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Oral history interview with Laurence E. Schmeckebier, 1974 June 7-July 15

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Laurence E. Schmeckebier from June 7 - July 15, 1974. The interview took place in Lyme, New Hampshire, and was conducted by Robert F. Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.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

ROBERT BROWN: Just talk on—it'll pick up your voice.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah, well, the—

ROBERT BROWN: This is an interview with Laurence E. Schmeckebier. And the date is June 7, 1974 in Lyme, NH. It's Robert Brown, the interviewer. And I'd like to start out by asking you if you could say anything about your youth, and then particularly think of it in terms of, as you began to go toward what became your career. How you got into the arts.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, the, the—[inaudible] I'm a Midwesterner, and I think that has some influence on the whole program. I was born in Chicago, lived in Chicago Heights, the south side of Chicago, now about 212th Street. Uh, raised there and went to the, local high school, [inaudible] High in the, the so-called suburban league there. Uh, we had a, I think, a first-class high school program there, which was more or less college oriented. Um, most of our friends went to the University of Illinois. I was something of an oddball. I went to Wisconsin.

ROBERT BROWN: Were your parents connected with the—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: My parents, they were well, father was a University of Chicago graduate. He was a dentist. He was a dental surgeon there. And with his name, he had quite an extensive practice in the whole surrounding country, which is all German. And at that time, anybody with a German name could, was obviously a careful and a good doctor and a good dentist. This is one of the things he was always very, very proud of. But I suppose that has something to do with one's career too.

ROBERT BROWN: He was proud of his Germanness, or his—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No no no. He was proud of, proud of being a good professional. Today, the new word is integrity, in political life. And this is something that was a standard part of our whole build-up. And that used to be one of the the features that was German. One talked that way. This was before the First World War. Um, so father had a large practice both in town and in the surrounding, mostly German, rural population there. Which is one reason why, too, even though we lived in town, I had a lot of contact with people on the farm, and I've always been very sympathetic to that point of view. This crops up when I got involved with John Steuart Curry and the whole Midwestern, um, point of view. The, um, well, as a, in high school, I was a—I must say, I had a good time. I worked hard. Uh, I was interested in athletics. I used to do a lot of, a lot of swimming, played on the football team. Uh, I was no star, but I was always good enough to play regular football.

ROBERT BROWN: But you were a serious student, as well?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I was a serious student when I wanted to be. My point of view was always that there are a lot of other things that I wanted to participate in, as well as the scholarly enterprise. And this is something that I continued through college. So that was—I went to University of Wisconsin in 1923. Uh, that was in the—that was a given period, which people—which had all kinds of virtues as well as, as it wasn't just the Roaring Twenties. There were a lot of good ideas going, especially at Wisconsin. Uh, Wisconsin was a—had a long tradition of a liberal point of view. It had a number of very, very distinguished scholars who were among the great liberals of American education.

ROBERT BROWN: And you wanted that? You knew of that before you went?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Your parents did?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No, the idea was I just didn't want to go to Illinois because everybody went there. And, and Wisconsin was—everybody knew, of course, about the state. And, and this is the great period of Robert La Follette, Sr. And I think that the state enjoyed a liberal reputation based on his career. Uh, that was very, very important to me later on, because I knew the sons, and especially Philip, who was then, later on governor of the state. Anyway, as an undergraduate there I graduated in 1927. Uh, my interests were all over the place. I majored in history and English. I was very much interested in the history of art, largely because it was history. Uh, we used to select our courses largely on the basis of the outstanding teachers rather than the, than the—

ROBERT BROWN: Who was it in the history of art that, there?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, there was, that was Oskar Hagen who was a Wölfflin student, came from University of Göttingen. Um, was distinguished as a musician as much as he—in fact more than he was as an art historian. He had written a number of of books on Grünewald and Correggio and a number of special subjects like that, individuals. But the fact was that Hagen introduced a—the German art historical methods, largely Wölfflin, to this particular institution, which was not—

ROBERT BROWN: Which was appealing to you, as a student?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. Uh, the appeal there was largely, I would say, the use of art history as a cross-discipline, disciplinary discipline. Uh, this is one of the great virtues of the particular field, because you—it's basically history, but it's art criticism. And it's, you have to know music. You have to know literature. You have to know everything else. And while I was a major in history, I also got involved with what was at that time known as the humanities, which was largely classical oriented. Which means that you had to take, um, several years of Greek and, and Latin as well as languages. And this, in the end, half my academic work was in languages, both Greek and Latin. That was kind of odd at the time, although the Greek class we had had some of the best people in the university. Clyde Kluckhohn was in there, Florence Rockwood—who later married Kluckhohn—is now, I think, a distinguished professor at Wellesley College. Uh, she was there. So there were, these were all Phi Beta Kappa, brilliant group of people. Uh, but see, humanities today is something entirely different.

ROBERT BROWN: Well was—Did you work very closely with Hagen?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Uh, I took courses from him. I would say in the large lecture courses, not the advanced courses. I would say that the people who influenced me more than anything else were the historians and the philosophy. I took a number of courses in psychology, in philosophy. Uh, and there was a visiting German scholar by the name of Edwin Baumgartner, who—a really distinguished scholar. He's the one who gave me the idea eventually to go to Germany. And I had letters of recommendation from him and from Oskar Hagen. And as a matter of fact, through them I met Adolph Goldschmidt at Berlin. Was a very distinguished medievalist and one of the great men, great names in, in—

ROBERT BROWN: You went to Germany the same year you graduated?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you do art history, or—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, I was going to study—I was interested in musicology. And I was interested in history, and I was interested in art history. I'll come back to that in a second. The undergraduate program, see, there were several other people whom I used to admire among the teachers. One was Eugene Byrne [ph], who was a medievalist and later went to Columbia. Uh, another one was William Ellery Leonard, whom I, well, I won't say I adored him. I admired him, because he was an extremely creative mind. Was also a linguist and a very, very sharp critic and a productive artist. Uh, so that when you went to his class—one course, for instance, was called "Philosophy of the English Poets." And this was a, a course we used to make fun of, as the "Philosophy of Leonard." But it was a view of the great poets through Leonard. And there was a certain philosophical orientation, which was not just one thing but it had a broader complex. Uh, among other great men was A. R. Hohlfeldt, who was a Goethe specialist and one of the great men of Wisconsin. As a German scholar and as a teacher, his lectures, for instance, on Faust were simply fabulous. Uh, the—

ROBERT BROWN: You had a great deal of interest in German culture?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. Uh, partly the, from home. After all, with a name like that, you can't, you can't get out of it. And everybody sees the business of being German, that was both an advantage and an extreme disadvantage.

ROBERT BROWN: In the '20s, it was because of World War I?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Certainly during the wars. In the war when I was in school, I was in grammar school. My goodness, the people would throw rocks at you and call you a German spy. There were many times when I had to hide in the, in the schoolroom to get away from a gang of these vicious youngsters, you know. So that, you don't forget that.

ROBERT BROWN: But in Wisconsin there was, because there's a large German population in the university, there was a good deal of—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, the German department was one of the strongest departments in the whole of the large college. And there were very distinguished people. And of course the—many of my friends were Milwaukee Germans. Just some of the names in the fraternity, Bollinger and Jahn and, and Gausewitz and a whole series of those. Although the—so the name is, is something one just has to accept. And it does influence you. There was a time when people said, "For heaven's sake, why don't you change that name to Smith or something?" And of course, that was something. But my father was very, very proud of his own heritage. And although I never spoke German at home, I did, learn it afterward.

ROBERT BROWN: When you went to Germany to, in '27, what, did you go with a good many assumptions and eager anticipation, or what?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, you see, this is one of those, this is a very real thing. I was—the plan at home was that I would graduate from, from Wisconsin and go to Harvard Law School. Uh, that's why I majored in history. I liked history. Uh, and then, at the last minute, this was in May, when I was very much involved with Goethe and Faust and German philosophy. And they had several courses in German classics and English translation. I think that was while I was taking German. Uh, and I proposed to my father, "Well, you're going to send me to college, to law school. Why can't I take the same amount of money and go to Europe? Take these three, four years, it would cost about the same. And I could finish my degree." And he said, "Well, that's fine with me." And that was it. Uh, one of the things he did, he set up an arrangement so that I would be paid, outside of initial expenses, $100 a month. And that would, that was my allowance. And for the four years, that's what I got. Uh, it had the advantage, from his point of view, and he was aware that if I got discouraged and wanted to come home, I couldn't because I didn't have enough money. So with that $100 a month, that was of course a whole lot less than what it would have cost me to, to go to law school. I managed to travel. I traveled over most of Europe. I bought books. I went to concerts. Everything was on an entirely different scale than in this country. And so, I used to love music. And there were times when, in Berlin, for instance, I used to go to either a concert, opera, or play every single night. I'd spend the day in the, in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum.

ROBERT BROWN: Doing research? Or—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Studying. Uh, just looking at pictures, one of the things you had to do in this game. You have to know pictures, you know. I felt at the time I knew every picture in the museum. Not research. The research business I didn't get into until I got to working on the thesis. But the history of art, you have to look at objects. This is a visual skill. This is what Berenson, what everybody else said. You have to have the eye. And, and I used to wander around. And I'd tell anybody else, you can't talk about art unless you know it, unless you've seen it.

ROBERT BROWN: Had you seen much before you went to Germany?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, not any more than the average student. Uh, there were art exhibitions. And I wasn't particularly interested in the visual arts. I was interested in, you know, architecture. Uh, but you see, there's another little factor. I got to Germany. I went to—and this initial plunge was really—this cultural immersion, it just about threw me. Because see, I was alone. I went to Berlin. I had nothing but a few letters, and none of them turned out. Dr. Goldschmidt was a great man, but he didn't want, he didn't have any time to waste on an American student.

ROBERT BROWN: You were not going to matriculate formally at any institution?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, that was my idea, but I had no idea. I hadn't—It's not done the way it is done today, you know, where you go to a given place. So I went to the embassy. I was really lost. Uh, I went to the embassy, and I'm always grateful to this. I talked to Jacob Gould Schurman, who was a distinguished ambassador and scholar. And he sat me down. "What's on your mind? What do you want to do?" I said, "Well, I want to study." And I was discouraged about Berlin, because the place was so big and there were so many tourists. And everybody was—I was lost. He said, "Well, you should go to a small college." And he suggested Tubingen, "Where you can learn German properly and you can get yourself established." At the same time, then, I ran into a friend of mine, Bill Bernhardt [ph], from Milwaukee, who took me back to Bremen and introduced me to a cousin of his, who had gone to Marburg. And so it was that I went to Marburg, just like that. And I handed this letter to one of his teachers, a Professor Carl Horst, H-o-r-s-t, who was a, well, part German, part Dutch. And was a specialist in German Renaissance architecture, published a number of books. And he kind of took me in.

He had a wife who was—came from Riga and spoke some English. And so it was, I stayed in—Marburg was, at that time, what Heidelberg was supposed to be. And I was the only American student there. The only one, as far as I knew, who spoke English. And I managed to settle down. I got there in, oh September or so, and I managed to settle down. And this was—got a room, and I talked to whomever I could. And I learned German. And this was the first thing. Then I went to a lecture. I stayed in Marburg for, until March. Then I went to Berlin for—

ROBERT BROWN: Did you find Marburg quite compatible? It was a small city.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, it worked out just—I got, I made many friends, German friends. I used to go to the German fraternity that Professor Horst belonged to. And, and of course, this was, these are all youngsters my age and younger. But they were all having a good time. And of course, I had had my good time. I didn't want to make a career of that. Uh, you know, they used to—the drinking parties, and the—drinking parties are not what we would call them. These are regular beer-drinking festivals, you know, as one always knew about at that time. And I, of course, I enjoyed that. But then there was always a limit. So then I got going. And the main thing is that when you get into an entirely different surrounding, there's so much you don't know. Not only the language, but the whole tradition of German scholarship—this whole orientation that people say, Well, you take, you go for a semester in Italy or a semester in Germany, and then you learn the language and this. This was a long struggle, and it took me a year to get on my feet intellectually. But then—

ROBERT BROWN: In particular, the language was the problem?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well no, the language—

ROBERT BROWN: Because you had had a course. You knew something of German art history from Oskar Hagen, and—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah, but you see, this is all pretty superficial, the sort of thing you get in a course.

ROBERT BROWN: What was, what was it that took a while to get, before you could function intellectually?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: The, well, the whole scholarly orientation there. I used to think I was a good student. And you get over into Germany. You talk to a student on some kind of a problem, you have to talk in his terms, not on yours. And the—you're talking in another language. Uh, now, at that time, one has to remember, too, that the Germans were not particularly friendly toward the Americans, and not particularly respectful of their intellectual achievements. So that I would speak up, and nine times out of ten, somebody would just jump down my throat. And this is why I say, you have to argue on their terms. The whole tradition of a war, you see, they felt that they won the war. We hadn't won it. They would have won it if it hadn't been for the Americans who came in there. This, this anti-German point of view was very real. Anti, excuse me, anti-American point of view was a very real factor.

ROBERT BROWN: So they, they were disdainful of you, or at least they ridiculed you at any opportunity. What was the professor like? Was he—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, these, this was the great thing. Uh, the number of students in art history, particularly in with Carl Horst, was small. Uh, I was taken in as a member of the family practically. And Horst was a very profound scholar, a philosopher, basically. He had been a student of Hermann Cohen and, in Marburg. And Marburg is a great center of neo-Kantianism, before the war. And I had courses with Heidegger at that time, only he went to Heidelberg. And E. R. Jaensch the famous psychologist, type psychologist. And I got very excited about that. And then, of course, once you get to—also Richard Hammond [ph], who was a very distinguished German art historian, was there. I didn't care too much about him, because he was much more of a, much more flamboyant and not the type that Horst was. And the two of them didn't get along very good, very well, so that kind of rivalry is very real, too. So if you were a student of Hammond, you couldn't be a student of Horst. So I stuck with, with Horst. And I must say this very—I have a strict adherence to the critical analytical approach, something that I always, I learned there. I think I had it beforehand, but this became clear. And I've never gotten over that. This may be an advantage and may be a disadvantage, from a career point—

ROBERT BROWN: Very, very carefully working, and, uh—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, analytically, this is what makes art history a science.

