh yeah-

MR. LEHMAN: So the lead intellectual, theoretical intellectual, in that cultural phase of it was Carl Radek.

MR. POLCARI: Radek. R-a-d-e-k

MR. LEHMAN: Who evidently was killed-

MR. POLCARI: He was purged, hung and purged.

MR. LEHMAN: By Stalin.

MR. POLCARI: But he was.

MR. LEHMAN: So he didn't do them any good.

MR. POLCARI: No. It was Stalin who had the idea of one revolution in one country in the late twenties which fit the situation in Russia and Western Europe because nothing was happening.

MR. LEHMAN: But that's what he was so opposed and had such hatred for Trotsky. Trotsky was always writing articles against Stalin, exposing him as a fraud and a terrorist and even a non-intellectual which was the worst of all.

MR. POLCARI: There's a lot of arrogance in the whole thing, intellectual arrogance. Stalin was treated as a mere bureaucrat.

MR. LEHMAN: Well, he was a bureaucrat-

MR. POLCARI: And the intellectuals like Radek and Trotsky were very much into theory and theoretical things, and they had no respect for Stalin whatsoever because he put his men in power everywhere. It's actually very classic isn't it?

MR. LEHMAN: Of course it is because he was an industrious animal who was digging, digging, digging. All the time, Stalin gathering 'catters' as the Russians called it, catters of confederates and placing them in key positions throughout the Soviet structure, hierarchy, and easing out the Trotskyites who had disdain for this everyday rupture-

MR. POLCARI: Administration-

MR. LEHMAN: They were theoreticians essentially because this guy was a worker. He knew how to create this structure of power and this is what it was, power. He got the power and then he used it.

MR. POLCARI: He ousted the theoreticians-

MR. LEHMAN: It always happens-

MR. POLCARI: It will always happen, and there is a certain irony. Leftist intellectuals adore theory. They see the world only as theory. Meanwhile the world goes out around them.

MR. LEHMAN: Damn right!

MR. POLCARI: And in the case of the Soviet Communist party it was Stalin who was going on doing the work while they were theorizing about the world-

MR. LEHMAN: He was raiding the structures and they were doing nothing.

MR. POLCARI: They were theorizing [laughs].

MR. LEHMAN: That theoretical structure is nothing compared to a concrete solid one that has a gun. But in any case of course you well know that Stalin then pursued Trotsky right down to Mexico and had him assassinated-

MR. POLCARI: Yes, I saw the bullet holes a couple of years ago.

MR. LEHMAN: You saw what?

MR. POLCARI: The bullet holes

MR. LEHMAN: Did you?

MR. POLCARI: In Trotsky's house they still have the bullet holes-

MR. LEHMAN: It was the house that was given to him by Diego Rivera wasn't it?

MR. POLCARI: I don't know-

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, that was Rivera who set him up in this place-

MR. POLCARI: Do you think it was Siqueiros who really participated in the-

MR. LEHMAN: Not the assassination-

MR. POLCARI: The attempt-

MR. LEHMAN: The first attempt yes.

MR. POLCARI: Siqueiros?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, I know for a fact, and Arenal the two of them. Luis Arenal and Siqueiros.

MR. POLCARI: I don't know Arenal-

MR. LEHMAN: A complete romantic-you didn't know Arenal? I knew him very well. He was one of those who set up the workshop with Siqueiros and he was a sidekick of Siqueiros and of course Siqueiros married his sister. In California, that's where I first knew him. In California, it was Arenal's sister at whose house we all gathered and painted these audible frescoes with Siqueiros. She was married at the time to a milkman or something, but she had this house, and an adjoining structure, someone else's garage, and that's what we used to paint our frescoes.

MR. POLCARI: So Siqueiros was actually a Stalinist-

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yeah-Stalinist, not a Trotskyite. Sure! That's the main reason why he became such an enemy, so hostile to Diego Rivera, because Rivera was a Trotskyite.

MR. POLCARI: Well Rivera was everything-

MR. LEHMAN: Well, but in those days, in that particular period, he gave shelter to Trotsky. Siqueiros of course was one of the heads of the communist party in Mexico, and he couldn't tolerate that. So there were these schisms, not only artistic-

MR. POLCARI: How did Orozco fit into this?

MR. LEHMAN: He fit outside of all of it. He was a non-political person.

MR. POLCARI: Yes, that's what I think, even though he was about social change and political change-

MR. LEHMAN: In a philosophical way and also in an emotional manner, not in the sense that he would like to substitute one system that is supposed to work for another system that frees the worker. No. He was a humanitarian. What he did was out of his feelings for humanity. It wasn't a theoretical structure that led him, it was definitely a human, a human feeling about his own people, and he was bitter, and-

MR. POLCARI: Skeptical-

MR. LEHMAN: In the way Goya-

MR. POLCARI: Skeptical-

MR. LEHMAN: Not really skeptical; it was more than that. He was indignant, outraged and indignant in what he saw around him, just like Goya when he made his theories-'The Disasters of War' and the 'Caprichos' and other theories. These were bitter satires; that's essentially what Orozco was, a satirist. A social satirist-

MR. POLCARI: He was called the Goya of Mexico, and he disliked the term, but he was called it.

MR. LEHMAN: That essentially is the connection and his relation to art that dealt with social problems, and social troubles, not theoretical, but practical. Free the workers of the oppression that he suffered-but they're not going to give the power to somebody else to oppress him, a political politician he hated. He scorned and he satirized them too-

MR. POLCARI: And the revolution-

MR. LEHMAN: In the frescoes in the National Preparatoria, the ones that are all scratched up and have been vandalized which he shows the politicians by extension, party apparatus for all sides to see: social caricatures. So Orozco stood outside these movements.

MR. POLCARI: And he was popular.

MR. LEHMAN: Very

MR. POLCARI: Very popular. Both as an artist and maybe for this attitude-

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yeah, but he never made speeches, political speeches.

MR. POLCARI: Like Siqueiros-

MR. LEHMAN: Three days out of seven he'd be making political speeches, the other four he'd be painting them. In any case, that was a different century between them and yet Siqueiros always had the greatest admiration for Orozco. Never faulted him for not participating.

MR. POLCARI: And he painted a portrait of him-

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yeah, I know that portrait.

MR. POLCARI: They were influential people, as the Mexicans were. It was Mexico City and Paris as the two main interests in the thirties right?

MR. LEHMAN: Mexico and Paris you're saying?

MR. POLCARI: Yeah.

MR. LEHMAN: I would say probably yes. Of course you had different groupings that were different for each. The younger social conscious artists were looking to Mexico, but the more aesthetic and theoretical minded were looking to Paris, and yet they were going to combine the two. I considered myself one who at the time. Whenever they were talking to me I would talk in a discussion about the qualities of Mexican Artists, and I'd always insist that it didn't compare with French art, and to this day I say that. I said that to Hurlburt when he came to interview with me. He was all gung-ho about Siqueiros and so on, and he couldn't understand why I wasn't completely enthusiastic about Siqueiros' paintings even though I worked so close to him-

MR. LEHMAN: Well he's the younger generation today. They're a replay of the thirties social conscious people-

MR. POLCARI: Well that's true, and those newer ones enterprise that element rather than the aesthetic element. As a matter of fact you have a whole grouping now of theoreticians who try to denigrate the whole idea of aesthetics itself!

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yes, very successfully. We're in that moment in 1933 all over again. They adore

the thirties. They adore all this idea of revolution. They don't think anybody was a communist really, they were just social retainers. Just like they are-

MR. LEHMAN: Give me a couple of names-

MR. POLCARI: No! [laughs]

MR. LEHMAN: I'm a little out of touch with these new modern generations of theory people-

MR. POLCARI: It's a standard attitude-

MR. LEHMAN: Of course I see articles about it all the time in the art magazines and reviews. Especially, if you read Hilton Kramer in the New Criterion-

MR. POLCARI: He has strong a few opinions about it all-

MR. LEHMAN: I find myself agreeing with Kramer more and more, if you want to know. Although-

MR. POLCARI: A lot of people do, frequently, but a lot of people do.

MR. LEHMAN: I do openly. [Polcari laughs]. Kramer comes up with some true notions. They are not theoretical. He puts us right where it's at no matter who he picks. I enjoyed reading him mouthing my ideas or writing my ideas, and I can't squirm out of that. I many times I feel I shouldn't be agreeing with Kramer because he's considered a reactionary-

MR. POLCARI: Well he likes modern art. Very conservative view of modern art too-

MR. LEHMAN: Well only in relation to somebody else's view of modern art. Because in the past he was forward looking about modern art. What drove Kramer was his attack on Guston and on Jack Pollock-

MR. POLCARI: He called Pollock a third rate painter-

MR. LEHMAN: I don't recall that phrase exactly. But I know that the review of the Pollock retrospective, for example-

MR. POLCARI: Then, that's when he said it-

MR. LEHMAN: And then when he also reviewed Guston later on calling him a 'Mandarin who was maturing into a stumble bum.' When he went from abstract impressionism to his clunky clowns, ku klux figures. That was a bit much, but even so I've been getting New Criterion and I follow certain events through that magazine, although I do see there is a conservative slant mostly-

MR. POLCARI: But this is interesting now. Here are you, a progressive, let's use the term from the thirties. Now, fifty years later, in the position where you are agreeing with someone like Hilton Kramer who is actually supporting modern art and both of you are in this combat with what's going on around you-

MR. LEHMAN: Well you have to be very precise about that. What is it that I'm combating? What approach? I don't know. I can't tell you of a single contemporary new artist that I have any respect for. Maybe I should [inaudible] because I haven't seen them. I can't name one name, and if I would name a name it would go back at least ten years or more. Contemporary, I don't know. Who are they, the young ones? And because they're younger than me they should be taken seriously. I think

everything is in a state of flux right now because there are no standards, no themes that are agreed on as themes that can be taken seriously. Everyone's on his own. Of course every artist should be on his own. That's what art is all about: what an artist does to respect himself. Otherwise, he's part of a group, or a philosophical theory. He has to hold back something of himself to conform to a theory. The last time I was here I said that all theory is false, that it was something thirty-six inches long which when you measure always gives you the same answer: one yard!

MR. POLCARI: Which I love!

PAUSE

MR. POLCARI: Actually let's return back. We've been off again on the thirties. The workshop continues on-

MR. LEHMAN: Yes-

MR. POLCARI: The War in Europe is obviously coming here, and the art world in disarray. Do you feel that social realism with the coming of the war was losing its steam partially?

MR. LEHMAN: Definitely-

MR. POLCARI: As a new reality was coming-

MR. LEHMAN: Social realism, I think, was dead by the time the war came along-

MR. POLCARI: It was dead you think-

MR. LEHMAN: Absolutely-

MR. POLCARI: Do you think it was around '36 - '37 that it started dying officially? But Why? Why do you think it was dying?

MR. LEHMAN: I always try to be realistic. In other words, who are we talking about in social realism?

MR. POLCARI: Just say Stuart Davis-

MR. LEHMAN: He wasn't a social realist-

MR. POLCARI: No, but he had social themes-

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yes. Stuart Davis I've always admired and respected, a good artist. I consider him one of the best-

MR. POLCARI: But let's say the whole thrust of the popular front and the congress is-

MR. LEHMAN: Social Realism from that point of view?

MR. POLCARI: Yes.

MR. LEHMAN: Basically from the communist party point of view.

MR. POLCARI: That's right.

MR. LEHMAN: I never believed it. I never followed it. I was always opposed to it. I thought that it had no relevance at all. That it was a complete anomaly in our time. In fact, in vanguard of social thinking, social realism is an anachronism because you had the whole twentieth century movements in art, which were advanced from 1900 on, and was moving away from realism at each step.

MR. POLCARI: Absolutely.

MR. LEHMAN: So that when you talk about social realism in the 1938 - 39 period, you're talking about a dead dog-

MR. POLCARI: But there was a lot of effort-

MR. LEHMAN: A lot of it being done, I know that.

MR. POLCARI: A lot of emphasis on legibility and progressiveness, the Federal Project for the retired-

MR. LEHMAN: Now you're bringing in another theme, another subject. The Federal Projects were one of the chief pillars of social realism, I think that's misunderstood, because if you're an abstract artist, you were thought of something for the side in the Federal Art Projects. I remember very well, from my own personal point of view. I did a mural design for, not the WPA, but for the government, the one that was commissioning artists regardless of need.

MR. POLCARI: Treasury Section?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, the Section of Fine Arts. I did a mural for the Section, and it wasn't abstract. It took me a very severe design and simplified. I would say classic in its configuration in its design. But it was refused by the Section on the grounds that people would not relate to it. The local people would not relate to it. Could I modify it somewhat? I did modify it, but the point is that they were always vigilant about keeping-what's that word they used, a funny word they used to describe this sort of thing-anyway about keeping designs and ideas that were not strictly understandable by the layman.

MR. POLCARI: Intelligibility-

MR. LEHMAN: Well intelligibility, but that's not what I'm referring to. Anyway, the point being that a design they couldn't except because they felt that people would not respond to it, relate to it. If they don't relate to it out of their own experience, they felt they can't accrue with it. Obviously they were worried about funding, about congress, the echoes about what they would be doing, from what they would be doing in the halls of congress. So this is an example of social realism, as fostered by the section of fine arts that was not communist, and not progressive politically. So it has a lot of branches, this kind of behavior. Especially sometimes it was a question of education and philosophy. That is, aesthetic philosophy, and right now aesthetic is in bad moments. Aesthetics itself is a word that no one uses.

MR. POLCARI: No it's been dismissed because it's concerned with basically the making of art, and art as a value in itself. Most artists' concerns are the moment emphasizing the social relevance of everything. It's the sixties generation. It will play its impulse out, don't worry. Everything goes around comes around.

MR. LEHMAN: What goes around comes around. But then again another branch of this thing which

is the question of teaching. Where do all these people come from? They come now from colleges and universities, not studios and not art schools. There are no longer art schools; colleges and universities. And where do these so called professors come from?

MR. POLCARI: Well, same thing-

MR. LEHMAN: They came from others who taught them, and who were imbued with certain theories in their youth, that is in the sixties, and inculcated them into new generations, and it went on from there. You don't have the kind of education, that is, hands-on education that you had when I was in school, in art school. You didn't work for degree, you just worked to become an artist-

MR. POLCARI: I think you used the right word: hands on. That's true about a lot of experience and a lot of people today. Less and less hands on experience, more and more theoretical-

MR. LEHMAN: It's very odd that it came back to the theoretical side again-that's the trouble-they start from theory, not from an empty canvas of brushes and paint. They start from the theory of art, and of course abstract expressionism had a hell of a lot to do with the turn that teaching took-

MR. POLCARI: All the writing about it-

MR. LEHMAN: The writing about it of course is also very influential, so that you have there hierarchies of both teaching and of practice which didn't allow for any deviation. What the hell is the difference between that and communist practice in the thirties?

MR. POLCARI: Well the way it should be is by nature restrictive, prescriptive, and ultimately deadening.

MR. LEHMAN: Well that's the definition of theory coming in again [laugh]. It really works.

MR. POLCARI: Anyway, at this moment in time in the thirties, the social impulse that had guided the decade is perhaps weakening? The war is moving, the hardened artists now were switching their subjects in concerns which was coming from Europe?

MR. LEHMAN: Well you're talking about during the war?

MR. POLCARI: No, just before, '38 - '39?

MR. LEHMAN: Well artists did not switch from social realism to the study of French Modernism just like that.

MR. POLCARI: No, no. no.

MR. LEHMAN: They were always influenced into the latest developments in France and had a wide breadth of knowledge of the whole history of art. Well, an education in many fields-both art and politics, and philosophy-it does come down to philosophy. I remember arguing with the abstract artists in the thirties, about philosophy. Art had nothing to do with philosophy, art had to do with just doing it. As soon as you establish philosophy you're inhibiting yourself, but that's another story. But it was interesting that the abstractionists did have a bend towards abstract theory, philosophical theory rather than social theory, and social realists of course are on the other side of that fence. There was always this island going on.

MR. POLCARI: So actually there were so to speak, metaphysics, about art in the thirties, and the

base-on the one hand is philosophic humanist basis-would you agree with that?

MR. LEHMAN: A philosophic what?

MR. POLCARI: Humanist argument, say the abstract artist versus the political and social in all its variety, and these were really different ways of going about things in the thirties. They took on a different cast in the forties-

MR. LEHMAN: Yes I would agree to that. One thing that had a great influence on the development away from social realism was exactly the Hitler-Stalin pact, and the complete flip flop of Russia and Russian theory, that is Soviet theory, among the artists who are so crestfallen to see this happen. And then in the past their own approach to art was bolstered by what they saw happening in the Soviet Union and the world at large, progressive world at large I'm talking about. Now suddenly it's not progressive any longer, when it has a part in our system-

MR. POLCARI: Yes that I think is the definition of non-progressive [laughs].

MR. LEHMAN: So that the theoretical foundation or basis collapsed. So where did that leave the social realists from a theoretical standpoint? Simply on their own. And on their own they turned to the different idioms that were taking place in Paris: surrealism and cubism, abstractionism in general. But when it comes to abstract expressionism, I feel that the basic foundation for that whole movement was the feeling of frustration of the artist involved with their own work; and the fact that they couldn't escape the influence of the French. When I say French I include Picasso and Matisse and that group. No matter how they tried, it would always creep into their work, elements of both of these, and the only way to get rid of it and to save themselves was to get rid of everything, which means total abstraction.

MR. POLCARI: This is interesting. This contrast is very much with an idea that has been made, that the artists went to abstraction because they were frustrated that they didn't bring about the revolution.

MR. LEHMAN: I understand that part, too, and I know also that Joe Masheck made that statement that Abstract Expressionism show the art in the service of democracy. That this was an example to show the world the freedom that the artist has under democracy as contrasted to realism in the Russian view of things. They weighted one against the other. Abstract meant freedom, which, from one point of view, you could say has some truth to it, but that's not what the artists were thinking. The artists don't think like that, 'Now lets see, I'm going to take a pen and paint American Freedom!' That's bullshit.

MR. POLCARI: Did you say that was bullshit?

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah. I said it low.

Tape 4 Side B

MR. POLCARI: Side 2, First tape July 26, 1996, Harold Lehman and Stephen Polcari at the Archives.

MR. POLCARI: So the theoretical basis of social art collapsed with the Molotov pact-

MR. LEHMAN: The theoretical basis of one phase of art, social realist art-

MR. POLCARI: Social realist art. What were you doing at this time? You were part of the union, you

were doing the workshop-

MR. LEHMAN: What time specifically?

MR. POLCARI: '38 - '39

MR. LEHMAN: '38 - '39 I was right in the middle of my own mural: a very large mural that I was working one that I had designed in 1936 and started painting in 1937 at Rikers Island, and it was a mural that was 70 feet by 20 feet, very large space, and I had several assistants. My chief assistant was Stanley McCoy who was the brother of Jack Pollock; and I had him with me for two years until the time I finished this mural-

MR. POLCARI: When did you finish it?

MR. LEHMAN: I finished it in May 1940. During that time I was also doing this work for the artists union. This was after the Siqueiros workshop had completed its time, and there was a transition to the artists' union workshop which continued till the War period actually. I remember 1940, I designed a float; I still have the original design. A large float, it was called America at War. Now that had to be 1941, excuse me, because the war of course was December 1941. So it was called America at War. I designed this big float, and the artists union got together and constructed it. It was in this big parade called the New York at War Parade, and that's one of the projects that I did, and I did several others. 1938 was the year that Czechoslovakia was invaded by Hitler. We had a monster demonstration at Madison Square Garden. I did-with the artists union-the chief decorations for this gathering: a huge wall piece behind the speaker's platform, and what it showed was two huge hands moving together obliterating the face of Eduard Benet who was the president of Czechoslovakia-

MR. POLCARI: Prime minister, yes.

MR. LEHMAN: I did that. I painted that, and I supervised the whole members in completing it. So that's two of the things that we did. At the same time I was doing my mural. So I was very busy. In addition I was doing some easel painting. I didn't do many easel paintings in that period because of the activities of the workshop and also the mural. I was also doing mural designs in competitions. So I was very busy and very active.

MR. POLCARI: The Federal Arts Project provided you with a living?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yes, definitely. \$23.86 per week. That was it. But that was a master artist salary. The assistants got \$21.

MR. POLCARI: Not bad, only two dollars difference-ten percent! Much larger gap nowadays!

MR. LEHMAN: You bet.

MR. POLCARI: So you were working. These were still social projects up to wartime.

MR. LEHMAN: Yes.

MR. POLCARI: I gather the art world still continued relatively the same. Correct me if I'm wrong.

MR. LEHMAN: Well, in what sense?

MR. POLCARI: The debates of the thirties continued. There were shifts. Did you see any difference in mythology and the whole idea of mythology emerging in the late thirties?

MR. LEHMAN: No. I don't recall any of that.

MR. POLCARI: How about American mythology?

MR. LEHMAN: Well give me an example.

MR. POLCARI: Benton, the WPA, emphasis on local legend and lore, that kind of thing-

MR. LEHMAN: Oh ,you mean American lore, the Midwest and Indian and that sort of thing. No, not of all. We know that Benton did interest himself in that because these were American themes that he was exploiting in his murals. Of course Pollock was working with Benton early in the thirties, not late, very early, when he was doing the Whitney Museum's murals, and also what was that other one? The New School. He did murals for the New school.

MR. POLCARI: Which are right around the corner, you know? [Equitable Building, NY]

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, right. Besides mythology and American lore, no. There was no actual movement as such. There were maybe one or two people who did use it. I remember mural painters out in the West and Midwest did definitely. Frank Mechau, you know the name?

MR. POLCARI: Yes-

MR. LEHMAN: Mainly did horses, any association with western themes. I don't recall any of that other-no. But you also had the depression going on in those years, and a lot of that found its way into murals. I should say the feeling did, and the iconography of the people being displaced, the death tolls and things like that I had in my own murals. Mythology I can't recall.

MR. POLCARI: Do you think the WPA murals...what do you think the themes were? The triumph of the people over their problem? Do you think that is the general emphasis?

MR. LEHMAN: There was a lot of that, but I don't think [inaudible] the theme or the emphasis. I'm always bothered when it comes to generalizing. I'll tell you this; I'll give you an example: the theme of my mural was Man Standing Thin, Activity Relating to it, and the Relation of these to the Family, it's a long title, but it's a big mural. What it basically means is that I was focusing on activities in this country, and the reason for them was to say what prompts them and what devotes them and what justifies them which would be the family. Because this is in a prison, and basically people in the prison are antisocial-they committed an antisocial act. What is the basis of social grouping? The family.

MR. POLCARI: It used to be anyway-

MR. LEHMAN: That's what we're talking about: what used to be. In any case that was my theme, and there was no mythology. Although, I didn't treat it realistically at all. It was treated in a very bold and, I would say, a classic manner. Whoever sees the mural will understand. It was done in a clearly very modern manner too. I even had the use of the introduction of cinema: the idea that cinema screen and the very center of the mural up top where the family was shown gathered around the table against the backdrop of a city skyline standing against the city, New York. All the elements came together from left and right. On one side it was the elements of industry gathering materials, and on the other side was agriculture gathering agricultural materials, food, and so on. And the

activities of both of these gradually leading up to a finished product. All pouring in to the area where the family is located. If you want to call that some sort of a myth-I don't know-to me it was very real. In any case that was the way I approached this thing.

MR. POLCARI: This is Rikers Island?

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah.

MR. POLCARI: Tell us the story then of the Rikers.

