



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

Oral history interview with Lawrence  
Kupferman, 1965 Nov. 12

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Lawrence Edward Kupferman on November 12, 1965. The interview took place in Newton, Massachusetts and was conducted by Geoffrey Swift for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's New Deal and the Arts project.

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

## Interview

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Testing—oh, that's way up too high. Testing, testing, testing, testing. [High pitched mechanical feedback.] I think the best way for us to get into this, as it usually is, is for you to give us a little bit of background, Mr. Kupferman, on what you were doing up until you got on the Project in 1936, '37.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Well, I went to the School at the Museum of Fine Arts for a couple of years. Actually, I was probably in the Museum of Fine Arts before I was born. [Geoffrey Swift laughs.] My mother used to visit it.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Uh-huh [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And I went to the boys' Latin School around the corner. And they had this—these classes after school on Saturdays, and so we used to go the museum. And I got my gratis [ph] education just from walking around the museum.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And we had these, obviously, very elderly teachers and we'd be copying things all the time. We'd be copying Greek casts, you know—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —in charcoal, very painstakingly. Or we would be copying Peruvian textiles or Japanese prints in watercolor or things like—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: The old attaché [ph] education.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah. We spent a lot of time on the Greek vases. Of course, you know, the Boston museum had this absolutely fabulous collection of Greek vases.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And then, I went to the new—old museum school, which was kinda deadly education in a way, because, you know, you had spent a month on a cast, carefully sharpening hard charcoal to points, then carefully drawing, and carefully filling in the shadows. And then we would—oh, then the second year where we were doing the same thing with models. You know a model would pose all week long.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And nine to one, you'd make one drawing.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And old Mr. Hale [ph] would come in and he'd just correct your drawing, you know? You were kind of doing a living statue. [Geoffrey Swift laughs.] It was quite horrible in a way. I mean, quite stultifying.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Not the way to draw, really.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And what we—and then, eventually, after two years there, I quit. And I went to the Massachusetts School of Art then and I spent four years there.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: But I was always interested, somehow, in etching. And I did a lot of—a lot of etching either way, even at the museum school. And, oh, summers I would spend—a couple summers I spent as a guard in the museum and Japanese or in the oriental section.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Another great collection.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Oh, tremendous collection.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Supposedly the best one in the West.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yes, it really is. And I spent a lot of time in summers there or in the Persian section with a print, with a miniature [inaudible]. I spent a lot of time with Japanese paintings, Chinese paintings, and all that sort of thing. And I was gradually absorbing all that material. I did a lot of etchings and I did etchings like everybody, of course, influenced by Rembrandt, at first, and then Joseph Cannell [ph], and Whistler.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Then I got interested in a fairly obscure etcher called Charles Meryon.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Oh, sure. A friend of mine at Yale is doing his doctoral dissertation on Meryon.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Sure. And I got terribly interested in him. And I did a lot—a lot of architectural etchings around Boston. Not etchings, but really drypoints. It was very painstaking, and I spent about, oh, a month, six weeks on each one. And Edward Hopper [ph] and Burchfield [ph] influenced me in some of the nostalgic, big monuments of domestic architecture that was left stranded by a railroad yards [inaudible]—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —and so forth. And I did that sort of thing a great deal. And, oh, I like Saratoga Springs a gre—a lot. And did watercolors up there and etchings too.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Of the United States Hotel, Grand Union Hotel.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was this all before the Project, just traveling around—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —on your own and—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah.

[00:05:03]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —finding big monuments to—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah, what I'd do is I'd save up my money, and I got about, say, about \$40, well, then I'd bought a—South Station buy a ticket for Philadelphia.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Or any city where I'd never been to before.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And put up at the Y, and then just wander around the city. And, I mean, cities fascinate me and—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —I think there's a great deal of magic about them. I mean, after all, all these buildings and all these streets are really human documents. They were conceived of by human beings, and built by human beings, lived in by human beings.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And destroyed or damaged, show so much evidence of living. So, they—I always thought of as kind of a surrealistic kind of—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —document; a real projection of the human mind. I mean, it's—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —a fascinating idea that I—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —fool around with. I still have dreams in which I find myself in these strange and beautiful cities.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: But beautiful in a very realistic way. That is to say. I'm fascinated by the Edwardian buildings because I'm living in one right now—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sure.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —you see?

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sure.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: A fine one.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: [Laughs.] So, that's the—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: So, you didn't see the architecture strictly for its formal qualities at all. It was—it was the whole ambient that it somehow—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's right. But—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —it carried with it.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah. But one thing I got—there was a certain Baroque quality about Victorian structures in America.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And if you waited carefully for the sun to strike it the right way, you get—you got the very mysterious and romantic shadows and depths, you know?

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: So, that the—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Wildly picturesque.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's right. That's right. And I guess I am a kind of a Romanticist in a sort of a Surrealist, even when I was doing those very, very realistic things.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And then, eventually, I got bored with this. So, I felt that wasn't enough. And I got interested in people like, oh, Dupree [ph] and Matisse and—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —began to consider other aspects of form than merely the Caravaggio.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: I mean, you know, that—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And beginning to work with color, too, I gather. Which you [inaudible]—  
[Cross talk.]

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Oh, yes. Yes, and I had become, as you can see, terribly interested in color.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And at that time, of course, all my experience with Persian miniatures, in north—in north Indian Mughal [ph] miniature, Turkish—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —and all of that came to be used.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And I became fascinated by, oh, things like what you do if you put a cool pink next to an orange and all with all those tricks that the Persians—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —to deal with.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So, I—how did you come to join the Project in—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Oh, yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —1936?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: The Project. Well, I finished the school and there were no jobs available, you know?

