



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Carl Holty, 1964
Dec. 8

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Carl Holty on December 8, 1964. The interview took place in New York City, and was conducted by William Ageer for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

WILLIAM AGEE: Mr. Holty before we get to your experiences in the thirties will you tell us something about your youth, your early training, your important influences, your teachers, and also where you were born and how you came to this country?

CARL HOLTY: Well, the matter of being born is probably of the most importance and has made the story of my autobiography a little difficult for people. From time to time I'm referred to as native born in the United States, which I don't happen to be. In the year 1900 I was born in the Black Forest at [inaudible]. My parents, my father being a doctor, had gone over to take up a specialty late in the fall of 1899. He had lived in the United States. He was a German and didn't take out citizenship until 1906 when I was six years old which makes me a naturalized citizen. But, we did return, I was born on the 21st of June, we were in the United States, exactly six months later for Christmas with my grandparents who lived in the midwest in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I spent the early years of my childhood in the somewhat more northern part of the state in the country near Green Bay where my father was a country doctor. But we moved, we moved back to the city in 1905 or '06 and I went to public school and high school there and I went to a private high school which is a very good school, now known as the Milwaukee University Schools. It had several other names and we had small classes and excellent teachers so that I went through high school in about two and a half years. I didn't graduate within that period because I was too lazy to push for it and instead took most half days for the last year and a half. It was then known as the state normal school art department there. I had earlier instructions with an old German painter who came over to this country to design the panorama, the last of which is still to be seen in Atlanta, the Battle of Atlanta, and then I later studied with teachers who had largely German training, they were all Americans but they had followed the Munich of America, that's what Milwaukeeans flattered themselves that their town was, the original Munich and to Dresden, Weimar and so on of course of the study and the influences were felt by us. This was all very colonial and I don't think it did me too much good. But then the twentieth century really only began after 1918 or 1920, not in the year 1900 and the way we lived in such Colonial culture and all the rest of it was just as colonial, and the yankees dreaded going back east and the Italians of going back to Italy was characteristic for everybody. I went to Marquette University in 1919. First I went there and then went into the Student's Army Training Corps during World War I and most of them were stuck, most of the student corps were stuck at the university but some of us were moved to Camp Grant where our career ended somewhere early in 1919, and I went back to pursue my studies, pre-medical studies. I didn't like medicine - I did like medicine actually but I felt I had a calling and one day when we were wandering up into the dissecting room and I saw a very handsome young corpse over there, the brevity of life was brought home and it gave me courage enough to confront my father once more and tell him I wanted to go back to art school where I had been in my high school days. I finished out that year and spent the summer in Chicago and at the Chicago Art Institute school over at Saugatuck, Michigan and in 1920 went to New York and studied at the National Academy under Mr. Francis Jones, whose brother, Holton Jones, a disciple, I think of the Barbizon School, was a distinguished landscape painter around the turn of the century, quite a fine artist. Mr. Jones more or less let us go our own way and it was a wonderful class because we had people of all ages. Being right after World War I many artists came back to the country and went to art schools, it was cheap, and the model was cheap. As a matter of fact the National Academy was a free school, so we twenty year olders had painters in there who were twenty-five, twenty-six, thirty, thirty-two, including some foreign imports that were very clever and you were painting in your student years against very stiff competition and this is what I think it ought to be. In modern teaching it's out of the question since most art is taught in the colleges and we go with our age group from one class to another. As a matter of fact when some of those thirty-two year old fellows stopped to let the model rest and commented favorably on your work you were in heaven. No award that you could get later on in life would touch it for real glory. Probably because it came out of envy or despite envy. I was in New York then until 1923, I tried my hand at independent work and then went back to the mid-west, as I always did in the summertime, and I think it was in 1924 I went through one of those series of uncertain periods. I found myself in Chicago drawing portraits, mostly in chalk and crayon and actually earning money. They were good portraits, I always could draw likeness, there were, there was nothing distinguished about them, but most of them were commissioned by Jewish families, wealthy Jewish families and the career ended, my career as a portraitist ended not one minute too soon with the Loeb-Leopold murder case. Too many families among my clients were involved either by relationship to the murderers or to the murdered boy, Bobby Franks, for some reason or other when evil befalls mankind you dump the artist, the first sacrifice that is made and it was about time for me to do that. It was the following year that my grandfather died and I inherited a small income and was relieved of making a living for myself. I married shortly afterwards, about six months later,

in the year 1925, and spent that winter practicing drawing by myself and trying to make up for the things I didn't do in drawing in schools. I taught school at that time at the Milwaukee Art Institute - taught school is perhaps putting it a bit too high - I had a businessmen art group and a ladies knitting society group to teach but I took all the money that I earned and put it into models, you could hire them very cheaply in those days if you hired them by the week and I drew all winter long and then tested the probity of the drawing of according to Mr. Ingres's advice by painting half a dozen figures, doing some portraits in the spring and I thought I'd found what I needed, though I didn't know what I needed and it was then that we went to Europe to live. I lived in Europe from late 1925 until 1934. I made several trips back to the United States. My first wife died in Europe, she was an American girl from Milwaukee and died of tuberculosis in 1930. My early studies were in Munich. I worked there with Hans Hofmann in 1926, but the period of instruction was shortened by the illness of my wife and I found myself on my own on a hillside somewhere in southern Switzerland. Through the influence of friends that visited, artists friends that visited in the neighborhood, mainly a painter by the name of Hans Reichel(sp?) who was a Klee student, I began to look upon painting as something that had to be inspired, not something that you learned. There were some agonizing moments when I thought I'd give everything up, having tested everything according to my own stubborn head way, then began all over again, more or less in the spirit of Klee. Oddly enough despite the German heritage on my father's side, I don't think I have anything very much in common with German art. The expressionists meant nothing to me and Mr. Klee and his symbolism meant nothing to me. I admired the work but there was really no bridge.

WILLIAM AGEE: Was that really your first discovery of what we call modern art and had you been seeing ...

CARL HOLTY: I'd see a lot of it but thought nothing of it. Actually it was with Hofmann in 1926 that we first were interested in modern art but it was in a sort of an academic sense. I mean to us the big bombs that exploded before World War I, at least so we were told, were Cezanne and there was Picasso and Matisse and we tried to study the methods that they used. The independent work came, rather, the independent search and the doubt that arose from the notion that they might not have been the only pebbles on the beach came then two, three years later. Nevertheless it was in a return to Cubism that I sort of got off the ground. It was about 1928, I think, and just one of those things hits you. It happens, I suppose, in every generation, the thing that really takes you away from the most pedestrian pursuit and opens the way for you to work, by no means an artist yet, full-blown or independent, but you've finally found a way in which you can work. And aren't looking for something to say, well you're not going to look for something to look for first to find it, well I found it about that time ...

WILLIAM AGEE: When you were working in a Cubist way, had you been particularly interested in Picasso or was there ... ?

CARL HOLTY: No, no the man that I was most interested in was Juan Gris and it was probably because he was so methodical and easier to follow than Picasso who was always a step ahead of you and not a purist as it were. I was also interested in the work of a man by the name of Roger de la Fresnaye who died in Switzerland the year before we got there, I think. One of the most ill starred of the French artists. Got a late start in his career and only about three years to do all his work and then poison gas, and then the tuberculosis out of the poison gas and he never recovered his strength.

WILLIAM AGEE: He turned out a terrific amount of work in a very few years didn't he?

CARL HOLTY: He did. From 19 ... everything began in 1911 and it was practically over in 1914.

WILLIAM AGEE: A very fine painter too I think.

CARL HOLTY: A very fine painter. What's very interesting is that it proves a point: if you're born at the wrong moment and ready at the wrong moment, you have to pay for it. Milton Brown who wrote the Armory Book Show tells me that Robert Delaunay, with whom I later became friendly, really created the biggest sensation at the Cologne exhibition which was then brought over here. Now the Cologne exhibition was in 1911, '12 ...

WILLIAM AGEE: '12 I believe.

CARL HOLTY: And you could see that de la Fresnaye could not have been ready, whereas Delaunay who was not older, Delaunay was a boy wizard, he took the Saint Severins when he was nineteen years old and the Eiffel Tower when he was twenty, was ready at that time. De la Fresnaye was not. I think de la Fresnaye from my studies, later on would have made a greater impression on the Germans than Delaunay or at least equally as strong a one and I used to know people in these circles later on, that is those who were left, but that was in the Swiss period and I made rapid progress. I had a show in Germany and was even invited to show by the New Secession in Munich, a room full of water colors which were not sketchy water colors, the technique was sort of Klee, but the structure was Cubism and French and tended toward the earlier Cubist period with not so much of the decorative or what they called synthetic cubism here, in the work. And apparently the organization had entertained several guests, the guests had gotten all the publicity and so the invitation to show a whole roomful of these was whittled down to fifteen to ten to five and the five were then shown and went up in smoke with the

fire in 1931 so that was a fiasco. True, we were all congratulated by all our colleagues in Paris for getting money which was, of course, insurance money, for our work, while those who were not invited to show were particularly pitied, as being poor devils that never had a chance. And that ended the venture of German exhibitions. Then after my wife's death in 1930 I moved to Paris. I had friends there and I'd lived in Europe long enough not to live exclusively with my American compatriots, I was lucky enough to be able to speak both German and French I learned as a little child so I could move more easily than they could although I had a lot of American friends, there in Paris, we didn't - and some in Munich - in school but the ones in Paris were by choice, the ones in Munich were because they stuck to you if you could speak the language and get them out of holes in restaurants with waiters and so on. I joined the, was asked to join the abstraction creation movement. Not in the beginning. Reichel(sp?) was; that's this man I talked about who was a Klee pupil, and he rejected the invitation for the same reason Miro rejected it, thinking that the purist program of Albert Laize, Mondrian, Jean Arp, [inaudible], would construct only an errant house, that wasn't their idea. It wasn't my idea either but it was during the following year that I met Delaunay who liked some of the things I did, he visited a painter in the same building whose work he didn't regard so highly, a very charming Italian chap who sort of disappeared in the shuffle, and it was Delaunay who recommended me and the membership was obtained by the recommendation of one man. That's the only way you could get into the group so that it was very dubious whether people would claim they were members of abstraction creation movement at that time without ever having been in Paris is valid. I don't see how it could be. The only other American at that time was Sandy Calder who is, of course, very well-known and I think had been in from the very beginning which was only a year or two earlier. So we didn't show in those days, we published books and we were very much on the outside of everything. We had dinner parties that were known as friendship dinners, diners amicals and I hold them in no fond memory. It always seemed to me as though there were about sixty misanthropes sitting around there, bewailing their isolation because Paris at the time was dedicated entirely to the success of four artists, Picasso, Braque, Leger, and what's the girl's name ... ?