ROBERT BROWN: Whereas Hammond would leap, intuitive leaps?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, Hammond was a great talker. And he was full of big concepts. Whether you could justify it or not, that was another thing. You didn't worry about that. And, and these were the phonies. There are phonies in disguise.

ROBERT BROWN: [inaudible] The Wölfflin tradition had been something of that sort, positing a very—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, that's just it. That's, that's—Yeah, I certainly did. And this is where Horst was very anti-Wölfflin, anti- these great popularizers. See, too, there was Spengler. Spengler was a great name, at least a kind of, I think, that—the strict historian and the strict philosopher would not accept. And this is one reason why Spengler was so popular in this country, and why he was a bestseller. And this is—when you talk about the anti-Americanism, this is one of the things they criticized. Because here I was spouting Wölfflin and, and Spengler, this whole idea of the decline of the West and the disenchantment with society as it developed there. And the, the Germans did not take that point of view, you see.

ROBERT BROWN: But some of the students must have, didn't they? Because of the, weren't these, as you said, these were very turbulent, or they, you haven't said, turbulent, but these were. What about the political?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh, that was, that was a very real thing. See, Marburg was a—

ROBERT BROWN: Heating up by then, wasn't it?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah, this was 1927, '28. In that year, for instance, we used to—Marburg was a very, very conservative, academically and culturally conservative center. Very pro-German and nationalist. The leading party were the Deutsch Nationale, and the Stahlhelm was very strong. And I forget the name of the head of the German National Party. But anyway, there would be these political rallies, and the student fraternities would all participate. And they'd come out with banners and uniforms. And, and then they'd have these parades. Uh, for every major occasion, the opening in university in the big awla [ph], and then for, well, they didn't celebrate Armistice Day. But they celebrated All Saints' Day, and this was a day of mourning for them. And they made a big affair of that. So you'd have all these, these parades. Now, I've often sat, listened to the political speakers. They used to go—and very, very strong, like, of course at the time, I used to look at that as, as kind of a Friday night pep rally, you know, before the football game.

ROBERT BROWN: Because at Wisconsin, you hadn't had such seriousness in that, had you?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well the, you mean in the—

ROBERT BROWN: Except as this was La Follette's time. There was—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Uh, no, I wouldn't say that. Wisconsin later on, and when I went back there, that was a little more, that was 1930s. And then there, there it was. But in Marburg you had this, these pep rallies. Uh, “we will overcome,” kind of thing. Uh, not that word, but we will achieve victory. And they, of course, Marburg had suffered terribly, not from the war so much as from the inflation. People were poor. There was always a terrible loss of life there. People on the streets you'd see were women. Very few men. And I remember commenting on it. Where did the men go? Though, of course, you just—it reminded me of how many million, millions were lost. Uh, but then there'd be these parades, with all the banners and and for such a political thing. At the last one were a couple of crummy-looking characters with brown shirts. And these were the real heels, the real bums and the—that were looked on as the dregs of society at that time. And this is something that one has to remember, because these characters then developed. As obnoxious as anybody could be, they were shouting their slogans and shaking their fists at everybody. And of course, they were tolerated but not liked.

ROBERT BROWN: But there was a tolerance in this, [inaudible] a wide spectrum of parties would be—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, they tolerated them. They, of course, you see, that's what the government did regularly. They tried to keep them from, keep the two wings from fighting one another. This was always, or—the communists and the brown shirts were fighting in the streets. And of course, they were the argument that the Nazis always had, that when the government troops would come in, they beat up the rioters, they'd beat up the brown shirts. And that's, it was an argument that they made a great deal of. But anyway, as far as the university's concerned, I always think of this group of creeps at the end who later became the storm troopers.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, you were at Marburg, then, into the spring of '28?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. Then I went to, the following, I went to Berlin. And that was—I was lonesome. I, the small town was all right, but I wanted to see, I wanted to hear music. And I wanted to see the opera. And I wanted to see the museums, and I wanted to travel. So I stayed in Berlin, and then went to Munich for the summer semester. And—

ROBERT BROWN: In art history?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, then I was listening mostly to art history. And, well, the story of the career there was, and this is—goes back to what you had asked about before. I'd heard so much about Wölfflin. And

when you really get down to it, Wölfflin was a great man. And everybody who ever heard his lectures was struck by his personality and the force of his, of his presentation and the clarity of his ideas. And the intellectual discipline involved. Because whenever he would proceed to analyze a picture this, or make a statement, he would present that in such a clear-cut fashion that there was just no argument. This was a scientific approach. What intrigued me was not only the approach but how did he develop? And I went to the library one time, and I looked at his thesis, which goes back to 1888, I think. And here, here was—he had done his research and his doctoral work on optics, on physiological optics. On what does one actually see. And this idea intrigued me, because, see, if you can clarify what the eye sees, then you can—then all the other philosophical implications that develop out of that, creative and historical and whatnot. And, for that, in that direction, then I started to monkey with optical illusions. Uh, Carl Horst used to point out a lot of things in architecture, not only the refinements on the Parthenon but in in medieval buildings. In Frankfurt, we used to go on these these trips, and he'd point out different areas where they would distort the building in order to have it look right. So many of the refinements, you know, in the, on Gothic cathedrals, where the distortion is not just due to the stress and the outward push, but they'd deliberately twist these things so that they—to give a certain optical effect. And I used to collect these observations. Then I got into color. And there were certain optical illusions in color, which paralleled the linear ones. And so I presented this idea to Wilhelm Pinder, who was the ordinaris in art history. And he said, "Well, that's all right, but you could, we could monkey with that. If you wanted to do something, you would have to concentrate with me. You'd have to concentrate on on some artist or particular work of art, perhaps in the area here." And he suggested the Luttenberger al Tau [ph], which was up in Bavaria. And I really had no interest in that, because I thought I had larger ideas. The other thing was that I was interested in Konrad Witz. And you could do this kind of comparison between, in various shifting generations, a succession of generations. Stefan Lochner and Konrad Witz, as two competing schools, two different generations. At the time, Pinder was very much involved with his theory of the generations, which was a Wölfflin refinement but much more meaningful in that, this idea of the son rebelling against the father, going back to his grandfather's ideas. And then the cycle that, not many of those cyclical ideas had been worked out by other people. But anyway, then I got the idea, because I was listening to psychology courses there, too. And I went to a professor of experimental psychology, Gustav Pauley [ph], who, and I had showed some of my drawings. And he said, "That's a good idea. Certainly you could do that with us." And to make a long story short, he set me up in a beautiful studio in the psychology department there. I had equipment and an arrangement so I could get subjects to work on, on the perception of color. And that took three years. I had, oh, I had dozens and dozens of subjects. And I narrowed down to three different types of subject who had different, a different range of perceptual capacities. And then I ran this experiment on the modes of appearance of small patches of color, which is basically, again, a painting problem. Basically, it's the problem of the Impressionists, of the Neo-Impressionists. You know, you took pure color, put it alongside of one another. And then they would interact, one with the other. So you have contrasting colors. You presumably, you would have, you'd have gray. But as you watched them sometimes, the blue would be, by the contrast, would be turned into green. Or sometimes, it was yellow and blue, the yellow would be turned into red. And then the subject would look at it and say, "Well, no. I see blue. No, I see green." And the end result of that whole thing was that there's a certain fluctuation that we called polyvalence of perception. This is what the, of course, the artists knew. And this is the reason for the whole development. Now, this was published as [German title]. That always amused me, because later on, when the Op artists got going, these were exactly the same problems that that I had monkeyed with back in '28, '29, '30, '31.

ROBERT BROWN: So you worked primarily on your doctorate with Pauley.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I took my degree with Pauley. And since it was experimental psychology, I had to know psychology. And then they said, well, psychology isn't a separate [inaudible] major. It's part of philosophy. So I had to take the degree, the exam in philosophy. And then they said, "Well, since you're interested in art history and you're taking a minor in that, you can take aesthetics, too." So I, I ended up taking the exam, preparing for the exam, which was in German. I also had an English, since I had an English undergraduate major, they included that. So I was preparing for the exam with a French handbook of English literature. And really got myself mixed up linguistically there. But anyway. I got a summa, not a summa. I got a cum laude.

ROBERT BROWN: Munich was a much larger place than Marburg.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh, yeah. See, Munich is a, is a big university.

ROBERT BROWN: And were you, was it as compatible for you? Did you—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, Munich is a wonderful city. Uh, it, and there are all kinds of, lots of people. I knew lots of artists there. It has a first-class museum, the Alte Pinokothek. And I liked the Bavarians. So anyway, I finished the exam in in late December of 1930, came home in '31.

ROBERT BROWN: But you did some work, you say, here in drawing and in painting. [inaudible] brief encounters, the Hofmann school.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No, no. No. That was very serious. My goodness, that was a half-day for a year. Uh, Hans Hofmann, see there are two schools for students preparing to get into the academy. Uh, one was Heymann, H-e-y-m-a-n-n, and the other was Hans Hofmann. Heymann was a strictly academic type, interested in drawing. And then Hofmann was the modern. Hofmann was a terrific person, and the virtues, the career that developed in this country were perfectly clear at that time. He was just, he was a handsome man and open as could be. A charmer, didn't know English, but the girls loved him. And this, of course, is where all the American students went. This is one reason why I used to go, too, because this is where you'd pick up your dates and then get friendly with other people. But I went to him one time, to tell him about my ideas on optical illusions. He says, certainly. He was very sympathetic. He thought it was a good idea. But he said, "You need practice at that. You come with me, and I'll show you." So he gave me a terrific talk for 20 minutes on the philosophy of Hans Hofmann. And I was just thrilled. This was it. The interesting thing was that through the whole year that I spent—this was, well, a couple of afternoons a week, and then I used to go to evening drawing class—he never got beyond that first 20 minutes. The basic ideas he outlined, yeah, were the same ones that he just repeated, worked out with the model.

ROBERT BROWN: Were the basic ideas ones that you'd already thought about? Or were these quite new?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, these were Hofmann's. Uh, what were the ideas? Well, it's basically a matter of an emphasis on basic problems of form. One, form is volume and linear pattern. Volume, which is a structural type of emphasis on form. Uh, the whole design problem and the color. And you just work around these things. This is a—and actually, in the, in my work in art appreciation for the general class, I've always used that, because this can be done scientifically, too, you see. This is when you—he was perfectly scientific. Whatever he would talk about, he could demonstrate to you. This is the way it is. This is what you see. But the thing about Hofmann there, which I have never forgotten and is, I think, significant in interpretation of his work later was his tremendous enthusiasm when he'd speak. And with gestures, and there's a certain calligraphic verve there, which is the basic characteristic of his, of his paintings. Uh, he paints as he talks. Uh, now other people will not have that point of view, but I always felt that I was in his presence whenever I saw a picture of his.

ROBERT BROWN: So you painted as well as drawing.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No, no, I drew. I didn't paint. I, my interest didn't, I didn't—once you—one of the realizations that you come to is painting is not for an amateur. If you want to paint, you do it right. In that way, the art of painting and the art of research are parallel. You have to—it takes a devoted person. The Sunday painter concept is, just doesn't work.

ROBERT BROWN: But you found that these courses you took, worked in very well with your art historical and psychological research?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: The whole processe of clarifying your point of view and these ideas that gelled [ph]. Once you know that, you—well, another thing I did, which I have never forgotten and influenced me a great deal, I used to audit Max Doerner's class in painting techniques at the academy. Uh, now, this was the same thing as in his book, which we used to use. And he was talking to artists, and he would say that you go down the line with every single paint or the chemical composition of paint. And then how you use it, how it's built up. And of course, I was fascinated by that because he, from a purely technical point of view, you'd have a parallel to what Hofmann was talking about from a personal point of view. And this is what I—and this goes back to the optics, too, which is the same process. And I—see, one of the great virtues of Doerner is that he would talk about painting procedure. He said, "The Old Masters did this and this." Uh, talk about the technique of Titian, technique of van Eyck, technique of Rubens. Those are three basic approaches. And then he'd go to the Pinakothek with us and point out, "This is the way he did it." And then he could build up a painting that way. This is the way he taught. So that you don't, when you—and when you're in the process of building, you can, paint something using the procedure of Rubens. But you're never copying Rubens. And you know, people are always afraid of copying an old master. There, you don't just copy an old master. You copy the surface appearances. You, you do it the way he did it.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. When you were learning, you were learning from Doerner the physical and chemical properties of the medium.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. And the, best of all, the most important of all, the procedure.

ROBERT BROWN: The artisanship, the craft.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. Call it craft or what, but it's the procedure. How did he do it? And he says, "I can't tell you how Titian painted this picture. But if you painted this way, you'll get that effect." And that is, I think, scientific thinking.