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And so, Harley Perkins is, I guess, was in charge then. I'm not sure. I think it was Harley Perkins and—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: He was in charge pretty much all the way through.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And I—and he hired me. And I stayed home and did—and continued to do etchings.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: No, I mean drypoints, actually.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And some watercolors. And my immediate supervisor was Samuel Green, who is now at the—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Wesleyan.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: At Davison Art Center, right. And he was a fascinating person. He was a Harvard Fogg Museum—Fogg graduate.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And he was so relaxed all the time, and happy, and was very gay. And he did these very wonderful, sensitive, nostalgic type of drypoints of the whole Newburyport, you know? Sheds by the—decaying sheds by the decaying wharf of—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I see.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —Newburyport. He was also interested in the New England factories. The factories built in 1860-'70-'80-'90 in—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —New England. Oh, such as the one in Rhode Island. Dear me, I can't think of the name of one of the first—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: There's one in Warrick [ph] right out—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —[inaudible].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Fabulous things. Some of them made of granite and so forth.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yes.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And then, some of them quite—the coal—the coal factory at the—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: At Hartford.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —Hartford has a—kind of a Russian bulbous root to it.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yes. I've seen her—

[Cross talk.]

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: But aside from those—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —splendid old structures.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Henry-Russell Hitchcock later—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —wrote them up in his book on Rhode Island architecture.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Right.

[00:10:09]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Until that time—I think until Hitchcock's book, which was 1940 or '41. I think they were pretty much forgotten, except by various painters.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: But they were an integral part of New England because they made these New England fortunes. And you would go into a small New England town and you would see the factories, and you would see the places—the, sort of, almost tenements where the people, the factory workers, lived. And then, high on a hill would be two or three magnificent Victorian mansions where the owners of the factories [laughs] lived.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: But I'm sure they made a great contribution to—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Indeed.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —New England.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Well, the Project was really very, very good. I forgot what they paid us; \$21.60. And you would stay home and work a number of hours a week for the Project, possibly 20 or 25, I'm not sure. And the work you produced for the Project would be turned into the Project.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Now, I mostly remember the headquarters on—what's it—661 Commonwealth Avenue.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Commonwealth Avenue.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah, near the armory there. And you bring your work in, and then they would take the work. And they would allocate it to various municipal institutions, such as the city hall, or a school, or a hospital.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: This was for permanent hanging in these institutions?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Oh, yes, I guess so. I—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —don't know how permanent it was, but presumably permanent.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Do you suppose most of it is still hanging or—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Gee, it could be. I don't know.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: In other words, you haven't reclaimed any of it. It became the permanent property of the—of the WPA. The Federal Arts—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —Project.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: I have reclaimed some material, not much. A couple, two or three paintings that finally wound up in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. And they gave them back to me.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And Sam Green would come around about once a month and look over what you're doing, and okay it.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And, oh, it was very exciting because the powers that be in Washington were always trying to cut the—or eliminate the Federal Art Project. Either cut down the amount of money they were spending because they didn't believe in art, you know? The majority of people in America today, even, really think of art as being something silly and superficial.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: I mean, if it comes right down to it a football team is much more important than an artist.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: So, we're led to believe sometimes.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: We are. I know, but—I know there's a tremendous interest in art all over the country. And more and more people collect art. But on a—on a statistical basis the percentage would be like one half of one percent, or something like that, of the total population of the United States could be interested in art. And you could say the same thing about France, for that matter. I mean—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sure.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And, I mean, France is supposed to be such a—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —tremendously cultured country. The interest in France in art could be no more than the United States.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yes, it's just relatively so. Relative to the culture.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's all.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: It's still a small percentage.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: It's a very small percentage.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And so, we formed an artists' union. The main purpose of which was to keep [laughs] the Federal Art Project in business.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And we had very stirring meetings of the—in the—very stirring meetings in the—in the Project. The union would initiate these meetings. And all we had sitting at—we'd sit in the office of the—of the Federal Art—the WPA administrator in Boston. Everybody would show up with their babies, you know—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —their wives.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And they'd sit all over the office and they couldn't do anything. You see, every time they tried to cut us we'd—we would—we would really do something about it.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Almost like a sit in. [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: It was a sit in.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: A sit in.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Absolutely. Oh, we'd call reporters and try and get as much publicity as possible.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: But—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Well, now this protest was aimed directly at the WPA administrators, rather than the Federal Art Project admin—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Oh, yes. Harley Perkins — the Federal Art—who work was in charge of Federal Art—



GEOFFREY SWIFT: Morrison [ph]

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Morrison [ph] was always, of course, interested in keeping that going. And so—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —the people who were cutting us would be the, oh—the people in Boston who would say, "Well, why should we be spending \$21.50 a week on these people when we can hire more people at \$14 a week to rake leaves, you see?"

[00:15:02]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right. Right.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And so, that was their attitude.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: It's always that bias in favor of physical labor or something.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yes. Or—

[Cross talk.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: [Inaudible.]