WILLIAM AGEE: Marie Laurencin.

CARL HOLTY: Marie Laurencin, that's right. Everybody else was on the side streets and the depression was still on. When the depression gave way, then the shakes came, because of the impending second World War, with the rise of Adolph Hitler. I married again in Paris, and spent part of a year, my daughter was born in Hungary, in Budapest, where my wife hails from, and I also went to Africa in that time. Africa, I regret very much having had to leave, if that's good English, it isn't really ...

WILLIAM AGEE: What prompted you to go to Africa?

CARL HOLTY: My father-in-law's business. He had a branch of his bank in Tangiers because of the advantages of a banker in that location, in a free city, which meant inland postage in six countries and so on and an easy exchange, cheap living and we spent several months there and I enjoyed it very much. It's probably the only place I'd ever been in my life that didn't look like every other place. Europe, of course, is not like the United States but it's more like it. Down there, where the midnight blue sky is definitely green and the moon is yellow and those jackasses take the place of radio transistors to keep you awake and the people look like they've been that way, just forever. I like them very much.

WILLIAM AGEE: How long were you there?

CARL HOLTY: About five months. I wanted to stay and my wife who is the Cassandra of her family and is never wrong saw the evil times coming and she was rather terrified and said the day would come when they would slit our throats and throw us all in the Straits.

WILLIAM AGEE: Were you doing a lot of painting there?

CARL HOLTY: I did a lot of drawing and water color because to paint in oil paint you have to have a home base. There are the impressionists who moved around like gypsies with their triangular easels to stand up. We did it when we were students, we also went out painting and later on the impressionists were so much deeper one way or another more sensitive, you can't just register these things, so I did water coloring and drawing; a good many line drawings and oddly enough had some success with them in Paris. There was the French, old French Army people and Naval people that liked the drawings of Arabs. They were quite abstract by the way. I don't know why they liked them but they did. The long and the short of it was that in 1934 we went, came back to the United States and went to the midwest temporarily because my grandmother was still alive and she lived in Europe a good deal of the time and we were out in Milwaukee for what we thought would be quite a long while; I must say I didn't like the idea of coming back to where you started from. Life had been so much more glamorous and things don't change very much in eight years in one place excepting here in New York where they tear it down every second year and build another city. And then my grandmother died suddenly and we moved to Connecticut, in order not to move into New York City. We lived in Westport for about a year and a half and then came to New York. I hadn't planned to show at all for some time. I didn't need to then, and ... needing to doesn't by the way bring you any success but I was perfectly willing to stay on the outside. As a matter of fact I had a

talk with Hans Hofman who in the meantime had come to the United States, and we discussed what you should do about presenting yourself in public and he said there were really only two alternatives. One was to start very early if you felt you were ready and to take all the blows that fortune has to deal out while you're young and tough and sort of get the world used to you, and the other would be to wait until you'd completed your life's work, more or less, and make your appearance when it would defend itself no matter what the criticism was. Well as far as I know, only one man in, or let's say very few men, but I only can think of one painter in the last century and a half that did that and that's a German painter Hans Mareiz(phon. sp) who consistently refused to exhibit and then we, he arranged the exhibit at the age of forty-eight or so, must of thought, must have had an idea that he wasn't going to live to see it. He had an idea which would be the ideal idea if you could live in any other way, Mareiz(phon. sp) had a patron, the great philosopher Fiedler who wrote on form, Conrad Fiedler. It would be best not to mix business with pleasure but the world isn't that way and nevertheless I was talked into it at that time by Hilaire Hiler and had a big show with him. We'd been friends in Paris and we had quite a lot of work to show as a matter of fact, that wasn't too good because American painters didn't show annually at that time, they showed every five or six years, putting out ten or twelve pictures which at least created the impression of preciousness and rarity and the one man show, the annual one man show was strictly a Paris affair and the pounding it out and grinding it out. So we had no success with this exhibition, but through it I met another artists, Stuart Davis, who taught at the League. I was introduced to a young group of artists - they were young compared to us - that is ten, twenty to thirty years younger, and finally became the American Abstract artists. Now their whole movement was launched too soon for the people themselves. As the Museum of Modern Art grew their interest at that time was centered more and more in the direction of surrealism and whether abstract painting would ever have been understood or not I wouldn't know, but any rate it wasn't liked.

WILLIAM AGEE: Who did this group include?

CARL HOLTY: Well this group included Burgoyne Diller who after a long life has finally been accepted, Robert Wolf, Ilya Bolotowsky, John B. Green, who was the purist of purists and now he isn't, he's moved. As a matter of fact I remember a conversation precisely with John when we speculated on the day, or when the day would come, that abstract painting would be accepted in America and I'm the one that said the minute you put in the schmaltz, it'll go over. Which was more or less true. Let's call the schmaltz. In this case, the sensuality that was invoked in the movement that is called the avant garde painting of the late forties and early fifties. Now Ad Reinhardt was a student of mine at that time and he was in that early group. He hadn't done anything as yet, he didn't do anything for several years, he was in the Navy then, during the war. Toward the end of it, he began to find himself but he was always very able, he had great technical proficiency and sensibility, he was a student ... came right out of Columbia and took some, went in I think for social painting. And some of them came into my classes, this was at a little school it was called The American Artists' School on fourteenth street which was abandoned by the John Reed Club and left a secretary and a janitor without any means of subsistence so they asked some artists and one of the artists was a former instructor and asked me through a friend Walter Quart(phon. sp), whether I would instruct free of charge and I thought I'd try and see whether I could teach some of the things that were going through my head which is quite different than correcting figure drawings and so on. I ... a little later in the Art Student's League I used to substitute off and on, I substituted one winter in an evening class at the League. Now if --- do you want me to go on with this or ...?

WILLIAM AGEE: I wish you would.

CARL HOLTY: At this particular point we're coming in to what we were talking about.

WILLIAM AGEE: Yes, I know. I'd like to have this tape for general Archives purposes after we're through with the research project on the thirties this is most useful.

CARL HOLTY: This was in 1937, we were living on Riverside Drive, I believe, and I had a studio on fifty-sixth Street and I used to visit with an uncle of mine who was a widower and with cousins out in Wisconsin, now only cousins are left and I do go there once in a while. They no longer live in Milwaukee. I made visits about twice a year, I'd drive out. On one of these visits Mr. Alfred Pelikan, (he's of Cechoslovakian origin therefore the "K") asked me whether I wanted to do some lecturing on the Federal Forum and he said he could get me the full five weeks job. They were engaging lecturers at a hundred dollars a week in sort of spells of from one week to five at any one city in the country.

WILLIAM AGEE: This was under the Department of Education?

CARL HOLTY: That's right, the Department of Education. Now it connects with the WPA from this standpoint. The people that did our dirty work were on the WPA. That is, they did the research for us, they put out the handbill, they printed the handbills and we were assigned to a building. Well, as I say I took the job for a subsequent autumn.

WILLIAM AGEE: Before we get on to that Mr. Holty, were these people who were doing a lot of the work for you,

getting the research done, were they on the WPA Federal Art Project?

CARL HOLTY: They weren't on the project at all. They were on the Works Progress Administration.

WILLIAM AGEE: I see.

CARL HOLTY: Now, as a matter of fact, for the record let it be said, these were the people that were almost unemployable. They were nice and they were awkward. No handbill ever came off that press right, the research was not done well. These are the kind of people that every country has at all times and at times like this also. They are just simply carried along. If they are farmers, they fall on pitchforks, and if they're brick masons they get fired from job to job. It's not because they're illwilled, they're just ... I noticed that at the time, that they were the kind that were, they were very eager and very willing. We met in a, shall we say dismounted school building, an old school building on Humbolt Avenue, that consisted of three or four classrooms, it must have come from long ago, it was a nice place and there one of the rooms was used for briefings, and there were tables with free literature about the project and we were simply assigned places to go by the project director whose name I forget, but there must be somebody there who sent you either to Southside High or Washington High, or Northside High or this public school or that public school.

WILLIAM AGEE: What department was the Department of Education in? Was it in the ... was that separate department by itself or was that in the ... ?

CARL HOLTY: I think it was a separate department. I'm sure because there was a Commissioner of Education and his name was, if I'm not mistaken, Studebaker, at the time because I had a lot of correspondence with him after this was all over. Now don't think that this was ... I was the art lecturer, but there were all kinds of lecturers there. It was something to see that caravan come in on Mondays the jalopies, old Chevrolets, Fords, people lecturing on the gold standard, the Townsend Plan, Soviet Russia, D.H. Lawrence, practically everything under the sun, and they looked it. They were not having a good time, short stocky women with leather coats, remind you of Mrs. ... of Dr. Lead and they, they'd know each other and there wasn't a great deal of camaraderie there, they thought they were sick and tired of being stuck in different cities all through the west and south and they landed there. All I can recall is that when they came in in the morning they took off their hats and coats, put their coats on their left arms and made a shovel out of their left hands and walked down toward those tables with the free literature and they just shoved it, I don't know what they did with it, whether they did their accounts on it, blew their noses into it, I mean they were just little fly leaves, but I did meet them again which is why I'm referring to that part, this may be a little humorous. Let's say fourteen years later at a UNESCO meeting at Hunter College. They, ... we spoke. And as I said, I had twenty-one lectures a week, talked everywhere and got sort of used to it, had no pictorial material, it was actually art appreciation in the sense of talking it up you know like a football coach's minute and a half pep talk.

WILLIAM AGEE: Were you doing these in New York or ... ?

CARL HOLTY: No, only there in Milwaukee, that was the job and that was the only job I had. I spoke for five weeks and it was over. Other ... I could have gone on, but this was a kind of a sporting thing for me and five hundred extra dollars, which was quite a lot of money at that time, much more than it would be today, and I had refused to go on the art project, while I was there, this Hartridge who was the local head of the art project, suggested that I do it and I ...

WILLIAM AGEE: That was in Milwaukee?

CARL HOLTY: Yes, 1934, and I had the feeling that that should be left to the people who needed it.