MR. LEHMAN: Well, it's a very bad story. To begin with, the place that I was designing was originally supposed to be designed by Ben Shahn, and he did some designs for it, and he submitted them for approval. When it was submitted to the corrections department-there the ones who had to approve it-they were adamantly against it. Why? Because it showed prisoners actually behind bars and suffering the indignity of treatment like the chain gang felt. He was contrasting, in other words, the brutality of treatment of the past with a more up to date modern handling of the penal system contemporaneously. But they wouldn't accept that because of the consideration of figures that he showed them. The supervisor of the New York Project came to me and asked me if I would like to design this mural, and I agreed to make this attempt. So I did, and I worked at it for awhile, and I did an entire color sketch. I did a lot of research for the thing as an example. I had a twin brother and he was trained to be a psychotherapist, and at this moment he was in Elmira reformatory doing some intern work. I went up there to visit him, and he brought me to the warden of that prison. I outlined to this warden what I intended to do on Rikers Island. It was a very famous warden, Warden Law is his name. But this was a reformatory don't forget, for juveniles, not adults, but he gave his approval to the theme as a professional. This was some of the research I did for it, I actually went to professionals. I had to write a thesis before I actually painted anything. My program: what I was going to paint. I did that. I still have it. You can have it.

MR. POLCARI: Thank you!

MR. LEHMAN: I wrote the thesis and submitted it, and it was approved on all sides by everyone: Municipal Arts Commission, Department of Corrections, and the head of the Federal Arts Project: Audrey McMahon. So there I was now, given the go ahead, and I did gather all the materials as necessary and started the cartoons, immediately went out to the prison, set up my shop there. That shop incidentally was one of specially built scaffold that had to be rolled out of sight everyday because it was in the dining room, and prisoners had to come in and eat three times a day, and when they did nobody else could be present. I was also at a disadvantage because I couldn't work all through a day. I had to work around the dining schedule of the prisoners. That brings to mind an interesting story. This is a fact not just a story. One day I got a call saying that the commissioner of corrections wanted to come out, and he had a guess with him who wanted to see my mural, what I was doing. And who was the guest? It was Fernand Leger, the French artist. He did come out, Leger, and I came out with him, and turned in front of my wall, and Leger inspected my sketch, full color sketch, and also details I painted. Two of the details he found very interesting and liked very much two details, and after looking at it for awhile, he spoke only French, so he turned to the commissioner, and in French, asked him, 'How long would it take you to paint this mural?' The commissioner translated to me, and I said, 'About a year and a half.' He said something to the commissioner, the commissioner turns to me and says, 'Monsieur Leger says he can do it in six months!' Can you imagine!

MR. POLCARI: What was the point here?

MR. LEHMAN: The point is what ego of Leger to say such even when he is competing with a young unknown American artist, even in a thing like that!

MR. POLCARI: The French haven't changed whatsoever.

MR. LEHMAN: Really? [laughs]

MR. POLCARI: They're still doing that.

MR. LEHMAN: This is fantastic.

MR. POLCARI: Imagine. It's actually amazing.

MR. LEHMAN: That is one of the events that I can't forget. I worked with this mural for two years, and then there was a layoff-

MR. POLCARI: 1938 - 1940?

MR. LEHMAN: Actually from '37-'40, but then I'm not counting the time there was a layoff. I had to quit altogether because what they did is the administration laid off artists after they had worked eighteen months.

MR. POLCARI: Oh yes, that's right.

MR. LEHMAN: They had a famous rule called the eighteenth month rule: if you were on continuously for eighteen months, you had to leave and then reapply all over again after staying out for a certain period. So I had to do that, right in the middle of a brushstroke! I did come back of course, and that delayed the execution of the mural. Meanwhile the World's Fair was coming along.

MR. POLCARI: Yes, yes-

MR. LEHMAN: '39 and '40. So they came to me and asked me to paint some full size replicas of two details from my mural for the American Arts Today Building at the World's Fair, which I did. One of them was a driller, and the other was a section from the that side of the mural where the driller was located. Both of them were mounted on the wall and stayed there for two years. When they came down, one of them, the Driller, finally found its way to the Newark Museum permanent collection.

MR. POLCARI: Oh excellent!

MR. LEHMAN: I got a letter from them telling me that, from the Newark museum, and the way that happened is the mural project shut down entirely in early 1942 because of the war, and all the works that were on hand were dispersed to get all-

MR. POLCARI: Given away-

MR. LEHMAN: Right, given away or just simply appropriated. That particular full size detail was bought by the Newark Museum. Now, several years later I read an article in the New York Times about the Smithsonian National Collection of Fine Arts, and their exhibition they were going to have about Federal Arts Project paintings. It occurred me to write to Joshua Taylor who was the head of the collection. I did; I wrote him a letter asking him, 'Have you got any works of mine in the National Collection.' I got a letter back from the curator of twentieth century art saying, 'Oh so nice to hear from you, we do have, we have your Driller!' The Driller was given to the Smithsonian National

Collection in exchange for something else, so now it's a part of the Smithsonian.

MR. POLCARI: That's wonderful! They were centralizing these murals-

MR. LEHMAN: The project of the painting, how it came about, and what came about, now let me give you about a what came about. I told you there were two details: the Driller ended up in the National Collection of Fine Arts permanent collection. The second detail: during the war I came to visit Pollock several times, I'm always going up there from Woodstock. So one day I was-

MR. POLCARI: Going up where?

MR. LEHMAN: Up to Pollock's studio on 8th street from Woodstock. I would make visits from Woodstock, and I would be visiting Pollock. One of these times I went up there, and he says, 'Hey Harold, you know there's a painting of yours down in a shop on Canal Street?' A big gift shop, junk shop if you will. I said, 'What are you talking about?' And he described me sections of my panel. And I said, 'That's hard.' He said, 'Yes, but what they did is they bought a lot of these paintings when the project closed down, and yours is one of them.' So I went right down there the next day to the Canal Street place, and I saw the owner and I asked him to show me any mural details he had. He took me to a back room and high up on the wall, sure enough, there was my painting in his junk shop. But it was signed Anton Refregier. It had a name under it, Anton Refregier, it was scrawled. And I looked and I said, 'Who's painting is that?' He said, 'Anton Refregier.' I said, 'How much you want for that painting?' He said, 'I want a hundred dollars.' I said, 'A hundred dollars, why?' He said, 'Because you see it's by a well known artist.' I said, 'That's not Anton Refregier's painting, that's my painting! I painted that. Now how much do you want for it?' He said, 'Alright, give me twenty-five dollars.' So I got my own painting back for twenty-five dollars cheap. I rolled it up and took it back up to Woodstock, but it was in such a ruin that it couldn't be salvaged really. It had been really abused and devastated, eventually I had to discard it. But here how one ended up, and how the other ended up-

MR. POLCARI: That's interesting. Now, all those things were lost; they just gave the stuff away. It's terrible.

MR. LEHMAN: It was a big painting, you know! You don't lose a big painting! But still it was lost in another sense, totally abused and not paid attention too. I lost a lot of things that way on the project. I usually would give them drawings, ongoing while I was doing the mural, I had drawings ongoing all the time, and I would submit them. I never saw them again because they were snatched up by the supervisors, and McMahon and so on. They took them to their own collection. I know this for a fact. My drawings were really exceptional, if you would see them you would understand.

MR. POLCARI: So a personal collecting-

MR. LEHMAN: Sure they're not going to snatch them away in some god forbidden warehouse bin somewhere.

MR. POLCARI: So you continued working on the Rikers mural-

MR. LEHMAN: Yes-

MR. POLCARI: Until '40, and you finished, and this was in the dining room, and then you left it, and put on record the fate-

MR. LEHMAN: What happened after that, I paid no more attention to the mural after it was done. I

had other things I was doing. But, about 1973, it occurred to me go out and see the present condition, how it was holding up. That mural was done in oil on canvas, and the reason it was done in oil and not the way I wanted it to be in tempera was because in the very beginning I started to paint it in tempera, pasting tempera. After about two or three weeks of work, I came back to the site one day, and, by god, the paint was falling off the wall. So we called in the technical specialist of the project, Ralph Mayer, you may know the name. So Ralph Mayer eventually became the leading technical specialist in art in this county, and he wrote the book, *Ralph Mayer's Handbook*.

MR. POLCARI: Oh yes. Now it comes back.

MR. LEHMAN: So that was a very early book. He was the consultant-

MR. POLCARI: I have the book!

MR. LEHMAN: Good. He came out and he looked it over. He said it was impossible to use this medium in this environment, because you had constant steams from the place, the inmates, from food. Food vapors and steam were settling on the wall, and there were carving the ceiling of the placing of the waterbase paint, and also the glue based paint, so it would soften, dissolve, under steam conditions. So I had to pull the whole thing down, all the painting I had done, and they put a whole new preparation on the wall, a primer, an oil based primer this time, and I started the whole thing over again-

MR. POLCARI: In oil. It's interesting, the food there-

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, I'll give you another interesting thing. When I used to come out while I was still doing it in tempera, and I had everything on the scaffold, the way you did that, is you mixed casein emulsion. I mixed a quantity of it for about a week straight and kept it in jars on scaffold. So I come one morning, and I see these huge winged insects on the scaffold-they were waterbeetles, come up through the drains, and they sensed casein. That was a nuisance also.

MR. POLCARI: I would say that's a nuisance.

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah! It was just as well I switched.

MR. POLCARI: Yes I would think so. That's enough reason!

MR. LEHMAN: I had no further problems with beetles after that. It turned out for the best really when I switched to the oil. I was able to get much better results. Now, we're in 1973, and I wanted to see how it held up. So I went to the department of correction, I saw the commissioner, and I told him what I wanted. He said sure, and they gave me a pass to the island. I had this date with the warden, I went out there, and he took me to this room that I remembered. I went into the room, and there were a couple of young people playing basketball or something, but there was no mural. I said, 'Are you sure that this is the room? This doesn't look like the room I painted.' He said, 'Yes this is it, the northwest mess hall.' I said, 'There's no mess hall.' He said, 'Well it was converted several years ago into an athletic gym.'

MR. POLCARI: The late sixties?

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, earlier than that. The point being that it had been converted to a juvenile facility from an adult facility. But what happened to my mural? 'Well there was a warden here in 1962, and he had it removed because he didn't think it was appropriate for this new environment.' So I said, 'Who gave him permission to do that.' He said that nobody did. It was his judgment and he

had the power to exercise his judgment; he was the warden. Well I was so outraged, of course. I went right back to the commissioner of corrections. I told him what had happened, and he investigated this. He said, 'We're going to make every effort to try and recover any of the scraps of the mural that may be left.' I doubt very much that there are any because of the nature of the method of hanging, it couldn't be salvaged; that was the story of the warden. But not in 1973, that was his story in 1962. Eventually the warden died. That warden died, so we couldn't question him, couldn't get any personal input. He did conduct an investigation however, and he wrote to me. I have those letters as well. I have all the correspondence relating to this mural. He says, 'I'm sorry, but we just cannot locate anything, and I'm afraid it is simply destroyed by the warden.' And that's how that mural ended. The one big thing salvaged was the Driller in the National Museum of Fine Arts today. I had six details that I had saved myself that I had painted in tempera, not oil, in the original medium. And these were exhibited at the Whitney Museum, but I had them in my possession. They were eventually exhibited down in Florida, in Miami, in the Mitchell Wolfson collection when they first organized. They wanted it to gather in a lot of work from the Federal Arts Project. The agent who was acting for him, Ellen Sragow, I don't know if you know her-

MR. POLCARI: I know the name.

MR. LEHMAN: She came to me and she asked me to submit these paintings, to [inaudible] his approval, which I did. He wanted all of them to exhibit down there. I never heard of Mitchell Wolfson or his collection or anything like that. I said, 'Well look I don't know these people, and you're asking me to send these paintings, which are very valuable, down to somebody I have no knowledge about. I'd like to know more about them, but I'd not rather send them until I do.' So the next day I get a telephone call from Miami. It's the curator who had seen my painting, and who had wanted them, who knew that I was refusing to send them without further information. He says, 'I'm going to fly up to Newark airport today, and I'd like to come visit you in your home, and talk to you about your paintings, and show you some documentation, and so on to show you we're a bonafide collection.' And he did that. That very day he flew up to Newark, came up into my house. I showed my paintings, and he showed me all of these publications that they already-

MR. POLCARI: Yeah they're legit. They built a new big building the Wolfson collection.

MR. LEHMAN: That's only in the last year though. But this was originally in the Miami Dade College of Art. In any case, he showed me this and explained to me what they were going to do- what they intended to do, and they wanted also to have a symposium...and invited me to participate in that as well. So, after seeing all this I said, 'Ok, fine, you can have them.' He took not only the paintings from the mural, but he also took a big self-portrait- because they wanted self-portraits from all the artists...to show alongside the paintings. This was a large self-portrait, which I had done in California in my surrealist days- quite different in the pose and technique, but even so I sent that along...and it turned out to be a very successful exhibit. The whole show was publicized; the brochure was prepared in color, each painting was reproduced in color. It was called, 'Public Arts', that was the name of it. I went down there and I participated in the symposium, and then after the exhibit (it was going to go on for about two weeks), I was supposed to get my paintings back. But when I was about to leave to come back home, the curator came to me and said, 'Mr. Lehman, Mitchell would like to buy all of your paintings.' - all of them, including the self-portrait. That was alright with me at this point because the proviso I had made, before sending any paintings to anyone, was that they should all be shown together...and should be kept together until they were sold. I would not distribute them piecemeal here and there, and that's exactly what was going to be. They met all of my requirements...and also the money requirements, they made no fuss whatsoever. So I couldn't ask for anything more...except for the Metropolitan Museum...or the Museum of Modern Art...

MR. POLCARI: That's a nice [inaudible] moment as opposed to the Rikers Island [inaudible] moment-

MR. LEHMAN: You're darn right! So, that's the way those details ended up in Mr. Wolfson's collection. In essence, that's the story of the Rikers Island mural.

MR. POLCARI: We turn now to the forties: you just completed the Rikers, war has broken out in Europe, and of course six months later...

MR. LEHMAN: Now, that's an interesting story you want to hear subsequent to that. While I was still on the project (of course people were getting called by the draft board), and I got it just like anyone else- but, two months before Pearl Harbor I was doing some decoration at Manhattan Center for the Artists Union...we were having a large affair, and I was in charge of decoration. So, I was mounted a ladder, reaching the balcony (and it was a leaning ladder, not a folding ladder)... someone at the base of the ladder was footing that ladder- to prevent it from skitting out from under...and I was up on top doing these things. Suddenly, some girl comes in the door and this guy turns his head around to watch...and as he does so, he turns his foot, and BOOM! -the ladder skits right out down from under me...and I go down to the floor, and break both arms- BREAK BOTH ARMS!... I was immediately rushed to St. Vincent's Hospital (I spent three weeks there, and that was a calamity). Audrey McMahan, the whole project came to visit me and all that...but after the three weeks, I was recuperating at my mother's place, and finally I was able to get some control of my arms (although they were not fully extended). Now, along comes December 7th...I was still healing, and I hear this announcement in the middle of the Philharmonic broadcast about Pearl Harbor...and it was right after that that the draft board accelerated its calls- I was called about three months later, and my arms were [inaudible]...so I went out to Governor's Island, where they had the examination-

MR. POLCARI: Physicals?

MR. LEHMAN: Both physical, and also general examinations- to see if you were qualified for the services. So, I went through the lines one after another. Ultimately, I got to a group of doctors I saw sitting there, and something I sensed...they were not actual medical doctors; they had to be specialized psychologists. One of them says, 'Is there anything you'd like to talk to me about?' (then I knew for sure it had to be that thing), I said, 'Yeah I think I would.'... I sat down, and I waited for him to make the opening...'Well what is it you would like to say?'... I said, 'Well I don't think I should be in the army, and I don't think you want me in the army.' ...they're looking through my papers meanwhile, and he says, 'Well you haven't been selected, you've been given a six months referral because of your broken arms.', I said, 'Yes, but after six months do I have to come back here again?- I want to get this over with now. I'm not fit for your army, because I'm an artist, and I have no interest in physical violence and that sort of thing, and what I do with my art is valuable to the government.'... at the moment I was doing something that showed it, I was doing a mural design that included a war poster that was already spread throughout the country. The fellow listened to me and said, 'Well look, why should you be any different than any other artist?' I said, 'Because, I am doing these things already; I am benefiting the government's war effort for one thing...and I told you, I had a mindset that I cannot allow myself to do any violent activity.' ...'So you think you're good enough to qualify as an artist not to be inducted? How do you compare yourself with Robert Graftman?' (he meant Robert Blackman, who happened to be an academic artist- well-known), I said, 'Robert Blackman? I thought you were going to mention a good artist, I have no use for Robert Blackman.'... (I don't consider him a leading American artist). This is the way he put it! A "leading American artist of the day", and he mentioned Blackman!... (I don't consider him a leading American artist).

MR. POLCARI: No one knows Blackman here at all, look at that 1942!

MR. LEHMAN: I said, "I don't consider him a leading American artist"... well he says, 'Look, he has exhibits, he has work in the Metropolitan Museum.'... 'Well, I don't consider that a plus. Well, if you mentioned the Museum of Modern Art...that would have been different- but, he's not a leading American artist'. So, he gives me a stony look and says, 'So, how do you compare yourself with Rembrandt?'... I said, 'Not unfavorably.' ...that's exactly what I said, 'Not unfavorably.' So, he gets up and he confers with his colleagues and whispers...then they come back to me, and he says, 'Well, they're going to give you a break', and he gave me a complete deferral, hopeless. Well obviously, he thought I was an egomaniac...and I was going to tell him I was much better than Rembrandt!

MR. POLCARI: You can't take orders in the army- that translates into, "can't take orders"!

MR. LEHMAN: The point is, I was being very circumspect. I went back to the project, and I told them, "This was a riot!"

MR. POLCARI: It's very interesting. You probably appeared so outré to these guys, they figured you weren't malleable enough to be in the army.

MR. LEHMAN: That's right, well among other things-

MR. POLCARI: You're right!

MR. LEHMAN: Well, I was obviously persuasive-

MR. POLCARI: Interesting.

MR. LEHMAN: So, that was the story of my induction into the army- or lack of it. That was why I was able to go up to Woodstock, which was an important element, because otherwise I never would have been able to do it. As soon as that happened, after this induction thing (or lack of it), I immediately made plans to go to Woodstock and paint my mural...I hadn't painted it yet- I just made a design for it.

MR. POLCARI: Which mural?

MR. LEHMAN: It was a mural that I was asked to do by the Section of Fine Arts for a post office in Pennsylvania, and I did... I submit the designs, they accepted it, and now I had the mural to paint. So, I went up to Woodstock in early 1942, and I stayed there four years. Not on this one mural of course, I spent the whole war up in Woodstock...but, I did a lot of war paintings as a consequence-commissioned war paintings, through the Section of Fine Arts, and through the Treasury Department itself.

MR. POLCARI: But didn't those programs come to an end very quickly? ...'42...'43?

MR. LEHMAN: Which programs you referring to?

MR. POLCARI: The Section-

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, the Section closed-

MR. POLCARI: And the entire Federal Arts Project period shut down-

MR. LEHMAN: Yes. But, work that had been in progress was allowed to finish. I finished my mural up

in Woodstock in 1943, and installed it in 1943. Meanwhile...

MR. POLCARI: Where did you install it, the post office?

MR. LEHMAN: In the post office- I went myself and installed it.

MR. POLCARI: Is that still there?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, yes, "The Renovo Post Office", and it's a very good mural incidentally. Nobody knows any of my work, this is the fabulous thing about my whole existence...that nobody knows me. Because, through force of circumstances, no one had the opportunity- no one could go out to Rikers Island and see that mural-

MR. POLCARI: That's what happens I guess, when you work on public things-

MR. LEHMAN: When you work in prison, the only audience I had were prisoners! A very appreciative audience I want you to know...they started by throwing mashed potatoes on the wall from their plates. When I first started on the cartoon...as I kept painting...there were less and less mashed potatoes, until finally there was nothing being thrown on there. In fact, they had to come up and talk to me...tried to...(they weren't allowed to talk to me)...but, once in awhile they would. Those who were working in the mess hall after the prisoners were gone- I had a lot of experiences with them. Meyer Burger (who was a very famous reporter for the New York Times in that period), he had a feature column called 'About New York.'...and he wrote every week about one particular person, or one particular event in New York- the whole column was devoted to it. Now, he came out to Rikers Island to write about my mural... obviously, he was probably approached by the Federal Project- by Audrey McMahan, probably. We had a public relations department; he came out to interview me, and he wrote this very nice column...which, I have. The only publicity it had in general- although it had a lot of write ups in national and local newspapers and magazines, was a result of the exhibit that took place at the Whitney Museum in 1940- big show, Federal Arts Murals. So, other than that, nobody can come out and see the murals. So, that's why I say I was very little known... and as far as the Woodstock thing is concerned, I finished that mural that is now in Pennsylvania, and it has been there right along. But, in addition, I was approached by a well-known gallery: Associated American Artist Gallery in New York. Reeves Lowenthal was the director...familiar with the name "Reeves Lowenthal"?

MR. POLCARI: No, I am with the AAA-

MR. LEHMAN: AAA, triple A. Well, that was one of the biggest galleries in New York then. Of course they featured American Regional- American theme work...Thomas Benton and such.

End of Tape 4

Tape 5 Side A

MR. LEHMAN: Okay, now... I had just completed the mural for the post office, and I had photos taken by a professional photographer- they were all black and white. I had 8 x 10 photos and I had to submit these to the Section of Fine Arts for approval...which they gave; they were very enthusiastic about the whole thing. I had a collection of the photos (as it happened), it had just come back in the mail from the photographer, and as I was entering my studio another artist in Woodstock (a very well-known one), Arnold Blanch...do you know him?

MR. POLCARI: Oh yes-

MR. LEHMAN: ...Arnold Blanch came up to visit with me, and I showed him these photos I just got back, and after looking through them, he says, 'Harold, would you be interested in doing some war bond painting for the government war bond drive? And it would be sponsored by the Associate American Artist Gallery.' I said, 'Okay, tell me about it'. He told me about Reeves Lowenthal, and how they had a whole program set up that was instituted by the Treasury Department to recruit artists to paint these painting based on themes that would be calculated to sell war bonds. He asked me to go down to have an interview with him. So, I called Reese and he asked me, 'Sure come on down' -I did. I went down the following week, and they presented me with this idea for a war bond drive, a poster. He said, 'Would you make me a poster with this theme?' ...what it was was a paratrooper... they wanted a picture of a paratrooper sent throughout the country-

MR. POLCARI: Doing something?

MR. LEHMAN: Well showing a paratrooper-

MR. POLCARI: Jumping?

MR. LEHMAN: Well, it's up to me, the artist, to do it anyway I like; but the idea was the paratrooper. I was always used to doing research for everything, and I went to the source always, so I could get some accuracy into the thing without being too photographic...but just to have some verisimilitude. After speaking to him I got a lead to the Department of Air Force in New York, and I went right over there. They had a display of different military objects, which I inspected and I made sketches on the spot- a grenade, a rifle, machine gun...that sort of thing. I went back to the studio that I was sharing...using...actually, rented by a friend of mine, Peter Busa, you know the name?

MR. POLCARI: Oh yeah-

Peter is a good friend of mine too. I went up to Peter Busa's house and I said, 'Pete, how 'bout I do this poster right here and now?', he said, 'sure go ahead.' So, I had some gouache colors with me, and I got a large format, an illustration board, and I did this poster right on the spot. Now, it took me two days to do it actually, and he had a beautiful girl at the time living with him, and he was out painting somewhere else; he was out, and I was using his studio. About after two hours, he would always come popping back into the studio to see how I was getting along...mainly to see how his girlfriend was getting along. Meanwhile, I was working on this poster. Well, I finished this poster and I brought it back to Reeves Lowenthal the next day, and he sat it up against the wall and he looked at it. He finally came out and said, 'You know Harold, this is exactly the kind of poster we DO NOT want!' And what was it that... disturbed him... it was a precise rendering- a sharp rendering. It was not loose and free, and of course, it was not done in oil paint- it was done in gouache. It was pretty tight in other words, and if you know anything about the Associate American Artists, they're teaching artists who have a feel of the pigment and the brush in that painting, American theme stuff, but at least it was painty...painty! He was an [inaudible] fellow originally- he didn't like that. I said, 'Ok, I'll take care of it', I went back to Woodstock and I painted him a picture- a poster that was just fantastic. But, when I sent it back to him, I get a telegram from him which he says, 'Paratrooper is terrific, many thanks for a job well done.' ...I still have the telegram, but it was a very good painting...and it was distributed throughout the country.