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —spreading it more.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: The old Puritan ethic.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's right. And it was—it was very exciting. And the people that I saw the most of at that time were Giglio Dante, and Jack Levine, and Hyman Bloom.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And Ernst Halberstadt. Those are the people that I saw the most of.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And Louise Clairmont who was Jack Levine's girlfriend.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: We would—Dante had a studio in downtown Boston on Stewart—the corner of Stewart and Washington Street above some stores. And we would have parties there, very intellectual parties.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And we would meet and talk over our ideas.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Jack Levine lived on Huntington Avenue opposite the YMC—YMCA.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Jack Levine was younger than all the rest of you, wasn't he? Or—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah, I guess so. I remember—I used to see Jack and Hyman Bloom a great deal when we were, oh, 14-year-olds and thereabouts.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And they—those two, Levine and Bloom, studied with a chap over at Harvard.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Denman Ross.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah, Dr. Denman Ross. And he was very much interested in them. And he had them over at Fogg copying old masters, you see?

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Which was either good or bad, I don't know.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: You know I think it was stupid, actually. [They laugh.] But, you know, it was some good, I'm sure.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But, at the time, he was thought of as a splendid teacher, I gather.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: There was another teacher there too—and I can't think of his name — that they had, that these two boys had. I wish I could think of his name.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I don't know either.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yes. And—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: [Inaudible.]

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —I remember Jack Levine was painting a very big picture in a very narrow studio on Huntington Avenue. Gosh, it was a huge picture. And the studio was probably, unbelievably, about nine feet wide. And he had this huge painting up against the wall, a beggar—the only thing I remember about it there was a beggar selling pencils under a lamppost.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And he'd use a reducing glass to see if he—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: [Inaudible.]

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —to see what he had.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: He didn't have to hang out the window or something like that.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: No, he really—no, exactly.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: He probably didn't have too many windows. [Laughs.]

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Well, it had a front window. I guess it was in part of an office or some—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I see.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —damn thing.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And I think—I thought his work was very exciting. We all—we all felt that—then, Jack Levine did *The Feast of Pure Reason*, which showed a ward politician, a ward heel, and a cop—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —the cop sitting in front surveying his knuckles, the ward heel sitting at a desk.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Painted with a very heavy impasto.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And we all liked—all the artists around town felt that Hyman Bloom and Jack Levine were doing very exciting work.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What about this artists' union now? Was this strictly members of the WPA—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —Federal Arts Project? It was?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yes. And yeah, I believe the writers also joined.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: The writers from the Writers' Project?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: I think so.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah. What were your specific gripes with the WPA administration? Aside, of course, from the fact that there was a certain amount of hostility on the part of the political hacks who were—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —in charge. Was that mainly it, just the—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —a fear that the—that the program would end suddenly—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —with the pressure of these people in Washington?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's right. Our sole purpose—our sole function really, was to keep the Art Project—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —and the—and the Writers' Project going.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And I—Harley Perkins and Thaddeus Clapp, too, who was—I forget who came first. I think Thaddeus Clapp came first, and then Harley Perkins. I'm not sure.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I'm not so sure that they all—that they had the same job. I think—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: They might not have.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: It could be that they were in separate jobs—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —in Boston.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And they were very much in favor of the artists' union. In fact—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —urged us to belong to it, encouraged us to form—to form it because it was a political tool that would help them—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Certainly.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —help us, of course, to—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —keep the Project going. Eventually, it shut down for a while. Then, eventually, it opened again.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:20:00]

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: I went to New York and did freelance advertising work.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yes.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Which I found very uninteresting. And spent a great deal of time there walking the streets. It was—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —both very—I wrote it all up in this—in this novel—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: In your—in your novel.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —of great length, yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Fictionalized account of life under the—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Oh, yes, more or less.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —Federal Arts Project.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's right, yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: It should be most interesting. Did you run across a man named Elliot Paul, whom Morrison spoke of in his interview? Paul was an ex-Boston newspaper man who was the publicity man for the Project.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: No, I didn't know him.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah. I thought, perhaps, he might have been in touch with you people in the artists' union since he was—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: No.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —very much in favor of the Project. And I guess had a number of ideas for fostering it—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —and getting publicity for it.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Well, I think you put your finger on one of the things that I neglected is publicity. I think it's very important for artists to get publicity.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Unless you're able to get it.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Such as Dalí, for example, and so forth. Why, you simply don't exist. GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right. Right. And I gather—I'm sure during the time of the Project it was a continual struggle to sell the Project to those coastal conservative New Englanders who felt that somehow you were malingering or—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Sure. Sure. Why don't these bums go to work.

[Cross talk.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right. Right. Now, with your own work—since you started in the Project and I gather this own particular genre of yours, this specific way of handling material and the

subject matter you covered, that is, Victorian buildings and their like around New England. Did you contact the Project? [Phone rings.] Should I—

[Recorder stops, restarts.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Now, what I was about to ask you when we were—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —interrupted was whether—since you were known for a certain way of doing things, did the Project contact you for any kind of special projects—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: No—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —for instance—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —they—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —did the Index of American Design, or the Historic American Building survey—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: No.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —get in touch with you—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: No.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —for your special talents?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: No.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: No? In other words, you were left—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: I was left strictly alone.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —strictly alone as this was the experience, I think, of most painters, which is actually I think one of the more remarkable things about the Project that everybody was pretty much left to do what he wanted to do and develop as he was bound to develop by himself. And the Project simply was a way of living.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's right. We worked like an artist should, just working in your studio.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And then, eventually, the Project broke up and I got a job at the Massachusetts College of Art teaching.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And I've been teaching there steadily for the last 24 years. And I feel it's a very rich and rewarding experience, but a big error; if you want to be a painter, you should just paint.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And starve, if need be, and so forth, but live very poorly and so forth.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: But, of course, what happens is that you get children and then you no longer can live in a slum tenement, you know?