WILLIAM AGEE: You were more or less financially independent?

CARL HOLTY: I was independent and I didn't think it was right to do it. He told me that I was wrong. Well, I still think I was right, because it made room for one more, and there was another project, which you remember, the Treasury Art Project, which was on quality, they were government commissions by Mr. Bruce I believe.

WILLIAM AGEE: Well that ... Bruce ran first the Public Works of Art Project which lasted only until June of 1934 and then he took over the Section of Painting and Sculpture which was under the Treasury Department and there was also the Treasury Relief Art Program which Olin Dows headed up, which was kind of an appendage, I think, to the Section.

CARL HOLTY: Oh yes, yes, I've heard of that.

WILLIAM AGEE: And they were more or less concerned with quality for government buildings. WPA Federal Art Project was more concerned with just getting people jobs.

CARL HOLTY: Well, I, I ... shan't ... I'll leave that to you and others. I had a few insights into it, I was here and I was down on "G" Street with ...

WILLIAM AGEE: I'd like to hear them very much.

CARL HOLTY: ... with Diller, who was at that time one of the heads of the mural project here and I saw this blackboard on the wall, well originally I saw it up on Forty-First Street or Fortieth Street between Madison and Park Avenue and I said what's that. Well, these were all the okays that went on these murals. And they were burdensome, I mean first of all the approval of ... the aesthetic approval and I suppose the subject matter approval, according to advice by the supervisor. Then the stuff being farmed out to high schools and schools, you had to get the approval of the school principals and so on. There were about eight or nine people at least that had to approve this thing before it went up. And I wouldn't care so much whether the principal at Midwood(phon. sp) High School in Brooklyn or Sheepshead Bay High School didn't like the kind of art, the fact was that these people were completely indifferent to it and their advice being asked and knowing somewhere none too deep down that they didn't know anything about it, they became resentful and obstructive. It's like being forced to make your living as a repairer of automobiles when you don't know how to repair and you don't know how to drive. You end up hating automobiles. This was the real stumbling block. Not the difference of opinion as to whether there should be a naked woman in the picture or a picture of Trotsky and Lenin, but the fact that it was an onerous chore, that they had to say something and not knowing anything about it didn't want to say the wrong thing, because in public life you can say the wrong thing once and you get paid for it very rapidly. I was glad to have my hands free. Now the work that I saw at the time that Hilaire showed me impressed me very much. Now under the circumstances certain things happen. You may hear elsewhere this is all hearsay, but I remember the time young Bobby Green told me that when they tried to cut back on the projects there was the one proviso that no man would be fired before a step in the project was completed so that they would soldier on the job until they had a new one okayed. This was one way of protecting their existence, that the next one went through before you finished it. In some instances, I don't know, I mean he's dead now and I think that Stuart Davis painted something, with willful intent not to have it go where it was to go. It was for a Williamsburg housing project, it's now a mural out at the University of Indiana. And in the years of my youth here in New York when I went to art school and did odd jobs, I did forget to mention that I was once a commercial artist - designed the Brier Rabbit Molasses candy ads for about six months - I remember that we would hear around the studios - also worked with the decorators - that if a thing was too good it wasn't good enough. That is, if you overdid a piece of decoration, when a red wall with a little gold trimming on it was the thing called for, why that was not going to be good enough which was told us particularly because we wanted to work with figures in the field of pure decoration. Now Davis's picture was certainly the kind of picture that was too good, certainly too good to hang in the hallway of a new housing project and too loud, visually too loud and it was never put up there. And it was bought, I think, back from the WPA by Mrs. [inaudible] and was then sold to Indiana which is a very good and proper ending for it. Even better if the University would stop putting banquet chairs right up against it or hang it a little bit higher. They have this big art building and they should take a little better care of it. But it's where it belongs. Now I knew other people on the projects that just painted pictures. Pollock was on, I think that was Olin Dows was it the ... ?

WILLIAM AGEE: Well that might have been.

CARL HOLTY: They were paid ninety-five or something dollars a month to turn in a certain amount of work.

WILLIAM AGEE: Yes that was ...

CARL HOLTY: Well, I only know that from hearsay but what I did know was this bit with the Works Progress Administration, I may ... there may have been other art lecturers and under other circumstances, I mean, I might have gone on but it was very trying sort of giving talks and had I not been raised in the mid-west where the greatest talker-upper of art that ever existed lived, I wouldn't have known how to go about it. That's who I believe is still alive at the Chicago Art Institute, a popular lecturer, lectured at country fairs and was a wonder to watch, I mean this was, he would say "Well, see the little cow heading over the hill that brings a message of springtime and love to you and you and you." And by the way a first cousin of Orson Welles and his ... who was that fellow used to run the WPA ... ?

WILLIAM AGEE: Cahill?

CARL HOLTY: Holger Cahill said, "Isn't that one breed of cats." But I admired Watson for what he did and for what he represented. He got himself up like an artist, with a brimmed hat and a broad band down the side of his pince-nez and he had a [inaudible] and he wore a belted coat and wore wrist watches when only sissies did, wore a cane in Milwaukee in 1910 and nobody took a swing at him but they all made fun of him and then at the same time he was a cultural teacher in his conduct. Off the record he was a man who had been a fairly decent watercolor painter and who finally found his raison d'etre, giving art tours through Europe. Well, listening to him and hearing him talk without any material made it possible for me to romanticize and make a kindergarten full

of old people down in Bay View think that they were having a good time when I told them about the Sistine Chapel, and related pictures along with content. That was my work with them and of course the lecture period wasn't a very long one and then I had some correspondence with Mr. Studebaker, probably on an expansion or something of this kind, I won't say that I was right in wanting to bring the whole thing to finish but, they had ideas, might have been quite alright to go ahead with them but this was the one thing, I don't know how much more you can find out about the Federal Forum from anybody else.

WILLIAM AGEE: Well as I say, I've been able to find out precious little about it and anything more that you have to say I'd ...

CARL HOLTY: You write to Alfred Pelikan care of the Milwaukee school board. He should still be living in the city there, he will be able to give you further information on it and I wouldn't know, well everybody here, Mr. Cahill would have known about it, he's dead. Mrs. McMahon, well she wouldn't have bothered about it. I don't think it was any of her province. You know when I spoke to you on the phone about a month ago my wife reminded me of it, I'd forgotten it because I'd had nothing to do with this, just as I couldn't give you any information about the pre World War I Americans in Paris. The ... whenever I was asked about the Armory Show, this was sort of an annoyance because you, the older guy tried to put you down you know, they were the ones that remembered it and you were too young for this so I knew only one of those early men in Paris and that's the one that just died, that's the owner of that leather company, Martin ...

WILLIAM AGEE: Gerald Murphy.

CARL HOLTY: Gerald Murphy and I knew him, not under the happiest of circumstances - he wasn't painting anymore. He was Fitzgerald's friend, he was Robert Benchly's friend and he was Dorothy Parker's friend because in the last summer of my wife's life, we were living in a place called Montana Vermala in Switzerland ...

WILLIAM AGEE: This was 1930?

CARL HOLTY: This is 1930, that's right, summer of 1930 and when we first went up there we lived in a pension and Robert Benchley and Dorothy Parker both lived in this pension and how they got there was through Mr. Gerald Murphy. Mr. Murphy had a house and one of his children contracted tuberculosis and they moved the family, lock stock and barrel up into this little town. He bought the local bar. It was a plain saloon, and he turned it into a kind of red leather chromium bar and then got a fellow that I knew, who has since died, to run it for him. They thought this would be a long siege so they had their friends come up and visit and I remember Scott Fitzgerald very well from that time. He was a very pathetic figure at the moment and nobody that didn't know him will ever know how beautiful that man was, because in the photographs there is always a glassy look in the eyes, and he had a profile that was much better than Barrymore and, well, I liked him too. At the time he was drinking a great deal, his wife was already in that institution down there at [inaudible], which was down the road a ways, you know, down the mountains, behind Montre which is where my wife was buried and up there is the institution where Zelda had already been sent and he used to take a couple of bottles of gin to bed with him you know because of the floor show - the pink elephants were coming, he was in bad shape. Everybody is in bad shape. Mrs. Parker who's a great wit when drunk is the most maudlin female you can imagine. She spent twenty dollars just to hear this miserable band play Little Gigolo you know over and over again and just cry in her beers or in her soup and then in the daytime you know, cold sober and everything else, she was rather witty. Not only, not so tough, she wasn't tough up there, you don't get tough when you're where people are dying, not so many of them. You know there were military sanitariums there, there were the British...She made so much fun of them because they knew how to die. They didn't look as though they were dying but you know, you carry that thing for ten, twelve years out of the war, and it has a way of sobering things, like a flashy wit.

WILLIAM AGEE: There are a few more questions I'd like to ask you about the thirties if you don't mind. You were lecturing in and around Milwaukee.

CARL HOLTY: In the city and county you know in that general area.

WILLIAM AGEE: And you would lecture at all sorts of places, high schools and ladies garden clubs ... ?