MR. POLCARI: I hope you have the poster.

MR. LEHMAN: I can't...it was purchased. Let me explain that- that was paid for (all those things were paid for), by Abbott Laboratories. They paid for these, and they added it to their collection.

MR. POLCARI: Which are in Washington now.

MR. LEHMAN: Are they?

MR. POLCARI: Oh yeah.

MR. LEHMAN: They were in Chicago at the time.

MR. POLCARI: They gave all their war art to the armed forces, to a museum. So the Paratrooper's probably Army, then it's in the Army Arts Center.

MR. LEHMAN: Well I hope so, because only recently...

MR. POLCARI: You could probably track it down-

MR. LEHMAN: Well, that's what I tried to do- I called Abbott Laboratories, and they have a division devoted to periodicals and that sort of thing. They checked it out, and they couldn't find any sign of it anywhere. I got a letter from them to that effect; it didn't mention about the army war museum.

MR. POLCARI: Listen, I've been there- I did a show last fall on such material.

MR. LEHMAN: Really?

MR. POLCARI: Borrowed about twenty, thirty paintings.

MR. LEHMAN: Well, then they should have at least four of my paintings.

MR. POLCARI: They very well may.

MR. LEHMAN: Maybe you've even seen them without noting it.

MR. POLCARI: Exactly.

MR. LEHMAN: Next time I go to Washington-

MR. POLCARI: Listen, you can look it up- you can go visit.

MR. LEHMAN: In Washington?

MR. POLCARI: In Washington.

MR. LEHMAN: Get me their address-

MR. POLCARI: I will.

MR. LEHMAN: Because I wanted to go down and visit Virginia Mecklenburg, the curator of twentieth century painting at the Smithsonian Museum of American Art. Now, incidentally... this is a side issue so I'll wait until later to talk to you about this...what we're talking about now is the war painting- I did that one, and very quickly afterwards he asked me to do another. I came down to talk to him about it, and on the spot I made a sketch to him of what I had conceived of for the next painting. What it was, was to show the invasion of Europe- the "D-DAY". They didn't have any D-day's. Well, it was an invasion poster showing the Invasion of Europe. I did a sketch of a close up of a soldier's face, with a grenade, about to pull the ring on the grenade, looking exactly in the manner of

Michelangelo's David. The analogy there...I saw the analogy right away. When I showed it to him, Reese, he caught it immediately, 'Fine do it.' ...I did. I went back to Woodstock, and I did that painting. It's a large head, about to pull the ring on a grenade and throw it.

MR. POLCARI: A very determined look on the guys face.

MR. LEHMAN: Of course. It was a very successful painting. Thereafter, he asked me to do one when they were about to invade Japan, carry the war to the Pacific. So, I suggested one to that, too, showing the gathering of soldiers (on a landing barge crossing the Pacific), and there were several on the ocean disappearing over the horizon...there was one very close up. I did that one for them, too.

MR. POLCARI: There was a whole national epic in the arts that essentially replaced the thirties' social change and because of the depression. Now it's 'win the war!' There was a lot of pressures from all around to contribute to the war effort in this way for artists, for everybody else. How did the art magazines...what did the artists feel in this? What was the discussion? How did they go about it? What styles were there?

MR. LEHMAN: The art magazines, writers, critics, and so on?

MR. POLCARI: Then the artists themselves-your friends from the project what did they feel?

MR. LEHMAN: Depends upon their orientation in the first place. Those who were French oriented and abstract, would have nothing to do with that- that was much too realistic, and much too old fashioned an approach to art. The distinction between art of their own and art for public use they could not make. You can't have an abstract poster and say 'sell war bonds.' It's an abstraction-and that is the flaw in abstraction- you cannot relate to ideas, obviously. The realistic artist was in his element. Especially, a mural artist who was used to dealing with public themes in a realistic manner. About the magazines, there were many artists in which the emphasis was on helping the war effort and dealing with artists who were doing that as well. There were articles on war posters. Matter of fact, in 1943... Museum of Modern Art had a big exhibit on the war posters. They wanted artists to submit poster designs that would be sent throughout the country. Not the posters themselves, but designs for the posters, and I did two of them in Woodstock, and both of them were accepted by the Museum of Modern Art...and they were exhibited there, and I came down and saw the exhibit. Then, they were sent throughout the country. I never saw those posters again; they were never returned to me. But, luckily I photographed them before I sent them out, and I do have the photos... but not in color. So, that was another element in the war situation... they were very cavalier about how they treated the artist's work. An artist knocked himself out to do these things, got no real recompensa...

MR. POLCARI: Or recognition-

MR. LEHMAN: And didn't even get his work back-...

MR. POLCARI: ...Work back and may not have even gotten a name on the poster-

MR. LEHMAN: That's true. I signed mine though... I believe. I rarely signed anything in those days, but... I believe I signed these. One of the posters (they all had themes of course), and one of them was called This is the Enemy.

MR. POLCARI: How is the only picture?

MR. LEHMAN: In my case, I showed a rape scene, but not in any realistic fashion. What I showed was a shadow on a brick wall of an approach of a Nazi to a woman, who had her mouth open and was obviously screaming. You got the picture pretty well just from the shadow. It was a fairly creative piece. So, that was This is the Enemy from my point of view. The second one, I showed a pair of hands reaching up to grab barbed wire from behind a wall, and through the arch formed by his arms you will see a window out of which a gun is pointing, with a Nazi head behind it, and a helmet, and smoke issuing from the gun (he had just fired the gun), and you see blood issuing from the wrists of the figure hanging on to the barbed wire. It was done in a rather faithful manner. Even though I mention blood, the whole thing (how can you deal with war tastefully) but even so, the image was there, and that was the second poster.

MR. POLCARI: Did they have prescriptions to how much gore?

MR. LEHMAN: No, no one said-

MR. POLCARI: No one said it-

MR. LEHMAN: Amount of blood?

MR. POLCARI: Yeah, or anything like that-

MR. LEHMAN: I never heard about it.

MR. POLCARI: Were those sort of things in people's minds that they accepted?

MR. LEHMAN: I never heard of that. I did what I pleased. All I showed was a little trickle of blood going down the wrist- I didn't show a lot of gore. That was enough, along with the smoking gun and the evil head in a helmet. You couldn't even see a head, you saw the helmet and two slits for eyes, and that was a helmet with a Nazi symbol in the middle of it-that was it. It was sent on exhibit and I never got it back. I did my own lettering, and it was a horrible letter. I never did any lettering; I did my lettering on these posters, and the way I did it (this was also an innovation), I took the headlines of the New York Post (they had block letters in those days and a very nice design I thought), so, I cut out the letters from the New York Post, and I reassembled them and I made a collage out of it, in which I collated, 'This is the enemy.' I just pasted it right over that shadow I mentioned to you.... that made the poster, "This is the enemy". Now, the second one, the one with the arms, the interesting part about this one is that about thirty or forty years later, Time Magazine had a cover showing the Berlin Wall, and that cover was done by a well-known cover artist named Artie Basha [?]. What he did was practically a replica of my poster; he showed the barbed wire, showed arms hanging on to the barbed wire over the wall, and showed blood trickling from the barbed wire. When I saw that I couldn't believe it- this was about 1970 or thereabouts. I cut it out and I sent it along to Time Magazine, along with a reproduction of my poster. I said, 'Look at this!' , it was 1962; I remember the date, 1962. I said, 'Take a look at this. Your artists actually saw my poster.' I got a letter back from Time saying they were very pleased to see my thing, but they never reproduced it, never showed it in their magazine.

MR. POLCARI: Of course they didn't show yours in their magazine.

MR. LEHMAN: That's what I mean. In the letters column they could have showed it, just as an object of interest, of human interest, and coincidence. I still have that incidentally, and that's going to go into the file, that comparison, that correlation. That's not the only time. A second time this happened in the last couple of years when they had the Bosnia thing. A famous photograph of

these emaciated men behind the barbed wire. I had done a drawing, not a poster, but I had done a drawing in Woodstock about the Nazi war camps that were uncovered after the war, during the war which I showed exactly that: emaciated victims behind these walls with the glass sticking out of the concrete. That was almost identical to this photograph. I sent that to Time Magazine. They didn't print that either, but-

MR. POLCARI: I don't think they probably would-

MR. LEHMAN: But, I also got a letter back-very interesting you see. What goes around comes around. But twice?!?!

MR. POLCARI: They do things that sort of hit it right on the nose-

MR. LEHMAN: It's a universal-

MR. POLCARI: It's an icon that's going to come back. That's what happens again and again, inevitably. So in this time you're doing these things for the war effort. Other artists are doing camouflage, some of them are working in the factories and shipyards. There's all kinds of things going on, a very strong part of everything.

MR. LEHMAN: Many artists were inducted, but sent immediately to help by doing war art.

MR. POLCARI: Kadish I think.

MR. LEHMAN: Kadish was sent out, but Guston was doing work for the Navy out in the Middle West.

MR. POLCARI: Artists in the war is a big topic, and now continuing-

MR. LEHMAN: Navigation, that's all I'm thinking of, [Guston] was doing navigation.

MR. POLCARI: You're continuing in your own style. How do you think your style has changed over this period, from the thirties to the forties?

MR. LEHMAN: Not too much, because I was after all, still doing murals. In one sense yes, I had done (don't forget) surrealist work in the thirties. A good deal of it, so that when I started murals, it was no longer surrealist- it was more in the classic norm of Michelangelo and Tintoretto. There was no room for surrealism in murals...at least not in my murals.

MR. POLCARI: But you were doing Renaissance-

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, Renaissance...essentially-

MR. POLCARI: But why? Why did you choose the Renaissance?

MR. LEHMAN: Because to me, the Renaissance was the epitome of mural art.

MR. POLCARI: It was mural art, and that was the key?

MR. LEHMAN: All of us: Guston, Kadish, myself. We were all a trio at that time, and we all worked along the same lines, and felt the same way about things.

MR. POLCARI: So, they were seen as it was sort of technical- they were the practitioners of mural

art. You wanted to do a modern mural art, so you looked at them for models.

MR. LEHMAN: Models in certain phases...the handling of form, in other words, the modeling- the strength of the composition.

MR. POLCARI: The entire composition, the composing.

MR. LEHMAN: Composing, yes. Even though I had this in mind, I still went my own way as to the introduction of modern elements in the composition. It's an odd combination. When you see it you'll understand what I'm talking about. You see these strong forms, Renaissance derived, essentially. If you want to be more specific it would be Michelangelo.

MR. POLCARI: Which one, Sistine?

MR. LEHMAN: The Sistine ceiling, yes. Not so much the Last Judgment, but the Sistine ceiling...his handling of form, his monumentality, and that sort of thing. It is not for example Piero della Francesca or Giotto, although I knew both of them just as well-

MR. POLCARI: Did Rivera like Giotto?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yes, definitely, so did Orozco. They actually started from Giotto, because of his simplicity. But in my case, it was not simplicity I was after, but turbulence and agitation- agitated forms and the serpentine line...contraposto in the figure.

MR. POLCARI: Which you used to express what?

MR. LEHMAN: Movement, exegesis, and (of course) agitation and turbulence. You can't express that with a central plane.

MR. POLCARI: Yes...absolutely, good point.

MR. LEHMAN: You have to have a...

MR. POLCARI: Twist and turning...

MR. LEHMAN: Rubens is another, a perfect example of the Baroque. But Rubens is concerned in the Baroque part of the treatment of form, and the constant serpentine and sinewy rhythms that perceive one out of the next. Incidentally, to go back to Jack Pollock, you find that always in Jack Pollock also...that serpentine, rhythmic and sinewy movement.

MR. POLCARI: He must have been aware of this kind of inner drama-

MR. LEHMAN: Don't forget that he did study Renaissance with Benton, and made many drawing copies from Michelangelo, from Tintoretto, from Benton.

MR. POLCARI: El Greco-

MR. LEHMAN: Not from the Pre-Raphaelite paintings, like Francesco, Uccello, or Giotto. But, from the High Renaissance. So when I was doing murals, the big mural, that was my model: the High Renaissance. And I included many things, but of course I had my own feeling about forms and so on. There's too much emphasis on derivation and on influence.

MR. POLCARI: Yes I know, I agree.

MR. LEHMAN: That's not the whole story ever.

MR. POLCARI: And in your murals you're trying to create the sense of drama-

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yes-

MR. POLCARI: In terms of composition and figure-

MR. LEHMAN: Let me explain another element. I was doing this in a prison for inmates.

MR. POLCARI: Rikers, yes.

MR. LEHMAN: Rikers Island. There was a dull boredom in prison. Routine is paramount; you do everything at the same time, in the same way, every single day that you're there, so that what you're doing is actually building up a complete sense of boredom to stultify the imagination and the will. You don't want inmates to constantly be agitated in their daily life. On the other hand, you want some kind of experience that will get the juices flowing to keep them alive. At least that was my idea: to make a very comprehensive and rhythmic composition that would include so many different elements to keep them interested, make them look at it, and follow it through, and empathize. Empathize with what was in the mural. That's one reason I had to have the rhythmical forms constantly in motion, but as a fall to that I had solid structural elements which anchored the whole composition statically. It was a static structure around these rhythmic forms. That also was a Renaissance concept.

MR. POLCARI: Benton did a lot with that-

MR. LEHMAN: Benton did a lot of that. Benton came right out of Tintoretto and El Greco. Of course El Greco was a very big name to all of us, his forms and so on. I used to go with Pollock, all the time to the Hispanic Museum.

MR. POLCARI: The one on 175th?

MR. LEHMAN: Jack and I went up there just to see the El Greco. They had Goya there too and Velasquez, but it was El Greco we went to see. Of course the Goya etchings, they had a complete collection of Goya's etchings.

MR. POLCARI: And you both liked this kind of agitated-

MR. LEHMAN: No question about it. Pollock went out with me to see my mural.

MR. POLCARI: At Rikers?

MR. LEHMAN: At Rikers, on a couple of occasions, especially after I finished it. He was very enthusiastic about it, one section in particular: the last section that I completed. The odd part of it is, that the last section is most like Orozco. It will be at least, at first glance, appeared to be, but it isn't Orozco. That's the joke of it, because I based it on an actual photograph. I used photography a lot in doing my preparatory designs.

MR. POLCARI: How?

MR. LEHMAN: Well, this for example, shows a mine rescue, after a mine disaster, and you had a group of figures with masks all holding on to a hose, a lifeline that led into the minehead, called a

wellhead. They were going down into this to rescue trapped miners, and alongside them were seated women, the wives of the miners waiting for the results of their husbands to be rescued. I appropriated one photograph in particular, and I developed it into a very monumental painting.

MR. POLCARI: Where did you get the photograph?

MR. LEHMAN: In Life Magazine- from the public print. I poured through photographs constantly in the New York Public Library picture collection. That's where we did all our research- the picture collection in the New York Public Library on 42nd street ...all mural artists on the project. They had a tremendous picture collection there and we were always going to them for our details-

MR. POLCARI: Looking for the subjects that you're painting-

MR. LEHMAN: Getting accurate details, and also inspiration. Several other paintings that I used- I used another Life Magazine photograph for the women, completely different from the miners that I just mentioned to you. But, I combined them and it makes a very conditioned whole.... that I made a detail of the women I painted, a detail that was exhibited at the Whitney Museum, and that's one of the paintings that Leger liked so much. That detail, that I photographed from the Dust Bowl. That is what that was from: a woman and child, refugees from the dust bowl, and that would be 1934 or 35. The design I did was from 1936-37. So I used elements, anywhere I could get them, that was appropriate. What I couldn't find I invented.

MR. POLCARI: Did you ever use models?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, I used models. They had a model project, and I always had models come down and pose.

MR. POLCARI: Then you did sketches?

MR. LEHMAN: But mainly I did nudes. I had them come down and I had them pose nude. I had some very classic drawings. But to actually have them pose in the configuration that I had in the murals I couldn't do. I never did that. That was pure invention, but, The Driller, and you've probably seen at the museum. That actually was a photograph that I blew up.

MR. POLCARI: Enlarged-

MR. LEHMAN: Enlarged. I didn't use a machine to blow it up; I just enlarged it. I made a pretty creative reproduction of it. I have that photograph still, and that was taken from a New York Times newspaper print, which recalled-I don't know if you're old enough, they used to have rotogravure-

MR. POLCARI: Oh yes-

MR. LEHMAN: This was in a rotogravure section and I clipped it out. I didn't do it for the mural, but it was interesting. It came in exactly right because I used that photograph of the man with a leg bent over a drill no one's ever seen before since. I was always being questioned about that-'How come you've got a man with that leg draped over a drill?' 'Because that's the way it's done.' They did drill like that at the Grand Coolie Dam that this is a photo of showing a driller doing that. It became a very monumental image and an icon. A painting was sent all over the western world on exhibit. You familiar with that? When they sent out a group of paintings from the National Collection on tour?

MR. POLCARI: When?

MR. LEHMAN: 1978-9, 80-81, that period, for four or five years it was on tour. It was a catalog in German. It was sponsored by some German group, and was called, Die Andere America: The Other America. And what it meant was, they were showing the America that was not paved with gold-

MR. POLCARI: This is a down and out America?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, as shown in the art of the period. The federal art of the period; that's basically what it was about. That went on tour. It went to several cities in Germany and went to England, and to France, and then to Austria, for the duration of about four to five years. I had clippings from all of this in German and also English. I have two catalogs, one in German, the other is the English translation of the same catalog. In it, my painting was reproduced and featured on one page. To get back to that era and how it came about, I used a lot of different materials to finish the mural. They didn't look all abstracted from one another.

MR. POLCARI: This is quite busy for you, the war period. You were quite active. You had a lot to do, a lot of projects and commissions.

MR. LEHMAN: Besides, I also had exhibits at the Woodstock Art Gallery, war art exhibits. I painted special paintings for that.

MR. POLCARI: Funny, we've been trying to acquire the records of the Woodstock Art Association.

MR. LEHMAN: You're kidding, have you?

MR. POLCARI: They have things through the years, but they don't have the staff, and we don't have the staff...

MR. LEHMAN: I doubt that they would have had much of an organized archive.

MR. POLCARI: No, they have things...but I think it's mainly later- it's a mixed bag.

MR. LEHMAN: At what point did you come upon them?

MR. POLCARI: I was there about two years ago.

MR. LEHMAN: I mean...at what point in time in their exhibits?

MR. POLCARI: Everything they have.

MR. LEHMAN: To go back to the war years?

MR. POLCARI: Fifties anyway. not that I know of the war years...but they were active; there were a lot of artists in Woodstock.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yes.

MR. POLCARI: As always-

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, of course-

MR. POLCARI: You're living up there permanently?

MR. LEHMAN: I was, yes, six years. I had a studio house, and I lived there throughout the war years

until 1946; that's when I returned to New York.

MR. POLCARI: So you left New York in 1940?

MR. LEHMAN: No, in 1942. I told you, after that accident that happened...after Pearl Harbor, and after I had that experience (physical exam for the army which I was rejected), and that's when I went up, 1942. So '42-3-4-5-and-6 I spent in Woodstock.

MR. POLCARI: So, that was very different though. That was still a community of writers, and different from the agitation of the city.

MR. LEHMAN: That's true. The funny thing is, that so many up there (all not being inducted)...I knew some that were too. It was full of artists: Refregier- he spent the war years there.

MR. POLCARI: We collected his things a couple of years ago.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh?

MR. POLCARI: From his sister I think.

MR. LEHMAN: Was his wife still around?

MR. POLCARI: Well...

MR. LEHMAN: I mean... you didn't have an interview did you?

MR. POLCARI: No, no.

MR. LEHMAN: Well he was there, and of course Guston was there afterward. He spent a little time before that as well, but after the war, and he came back to New York and lived in Woodstock for awhile, and then permanently he had a studio there, and died there.

MR. POLCARI: So, there are exhibitions also of your art? You organized some in Woodstock, and then there's the Artists for Victory group that's organized...

MR. LEHMAN: That's right- Artists for Victory. Now that, Artists for Victory, is in the Metropolitan Museum in 1943; Pollock had that painting - *The Flame*, in that exhibit... I remember it.

MR. POLCARI: He did it much earlier though.

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, well I don't know how much earlier.

MR. POLCARI: '38. Well again, they were guessing.

MR. LEHMAN: I don't think he did it that early... I know...I see it's been given for '38, in fact, there's a grouping of years there.

MR. POLCARI: '38-'41.

MR. LEHMAN: '41 is more likely.

MR. POLCARI: Why do you think he exhibited that painting?

MR. LEHMAN: Because, he had nothing else, and nothing that would fit the subject. After all, it was the subject that it was involved: artists for victory, war victory- it's generalized themes. Pollock never could paint a concept as such. You never could give him a concept and he'd go paint that... even in the Siqueiros workshop, he could never handle anything like that. He just didn't think conceptually. He was emotional through and through. Isolated forms and configurations- yes, he would be able to handle...but combine them into a generalized philosophic concept? No. It was only after he got caught up in Jungian philosophy (or psychology) that themes became paramount- and they were myths, not themes...there's a difference between a myth and a theme.

MR. POLCARI: Did you ever talk about the Indian stuff with you?

MR. LEHMAN: Not to me, no... matter of fact, he talked very little. I think he was sort of... how shall I say?...Inhibited.

MR. POLCARI: Very shy and inhibited-

MR. LEHMAN: I don't mean in general, I mean in confronting me. He wouldn't talk too much theoretically. Oh, we'd talk a lot about inconsequential things; we'd play chess, checkers- we were always playing games up there, and talking-

MR. POLCARI: He went up there too? Pollock went to Woodstock?

MR. LEHMAN: Not to Woodstock- in his own house on 8th Street. Incidentally, he was a very good checker player.

MR. POLCARI: No one has ever noted that!

MR. LEHMAN: Well, it's worth noting, because it shows that he had a compartmentalized mind. He could grasp the elements of a game theory, and work through them. He had to, in order to be able to play this game so well... and he did play well; he had to anticipate moves. He was one of the best checkers players I ever had. I was pretty good at it myself. I was always playing checkers.

MR. POLCARI: I don't think anybody plays anymore now.

MR. LEHMAN: I know, but I thought it may just be a passing interest. I'm grasping everything I can think of about Pollock, because it might be of interest. For example, the books he read. I know one book in particular that he offered me. He asked me if I would read something about ideas. That book was by Adolf Hildebrand and called The Problem of Form. It was a book he got from Benton, and it dealt exactly with pictorial organization on the plane surface.

MR. POLCARI: 1890's, yes?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes. Well Hildebrand, of course, was a sculptor- not a painter, and the configuration that he's referring to is design on a plane of sculptural form in bas relief form. Which is essentially parametric design, because it doesn't poke holes in the surface here and there. So, this problem of form dealt with that, and he had the book, and [Pollock] had asked me if I cared to see it. I did, I followed it, and I was disgusted with him afterwards-

MR. POLCARI: There were a bunch of sculptural tableau to prepare his mural paintings, to do these things [or disclaimed it] -

MR. LEHMAN: These are not sculptures-

MR. POLCARI: Yeah-

MR. LEHMAN: Preparatory figures for his murals, in order to put them in certain lighting situations. It's basically lighting that he's after, and he made these little figures, and set them in a set... and that's how he flipped up his murals.