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And you have to, you know, live in a better place. You have to actually have better schools, and so there's this pressure to—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —provide a living.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And—but I think, I—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I guess the academic community, in a way, has absorbed an awful lot of the same people who were on the Project in the '30s.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Well, it hasn't absorbed—it hasn't absorbed Hyman Bloom or Jack Levine to any great extent.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Of course, they were lucky they—both of those boys were taken in by Edith Halpert of the—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —downtown gallery in New York. And she really did a great deal—she was one of the few good American art dealers at that time. And she did a great deal to promote them.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: You know although there are many dealers nowadays, there are very few of them that are basically interested in art qua [ph] art. Most of them are interested in the—in, well, novelties and gains.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —you know you wonder about the whole structure of the—of the—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Catering to the public space for novelty.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And, thereby, making money.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's right. I was with the Pace Gallery in Boston for a number of years.

[00:25:02]

And they gradually became more intrigued with the idea of—in their case, of well why should they bother trying to sell something for \$400 when they could sell an Osia Cometti [ph] for \$30,000? And—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —Hans Arp and Louise Nevelson—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Nevelson, yes.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —a Nevelson wall for \$25,000?

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Wall of boxes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: This is in no sense a criticism of these three artists. I think they

were, all three, very authentic artists.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And—but now, it's become a kind of a wild rat race where they're always looking for Ladidia Cree [ph] and maybe it's always been so, I don't know. And you have Pop art and Off-Pop art, and I think they're both really quite valid arts, actually.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: But unless you're producing something—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —brand new—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: I think—I think their validity becomes a little blurred when they—when they get caught up in the Madison Avenue publicity [inaudible]—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And become part of popular culture.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Well, Pop art is a kind of a—kind of a—it's, in a sense, an offshoot of Dada. And is, in a sense, also surreal.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And, but at the same time, it was pretty bad art too.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And yet, it has—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: A bunch of it—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —it has a certain validity as—because of these people can say, "Look, fella, I'm painting my landscape. I look out the window and I see Coca Cola signs. I turn on the TV, and I'm surrounded by all kinds of advertising. I go to the movies, and I see Jean—"not Jean Harlow, but this—the latest Jean Harlow.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yes, uh—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Marilyn Monroe.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And so, why shouldn't I paint them? This is my landscape. To be sure, it's a brutal landscape, to be sure.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: To be sure, it has—it's full of the lowest level of art.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: But that's beside the point because I'm painting what's true to my own times.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: I think it's a mistake, but that's their attitude.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And those—it's a—it's a kind of a literary art in many ways too, because it—in, at least insofar as it exploits irony to such an extent. Some of

the—some Pop artists, of course, would maintain that irony has no part in their—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —paintings. But this is—this is strictly a one-to-one correlation between what they see and what they think.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And—but they're not really injecting their own—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: But in New York—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —[inaudible] into it.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: If you really visit the galleries of New York, you know, many of them, you'll find it's just a frantic effort on their part—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —to show the very latest and to be there first—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —with the latest novelty—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —you know?

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yes, it's a wonderful guessing game what's going to be the next big sensation.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's right. They try—they were trying to work with obscene art. But it didn't quite work out.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative] [laughs].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: But I do feel that as bad money drives out the good money in economics, the bad art will drive out good art. As the audience becomes confused—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —the audience—and as I think of the monied Boston audience particularly, or any—not necessarily—the complete Boston audience, which I know very well. Pretty much people who are consumed with status paintings and trying to get the very newest thing, you know?

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And they're really quite bewildered and know very little about art. Or there will be people who will buy art where the subject matter is sentimental—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —and refers to their own existence or pictures of pretty children playing or—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sure, Sure But this is—

[Cross talk.]

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —a sailboat, something like that.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: This has been the case throughout history, really, since—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Or—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: since the days when the rich burghers of Amsterdam bought—and in



Belgium—bought sentimental genre paintings in the—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —17th century.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Or another type of art they'll buy will be imported art. And we're still—America's still very provincial in that respect.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: In that they will always attempt to buy something imported. And so, they will pay—oh, they'll pay \$500 for a Picasso print.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Or \$500 for a Chagall color lithograph.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Or I saw one—I saw a Rouault lithograph sell for \$1,400. And it's—instead of taking that money and buying three contemporary unknown painters, where they would have to use their own judgement—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —they just will pay excessive price for something imported.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Well, hopefully of course as art education increases and improves in the colleges then, we'll have more sophisticated patrons.

[00:30:00]

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Maybe, I doubt it.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: [Inaudible.]

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: I doubt it, I doubt it, because—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I think—I think status will, unfortunately, always be a component of the decision to buy or not to buy a painting. But—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: I see young, recent graduates of the Ivy League colleges around town are buying, for these big names, Picasso prints—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —Rouaults and Chagall.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Or Goya or something like that, you see?