ROBERT BROWN: He couldn't tell you, because that was, you mean, the brush work and the mood and the very

idiosyncrasies that went into the way the paint was put on or the figure was realized. He couldn't explain that.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah, he can't. Well, he can point out the idiosyncrasies. But he said he can't tell you how he did it, because he wasn't there. But if you do use this method, you paint it this way, you will get that effect. Broken color or surface color. This is the kind of thing that I was working at with the laboratory, I think. This is the way the, well, some of us in psychology at that time worked. David Katz [ph] is another one of those people on modes of color, appearance. Well, anyway, I did used to listen to Pinder. Pinder was—I went to his seminars. And there, of course, was talking about influences. The greatness of Pinder is his tremendous personality. The man was a terrific drive and enthusiasm. Related to Hofmann in a way, but a really profound scholar. Also a big musician. And at that time, too, of course you could watch the general trend to the new political orientation. It appeared in the classes. Pinder was very nationalist. And of course, one has to realize that the National Socialists would never have developed if it weren't for the Depression, the cutting off of foreign aid and the support that the Americans had given to the, through the financial aid programs. France didn't help by insisting on their pound of flesh. And so you got into this desperate situation. And academically, people were poor. Students were hungry. We used to go to the student menza [ph], and we'd get the, used to eat a regular meal for 12 cents. Fifty pfennigs was a bowl of soup and a roll of bread. Of course, this is when I didn't save money so I could travel. But the students had a hard time.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you develop any close friends among the students that you kept?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Kept, no. No, I lost contact with most of those people through the Depression and stuff. Actually, I picked up a number of people when I went back in 1960. And one friend of mine from Marburg was Harold Busch [ph], who developed a terrific career as a journalist and an art historian. He had served in the Navy, was on a submarine and wrote a number of books on the submarine war, from the German point of view, which have been translated. And I met him in Frankfurt. He lives in Frankfurt today. And I correspond with him. A number of other students that I tried to contact, but many were lost in the war, of course.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have a promise of, well, you intended to come back to the states. You had no intention of staying.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No, no. No, no. I had—I wanted to get my degree and then go back. What I wanted to do, I had no idea. I thought eventually, it was a matter of teaching. And it was through one of my history professors that I, whom I met in Paris one summer. And he went back to Wisconsin and talked to Oskar Hagen. Oskar said, "Well, this is just the kind of fellow we want." And it was arranged, and I was hired as soon as I would get my degree. So I came back. In February 1931, I started teaching. And stayed in Wisconsin until 1938. In '38, I went to the University of Minnesota. Forty-six, I went to Cleveland. And in '54, I went to Syracuse.

ROBERT BROWN: How did your teaching develop? Did you reconstruct that at all at Wisconsin? Had you taught —You'd not taught, really, before.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I never taught before. This was, no, I had quite a struggle.

ROBERT BROWN: What were you going to teach? Psychology?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No. Well, I was in Oskar Hagen's department, as an art historian.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. And he was chairman of—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: He was chairman of the department. And I had—of course, I was, having just figured my degree, I was pretty cocky. And I had a lot to learn. And I learned it the hard way. But what was really difficult is that the whole field of the history of art—See, I had talked to, spoken very little English in the whole time. And everything that I had learned, my thinking, was all in German. And I didn't realize that here, even though I was an American and spoke English, that I had to do a lot of translating. And so I was thrown into a lecture situation. And I wasn't ready for that. I didn't get much guidance, either. This is one of the reasons why later on, I used to spend so much time with other, the younger staff people. I didn't get much help. No one ever warned me that, of the terrors of an audience.

ROBERT BROWN: You were asked to lecture? What kind of course?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: On Venetian painting of the Renaissance, which was one of my favorite periods. I was always interested in the Renaissance. And, well, this is much, was very difficult. And one time, the chairman of the department came in there. And I was terrified that this was a disaster. And he gave me a very unkind, unsympathetic criticism. Here, if that's the way you're going to talk to them, we've got to find somebody else. And so this is the Depression, and there weren't any other jobs. So then I really got down to business. And I would write out every single word of the lecture before the, before I went into the thing. And then I'd leave the manuscript in the office, so that I knew exactly what I was going to say, but I said it and didn't read it. And that

is a practice. It used to take me three or four hours to prepare each single lecture. And that's the way you learn. There's a craft to that, too. And there's only, you don't just spout. You have to—

ROBERT BROWN: Did you always have slides?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: You always worked with slides. You can't, history of art, you can't do without slides. Of course, I was all full of color psychology. And this was, I think, an interesting comment on the academic environment of the time. This is 1933, '34. The people in the psychology department were very much interested in optics. And Mr. Henman [ph] was, who was the chairman, said, "Well, why don't you come down? I'll set up a laboratory for you and give you equipment. You can carry on your experiments." I wanted to do this thing in English, because they had a tremendous, I thought, significance. Because the method that I used was entirely new, still hasn't been used. And it's something that would be of value both to art criticism and psychology and studio artists. I was told that if you want to go over to the psychology department, you go. That was that. So there was no cross fertilization, no interest.

ROBERT BROWN: A bit different from Munich, then, wasn't it?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: It was very different from Munich. I was shocked at that, and maybe just a little bit bitter.

ROBERT BROWN: With Mr. Hagen.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. And from that time on, I never touched the color psychology again.

ROBERT BROWN: But were you happy working with Hagen and staying in art history?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I was happy with teaching. But, well, anyway, it had the virtue of waking me up and making me work. And from then on, the first thing I—well, I used to write up—

[Side conversation.]

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh.

ROBERT BROWN: You used to write them out.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I used to write them out. And then I would deliberately choose a new course each year, so that I had new material that I had to work out. And I was able to cover, in a specialized and advanced course, specialized study so as to bring it together, the ideas I had. And this is something that took a tremendous amount of work. But I felt that I learned something. And the—

ROBERT BROWN: How were the students, then?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh, the students were terrific. One of the things one has to realize, which today isn't so, you have students in a class of 50, 60, 70 who had never seen a, had never been to Europe, had never seen a, many of them had never seen a museum. Who were somehow attracted to this thing, but—

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ROBERT BROWN: Your relation with your students at Wisconsin, because you—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, you see, in the first place, I talked about the, so many of these students who had never seen a museum, had never been to Europe, who knew no other language. They'd taken, they were required to take French or German, but that, they don't, this was an academic subject. You don't speak it there. The kind of techniques on language that we had learned through the war, that wasn't heard of back then. That was considered impossible. Uh, that was scholarship, wasn't academically respectable, the language studies of the armed forces. Uh, so with this kind of student material there, I understood that. Because while I had gone to some museums, I wasn't particularly interested, and this wasn't our way of life. Then having gone, been completely immersed in this thing in Europe, I felt that I understood, and I also felt that I had a mission there, because the field is wide open. The mission idea, you know is part of the whole psychology of the Depression. Uh, here, they take the automobiles and the, and the glamour out of material glamour, out of life, as the Depression did. Then what have you got? Then you have your own resources. And this idea of building up from the soil is something that was very real. When you get these kids from all over the state who would really work, who had no money at all. And of course I had, from the, from the German point of view, I had—was sympathetic to that. And from being a Midwesterner, I understood that too. And therefore, I used to work very, very hard. At the same time, you had to be academically respectable. When I gave a Venetian painting from a scholarly point of view, so that that student who finished that course could go anywhere and be able to talk with authority on the masters of the Renaissance.

ROBERT BROWN: And most of them were serious enough?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh, they, not only were they serious, but they had brains. They had the drive and the capacity to absorb this, even though they don't see an original painting.

ROBERT BROWN: Did they have—and they have real interest in wanting to—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Real interest. There's absolutely no question about it.

ROBERT BROWN: It wasn't simply exotica to them—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No, no, no, no, no. Absolutely not. This is what was so exciting.

ROBERT BROWN: They were hungry for this kind of thing.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Certainly. And also, they were critical. And the idea is, from my point of view was, is that you have to insist on their being critical, that they don't get sucked in by every medicine man that comes along. And in the academic field, you had all kinds of these Dudley Crafts Watson people at the art institute. Now, Dudley Crafts Watson was a wonderful person and all that, but he was a spellbinder and gave all these beautiful things. Well, this was the thing that I considered false and, at that particular time, was of political and social significance. Well, one of the things, you had the interests of the students. I was interested in politics. I was interested in artists who were interested in politics. I always felt, for instance, that this German Expressionism that developed in Central Europe after the, well, before, during, but especially after the war, George Grosz and the rest, I thought these were great artists. Uh, one of the first impressions I got, had when I landed in New York, and when I came back was to stop in—why, I did I don't know—stopped into New School for Social Research. And there were the newly completed paintings by the Mexican, Orozco and Tom Benton. And I was very much impressed with Orozco, because here was a man with a very dynamic personality, an expressionist if there ever was one, but who had a mission. Who was interested in the use of this particular point of view and this technical procedure for, well, national purposes or for political purposes. But for society. Now you see, these words have different interpretations and different meanings in different periods.

ROBERT BROWN: This time, these were very immediate to you.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: And that's how I got into Mexican art. The first year, '32, I went down there. And I had become acquainted with Orozco and had met a number of people. His dealer, for instance, in New York, Alma Reed, who ran Delphic Studios. And I went down to Mexico with a number of letters to his friends, to them. And this was really something, as far as getting acquainted. And I did a, did a survey of the artists, of the work that they had done, the sequence, and all the stories that I could. And just took notes on everything I saw, and used the same procedure, um, analyzing the picture that I had always insisted on. And this caused a little difficulty, too, because I was talking about Mexican art. This was all revolutionary, Communist.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean when you came back to Wisconsin, you were talking about—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Right, when I was, when I began to teach. I was talking about Renaissance on one hand, but on the other hand, I was talking about contemporary art and where we were going. History is of no real value unless it has some orientation in a given time and place. And this was, I think, one of the reasons why I had an attraction t students, or I was interested in students catching onto this idea.

ROBERT BROWN: Did it cause you a problem? On the one hand, you were talking about beautiful things of the Renaissance. On the other hand, problematical future.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, it didn't—

ROBERT BROWN: Or you didn't feel a, a conflict of the fact that you were on the one hand teaching a complete —

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No. You see, one of the concepts involved in the, in Mexican art was a Renaissance. Because here was a given set of conditions of a revolution, which is, has been accomplished, and a political party which felt that this was the opportunity for people to become themselves to establish their historical identity, their contemporary identity, to use their historical heritage, their cultural heritage to the development of a greater future. Development of themselves. All these issues that we talk about, the minority groups, these were very real then. Mexicans are not just Spanish. Uh, they're, they are Indians and they are Spanish and they are native Spanish. And then there's, a vast majority of them are a mixed race. And so the idea of despised races, one that, minority groups, one that Orozco was very sympathetic to. It appears in the New School murals there. Uh, despised races, what he put there. One, was the, there was the Mexican and another was the Jew. And of course, this was an issue that was very, very strong. Anyway, this this is the kind of talk that I would get into.

And I was working on the Mexican thing. I did, with the first draft there, I was giving all kinds of lectures on the outside.

ROBERT BROWN: Were these very well received in Wisconsin? Or was it a mixed—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh, I think they were received. I never really knew. I used to get an audience out there. Many times when I gave public lectures, when I had two or three people there. But that's one of the things you learn. But, as far as the students are concerned, this was a, these were always elected courses. There were no required courses that I gave. I always managed to get my share of students. Uh, actually, the one success story on that line, to answer your question, was a Minnesotan. When I first got there in '38, I took over the survey course, which is an elective course. Uh, I had 50 students or so. And, um, at the end of my—after—this is during the war in '41, '42, in there. I worked that survey course up to a thousand. And of course, we had a very going graduate student program. I did that myself. I didn't have any, have any help at all. So in order to take care of these students, I used a two lecture system, you know, with a third hour discussion group. And then I would have these assistants, who would take care of the, um, discussion groups. And we would have a special briefing class with them, so that they would go over the problems. And this was a kind of a program of educating graduate students in teaching. And I used to work on that.

ROBERT BROWN: Why did you go to Minnesota in '38?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, '38, I had a—I was very unhappy at Wisconsin, as far as the position is concerned. And there, this opening appeared in in Minnesota. This was, at the time David Robb was there, who's always been a good friend of mine. And he was going, he was working on a book. And he stayed there for one semester or so, and then went on leave and took another job in PA, I think, later on. But, so then I was there alone. And after the first year. And well just, there was a—

ROBERT BROWN: [inaudible] If you were there alone, then you were pretty well free, were you, to, compared with the Wisconsin.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Was the attitude with the students the same, intense interest that you had developed at Wisconsin?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh, yeah. Yeah. It was much more so. We had, we used to have a seminar. My ideas had kind of evolved at that time, too. At Wisconsin, I was, did the Mexican book that wasn't published until I got to Minnesota, though. University of Minnesota published the thing.

ROBERT BROWN: You had done your handbook of Italian paintings, too.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, yeah. I did that book. Uh, see, the Italian Renaissance book was based on, I think you noted that, was based on the class notes, which I used to mimeograph for the students. And the problem there was that so much of this basic material was buried in all kinds of different articles that you couldn't—and in foreign languages, which students couldn't get at. And I wanted to have the factual material available to the first-year student. See, I don't believe in this business of giving a survey and giving a little of the frosting, and then giving an advanced course, where you get a little more of the meat, and then the still advanced course—

ROBERT BROWN: You felt they should be offered this opportunity from the beginning.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: You use exactly the same method, and the real structure of the approach to be given in the first day of the course.

ROBERT BROWN: You found the students liked this challenge.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: The students accept that.

ROBERT BROWN: It was much more than it normally is. It's not the frosting at all. It's the depth.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: You see, you can give the depth. Maybe, I would argue, that a work of art is a little more congenial in that way, because a work of art is always there. But the problems there are so exciting. And these are all factual. The form is, what the thing looked like, when it was done, who did it, under what circumstances. This goes on and on. And you can do that the first day of a given class. And the same thing will happen when you're doing the seminar. I take someone like Peter Paul Rubens. You can get a one lecture on Peter Paul Rubens, or you can spend a semester or a year, or maybe a lifetime, if you want to. And this range, I think, is essential in the whole undergraduate/graduate ethic. This is the argument for the handbook. Interesting, and I re-wrote that. I submitted it to various people for publication. And they said, well, the answers

are stock answers. The undergraduate courses handbook. For undergraduate courses, the field is well taken care of by textbooks. And for graduate students, they're supposed to dig their own information out. Well, I would agree with that, that they should dig out the information. But there's so much wasted effort involved in digging this all out, just in this procedure of the digging. What you really need is to have this information clarified so you can go on from there. And this is the essential phase of the Renaissance, because the Renaissance is not just the research. And the Renaissance is a creative enterprise. This is why I felt that the Mexican enterprise was so exciting, because here is a contemporary period, a period of no more than 10 years, in which a small group of artists created a style of international acclaim. A small group of artists, with the generous patronage of an enlightened government. These were only a few individuals who were involved.