MR. POLCARI: Exactly, so this kind of thing about sculptural bas-relief, and now composition, would fit in. Pollock was interested in that-

MR. LEHMAN: Well, that's where Pollock got it from- Benton's little stage setting for his murals. And that was his introduction to Tintoretto- Tintoretto did that. Benton told me, 'Tintoretto made these models also.'

MR. POLCARI: You learn a lot from Benton-

MR. LEHMAN: Continually, continuity.

MR. POLCARI: Do you remember any other books at all?

MR. LEHMAN: That is one that stands out, because I wouldn't believe that he would be reading that book- but he did. I don't recall him mentioning anything else, although he read a lot of art magazines... but everybody did. I don't recall him actually discussing anything that he ever read. It just wasn't his nature to discuss at length, but he would welcome others. He would welcome my talking to him about things. Especially when Kadish and I got together at his place, we were always-

MR. POLCARI: Kadish read a little.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, he read a lot. He was well read, and he fancied himself quite an intellectual.

MR. POLCARI: He was close to Pollock.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yeah, Kadish was close to Pollock. He was one of the very first to meet Pollock in Los Angeles. You know about that right?

MR. POLCARI: Yes, yes.

MR. LEHMAN: But, that's how the three of them came together, and how I came into it in high school with Guston.

MR. POLCARI: Did you read Bultman, Fritz Bultman.

MR. LEHMAN: No, Fritz Bultchmann I never met.

MR. POLCARI: This is a good time to stop actually. We're about to leave the tape again: 1945 is a good time. Why don't we finish with today, and we'll pick up again.

End of Tape 5 Side A

Tape 5 Side B Blank

Tape 6 Side A

MR. LEHMAN: ...they also had two Goyas, but mainly the Goya prints: Goya etchings and drawings,

and mendicants and lithographs- they had a complete collection; we went to see those originally. After that, we would go to the Museum of the American Indian, which was in the same complex, and spent some time there, because Jack was very interested in American Indian motifs and their ceramics.

MR. POLCARI: You say motifs...you mean specifically? The not so general thing of the shape?...or form that the motif themselves-

MR. LEHMAN: Both. He wasn't looking for motifs. He was just interested in what he saw there.

MR. POLCARI: Did he have any favorites? Do you remember?

MR. LEHMAN: I can't recall precisely, but I'll tell you where he did have favorites in that same direction...we went to the Museum of Natural History also, many times, and he was very much taken by the totem poles, and the Northwest American Indian art, as well as the art of the Canadian Indians-

MR. POLCARI: The Inuit, now we call them Inuit, they used to be known as Eskimo-

MR. LEHMAN: Eskimo, the Inuit-

MR. POLCARI: Yeah, he seemed very much-

MR. LEHMAN: He was very much interested and absorbed in that. I don't say that he concentrated on it, it's just that he definitely was intrigued by it, and very much excited by it.

MR. POLCARI: What were the dates of your visits?

MR. LEHMAN: I couldn't give you specifics, but I'll give you in a broad spectrum of time: between 1937 and 1941.

MR. POLCARI: That's when-

MR. LEHMAN: Those years-

MR. POLCARI: Did you go to the Indian show together at all in MoMA?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yes. Also to the Brooklyn Museum. He and I went to the Brooklyn Museum several times together, for special shows and the regular permanent collection.

MR. POLCARI: Including the tribal art-

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, right, and they had (I believe) the arts of Oceania, which was apart from the African art.

MR. POLCARI: You saw that with him? You liked that too?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yes. There were always things to absorb and to like about all of these exhibits from both: Oceania, the Indians... and Africans as well.

MR. POLCARI: Would you used to talk back and forth about the...?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh sure-

MR. POLCARI: Did he ever mention shamanism?

MR. LEHMAN: No, no (I know what you're talking about)...I'm sure of it...no, he never mentioned that. That came along, I'm sure, after his induction (you might say) into the Jungian philosophy and psychology, where he was separately under the influence, and under the administration of Jungian elements.

MR. POLCARI: Elements- that's right, did he ever talk about Jung with you?

MR. LEHMAN: No, never.

MR. POLCARI: Do you know if he attended any meetings in New York? There was a psychology club, a Jungian group around-

MR. LEHMAN: I don't know anything about that, no- I don't remember that. He never mentioned that to me-

MR. POLCARI: What did you think of the Indian material?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, I was very ecstatic about-

MR. POLCARI: So, even among people who had political interests (such as yourself) there was a general great interest in Indian art-

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, absolutely. It was-

MR. POLCARI: So called "primitivism"-

MR. LEHMAN: Yes. Well, first it was the ideas- the psychological manifestations, that there's evidence in these things...and then it was an aesthetic. I do remember (and I suppose it's still there) on several of the sculptures (and these were American Indian, Eskimo American...) I'm not actually certain, but there were figures that showed in the knees of the figures, human faces. In other words, by looking at-

MR. POLCARI: Northwest Coast-

MR. LEHMAN: Are you familiar with that?

MR. POLCARI: Yes-

MR. LEHMAN: I noted that- pointed that out to Jack. It was high above eye level, that was a very intriguing thing; how they saw these faces, in truly abstract configurations, you might say. But, the interesting part is, that several years later (in *Life* magazine) there was an article where they showed photographs of people, nude from the hips down, and they showed these faces in the knees of people.

MR. POLCARI: These weren't Indian?

MR. LEHMAN: No, no, no, ordinary people a photographer caught. By the angle of the light hitting the legs of these people that he was photographing, the knees had a very strong demarcation of a face, both knees, but this was long after I had already seen this in the Indians.

MR. POLCARI: You talk about this with Jack at all?

MR. LEHMAN: No, no. I might have, but I don't remember. But after the museum, and I believe I was with Jack at the time (at the museum that is)...but after, in lieu of the Life Magazine episode, I'm not certain I discussed it with Jack...but, I certainly noted it, and I made the connection right away- because I remembered about the Indians.

MR. POLCARI: Did he, you, and others in the period think about the unconscious? And what the contents of the unconscious were? Were they Indian, so to speak? Tribal? What were the contents of the unconscious?

MR. LEHMAN: You mean as related to Indian art?

MR. POLCARI: Well, you said this work was a psychological manifestation of primitive art...how do you mean this?

MR. LEHMAN: It would be an obvious one. That is to say, transform a physiological or anatomical fact into another kind of anatomical fact, which, is from the knee to the face. This is more or less obvious, but then making a carving to show this, so that it actually transforms a knee into a face- that is what seems to me has some subjective characteristics, besides the anatomical one. Otherwise, why go to the trouble of memorializing it in a carving? And as we know primitive peoples constantly use elements of anatomy to suggest other subjective elements that occur to them. This is one of the things that gives me so much mystery and even majesty from African carvings, so that, from Africa to Indian, in America to Northwest Eskimo, you have this connection. Now, where is it coming from? It has to be in the psyche. I wouldn't say the primitive psyche, I would say the human psyche; because even in a developed character you will find this kind of manifestation in art like Hieronymus Bosch. You will find elements of transformation which it is. Bosch used them as a psychological and an ideational characteristic in his subject matter, especially in *The Garden of the Earthly Delights* and other things. On the other hand, take a man like Bruegel who was also an extremely fine painter, you will find that kind of subjectivism in Bruegel as much as you do in Bosch. It becomes an individual predilection, it seems to me, rather than a tribal one. And yet there was a connection between these tribes- Oceana especially also. In Ocean, the posts, you know, in front of the huts. Jack, I know, took all that in, but that combined with Picasso images; not the two faces only, but the savage images of Picasso's work in the 30s, and of course it goes all the way back to *Demiselles d'Avignon*, where obviously adapted- and that of course what impressed Jack first with the Picasso: the utilization of these primitive and savage configurations, and he put that in his own words, deliberately imitated it, and this is- I'm talking about the work you would call 'shamanistic.'

MR. POLCARI: So you saw the Picasso show?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh sure-

MR. POLCARI: The forty years of Picasso show-

MR. LEHMAN: The forty and the fifty. The 1939 show and then the one later.

MR. POLCARI: You went with Jack to the '39?

MR. LEHMAN: I believe I did, yes.

MR. POLCARI: So that was a big show. Did it impact on your work, too?

MR. LEHMAN: Up to that moment- that was the biggest. A Picasso retrospective, and of course needless to say we were all extremely impressed, and of course don't forget that was after the

Guernica mural. Guernica was a fantastically exciting experience. We went together to see that when it was at the, I can't remember, was it Bucholz? [name ?] Some gallery on 57th street showed it on loan, and we went to that. Of course he adopted a lot of that figuration and approach to his own work.

MR. POLCARI: Did the statements at the time by Rivera/Trotsky say it was okay for modern art to be modern, didn't have to be social realism-did that affect you in any way?

MR. LEHMAN: I didn't have to hear that at all. That was my own conviction right from the start. Of course, I was glad to see it said by one of the prime movers of the Russian Revolution.

MR. POLCARI: And the mural movement-

MR. LEHMAN: And the mural movement, but it wasn't necessary for me to read Trotsky for that. I always felt that way. In fact I was always deady opposed to social realism as such, although my murals had a lot of it, but my murals are not really social realist they were classic in the same sense as Michelangelo or any other classic mural paintings: Signorelli, and Piero della Francesca and so on. In other words I was concerned with form, with designs-

MR. POLCARI: Okay, but you seem to be conceding murals as a thing outside of art history as a style so, 'Oh, I want to do a church, I'll do gothic, I wasn't to do murals, I'll look at Michelangelo. So that's the style of mural painting.'

MR. LEHMAN: I wouldn't say it was as simple as that. There is influence there, and of course when you're a young artist you're definitely open to influence by the one's you admire. There's no question of that. When you're doing a large mural design for the first time, and a very ambitious one, you certainly are going to be open to influences by others who already have gone that route. It's not that simple because there's a very complex combination of forces at work at all times, both with social, political, and new aesthetic.

MR. POLCARI: And historical, things that transpire-

MR. LEHMAN: Well art historical always exists, because when you say aesthetic of course you're not sealing off all of the things that you admire. In a way it becomes a part of your own aesthetic basically, whether conscious or unconscious. But they're there. I had already had a long background in classics' approach to art. You saw my surrealist work, and that is not nearly surrealist, it's also classic in form, and it's derived essentially from the painting of the Renaissance, Piero della Francesca, from Uccello, from Signorelli, and of course from Michelangelo-that's the pastness; is in the contemporary, also derived from de Chirico and some Picasso.

MR. POLCARI: De Chirico, interesting. De Chirico combined with these figures. Interesting-

MR. LEHMAN: Well, de Chirico is essentially a classic artist aside from the subject matter: the way he handles his forms, the way he paints it. He draws some classic paintings. It only developed later, but he himself professed an adherence to classic and romantic painting and shared all of his modern paraphernalia deliberately willingly and willfully-

MR. POLCARI: There was a show of de Chirico in America, right now at Hunter-

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, I know. I've seen the announcement, but I didn't see the show, no. I thought I'd go up there though to see it on 68th Street. Yes, I'm curious about that. But the point is that there were this whole wealth of influences, and not so consciously either. They were all there, in the air

constantly. So, I had the old master background, and the modern I was very much into at the time.

MR. POLCARI: Well, it's wonderful shows, it's like a real textbook: cubism and the surrealists, the fantastic shows, and then Picasso- in the late thirties was great.

MR. LEHMAN: Well, that was 1936 I believe, 'Fantastic art and Surrealism and Dada.' Yeah, that one. So all of that was quintessentially a great interest to me. Max Ernst was one of my favorite painters, for example, while de Chirico actually was Philip Guston's. I bring in Philip Guston because he was very much into all this at the time himself, and of course, we were all in a group: Guston, I and Pollock.

MR. POLCARI: Did Guston ever go to the museums with you? The Indian museums?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh god, yes. Not the American Indians, but the Metropolitan, even the Brooklyn Museum and the Frick Collection. I didn't mention the Frick, but Jack and I went to the Frick Collection also many times.

MR. POLCARI: This would be a regular thing on weekends or Fridays?

MR. LEHMAN: To go to museums? Absolutely, even in the middle of the week. We were constantly attuned to what was going on both in the very modern collections, and also old masters.

MR. POLCARI: Now, the thirties of course, was the height of the mural movement. Now, as the forties moves on, do you feel any change in the air, do you feel say modernism of modern art coming on more strongly with American artists? Say by '45-pick it up where we left off-

MR. LEHMAN: Well, let me answer that. You always had the American Abstract Artists Association. That was a group that was apart from the general run of painters in the art project who were doing murals. Although you did have abstract painters doing murals like Gorky and Dalton Green and several others in that group. Now, we appreciated them-we were not sympathetic to their approach to painting. Of course we were gung-ho for real solid forms based on real life, but with a strong mix of formal elements. We were not illustrated in other words, we didn't see that theory at all. So, in 1942 the project came to a dead halt- it ended, finished. At that point all the artists then were thrown [inaudible], and also a lot of them were inducted into the services, and so on. But the murals, as you say, had just about run its course. The paintings in your own studio essentially, that is if you were going to do any. As for myself, at that very time, 1942, I moved to Woodstock from New York. I finished my big mural in 1940 actually, and I was doing some easel paintings since then, and also many designs for murals for the section of fine arts. I had one that I was given a commission for, a mural, and I had done the design for it in 1941 this was, around Thanksgiving. I was doing a decoration at Manhattan Center in New York for the artists union incidentally. They were having a big event there-I was doing this decoration, and I was up on a ladder, and someone holding the ladder let the ladder slip from under his foot, and down I came and I broke both arms.

MR. POLCARI: Yes, you mentioned it. You were laid out for a bit?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, I was taken to the hospital, and I was hospitalized for three weeks; and just when I left the hospital, and I went to my mother's home to recuperate, you had Pearl Harbor. I heard the announcement of Pearl Harbor on the radio at the time it happened in the middle of a New York Philharmonic concert, and my arms were in a sling, both of them. The point I'm making here is that I had this mural design already finished, I had a commission now for the mural, and I had broken my arms, so it had to stop while I was recuperating. It was in that time frame that I went to

Woodstock and I took a house there, and I moved to Woodstock in June of 1942 to do this mural. That's what I did to begin with: finish the mural. I was still now well aware of what was going on everywhere in the art world. Of course I continued to get the art magazines and so on, and I was doing easel paintings, and of course the focus now was on the war, so I did a lot of paintings relating to the war, and drawings.

MR. POLCARI: Tell us about those paintings-

MR. LEHMAN: In 1943, there was an exhibit sponsored by the Museum of Modern Art, Artists For Victory was one exhibit-

MR. POLCARI: This was at the Met-

MR. LEHMAN: Yes at the Met, and incidentally Jack had a painting in there called *The Flame*.

MR. POLCARI: He just stuck that in? It had nothing to do with anything, not with the war?

MR. LEHMAN: No. Except he happened to have that painting, and flames projected war, you know? So he threw that in. It was accepted. Now, the Museum of Modern Art had this big exhibit of war posters. It was an open exhibit for artists-

MR. POLCARI: A competition-

MR. LEHMAN: It was actually an open competition, that's what I meant. They weren't selected. I did two for it and they were both accepted, and they were both exhibited, because they were very good posters, good paintings. But, damn it, the museum never returned them to me, I never got them back. Nobody was ever returned their posters.

MR. POLCARI: What happened?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, what happened? To this day I don't know. They sent them on tour throughout the country. The exhibit was sent as a whole, as a unit on tour, and I don't know how long it was touring, but I never heard from the museum about returning the posters. I don't even know who arranged for.... In any case I never saw the posters again- luckily I do have photographs that were taken, not in color unfortunately, only black and whites that I took myself.

MR. POLCARI: So, a lot of artists entered this competition. Did Guston? Did Pollock? Did Sande McCoy?

MR. LEHMAN: No, nobody I knew who actually had posters in it. They may have sent posters, but they were not accepted. So, I had the two that I sent both accepted, and both were lost. It galls me to this day, but even so...

MR. POLCARI: Do you remember anybody else who was doing-

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yes, Sy Fogel-Seymour Fogel. He actually won a prize. They gave out several prizes. He won the prize in one of the poster categories. And I believe Anton Ruxebury [?] sent in a poster. There were several others, but the names escape me. I do remember distinctly Sy Fogel. He was a good friend of mine for one thing, and the show got a lot of publicity.

MR. POLCARI: You felt that the art world was gearing up toward the war. Like yourself, that was the subject for everybody? A major concern at least?

MR. LEHMAN: You had to have your head on a stand not to be aware of all of this and to participate. At the time, I was a participant. Throughout my early career I was a participant always, even in Los Angeles as you know now, and in the very early stages with Siqueiros, in 1933. During the war, I did not only these posters, but I also did large works, that were shown in the Woodstock Art Association war shows. In fact, I organized two of these war shows-

MR. POLCARI: War shows in Woodstock?

MR. LEHMAN: Woodstock artists. In addition, previously I had done a Guernica of my own: a lithograph, which I did the same time that Picasso did his Guernica. I called mine Guernica because it was based on the bombing of Guernica. I don't know if I showed you the print. It was a lithograph, and it was exhibited at the Alma Reed Gallery. She focused on Mexican art at the time, I remember. I had done that already on the Spanish war, and I also did another design for the Spanish war called No Pasarán. In other words, 'They shall not pass,' which is a famous [inaudible] by Delores-I can never pronounce the last name-Apacionale

MR. POLCARI: Apacionale. Yeah, she died a year or two ago.

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, I have the clipping...it really touched me. I did a whole design for a litho. I didn't do the litho, but I did it for this design, which I still have on No Pasarán. So, I've been very active in anti-war art, my own art.

MR. POLCARI: How did you feel about the United States? You were anti-war...but how did the United States fit into this?

MR. LEHMAN: I was in perfect agreement. First of all, we were attacked. We weren't the aggressor in this; we were attacked. You had to take a counter action and what else but a war action? It fit right in, of course, with the whole movement helping the allies in Europe fight the Nazis.

MR. POLCARI: So, you didn't have this sense that say... Bob Motherwell said that your initial reaction was that the war was "at least in Europe", was a quest for empire, and you didn't care?

MR. LEHMAN: Pardon me, but that's bullshit. I'm gonna say it in plain English- Motherwell is an idiot, I always thought he was. That too you can register. To say a thing like that, is a total misreading of history, of dictatorial ambitions, and the worst elements of human motives. To say that was really an imperialist conflict. He saw this back in World War I, because in World War I you could justifiably say that-

MR. POLCARI: Well, that was sort of the Partisan Review; some Partisan Review people reacted in that way. Their attitudes were from World War I, which is 'War is bad, and the imperialists are evil'-

MR. LEHMAN: What about Hitler?

MR. POLCARI: I know-

MR. LEHMAN: How important are Motherwell and company now? What about Hitler?

MR. POLCARI: I have a problem-

MR. LEHMAN: I know you know, but I'm talking about...didn't he think about that?

MR. POLCARI: He's reacting intellectually with the nonsense.

MR. LEHMAN: Well, he's not intellectual, because to be an intellectual means to think!

MR. POLCARI: I rest my case.

MR. LEHMAN: okay, I rest mine then. Let's not waste more paper.

MR. POLCARI: So, this is obviously everyone's concern, and it takes over as a subject. How's your style changed do you think? Do you change at all?

MR. LEHMAN: Not really, you don't radically alter a style just because of a subject matter. The subject matter happened to fit into my style, because I had been doing it all along for years before that. In fact, it was dumped right in my lap, so that I was exactly the kind of artist who was fit to do this sort of thing. I had so much experience in the past- I didn't have to adapt to anything. I did it. Don't forget, I was still doing other work: my commission work, that mural for the post office, and lots of war paintings. I mentioned these to you; they called them posters. They were paintings done by the Treasury Department, and they were for war bond drives. I did four of them, and I did them through the auspices of Associate American Artist Gallery run by Reeves Lowenthal. It was Reeves Lowenthal who got to me and commissioned me to do these after having seen photos of my mural that I had just finished. The way that happened was that Arnold Blanch, a well-known artist (I knew him quite well); he was in Woodstock all those years-

MR. POLCARI: And he also went in the service at some time or he became a service artist?

MR. LEHMAN: No, not Arnold. It wasn't Arnold. Arnold saw these photos when I got them back from the photographer, and he asked me immediately, 'Would you like to do some war paintings for the Treasury Department.' I said, 'Okay, let me know about it.' So he got Reeves Lowenthal to call me and ask me to come down and see him about this, which I did. I came to New York, and he immediately gave me a commission to do a poster, which I did up in Woodstock. I think I told you in the previous tape that the first one I did, I did in a very slick poster style, and I brought it to him, and he looked at it for a minute and walked away, came back and looked at it, and then he said to me, 'You know Harold? This is exactly the kind of poster we do not want.' I went back to Woodstock, and I gave him the kind he did want, which I would have wanted anyway. It was a real painting. He just loved it. He sent me a telegram immediately saying, 'Paratrooper is terrific.' They sent that all through the country with a biography in the back of the print. Then he asked me again to come down and do another one. This second one, I did adapting Michelangelo's David. You know the sling? The idea of course the correlation of the invasion being imminent, so we were going to attack the Germans in West Europe across the English Channel. I showed this large head of American soldier about to pull the pin on his grenade instead of a slingshot. The parallel was very clear. He loved that. In fact I did the sketch immediately in his office. It came to me and I did a sketch right on one of his own notepapers; and he liked it, and I went back to Woodstock and I did it. That also was distributed throughout the country; then I did a third one, and a fourth one. The third one of course, was the invasion of Tokyo. It was called Onto Tokyo. They liked that, too. Now, all these were paid for by Abbott Laboratories, I mentioned to you.

MR. POLCARI: They commissioned the posters, too, as well as paying for the artists to travel around in the war theater? They did posters here too?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes. I was on that poster project. They paid for all these posters, but they also took possession of them afterwards. I never knew what happened to them until you yourself told me that there was a museum in Washington that has a collection of the Abbott Laboratory posters and paintings, which I have yet to investigate, and I certainly intend to do it and see if they had mine

(that might clear that up). So, I did a lot of war art. In 1944, I did the biggest of all. I did a large one called, Man in a Foxhole. It was a war art exhibit also at the Woodstock Art Association which I organized, and this one was a twelve by eight foot three dimensional painting. I say three-dimensional because it was three panels, a triptych really, but the left and right sides of the triptych projected from the wall at a forty-five degree angle. Here is where it came into play the old experience with Siqueiros and the workshop, because what I did-I think I told you-I made my own projector and every element of that design I projected onto it from different angles so that when you move in front of the panel the forms move according to how they were projected, which is essentially the same principal as Siqueiros exercises that he did in Argentina. So there was a continuum there. It was put into play in these war paintings. That made quite a stir, and I did this other thing that I told about, also a war thing, but this is '43 a year before, and that was a collage, basically. What happened there, was that in Detroit you had these race riots, a tremendous situation with race riots going on through the country. So, I did a large collage showing the torso of a soldier who had his guts blown out, and you saw this from the rear, and instead of seeing the interior of the soldier, the whole interior was taken up by a collage of photos of the American scene of that period showing all the bad things that were going on in the country, while the soldiers are getting their guts blown out. For what? For this? And in the middle of all these photos I placed a shaving mirror, across the shaving mirror I had, had a legend saying, 'Who me?' Point being- that when you look at this whole concoction or collage, you saw this shaving mirror, but you saw nothing because standing away from it there are no forms visible, but then you come close you're face materializes in the mirror, and you answer that question: 'Who me?' 'Yes, you.' The viewer in other words. It was a very graphic design-and to make it even more graphic, it was framed by barbed wire.