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Because they get this big name for a couple of hundred—\$300, \$400—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —they could buy a big name thing.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: I feel there's very little—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Of course, they may like the Picasso print, or the—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Certainly.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —Rouault, or the—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —Chagall print.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Certainly.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Those are pretty good names to bet on, after all.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's right, but they should also be able to like contemporary work by other—by unknown people.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sure. Well, now there's one patron who seems to have the right idea. And that's Robert Scull, who is—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —recent—you know he recently sold an awful lot of his Abstract Expressionist work—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —that he'd bought in the '30s, so that he could set up a foundation to help young and unknown artists.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Oh, wonderful.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Although, of course, it's hard to find artists who aren't picked up by galleries. There being so many galleries that almost everybody, good and bad, is picked up at one time or another. But he has the right idea, I think.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: I think so, that's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Well, speaking of galleries, did—what was the setup, or the arrangement, with galleries in the '30s while you were on the Project? Was all your work officially committed to the Project? I gather it was. Or did you people have any recourse to independent shows?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: No—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Not that there were many people who could buy or were buying paintings.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: But they're—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: No, I believe—well, I don't know. I guess if you earned any money they'd take you off the Project.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right, yeah. It was as cut and dry as that?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Oh, I think so.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah, mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Of course, you—I'm sure that you could sell a print in a gallery and keep the \$10 that you got out of it without jeopardizing your place in the Project. But you sell —

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —very—hardly anything.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right, yeah. You know did—I mean, what do you think was the—wait.

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GEOFFREY SWIFT: I was about to ask what you thought, if anything, the—your experiences on the Project did for you—your development as an artist. That is, in terms of your painterly method, or your choice of subject matter, or what have you—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Sure.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —did you find yourself developing at the time?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Well, it was invaluable in this respect, particularly, that it sustained my continuum as an artist. You see, it's very difficult being an artist in America. And so, if I didn't have the Federal Art Project well, then, probably I wouldn't—I would go—gone off and been a clerk somewhere is what I'm—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —saying.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And I'd lose the continuum of thinking of myself as an artist, you see? It helped develop my style, sure. Sure—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —at that time while I was doing this very Surrealist, super realistic kind of thing. And I abandoned that completely, of course.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: But I had to get that out of my system, and so I didn't realize that it was merely—I was merely using my eye and my hand but not my brain—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —particularly, in a very little—very limited way, of course.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And gradually, I broke away and became interested in, oh, Picasso, and Cézanne, and Matisse, and all those people. And then, of course, I used to teach freshmen painting and sophomore painting. And that helped me very much because I gave lectures on these artists, see—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right, mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —and taught myself a better understanding of them.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative], art begets art in other words.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: As it so often does, yes. Did you—in the—during the course of the Project, find that the federal government as such was a sympathetic and cooperative patron?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Well, we weren't conscious of the federal government.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: You weren't conscious of that at all?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: No. No, we were conscious of—oh, we only were conscious of immediate supervisors and that sort of thing. And the federal government—well, of course, that this whole thing was great because they hired artists of a wide variety of attitudes towards art, you see?

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: I mean, including routine portrait painters. The only criteria for hiring—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Was need.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: No, it was—were they a professional—were they professional artists or not.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Professional painters and—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah. And need, yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And need.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Because virtually everybody who was a professional painter, with very few exceptions, was in somehow in need in those days.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Right. And so, it was very good. Of course, the beautiful part about the Project is—was that it got the artists of Boston to talk to each other, which they haven't done since.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: I find that the Boston artists are isolated, you know? And most of us lived on Beacon Hill or on Huntington Avenue. So, we were geographically closely related.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And then, we were—we had a common bond in that we were all in the Federal Art Project and interested in maintaining its survival, so we had the artists' union. And so, therefore—and we were almost the same age, so not all of us [inaudible].

GEOFFREY SWIFT: But, generally, the median age—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: But in the group—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah. The early 20s I would say.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yes. And so that therefore we used to have these gatherings, social gatherings. And, oh gee, we'd have spaghetti —somebody would give us spaghetti supper, and somebody would bring in a half gallon of wine. And I got sure enough sick of eating spaghetti. [Geoffrey Swift laughs.] And it was really—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: With or without meatballs?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah, oh, mostly without.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Without? I was going to say—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Sure. We might get a little sprinkling of cheese. [Geoffrey Swift laughs.] And then, we even went down to places like Rockport. I remember Giglio Dante had a—hired a store down in Rockport, down by the quarry, down by the granite works there.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: It was only off the road, and it was an abandoned store. I guess he paid practically nothing for it. And some of us would live there.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And, oh, it was really great. And it was really a lot of fun.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And we discussed art, and that sort of thing.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I—how was the—what was the reaction among—by you and your friends and associates in the Boston painting group to the Mexican mural renaissance, which had so much impact in certain places in this country in the '30s?

[00:05:04]

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Oh, gee, I don't think it had any impact.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Not much impact?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: No.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: No, I certainly haven't detected very much in the—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: No.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —work I've looked at by people here in the '30s. Because, for instance, in Chicago it was very powerfully felt and—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Well, it didn't make any effect on us. I mean, we knew about Diego Rivera and Orozco, of course, and [inaudible].

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And—but they merely esteemed as other painters. I think, in Boston, the painters are—most people are [inaudible] Soutine, Chaïm Soutine.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Soutine was really a big influence on Bloom and Chagall.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Uh, Bloom and Levine.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And Levine, yeah.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Were there any local painters who—older local painters of some repute who had much influence on the younger group?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: No.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: No? No, because they—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Oh, Karl Zerbe came to Boston. And he came to Boston to teach at the School of Museum of Fine Arts.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And he was the kind of Abstract Expressionist more—well, more of an Expressionist, semi-Abstract Expressionist.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And he was quite a good colorist. And he influenced people to some extent.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative], through his teaching.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And he was also on the Project—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: He was on the—on the Project. We didn't see that—he wasn't a member of our group, really.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was he older than—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yes, he was older.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Older?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was he a—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: He was, perhaps, more concerned with the museum people and that sort of thing.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: The museum itself has never done very much for Boston art. And it's been very remiss in that respect. For example, it never has any annual shows of, say, artists. For instance, like the Cleveland museum—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —would have an annual show—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —of artists in the Cleveland area. And I—the Detroit museum, and things of that sort. But Boston museum has always—we always felt, in Boston, that the—they really—the real Brahmins [ph], the people of Boston wealth had very little interest in Boston—in living Boston artists.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And if they bought any paintings they would be—they'd buy Renoirs.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Renoirs, yes.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Because it's a good investment—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sure.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —and so forth. They're terribly investment minded. Boston is an investment minded city.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sure.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: The idea of—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sure.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —perpetuating the wealth.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: On the other hand, of course the Boston museum has been of incalculable use to these same Boston artists who—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Especially—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —including me who are complaining about the Boston museum, you see?