CARL HOLTY: Well, those were the little spots you see. I said twenty-one lectures a week - that's making it dramatic. Let's say you go to a luncheon and talk for ten minutes or fifteen minutes. A garden club luncheon, anything else, any club luncheon, you see you were ... the government placed you at the service of the public and of course with emphasis on the schools but they were not during school hours as I recall, usually in the evening, and in the daytime there would be sort of an assembly hour, say in a high school. Because I remember standing next to the principal of the West Division High School, an old timer and this was one of those old foul smelling auditoriums with a thousand people in it - there was a good deal of annoyance and noise that wouldn't quiet down, and I was a little bit astonished at the profanity of the principal beneath his breath whom I had remembered from my student days. I didn't go to that high school, but I had remembered him as one of those guardians you know of morality and conduct. To hear him cuss in lumberjack terms to a bunch of kids in the

aisles. It was all that sort of work. You were there where nobody had been before. The art lecturers probably were pioneering before the others. Now maybe I'll tell you the end of it which goes with the one memory that I have of those people, none of whom I've met personally ever, more than a "hello" and a "hi" you know in a hallway. In 1952 there was a UNESCO conference called at Hunter College and Paul and I were teaching out at St. Louis at the time in Washington University, we wanted to come home here at any time and he bulldogged and bullied Ken Hudson, our dean, into sending us on saying "dammit it isn't everybody that's asked to these conferences and this is something the Washington University can be proud of." So we came to New York for a week and actually the art conference, to the disgrace of UNESCO, was not even on the agenda, was not even in the pamphlets, it had been tacked on afterwards and it was a very entertaining evening by the way with a good deal of acrimony back and forth with Mr. Cheymethé and shall we say the "do-gooders" of the conference and the "do-gooders" of international goodwill. We were all tangled up in it. I mentioned it to him yesterday and he said "Yeh, I remember that," he said, "I said a thing or two," and I said "that's exactly what you said." "You said as far as you were concerned UNESCO was a mail carrier, you could get along with all the artists in the world by yourself, all the institution was to do was to provide for the communications." He said "I don't remember." I said, "Didn't you say it?" He said, "I guess I did." And nevertheless I went there on the first morning just to take a look and there were all these jive educators, Stoddard Brothers and all the rest of them, wearing the usual uniform in those days most of them wore brogans and officer's flannel shirts, gaberdine trousers, standing around, there were lots of flags and there was one unhappy man walking up and down, nobody paid any attention to him and I guess I'm the only one that knew who he was and that was Archipenko, who really didn't know what the hell he was doing there and then on the second floor I recognized by their actions, my colleagues of fourteen years before. There were tables with free literature and these fellows signed in, their coats over their left arms, their hands up like shovels and everything on those tables, they were now well-dressed, they were now educators, before that they'd just been barnstorming snake oil salesmen. I don't know whether they were the identical people but they certainly had the same background. It was a short thing and I would have forgotten about it. Now I'm talking about it, it all comes back.

WILLIAM AGEE: Did ... was this idea originated by or did Cahill have anything to do with that?

CARL HOLTY: It was done directly with me through Pelikan who knew that I came up from time to time, who, like me, he was a painter too and a man of ability and he used to visit with me in the summer time in Europe when I lived there in Paris in my widowers days, two or three years. Pelikan felt a little more at home, I think many times in Europe where he had probably been under the big tent when he was a kid than he did here where he had some disappointments. He simply suggested it to me out of a clear sky and I didn't even know what it was. Now the actual operation of going in and signing in and so on, well, I taught at Brooklyn College from '56 through '59 and left there and came back this fall and had forgotten the procedures of, you know, paper work, that is the personal ones, I don't mean the classrooms, I'd forgotten, you forget those things and I've forgotten that. I mean I only see the general picture and I recall a few instances, one I was lecturing down on the south side which is a Polish neighborhood in a kindergarten room and seeing these poor old people sitting on these kindergarten chairs and in sort of a large circle and I thought well I'll try to make it especially good and I do know that it was all they had you know as entertainment. This was still hard times and that was about it. As to the other work, I have heard about it and I've talked about it a lot, or listened about it, listened to Lou Block tell about it because Block had a fantastic memory.

WILLIAM AGEE: I understand that. I want to see him.

CARL HOLTY: Well, he's worth going down to see. He's also an absolutely delightful person, who, despite the fact that he knows a good many people that are not nice people, is not given to dwelling on it. He's fine and he's married, he's ... I'm sure he's still affiliated with the University of Louisville in some capacity.

WILLIAM AGEE: I know he's living in Louisville.

CARL HOLTY: Yes. Well, then I saw him again. Of course we had talked about this, about the Artist's Congress days with which I had something to do.

WILLIAM AGEE: Did the American Abstract Artists have anything to do with the American Artists' Congress?

CARL HOLTY: Only this: some of the members were also members of it. As a matter of fact, what happened at that time, the Artists' Union people, the Congress people, of course the Congress people had to have a little more front. This was a front organization of course, but not a very effective one and most of the members didn't know it was, but it was that sort of thing. But I mean they had to be better known. The Artist's Union was there to protect the jobs of the painters on WPA. It was founded for that reason. The Cultural Contribution, I think that magazine they put out, that paper that Davis headed was very good. It's better than any of the slicks that you have today in the nature of the content and the way it was presented. There is nothing that anybody has to apologize for, and the artists, well the abstract artists, well we had a millionaire group of course, George L. K. Morris and Mr. Albert Gallatin, Mrs. Morris, [inaudible] and Charlie Shaw who were known as the Park Avenue

Cubists but were not people on WPA, but neither was I, nor was [inaudible], nor was Dave Turnball. We were either teachers or we were on WPA, that's how they made their living.

WILLIAM AGEE: What was your general aim or idea behind the American Abstract Artists' ... ?

CARL HOLTY: Clean up the mess. That is ... I mean American painting appeared to us at the time, appeared as a terrible concoction, half modern, half this, half ... what was it called?, regional art?

WILLIAM AGEE: Yes.

CARL HOLTY: And sometimes the artists just crossed the lines according to whether they were successful with something. I think it was back in '35 or '36 that Henry Billings did some things with a locomotive which looked liked abstract paintings or looked like Leger's Arme Mechanique and Leger was a little more abstract than Billings'. The idea was the same, to make forms out of mechanical forms. However, it didn't work and then he turned to social painting and I think I asked him, or somebody asked him how he could do it, he was on his way to something and ... well he said nothing happened. He found ... I don't think that this meant money, I think there's something else outside of that that counts and that is rapport. If you work along, alone, and it is folklore that each artist is an individual but it is not true. He is an individual, but he works in concert, he has friends, he has people that agree with him and without that it's like ... he becomes ... I won't even say frustrated, he becomes creatively frustrated, he just doesn't work. I was looking over some stuff the other night at home, drawings from that period and it impressed me how many things remained in the project. Well, God knows if I never did anything else I've painted enough pictures, in spite of the fact that we were not...on the other hand you had a pretty good idea that it still needed development which usually begins with having painted them and showing them and the direction at that time particularly in the modern groups, the museum of modern art was Dada? Now they wanted, they had a feeling that that was the department of ideas, thank you, that had been solved by others, by masters and that was it. They ... you were told that in so many words at one time. And there own directions were manifold but they generally ran along the surrealist line. They still do you know. I mean that is they may show Mark Rothko or they may show somebody or Jack Pollock for a few weeks but back comes De Chirico, back come these things.

WILLIAM AGEE: Essentially it was then particularly oriented to the French wasn't it?

CARL HOLTY: The museum?

WILLIAM AGEE: Yes.

CARL HOLTY: Yes. To the foreign yes, I mean to the out ... non-American. America was not supposed to be anything and there was some truth in it, we all went to Europe to study their ideas and to pick up what we could. I don't think I'm an innovator at all, but I don't think innovation is all there is too it.

WILLIAM AGEE: Of course not.

CARL HOLTY: But there are innovators and a good many people we can say fools rush in where angels fear to tread or you can say certain people won't do certain things until the time is right. For instance, I saw some murals, mural designs by Willem de Kooning on the project that have never been carried out and that his friends, for better or worse, I don't see why they've done it, have suppressed to show him as a hard edge designer of great excellence with no expressionism and none of the other things although I imagine technically having been a house painter, he was equipped to perform all these tricks long before he ever went to do them. But Bill was a member of the abstract artists, or considered becoming one and then didn't become one. Gorky was one until I got in. I'm afraid I'm the fellow that more or less caused him to quit.

WILLIAM AGEE: Why was that?

CARL HOLTY: Well, we were, it was the first or second meeting and they were arguing about a title for the group and I didn't realize that at the time that sitting around on chairs like this was their amusement. Actually sitting on banquet chairs was their amusement. He was in no hurry and he was recommending certain names and finally I said after all it didn't make very difference how original the name was, how original anything was, it was a matter of quality and I guess nobody talked that way before in the crowd around him and he sort of said well, I don't feel at home here this evening, when you get organized let me know and I'll come back. He never did and I never cared about it. I didn't like him principlly, though I respected him and I thought he was often very amusing when we did get together on other matters informally several times. I had the feeling that he liked certain other artists that were also born at the wrong time, they should have been born at the time when they could have worked through Rubens or Raphael in schools where their predominant manual ability and technical understanding would have served them in good stead and then working on another man's work because there wasn't much substance there and that on the best days of their life perhaps they would also paint a good picture, just like Johann List who painted the Shepard's Breakfast and that was his holiday form working with

Paul Rubens. The idea was that the time was not propitious for people like that. After he died I always had the bad, you always have bad feelings if you don't like somebody and they die. In that respect Freud is probably right, the dead are always right because you have a conscience. I was in California in '50 in the summer teaching at Berkeley when they had a memorial show. Lord knows, you had room enough to see it all by yourself because I went to the museum, it was beautifully hung and I laid myself out to do him big justice and I felt that he was stuck back there where we had all been stuck at one time, taking old pictures apart and putting them together again, compositionally with another pictorialization of their plastic qualities, not another plastic, not another space. Now of course the younger generations come along and I hear them talk about him as though he was one of the great, maybe his is, one of the great, I only state my....

WILLIAM AGEE: What do they think about the paintings of his last two years?

CARL HOLTY: Well, they were very adroit. You see the paintings of his last two years, and he lived very heroically the last part of his life. I happen to know everything that was wrong with him, I suppose you do too. He was operated on. That's the first shock I got. It was during the war, I believe, I saw him at the Museum of Modern Art and was shocked at his appearance. He had just been operated on for cancer of the rectum and that's a very messy affair. He called it a tumor but I later found out from Stuart Davis about it and he was very uncomfortable living after that. Then I believe there was some marital trouble and finally in an automobile accident he broke his neck. When I was artist in residence at so many different places the question would always come up whether there was a secret reason for Gorky's suicide, and I said how many more did he need? I mean he worked very heroically during those years, he did all this work but, he had done one before, that fancy one, that big one the, I don't know, with those fancy titles, that was shown in Sidney Janis' abstract and surrealist show in 1944 I guess. At that time it was the Mortimer Grant Gallery. We were all in the show and there was this big picture, it was very adroit and that was already the technique. The application of his later work and he was always, in lieu of something better ... he certainly was an outstanding master, let's put it this way. I don't see him as anything else but a master and later ... well, what often happens, when people get enough influences into their work then of course they begin to look like something you've never seen before. I mean Gorky was once like Picasso, he was a student of Picasso by long distance, of Leger, all these things. Then Matta came in, and Matta was the impure figure. This has a little bearing on the ideals of the abstract painters.

WILLIAM AGEE: Very much so.