MR. POLCARI: What I hear is the forms are becoming increasingly violent in regard to the race riots and the war. The thirties was no picnic, of course, in the history with the depression and everything and social conflict, but increasingly this violent conflict itself is a subject in the forties. And this aggression and this harshness and this torment-

MR. LEHMAN: Incidentally, I still have that collage. I have it complete; the only thing I haven't got is the barbed wire, which for safety sake I had to take away. I can always replace it, but it's there. That's another thing I had done. An extremely original piece- you might gather even from my description-

MR. POLCARI: So, you continued to do these aggressive images obviously allusions to the war and for war organizations throughout, through '45.

MR. LEHMAN: '45 right. But the one I just mentioned before, The Man in the Foxhole, that large one using the projector. The point of that was showing a soldier in two phases. This also included movement in a different way as an idea, I mean ideas that move. In one phase he was almost in a fetal position in a foxhole, in a dug out foxhole at rest. Suddenly this whole figure exploded in all directions when he was called into action. It was an in and an out movement, and it was extremely effective.

MR. POLCARI: You seemed to be wanting to make physical, more real the experience?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, absolutely.

MR. POLCARI: I mean art with a mirror, and this-

MR. LEHMAN: And with a movement, you see, a real movement, almost cinematic it was.

MR. POLCARI: It's like you wanted to make it concrete.

MR. LEHMAN: Right.

MR. POLCARI: Rather than an illusion, if you will-

MR. LEHMAN: It's not illustrational in other words-

MR. POLCARI: Not even a symbol, but something really real.

MR. LEHMAN: Expressively real, yes. Professionally that's gone, too. I left it in Woodstock at the door when I came back to New York, and the studio had belonged to someone else, and I rented it during the war years, and he'd come back. When I went back the following year to retrieve it, it wasn't there. I don't know what happened to it. There are so many instances of this kind where my work was lost or destroyed. I must have the world's record for this sort of thing.

MR. POLCARI: Actually, it's really quite striking. You've lost a lot of work; you've had a lot of bad luck.

MR. LEHMAN: From the small to the very biggest, the large mural-

MR. POLCARI: Rikers right-

MR. LEHMAN: It's simply incredible. So, all I have are records of these things.

MR. POLCARI: Once in the archives, they're permanent-

MR. LEHMAN: True, true, but not the work.

MR. POLCARI: Yeah, not the work Tape 6 Side B

MR. POLCARI: Side 2, first tape September 20, 1996, Stephen Polcari with Harold Lehman. We we're talking about the war warps. We've reached just about 1945. Did you go through a period of considering the effects of the war? How about the camps, and their impact?

MR. LEHMAN: How about the what?

MR. POLCARI: The death camps-

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yes, I did many drawings about that. That's when they were first revealed, 1945. I immediately did a lot of drawings, wash drawings- very effective blackened drawings of these. I didn't do oil paintings, murals, didn't amend itself I think to that. Graphic work, yes. I did a lot of it. I still have those drawings. The interesting part is fast forward to the war in Bosnia, and what you had was these skeletal images, behind barbed wire. They were reproduced all over the world, these photographs. Time Magazine had a painting on its cover...oh wait, Time Magazine did have a painting on its cover, and this had to do with the wall, the Berlin Wall. I'm sort of telescoping two events, so I'll separate them. The first is the wall where the Russians were shooting people who were trying to escape over the wall, and they had a cover on Time Magazine showing a figure trying to get over the wall, just beyond mind you, and barbed wire, and the Russians had shot this figure obviously, but there was blood streaming down the arm. This was an exact reproduction of my poster that I had done for the Museum of Modern Art several years before-

MR. POLCARI: Oh you mentioned this, yeah-

MR. LEHMAN: Immediately, I wrote to Time Magazine, including a photo of my own work showing that similarity. They wrote back, but they never printed it in the magazine. But, they wrote back acknowledging receipt, and also how interesting it all was and so on. There was a coincidence. I anticipated this thing. Then the second time around was the figures in the Bosnian slave camps, or "prisoner of war camps", where you had the emaciated figures amalgam against the barbed wire. Again, an exact reproduction of some of the wash drawings I did of the emaciated figures in the Nazi-

MR. POLCARI: Nazi camps. When did you do these? '45, '46?

MR. LEHMAN: At the time of the happening-

MR. POLCARI: Immediately after?

MR. LEHMAN: Immediately, yes. The drawings were done 1945. As you know the poster was done in 1943; the poster with the arms showing a Nazi shooting an attempted escapee. So there was '43, and there was '45, and then way forward to '90 something.

MR. POLCARI: How about in the immediate years, like '46-'47. Did you just then stop your war work?

MR. LEHMAN: '46-'47 I was already back in New York, yes, and there was no point in continuing war work-the war was over.

MR. POLCARI: You didn't do any summing up work?

MR. LEHMAN: Well, how do you mean summing up?

MR. POLCARI: Well, you look at the thing in perspective now, its history, what has this cost-

MR. LEHMAN: You're talking now about a moment of reflection. In my case there was no reflection needed, because I did what I did at the time it happened. That was my thought about it at the time. I don't see how I could reflect on it. No, I did no "summing up", as you might say... no.

MR. POLCARI: So, now you're back in New York- the war is over, artists have come back...there's a lot of stuff going on. You have the Peggy Guggenheim gallery-

MR. LEHMAN: Right-

MR. POLCARI: And things like that, and how did things look in New York at that time, '45, '46, '47-

MR. LEHMAN: Well don't forget, at that time the vanguard of Europe had been in New York all during the war years, and I was very much aware of that (and I saw a good many), but I never met any of them actually personally, because I was in Woodstock all the time. But I did come and see the work, and I saw Peggy Guggenheim when she first opened the gallery, I believe it was 1943, I was in the first show, and I was very interested in the way Frederick Kiesler had designed the gallery. I thought it was very inappropriate; I didn't like the way he designed it. It was very much against art. In any case, there it was, and it was the most advanced design for a gallery in New York, and I went there frequently, and I went there with Jack too incidentally because it was essentially surrealist work.

MR. POLCARI: Before he exhibited?

MR. LEHMAN: Well, it was leading up to the group shows that Peggy Guggenheim had of American artists. It was '43, so the war was still going on, and the man who ran the shows (the curator of the gallery), was Howard Putzel, who I knew in California because when I did surrealist work, he was also in charge of a gallery up in San Francisco who showed my work. So, he knew me, and he asked me to bring some stuff to Peggy Guggenheim, which I never did. I just didn't have anything that was appropriate: surrealist and abstract.

MR. POLCARI: But, you could see the emerging atmosphere- or felt it anyway. Putzel died young, died in '45.

MR. LEHMAN: That's right, he did.

MR. POLCARI: That was a loss. How did you see the future of art at that moment?

MR. LEHMAN: Well, that's an interesting question, because I'd been thinking a lot about it in Woodstock. I wasn't just doing these war works, I was always thinking on my own about the future of art, about the current art scene, and what could come out of it. When I say current, I of course mean, the vanguard art scene, not the social realist or the mural art scene. I figured that was gone.

MR. POLCARI: Why did you figure that?

MR. LEHMAN: Because, there were no longer the social applications or social opportunities for mural art-

MR. POLCARI: You mean no one wanted walls or the whole atmosphere-

MR. LEHMAN: Actually, they should have. For example celebratory murals for the end of the war, like you mentioned summing up-that seems to me would have been a good time and a good subject, but I didn't think any of that was happening. I look back and I try to remember, but I don't recall any of that having been done-

MR. POLCARI: It's like, the war just became the next item on the next thing, and blotted out all of the thirties-

MR. LEHMAN: Right, and meanwhile the Abstract Expressionists had begun with the exhibit at Peggy Guggenheim, in a very tentative way. They weren't an organized group; they were all on their own, but they were all determined to no longer do what they were doing before. All of them had been on the Project, just about all of them, on the project doing illustration or mural work. Those that were doing easel works were doing realistic easel works. Maybe one or two who had been trying different ways of painting, other than realism, and not quite abstract. So, the general mood was surrealist mood not abstract mood, which eventually evolved into an abstract mood because the subject matter of surrealism was not very sympathetic. I'm talking about the unconscious, the subconscious, and Daliesque type of approach to surrealism. What was left, was an entirely different kind of approach, more or less in the style of Matta, who was surrealist, but he was also abstract. So, what would you call him? Fantasist, actually.

MR. POLCARI: Did that seem more fertile than Dali-

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yes, Dali was dead as far as I was concerned. I was very much into his work in the thirties, but he pretty soon shot his bulb as far as I was concerned. I had no interest in him at all. De Chirico, on the other hand, I was very curious, because having done one of my murals, I wanted to know what he had been doing, and I knew that he was in Italy all the time, and was accused of

being a fascist, actually. He was elected to the Fascist senate, and that of course put a big damper on him, as far as I was concerned (and everybody else was concerned). And then the work itself was no longer the characteristic de Chirico work. It was pastiche then (the romanticism out of the nineteenth century), with Courbet and Delacroix- without a trace of the early surrealism and metaphysical manifestation. So, that put the hiatus on de Chirico.

MR. POLCARI: So, that finished him off as someone to look up to-

MR. LEHMAN: Right-

MR. POLCARI: We're talking about the mid forties now.

MR. LEHMAN: Right, so what was left: Picasso and Matisse. I had never mentioned that to you-

MR. POLCARI: No, no.

MR. LEHMAN: It was during those years Matisse, to me, became more and more important.

MR. POLCARI: Why?

MR. LEHMAN: Because, I could see in it (in his paintings) as a really important development in twentieth century paintings, not so much Picasso- Picasso on the side of form, of primitivism, and of the utilization of fantasy...all the things that go with Picasso's subject. Whereas Matisse had no subject, he was just a painter, and it was painting-

MR. POLCARI: Traditional subject-

MR. LEHMAN: Well, yes. He did nudes (of course), interiors, still lifes...he did traditional subject matter, but what a difference. Of course, his approach to painting was right out of Cézanne, basically. People didn't seem to understand that so much, so they called him a decorator. He was not a decorator, never a decorator, although it had that look when you looked at it. If you studied it, he was a first class organizer and a designer in the Cézanne tradition, and Gauguin of course. So that period of art then became a very great concern to me and a very great interest to me. I used to come to the Museum of Modern art and other galleries and see Matisse firsthand. This facture, as you say, the use of paint seemed to me the most advanced approach to twentieth century art, twentieth century painting. And of course his verticality of design and his color. And of course, as you may know, Picasso himself admired Matisse tremendously, even bought his paintings very early on, and always was in great admiration of Matisse right until the day he died. As I say, I then became interested, absorbed in Matisse-

MR. POLCARI: In the latter part of the forties-

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, even while I was still in Woodstock. I was still doing the war paintings. And Cézanne, incidentally- I never paid too much attention to Cézanne, although of course I was very much aware of him. I mean in depth Cézanne and Matisse-

MR. POLCARI: But these are very different from all the struggles of the Thirties and Forties-

MR. LEHMAN: Absolutely-

MR. POLCARI: It's like, it is emotionally okay to be concerned with art and pleasure or art and joy-

MR. LEHMAN: You mean after the war now?

MR. POLCARI: After the war, and not this endless social-

MR. LEHMAN: Essential elements of art, and the pure pleasure of art-

MR. POLCARI: Must have been restorative.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yes, definitely, but not only that it was almost being reborn. After having been plunged into the atmosphere of the Renaissance and of the solid two-dimensional form design and drawing and so on. I had already begun in Woodstock to do some of these approaches on my own without having gone to see Matisse, or Gauguin, or Cézanne. I could see every reproduction of course, but not that I had seen the original. Anyway, afterwards that's what I really became absorbed in, after the war I'm talking about.

MR. POLCARI: And you pursued that for a number of years into the Fifties?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, I would say. I had some painting still that had a strong Matisse sense. But the Matisse I'm talking about is not the Matisse of the Thirties, of the Forties, but the Matisse of the early teens. I don't mean the Fauve period, I mean after the Fauve period, when he did the solid figures and portraits-

MR. POLCARI: The Dance, things like that?

MR. LEHMAN: That's still a little early on. A little later, I'm talking about between 1913 and 1920. That period, which were very severe (almost cubist), but still very focused on the picture plane and on rhythm and structure. The fact that, he had very severe color in those years. Not bright color, but very severe. Which appealed to me, because I, myself, had that type of color in those days. Then I broke out of it a little later on.

MR. POLCARI: The cold war seemed to have no effect then?

MR. LEHMAN: In what way?

MR. POLCARI: I mean, it was an ex political issue. Did you start doing things that relate to that?

MR. LEHMAN: To the cold war?

MR. POLCARI: Yeah.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, you mean there was a political issue again coming along.

MR. POLCARI: Depression, the war

MR. LEHMAN: No, no, no.

MR. POLCARI: Was it just more remote as an issue?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, I think so, because it was a cold war and not a hot war. The only manifestation of this thing was basically the Berlin Wall, which started it really. Churchill: 1946, making that speech in Fulton Missouri about the Iron Curtain and the wall coming down, symbolic wall. I was very much aware of that, but it didn't call for any graphic paintings or drawings it seemed to me.

MR. POLCARI: Which are also somewhat burnt out by war-

MR. LEHMAN: That may be, but I had contempt for Stalin and the whole group around him. The whole Stalinist era and the whole Stalinist regime. Don't forget, I was very much there- when he had not the Soviet tanks. That disillusioned a hell of a lot of liberals. But then coming from Stalin I wasn't surprised. I mean he was a treacherous s.o.b., right from the beginning of his career.

MR. POLCARI: So, by late forties even the revolution seemed irrelevant, and not only that betrayed-

MR. LEHMAN: Betrayed. Absolutely. When was Trotsky killed?

MR. POLCARI: He was killed in '40...

MR. LEHMAN: During the war wasn't it? Early in the war- well, that put the clincher on it. It was Stalin who ordered it, and was Stalin's henchmen who hid it.

MR. POLCARI: Did you notice Siqueiros participating-

MR. LEHMAN: Of course, that's why I'm laughing. The first attempted assassination was conceived and tried and carried out almost by Siqueiros-it was a comic opera thing-Siqueiros and Luis Arenal who was his chief assistant. I knew about that, and that's what led to his interment in Mexico and his exile afterwards. Yes, I was well aware of that.

MR. POLCARI: Basically for you, the radical politics were over. You're in support of the United States at the moment.

MR. LEHMAN: Radical politics by that time to me was behind me. I didn't think it had any real function, any real purpose, or any real future. Although you still had all these parties and movements and so on. To me it was a forlorn gesture. It didn't amount to anything. And I was proved right. Over the years look what happened. I had nothing to do with any of that anymore.

MR. POLCARI: So, you went on with your painting, and Matisse, and who else interested you in the late forties, and fifties? Giacometti? Dubuffet?

MR. LEHMAN: Giacometti, oh yes, sure. Always, I very much liked Giacometti, but the new Giacometti, the very elongated thin figures derived from antiques, early Greek and Etruscan sculptures. Incidentally, you have to remember that I was a sculptor originally, and I never stopped doing sculpture. Not in Woodstock, because I didn't have the equipment in Woodstock, but when I went back to my studio, yes. I had his sculpture, and incidentally I did assembly sculpture in Woodstock- that I did in Woodstock. In any case, that did interest me. I'm trying to think back now what I started doing in the studio. Well, I started teaching for one thing-

MR. POLCARI: Where was that?

MR. LEHMAN: In my studio, I had private classes in my studio. Well, I did teach for a while at the YMHA on 92nd street. The 92nd street Y set up classes there, and I taught for a while there. When I withdrew from that to my own studio I was more or less in a funk at that time.

MR. POLCARI: Why? In what way?

MR. LEHMAN: Well, you might say not having any real source of inspiration except for what was around me. I did many portraits and things of that sort, but I was not interested in abstract

expressionism, in fact I was very much against it, opposed to it, having just come out of the classic school in modern art.

MR. POLCARI: So what did you do-you tell Jack his work was nonsense?

MR. LEHMAN: The funny thing is during the war, when Jack had his first show at Peggy Guggenheim, he asked me to come down from Woodstock and look it over before he brought it to the gallery. He wanted me to see everything he was going to show. And I did, I came down, and he brought the paintings out one after the other, many of which I had not seen before, and I looked them over one after the other, and I was very interested in what he had and what he was doing. Now, don't forget this was surrealist; he was not abstract. But when he brought out some of the things that he was going to show, it was so obvious the Picasso influences in these things. The Picasso surrealist style, and I cautioned him that he'd better get rid of the Picasso influences because that's the first thing the critics were going to jump on. But then he had the show, his paintings were in without having been altered, and sure enough the critics did jump on them about the influences. But I saw the show in his place and I was then now up to date on what he had been up to himself during the war years. I was very interested, but still not approving you might say.

MR. POLCARI: So, he brought them out, and what did he say about them, 'This is what I've been doing recently. Over here, what do you think?'

MR. LEHMAN: He didn't say much. He never talked much even to me. Where I was concerned he had a sort of a block. He was very much, I would say, impressed with my knowledge and my breadth of understanding of art of all periods and so on. I say this only to be objective, to really explain the situation of the period, and this was true because at one time when I went to the bar with him and tried to draw him out about subjects, he said, 'You and Phil Guston, you and Phil, and Rube, Rube Kadish, I know you don't have much for use for what I'm doing.' He had always that feeling that he was apart from us three. He had a sort of inferiority complex about it, and it carried over even in these war years whenever I'd speak to him, see him, he wouldn't talk very much. He wouldn't talk about his own work. He wouldn't try to explain it. You could see it. There it was, but the one who did the explaining was Lee Krasner, she was at that moment when I was looking at these paintings, and she would blab on.

MR. POLCARI: Did you think she was accurate in her descriptions? She inflated-

MR. LEHMAN: I can't recall the conversations, but these were essentially explanations in face of Jack's. She was explaining Jack, not her own interpretations. Basically she was the mouthpiece for Jack.

MR. POLCARI: Which Jack allowed-

MR. LEHMAN: Oh sure. He smiled now and then, or he would nod his head, shake his head, and grunt now and then, something like that. It was all on a very pleasant level. He and I got along very well. We went all the way back to high school, and all these different experiments with Siqueiros' shop. We were very close friends. So I was very glad for him to have his show, and I was up at the opening. And I watched his work develop more and more into an abstract mode rather than surrealist. I was very interested in seeing what he was doing. But at the same time, don't forget, I was more and more convinced with my own attitudes for painting, and it didn't include abstract expressionism approach at all because the use of it would completely undermine everything I had been doing, and had been thinking about in art. In addition, it was such a new foreign approach for me, but I just wouldn't do it. I didn't do it. Although I made certain experiments. Let me be clear

about that. I made some experiments. I have a few still dating back then. But it wasn't satisfactory because also it sort of submerged me in the crowd of abstract expressionists. I wasn't interested in that. I have some things that I wrote about that, at the time.

MR. POLCARI: I have one question: did you go to the Oceana show at MOMA in '46?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, oh yes.

MR. POLCARI: With Jack?

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, we saw that show.

MR. POLCARI: He probably liked it.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh sure. I did too. I always liked those examples of primitive art. Why they call it primitive, I don't know.

MR. POLCARI: You can't call it primitive now.

MR. LEHMAN: No, that's anthropological and ethnographic essentially.

MR. POLCARI: It's a dead term now, and you can't use it.

MR. LEHMAN: I bet you can't-

MR. POLCARI: So he enjoyed that show too. He took a liking to that and the Indian show-

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yes, yes- Oceania in particular. You can see a lot of elements of Oceana in his work of that period (of that period in the '40's), obviously before he became totally abstract. His figurations and his shamanistic style of painting, like the painting he called The Bird, a well known painting.

MR. POLCARI: Did Guston go to any of this? What was Guston-

MR. LEHMAN: What's funny is that I don't see him in the picture; Guston wasn't there- forgot to mention it. He wasn't in New York, he was out in the middle west. He left earlier in 1940-41, I believe. He wasn't around New York at all in any of those years when all ferment was starting. He was still doing his very poetic and soft paintings, Corot and Picasso combinations, and not surrealist, but sentimentalist-

MR. POLCARI: That's very different from the mural things to do.

MR. LEHMAN: Very different.

MR. POLCARI: Not too many of these things in the early forties have been seen, it's like they've been suppressed.

MR. LEHMAN: Say that again.

MR. POLCARI: Many of these things from the early forties, this Corot-like style, hasn't been seen-

MR. LEHMAN: Darn right. There's a good reason for it- because they're bad paintings-

MR. POLCARI: They're bad paintings, but did he disappear with them?

MR. LEHMAN: He didn't disappear. He deliberately, consciously, made an effort to suppress them.

MR. POLCARI: They didn't seem very successful, because no one really discusses his work very much. They do the murals, then they jump to the late forties-

MR. LEHMAN: Right. I told you this on the other tape. This is right in line with our time period, after the war (when everybody came back) there was a very big gathering at Pollock's place- Jack Pollock, before he moved to East Hampton. All of us gathered together, all his old friends. I'll give you a whole roster of names from Los Angeles and New York: myself, Guston, and Kadish, and there was Elma Brown, who was John Brown's sister, and Roy Pollock (who she was married to) and then here in New York there were several others: James Brooks was there, and then who else... That was most of us. In any case, we had this gathering, and there we were all assembled in the big room, and his mother was in her side, in the kitchen somewhere. The hubbub of the conversation is going, the beer is flowing, and the conversation is flowing... then suddenly Jack popped up, he turned to Phil and said, 'I won't stand for the kind of painting you've been doing.' And a sudden hush. Phil was sitting right next to me, and I looked at him and he was dumbstruck, not a word out of him, and he didn't respond or react. I did, I said to him, 'Don't let him say that to you Phil! Tell him what you think of his work!' Phil was quiet. But after that, when we left (we left quietly), and right after that he started doing abstraction, total abstraction, and I remember the first exhibit he had of his first abstract tentative markings, I wouldn't call them paintings- markings; at the gallery de Kooning also used-

MR. POLCARI: Charles Egan?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, the Egan Gallery. That's where he had his first show. I was up there, and Phil was there, and there we are sitting in a bench in the middle of the gallery, and not a soul in the gallery beside himself or me. After saying hello and so on, he turns to me and says, 'Harold, an artist should never get married.' Where the hell did that come from? But it showed me that Musa didn't approve this sudden change and transformation, because suddenly he was no longer the white haired boy for American art. He was just another abstract expressionist who wasn't making it.

MR. POLCARI: So he was getting pressure at home-

MR. LEHMAN: I'm sure because he was so successful, and made money, and so on.

MR. POLCARI: With what? The Corot-like things?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, they sold. They were very popular. Museums bought the murals, they were typical museum kind of things. They were so poorly done, such bad drawings... I don't want to start this with you, but when I had an interview with Dore Ashton, who was writing a book on Guston. She came to me for help, and to get some input, and she cut it out, some of these things, and I thought that these things are terrible paintings. Especially, it was after he had won the Carnegie with that painting called Sentimental Moments... that was the name of it; it was the most atrocious painting, I believe, that he had ever done. I said so, and she admitted that he doesn't like it himself anymore, she said to me.

MR. POLCARI: Well, this is a good suppressed episode, because she didn't write about that stuff much in her book.

MR. LEHMAN: Yes. I'll tell you how she wrote it: she made one phrase that said the paintings were

somewhat sentimental.

MR. POLCARI: Yeah, that's right.

MR. LEHMAN: That was the phrase: 'It was somewhat sentimental.' So they [inaudible] over, all the writers, and this book of Robert Storr-

MR. POLCARI: In the late forties, this change in Guston is very sudden, and what do you ascribe it to? The changing atmosphere? Pollock? De Kooning?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh absolutely. He felt "out of it"- he felt that the art world was leaving him behind. He wanted to get on board. This is what, no doubt, provoked this change... and of course, he had been mulling it over in his own mind for some time. He's an intelligent guy, and he also was a very sensitive person.

MR. POLCARI: He drank too though-

MR. LEHMAN: Not when I knew him. He never drank. I heard later about his drinking from McGee, David McGee. He told me about his drinking after he had this massive heart attack, not the one that killed him, but his first heart attack. That was...well, people change, and the way he changed was astonishing to me. He never, never drank!