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah, because it was great 19th century collection, yeah.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Oh, no because of everything.

[Cross talk.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: [Inaudible.] Yeah.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: I mean, because of a—of everything they have, you know?

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Just the whole museum is stupendous and tremendously valuable

and it—and everything I know I've learned, you know, in the sense, from—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Wondering through the—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —wandering through the Boston museum, especially, as I said, as a youth. But—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: It's kind of curious, actually, and a little sad that Boston, with all its resources, the museum with all its resources, it's ironic I guess, that they wouldn't have annual shows of Boston painters when so many of the museums in the country, the minor museums—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —in the smaller cities an annual show of local painters is usually one of the big highlights of the year—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —because they have so little else to show.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Well—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —I know, in the '30s, that through—indirectly through the WPA, a number of midwestern, southern, far western communities started community art centers.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yes, they did.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —this was—this was primarily the function of community art centers to— not only to foster the—foster art education and public appreciation of art, but to show local painters to provide a place in which to have a continuing round robin sort of revolving show of local painters.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: We approached Mr. Rathbone, oh, several times about doing this, but we never could get a fair space with him. So, we organized New England Contemporary Artists Group. And for the—we put on two huge shows at Northeast University, which is on Huntington Avenue, more or less, across the street from the Boston museum.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Boston museum, yeah.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And we used their huge gymnasium for a really big show in which we showed three works by all these artists of New England.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: This was recently?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah, I'll give you a catalog. A very elaborate catalog.

[00:10:00]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I'd love to see one.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And this is—but, you see, we really should have the prestige of the museum showing.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sure.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And, of course, the museum, however, it has bought some art by some Boston artists. And they own a lot of my prints and three watercolors and that sort of thing.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What do you suppose Rathbone's objection to that kind of a show would be?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Perry?

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yes.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Well, I spoke—I spoke to him about it, and he said, Well, people would be left out of the show and they'd be mad at the museum. And that is the most ridiculous thing in the world. You see, the Boston museum could give—set up some standards. And I told him. I said, Well, the way to do it is to set up a jury. There must be 12 regional museums in New England. Have these various directors of these various museums, they're familiar with the artists in that area, have them select—each one of them select, say, six artists and that would be the jury, you see?

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And it would be that simple. And—but he's never done anything about it because, I guess, they're more interested in—there's still that same provincial attitude—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —that anything local can't be any good. It has to be imported, you see?

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: So, now right now he has a big show of—I don't like the guy's works. I can't think of his name. [Laughs.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Well, I haven't been over there recently.

[Cross talk.]

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah, well, make—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: [Inaudible.]

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —a French artist and—who died recently.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And they just recently got around to buying a [laughs]—their second Picasso [laughs], for that matter. So, they've been pretty retarded on modern art on the whole.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative], and I think the central collection's pretty good. I mean—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Oh, yes. Oh, sure.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: The collection of Impressionist and post-Impressionist—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Sure.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —is first rate.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah. What did you think of Morrison and some of the other people above you? Did you have any contact with them at all or—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: I had very little contact with Morrison. Harley Perkins was a very sweet guy. Very nice. I don't know how strong an administrator he was, but he was—he was excellent as—I mean, I don't know how strong he was in dealing with his superiors and other politicians.



GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: But he was a wonderful person and—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I gather there was a little bit of strife there between Perkins and Morrison and Francis Henry Taylor, who was then head of the Worcester museum.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Oh, yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And was head of the regional committee.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's that gentlemen.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah. I never did know him but—yeah, they tried to replace Taylor. Well, they tried to replace Morrison with Perkins and I guess it all [inaudible] showdown at one point.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: But—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Well—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Well this was all more or less removed from you people who were—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —left to do your work.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah. I guess Taylor was a very great museum director, but all you do—all you have to do is read his articles in the *Atlantic Monthly* condemning modern art, you know, in the most journalistic [ph] way—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —to realize what sort of a chance—and, there again, you take the *Atlantic Monthly* in Boston. They have consistently derided and run articles against modern art, actually.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Except there's—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: To this day even?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: To this day. Except, of course, occasionally when other people would—say, Greece, they will show reproductions of contemporary Greek art.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: But in dealing with anything local, they're idea of a great painter is Andrew Wyeth.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Now, Andrew Wyeth is a provincial painter.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Is an anachronistic painter, actually, who—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sure.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —should be—I mean, would be painting in 1850.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And they would run articles on people like that, you see? I expect the next one will be Norman Rockwell. [They laugh.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Who, I gather, is really quite humble, doesn't really consider himself a painter just an illustrator.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Well, he sure—he is an illustrator. And I'm sure he must be a very good illustrator because he's very popular. And that's his function.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: [Inaudible.]