ROBERT BROWN: How was the Mexican book received? Did you get quite a response from it when it was published in '39?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh, I wouldn't say so. It won a number of design prizes.

ROBERT BROWN: Had you [inaudible] the design?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. I had a first-class designer there. But we worked together. The response, well, you see, I took a different slant, which was not popular. I was very much—I considered Diego Rivera a fraud, which he was. And I said so. And I wasn't only expressing my own point of view, which I could describe there from the work, and prove. But the other artists felt that he was that way. And this was not just a matter of jealousy, because I've always been sympathetic to the underdog anyhow. I mentioned Carl Horst, who was the underdog in that department there, kind of ignored. Orozco was one of those yet--now, after so many years, Orozco remains the great personality and creator of the whole movement. This, how was it received? Well, there were a number of sharp criticisms because I was pro-Orozco and anti-Diego.

ROBERT BROWN: Who did this come from? Mexicans, or from art critics?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No, from the critics in this country.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you take that seriously?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No, no.

ROBERT BROWN: What about social interests, generally, and the fact that you're calling attention to this [inaudible].

[Cross talk.]

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah, people were sympathetic to that. Of course, I was not—they label you a communist. But I see nothing wrong with somebody who is a communist, who is a genuine one. But the phony one is the one I think is dangerous, because he's using other people and other ideas for his particular thing. In other words, with the Mexican group, Siqueiros was the genuine artist and the genuine communist, who believed in—in fact, he was active in the labor unions and protests and all this kind of thing his whole career long. Whereas Diego would always use the party for his own benefit, which is, whether it is financial or just conceit. He'd shift, one way to the other. Communists didn't like him at all, whereas Orozco was one of these people who was an artist and had his own beliefs, and he stuck with them. And fought for them.

ROBERT BROWN: What was your relation to colleagues and the administrations at the time, with these interests? Was there any problems created, or was this generally a great deal of interest in these things?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, in Wisconsin, I was a little outspoken. I was always, I spoke out on Mexican [inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: Conservative time at Wisconsin? Because you had said when you were there in the '20s, it was liberal, quite liberal.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: On the contrary, there was an awful lot going on at Wisconsin on the liberal side. I, no, I was, oh, I'd say I had lots of friends. I don't think that I was—I think I was a lot less, very indiscrete, as every youngster is.

ROBERT BROWN: You were married then, too.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah, yeah. We got along at Wisconsin. I think Wisconsin is one of the, at that time, was one of the great institutions in the country. Talk about East or West, my goodness, when you look at the quality of the library, the quality of the staff, the quality of the undergraduate students, compared with any other of our Eastern universities, you can't make generalities. But these were tops.

ROBERT BROWN: There's a great popular pride in it, wasn't there, across the state, and generous support?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: For the university? They always had to fight for their money. They were always having trouble. These were the days of Glenn Frank, and one felt that Glenn Frank was an outsider who had brought in all kinds of communisms, a lot of argument there, particularly through the legislature. La Follette was always playing politics, too, at that time. Well, when I was teaching there, that's when he launched his national progressive party, which was a disaster, which was an imitation Nazi affair. He had a button with a cross arm, and he had uniforms. He got the W men with red sweaters, and Ws on their front as ushers. And the reason why this is so vivid to me is I was there. See, I knew [inaudible]. I liked him very much. But he was a very dynamic person, and I felt that he was going to go great places in the national political scene. And that's why he started this party. And that really blew up. But in the—Curry was there.

ROBERT BROWN: I was going to say, Curry was brought in while you were there.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I was there.

ROBERT BROWN: And [inaudible] School of Agriculture, though, wasn't he?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. But Curry did a picture of this thing, so it's in the Curry book. The story of Curry is, I think, related to this because I felt, you see, in the 1930s, there was this tremendous patriotism. A genuine one, which I believed in. I believed in the native artists. I was not imitating. I was not trying to be a European émigré or anything. I was not interested in Europe, because I felt the future was always centered in America.

ROBERT BROWN: But you weren't going to be a National Socialist.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I certainly was not interested in National Socialism.

ROBERT BROWN: American National Socialism.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No. No no. And I'd seen too much of that there. See, I had gone to the Hoffler [ph] House. I've heard Hitler talk, and I heard students get hysterical in the class. They'd mentioned a Jewish artist, and everybody starts thundering. And the lecturer had to stop. This was 1929. Student elections had gone completely National Socialist at that time, so it took two or three years before it became national. No, that was frightful.

ROBERT BROWN: So there was a patriotism—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: But in a genuine sense, in the same way that Frank Lloyd Wright was a patriot. See, they'd often say that Wright was an isolationist too, but isolationism has to be understood in the sense of a genuine patriotism. And of course, we, my wife and I used to go out to Taliesin quite often. We knew Frank Lloyd Wright. We knew his wife. We were very much interested in the development of the school in Taliesin.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he outgoing with you?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh, yeah. No, we got along. In fact, in 1932, he published the first edition of the autobiography, which I was simply thrilled with, because I thought it was one of the greatest statements of the creative point of view in America that hadn't been published. And a course that I gave on introduction to art, I used the autobiography as a textbook, which he was pleased with. That was something he couldn't understand. But I used it as a textbook. And it's one of the most effective jobs I've ever done. Why? Because he so clearly states his point of view as an individual, as far as his parents and his family, his background, his point of view as a creative artist, his sympathy with the client. You don't often associate sympathy with Frank Lloyd Wright, but he was very sympathetic. He was interested in technical procedure. He tells you. There are sections in there where he tells you what a building is, how you go about planning a house. He has certain political social ideas there, but these are subordinated to his personal approach. And I think this is the thing that was so desperately needed at the time.

ROBERT BROWN: This is related to what Hofmann said to you, that you should be trying out these things in your drawing class, the color theories and so forth. Here, some of your students. You're getting them right into the creative—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: And architecture courses, above all the arts, with a home, you can't avoid that.

ROBERT BROWN: No. But it was a very basic and effective tool.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Then, see, the story of John Steuart Curry is another one. See, at the time I was very much interested in the Wisconsin Union, which is a commons affair there, where they had an art gallery

there.

ROBERT BROWN: You were in charge of some of the—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I helped. Porter Butts was the director, who was an art historian, who was taking art history courses. And they had this gallery. And I served—it was always a student-operated gallery—and I served as faculty advisor. And then I was interested in, oh, I got a number of shows [inaudible]. Showed a lot of Mexican things. Orozco a show, Diego Rivera show, Jean Charlot had a show. George Grosz stuff. Walt Kuhn. A whole series of people, whom I knew and wrote about. Students did it, but I liked to work with them. And in the process along with that, then, we had a Madison art association. And we developed a number of lecture series there. One of these was Grant Wood. And this was through a friend of Wood's, who lived in Madison. He got him. And it was the first lecture that Wood ever gave, public lecture. This was 1933, something like that. And this started him on the lecture tour. He did a very, very good job.

ROBERT BROWN: What did he talk about?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, the regional point of view. You see, this is bad taste nowadays, too, to talk about patriotism on the part of an artist, and to talk about a kind of anti-School of Paris. What they do is not what we do. We need to—and also, art in the Midwest, the Midwest as a source. Most everybody had to go to New York in order to be an artist. Anybody who came from the Midwest couldn't be an artist. And the fact that there were painters in the Midwest, you know. People bought pictures in Iowa. And so anyway, Grant Wood was very successful. And then I had Reggie Marsh. Reginald Marsh, who came out. He was an entirely different type of person, not very articulate. This lecture was a disaster. He kind of talked into his sleeve, but he did a demonstration out there, made a couple of lines this way, with the mountain and the valley and this places. That's what these people are teaching and doing. This is Marin, John Marin. He had no use for that [inaudible] and what he was doing [inaudible]. Sound knowledge, anatomy, and good drawing, draftsmanship, painting. Some kind of a conscience about people and society. And it was in this—I did not have anything to do with—

ROBERT BROWN: Were these students, as well, or people in the town—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: People in the town and students. But it was, it was through this operation that they became interested in John Steuart Curry. And as I say, I had really nothing to do with the selection of Curry as a person, though I did have a lot to do with the generation of the ideas. Uh, they tried for Grant Wood as an artist in residence. Uh, but [inaudible]. See, the artist in residence idea was, which was the title under which Curry was brought, it was not a new idea. That had been used in in the experimental college years ago, years before that. They, this is Alexander Meikeljohn, you remember, who started the experimental college, there, with Glenn Frank. And this was a radical idea, educationally. But they had various artists in residence. A poet, literary people, and an artist. And his job was simply there to be present to talk to students and be doing his own work. It's the kind of thing they have here today in in Dartmouth College. And it was for the position that Alexander Meikeljohn had as a professor that—for this this budget item—Curry was invited. And he was put over the Ag school just to, to keep him, kind of, academically pure. So that was, see he was not, he was employed by the university, paid by the university, but put over in the agricultural college, so that he would, he would be unencumbered by, or—

ROBERT BROWN: Not be contaminated by, uh—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, not get involved with the art department and art history and everything else. That's how that developed. And of course, then I was very much interested in Curry, just because he was a genuine artist, one who was terrible shy, unsure of himself, but with a whole series of ideas. We used to talk long, long hours on this whole business, Mexican and Renaissance and whatnot. That's how I got involved in the book on Curry. And that was started. He came in '36. Uh, I left in '38. I spent five years on that book. Published it in '30—'43.

ROBERT BROWN: While you were Minnesota. What, was he a fairly articulate man, and was he?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No, he wasn't articulate, and yet, when he set himself down to make a statement, he did very, very well. He had a very simple, straightforward style. I quoted a number of his speeches. He wrote very sincere, straightforward letters, for instance.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he very happy at Wisconsin? Was that a very congenial place for him?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I would say so, yeah. I don't think that they, well, the art department used him as they might have. See, the, this is always kind of a curious thing. As an artist in residence, what's he supposed to do? He's supposed to talk? Well, if you talk to him, when? Well, if you keep it open that way, for a while there, he had a terrible time, because he had this little studio, and anybody who came to visit campus wanted to see him. So in other words, he had a constant stream of people, and he wasn't able to do anything at all. He had a

number of first-class commissions such as the, what was it, Department of Interior, he had. And then the Department of Justice in Washington was a WPA mural.

ROBERT BROWN: Of course he had to—He had to be away from Wisconsin to go down for the installing.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, to install it, that wasn't very much. But the, he did that on canvas at home. Well, can we stop for a minute? [Tape stops, restarts.] Well, I got into this Curry story because here, in what this man tried to interpret was, um, with the vast panorama. I called the book in the end the *Pageant of America*. Uh, this was a commercial problem, too. They had to have Curry's name in the title, and then they had to have some kind of a definition of what it was. So it was Curry's, John Steuart Curry's *Pageant of America*. Uh, but as this, one man with all his frustrations and everything else, tried to give some kind of expression to the whole panorama, which was America at the time. This used to be interpreted in a given span there, between 1936 and the beginning of the war. See, what the war did was, of course, intensified what was already there. One of the things that Curry did for the Office of War Information, I guess, was a poster, as everybody else—Ben Shahn did a couple of famous ones, you know. But Curry did one of a farmer standing out in the cornfield with, a fistful of corn, of wheat. A wheat field, up to a little below his waist, and then a figure of defiance. And well, this is the way Curry was doing. The farmer who is standing up for his rights or standing up for freedom, justice, or which is what the war was about.

ROBERT BROWN: With his kind of production.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. With, still himself. And so whatever he would hit would have that kind of character. I—

ROBERT BROWN: He was consistent, true to his way of seeing.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: He was, he was consistent. And it was not my concern to say this was a style. I don't like to define style, because as soon as you do, then you ruin it. It's no longer style.

ROBERT BROWN: Style is something that's living and unconscious, or can be?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, style is an inner structure. And as soon as it becomes a pattern, then it becomes what the imitators of the Regionalists or the imitators of Michelangelo or the Mannerists, or imitators of the abstract people. See, the Abstract Expressionism is another bandwagon. There are a couple of good ones, and the rest are imitators. In Curry, this thing was very, it was very genuine. And—

ROBERT BROWN: He was unsullied by the critical acclaim. Kind of like Thomas Craven's writing about him, you know, is—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well Craven, Craven, you see, was the bad boy of the time. All scholars and critics hated him because he was a nationalist and because he liked these people.

ROBERT BROWN: But I mean, what effect did this kind of, did his praise have on Curry? It didn't—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: It didn't bother him. It was—he was very grateful that somebody would understand what he was trying to do and would pat him on the back. Every artist has to have somebody to tell him he's good.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you think of Craven's work, then?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, Craven is a phenomenon there, a man who—he wrote me one—I knew him—he wrote me one time. He said, I don't know, kind of reviewing his career. He said, Well, you think you're one of the men of art and the, what is it, the big thick masterpieces that sold something over a million copies. Something of a record or a definition as to whether one is successful or not. At that time, that was pretty good. Uh, no. Craven, I felt was a journalist. Uh, and he would tell the story of how people—he would twist things to make it a good story—I don't feel that he was a critic and never did. My definition of a critic is one who examines what is there and helps you see it. Presents it. Uh, remember, this is a historical phase. This was one of the criticisms one could have of my stuff is that I'm not really much concerned about this—saying, Curry was the greatest artist that ever lived. I mean, so what? I happen to think he was good. I happen to think that Michelangelo was good too, but you don't have to compare the two.