MR. POLCARI: It's funny you're saying that he did these abstractions, and it's really like a whirlpool change, and then years later he made another whirlpool change, back to-

MR. LEHMAN: To me, that is so obvious and clear as to what happened in that case. He knew that he was not an abstract expressionist at heart. He got on the band wagon, it did him good and made him famous. But he essentially was a realist painter, and also, he had that streak of comic strip in him, which he did very early. When I first knew him in high school, he was doing comics. Now, he never lost his love and his interest for the American comic strip, especially Mutt and Jeff, Inkabibble, and Crazy Cat; those were the big names for him. If you look at his first attempts after his abstract phase, you will see the elements of Mutt and Jeff in it, all through it, the heavy thick outlines. Ignorant writers ascribe a lot of it to Crazy Cat. It isn't so; it's Mutt and Jeff. The thin legs, thin forms that he came up with eventually, pure Mutt and Jeff. So he felt at home going back to his first love, but not overthrowing his subsequent development in painting, but to combine the two, and this is what gave him a uniqueness then at that time. He could get away with it. Why? Because, the whole trend now was away from abstract expressionism... into what? Pop art.

MR. POLCARI: Which is comic based, some of it.

MR. LEHMAN: Right- a lot of it. So, that he was like in line with the comic elements. But that quickly changed to a tragic element when his wife had a stroke, a mild stroke. That really altered his style, yet again bringing in the sense of the tragic into this new method of handling figurations. That's when he went to Goya, the late paintings of Goya, the black paintings of Goya, which are everywhere in his last works. Stoff himself mentions it. We're off the Jack Pollock phase here-

MR. POLCARI: That's okay. He always used a certain kind of palette. Do you know why?this pinkish palette, pretty distinctive.

MR. LEHMAN: Funny you should mention that, because pink was always one of his favorite colors, even when he was a schoolboy. I remember right after school when he did that well known painting called, The Conspiracy. I was there when he painted it. It was right there in his hand when he

painted it. I was giving suggestions-we'd give each other suggestions in our work-so I was doing this. He had a truncated column right in front of these figures. The column was absolutely pink. In the middle of the pink was a black oval to the hollow of the column. I made a comment about that, and he felt that the pink goes so beautifully with the black, and that's why he put in: the pink.

MR. POLCARI: He just had a love for the pink. Did it have any symbolic value?

MR. LEHMAN: Not at all.

MR. POLCARI: ...as the subject?

MR. LEHMAN: Not at all, because how would a pink color be subjective in the painting of the Ku Klux Klan? It was illogical- but that didn't occur to him. It showed that he wasn't concerned so much with the subject as was the ordering of the elements of design and color, and of course in those days he was strictly a follower of the Renaissance and particularly Piero della Francesca and Uccello.

MR. POLCARI: I think we can end here on this tape-

MR. LEHMAN: Are you almost through?

End of Tape 6 Side B

Start Tape 7 Side A

MR. POLCARI: September 20, 1996, this is the second tape part one.

MR. LEHMAN: You mention Rosenberg. Of course, my feelings to Rosenberg and Clement Greenberg- I had feelings about both of them. Of course, they were both chief champions with sense, common sense, of abstract expressionism.

MR. POLCARI: You think their arguments were fallacious?

MR. LEHMAN: I think they were fallacious; I think they were shallow, superficial, and betray a real lack of profound understanding of painting. In particular, Clement Greenberg who made such a big stir. I followed him since the Partisan Review days. I had his book Art and Culture and so on. It's so full of shallow nonsense and pure aggressive assertion. This is all he is; he's an aggressive assessor. He marshals no arguments for his theories, but they remain aggressive theory, and it bulldozes a whole generation of artists and writers as well, and teachers.

MR. POLCARI: I think it's because of his confidence.

MR. LEHMAN: Self-confidence.

MR. POLCARI: That's right, in that he was talking about form in a way that they could relate to, as though it was a technical thing.

MR. LEHMAN: First of all, let me tell you about Greenberg's understanding of form... he continually harped on cubism. Cubism was to him the form of the twentieth century, and everything subsequent to that was either a follow-up on cubism or it was nothing. And yet nowhere does he define cubism. Nowhere, and nobody else had either, and that's another point. What was cubism? Nobody can tell you. They can say that painting is cubist, or that painting is not, but they can't say what makes this one cubist, or even what makes Picasso's cubism cubism. The whole idea of

cubism is a fraud, because cubism is not cubism, it was simply another way of painting, and that's what Picasso himself said. Cubism is just another way of painting, and Matisse is the one who first mentioned the word cube when he saw the first show of Braque and Picasso, a joint exhibit. He said. 'Oh, look at the little cube.' ...it was picked up by Fénéon, the well-known French critic.

MR. POLCARI: Félix Fénéon.

MR. LEHMAN: Félix Fénéon picked it up and gave it to appellation: cubism. But nobody made a definition. Now you have Kahnweiler's book on cubism, a very serious book on cubism, which we also tried to explicate it. After all he got it right from the horse's mouth: Picasso and Braque. But nowhere does he say precisely what it is. And why is it called cubism? You don't really see cubes; what you see is a breaking up of shapes. There's a plane and space relationships, all which are then reconciled on a picture plane.

MR. POLCARI: Redon reconfigured-

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, but where are the cubes? I'm talking about Greenberg. He never actually defined cubism, but this also left out Matisse, and the whole school of art, school of Paris. He focused in a very narrow lens- Greenberg did. Then he says abstract expressionism comes out of cubism: he's an absolute nut. What about Kandinsky? There was no cubism in Kandinsky. It was expression- expressive emotion essentially. What about Kokoshka? There's expressionism again. What about Van Gogh? ...expressionism, which in turn led to Kokoshka and the German Expressionists. So far, you don't mention cubes or cubism, and yet all of that was bound in to the cubic approach. I use the word only because it's a common term now, but all of it was bound into abstract expressionism. They're not all alike. Look at de Kooning- where is de Kooning like Jackson Pollock? He isn't! Who was he like then? He's essentially surface, you know. And there's a lot of Matisse in de Kooning, the early Matisse, especially in his color, in his later color... and of course allotted over with Picasso, we know that as well. And then Gorky- Gorky, who was a belated follower of Picasso, as we know, when he painted a copy of a photograph of his mother and child, it was right out of Picasso's monumental period of the 1920s. ...and then later on, the Picasso period of the 1930s. I'm bringing in all these other abstract expressionists only to show the errors of Clement Greenberg in focusing on cubism as a be-all and end-all of abstract expressionism- which it was not... because it was abstract and also expressionist, you see. Where did the expressionist element come from? Not from cubism. Where does it come from? Especially in the matter of emotion and feeling, you don't use such terms when you talk about cubism.

MR. POLCARI: How about Harold Rosenberg?

MR. LEHMAN: Well Harold Rosenberg. He's bad too, but not as bad as Greenberg. His whole point was action painting. He invented the term and related it both to de Kooning and Pollock, obviously. He was more partisan of de Kooning, as you know, than he was of Pollock. But the action painting had to do with the action of the brush and of the bodily movement in handling paint on canvas and so on... that the canvas was an arena in which to act. Okay. Fine. But so far you have not mentioned cubism! That's where the expressionism comes in.

MR. POLCARI: Well, it's also the idea of creativity.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh sure.

MR. POLCARI: Which is after all what painting is, so it has a relationship, and then it has a development.

MR. LEHMAN: But Rosenberg... I liked his writing in the New Yorker. He had some common sense, and that was not provoked by a theory at all times, like Clement Greenberg's was-

MR. POLCARI: The theoretical quality of a Greenberg.

[skip in tape]

MR. LEHMAN: But Thomas Craven was to the American Theme School as Clement Greenberg is to the abstract expressionists. A quaint crank, who will soon be just as extinct, just as irrelevant (if he isn't already) so it is all fanatic, a brief flare-up and then silence. 'When you read a myopic dolt, so busy digging your private ascetic dugout, come to realize some essential truth. In art there are no single absolutes, but multiple pathways to excellence. Forty years ago I wrote 'Advice to the artist'. If your work can be given a name-ism, leave it- it's already dead. It is not the ism, but the theory that produces work of quality. It is the individual, the artist of talent and ability. Furthermore, artists are not cats going for a mole labeled abstract expressionist. No, they're individuals, with individual perfections, sensibilities, impulses, etc... No two of whom responds in exactly the same way to stimuli whether internal or external. All the more reason to avoid isms, both straight jackets of art, all lovely ready to be placed around the artist's neck by its voluntary keeper, the critic.'

MR. POLCARI: This is something you wrote in the Fifties?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes. I wrote it in the forties.

MR. POLCARI: In the forties? Ah. You're at this moment now in the Fifties. Abstract Expressionism is coming on- you don't like it- and if you water down and popularize ad nauseum... How do you feel, it must be extremely isolating?

MR. LEHMAN: I was isolated, it's true-

MR. POLCARI: And very depressing-

MR. LEHMAN: And depressed-

MR. POLCARI: How did you resolve that crisis for yourself?

MR. LEHMAN: It was very difficult. I told you what I did- I did paintings, but I always tried to be myself...but of course it was always my interest involved at all times. Here in 1948, there was A Life Round Table on Modern Art-

MR. POLCARI: Life Magazine-

MR. LEHMAN: Yes. I wrote a commentary on that-

MR. POLCARI: Ah, at that time-

MR. LEHMAN: In 1948, right after the Round Table. Are you interested?

MR. POLCARI: Oh, yeah.

MR. LEHMAN: I'll try to cut it short. 'A Life Round Table on Modern Art was good as far as it went. Unfortunately it did not go far enough. One representative modern painting could have done more to clear up the matter than your room full of critics, connoisseurs and collectors. Painters never think in terms of morals, ethics, or other philosophical concepts. They think in terms of paintings,

they [inaudible] themselves only so consideration, never concept. And therein lies the crust of the matter. What does it undertake to explain modern art to the layman? Compound confusion by injecting irrelevancy into what as a direct experience, a response. It is the methods utilized to achieve this response that the modern artist is concerned with. But of course, the only response he is really interested in is his own. He is his own worst enemy with the explainers not far behind. Another difficulty lies in the general nature of your discussion. Strictly speaking there is no modern art only modern artists. Better yet, there is only good art and bad art. This entails value judgments, and as your moderator pointed out, this is where your discussion came to a dead end. So it would seem your panel was wasted. You should have gathered a group of modern painters together, and photographed them at work from start to finish. This would have explained more about modern painting than all those experts' high-flown clap clap such as Meyer Shapiro's [inaudible], and then Picasso's *Girl Before a Mirror*. Unfortunately, your so-called enthusiasm neglected one of the main points in the problem of modern American artists: the eternal problem of all young artists is to escape the domination of those they admire. The only way to do this is to add to their achievements. In this past it was relatively simple. There existed a unifying thread, reality. This is to say, real forms, cables, [inaudible], paper, all objects, and ideas into which these were fitted like actors on a stage, still lives, *Venus and Psyche*, they were subjects. Cubism and abstraction pick apart the first. Surrealism insanity broke up the second. The young artist was left holding the pieces. He has not yet put them together again. To be specific, no progressive artists today can take concrete forms or ideas without in some ways recalling Picasso, Matisse, Rouault, Miro, Klee, etcetera. When he does and they don't, they had to be pretty trivial. The forward looking younger painter would rather accept the disintegration of form and subject to go on from there, but to him all representation is a field book-marked cynic. Even abstract representation, that and also Cubist and Surrealist representation: de Chirico, Dali, Miro, and Klee. It was at this point that painters like Pollock and Matta come upon us who are now driven to utilize the priming elements of painting themselves: texture and color, rhythm, lines, movement to achieve valid expression, one that is new yet acknowledging no debt. If we accept the fact that there are good and bad painters in all periods in all movements even the most advanced, the essential problem of the panel discussion becomes simple: what is the modern artist trying to do?' I think I'll leave it at that-

MR. POLCARI: Now, this is a writing that you did in '48.

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, 1948.

MR. POLCARI: The critical art world, which had basically probably been pretty bad in America before then, was now heating up, and you were getting all these people who were starting to pontificate about art, and that must have been extremely difficult because...it's still a bad business.

MR. LEHMAN: What did you think of the essay?

MR. POLCARI: Well, I think it's pretty strong on target.

MR. LEHMAN: It's only what I wrote that's strong, because I was very emotional about these things too. They meant a hell of a lot to me. I was not writing as a writer, I was writing as a painter, and painters have to feel very strong about what they're doing.

MR. POLCARI: Well, these things, when they come in the papers, expand on everything. You continued to work in the fifties, and you stayed in the city?

MR. LEHMAN: I was in New York all the time in Chelsea.

MR. POLCARI: In Chelsea-

MR. LEHMAN: On 23rd street-

MR. POLCARI: Your work is...how were you responding with things? You continued doing portraits-

MR. LEHMAN: Well, no wait that's another thing. That came along, I'm going to skip a little, in 1964 there was the New York World's Fair. Now in the fifties, to support myself, I started to do a work with a large exhibit in the Ferry Houses. In fact, I think I was probably the first serious artist who actually did commercial type of work, which is now all over the place, derived from Pop Art. So I was doing work in the fifties for these houses, so that prevented me from doing creative work of my own. And then along came the World's Fair, and I was in charge of the Coca Cola Pavilion at the world's fair, all the art in it, because they had a lot of it. I did a lot of large sculptures for it, styrofoam sculptures. I did that.

MR. POLCARI: They were like? Describe them:

MR. LEHMAN: This pavilion [inaudible]. The public walked into a ramp, and you find yourself in a different area of the world. First you walk into Hong Kong. From there you walk to the Taj Mahal, from there you walk into the Angkor Wok. The Angkor Wok, as you know, is a collection of enormous huge sculptures and temples in Cambodia, and I did a sort of reproduction of a central temple, full size, very big, all carved. And there were several others. Oh yes, there was South America, Sugarloaf Mountain, the view from the real Sugarloaf Mountain. So there were a lot of these things, but there was a lot of [inaudible] art among them. That was '64 and '65, it was a two year exhibit at the World's Fair-

MR. POLCARI: Yes, I remember. I came every year-

MR. LEHMAN: Well did you get to the Coca Cola Pavilion?

MR. POLCARI: I'm sure I did-

MR. LEHMAN: It was right across from the IBM building. The IBM Building was the first instance where you had the cork and steel, ruptured steel. That later became the [inaudible] focus, like Stella. In any case, that's what I did in that period in addition to doing some paintings, of course, and a lot of drawings.

MR. POLCARI: But then at this time, a sensibility of Pop Art takes over-

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, that's true-

MR. POLCARI: Which dominates and actually repudiates much of the classical painting that had been the basis for even most modern paintings that even had-

MR. LEHMAN: Absolutely-

MR. POLCARI: So talk about wiping out-

MR. LEHMAN: It was a sort of hiatus at that time, because I was no pop artist. I was not intending to be, although, I had done a lot of similar work in the exhibits- I did dioramas for example. They haven't yet caught up to the dioramas. There's been one painter who did a little of that; a woman painted a landscape with a little huts and benches three dimensional in front of the landscape...I can't

remember her name. In any case, in the fine arts I really was not very active, but another thing came along that I didn't mention. I got married.

MR. POLCARI: Well, that helps.

MR. LEHMAN: Well, it did put a burden on me! I had to support a family. I got married, I moved out of my Chelsea studio to New Jersey, a house in New Jersey.

MR. POLCARI: You had a family?

MR. LEHMAN: Well, of course my wife and within a year I had my first child born 1956, exactly 40 years ago. So that kept me very busy working.

MR. POLCARI: So, you had to be very serious about having a steady stream of support.

MR. LEHMAN: Well, I had to yes, that's right.

MR. POLCARI: And then... so you continued working in this mode-

MR. LEHMAN: Well, eventually I went into phases of it, scenic art. I did scenic design and painting, and I worked with CBS. For ten years I was at CBS, in charge of a show on CBS. Then the thing I did because that gave me some financial security. As a matter of fact, the first writer who came to me for help came to me at CBS, Lawrence Halbert, about the Mexican muralists, that was 1973 or 4. Then there was Dore Ashton in 1978 I believe, and Francis O'Connor, before 1976. They all came in a steady stream, a lot of them. One told the other, and either it was Philip Guston, or it was Jackson Pollock, or it was Siqueiros. So they all funneled through me.

MR. POLCARI: You were there. But then the art world's changed so completely. Abstraction, you mentioned sculpture, and such-

MR. LEHMAN: My first experience, I was still with CBS, I had taken the subway downtown on a lunch break once, and I got out at Canal Street. When I got out I saw this big bronze wall in an empty vacant lot. I think, 'What the hell is that?' I paid no more attention to it, I just noted it was there and that was the end of it. Only later did I find that it was supposedly a sculpture, one name: Richard Serra. Then along came the Tilted Arc. I'm skipping a lot here, is that alright with you?

MR. POLCARI: Go ahead.

MR. LEHMAN: Along came Tilted Arc. Now this was 1985, a lot of things happened between, I'll let you know about that, but now that we're on Serra. Along came Tilted Arc. Meanwhile, I had followed what he was up to. I saw examples of what he was doing, and I despised it as completely counter to the idea of sculpture at all. There was nothing but a blank structure, more in line with architecture than it was with sculpture. In any case, I didn't care for his stuff, and then I hear about this Tilted Arc, and then saw photographs of it, and then about the hullabaloo it was causing, and after that that it was now going to be the subject of a discussion, an open discussion, by members of the art world, and many others as to what's to be done about it, but people wanted to remove it from its location. I told the committee who was in charge of this from the GSA. I called the headquarters of the GSA federal courthouse building, and I offered to be on the panel. I wanted to be part of this discussion group. So they said 'okay, come on down, are you going to be speaking as a jurist.' I said, 'No I'm going to talk as an artist.' They were hesitant about that because they had enough artists who were for it already, I said 'don't worry about it, just put me on your discussion group.' And they did. Now I wrote this essay. You were limited to four minutes, everyone was limited for four minutes.

So I wrote this talk, to last about that period. Meanwhile, I had gotten some further information about Serra's work, in Art and America no less. It was on the cover of Art and America this previous year in 1984, in which they talked about a piece he had done in Paris, a piece that had been removed from its original site because it just didn't fit. For one reason or another, it had to be removed. When it was removed it was put down in another area, and lo and behold it was considered to have gained by the move, even by Serra himself. So I have this article. Of course I saved my magazine, so I went back and reread it, and I took it along with me, and I quoted from it, matter of fact. When it was my turn I got up and I gave this talk. Well, I had it written, I didn't bring it along with me-it's just going to be another second and I'll read it to you because it's very interesting-I mentioned first that I was mural painter who having done one of the largest murals in American in 1940 lived to see it destroyed twenty years later-

MR. POLCARI: By this warden-

MR. LEHMAN: Secretly, wantonly, and without a public hearing. Yet, I now say remove this wall! And that created consternation. So I went on from there to give my reasons, which I also brought out this article. The point is that Serra had claimed over and over that to remove the wall was to destroy it, and the reason I brought this down was to show that it would not destroy it. It was already done before, and it was not destroyed, it was enhanced.

MR. POLCARI: It just needed a new location.

MR. LEHMAN: But the point is that they were dumbstruck. They couldn't answer me; they couldn't believe an artist would take such a stand: it was the art world against them - that's what it was. But I never consider myself a devout follower of anything, I'm an individual person, always an individual, and I always thought to myself... and this didn't belong there, regardless of who I was or what I was, an artist or not. So, I made the point that it was possible to remove this. Serra jumps out of his seat and he lunges for me and says, 'You want to destroy my work!' I said, 'I don't want to destroy it, I just want to move it!'

MR. POLCARI: [laughs] I remember it all.

MR. LEHMAN: All those so called big shots there came after me afterwards during the break and said, 'Why did you want to do that, blah blah blah.' I said, 'Because I don't like it, and it doesn't belong there.' How the hell can you be objective about these things and not subjective, and always stick up for an artist just because he's an artist, but the point is you make art ridiculous in the face of the general public when you do this. Can't you ever be objective about anything? And intelligent? And the one who I was talking to was Kitty Carlyle. She had spoken just before me, you know her, putting bomb on the waters, and what's his name, the ex-senator from New York, he became crippled, had a stroke or something, and he also came out for it.

MR. POLCARI: Keating? That was a long time ago-

MR. LEHMAN: No wonder I didn't recognize. The one who was senator after him. In any case, there were several of these people, and he was in the head of the GSA. He came to me, and not only did I hold my tongue, but I came back that afternoon and added to it because I only had four minutes, they gave me another four minutes to extend my remarks. I had other things that I had to say. So I read it off at the afternoon meeting, but that was an upbeat one which I suggested how they could go about public art. That is to say choosing it, about interest in the public, about having a more democratic process... that sort of thing. After I got through, and it was reported in the press here and there, they picked out my possessions and quoted them, as a way of resolving the concrete

battles in public art. Make it more democratic, and more intelligently organized, and that has been done since.

MR. POLCARI: Yes, they changed things after that.

MR. LEHMAN: Without my being given a credit-

MR. POLCARI: Well, they realized they had a problem--

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, of course-

MR. POLCARI: And Serra is very [inaudible]-

MR. LEHMAN: But I found the way to solve the problem-

MR. POLCARI: Very confrontational, but they realized that having artists decide to plunk things down irregardless of the place, or the people who have to deal with it was essentially counter to the idea. After all, it was their art, they were the ones who were paying for it. The government!

MR. LEHMAN: But there was another point involved here- the arrogance of this man, Serra, in claiming that he is allowed to do any damn thing he pleased, and he says it openly. He said that he disregarded the architecture and the functions of the building for which he designs. That he didn't like the building, so he was not going to pay it any attention. And they didn't think the artist has any obligation to consider the purpose of the building. So, the whole point of public art is exactly those two things: an objective point which is to harmonize with the building and with art and there's a subjective element which is to harmonize with the purpose to which the building is set up- those two elements. And if they're missing, these should not belong there- I stated that.

MR. POLCARI: Well I agree, I think the art should go with the environment, and you're right, the subjective purpose. But it also ignores the art world, which is extremely arrogant, extremely imperialist, incredibly self-righteous, full of themselves like you cannot believe. They're the original A league, and everyone else is a boob.

MR. LEHMAN: Well listen, I put him in his place. Let me tell you.

MR. POLCARI: I know I'm in the business over here. I know the business. So we end for today.

MR. LEHMAN: Any particular element that you wanted to get to?

MR. POLCARI: No, no, we're going on now. We basically have come to the end of your career actually, your artistic career, you're working, and you've retired-

MR. LEHMAN: Well not really. I wouldn't say that.

MR. POLCARI: Well what did you do? You continued to work? You were working for CBS and doing these things?

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, I was doing my own work-

MR. POLCARI: And you have continued in your own studio in New Jersey-

MR. LEHMAN: That's basically it, yeah-

MR. POLCARI: Continuing to paint and sculpt?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh yes. In fact I did a hell of a lot more since I supposedly retired than I did before, mostly sculpture and drawings.

MR. POLCARI: When did you retire?

MR. LEHMAN: I didn't retire, but I left CBS in 1980. I left to do my own stuff, and I did, I had two one-man shows at the Farleigh Dickinson University, and several other places. But nothing of real consequence in the art world, because I didn't do abstract expressionism!

MR. POLCARI: But you continued to work with your interests, in your bios and resources in a figurative mode.

MR. LEHMAN: I wouldn't call it exactly figurative, it included elements, lets put it that way, but it's a not figurative mode, but sometimes I would. I mentioned about religion last time to you and how I felt and my writings about that. I told you that. And poetry, I did a lot of that. I had several elements of it. This one is called 'Forthright.' 'The wind we remember is the one with consequences, not the silly sound and breeze. You must disturb the air before the [inaudible] so the we who call the bureau for the [inaudible] may notify the speakers and exalt them and all the silly gossip with the ears pressed tight against the night and are they ever right and never fooled to fear the day and shun the jewels of light.'