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah. I mean—

[Cross talk.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: He has—he has no pretensions of anything more.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: No, he takes—well, I understand he's doing—he does abstract paintings himself.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I read that, yes. That he'd tried an abstract painting.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: But what he does is look for a good type and photographs this person—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —in a proper pose. And then blow it up and more or less fill it in.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: It's not much of a trick.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, I'd—well, Wyeth may be an anachronism but he certainly is part of that whole American precisionist division that—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —runs from, oh, from probably [ph] through Aikens [ph] to—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Occasionally, he'll do a work that has sensitivity.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:15:01]

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: But I don't—I don't feel it's that meaningful because I do feel that every era—every cultural era develops its own particular style. And his—but, of course, it should have room for any kind of artist. I'm all for Andrew Wyeth painting any damn way he wants to. But I don't believe his work is worth \$75,000. [They laugh.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: But, you see, the kind of people that pay \$75,000 in—on the whole are people who admire Wyeth for the wrong reasons.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: They admire him simply because he does recognizable subject—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's right. There'd be a Texas—a Texas oil baron [ph] or something, of that sort.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. They admire him because he has a certain homely quality to his work.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: It makes them feel at home.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Let's talk about something more constructive. [They laugh.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Anyway. Yes, another question I was going to ask you. You say you didn't

really feel that there was any kind of regional feeling as far as a strong local feeling reflecting itself or making itself felt in the work of the people, you and the people around you. But was there any reaction? I suppose there must have been some kind of reaction, either for or against, the general national feeling among artists and writers and all, a feeling of protest of art or art in its broadest sense in the service of social welfare.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Oh, yes. Yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And a—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: I think that, well, there was—now, for example, you take Jack Levine's—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —painting, the ward heel [ph] and the cop and so forth—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —would be a protest against municipal brass [ph] and municipal mismanagement.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative], right in the George Grosz tradition of—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —a few years before.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Right. But I really don't feel that was—that was taken up very much by local artists.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative], but as far as—well, I talked with Siporin yesterday and he talked to me about, oh, his group going to St. Louis and doing the St. Louis post office mural.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Sure.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And they're doing a pilgrimage to Mexico City, for instance, just to see some of the Mexican—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Oh, yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —mural [inaudible].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Terrific.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And feeling themselves very strongly in league with this.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: The whole middle western regional feeling. It's odd, in histories of the period—what few histories have been written so far of the arts of the period, the writer generally stresses this is a period of regionalism. And I'm just not so sure that such a concept is really valid. That in certain places—and Chicago is—was—is a particularly strong case. There was a regional feeling. You had Nelson Algren and some of the other writers, and the painters, had a strong midwestern feeling of—feeling that their work was indigenous to, and reflected, the particular qualities of the prairie. Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —I mean, they're all very much aware of that.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: But in New England, I gather this wasn't true. It was much more diverse, diffuse.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: More international, see.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And more international and—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah, we were more interested in European art here.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And in the technical—the form aspects of art were more important here on the whole. Of course, now I was an indigenous artist in the—in that I was doing realistic—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: [Inaudible] realistic paintings and local subject matter.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Right. But and, eventually, of course, I broke away from it.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: But I think the most exciting thing that happened around here was [Alexander] Sandy Calder. See, there was a Margaret Brown gallery here in Boston. She passed away. And she showed a lot of very avant-garde things.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And she was one of the first American galleries to show Sandy Calder. And I think that really was very—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Was he back in this country at that time, or was he still in Europe? I guess —

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Well, I don't know what time.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: I may be jumping 10 years—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —on you. I don't—I don't—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: I don't know myself.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: No.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: It's certainly quite likely that he was in Roxbury, Connecticut at the time, where he lived.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Well, I think the influence in the—in—well, there was—another influence was—there was—at Harvard there was this avant-garde gallery of—in an office above the Harvard [inaudible] there at Harvard Square. And they showed all kinds of, oh, people like Matisse, Picasso and Paul Klee. Particularly, I remember Paul Klee—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —there. And that was, oh, I'll bet that was 19—it could be 1940 or 1939.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: What we were aware of was the stirring in Europe of all these ideas and, you know, form and subject and Surrealism—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —for that matter. And I think that was the really exciting thing.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: I think Picasso was very interesting to many of us.

[00:20:02]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: But for people like Bloom and Levine, it was principally— oh, Soutine, more than anything else. Maybe some Oskar Kokoschka too.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You think—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Maybe some of the German Expressionists.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Kirsch [ph], Kirchner—

[Cross talk.]

GEOFFREY SWIFT: [Inaudible] something like that.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: [Inaudible.]

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: [Inaudible] the whole Blue Rider school.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right. Were there any major shows of European painting in Boston during the time that you remember?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: No.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Nothing other than this—a contemporary European painting, nothing but this small gallery over the Harvard coop [ph]?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yes. It was mostly things like prints or small Paul Klee paintings possibly.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That they probably borrowed from New York, there was one dealer in New York that used to handle [inaudible].