CARL HOLTY: Well the ideals weren't held by all and they weren't held by all permanently you know how those things are. It's like Pissarro who went off the deep end for a couple of years on the pointillist technique and then changed his mind. So a good number of us wanted to make things like that. We worked with scotch tape and the stuff was pure and I would have died before using a smear or anything like that and it struck you as something...well, clean in every way. Now I'm not particularly that kind of an austere person. We used to ... Bearden is the fellow that really called my attention to it, you can tell the painter's work by the audience that came to see it. Now I'd see Mondrian and you'd see all these mathematics professors in there, all these thin rails and when Hofmann would show you would see the biggest bunch of messes and state cripples, all looking because they read about it you see. They were all looking for the end of the emotional rainbow you see whereas the others wanted things absolutely purity and Ad Reinhardt has still got a little of that in his system and there are people that have this personal angle of purity. At that moment, if I think of the work of Reginald Marsh, which was neither Renaissance, neither Rubens, nor was it real, nor was it Coney Island to any of us. We wanted to leave that sort of thing and I think of him first of all because ..

WILLIAM AGEE: That seemed to be very much the end of tradition didn't it?

CARL HOLTY: Well it did. You'd see people like Arnold Blanch at that time, the painting that they did. It was partly ... it was sentimental in feeling. He's not today so highly regarded but he's a much better painter than he was then because he's sort of cut to his size; does these very handsome little ornamental things, decorative things and ... but I think that had a great deal to do with it. You heard here of the moderns from Europe and here the kids were talking about something else, Daumier or El Greco and there was this small group of people and I think the man that triggered it pretty much, though that's been disputed and I wouldn't know, Harry Holtzman who was the great enthusiast about Mondrian and his attention was called to Mondrian by Diller. He was the man that started that sort of idea. Then of course during the war some of these artists came here but they had nothing to do with the later development. American Abstract Expressionist painting was released by the surrealists, not by Leger, not by Mondrian, not by the abstract painters. This was...this doesn't go with the American ethos somehow or other. This is not...you can see from a thousand and one it isn't warm which means one can't establish rapport with it, it is rigid, it isn't what art should be, it hasn't ... it doesn't reflect let's say the sensibilities that the ordinary man in the street might have about our atmospheric surroundings which give every land a different look and for one thing or another it didn't ... and literature has had ... literature has spoiled an awful lot of painting in America, it weakened literature, sort of misunderstood religion, certainly didn't do George Inness any good and I think Inness should have been a far greater painter than he was by his ability and you could make comparison with a man like Inness who became befuddled by the thing, with a man like Corot

who never did, who was a sort of a pious saintly man but at least technically clear. Now this has something to do with a long tradition that you can't fake but I mean the later work here, the abstract expressionist school for what it was worth, I think it certainly did improve painting. The piecemeal business was given up by all over whatever it is and a certain audacity which goes into it. Just how long that will last, just how far this will carry in future generations is pretty much somebody else's business to answer. I mean nobody is a crystal gazer but it certainly changed the picture, it impressed the Europeans also at a time when the Europeans had become very weak. Because when I was living in Paris the men that are say well-known French painters were younger than I was, or my age, and their particular provincial arrogance was fantastic. We were all studying this thing intellectually and they felt they could get it by osmosis and the answer it can't be done exclusively either one way or the other and the big wart activity that we have today is another story. I don't think that necessarily fries as many fish as people think. It sort of keeps the show going; it may force the more important of tomorrow's artists into the ivory tower it may detract. Whenever art becomes very popular it begins to approach the theatre and the melodrama and great numbers of people are confronted with things like Pop Art or it doesn't have to be Pop Art - a certain side of surrealism as not expressed by Rene Magritte but let us say by a fellow like Bacon who is yelling at you. Maybe it's his technique or his approach for whatever elemental qualities he may have and he certainly is a professional, he knows how to make his pictures. He resembles the Boris Karloff school. An old thriller or the Grand Guignol, a shot in the dark, slammed door, shriek, etc, etc. We have it a good deal in the theatre, in the modern theatre.. I just ... either I'm just getting terribly old, but actually I never thrilled to that kind of thing so it isn't just ossifying. Well, I'll wind this up for you after the ...

WILLIAM AGEE: Fine. Before we get on and finish could we ... there are still a few question about the thirties I'd like to ask you.

CARL HOLTY: Yes, remember now I came back here in the thirties, in '34, spent the year out in the mid-west which was nowhere and was aghast at the slow pokiness, particularly in Wisconsin. Then I moved in here, into the time when we had, when the school of social art was stronger here, the regional art stronger in the mid-west. As a matter of fact I quarreled with the later Oscar Hoggen of the University of Wisconsin about the prominence given people like Tom Benton and...bur more so the man that Paul called Wood Grant, Grant Wood. And the other fellow that was for a time -- Curry.

WILLIAM AGEE: John Curry.

CARL HOLTY: Yes, he lived in Wisconsin for a time. Now Curry had ability. You can see that in his big picture - I think it belongs to the Metropolitan Museum, it's of Wisconsin, the wheat fields. If these were artistic sensibilities instead of sensibilities before nature pure and simple that is when you look at it this way, it is the naturalist thrill without enough information, such as the Hudson River School, curiously interesting and readable like a book. But then there was Paul Sackler, there was this sort of deference to regional art, there was something nostalgic about it. Now this was all off to one side and I knew I wasn't going to look at it. Because it had begun before I went to Europe. As a matter of fact, I had a whole page of my conte crayon drawings reproduced in the Christian Science Monitor as early as 1923 in the first attempt to canvas the grass roots for work of people that were not seen in the east because painting in America until 1912 had been a very tight community. There had been Boston, New York and Philadelphia. And the National Academy, the Pennsylvania and then as an addition to this the Corcoran in Washington and most of the painters were anglo-saxon and a couple of Germans. They were congenitally sympathetic to each other to a large extent. One of my teachers was Howard Giles the illustrator. I met J. Alden Weir, heard a lot of stories about the great painter of Death on the Racetrack, Albert Ryder. This was before my time but it was a closed corporation and nothing happened until the WPA days. Of course that let everybody in, Japanese, Russian, Jews, Mexicans and so on but in the early 1920's there was this attempt to canvas the country and it was when people, as far as I'm concerned, like Edward Hopper were fresh young artists, of course they did not continue to be: or a man like Tom Benton. Today they probably look back on his early things and say well there are the seeds. Or, the somewhat dry school of airless painting, Niles Spencer, begun in the early twenties and they were looking away from adaptations of the impressionist paintings such as we had with the Lawsons, the Scofields, the Redfields, the sort of thing you used to see at the academy shows. Along with a sprinkling of things that looked like Andre W. Wyeth but they had no standing at that time. There will always be some people that paint something like that, that sort of poetry, a little bit on the dry side. And that, that was a sort of a forerunner and now in the thirties things had moved through the depression and the jolt here for anyone who had lived in Europe in the years when Europe was so used to depressions lived with them a little more usually than here, this was a big shock. I still have, had students that are not fifty years of age, still can't forget that Poppa lost all the money.

WILLIAM AGEE: It arouses a great deal of bitterness in many, many people still.

CARL HOLTY: So that engendered a certain interest. In New York there was also the ordinary intellectual circles, somebody complained, I guess it was Diller said to me "Do you get these goddamned things from the American Institute of Arts and Letters and so on?" I said, "Yeh, but I don't go up, that is to the 155th Street shows." I mean I can say either yes or no to probably when you're doing alright when you're trying to make some kind of a

picture in the officially accepted art, some kind of an image along with the officially accepted literature but then literature isn't officially accepted, it's popularly accepted. You see and the painting is officially accepted so they're a kind of axis opposed. And then in the late thirties as I remember it here there was this group, The American Abstract Artists. All of us who showed with them made considerable sacrifices because working as we did we frittered away our production by showing two or three things annually with them so you didn't put up your own show. The dealers here, at least those that I knew didn't particularly favor you affinity with groups. They would rather have you alone or not have you at all, whichever it was. My early dealers here were all Germans. I was initially with J. B. Neumann, later with Carl Nierendorf and then again later on with J.B. Neumann. This group was...had its show and by the way the first show of the American Abstract Artists created a stir. It was in the Squibb building. And the stir was created by the fact that so many pictures were sold. They were sold, that was of course the secret, they were sold to members of the group, I mean Gallatin and George Morris who had some money, Gallatin had a lot of it although he was a man who was sick on stinginess. He couldn't help it, it was pathological, always felt that he was being charged more dues than others were though he wasn't. He paid two dollars like the rest of us. And stubborn as an army mule, stiff bloke, and horrified of associating with possible communists. Of course there were some there. As a matter of fact the group had some turbulence between its Trotskyists and Stalinist members which we in the...from along the [inaudible], knew nothing of, but you would notice the coolness between certain people or the new friendships or the new alliances at the meetings that we had very second week. There was one incident in the WPA as I know it that may be of interest to you, someday it should be told, I don't know whether to tell it here or write it, it was the life of a man by the name of Albert Swindlen [ph].

WILLIAM AGEE: I wish you'd tell it now.

CARL HOLTY: Well, I'll tell it as it was told to me partly by Harry Holtzman who was his friend, entirely by him, but some of it checks out. I wouldn't want any conflicts with the widow. Bob Graham, my dealer, has shown Swindlen and has bought some. But, Albert Swindlen who was born I think in '98, came from England to Canada and for a thousand years that family had been swineherds. They had the beautiful name Swindlen. And they were that in Canada. The parents died leaving a daughter who was a maid in the service of the little boy Albert and the sister dutifully, as a good English girl, saw him through school. He lived with her and then when he got to be old enough he crossed over into the United States and saw his own way through high school at the Art Student's League where he showed promise. He then went in to what was actually the golden period of his life. He became a dish checker at the Harvard Club which was that one period when he could work and live. I believe he got a hundred dollars a month and he worked from seven o'clock at night until midnight which left him the night to sleep and the day to work. The Christmas presents of the members amounted to about two hundred dollars and that clothed him and he painted pictures. And here the Museum of Modern Art is a little bit reticent about it. They claim they once showed a WPA exhibit. I thought it was an abstract art exhibit. We tried to get them to do it again but this was in 1932 and it was in the Rockefeller house, the new building hadn't been build yet and Swindlen had a very impressive group of pictures. And then he married. And then the WPA people decided the WPA was to go only to American citizens and Swindlen was a foreigner. And so he went to the De [inaudible] Ad Institute and became a mechanical draftsman. He was married and he had a daughter and so help me that was the only light in all of his life because I ran into him on a train in 1950, going up to Brewster, my wife was visiting with friends up there. And Swindlen and his wife were going up to a camp to visit with this Albert who was the kind of a man that said nothing preferably, with the more talkative with [inaudible], and he did take up painting again the last years of his life for that authority you'd have to get Charles [inaudible] who shared a studio with him. Apparently the wife interfered with the painting all the time trying to turn Swindlen into an abstract expressionist. I look at my work which isn't bad I did some sloppy painting and he died about five years ago. But, when you think that it took a thousand years to raise the Swindlen estate and he almost made it. And then came a few mistakes and wiped out all of it.