MR. POLCARI: Did you write poetry before?

MR. LEHMAN: I did in 1952.

MR. POLCARI: Oh, '52, huh? Oh, okay. Yeah.

MR. LEHMAN: And a small one, 'To the Heart of Things:' 'When outward skins resemble rubbish, any school would seek a dunce. But thrones are required for kings.'

MR. POLCARI: Well again, I hope this is part of the donation.

MR. LEHMAN: When a man cries, 'Look, a masterpiece!' He is in the same position as he who cries 'Fire!' in a crowded room. By god, they better be plain.

MR. POLCARI: [laughs] Do you look at the century now? You look, and take it, and sculptured it, much of the century. How has Modern art turned, and has Modern art turned out the way you wanted it to? What do you think now of the revolution, essentially?

MR. LEHMAN: Well, let me tell you, I don't know what art you're talking about. What hit us was Abstract Expressionism-

MR. POLCARI: Oh, well-

MR. LEHMAN: So what is a consequence of Abstract Expressionism that has any deep feeling? And I'm talking about deep feelings, essentially, because any artist worth the name is an artist who can create work that has depth and profundity. You know, feelings. And I don't see anything. It's true there are some that tried have it like Ansel Kiefer, but you repeat things like that, you know? I don't consider that the proper road.

MR. POLCARI: Why not? Too big? Or bombastic? No figures?

MR. LEHMAN: No figures in his work-

MR. POLCARI: Who?

MR. LEHMAN: Expressionist things, and work by this other German, George Baselit, cause it's all upside down-that's a gimmick, that upside down nonsense- he takes it right side up, he gives it to us upside down.... and other things, not the sketches, but the conceptual mode which we haven't even mentioned yet, but I consider that an abortion. One can conceive, but it takes an artist to deliver and to fashion, to make. That's one thing I have against Serra. He never touched any of his big pieces- it's all done at a foundry. But, we are going into personalities. In general, I don't see any... I'm trying to think if there are any particular artists I can really admire today, contemporary artists, and I really can't think of one. And I follow everything. I go to exhibits. I have all the magazines, the art magazines, and so on. And to me, it gets smaller and smaller in concept and in approach. So, I think that art right now is at a standstill. I mean meaningful art. Of course there is a mildly being done, but you never stop being done. You have to stay in school grinding them out, by the zillion, you know. And a lot of it comes from what we teachers are telling them. And where do these teachers today come from? Abstract Expressionism--

MR. POLCARI: Well, they come from academic ideas of art history, theories; they come from a prescribed rigid kind of aestheticism-

MR. LEHMAN: But not the old academics, but the new academics-

MR. POLCARI: New academics-

MR. LEHMAN: Anything that's according to rules and passes along rules is academic. The point being that where a teaching of art is concerned with the process and procedure: how to do it, how to use crude materials and metals to create art, but it doesn't teach art, itself. It can teach by example, yes. So examples, but that's one of the [inaudible] that are being changed. That's the thing.

MR. POLCARI: But there aren't too many people with a profound inner-life to have something to say. And I don't know if we're producing anybody like that anymore in the United States, when TV is the biggest entertainment.

MR. LEHMAN: We're probably moving in to a whole new area and a new phase of art, which has to do with multimedia concepts, and not just the brush or the easel or the canvas. In fact, in 1936, Siqueiros and I proclaimed the death of easel painting-in 1936, mind you. And I said to him, I'm in the workshop, you know, 'the death of easel painting.' But of course, it survives and it thrives despite my pronouncing. At least from what you meant though, the meaning, just like Clement Greenberg. We talked about Clement Greenberg today, in such a retrospect-

MR. POLCARI: Well, he's the person to bash.

MR. LEHMAN: To bash? [laughing]

MR. POLCARI: To bash, yes.

MR. LEHMAN: Well, I was one of the first to bash him, let me tell you.

MR. POLCARI: He's just sort of a [inaudible] mannerly-

MR. LEHMAN: So do they realize when that new influence is delicious?

MR. POLCARI: Oh yes, oh no question. They do. They carried it, but they can't get over neo-social realism of such left-wing politics. We're back to the politics, to the thirties. See, political correctness and everything else-

MR. LEHMAN: Now, that's a whole other story, and of course when you get this political correctness now, they're destroying the whole goddamn Modern Art. Modern Art is-

MR. POLCARI: It's what they want to do.

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, sure.

MR. POLCARI: What they want to do. Well-

MR. LEHMAN: I like to read the New Criterion-

MR. POLCARI: Oh yeah, I'm aware of it certainly, yes.

MR. LEHMAN: But actually, I've been subscribing to it for over a dozen years; Hilton Kramer was always, in my book, a very sensible critic, you know. And I was astonished to see him come out against all these things. When he came out forthright against Serra, by god, he was my boy. But, then on the other hand, he's lost his whole point, in the field of art. But in the field of politics he's very conservative; he calls himself a neo-conservative. These people have nowhere to go. What's the point? So where do they go? Do you ever hear the word reactionary?

MR. POLCARI: Oh yes. Of course.

MR. LEHMAN: You rarely see it mentioned.

MR. POLCARI: No, no. Today's terms are right when they're far-right. That kind of-

MR. LEHMAN: But the point is they're all reactionary.

MR. POLCARI: Well, yes. Their not on the band wagon for political change according to some prescription. But of course, they outlived the case in the thirties, too.

MR. LEHMAN: But...why conservatives? Conservative connotes an establishment of the least progressive element.

MR. POLCARI: Well, that's the argument.

MR. LEHMAN: But you have to be progressive at all times! That's what makes the world go round!

MR. POLCARI: Well, yeah. Okay, I can probably consider it the more moderate and weary of some of the changes, but now I see change, all change, as always a benefit. I see a lot of it as actually destructive, rather than constructive.

MR. LEHMAN: Well, how about real conservative progressive?

MR. POLCARI: What you're talking about is a moderate conservative, someone really practical-

MR. LEHMAN: They all call themselves moderate now-moderate.

MR. POLCARI: Well, no. Not in the universities-

MR. LEHMAN: Oh no, the universities are gung-ho for multi-culturalism and diversity and politic likeness. I thought that now I'd seen it greener than a brown hill.

MR. POLCARI: No, not according to The New York Times.

MR. LEHMAN: The New York Times, right. But, we're living through an interesting age. We're always living through.

MR. POLCARI: Alright, I want to thank you. It's a wonderful set of interviews.

Tape 8; Side A

MR. POLCARI: ...talking with Harold Lehman, Stephen Polcari at the Archives of American Art on March 28, 1997. This is the last section, part eight, of the interview with Harold-

MR. LEHMAN: Okay, now actually, we're retracing our steps, but this was in the 1940's or early 1941. Pollock, of course, is a very close friend, and he lived (at the time) on 8th Street with his brother Sandy and Sandy's wife-the three of them. I had no knowledge about this painting, so I got a phone call from Jack asking if I would take photographs of the painting that he had and that Alloy, Sandy's wife, would bring it over to my studio. I said sure, (I did a lot of photographing at that time) she brought it over, it was a rather large painting. I did photograph it, and I photographed her as well. I gave them the prints. I developed the negatives, and I also developed the prints and printed them. I did the whole thing, and I gave Jack copies of the photographs. Years later, when I was being interviewed by Francis O'Connor, I mentioned this painting. He was very anxious to get a print, so I did give him a print of this painting. It was unknown to him, and he has it with the [inaudible] from the catalogue crediting it to me as the photographer, but the painting is-

MR. POLCARI: Disappeared or painted over-

MR. LEHMAN: I don't know, but, one last point, it was done for the Federal Art Project.

MR. POLCARI: Do you remember the subject?

MR. LEHMAN: With Pollock there was no subject. It wasn't abstract but it was with sort of a Surrealist fantasy concoction that had a figure on a table and a bowl with iconography of that period Jack borrowed from Picasso and from Orozco-an amalgam of the two. That's the iconography, but as for subject, who knows? There was no title, but there was a stamp or a printed statement at the lower bottom left with his name signed saying "Federal Art Project, AP" and a number. So it was given to the Federal Art Project. That's what happened-

MR. POLCARI: Oh, that's what happened to it.

MR. LEHMAN: And when they were all liquidated, who knows who got a hold of it. Somewhere, someone has it. And they should have come forth with it.

MR. POLCARI: Well, they're making a big mistake if they don't.

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah!

MR. POLCARI: But they sold those paintings by the hour-

MR. LEHMAN: I know, by the pound!

MR. POLCARI: Who knows what happened.

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, I had one of my paintings...it was Jack Pollock who brought it to my attention. I lived in Woodstock at the time, and every time I came to New York, I'd go up to visit Jack. It was rather frequent, but this was one time about 1943 or 44. I was up there and he says, 'Hey, Harold. There's a large painting of yours down at the warehouse on Canal Street.' I said, 'What are you talking about?' He said, 'You know, you had a large panel at the World's Fair, 1939 fair, and one of them is now at this gift shop.' He didn't want to say junk shop, but that's basically what it was.

MR. POLCARI: Yeah, that's Canal Street.

MR. LEHMAN: Canal Street. I said, 'Really? I didn't know anything about this.' He said, 'Okay, I'll tell you where it is. You go down and see it.' So I did. The next day I went down there, and sure enough up against the wall, high up on a wall in the backroom was my panel. I had two panels at the time that I painted especially for the World's Fair. One of them is The Driller that becomes famous-

MR. POLCARI: Oh yes, I know that picture.

MR. LEHMAN: Well, that's in the permanent collection of the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, and the second one is up in this 'gift shop.' So, I went to it; I looked at the painting. It was just hanging loose on a wall, and at the very base of the painting, beneath the paint itself on the canvas there was print: Anton Refregier-

MR. POLCARI: [laughs]

MR. LEHMAN: So I called the owner over. I say, 'Where'd you get this painting?' 'Oh, we got it with all these other paintings.' I said, 'Well, how much do you want for this painting?' He said, 'Oh, well one hundred dollars.' I said, 'Why a hundred dollars?' He said, 'Don't you see? It's by Anton Refregier!' I said, 'Well now, look. That's not by Anton Refregier, it's by me, Harold Lehman. Now, how much do you want for that painting?' He said, 'Twenty-five dollars.'

MR. POLCARI: [laughs]

MR. LEHMAN: So, I got my own painting back for twenty-five dollars. I did buy it back for twenty-five dollars.

MR. POLCARI: You wonder what did the World's Fair do? Was this a WPA thing, and then they sold them after the World's Fair?

MR. LEHMAN: It was a well-known thing, too. These people were simple numbskulls.

MR. POLCARI: They were numbskulls. It's America, unsophisticated.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh boy, yeah. Let's not get started with America. Look what happened over the weekend with the idiots out on the coast. Coochoo land, I've always called it Coochoo-

MR. POLCARI: Well, that's your home state! Well, it's not your home state-

MR. LEHMAN: Only for six years.

MR. POLCARI: Only for six years, that's true.

MR. LEHMAN: But when I was there, we had a delicate situation. That time the big thing was the sixth race. I knew these culprits who were all members of the sixth race, and they were far superior to any of the rest of us.

MR. POLCARI: The sixth race? What are the other five?

MR. LEHMAN: They had vibrations-you know-here, there, everywhere. And it all comes out of theosophy, Nietzsche, a perverted understanding of theosophy. At that time, Krishnamurti was there. He'd make frequent of this-

MR. POLCARI: Yeah, I know. Pollock was interested-

MR. LEHMAN: Well, I went with Pollock when we were in high school. That was years before the New York days. I went with him and saw Schwankovsky who was our teacher in high school. He was the one who brought us to this.

MR. POLCARI: They were still there. They were still the sixth race. Listen, today we have five genders-

MR. LEHMAN: Like a male, female, male-gay, all of that?

MR. POLCARI: Oh, a female-gay, and then add transsexuals-

MR. LEHMAN: Wait a minute, you forgot the clone gender-

MR. POLCARI: Ah!

MR. LEHMAN: There's gonna be a clone gender-

MR. POLCARI: Oh, the clones! I don't keep up. To me, it's the same stuff: a bunch of intellectuals over here-

MR. LEHMAN: And besides, there's no intellectual discipline. That's basically at the root of everything.

MR. POLCARI: There's no discipline period.

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, but you start with the intellect. You have to have an intellectual modus operandi, a method by which to live, I mean, intellectual beliefs and so on, not religious and obscure beliefs which is probably what they've been based on which is rampant in these cults, but let's not get into cults.

MR. POLCARI: Well, there are intellectual cults as we know, and-

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, but a cult is a cult is a cult.

MR. POLCARI: Yep, I agree. I wholeheartedly agree. We have them in the highest universities.

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, well now-

MR. POLCARI: Today, what did we want to talk about?

MR. LEHMAN: I don't want to overdo it, but I brought things-pictures and written things of mine. In addition-this is very special-I did bring an album. Remember I told you-I told you about these posters for Abbot Laboratories. That was a very well-known one during the war. Look on the back, it even has a little [inaudible] that was distributed throughout the country. It was done through Abbott Laboratories, I think I told you-

MR. POLCARI: Mm Hmm

MR. LEHMAN: I have one other. I didn't want to bring-

MR. POLCARI: I love these things. I wish there were a market for them. There's no market for them.

MR. LEHMAN: I think they're terrific. But you mentioned that it might be traceable to this war poster division down in Washington. You mentioned a poster?

MR. POLCARI: Oh, well the National Archives has war posters. The Army Museum has war art.

MR. LEHMAN: But it's something that took over Abbot Laboratories paintings.

MR. POLCARI: Well, the paintings themselves went into this armed forces-

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, that would be the...that's what I'm talking about.

MR. POLCARI: They might have separated the posters also and given them to the National Archives.

MR. LEHMAN: Well, these were paintings, basically, not posters. They were used as posters, but these were fine oil paintings.

MR. POLCARI: Oh.

MR. LEHMAN: Let me tell you a little story about that. Are you still on?

MR. POLCARI: Yes.

MR. LEHMAN: Alright. This is the first poster I did. And the way it came about was in Woodstock I also knew Arnold Blanch.

MR. POLCARI: Oh yes.

MR. LEHMAN: Very well-known painter. He was a very good friend, he used to come and visit my studio. He saw some photographs of a mural I did-I had just completed and installed out in Pennsylvania. I had the photographs; they just came in that day. I was looking at them, and he asked to see them. I [inaudible]. He didn't say anything. Afterwards he said, 'Harold, how'd you like to do some war paintings for Abbott Laboratories and Associated American Artists?' I said, 'Why not?' So we went down and saw the director, Reeves Lowenthal, and he told him about me. I got a telegram from Reeves Lowenthal asking me to come see him.

MR. POLCARI: Mm Hmm

MR. LEHMAN: Well, I did, and he asked me if I would do this on this theme of the paratrooper.

MR. POLCARI: Mm Hmm.

MR. LEHMAN: Okay, I'll do a paratrooper. While I was in New York-that same week-I borrowed a friend's studio. It happened to be Peter Busa.

MR. POLCARI: Oh, yeah.

MR. LEHMAN: He was a good friend of mine. Coupled with Peter Busa's studio, I borrowed his materials, and I went out and got a big poster board. I painted the poster right then and there over night, a big one of a paratrooper. It's very slick, you know. The next day I brought it to Reeves Lowenthal, and he threw it against the wall. He looked at it long and hard. 'Harold,' he says, 'you know, this is exactly the kind of poster we do not want.' I said, 'What do you mean?' 'It's too slick. We want something painty.' Painty! You see, his stuff was known for its use of the brush and pigments and so on. Oil, oil: the smell of oil paint. And, it was basically oil painting, which he pawned off on Abbott Laboratories to use as a poster. And they did; it was very successful! So we had some leading American artists doing this. Well, I said, 'Okay Reeves, don't worry about it.' I went back to Woodstock, and I painted this oil painting full of rich pigmentation and brushwork and so on. I shipped that down to him. When he saw that, he sent me a telegram immediately saying, 'Paratrooper is swell. Many thanks for a job well-done.'

MR. POLCARI: That's the image [inaudible] posts of this paratrooper [inaudible], 'Buy War Bonds.' It's really great. It's in good shape; isn't it in good shape?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, I kept it very carefully. In fact, I was reluctant to bring it down this way because of the edges, you know.

MR. POLCARI: Yeah, you never know.

MR. LEHMAN: But, I took good care of it. Anyway, here's another one. All are paintings in the [inaudible] of that period.

MR. POLCARI: Oh, that's another poster, Arms of Tokyo. That's terrific. This is some kind of cover?

MR. LEHMAN: No. Yes it was. What's New is the name of it. It was put out by Abbott Laboratories-this very magazine, Abbott Laboratories. This was used as a cover as well as a poster. But this was when they were preparing the invasion of the pacific.

MR. POLCARI: That's right after the end of the European Campaign in just a month or two. It'd be just marching-it-along-dropping-the-bomb time.

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, it was. It was in 1945.

MR. POLCARI: And this one on the left-

MR. LEHMAN: Now, this is something else. This goes back to the Siqueiros days. We were set up to do public use of art on revolutionary themes and that sort of thing. When the workshop closed down, when Siqueiros left to go to Spain for the Spanish War, I went to the Artists' Union, and I proposed that they take over the workshop and make it an Artists' Union Workshop. They did, and I was in charge (pretty much) of all the activities that went on with it. Now, this is one of the key things they did at the Artists' Union Workshop, I designed this and painted it, too.

MR. POLCARI: This float. This wonderful float of a bunch of workers, uh soldiers-

MR. LEHMAN: These represent each country of the coalition, the alliance: the Americans, the

Russians, the English, and the French-not the French-

MR. POLCARI: The Spanish?

MR. LEHMAN: Not the French. I have a close view of it right here...oh, the Chinese.

MR. POLCARI: Ah, the Chinese, that's right...about to pound Hitler in the mouth. Is that a paper maché Hitler?

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, it is, and mounted on a spring so that this was a punching, uh, a boxing glove attached to a movable shaft that went in and out and socked him in the nose and his head lolled like this. Point being, of course, that you contribute until you get more of a punch. So knock out Hitler!

MR. POLCARI: On a sliding scale!

MR. LEHMAN: It was a very successful float. The New York Times even wrote about it. And these were all cut-outs, obviously.

MR. POLCARI: Mm Hmm.

MR. LEHMAN: So, I was very active in the movement-social conscious movement. Here's another one-which I still have incidentally. This was done in Woodstock: [inaudible] the painting. This was a large panel on plywood, and I attached a heavy brown paper, glued it on, cut out this opening, and first attached to the wood panel these clippings that I got from papers and magazines showing all the problems and troubles that were going on all over the country when these poor devils were getting their guts blown out. And for what? For this?

MR. POLCARI: This was during the War. This was all the trouble during the War, with riots and troubles in America, while the Soviets were abroad fighting.

MR. LEHMAN: Well, they were getting their guts blown out! And all this trouble was going on. The point is they were fighting for democracy and to preserve it from Fascism and that sort of thing-

MR. POLCARI: That is democracy.

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah-

MR. POLCARI: Fighting!

MR. LEHMAN: Well, that's what it comes down to-

MR. POLCARI: Internal strife! [laughs]

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, right. But if you look close, you'll see all the various problems that were going on. Now, in the middle I mounted a shaving mirror. You talk about assemblage and that sort of thing: this is 1943, and around the mirror I have a piece of barbed wire, and also the frame of the panel was barbed wire. You can see. Now, I put this little slogan Who Me? across the mirror. If you look at it from a slight distance, you see nothing but the vague indefinite shapes, obviously, but, as you come closer and closer and closer you're face materializes in that mirror so that you answer that question: Who me? Yes, you! In other words, we're all responsible for what's going on.

MR. POLCARI: Do you still have this work?

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah. I have the work.

MR. POLCARI: What are you gonna do with your work?

MR. LEHMAN: Guess. Well, a lot of people have discussed interest in it lately, but, I mean, I'm not dead...but you see, people don't know about it. What I would like is to have a show of some of this stuff so people will know about it, know that it exists.

MR. POLCARI: Have you tried galleries?

MR. LEHMAN: Galleries, I'm not...not with this, but it's a thought, because right now I know that this kind of approach-social and political awareness approach-is more and more coming to the fore. In fact, it's already being shown.

MR. POLCARI: Oh yes. It's definitely back.

MR. LEHMAN: What I need, frankly, is an agent or someone to carry the ball, because I can't be peddling this stuff myself. So, I could use someone like that, and I have several things. This is a study I did from life-

MR. POLCARI: In the 1930s?

MR. LEHMAN: [hesitates]Forties. This was in Woodstock; it was 1944. Again, at the time, a very protesting...I organized a war art exhibit at the Woodstock Art Association Gallery, and I did the chief piece that was in it. This was a twelve foot by eight foot, three panel screen: a triptych (I called it a triptych). It's called Man in a Foxhole. Man in a Foxhole-that's the theme. And what am I saying here? Men at war in a foxhole most of the time is spent in boredom and in just...keeping from being killed, when suddenly there is an explosion of activity and action, and then they spring to life. This shows the two different phases.

MR. POLCARI: Okay, so it's a double image?

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, absolutely! This way and this way. It made a big hit in Woodstock at the time with the gallery written up, too.

MR. POLCARI: I'd like to see it. It's pretty big!

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, twelve feet by eight feet and-now here's what [inaudible]: gone. This is three panels of wood screen. When I left Woodstock, I left it in up in the attic of my studio. The next year, I came to get it, and it was gone. Someone else had already taken over the studio and without a word...someone may have it, I don't know, but I never was able to trace it down. So, the point I wanted to make now was that this was done with the use of a projector. If you recall the Siqueiros method of projecting-the plastic exercise in Argentina. Do you recall that?

MR. POLCARI: Yes, yes.

MR. LEHMAN: Remember it was nudes, only nudes, but the way it was done...everything was projected on a curved surface from a certain angle, and then when you moved, wait a minute, then it was also projected from another angle-several angles-so that as you moved, that same figure moved with you and took on different configurations according to where you happen to be at the time. That was the effect of this, too: everything here was projected. For example, this arm going across, here, you see it goes across, but really this point is four feet away from this point here. I

made it so that it appeared rational at the elbow-the elbow at the joint is at that joint of the panel-

MR. POLCARI: Yes, I see that.

MR. LEHMAN: But as you move, these things move with you. So, my point is, that I put to use some of the things that Siqueiros had been using-

MR. POLCARI: You had the multiple perspective of polygonal kind of thing-

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, that word would come up: poly-let's not go into that. I forgot the words used. Werner was the first one to bring that to my attention. I said, 'No, I never heard Siqueiros use the word.' And he didn't...So, and, here, this is a perfect example. This is a very distorted head here. If you look at it head on, it's stretched like a rubberband. But, as you get further away, and at a proper angle, it returns to a normal aspect. It had a lot of innovation in it. Incidentally, it was done in waterbase paint.

MR. POLCARI: Oh?

MR. LEHMAN: So, it looks like a fresco.

MR. POLCARI: What kind?

MR. LEHMAN: Waterbase, uh, [inaudible] posters. They didn't have vinyl paint in those days.

MR. POLCARI: No, they didn't.

MR. LEHMAN: It was basically poster color. Now, these 1943 posters-I told you about these-I did these for the Museum of Modern Art exhibit; War Posters, it was called.

MR. POLCARI: That was 1943 at MoMA?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, 1943 at MoMA. Both of these were shown and sent out for exhibit throughout the country. I never got these back either. The museum never sent me any word as to what happened to them or how to retrieve them, nothing. They simply swallowed them up, and I never saw them again. These were very good posters.

MR. POLCARI: Deliver us from evil, that's a phrase from-

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, well these were themes that were given to the artists. You had to select one of the themes from what was given.