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, I gather by and large on most of you the impact of the WPA was, oh, perhaps just only a—only insofar as it provided you with a—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: A continuum.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: A continuum, yeah.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's right. So, that you could consistently consider yourself an artist and continue working as an artist.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative], which was, perhaps, the only proper role for that kind of wide [inaudible].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yes, it's up to the artist to have seminar discussions concerning—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sure.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —aspects of our café discussions, so called.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah. Do you remember whether any of you, out of your meetings or just conversations among yourselves, came up with ideas for projects that you might carry out under the WPA Federal Arts Project?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: No.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: No?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Not at all.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Since the—since the Federal Arts Project was such a play it by ear kind of thing—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —it started first as a relief project, and then what do you do with the painters? Do you let everybody go off on his own, which is—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: These—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —about all you can do with a—with an easel painter or—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Well, what we considered ourselves is individual painters concerned with our own destiny, more than anything else.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Our own artistic destiny.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And I know that it's unfortunate that we probably didn't take up more group projects. But no, the idea of thinking up a group project never even occurred to us.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative], well, which is significant in itself, yeah.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: The mural painters—there were, of course, mural painters working in Boston. There were murals done. Did you ever—were you ever approached to it? Or did you ever show any—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: No.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —interest in doing a mural?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: No.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: No?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: They weren't very good ones.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: No, I know. I've seen some of them and most of them [laughs] aren't very good.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: I think that I can—there should be a—more of a community project. For example, the—in New York, there were very successful with that club on 13th Street, with Motherwell and de Kooning and all those people. And in that club, in their discussions, they forged the basis and the thinking behind Abstract Expressionism.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sure. And it was during that time that it began.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Right. And so, therefore, I think if in Boston there was more of that seminar attitude, this idea of group—of group art almost, you might say—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —it would have been more valuable because the same thing happened with—happened at the Café du Bois [ph]—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —in Paris, when, oh, Van Gogh and Monet and maybe, Sisley and

Gauguin and others got together and discussed Impressionism.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sure, the—oh, with Cubism and the meetings of the ['en plein air -Ed.] group and all that—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —sort of thing, yeah.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: After all, in Cubism's the most—the single most important development, perhaps, was forged by two men, by Braque and Picasso.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sure, before all the rest.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: So, they passed on their ideas to others and the—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: It permeated—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —formal—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —throughout everywhere.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Formal and informal meetings. I mean, imagine seven, eight, nine, 10, 11, 12—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —et cetera.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: But Boston now is in a very bad way in that the artists are even less communicative than before. They're spread all over the city.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: I mean—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —and they get to see each other less and less. Although we've had some meetings, in the—New England Contemporary Artists Group have had meetings from time to time. Either here or in Natalie [ph] [inaudible]'s house around the corner. House is a small palace. She—she's a sort of a patron of the arts in a way. And we've developed— but mostly, our discussions are concerned with the mechanics of setting up an exhibition, you see?

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sure. Sure. Yeah, well of course for—it's always a great mystery to me, and I'm sure to everybody else, just how does a—something that you can call a recognizable art movement begin?

[00:25:03]

Something like Impressionism and Cubism, you have to have a group of artists, or one strong personality who can dominate a group, or two strong—or three strong personalities, all to— there has to be some kind of, probably, pre-disposition in the culture for them all to think or to see the same way or relatively the same way—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Right.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —so that they all want to paint or see the world in the same way. And this wasn't the case in Boston and—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Well, it was to an extent.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: It was the case in New York after the war.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: There was a minor movement—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: How does it come about, it's a great mystery.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Well, through, as you say, one strong person.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: There was a minor movement in Boston—this was more recent—was started by Karl Zerbe—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —who was the main teacher of the museum school.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And his students formed a group, which I call "worship the old master's eclectic group." [Geoffrey Swift laughs.] And you have people like David Aronson, you see?

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Right.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Who was doing [inaudible] Soutine, for the Boston—for that section of Boston audience that—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —really has no understanding of modern art but—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Is Aronson old enough to have been on the Project?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: No.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: No, he's not?

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: No. And he's doing eclectic. And there were others like him around town. [Inaudible] Smith, this chap who does these old master prints.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Sure. I know his name as well as you do but—

[Cross talk.]

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah, I just [inaudible] —him so intensely I can't think of—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: And sculpture; I like his sculpture.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And his sculpture, yes.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yeah.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Yeah, but if you're liking his sculpture, I like Maureen O'Morini's [ph] sculpture better, who is working along the same humanist line but doing it with a better understanding of form—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —than this chap does.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, actually, since we've covered some ground, on that note of having forgotten his name, we might just conclude.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Well, fine.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Anything you want to add while we still have the machine going? Leonard Baskin, that's it.



LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's it.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Yes.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: That's it. No, the only thing I could discuss further would be my present paintings.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Which are dealing with the land—what you call landscapes of the mind.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And deal with the subconscious and the idea of being alive, the forces of life, and in the mind with the wonder of the human mind, which is this fabulous machine.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Accepts data and processes it.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And then, draws upon it intuitively instantly when it needs it. It's an endless universe in your mind. It's like that portrait of my wife over there. You only see the upper half of [laughs]—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: —or things like this here.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: In which I'm attempting to celebrate the wonder of being alive, you know? And also, recently—

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Nothing is specific as, say, a subjective picturization of the workings of the mind or something much more general and—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: More general, right. And then, I have these cinema pictures which are like film strips.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Which I drew a number of heads—subtly moving and changing.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Hmmm, that's interesting.

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: It's the one in the foyer. And—in which I attempt to show subtle changes in human situations, [inaudible] conversation between two people and that sort of thing.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: And I'm doing them in silk-screen prints as well.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Mm-hmm [affirmative], interesting, yes. Yes, I'd love to look at some of your work before I—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Fine.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: Let me—

LAWRENCE KUPFERMAN: Sure.

GEOFFREY SWIFT: —this thing—

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]