WILLIAM AGEE: You should write about that.

CARL HOLTY: Yes it should be. But I don't write too much about the present, more about what the present reminds me of fifty years ago. Harold Rosenberg cautioned me against being a chronicler because I didn't have a big enough popular reputation, not to be put aside, just tell the story and leave the painting to us. But I do know some stories and that was one that does relate a little bit to the ease off of the WPA.

WILLIAM AGEE: Yes it does.

CARL HOLTY: And there is an awful lot of material if you get these people talking. Conflicting stories don't mean so much. Memory alone does that you know.

WILLIAM AGEE: Certainly.

CARL HOLTY: And [inaudible], she told me that she'd been taking out stuff, that on matters of the abstract art she'd think I'd be simple enough: and I was chairman for five years and John Graham for five or seven. We'd

have, you know, just rattle on about the same way until 1945 when I left. That you'd get together and she said that there are four or five salient points, where nobody agrees. I mean the taping, which is not argumentative it's just different stories.

WILLIAM AGEE: Well, that may be five different interpretations, not just the way people interpret things in that time. I think it's more than just memory, don't you?

CARL HOLTY: Well, it's memory and it's, you know, it's something like ... Reinhardt said one time about a retrospective show. "A retrospective show is what you want it to be." You leave out what is embarrassing or you think is embarrassing and in some instances you don't ... I think for instance that the, perhaps the phoniest image of an artist that someone presented is that Jackson Pollock in his first memorial show at the Museum of Modern Art which is I'm sure due to the exaggerated enthusiasm for him by Sam Hunter who simply cut out ... if he cut out the early work that would be alright but to cut out the late work because the late work renounces the famous work and it embarrasses it to some extent but a man has a right to do this you see. There was enough of it, it wasn't just one picture, there were a number of pictures. He gave an entirely false picture of the man. Usually you do that sort of thing yourself you know. But, this was done by somebody else.

WILLIAM AGEE: Pollock is, I think, thought of too much in terms of about two or three years. And what he did just before he died modifies that to a great extent.

CARL HOLTY: Well, that show that he had at the Marlborough a year ago, it made ... though there were not many of the late ones, well, they shouldn't be hung together or at least in a separate room or something like that where the painting could speak for itself. I knew Pollock slightly. There was a difference in age. As a matter of fact I knew him originally, speaking of the thirties, from a drawing group that John Graham had in his studio down on Greenwich St. If anybody discovered those men it was Graham. Graham had in his entourage de Kooning and Gorky, Pollock, and that's about it. We used to draw down there at night, he had models and we have this a good deal today in New York. You know, you get a model and a group of fellows will practice drawing. Planning to do it here too. And I drew there a couple of times with these people and of course Graham, do you know John Graham?

WILLIAM AGEE: I know who he is. I didn't know him personally.

CARL HOLTY: Well, that's a story. John Graham is a fantastic figure. The most fantastic figure of the lot. And when you talk about him to an art historian, I talked about him to Milton Brown and he said it's just too bad that he wasn't a very good painter. And I said now who ever got that story going because he was an excellent one and all kinds, had all kinds of interesting things. But, of course, he was more than that. He was a philosopher and a poet and a liar and an everything under the sun, a Russian, who was really a Pole, who was really a Scotchman and he even fibbed about his death. I saw him before he went to Europe and asked him how old he was and he said seventy-two, he was carrying some flowers to a young lady friend and he died in the fall. He was eighty. He had three families and I think the son that collected the body was a major general in the American Army. Nobody ever knew anything about that. But, he was a fantastic man. A civil judge in Russia when he was thirty, he was raised in a school of painters in Moscow. Fantastic connoisseur of art, the best in this country. I mean the kind that's almost the genre that has died out. This is not [inaudible], because that's nothing compared to this. This is the eye for the thing and he could not only tell that it was Tintoretto but when he did it, what part he did and whether it was a good day or a bad day. And in one minute. It was just exactly the kind of expert knowledge that you find in other fields but very, very rarely, you know. That is the absolutely unbribable eye and ... He was the man that had these people. I think he was on WPA too at one time ...

WILLIAM AGEE: I believe so. Do you remember what his attitude was toward the WPA and the Art Projects?

CARL HOLTY: No, because I didn't know him. He once was voted out as a member of the American Abstract Artists after having been voted in. I don't want to go into that, it's not a very nice story. It was an enemy of his that managed to have another role call on it and something went wrong. It was by one vote and I think the whole organization would have been entirely different in the future if Graham had been in it because the ones who were not the purists, who had had a snootful of it, began to drop out and it ran into very sterile years.

WILLIAM AGEE: When did it finally end?

CARL HOLTY: It never ended. It's still running. Charlie Shaw told me last year it was twenty-five years old and he's the only one ... I don't know whether George Morris ... some of those that were the first night made a point of sticking. I recommended in 1940 that we disband because the idea was not to have an academy, it was to have a group that could show because these people were not being shown. Now when a couple of years ago, one of those Soye brothers complained to me on the bus. He said "What's happened? I didn't get a chance to show anything." And I said, "Well, Soyer, think back, there was a time when the people that are now keeping you out were the ones you kept out." He said, "Oh we didn't keep anybody out." I said, "Oh yes you did." I said, "I was on a jury once with Willie Gropper [ph], Willie and I went to art school together and I asked Willie to give me

a vote for Maholy Nagy and he said he would and then he voted against him and I said, "that's a hell of a thing to do." This guy said "Well you know these guys will give you the knife if they get in." Well, they did, exactly, I mean it was sort of a competitive slaughter. But at that time the idea was to let these people whoever they were, Davis and Pollock, there were two German/ American artists, Bolotowsky, [inaudible], Swindlen, Holtzman, whoever they were, I had a gallery but almost nobody else had.

WILLIAM AGEE: And this was really their only chance to show?

CARL HOLTY: This was their only chance to show and to show in concert where they could see their work.

WILLIAM AGEE: How many exhibitions a year did you hold?

CARL HOLTY: One.

WILLIAM AGEE: Just one.

CARL HOLTY: And then of course rentals being so tough and no place. There the first one we had in the Squibb Building which had the top floors with the very low rent. Then we had the one in the Baech [ph] Library for a short time the city of New York, had something to do with the WPA or not but anyway had the Baech [ph] Library turned it into a city library and turned it into a city gallery and there were a series of group shows. Then the group shows. And then we went to the Riverside Museum which would show only a group once every two years, I think they still show there and of course that had the drawback of being the windiest part of Riverside drive where people were kept away by the wind. You couldn't open the doors on the Riverside side. You'd have to open them on the 3rd Street side. I crossed through there for years, on very good terms with the people that own the place. And then we got some bargains in the Fine Arts Building, that is the Art Student's League now has the whole of the Fine Arts Building that used to be exhibition galleries and the International Academy was shown there and they charged something like eight hundred dollars a day or eighteen hundred dollars a week, I forget which, for shows. They would give us a break when they had an open day and we could do it. We had no money like that and we would show wherever they let us in the door. The museum said nothing and of course the Baroness Rebay said if you'll just all call yourselves "non-objective" we'll be great friends which meant she wanted to turn the Artists' group into a Greek Chorus and do like this every time the name Kandinsky or Bauer was mentioned.

WILLIAM AGEE: What was the attitude would you say as a whole among the group toward the WPA and the government programs of the systems?

CARL HOLTY: They lived on them. The only thing at that time when I knew them, they had a feeling that if the government could, they would throw them out tomorrow.

WILLIAM AGEE: They had ...

CARL HOLTY: They had a reason for it because there was a cut-back. And they had trouble with...I remember they used to say "and they had to get a general to handle this", I remember General Summervell, and they had protest meetings, you probably know about that, they were famous meetings and somebody said well, Philip Evergood may be no good but he knows how to take a beating, sort of a ring, and the cops beat them up. That was their concern in those years was to hang on you see.

WILLIAM AGEE: Yes.

CARL HOLTY: And what they thought of the thing, I mean coming to think of it by hindsight and everything else, all things taken even that the government did there were people on that project that I knew, knew them later as students. They may have been helpers, they may have been assistants to many people that would not professionally qualify in my estimation but at that time they posed as professionals. Today of course it's a different story. You're not even supposed to be a professional and still it's a dirty word. So that ... different thing are called for. Actually I thought there was nothing wrong with the project, it kept things going. Some of the post war generation was left out ... I mean the GI students that I had...

END OF SIDE ONE

WILLIAM AGEE: I think we were talking about some of the attitudes towards the project.

CARL HOLTY: The project, the project was the...well there have been projects like it in recent times. I want to talk about the famous modern, at that time in Athens, that connected Pericles with the city that gave the city its art. But in the turn of the century the Italian American boys remember these people like Giorgio Cavallon, the Victor Emanuels was the WPA project. And everybody whether they used to joke about it and didn't like the work, but Wiess, who died in Washington, and with whom I taught at the Corcoran some years ago, told me the

whole story. He said this was like the WPA. I mean anybody that had a soul to save by earning his living as a sculptor or a colorer was on the job. And I think at that time they took this attitude. There may have been other things. Now Diller, as I understand, was an excellent administrator, honest and had an awful lot of mural work to handle that his, people of his own mind didn't approve of, figural works and ... you know Indians in the woods and Indians shaking hands with other people. He just said well look these aren't bad, these people know their business and that's as much of it as there is. I think as a matter of fact Diller put up quite a fight for the thing, have you talked to him at all?

WILLIAM AGEE: Yes we have.

CARL HOLTY: Because Diller knows an awful lot. It might be worth your while and I'd rather have somebody do it with him. The story of Jack Pollock on the project ... there are three figures in this that mean something. Pollock who became disaffected from the work he had been doing and then was not showing up and they worried about him because this was his only income and Guston I think was the intermediary to allow some of the later work which was then on the way to his later abstract style. That could go on, it's a good story.