ROBERT BROWN: So you take each man on his own terrain and analyze and, for the reader.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. So that there is no misunderstanding. There are all kinds of faults in Curry's work. His design, his structure, and that. But on the other hand, the man had ideas. And I always used to insist on, these ideas have consequences, have power. And the ideas are crystalized in some kind of a form. I mean, there are so many of these themes, like, oh, well the Department of Justice as one—justice with a negro fugitive

being brought up before a judge, and the judge telling the mob to stay back. And here is the black on the steps collapsed, the man beaten and that. Well, here, this was back in 1936. Uh, here was a man who was conscious of a minority problem and that is still a strong statement. There was another one called *The Fugitive*, which Mrs. Curry has in the living room. And nobody ever saw that, where he's up on a kind of, arms outstretched. Uh, this was done way before the Civil Rights thing.

ROBERT BROWN: So you're saying the man had essential reactions, and he put them down directly in his work.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. And these reactions are consistent. It's not the victorious boxer. But the guy was beaten. His sympathies were always, were much more with the underdog. And I have always been very sympathetic to that. And these, this is again a matter of personal taste. It's Orozco. This is Daumier. Uh, it's not a caricature, but there are certain elements in that. Uh, there's sympathy for the guy who gets kicked around rather than the one who does the kicking.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you work closely with Curry when you were working on the book?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh no. We went through every single drawing, every single thing that we had. And this took many long hours. I went to through his drawings, for instance, studio in Madison. He had one side of the studio stacked to the ceiling with drawing books, notebooks and things. And I went through every single one of them. Uh, that was a, that was as thorough a job as anybody could possibly do. And yet, there's so much there, you had to cut it down somewhat.

ROBERT BROWN: So how would you cut it down? What was your criterion?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, you take any one of these themes. Like, I mentioned *The Fugitive*. There are all kinds of drawings of negroes, of boxers, bellows [ph] types of compositions. Um, and he'd used find a whole series of drawings of the guy just collapsing on the canvas. And there weren't very many of the guy who was doing the, who was beating him up. You knew exactly where his interests were. So of those there, you would take the—pick out the one that was the most expressive, that carried that idea. This is again a research technique that you have an idea. There are various ways of doing it. And the one seems to express that most completely. Then of a series of these, then, you find a given phase. Then you find one that is, expressing that phase most completely. So when you have to eliminate the—there's almost a law that comes out there. And this will stand up any kind of criticism. You can go back again if you decide this man didn't do a good job. You go back over those things. You'll find, using his approach, you come out almost the same way. And I mean, I think that the Curry book was a—had many virtues in that. See, it's not my thing. It wasn't my story that I was telling. I was telling his story, but from the point of view of a, of an historian and critic, I think this does that job. Now, somebody else will come—and this is always the reaction. They hated Curry's work. See, they, or, didn't hate it. They disagreed. Said this is not an artist. And artists were against him, too. I think of a review by Lester Longman from Iowa, who said that, who spent the whole review condemning Curry. And the last line, he said something to the effect of, well, this is not to criticize the book, because it was ably done. So, all right. I wanted to find out what he thought of the book. Now, the fact that it was published, that's another thing. Or the fact that Curry was there, that's another thing. And I would hope that more people would catch on to this idea. We always need more critics who would tell the story of the artists, so that people would have—be able to discriminate between one man and another, as to which one most adequately expresses the life or the culture of our time. And now this Regionalist business, we never had that. I mean, the comparison of one and another. Uh, it's interesting now in 1974, you talk about Regionalism. There's a great deal of interest, and yet no one pays any attention to Curry. I mean, Curry was the guy who was the source of most of those ideas. Now, Benton may not agree with that. But you can take pictures and their dates, and see when they were painted and when they were exhibited. So when they were seen and publicized, see this, that, you can find in the literature. I would never disparage Tom Benton's achievement, because it's admired very much, partly because he was a fighter and did his own publicity. Uh, but one doesn't have to—I don't think one has to run down one in order to praise another. I mean, each one has his particular [inaudible] place in the sun.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, you extracted a good deal of response from Curry himself, didn't you? For the book.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No, he was very grateful. No, I think he liked me and you know there was no great financial reward for that. I think that the whole effort, five years of effort, I think I got royalties of about $900 out of it. Which might pay for the secretarial, for the typing. Uh, but didn't pay any of the, what was it, travel or the [inaudible] that kind of thing. That all came out of my pocket. So, um, well, of the book's, you see—what I got into after Curry, then I got into in Minnesota, I was very much interested in, well, training students in the art of historical research. And already had the deal with original material. During the war, '38, the war was already over the horizon. It was coming. And then during the war, after the war itself, there was no letup as far as students are concerned. I happened—I had to wrassle students, including men, '42, '43, '44, in there. Uh, where would you do, where would you, where would they do the research? So I got into this business of doing research in our own backyard. It was a, let's say, with the large classes, I had a seminar of 25, 28 students. All of them

doing the work of going out into the community and finding research projects. Uh, one girl did a study of the architectural form of breweries. And you know something about that. You see these breweries all come at a given time, in the 1880s, out there. This is Minneapolis. And St. Paul. And there was a very definite form that developed because of the seven stages in the brewing process. So you have a seven-story affair. And since they were all German, it's a big building, they all had a certain style concept there. They always thought of the Rhine and the castles on the Rhine, so that this is Romanesque and becomes a castle. But it has an organic reason for it. And this was one that always sticks in my mind. Another one where a girl, Virginia Warren [ph], went out and discovered a Mexican colony over in St. Paul. And here was—this was the Virgin of Guadalupe in St. Paul. And she did a study of ex-votos there, all done with miracles. You know, they were plastered all over the altar and same thing that you'll find in Mexico, but done by Mexican-Americans living in in St. Paul. All the background was not Mexican, but St. Paul with brass beds and everything else. And done without sophistication, completely naive. One of the most fascinating phenomena. I emphasize St. Paul, with its streets of 30 below zero for six weeks at a time, and this kind of thing. Uh, another one was a history of elevators, grain elevators in the Northwest there.

ROBERT BROWN: So these were all getting into finding basic data and, and cutting out a definable portion of form.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Find a project or a problem. It could be the grain elevator. It could be the mill. Uh, all kinds of refinements on mill structures, for instance. One mill, the Washburn mill, I think it was in St. Paul had a curved facade. It looked like kind of a Greek refinement there. Well, it was, but not a visual one. It was a structural one, because the contractor had been building dams. And this wall is a six-story structure, this wall had to be reinforced. And the curve is one way of reinforcing that outward pressure.

ROBERT BROWN: You did this as a, as a student exercise.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: These were student projects.

ROBERT BROWN: And then this culminates in your own, published one, coming right in the, in the '40s, which is related to the one that come out, comes out right after the war. The *Art and Red Wing*.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, well, right, wait a minute. Uh, these were projects which I hoped, at some time or other, to pull together in a general book on art in the community. And this was to be a metropolitan community. And I make that as large as I could. I never used that. The Red Wing thing was kind of a pilot project. This was how I got onto it, which is part of a general project set up by the graduate school under the direction of Theodore Blegen, who was dean of the graduate school during the war, to study the impact of the war on a typical Minnesota community. And they settled on Red Wing because it was small, 10,000 people. It had had industry, had all the qualities of a typical community, kind of a Middletown. The Lynd book on was very much known and appreciated. And this was to include specialists, then, in education and political science, in history, in economics, well, I forget some of the names. There are about a dozen people. And the last one on the list was art, and that was because Dean Blegen knew me and knew of my interest [inaudible]. Said, why don't you do get in on this, too? I said, what is there in art in Red Wing? Or rather, I didn't ask that. He said, since you're talking about art in the community, there must be something there. Then I did, I did that. And that took me two years to do during the war. And it was really a fascinating challenge because there was absolutely no precedent ever. There was no evidence of any art there. There's an Episcopal church. Uh, there are old houses and a couple of pioneer houses. There's a pioneer factory. And I literally walked the streets there, in Red Wing, trying to find out how are you going to, what is the pattern? How can you go after this thing? And I think, after a lot of investigation—I talked to people, went to the bar. I went to the—I talked to some people who were concerned with the ladies' aid societies and the church, the schools, the clinic there, the medical clinic. Uh, some of the old timers, pioneers. Uh, but I would ask them about specific things I saw, such as the soldier's monument there, Civil War monument, which I found had been proposed in 1866, right after the Civil War. Was never really completed until 1916 or 1917 there, when they were in the midst of the other war. And somebody decided, Hey, we better get some kind of monument up there, or we won't get anybody to enlist. I thought this a curious commentary on propaganda and the war.

ROBERT BROWN: And you were able to find that was the reason and so forth.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, this was one of the facts. And then there the library, the congregate library, again, this is the virtue of a library. There was an archivist there. The librarian was trained that way. She had a file of, well, newspaper clippings and [inaudible] and there was an art history society that had been organized some years before the World's Fair of 1876. And several, there were quite a few people who had gone to Philadelphia from Red Wing, to the World's Fair. And then they used to have meetings. And they had a program. And I quoted from that. Well, this is the kind of thing you dig up. And you realize that this small community was well aware of art, was as aware as they were in many of the metropolitan communities. Uh, that they, that these people were not dumb. They were not uncultured. They were not a people from the backwoods. Uh, just the

same as, of course, you find there are [inaudible] on a large scale, organizing this county at the same time, as soon as there were in Europe. So this kind of inverted provincialism that we get, I wanted to clarify. These people had a sense of aesthetic values. There are artists there. There's sculptors. There were people even in the iron works, [inaudible] iron works. Were well aware of functional design in that building. There were no frills there. That was just as pure as anybody could want. 1860, that was. Uh, anyway, but I did get a pattern out of there. Architecture, paintings, sculptures, the whole realm. Now this is the pattern that I was using on the art of the metropolitan. And then the reviews of that thing, somebody said, well, it doesn't look as though there is any art in the community. Well, that person I can't talk to, because they just wouldn't understand what I'm talking about. I say there is art in every community, just the same as there is art in every individual.

ROBERT BROWN: And by art in this case, you meant expression, right?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: The urge to articulated expression. It's not just expression, but an expression that has some kind of an inner cohesive form.

[END OF TRACK]

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Talk about Red Wing. Red Wing is a study of art in a typical community, Midwestern community. And as such, it fills in a void that the Lynds left in Middletown, because there's nothing said, very little said about art there. And I, and when people build buildings, simple or complex, a building is a work of art. A piece of architecture. The church that they had there the Gothic revival affair, was a good church. Still is. And there are a whole series of other churches there that have different form, but there are reasons for that. And when the, before people tear these things down, as they are doing consistently now, they ought to realize what those reasons were. And maybe those values are worth hanging onto. Because ultimately, this all goes into the whole problem of cultural conservation. Cultural conservation. It starts in the community. And I always paralleled that idea of cultural conservation, preservation of historic monuments, as a counterpart to the, to land use and conservation.

ROBERT BROWN: Well also this seems similar to your being able to talk about more of the future in your lecture on Mexican art at the same time you're talking about a completed style and Renaissance art. Because you said then that in a way, the Mexican movement is a renaissance. And looking at the historical Italian Renaissance, you were looking at, at re-establishing traditions, looking at the past, the best of the past, and building on that. And you're just now saying that from this, these community studies of community art forms, this conservation ethic could emerge. And, but more than just that, could it be building from that? A building upon that?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, this, there are all kinds of definitions of renaissance in American culture, and especially in the 1930s. And I was very much involved in that. And the question is the process. How do you do it? And there's a whole series of these things. One is you promote the artist. Uh, another thing, you promote the care of past artists, artists' works. Uh, another thing, you promote contemporary architecture, new ideas. But you also have to promote the contemporary architecture of a generation ago, or two generations ago, or a century ago. You don't just destroy it. And these origins, these original buildings, may be very simple and very primitive. But the fact that they are primitive indicates that they had some, had value because they are a beginning. Somebody said, here I will build a house, sod hut or log cabin or whatever it was.

ROBERT BROWN: And we should have these things to remember this effort, the struggle? The—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Not to remember, but this you don't just have those to remember. You have these as a stabilizing element in the future creative process. You don't, no one starts from scratch. I don't care who or what artist he is. He says, well, I'm a creator. I don't care about history. This man, whoever he is, has seen something. And art develops on art. It doesn't develop on reality. You want statements. You see, reality is always there. And somebody says, I'm going back to reality. Yeah, but he always has to see reality through some kind of guidance that might be more sympathetic to him. But there is a selection there to begin with.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, this kind of goes back to your looking for norms and perceptive modes in your work in Germany as a student, doesn't it? Because by looking at the typical, the average, the common denominator, the value of it lies in—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. The evaluation process goes in that. But anyway, this job is a huge one. And I think the only way it can be accomplished is in the educational process. If you get 25 students thinking this way, those people are going to go out and educate 25 other people. Or in my case, there's quite a few groups of 25 that I've influenced.

ROBERT BROWN: A great deal happened? Do you see it happen when you were with the University of Minnesota, as a result of these student projects, studies in Mexican art and the brewery design and so forth?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, the a one study was a history of Minnesota architecture, was by Don Torbert

[ph], who was published some years ago. And that thing started in the seminar. I mean, that, that was a—

ROBERT BROWN: A very concrete result there.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Got a big kick out of that idea. Uh, but I see these people, like Virginia Worley [ph], who's now Mrs. Jason Schenner [ph], the wife of a distinguished painter she's very active on conservation projects. She has a very strong point of view against the oil companies and against this and that. And it does get into politics. But it has to. Uh, when you're dealing with somebody across the road there, who's going to destroy a hundred-year-old covered bridge. This was a governor of the state who came down to the Bedell Bridge here and said here, "This is going to be torn down starting tomorrow." And somebody else in the community says, "No, governor. I beg to disagree with you. We're not going to tear that down." And it's still there. They got a, they got a reprieve for that for the next five years. It's a strong group of conservationists there in North Haverhill who are active. And they're going to raise $200,000 to restore that thing. Without a cent coming out of the state treasury. But this is the kind of thing I get excited about. But well, feel that in our area of cultural history and art history, there has to be a place in the university circle for this to germinate in the university community. I don't think that, I think we've lost a lot of ground since then.