MR. POLCARI: Who chose the themes? O.W.I.?

MR. LEHMAN: I thought...it might have been the Office of War Information...This is especially [inaudible].

MR. POLCARI: Mm hmm.

MR. LEHMAN: Now, this is a mural- a huge mural I did. Also (which I wanted you to know) there are some elements, many elements, of Siqueiros-type approach, or Mexican, if you will.

MR. POLCARI: It's a lovely photograph.

MR. LEHMAN: That's a whole mural. This was photographed by Burkhardt Rudy Burkhardt.

MR. POLCARI: Oh, yeah?

MR. LEHMAN: When I finished the mural, they sent him out there to take pictures of it.

MR. POLCARI: Where is the location?

MR. LEHMAN: It was in Riker's Island.

MR. POLCARI: Oh, this is the famous Riker's Island mural.

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, yeah.

MR. POLCARI: That's a pretty good photograph for that time!

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, excellent! This was...well, it's a large transparency. I never saw anything like it. He had a large camera, a five by seven camera, and the transparency itself was five by seven-each section. I have those still. I had these prints made only recently from the transparency, and it turned out very successful. Now, the point I was making was that in doing this there was no projector used, but there's a lot of [inaudible]. I mean, you might almost call it Cubist-look at the intersection of these forms, with this form where you get transparency.

MR. POLCARI: Transparencies overlapping planes-

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah-

MR. POLCARI: And this fellow is building on the right, and this is a miner over here?

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, they're drilling.

MR. POLCARI: What is this form?

MR. LEHMAN: That is what is called a pithead, a mine pithead. These are cables that elevators attach to that bring the miners down to subsurface. These miners, these are rescue workers actually, because there is now an accident. You see the smoke coming up from the pithead.

MR. POLCARI: What's over here?

MR. LEHMAN: Well, you have to know the theme of the whole thing. I don't want to go into it too much. I just call it's Man's Daily Bread, Activities Relating to It-

MR. POLCARI: The making of-

MR. LEHMAN: The relations of these to the family. It's called Man's Daily Bread, Activities Relating to It, and the Relations of these to the Family. It's focused at the very end-

MR. POLCARI: It's very epic-

MR. LEHMAN:...The whole family. You can see I use a cinema effect. Matter of fact, this is where I get a cinema screen shot up against a city silhouette. So there are a lot of very modern-

MR. POLCARI: And cutaways-

MR. LEHMAN:...Modern, creative approaches to this thing. And even here, there is what I would call a compositional fantasy. This pyramid, for example, what is it? It's supposed to show these farm workers but, instead of building up into the space, it builds up into the peak of a peak of a pyramid.

MR. POLCARI: Now, that's almost Precolumbian in a way. There's a stack-

MR. LEHMAN: The figure, you mean?

MR. POLCARI: Yeah-

MR. LEHMAN: Possibly.

MR. POLCARI: Interesting, interesting.

MR. LEHMAN: But, here too, you see, this movement brings you in here, and this movement brings you in here, and they funnel together all coming into the product of agriculture leading to processing, and then the family with a loaf of bread being the focal point of that. Plus, this is a mess hall where they ate. I kind of didn't want to-

MR. POLCARI: Yes, I know sometimes. That's the miner and the-

MR. LEHMAN: This is a driller, and this is far better-I consider this far better-than the painting you saw at the Smithsonian.

MR. POLCARI: Well, it's quite a heroic figure, big character. His anatomy is what he is, a powerful creature-

MR. LEHMAN: That is such a crime to have destroyed that thing. That was worse than any Nazi act; it was just as bad.

MR. POLCARI: Yeah, well here, it's indifference that will do it. Powerful figure. Nowadays it would be a woman-

MR. LEHMAN: [laughs] Incidentally, this is absolutely accurate. It was taken from a photograph.

MR. POLCARI: Yes, I think you showed me-

MR. LEHMAN: Yes, I did. What I mean is no one would believe that a driller would actually just throw his legs over the drill and nonchalantly drill away like that. You know, the vibration [inaudible]. But, it's there; I have it in the photograph. I still have the photograph.

MR. POLCARI: Yeah, I remember it.

MR. LEHMAN: But, it makes a hell of a monumental image!

MR. POLCARI: Yes, it's a monumentalization-if you will-of those activities. They're epic and monumental, these works.

MR. LEHMAN: You compare these forms with any...There are millions of driller paintings of the period. I see so many of them in the WPA period, but they are so puny and banal, you know. It's simply a man with a drill without any connotations symbolic of the act.

MR. POLCARI: Yeah, you like the monumental-the power and force of it, and the importance of it-

that comes through in your work.

MR. LEHMAN: Well, this is what it's all about. I mean... I don't make paintings in order to describe but to inspire and to get the feel of the moment, beyond the moment, the universality of things. As a matter of fact, Joshua Taylor did it right in his book America as Art. You have that book-

MR. POLCARI: Mm hmm.

MR. LEHMAN: When he was director of the Smithsonian National Collection. He reproduced that painting at the Smithsonian-he reproduced it full-page-and he went on to describe it. He was talking about what it meant to him, and he was right. He got to the core of what I was after.

MR. POLCARI: This universality, does...What you were saying, it seems, is that on one hand, this is particular- it's particular to America. It's actually, though, abstract and universal- it's a universal human concern.

MR. LEHMAN: Right. Well, it's the monumentality of labor and the-how shall I put it-it's the value of labor aside from earning the salary.

MR. POLCARI: It's the abstract idea of labor itself-

MR. LEHMAN: Labor constructs, labor builds, labor grows things. In fact, without labor you'd be nowhere.

MR. POLCARI: Yeah, truly.

MR. LEHMAN: And, incidentally, you know this all done symbolically. Look at the color: that's no color of a drill, it's simply a color of my invention. This is interesting: see the color I've given him, the brown on the dark side, the green here, also to get an emotional impact? Well, when they cleaned Michelangelo's frescoes recently, and they got all that dirt off these figures, they found some of these figures painted exactly like this: brown on one side green on the other side.

MR. POLCARI: Yes, I know.

MR. LEHMAN: And they couldn't believe it.

MR. POLCARI: How big is this figure?

MR. LEHMAN: That figure is about ten feet?

MR. POLCARI: About ten feet tall?

MR. LEHMAN: Easily. Here, let me show you. The wall was twenty feet high.

MR. POLCARI: I remember the image; it's quite huge.

MR. LEHMAN: Well, the wall was twenty feet high, and that's at least half the size of the wall. This was done in Woodstock...the feel of the war victim-

MR. POLCARI: This is the war victims in the forties. Are these watercolors?

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, they're wash drawings. I did a lot of wash drawings.

MR. POLCARI: Mm hmm. Just heads?

MR. LEHMAN: Well, these happen to be just heads; I did a lot of figures, too. This is one too.

MR. POLCARI: Yeah, quite powerful... again....*very, very powerful head. Well, I hope some of these come to the Archives!

MR. LEHMAN: Well, they will; where else are they going to come? Now this is the rest of this thing. Pardon me while I get rid of my personal things. I told you I did a lot of writing, or somewhat, I just wrote a few things, basically, as sort of a...If you would like a crate of this, I could have a [inaudible] made, or a laser print made.

MR. POLCARI: That would nice.

MR. LEHMAN: And you could have it for yourself. A laser print.

MR. POLCARI: Yeah.

MR. LEHMAN: Okay, well, we'll put this away later. Now, I'm going to try to concentrate on the things that refer to painting and to art.

MR. POLCARI: These are your writings?

MR. LEHMAN: Yes.

MR. POLCARI: Over the years?

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, well here's one. I have a date that says 1952; these things go back about 1947-48. 'In what nightmare lies this dream, this early lyric an epitome. Why when young repose in rhapsodies for seeking ignorance? In what snare lies this essence, elusive and fox-like with a motion of eels. So we must further trap it in dream.' And they are very short.

MR. POLCARI: Did you write poetry all along?

MR. LEHMAN: All along, yes. Right from the beginning.

MR. POLCARI: These are harsh images in this poem.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, absolutely.

MR. POLCARI: This was not love lyrics.

MR. LEHMAN: Definitely not. But I do have one of those too. You wouldn't believe; you'd think it's by Shakespeare. I even remembered it: 'But soft crept I into the hills not daring voice the many trills which in my heart did beat for was this not the wondrous night when my lovers would meet.' And so on. It turns out it was, but she didn't show up.

MR. POLCARI: [laughs] It's a blessing.

MR. LEHMAN: 'Tort night, like strings stretched tight, has reached its outmost limits, my inward being. Thou thought made audible signed one, two, three, and thus through a hoop of night I leap regarding not the other side of what is sensible.' [skip in tape]...This is about religion, if you want to hear about that. Do you?

MR. POLCARI: What you think of religion?

MR. LEHMAN: Well, certain elements of it. 'All, I emphasize, all occult and eastern philosophies are considered an anomaly, an anachronism, totally irrelevant to modern twentieth century experience, and, in fact, an affront to modern intelligence. To some, a waste of intellectual resources. It is an escape from thought and its responsibility: action. How will [inaudible] domineering world love to see the threatening masses all glued to their own navels contemplating nothing, thinking nothing, acting not at all. How confident to see them in their millions all sitting cross-legged, trance-like, lowering their blood pressure, and of course exerting no pressure whatever on those who really benefit from such toys of the mind: the rascals, thieves, and incompetents rampant in American life.' That's 1950, but it's of a piece with these paintings. Now, here is something I told you about. About art, I wrote about art. This is serious stuff here.

MR. POLCARI: Yeah, you don't-go ahead. You don't have to read them into the tape.

MR. LEHMAN: Good.

MR. POLCARI: Hopefully they'll come in the Archives.

MR. LEHMAN: No, I'll just read to you because I don't know if I'd want this in the tape anyway. This has to do with the Tilted Arc controversy.

MR. POLCARI: Oh, that's rights. You wrote Serra, you told me. [laughs]

MR. LEHMAN: No, I was down there.

MR. POLCARI: You were a witness?!?!]

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah. If you have the typescript of the proceedings, I don't know-

MR. POLCARI: No, we don't.

MR. LEHMAN: Well, I'm giving them to you. I have a thick wad of everything said at that hearing, if you're interested.

MR. POLCARI: Oh, wow! How did you get that?

MR. LEHMAN: Because I was a speaker, and the secretary-

MR. POLCARI: Oh, gave you-

MR. LEHMAN: Assembled the entire typescript-

MR. POLCARI: Fantastic!

MR. LEHMAN: And sent it to me. But, unfortunately, it was so badly transcribed. It was all done on audio tape, and the transcription was made from the audio tape, but whoever did it was practically an illiterate! Even mine was so poorly transcribed, I can't believe. I had to make corrections constantly. So, that this is inaccurate.

MR. POLCARI: You did that on the script?

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, but this is my actual script-mine.

MR. POLCARI: Your statement?

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah. I call it 'The Artist and the Public.' 'I speak as an artist, a mural painter who having painted one of the largest murals in America under the Federal Art Project lived to see it destroyed twenty-two years later secretly, wantonly, and without a public hearing. So, I know something about public art and the artist's rights. What I now say is remove this wall,' This is all out in the open, in a public hearing, with Serra right in front of me. 'When an artist leaves his studio and his gallery and moves into the public arena, he immediately assumes a different character and so does his work. When he chooses to design for such a space and milieu, he is obliged to consider more than his own persona and his own artistic freedom. There enters now two things which limit and control this freedom: one, the space itself, the environment; two, the people, the general public involved in this environment. Whether as spectator, user or just casual passer-by, the work must harmonize with the space and must harmonize with the public's use of this space. If either of these fundamentals is lacking, then the work has failed in its purpose and doesn't belong in such a space. Any competent designer knows this to be true. It is fundamental, and artistic freedom has nothing to do with it. This claim is just a smokescreen used to cloud the eyes and mind and disarm criticism. But it is [inaudible] the court issue: mainly, public art is public not private and must certify itself in the public arena. This work has had plenty of time to do that. The fact that these hearings have become necessary shows that it has not done so. The fact that so-called experts have been called in to speak for it only emphasizes another failure: the work cannot speak for itself as any artwork should. One can find experts to speak on any side of any issue. They cancel each other out. So, the ultimate judgment must be made by the people who confront this piece every day, for whom it's become part of their lives and their experience. Finally, the trouble here is that there has never been a written code or a body of principles evolved to guide both the artist and his patron in public art, as [inaudible] in architecture, where the architect must conform building codes and other considerations. What architect claims these are an attack on his artistic freedoms? So if these hearings do nothing else, let's hope they relieve your rethinking of the whole subject of public art and public space. If they do, they will observe the purpose far beyond what they do about this particular work.'

MR. POLCARI: Mm hmm.

MR. LEHMAN: There was dead silence.

MR. POLCARI: I would imagine so, yes

MR. LEHMAN: I was the only artist who showed up who dared to challenge the Tilted Arc and its placement. And I was tackled; Serra jumped out of his chair and came lunging for me almost as though to attack me physically, yelling, 'You wanna destroy my work!' I said, 'No, I don't want to destroy it, I just want to move it.' And then-see he'd been claiming that to move it was to destroy it; that was the chief claim, that it had to stay where it was-so, I happen to be a fellow researcher, and I had researched some of his stuff in the past. Only a year before in Art in America there as a big article on a piece he had done in Paris that was removed. It was finished, placed in its original site, and it had to be removed because it didn't look good, it didn't fit well. So, it was removed, and it was placed in another location. And, Serra okayed it; in fact, everyone okayed it saying it gained by the move. So, I read this out, my second paper in the afternoon. I called a complementary material, and the name of the article was 'The Meteorite in the Garden' from Art in America. And I'm quoting... well, you can read some of these out if you like, I-

MR. POLCARI: So, in your statement, this is your second statement. That was in the paper.

MR. LEHMAN: This is the same day, and yes, it was in the paper. See, in the afternoon they allowed you to elaborate on your original statement if you wanted to because you were limited to only four minutes in the original.

MR. POLCARI: I forget, was this a trial by jury or a judge?

MR. LEHMAN: Well, you wouldn't call it a trial by jury. They did have a board there; it was the board of the GSA, and then it was referred to the Washington headquarters. They're the ones who made the final decision. But, you remember Donald Thalacker? He was the head of the GSA at the time, and he was present there. Donald Thalacker, he died about a year later. Then, now I go on to say-it's only one page, incidentally-'There is a lesson to be learned here. That lesson is you don't go to Washington alone for approve of an artwork placed in New York, you go to the local surroundings and get some input from the people there. There are not all ignorant dunces to be ignored and contended with a fait accompli. Place a model on display, let people walk around it, discuss it, and get familiar with it. Then let them say if they want to live with the work or not. Only after that should approval be so in Washington. That is the democratic way, not the process by which Serra's wall was commissioned and set down here. Yes, this is a radical notion, but this is a radical piece. One radical notion deserves another. Also, most people, laymen, just don't know how to respond to a situation like this. They have strong feelings of inadequacy, not to mention inferiority, in matters of art so they rely on experts discussing their own intuition. The experts, of course, are only too happy to oblige. But these experts have their own ax to grind. To a man they stand behind one of their own with not a dispassionate objective voice among them. I suppose it's too much to ask an artist to acknowledge failure, but some works are failures. This is such a one. It fails to enhance a state, and it fails to inspire. Work on such a scale as this must do both.' Then later, when the GSA was complaining about my statement, that here I was-

MR. POLCARI: Why were they complaining?

MR. LEHMAN: Well, because the GSA-it was their responsibility, they put it there. They didn't want to be seen as committing a \$178,000 error.

MR. POLCARI: Yes, I know that mentality.

MR. LEHMAN: Okay, so Thalacker came to me to complain! Then I wrote to them, to the GSA; I said some thoughts about the GSA, 'I am not attacking abstract art, nor am I attacking abstract artists such as Serra. What I am attacking is an attitude of arrogance and self-righteousness masquerading as this expertise who says, "We know, and you don't. And we'll decide what to put in the public space, and not you, the people." No one has more affection and respect for Jacob Javits than I, but when he sees the uproar over Tilted Arc as an attack on artistic freedom and [tape cuts off]... Tape 8; Side B

MR. LEHMAN: ...Program, or that museum there, actually. And, I told her about this hearing. I asked her, 'How would you like to have it for Bard College?' 'No.' And, she didn't say anything at the time; in fact, she protested the whole idea of trying to remove someone's work of art from it's original site. But, several months later, I see in a press release that she had gone to the president, Botstein-

MR. POLCARI: Botstein, yeah, Botstein-

MR. LEHMAN: Botstein, to suggest this to him personally, and they were taking it under advisement. Nothing ever came of it.

MR. POLCARI: No, it'd be a coup to bring it there. So it's self-aggrandizement in the end.

MR. LEHMAN: But they took it seriously, that's the point. After having-

MR. POLCARI: They'll find a place for it-

MR. LEHMAN: Well, you know where it is? It's in storage right now.

MR. POLCARI: In the end, it'll have to find a place for it, someone will, and that will solve it. There's no wrong to admit that publicly-

MR. LEHMAN: A thing like that is not going to be destroyed like my mural. [laughs]

MR. POLCARI: Yeah, they don't want to admit that.

MR. LEHMAN: And here's an interesting letter that I wrote in reference to it to Grace Glueck. This is interesting; this was after the hearing, 'Grace Glueck, New York Times: I was one of the speakers at the Serra Tilted Arc hearing. Enclosed is a copy of my statement given in two parts. Speakers were allowed four minutes to make their statement. Now, what prompts this letter is an article you wrote in February, which focused on this very issue and this very piece. I had clipped it out and filed it away without having read it all the way through, a bad habit. I came across it the day a week after the hearings and read it through immediately. I was astonished to see you said much the same things I did, even using similar phrases, and the factual information you presented only confirmed my statements and my conclusion, but-and this is where we part-after a solid exposition of the facts and your convictions that Serra's piece was the ugliest public art in New York, "Domineering, bully, and didn't belong there. It was a mistake to take it on, etcetera etcetera." You abruptly back off and fail to follow your statements to the inevitable conclusion: remove the Tilted Arc. No, you then start waving the flag implying that it would downright unpatriotic to remove the piece, that art is not about compromise, a red herring if ever there was one, another nonsequitor [?]. What we're talking about is this particular piece and this particular space; let's stick to that. In this connection, you, yourself, point of something I didn't know: that Serra deliberately put out to confront the space and the public, now harmonize with it. Also, that he, himself, had doubts about the location's visibility for his work. This alone condemns it and makes an even tighter case for its removal. He got what he asked for: confrontation. Why does he now whine when those confronted want him out of there? As for leaving the piece in place seven years so the public can become accustomed to it, what patronizing nonsense! The wall has been there for more than three years now, and, far from becoming more accustomed, the public has become less and less so to the point where mere annoyance in the slight has now become active loathing even hate. It was incredible at the hearing to see the violent emotions aroused by this piece, and no wonder: its wide expanse unrelieved by any sculptural incident generates an oppressive feeling of claustrophobia of being shut away from air, sky, and space. Its color, a repulsive rose brown, is enough to make one puke and gives evidence of people having done just that. Or is it only urine? And the whole piece has an air of having been dumped there on the way to someplace else. That is what comes of challenging the space, "And Serra's pigheaded refusal to accommodate it," your words. As for Serra's claim that to remove the work is to destroy it, another large Serra was removed from its original site in Paris. Far from being destroyed, it was acclaimed by all concerned including Serra as having gained inevitably from the more. You will find details on the last page of my statement supplementary material. Lastly, the GSA's attitude, I deal with that in the paper titled "Tilted Arc Consorts about the GSA" written after the hearing. I can't close without a comment about your own role in this sorry affair. So far as I know, you are in professional art world to come down against this piece. All others close rank to be present a solid front against, I suppose, the philistine. If that's what it is, welcome to the club.'

MR. POLCARI: I know, but the art world will close rank because the art world-

MR. LEHMAN: Well, they did, but there's always a maverick somewhere, you know.

MR. POLCARI: Yeah, it's the same thing. Everyone doesn't want to go along with what's done because everyone's afraid of being out of fashion, old-fashioned. It's the old Van Gogh problem, and this is just the latest example of it. The point is the art world can't govern on some of its decisions; it's too partisan.

MR. LEHMAN: No, it can't because it also reveals its own bias and its own lack of intellectual integrity. [pause] For example, 'I'm ready like that to change my opinions. Let an evidential pin drop; I keep my ears well oiled to catch the sounds. The petrified analysis called last is of all consequences least when blasted trumpets sound. Better doesn't matter underground.'

MR. POLCARI: Well, even [inaudible], even intellectuals and artists, we know them well. They're not the finest. These you should give and everything, as you know, it'd be perfect some day when you carry on. This will supplement your interview.

MR. LEHMAN: Yes. Here is something-well, I told you this-my definition of a theory, remember that?

MR. POLCARI: Oh yes, what was that?

MR. LEHMAN: 1947 this is written, 'Theory, something thirty-six inches long, which, when used as a measure, always gives the same answer: one yard.'

MR. POLCARI: That's right. I love that. I have to xerox that.

MR. LEHMAN: Well, this is the Pope to Michelangelo: 'Is there not a God?' Michelangelo, 'No, there is no God, but this is what he looks like.'

MR. POLCARI: [laughs] Well, perfect. I think these have been terrific interviews. Here, I will-copies.

MR. LEHMAN: Good.

MR. POLCARI: Which you can take with you. And, I will proceed to hear. I think this is really fine, and we're in great shape.

MR. LEHMAN: Fine. One last thing here, 'Art, which goes right to the root of things, uproots the weeds and dissertation which plausible, humane preposterers feed of the brain and hypnotize with truthful sounding lies. Sheep were not bleeding, "Baah.'" Well, you have to see it to appreciate it. These are things that have to be seen not performed. I have my own way of-

MR. POLCARI: Well, yeah.

MR. LEHMAN: And again, the actual is that which contains no further possibilities.

MR. POLCARI: Yeah, I like that.

MR. LEHMAN: That was 1952. 'All design inevitably tends toward a geometric absolute.' This was my conclusion in 1951.

MR. POLCARI: Well, these writings and your WPA stuff I think will be terrific as an addition.

MR. LEHMAN: 'How many dunces are now teaching the world's wisdom to the young who, having been to a good school, know well how to play the fool?'

MR. POLCARI: Yes.

MR. LEHMAN: 'Floating, waiting to be mentioned, like a ghostly guest the realities of art hover about and outweigh conversation. Do not speak of them you who would take notes even at the apocalypse.' And so on. I was thinking of getting together a small book of all this, you know.

MR. POLCARI: Well, at the Archives it would be a small book. It's all available, and it's there-it's microfilm. So, basically, it's published. That's the way it works because it's all concentrated in-

MR. LEHMAN: Yes yes.

MR. POLCARI: I want to thank you for these interviews, and they're going to be a great boom. It's been a pleasure.

MR. LEHMAN: You've been a very patient and receptive audience. And understanding. I know I-I had to say, on occasion, I don't get my thoughts together as constantly as I ought to and as I used to.

MR. POLCARI: How old are you now?

MR. LEHMAN: Eighty-three.

MR. POLCARI: Wow.

MR. LEHMAN: But let me tell you something: it's this illness that's knocked me out, and that has put a fog in my head over the past three months. It's really done that; I've had a terrible virus-thing. I spoke to the doctor about that, and he said it's going all around and is very characteristic of what I'm going through. This virus has that effect. And, there's no medication; there's no way to treat it because it's an unknown virus, would you believe?

MR. POLCARI: Well, you need some warm weather.

MR. LEHMAN: Well, it may be the sun, warm weather, and also-

MR. POLCARI: Like today.

MR. LEHMAN: Yeah, go down to Florida and so on.

MR. POLCARI: Alright, thank you Harold.

MR. LEHMAN: Oh, you mean you were taping that?

MR. POLCARI: Yes.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Last updated...July 26, 2007