WILLIAM AGEE: Yes, very much so.

CARL HOLTY: But I think you ought to talk to Diller since Guston is inclined, disinclined to talk about it because he's a kind of a heroic role in there. You see he was a classmate of, high school classmate of Pollock's out in Los Angeles and they grew up together. But Diller's story is a good one. I don't know whether those things would have come up maybe he did tell it. They practically had to go over and get it out of him, you know, I mean he's ... Pollock was an irritable person, an irritated person, usually irritated when sober and you know didn't live in a good skin you see, a good deal of dissatisfaction with himself his whole life. Maybe not so much so then when he was younger, but I always remember him as rather sullen and silent.

WILLIAM AGEE: Did you find that many people when they were working on the easel project, were painting for the project, just to turn something out, just to get a paycheck?

CARL HOLTY: I'm afraid I know some of them were, but I'm not going to mention any names. I mean they were painting as well as they could but the project got the leftovers. I mean they had ... there was some judging of it you know, I believe, there was some discussion about it, whether they'd take it or not.

WILLIAM AGEE: Well, Jack Tworokov for instance - we've done a long, good interview with him - said that it got to the point where, while he was very grateful to the project because it was keeping him alive, it became too much of a way of life. Because of a certain social, ideological pressures on him, found that he began painting for the project, not for himself, and he thinks that that is responsible for, his late development as a painter. But I wonder if it didn't in fact give them a chance to develop, day by day, as painters.

CARL HOLTY: Well, I'll tell you one who didn't think he did and that was a painter by the name of Frank Mascho who was out in the west and who did a lot of horse paintings and he was praised for it, not in the terms of the project. Tom Benton once referred to the virtue of coming back to good old America and leaving poisonous France. He pointed up the wonderful work that Mascho had done on these things and somebody mentioned this to Mascho in my presence when he was at Columbia, each year he ran that school until about '40 and he said of all the damn nonsense [that] I was painting good pictures and I was just turning out [inaudible]. And certainly a man like Cameron Booth(phon. sp) was painting those horse pictures for the project. Now Mascho tried to do as well as he could but it was then the emphasis on the scene, not so much on the anatomy of the nag, but the emphasis on the scene and before that he was with us in Paris in our group round about '31, he was sort of under the influence of De Chirico, you know and it was quite a different thing. It was as though he said I just don't know how to do it. I mean abstract artists taught me a little more about niggling it out and so I can do this sort of thing. Now in, certainly in Cam Booth's case it's so because Booth - it isn't the only thing that he did for that. I mean that was just Cameron I think the stature he might have had is the amount of commercial work he did but I do know that in 1936 when he came to visit me in Woodstock, fellow by the name of Perry Marlowe brought him over and Cam and I had been friends for a good many years and he knew I was living there. He said, "Oh boy, I'd sure like to work this way." And I said, "Which direction would you go?" And he said, "Kandinsky's." And he said, "You know I can take up." I learned it and I've done it and so in that case you find a little solace in those two figures. I mean one...I think Booth would admit it today but I don't know about Tworokov, about painting for the project. It all depends, you see, most of the commissions done for the churches of the west were projects, but they were carried by other things that the project didn't have. It wasn't an afterthought to begin with, an embellishment of the churches but the church didn't influence them, it influenced them only rarely - it actually ... Malraux makes that quite clear - it filtered the work but it couldn't command it because otherwise they'd be hardly able to do it. And here it was...I would say the trouble was they were not told what to do. So that you just got a general idea and I think this holds true in painting in America today, a sort of composite picture of what the thing looks like and then you latch on. As, let's say a young man that is out to make his way and with reasonable enthusiasm, a certain who knows which way to go is inclined to look at it that

way. So that they'll follow to an extent but then they'll give it a little bit of a twist so that somebody can tell Jim from John. I think that was probably what did happen on the project, it was sort of how could they paint like the project. John Zera, the painter, once said to me when he came back here, "the trouble is in this country is nobody tells you what to do. I didn't understand exactly at the time what he meant, but he meant that there was something before the beginning which you then did or revolted against or you carried it out exactly as you thought it was supposed to be. But this was always approximate. I think that was probably what Tworkov meant.

WILLIAM AGEE: Yes.

CARL HOLTY: In the case of Mascho, and Mascho was more intelligent than Tworkov as a person, I mean what the French call the salt behind his ears was gone and Cam Booth, older too, and he just used to making these compromises.

WILLIAM AGEE: Picasso said that he knew Bogata, which is interesting in many ways, he said it used to be that there were rules of art and you worked within those rules. Now there, as a result now there are no rules and so as a result there is no painting, there are only individuals.

CARL HOLTY: Some truth to it, that is what it looks like right now but you see there ... I'll tell you something, Picasso's murals for UNESCO, yes he made some, Rock ceilings that he was supposed to have done in the Louvre, you know those circles, all these works are the weakest works of these artists and there's a time, ... you can't just go from freedom to adjustment again overnight because some enthusiastic priest or some architect says here it is. For instance, I've been surprised that the big houses here in New York the big commercial houses all of them down here have huge lobbies that are yawningly empty, haven't gone in to buy these giant canvases of Tworkov, if you will or Kline if you will, whoever they are. They can buy them for a reasonable small amount of money and just hang them on the wall. Mural painting in a permanent material is very costly and then it requires maintenance and then it gets out of fashion and then it looks like hell as in the Chanin [ph] building, or that one that's crawling with Indians up, I think it's Con Edison up on Lexington Avenue. So the idea that a loose picture hangs there which might turn out to be good and then they would have speculated will and if it didn't turn out, it could be written off on plain depreciation of property. It would be absorbed. They have never seen it. Now this is being done in industry with pop art but there it is the idea of immediate entertainment of buying a room by Segal and sticking it out in some plant in the countryside so that the visiting people that come in on business can be shown something for a gag or a laugh and then to be thrown out. But the idea that these things are needed and would be pleasant to look at, that idea hasn't come yet. The WPA hasn't brought it. It would be a hundred or two hundred years more before it come. So that you'd often say well why ... on the other hand if there's an angle to it such as the Four Season. They bought the Rothko and Rothko took it back and Rothko said to me he didn't want them hanging in a saloon. Actually I believe his income tax was too high that year but you would never expect him to tell you that. Maybe he didn't want to do that sort of thing. Well then they borrowed a, they rented a Pollock for a lot of money so this is just the name again. And somebody had an old de Kooning stage set that they've taken up there now and they're paying a huge rental for.

WILLIAM AGEE: That's up at Yale isn't it?

CARL HOLTY: That's the one. Now this is something that he left at somebody's house. Delmouth told me about it yesterday, Harold Delmouth who was also on the WPA and knows quite a lot about it. He was very close to Dave Smith in those days. He was also on the WPA and also a member of the Abstract Artist's. And ... I think that that was the one point there, that there was not enough direction and then you sort of caught on. I don't know, I wasn't on it. I've never been able to do that sort of a thing, I've never tried it and I don't think I would have been able to do it; adjust to it unconsciously. But you can do that you know just by being a nice fellow. For instance Miro did some sloppy work here in America, rather he did some work that was over tidy because generally he was freer before. Of course it was that big mural he did in my place up in Harvard in '47. Just because he's a nice fellow and when he planned it in blue black and white and when the man that ordered it came in and I talked to him one day Miro didn't see him, didn't want to see him and this man said well I guess it will be alright when the colors come in and I mentioned it to Miro and then I noticed he introduced more colors. Now he may have done it because the big blue black and white project was too dull though he hadn't done it really. He just had the black in on this cerulean blue surface. The seduction is much more liable to come from wanting to be a pleasant person than from just making the dough. I mean you want to be well thought of and no trouble and there will always be time to be, to be, stick up for your guns a hundred percent when the time comes. So maybe people did adjust. Paul Burlin who was on that project adjusted to it the minute he came back to this country. He wanted to be sort of an American scene painter. He used to show me - in those days we were very close - show me his work and say "is it American?" I said well who cares and he said I care and he did care, really. That is, would it have the flavor of adjustment, not just, not to be a bribe. I think the one accusation made, the most unjust accusation made usually talking to artists is to want to do this and to appear as the rebel. I mean that may be the surface picture but the rebel is usually a clown, you know, clowning his way in. And then there are certain kinds of people that really believe, I think you have a good deal of that in New York, a certain amount of expressionistic audience that likes to see gory things, sort of vicarious living and I think these are the sort of

people that celebrated de Kooning's "Woman," which is a sort of an outnumber for the day. I've often wondered, I don't know him well enough, but I wonder whether he calculated that or not. I don't know whether he's that kind of a fellow. But the fact of the matter is that his early black and white abstractions that brought him some prestige, left him without ten cents to buy a cup of coffee and the day that that woman was painted the sensation was on and this is the thing that broke the ice a little although he didn't schedule it.

WILLIAM AGEE: No matter what he does or why he did later things, one fact that does remain, I think is that his early things are the best ones and they always will be.

CARL HOLTY: His black and whites?

WILLIAM AGEE: Yes.

CARL HOLTY: Well I like some of the later things. I liked the Tree in Naples, I like some of these things. I like the River Gate. Seems to me I was the only one who liked it. I remember Mark Tobey didn't like it at all.

WILLIAM AGEE: I don't think his things after 1955, for instance, are as good or as strong as his painting before. Now why that's happened I don't know but the ultimate truth I think of his art are the black and white - the initial breakthrough.

CARL HOLTY: Is the black and white the "Excavation" and so on? "The Attic"?

WILLIAM AGEE: Partly. Ultimately, say two hundred years from now you know that will be the ultimate truth of his art. What happened to it afterwards is, who knows?