ROBERT BROWN: You think it can germinate outside of the university circle. You're not saying that. You're saying it can't be—

[Cross talk.]

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, I think most of the activity is not outside the university, but it should come from inside. A lot of things have happened to education since then.

ROBERT BROWN: This is all related to the WPA, as you knew it. Did you know the WPA? Were you acquainted—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh, sure. I used to run large NYA projects, students, yeah, students getting 45, 50 cents an hour. For a time, they were getting 25 cents an hour.

ROBERT BROWN: Connected with the university?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: You know, in the, in the department there. I'd hook up projects, so they could, so students could get jobs. Sometimes, they're making slides. Sometimes they're, I don't know.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think WPA was an essential influence on the artists in America? Or do you think it was something that happened?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Look. You asked the question. There is no artist functioning today whose roots aren't somehow in WPA. It was one of the greatest accomplishments of the decade. This is, this is a large generality, and I don't like those. But certainly when people criticize WPA and all this government sponsorship of the arts and that, that they're all communists. You know, we used to live through that. This was of the anti the McCarthyism, and that. Uh, every—you go down—I just want to avoid the generalization—but you go down the list and almost every artist had some, from among the abstract artists, Abstract Expressionism and the rest, after the war, nearly everyone had his roots somewhere in WPA. And I think the great cultural bloom that we experienced in this country after the war is due, in large part, to the program of WPA. Nobody has done that.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think it's sustained enough artists, made the difference between giving it up completely and—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, it sustained artists. It also got artists interested, got artists into it, into the thing as artists. I mean, creative people who were, who might have done something else, who went into art, or were bitten by the bug.

ROBERT BROWN: Well by the comparison, do you think post-World War II sudden availability of many, many, many university jobs for artists, has that had a, a sustaining and a bettering effect upon the state of art in the country?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I wouldn't say it's a, it's a beneficial effect.

ROBERT BROWN: It certainly had an effect, though.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: It had to have an effect. No question about that. Uh, no, I think that was a little on the unfortunate side, because here, these, this developed another kind of—

ROBERT BROWN: Dependency?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Dependency. People got into the thing, and they're no longer productive artists.

ROBERT BROWN: WPA didn't give them enough to, um, they couldn't rely on that alone, could they?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: They could eat. And also, I think they gave them certain motivation. But that was the times. People, art was something necessary. Now, it's an embellishment.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you used to have long discussions with your colleagues at Wisconsin and Minnesota on this?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I used, I used to love to argue. And I was always one of the most loud-mouthed of all of them. And Wisconsin hardly. But no, I've always loved to argue on these things. As soon as you get into university politics and committee work, I had less interest. Committee work when you have a positive job to do, but when you get into academic politics, I lost interest on that.

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you think you did?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Why? Because people are no longer themselves. See they're, as you have a social scientist, or a literary, perhaps, person. He's not talking about the things he knows. He's talking about something he doesn't know. And—

ROBERT BROWN: Making judgments.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Making judgments for somebody else. No, he doesn't want to be involved. He wants to let the others—wants to control somebody else. This, in many ways, that's why I went into administration. Of course, the business of running departments, that's something I had done from the very beginning anyhow. I knew Mr. Hagen there. I used to do a lot of his administrative work. Attending committees and that kind of thing. Ordering books. I used to spend a lot of time on the library problem, because I was always interested in in books.

ROBERT BROWN: Your real sustenance, then, was your own research, your students, and other creative people like Curry. You mentioned Frank Lloyd Wright. People like that were your real stimulus at that time?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I always liked artists. Uh, many historians don't like to have too much to do with with artists.

ROBERT BROWN: But you always liked to write?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh, that I always had. That I was always bitten by that bug. As an undergraduate, I liked to write. As a high school student, I liked to write. And I believe in research. The idea of publish or perish, I think, is a false concept.

ROBERT BROWN: And you talked about—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No, wait, wait. Let me, I don't want to lose that. Publish or perish is not false. The fact is that if somebody's not publishing, he's not producing anything, he has no business being in the academic field.

ROBERT BROWN: You believe that?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: What about production of working closely with students? If he isn't, if he isn't publishing and researching, he can't be?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No, he does that, too. Because inspiration comes from students, because students are your audience.

ROBERT BROWN: I see. But then, you must then be a productive scholar.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: You have to be a productive scholar in order to talk to students. You have to, whatever you're doing, just the same as an artist, has to be a productive artist in order to teach. Now, this is a part of the problem. But it, people get—see, this is what happens to the political side of it. Uh, people should be—there's absolutely no reason at all why some program—if you have the proper kind of administration there—why programs can't be adjusted so you, when you do an effective job of teaching, you do an effective job of research and publication. If the research isn't published, it's not worth doing. Now, this is not the fault of research. It's the fault of our publication system, that we don't, we don't do enough publication, enough variety

of things. You always think in terms of big business as publishing, and that is false.

ROBERT BROWN: That limits the variety right there. Well, now, you were trained to be in, to be in research, being objective, under the influence of Horst and people like that. And yet, unlike other historians, as you just said, you befriended artists, like Frank Lloyd Wright and Curry and others later. Uh, you didn't feel there was danger in losing objectivity. You obviously thought there was so much more you would gain.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, you, for instance, if you didn't like Frank Lloyd Wright, you wouldn't write about him. If you weren't committed somehow. Uh, the Curry, the same way. Yet, yet you don't go overboard and start talking about him as being something divine. And people have criticized me. Well, you don't say whether Curry is good or not. Certainly he's good. Otherwise, I wouldn't monkey with him. But here it's for you, the reader, to decide what, how great he is.

ROBERT BROWN: But and you enable the reader to begin that judgment.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: That is what the job is. The same thing as with Mestrovic. You do a job like that where there are thousands of articles and books written about him. Uh, yet I think I was the, mine was the first job that gave the whole story of Mestrovic as a sculptor and as a Croatian patriot. And I had to work like the dickens to get the information out of him, because he wasn't talking. He's not, he would talk, but he wouldn't say anything. And I used to have to depend on Mrs. Mestrovic, who was a lovely person who understood what I was after. Then, I went over the literature, the European literature. I got the information.

ROBERT BROWN: But initially, you admired him, or you liked him and his work.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. Now in the end, I didn't say that he was greater than Rodin, which is another large order. But I think that that here, there is a time coming when one will recognize that Mr. Mestrovic was one of the great masters of the 20th century. I said it a couple of weeks ago when I gave the talk, but I didn't make any generalities like that in the book because that isn't my idea. But—

ROBERT BROWN: You're writing for, you're writing for a public that can educate itself in part, right? And I mean by the, you lay these things out, and the public can, through your book, begin to come to some, if not conclusions, at least make some judgments.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. And I think that is the essential part, of any critical job.

ROBERT BROWN: And this is as you talk, too. As you described much earlier, your relation with students, to get them to begin educating themselves and—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: They're the ones who make the judgment. And this is the reason for my interest in Italian Renaissance, because here's a tremendously creative period. I can think of nothing more destructive than to have a student hemmed in by the opinions of a given textbook writer. I don't want his—and I've heard that from many other people that there—this Italian book was, had, remember, a great sale. But I'd run into so many people students and otherwise, who have said that this is the book that gives me the information I need, so that I—and they're the teachers. See, they're the lecturers. They want the information so that they can give their opinions as an inspiration. But I think the students should have that in—that factual information on which the lecturer gives his opinion. That they don't always do. This is a false—this is a poor Michelangelo. This is a great one. Well, many people would just let it go at that. Well, I'd like to know why. What is the information? What have you, what kind of data have you gathered there? And then what do you see?

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, your visual analysis.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. Now, he had, the instructor had an advantage in seeing the original. I as a student didn't see the original. So I've got to take his word for it. But still, I want to be, him to describe that in terms of the photograph with his wider vision. In other words, he can walk around the—

ROBERT BROWN: Because as we said earlier, he's abusing that student if he just—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: That, that's it. I, you're so responsive, because, there—and there aren't many colleagues who are that way. I mean, you you—

ROBERT BROWN: Well, the this was the same idea, in the, *Red Wing* was the beginning of a series. Laying out the data. Now, do you think there should be a time when definitive synthesizing of these things—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: That's what I thought about so often. I just love to go back there, to Red Wing and do a "Red Wing Revisited."

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. Draw final conclusions, or—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: And draw conclusions.

ROBERT BROWN: You would draw conclusions.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I would, yeah. But all, I had to do it on the basis of what I see. And I'm afraid it would not be a very pretty picture.

ROBERT BROWN: But also, would you, what of the possibility of others then coming in, giving their opinion and drawing other conclusions?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, I think the, sure.

ROBERT BROWN: This is ever changing, in other words. There's no definitive statement. This is, for Michelangelo, this is good.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: But in the case of Red Wing, if one went through there and did the same kind of review of the community, and then you could draw certain conclusions. And these, what would these be? City plan, land conservation, land use, conservation of resources, such as the river.

ROBERT BROWN: And make judgments based on those.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: And then say, this is where they lost out, by making this improvement. Uh, the point then would be that the next time they, that somebody does a plan or a redesign, the next architect who comes along will, kind of, learn a lesson by observing those two things. Um, see, Red Wing, with its river and its railroad and its highway, which goes along the same [inaudible]. And I think I know what must have happened. I don't know. But when they build highways, I'm sure there's a four-lane highway that goes right down the middle of the town. Who knows? I'd love to do it. But the, also well, zoning. All these things. And then the matter of the decoration of buildings, murals. They had murals there, decoration of interiors. Uh, store decorations, window design. All kinds of things. It'd be interesting to see what this, in pointing out the difference between somebody who did an original design for a store window, and somebody used the pre-designed pattern, packaged affair that the Sears Roebuck did. See whether there's any effect there. Well, I'm sure people think in a community more creatively now, certainly than they did at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: More creatively.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I don't know. I don't, I really don't know. But it'd be fun.

ROBERT BROWN: You, sure you'd be the first to check that assumption, would you?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah I'd be careful about that. Since I've talked so much and I'm about to get caught in my own contradictions. But on the Red Wing, the biggest compliment I ever got on that was that Ted Blegen directed the whole thing. When it was all over, he said, "Laurence, this is yours"—there are, oh, a dozen different things monographs published—he said, "Yours is the most interesting in the whole bunch." And I, he may have [inaudible], but all the same, he—it had pictures, for one thing. And it was basically a constructive point of view. People could see what was there and see what could be done. When you restore a historic building, you don't add, you don't add in, you don't mess it up. You try to keep its original character. Now, publications.

ROBERT BROWN: I just want to ask about maybe one more. During the war you did this appreciation of art thing for the armed services.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that sort of a spin-off from your lectures and, or was it something you specially—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, you know what that was. Appreciation of art was done for the Armed Forces Institute. And this is with a self-help, kind of, self-taught appreciation course. And this was a new idea for me, because I've never done anything like that. And the theory, the idea was to develop some kind of a scheme so as to encourage a, um, student spectator, soldier, something to do to keep his mind occupied, to look at pictures, look at another picture. Compare them, and arrive at some kind of an understanding, even though he knew nothing, supposedly knew nothing about art. See, this is one of those false concepts, too, that people know nothing about art. Certainly they know something about art, because they look.

ROBERT BROWN: You said before, art is made out of art. It doesn't come out of nothing. And similarly, people. There's a well of perception.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah, sure. And people aren't dumb, see. I just—

ROBERT BROWN: Was this sort of a psychological educational thing during the war?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, what it was is a series of—this is the new thing for me. Because I've always been against these multiple choice, this kind of examination. But I learned it. And developed a whole series of questions to be answered by the reader on the basis of certain color reproductions. We used a Thomas Craven book, on art masterpieces, which see this is again one of those economic things. They could get that for something. That was published without Craven's text, just the illustrations. And the idea was to ask one question, true false. Uh, one was to have five choices there. And then the last question somehow would lead the reader to a decision. And he would discover the answer himself. And the answers were always in the back of the book. He could check for the—he wasn't supposed to look at that until he had gone through the whole series. And I had a number of comments from people in the Army who came back afterwards, "Hey, that was an interesting thing." Uh, the other part of it was a handbook to go with a textbook that was on *Art Today*, I think it was called, written by Ray Faulkner. And I never discovered it until afterwards: the guy who made the assignment was Ray Faulkner himself, was, who was at the Armed Forces Institute then. So I tried to get out of that. And they said, No, it has to be that. So I wrote out those things, using more the illustrations than the text, because I didn't particularly like the text. Uh, but the study of, oh, it must have been about a hundred color reproductions. I put them into groups of—put the portraits together. The iconographical types, um, which is another subject that I've always been interested in, because it has to do with the idea of iconography as related to functions. And then I put the portraits together, the crucifix pictures together, the Madonna and child together, so they would analyze Renaissance and Baroque medieval Renaissance eighteenth-century modern, nineteenth-century modern. Wherever you could. So you had these standard themes, still life landscapes and—you can't, you can't help but gain something, just because people look at them, with using this comparative method. This was Wölfflin [ph].

ROBERT BROWN: And you liked the idea of doing this. This appealed to you.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I liked that.

ROBERT BROWN: Your essential populism, or wish to be a missionary, as you described yourself when you first came—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well this, this is a project. This is a kind of thing that reached out into an entirely new audience. And I think I think it was a job. And the idea has never been used otherwise. Uh, you know, every one of these things could be done over. Uh, [inaudible] that's one of the things. Even the Curry business, somebody could do it, do the book over. But he'd have to use my material, because this is, there's nothing in that, there's nothing that's wrong. So and I think, see Curry in 1974 is an entirely different person than he was in 1946, when he, when he died. And the eyes that look at his work are different. That is one of the virtues of the art enterprise. Well yeah. Go ahead.

ROBERT BROWN: I wasn't going to ask [inaudible].

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. Well, maybe what I'll do, I'll stop.

[Tape stops, restarts.]

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well now, the, what was it? Uh, it was, that was three weeks ago? Four?

[Tape stops, restarts.]

ROBERT BROWN: This interview is July 15, 1974. Second interview with Laurence Schmeckebier in Lyme, New Hampshire. And we were going to begin today by talking about, you you described something of your time during World War II, the handbook, and your time at the University of Minnesota. And we're going to talk also now about the time you go to Cleveland to the Institute of Art there. And if there's anything in general you'd like to say about that time.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Uh-huh. Well now these interviews seem to me, are very, very stimulating because first of all, you come up with questions I hadn't thought of. And then you talk and you think as you talk. And then you think afterward about it. You want to you think of all kinds of things you should have said at the time. But you know it's always been a little bit of a curiosity how somebody with my background would get into art history and then get into a European education and come back and teach in the Midwest again at that time, when it wasn't, it just wasn't done. But there are a couple of things as an undergraduate which I always felt had a tremendous influence. And sometimes I admit it. Sometimes I don't. But see, I was a major in history and a major in English. And I liked to write, and I liked literature. One fellow in the English department there, who had a tremendous as a personality, he was a, he was a power—was William Ellery Leonard, who wrote a sonnet sequence called "Two Lives. " At the same time he was doing the background notes on a kind of psychoanalytic study, which he later published as *The Locomotive God*. Uh, now Leonard people always would insist that he was

as crazy as a loon. He may have been, but he was a very dynamic person, a linguist from way back, and a philologist. And he gave a course called "The Philosophy of the English Poets." And it ended up as a "Philosophy of Leonard." But then he approached, he would approach the poets from the poets' point of view. And I thought that was is important. The other person who was tremendously influential was a German professor, A. R. Hohlfeld. H-o-h-l-f-e-l-d. Uh, Mr. Hohlfeld was a, was the expert on the German poet Goethe. And gave a course in German classics, but gave particularly a course on Faust, Goethe and Faust. And of course Goethe is always looked upon as the combination of the unique, the world unique, unity of the artist and the scientist. Uh, see this, then, combined with my interest in history. And the historians were always these famous historians of the frontier, like Carl Russell Fish and Turner had been there. Merle Curti came a little later. Uh, so that was—this idea of the poet and the scientist, from the historical point of view. You learned in Germany and this was in Marburg first—see, I'd also had courses with Oskar Hagen. And Hagen was always talking about Wölfflin and the principles of art history. And I was kind of involved in that, because this is the great philosophy of art. And I used to talk then in Marburg with—this is small circle, but I was able to participate with it—about Heinrich Wölfflin. And these people just jumped down my throat because, see, Wölfflin was a universally accepted and admired art historian. But, the pupils of Wölfflin were the ones who did much more harm than good, because they would always repeat the principles and not go at the sources of those principles. And so a lot of the words that always stuck in my mind, the very beginning—in fact, Leonard used to use it quite often—but art criticism is to the German is called *Kunstwissenschaft*, which is scientific, a combination of art and science. That is, they used *Kunstwissenschaft* as opposed to *Naturwissenschaft* the natural sciences. And we translate it usually as the humanities. And they called it, more a scientific art criticism. Uh, that is, art criticism, which has an objectivity in historical and critical evaluation of art. Um, in Marburg, too, this used to be a center of the Neo-Kantian movement, a generation or two before that. And so this sort of hung on. And Carl Horst, who was this friend I talked about before, and teacher, had been a pupil of Hermann Cohen who was the great *neukantianer*. Uh, but I got to Munich, had, then I got under the influence of Richard Hernizvogt [ph], who was a philosopher, another Neo-Kantian, and one who spent all of his time on the great 17th century philosophers, like Descartes and like Leibniz and John Hobbes, and Kant, of course. And this was always based on the Renaissance philosophers who—and these people, this was always the emphasis on methodology. It's not the final conclusion but process of getting there. And my goodness, you argue these things. And I learned this skill of argument of, there that well you argue this side of the fence and then the other. You would always know how to argue. Uh, another facet to this thing was started in Marburg, was psychology. And I used to go, used to listen to Heidegger, who later became very famous. He was well known at that time, in 1927, as well. Uh, but particularly E. R. Jaensch, J-a-e-n-s-c-h. E. R. Jaensch who was interested in type psychology, where, you know, he'd divide people off into different types. Long-legged, short-bodied type, and short-bodied, long-legged, vice-versa, you know. Uh, but this is a very dynamic lecture. And I, of course the Germans in general were very much, this is pre-Nazi, but they were very much interested in typology. Uh, the analyses of human beings and would point into that. Jaensch was later discredited by the Nazis, so that he was, he was very a very profound scholar. But there was very, very influential [inaudible]. And I went to Munich. Then I got under Pinder's influence, who was a personality but a superb scholar. And August L. Mayer, who was, at that time, well, oh, was especially interested in Spanish art and particularly of El Greco and was it, was assistant director of the, or curator at the Alte Pinakothek. And we used to go into to the laboratory, and we'd work with the old masters, you know. [inaudible]. This man had a superb eye, and this is one of the things I always [inaudible] about him, too. But in this process then—this is what I want to make clear—I developed this interest in the method. As far as as Wölfflin was concerned, the principles were fine. They went all, it's all so clear. The linear, the painterly, and this and that. But what interested me is not the principle and its application to the work of art, but the process of getting at the principle. And I went—I know I described that before. I dug up his doctoral thesis. It went back to 1880-something, '86 which was strictly on perception. [inaudible] the psychology of perception.

ROBERT BROWN: And this is what triggered you into your own—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: That's what got me into psychology. When Pinder wouldn't accept my ideas. Uh, he wanted me to do, a specific study on two or three altars in upper Bavaria. I was interested in this general thing, and that's how I got into into the psychology department. Worked with Gustav Paulay in the whole series of experiments on perception. Now, is that too long-winded?

ROBERT BROWN: No, no. This is filling in and explaining further what you, some of the things you talked about the first time.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. Now that the teaching business. The teaching experience. One of the greatest shocks I ever had, and I had a number of them, was the return to the United States in 1931. Uh, to the Depression and to a world which I had—was not as happy and opulent as, and as lively as it was when I left in 1927. And the first place, there was the Depression itself and its, what I called, the "attendant social demoralization." People were depressed. There was something wrong. And one felt it on the street. Uh, you saw these people wandering around. There was always kind of a glum sideways look. And it was at this time, this first week —I stayed in New York a week or so—I saw Orozco's murals in the New School for Social Research. And coming from German Expressionism and the Europe of that past four years, to see Orozco, I, that kind of hit me,

because see, here was an Expressionistic mold there that had a purpose. Laneen, Cariopreta, Agande [ph]. Three ideas three men who somehow looked into the future. They didn't like what they saw, but anyway, that was part of that that theme. I still think that's one of the great expressions of the time. We got back to Wisconsin, started teaching. I experienced something that I hadn't been aware of, and that is the pressure of academic conformity. Uh, Mr. Hagen was very German. And while I had a German name and I had been brought up somewhat in a German fashion, I was still very much an American. And I resisted the German control in Europe. And then when I got into a department like this, which was—obviously you did what you were told. And that caused trouble. I thought, for instance, as an art historian, interested in criticism, I could continue my experiments in color psychology. I was told, "You want to go into psychology? Go into psychology. We're doing art history." And—

ROBERT BROWN: Did you notice this rigidity in Germany, too?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No.

ROBERT BROWN: No, this was Hagen, more than—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: This was, this was an old-fashioned kind of German. This, this—

ROBERT BROWN: He'd been removed from it, hadn't he? He'd been taught by an older—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. See, his education went back to the pre-war period. Now, I have nothing against him. That's that's the way he was. But I was the one, I suppose, at fault. But there's that that point. The idea of a youngster doing—and I certainly was a youngster—doing something that he wanted to do. That was a little difficult. The third item there that would be kind of a shock, was the realization that art history was not just a matter of the history of European art. Because here, you had these students of a class of 30 or 40. Not one had ever been to Europe. And not one would ever have a prospect, at that time, of going to Europe. Few of them had ever even been to Chicago. And if they did go to Chicago or one of the big, Minneapolis, one of the big cities, they certainly didn't go to a museum. Uh, so the contact with original works of art was limited. And yet these people were not morons. They were extremely intelligent, extremely sensitive. And I felt, and I would, I still think that the idea is valid. But there there was a vital need for these students in—and I won't say Midwest, I would say Middle America, the heartland of the, of our country. A vital need for the concentration on those arts that had meaning for them. One area was the contemporary field. Another was the American art. Academically American American art was not acceptable. I mean, you know it already. But at that time, you think 1931, there was no course in American art. And in the university curricula throughout the country, East and Midwest, there were very few courses in American art. Uh, the literature was limited. And I felt that that was a necessity. And the third item there was that students should be aware of art in their own surroundings. At that time, this is 1931, '32, '33. One talked about regional art. Uh, that's a bad word now. Today we use the word environmental. And I would say, in reinterpreting that, you talk about environmental art studies. Uh, art, I used to talk about art in your own backyard. And this was in Madison, in those days. And there was art all around you. But you, nobody paid any attention to it. Uh, now at that time, really another couple of items that I just sometimes forget. I got interested in Mexican art. Thirty-two, I went down to Mexico and did, I wrote the first draft of the *Modern Mexican Art.* I was interested in American art, and I started, I didn't know that much about it, but I was learning. And I was trying to promote an interest in American art in the College Art Association. This was, this was something just not done.

ROBERT BROWN: You were becoming active in the College Art Association?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah, yeah. I was interested in local art promotion. I got interested in the Madison Art Association. And this was a, they got, they developed, a considerable membership from faculty and students and townspeople there. And then we began to invite artists to talk. This was in in connection with the Memorial Union there, and that was run by Porter E. Butts, who was an administrator but who was interested in art history and in the process. And so people like Grant Wood, Tom Benton, Reginald Marsh, many of these people I, knew, we'd bring them in to give talks. And then I was interested in an art gallery that the Memorial Union had developed. And that was, this is done by a student committee, but I served as faculty advisor for them. [inaudible] various ideas. We had shows, Orozco. We had shows of Diego Rivera. We had Jean Charlot. Uh, we had, oh, Reggie Marsh. We had Walt Kuhn a series of drawings—

ROBERT BROWN: They were selected because they were contemporary? The students might be interested, or—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: They were contemporary. They were American. They dealt with social issues. I felt that the idea of content was an important facet. Um, now this is the second shock and the adjustment to it. The, my research interests, now this is a thing. How do you do research when you don't, when you can't travel? Uh, there were the books there, but you had to look at originals. And so it, out of this that I, as I say, was interested in Mexican art. And I used to do all kinds of talking both in class and out of class, on the contemporary Mexicans. You know, you get into—

ROBERT BROWN: Had you corresponded with them, or were you?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: So you were learning a good deal about them, and had a good deal of data.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: And in fact, my trip down there was spent almost altogether interviewing one artist after another. So whatever I did on that, I did—and that that book is written from the artist's point of view. This is based on interviews. And I talked to every one of them, without exception. Uh, even Siqueiros, who was an oddball then. Uh, but he was very nice to me, and I got—tried to interpret his slant on this whole movement. The other thing that I was working on at the time was kind of a—since I couldn't work in psychology—that was German medieval sculpture. This had been Pinder's great forte at the time, the three years that I listened to him. He was always talking about German 13th- and 14th- and 15th-century sculpture. And I had a very definite idea there, because his approach was, well, from the German point of view, was very patriotic. And emphasized the great monuments of the 11th and 12th centuries, especially the Holy Roman Empire. And one of the things that always intrigued me was that somehow this, through the study of sculpture, which gave expression to buildings and buildings gave expression to a political concept, the cathedrals and monasteries. This goes back to the time of Charlemagne. Uh, there was a cultural federation, a European cultural federation, established by then. Which has a very sharp, contemporary, 20th-century analogy. And you know, this is what they're still working on. And they're talking about political and economic, but the cultural is what they are closer to achieving than anything else. And I think one of the great solutions to the European problem, now as then, was through this total—

ROBERT BROWN: Affinities.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. Uh, because you had the different racial groups, and geographical groups. One way in which they can tolerate the next one, the neighbor, is by respecting them. Each one for what he, us, is, and does. And this is one of the things you learn from artists. The good ones.

ROBERT BROWN: You said that this was one potential of this study.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. I, later on, 1960, when I had the Fulbright and I went back, I spent the whole year on medieval sculpture again and traveled around, looked at things. And I still think, do I still have the manuscripts, two or three manuscripts. Uh, that will go in the archives sometime.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, you were particularly interested in in look, in seeing as many as you could, and then at finding these analogies among them. Had Pinder emphasized this at all?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah, with the particular emphasis that the Germans were the leaders.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, okay. Yes.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Which is natural.