CARL HOLTY: Well, I don't know because afterwards what happens, this is critical, you know when Thomas Hess writes about him and says "the beautiful anti-aesthetic forms" which is nonsense, that's just a contradiction right there, that Bill does use the anti-aesthetic as the form that breaks the structure and whether he'll continue to do that is a question because that's something you cannot lick. He didn't do that in his early work. He tried to do it as well as he could. You say, if your canvas is a rectangle, if you get to the edge of it you are made more and more aware of its limitation and you don't put a curve right on the edge because it bulges out or it doesn't look right. The renaissance masters did it, everybody does it. Picasso did it, Matisse does it, every painter worth his salt and has the knowledge is going to avoid that trouble and the farther you get away from the outside, the greater your eye can be in arabesque etc., etc. Well, Bill often does just the opposite. You see, he places that curve on the outside and stakes the straight part in white you know like his "Connecticut Roadway" down the middle. He's done it you know in painting a picture to a certain point and then it gives it the look of improvisation you know to botch on it once more and if you know how to do, that's not too hard to do and with wet paint it's true but you'd better make up your mind that in three smears that's it. And then you have to take it off and do it over again (I mean the white paint) and paint into it and put the white with the other and temper it. Sometimes he's done very commonplace things. That bothers me in a way, this disorder. But that particular disorder, you find all the way through Kline and it's something that has become kind of the keystone of that painting. It hasn't got this open look which allows everybody to participate in it, you know and identify with it, sort of a voyeurism rather than an appreciation of the work and then it is brushed aside, as either being pedantic or wrong. Well, there have been errors like that before. You had it in Sargent's time when exaggerated distance was considered the real thing and there's one painting, I think, the Worthlands, not Worthland sisters, but somebody's children, one of them standing by a vase and by god it's a mile deep down the middle of that thing. Now paintings shouldn't go that far. But that would have been admired in the time as a supreme successful thing, whereas let's say Sargent's sketch of Monet in his garden which is far superior to it would not have been. You see? So the same thing happened again. It's something, for instance, the hard edge school, some of these things that Kelly and these people do. They'll take this big curve and they'll use a medium which is smooth as glass and neat as hell and put it on so that you think there could be nothing purer and still that curve has no answer. To a sensitive eye that picture is so cluttered up, but nevertheless that's alright, whereas Diller whose work would be absolutely clear would be considered as well, that's just neo-plasticism, that's not very good or, as Rothko said to me one, "He's got a personal angle there," and he said, "I think he's a bad painter." And I don't think he's a bad painter at all and he's what he is and I don't think that's the only kind of painting there is in this world and if you asked me I probably would prefer certain types of Rothko to some of Diller, although Diller would always command greater admiration. Something like Zuberan commands my admiration whether I like it or not because it's so goddamned wonderfully made, you see?

WILLIAM AGEE: Sure.

CARL HOLTY: But I think that uh, I've often meant to ask de Kooning but I .. he keeps pretty much to himself and I don't associate in his circles ... why the hell he continues to do it? Of course I know that he knows. de Kooning is one of the few trained painters, knowing painters and this sounds like a plea for pedantry but is isn't, you know, it's not that at all. You're always walking the razor's edge in painting and it's like making canvases like Barney Newman and these people who make them bigger and if it's too big you add six more inches and then

that makes it alright. Well, it makes it alright because it takes it out of painting into a sort of a natural phenomena. Who can judge whether the hell a mountain is any good, it's so big. You envelope the observer, take him away out in space. Now ... whether that happened ... I mean I had no personal experience with that. You'd better ask me whatever else you want to know about the WPA.

WILLIAM AGEE: I wonder if you felt that when you were talking and, you say that usually your lectures were art appreciation things without visual materials ...

CARL HOLTY: At that time.

WILLIAM AGEE: ... whether you found that you struck some sort of responsive note in the people? Do you feel that somehow you told them something that opened their eyes to something they didn't have before? I know these are very hard effects to judge, but do you think that they did?

CARL HOLTY: Probably, you see I found this lecturing in art, in the beginning, when I started out which was not too long before that, actually big lectures, I had learned certain things. For instance, the negative approach is never any good. You speak of negative elements but it has to be within a positive setting. It just alienates people when they hear somebody stand up as so many of the boys did here that went out as artists in residence and declared immediate war on provincials by saying you don't like modern art. You know Bob Motherwell still does it and it's sickening. It is a bad approach and it sets up a determination on the part of the listener not to listen. That's your reward for it. It's a tactical error. The other thing is, originally, when you're talking to an audience, I thought always tell the truth and stay away from the tricks. Well, you can't lecture and I learned it in those three weeks or five weeks, you can lecture without some tricks. There are certain tricks, like, "This reminds me of a story," is a cheap one, you know the after dinner speakers trick, but there are better ones in which you have to make yourself ridiculous on occasion, that's ...

WILLIAM AGEE: You mean to get their attention?

CARL HOLTY: No -- that's as easy as anything goes. You can press that like a button, just tell them your own attempts and somehow casually in passing admit the failure or what you father said about it or something like that and a ripple of amiable laughter goes right through the audience. In the end a good lecturer is an actor and you have to learn that. You have to watch your audience. You never use a script. You have to watch and use all kinds of tricks. Talk with the man that's falling asleep. That's the guy to keep awake, keep him awake and the rest of them will stay awake. You have to speak in their, in terms of their mental vocabulary. I could do that. I think I'm very much anti-snob. I mean in that sense, there's no point in talking at all if you feel at the outset that that way will prevent anybody's understanding anything you say. I guess I did. I don't recall one doggone thing of that time that I spoke about. It's too long ago. And I imagine that in the club lectures much of it was in defense of modern art, but in the other lectures it was rather a historical tie-up, you know with things. It was years later that I learned to bring an audience such as those audiences up out of their seats whether they like it or not. I tried it when I was lecturing in what might be called the solid south, about ten years ago, when I was lecturing with the Association of American Colleges.

WILLIAM AGEE: You were at the University of Florida and Georgia weren't you?

CARL HOLTY: Yes. Well, there I was artist in residence, in Georgia for two years and Florida for a year and Washington University in St. Louis. This is very funny. I was the substitute for Fred Conway at the University, George Washington University. But I seemed to have acquired a little more prestige. I read in the St. Louis Post Dispatch that I had been out there as artist in residence which is not quite the story, and I was resident summers at Wisconsin and California and then at the Corcoran and then for two years at Louisville. God knows if I've been anywhere else. Well, I've taught through all the colleges here. I was here for what? Three and a half years at Brooklyn and I've taught at Hunter and lectured around. But it was in those cold turkey places let's say like Union Theological College in Barberville, Kentucky, which is Appalachia, and you have an audience sitting there of people that grew up in poverty and you're trying to interest them in art and you better do it. And I finally developed a technique. I could tell you exactly what it is. I would start out and say I want to talk to you about art until I can make you feel like artists. Well, that's challenging you know and they are from Missouri. So you tell them to get up in the morning someday and walk down the street and see everything as though it was vital in their life, as though every woman they passed could be the woman that was going to be meaningful for them, as if every house might be the house they would die in, every tree the tree they would collapse under and so on. You bring an audience off it's back this way because this is a feeling they all have and try to keep down and of course it's a known pathological state and you have to tell them that that's pathological state and if they actually felt those things they would be sane. But in a similar way this is the way all of life looks to an artist. It is not that kind of a threat but it is that interesting. And then you can simply usually tell them what you want. Well, there are tricks. I don't know if there's anything that you can do without learning how to do it. But I didn't know it at that time, I guess I just went on sheer momentum and of course I grew up among those people, don't forget, so that I knew their linguistic limitations, their mixed languages, remarks from childhood, things that

would, especially among the older ones, make them rich, you know, something of one of them. Oh there were times when you ran into something fantastic. I remember speaking one night in Wisconsin ...

WILLIAM AGEE: This was for the Federal Forum?

CARL HOLTY: ... that's right, when a woman came up to me with a hat about this big and it's like a pocket and as red as a beet, a body like a snow man and with her a husband and a son and she asked me after I was through if I had a little time, whether I would come to their house. She had some things to show me, some paintings she did and some things she had written and I went over to the house which was very close to there and they had made a little supper of some kind - lemonade and ginger snaps I forget what - and she had little water colors on the wall which she said she made for wedding showers and little poems she showed me that she'd sold also for showers, engagements and anniversaries and then opened the drawer and pulled out two novels each one this high and said, now you know so much, how do I sell them? I said well, I wouldn't know that, but in the meantime as I turned around I noticed ... you run across a nut every once in a while, you run across obsessed people. What fascinates me in those cases is the energy, there's the same energy that is in Michaelangelo. But the fact is that this woman was a success because I have never seen such adoring looks as those on the faces of her husband and her son. I mean this was it so I did as well as I could, I gave her advice and she's already gotten these back and then I suggested that she submit them for editing, an outsider can always do this better, I said, why don't you submit them for editing? Well, that was an angle she hadn't thought of, that's how I got out of that house alive. But I had to leave her with something very positive and it's something that these psychiatrists and ... well they get money for that kind of a visit. That was the only incident I remember of that particular kind. I used to go once in a while with my sister-in-law, my first wife's sister lived there and there would occasions when I gave a real good lecture that didn't come off and then another one that did. I'd hear the comments afterwards. As I said I remember that one roomful of people in that kindergarten with these working people and knarled hands, listening because it was the only way of getting their money's worth, they had no money but time was money. That was their time and that was something to get compensated for and ...

WILLIAM AGEE: Well, at least you opened their eyes if for no more than an hour, don't you feel?

CARL HOLTY: Oh yes, I guess I've been a Johnny Appleseed of that kind of stuff, if you want to call it that. As a matter of fact, I've thought sometimes, I don't like to be unkind, and the most amusing incidents in the lecture trade are some kind of an unkindness to your hosts. Giving a good lecture at a girls school once in Montebello, Alabama with the president of the college sitting behind you, bored and then coming to life, and then when it was all over saying "hotdog!" and offering me a doctorate if I would give them a lecture free. Amateur painters that studied with you along the line and some of the curves thrown at you in small towns, Rome, Georgia, Owensboro, Kentucky. For all I care, judging a show in New Albany, Indiana which we did last summer on a summer day. It looked like one of the covers from the Saturday Evening Post by Norman Rockwell. Pennants all around this lovely little town in the street, lovely. And a porch with an orchestra playing and a woman singing and chairs in the middle and me and the other juror going around through alleys and everywhere with pictures pinned up all over, you know, on clotheslines and finally managing to find three that are not too bad and giving them the money and then having the entrepreneurs of the show saying what are we going to do with these twenty-five honorable mentions and going back into the thing again.

WILLIAM AGEE: Well, Mr. Holty, we've talked about a lot and it's been a good session.

CARL HOLTY: Well, I hope it doesn't read cold when it comes in.

WILLIAM AGEE: I don't think so, I don't think it will and I do want to thank you very much and I think that's probably enough for today.

END OF TAPE