ROBERT BROWN: Headquarters was there.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah, which is natural. He could, he couldn't do otherwise. To [inaudible] another way, but even so, given the period there, the emphasis was one or the other. But the whole concept of a total European unity was always there. Well—

ROBERT BROWN: And you had plenty of time to do this in the thirties, when you were at Wisconsin? Did you have much time to do this, continue this—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, you have to understand, I had the time. I was always desperately in need of money. And there were no summer school jobs. Sometimes I got a job during the summer, but several times, I did not. And I didn't have money enough to travel—

ROBERT BROWN: How did you get to Mexico?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, that was because I was a bachelor. That was just before I was married. And then afterwards, why, the last time I could do that. But the—well, '34, for instance, when I had no, I had no job at all, I had to sit home. What did I do? I spent the whole time working on medieval sculpture. I did one, one draft there. Uh, see there were no subsidies then. One of the things people have to realize that have a $1200 salary as an assistant professor. There was no subsidy for research. Uh, nobody was concerned about whether you did anything. Come promotion or when they wanted to get rid of you, they'd say, well, he doesn't do any research. Uh, but this is an entirely different world than what we have today. Um, well, the other thing that I like to argue and explain some of the problems I got into. Because I did, I resisted the Wölfflin. When I did the Italian book, I

was always talking about Wölfflin's various books. Not the principles, but the masterly analysis of the work of art as a process of achieving, of clarifying these principles. And so instead of the principle, it was the analysis that I thought was important. And my argument was, you teach research methods. Not to graduate students, but you start with the freshmen, the first time you get at them. And there is only one method, and that's the right one. And you teach the, you start off with that. And with that, with the method, you work with sources. You don't have to take what somebody else says about it. You get at the source. And you deal with the fact, the factual material. And what I used to do in the Italian Renaissance course that I gave, I used to write out my notes, the stuff that I would, I had the advantage of spending a lot of time in six months, eight months it was in Italy. And I'd seen everything practically. And I used to give the information on what I had seen, and then the factual information from the books. Now, these were the Venturi and the Michel [ph] and the German [inaudible] *Wissenschaft* volumes. And the team at Becker. Now, just lining those books up, they're all in German. Few of the kids ever read German, or the foreign languages. It's much better nowadays, but at that time, it certainly wasn't true. But the problem is not to let them have to wrestle through all that factual material, but to get the essential material out so they can do the real job of art criticism and analysis. And that's the way it sits. You think of a structure like the Raphael Stanzas or the Sistine Chapel. That's a complicated complex of ideas as well as designs. And this information, I mean, just the scale, the measurements and that. And this is what I used to have in notes. And this is what then, I would mimeograph for the students. So that I knew what I was doing, and the results that I would get out of those kids, who had never been to Italy and probably would never go, were just fantastic.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. Yes. Good. Because you avoided what a lot, many times in teaching is, we get them to to muddle around in the, collecting the data, right? You enabled them immediately to go in to the analysis—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. And understanding of it. And of course, somebody would say, Now you this is something that's for graduate students. I mean, they should find their own way. Well they can find their own way, but you can give them a start on that. The very objective is not finding the way, but the understanding. And you have to—the understanding of the work of art. Uh, now this is not Wölfflin, you see. And this is [inaudible] on the other hand, you read some of the textbooks on art, on the Renaissance. You're always taking a course in that particular person's, author's point of view. And I really am not interested in somebody's taking my point of view. I'm interested in getting Michelangelo's point of view. And that, and this is what I call scientific. And this is what I understood, and still understand, as the, as *Kunstwissenschaft*.

ROBERT BROWN: And the students, and the undergraduates would start with working on the source material with the data at hand.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. When I—and I can cite many people, they did a superb job. They'd develop a style, a writing style. They organized their ideas based on what is there. And then you get their personal interpretation. I like it, I don't like it. But they had reasons for for that kind of preference.

ROBERT BROWN: And did this go down well in Wisconsin and then Minnesota? Did you do the same thing at Minnesota?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh, yeah. Uh, with the students. And that book, see those notes were the ones that were published in the Handbook of Italian Renaissance Painting. I still think it's a good idea. And I still have no competition in that. My colleagues, who are, who do the textbook, they'll say that it's still a good book. Well, then a final note on this kind of Wisconsin period, which is kind of a growing-up period, Wisconsin and Minnesota. The research program, because I always believed you, I should be producing something. And I used to work hard. Uh, one was the study of the, of Mexico, the new modern art. And that manuscript went through five or six, seven versions before it was published by the University of Minnesota Press. And then I got into John Steuart Curry. Curry was brought out as artist in residence in 1936. And—

[END OF TRACK]

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, the research program. One was Mexican art. And that was—there's a great deal of original material there. Nobody else is—has done the combination of interviewing the artists and describing the murals.

ROBERT BROWN: So you had both. You had both their point of view and what you subjectively saw, more or less —

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. And I described them, so you can—I went down '54, later, and looked at them and what I had said about them. This color goes forward, this goes back. This this works. This doesn't work. I was right. Uh, and I think anybody else would go at it and follow that description, they'll agree. Uh, then I got—

ROBERT BROWN: Excuse me. This objectivity is one thing you got from Horst, isn't it? And the others were reacting against the people who took Wölfflin's principles only and stressed—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, Horst was anti-Wölfflin.

ROBERT BROWN: But I mean, these other teachers, they gave you this good grounding in objective, succinct, penetrating description, right?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah, yeah. But this is what I really got hooked on the idea of the, this 17th-century approach from Descartes. And of course I was interested in mathematics. I didn't know anything about mathematics. But this was a process of clear thinking and positive thinking. I, this is what the historians teach you. And the assumption is if you're an art historian, well then, you have to be a man of the spirit. You sit upon the throne there and you dispense opinions.

ROBERT BROWN: You're the artist.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. Uh, now then I got involved in, with Curry. And I was fascinated by—of course I liked him very much. I liked Mrs. Curry. And my wife and I, we worked together on it. In fact, she worked on all of these things as editor and critic and everything else.

ROBERT BROWN: Had she been trained in art history?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No, she was, she had been to Europe, of course. Had traveled, was more of a musician, but was a first-class student. Actually, her major at Vassar was economics or something. Bu she was very much interested in this and worked with me. Had also been interested in literature. She had been a foreign reader for [inaudible] secretary before I married her. So that's a little of that background. But anyway, we got involved in the Curry job. I started that really in '36, '37. And then I did—the book wasn't published until '43, in Minnesota. But the idea there was that, among contemporary artists, he was a fellow whose work was right there. And he was right there, so you had those two things. But as one who had a—coming from the Midwest—had a view and an interest in this whole panorama of American society, American culture. And they, the book, it wasn't my title. But the book was finally called *Curry's Pageant of America*. Uh, but he—a shortcoming of his—but he would tackle everything. Uh, the landscape, the American folkways, such as the religious, rural religious festivals and performances and stuff. The people on the street, the portraits, the circus, the railroad. All of these, there was, there was no limit to what he—the farm. The city. Uh, there was no limit to what he would choose. And yet there was a kind of integrated character to everything he saw. And I felt that this was the way that one could give some kind of an interpretation to American culture as a whole, as an historian. And what I tried to do with the Mexican movement as a 10-year enterprise, which [inaudible] 1920 and 1930, '39 when the book was published. But you could do this through the work, thinking, the vision of one man. And this was a kind of a problem of the being scientific about it and yet getting the poet or the artist using his scientific methods. Now there's a little hitch to that. And I don't think one realizes. You see, in politics, it's very easy, because one man, Kennedy, or Truman or whoever it is, you get an interpretation of that period through what that man did. Eisenhower. Uh, but the artist one doesn't like to look at things that way. And one doesn't.

ROBERT BROWN: And with Curry, you sensed that you could.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well I attempted it. Yeah, I sensed that you should. And this is the real problem of how to go about it. There's a technique involved there, too. I used the illustrations. I had lots of them in there, with notes under each illustration. And these, he and I had gone over very carefully, so to make every associated idea that I put down on it. And then I tried—in the text I tried to tie that together. So you could read it both ways. You could read from the text or you could read from the pictures.

ROBERT BROWN: You could read it from what he approved or what he said he'd intended, and then read it from your attempt to try to synthesize the whole thing. Did you feel he tried, he hadn't tried to synthesize it, of course, in words. But his paintings, in his paintings, do you think he had, he had synthesized?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, there's a problem. Who manages to tie this all together? That that's almost an impossibility. Everybody strives. And there's so many shortcomings to Curry's work. And yet, when you look at the shortcomings and look what the man attempted to do, it's always the possibilities that lay in that career. This is what I think is important, because this is an interpretation of American culture as a whole. You think of the potentialities of this culture, of art, especially as you see it, as we saw it at that time in that particular circumstance, in Wisconsin especially. Uh, along with this was my interest in the Renaissance. And I made the note, the Renaissance and the concept of rebirth. Because, you see the word Renaissance used to be used quite often. There's a word "renaissance" was used. And then the renaissance of American art. Or is there an American renaissance, or is there an American art? People were, there was a whole bibliography that comes at that time, where people were trying to give definition to the aspirations of a new America that was emerging out of that tragic years.

ROBERT BROWN: This was one of the most hopeful things.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think there was some wishful thinking going on, too? [Inaudible] or were they—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Wishful—certainly there was wishful thinking, and a tremendous accomplishment. I always think of a—talk to the political scientists today since the second World War or where [inaudible], "Well, we've got to do something for the public. We've got to uplift our people." And very few of them have reviewed and really understood what was accomplished through WPA and through so many of these agencies. WPA is still a blank page to most younger people. Anyway, the, at this, both Wisconsin and Minnesota, there with this Curry business. Uh, and the inability to travel. Uh, the advantage in not being able to travel in that you looked a little more closely at your own environment. Then I got into this whole regional business, you see. I would much—I was interested, for instance, in doing a book on Max Beckmann at one time, just from Europe, from I saw a show of his in Munich. My God, I was impressed by that. But how'd I get to Max Beckmann, even in St. Louis where he was for a time, I couldn't get to him. And Curry was there. And I had the—an honest belief that this was a great man and that the ideas especially, that he worked with, were great ideas, had great possibilities. And then I got in involved in investigating the artistic traditions inherent in a native environment. Because that's what the Red Wing study to me is important, because there was no art. Uh, there were a couple of artists there. Um, Biederman, for instance, was there, and he'd done a couple of designs in the [inaudible] there. Well, he was considered by most of the other people in town at that time, '30s, '40s as kind of an oddball. So that I don't know if you could say he was the expression of Red Wing. But you look at the street pattern. Uh, the houses, the succession of styles, even the landscape, gardening, the factory buildings, the arrangement with the town. The roads and the river, the railroad, the railroad station, and all that, the library, all the embellishments there. There was a pattern, which is something that is very characteristic of that period from 1853 until 1943 or what, what it was when I stopped. Now, I was interested in Minnesota art history and the, all these studies in American Middletown. And I think that Red Wing thing is important, as far as I'm concerned, one of the most—I think I said that before—one of the most exciting projects that I ever did was a couple of seminars based on local art history. Where you had 25 good graduate students, each one coming in with a project there. And people were sitting on the edge of their chairs to see what this person is going to bring in.

ROBERT BROWN: Were they, people, there was an awful lot of interest then, was there?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, they got it.

ROBERT BROWN: Did they come to it and—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: In other words, I did not have to do them a sales job. Uh, once you'd set up a program like that, they responded. Now this is, this is not academic salesmanship.

ROBERT BROWN: Strong urge, general urge—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: There was a response. Now then, see this is, this went through the war. Then, I did a book for the armed forces.

ROBERT BROWN: A handbook, yeah. Yes. You talked about that art, *Appreciation of Art*?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: *Appreciation of Art.* And that was that was a real job. But I felt that was, it had to be done. And it was reasonably successful. But then, of course, at the end of the war, then everybody was restless. New jobs were appearing. And I was offered the position as director of the Art Institute in Cleveland. That time it was known as the Cleveland School of Art. There are a couple of motives I had in mind. When I think about it now, I don't know whether I was smart or not. But I did it. And the, one of the ideas was, as the sole administrator, as the head of the thing, I could do what I wanted. It's one of these—I am not an administrator. But I wanted to do the job because that would give me freedom to do what I wanted. And I could carry out a program. That I had in mind. And Cleveland, furthermore, was an ideal community with a long record of civic cultural pride and active patronage. This is, those people, they still are there. They're proud of their public institutions, between their symphony and their museum and the art school and the Museum of Natural History, the health museum, all kinds of these institutions are supported by, with public funds. And this is, they still do it. Um, and then I felt that there was a desperate need for new approaches to the education of artists.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you think was lacking? Or what did you sense—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Art. I mean, first of all, I did not, I didn't think that they were attracting the able student. Uh, secondly, I don't think they were given the proper education. Thirdly, I don't think they were given the facilities. And I don't think that they were given the freedom. Freedom in my terms now, not letting them alone, letting them do what they want. But the proper education and then the opportunity to do what they want to do. You can't just do that without training, without equipment. This is, again, goes back to the methodology business.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. But once they had the proper training to allow them to experiment a little.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And now, in that line, see the motive, why did I do it? Uh, when you leave the academic and the protection of an academic community here you're on your own. You're subject to a board of trustees. You can be fired at any time. And I was on the verge of it regularly. And there was no social security. There was no retirement. There were, there were no benefits whatever. You got your salary and that was it. Uh, there are all kinds of responsibilities, and you were the anchorman. Uh, you had a reception there. You were the first one there to open the doors. You were the last one there to make sure that all the windows were closed and the door locked. And that happened many, many times [inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: But this was partly publically, partly privately, endowed or supported?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No, this is, this is a private [inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: Private entirely.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: And I've always said, anybody who gets to be an administrator must have a hole in his head. And I did a piece of sculpture with that title. *The Administrator.* But then, there was that, the method that I started out with right away. It was an emphasis on the professional medium, all areas so that the artist could get at every medium. Uh, there's no—to my way of thinking, there's no distinction between fine and the applied arts, between the hand and the machine art, between the industrial design and the crafts. All the, each artist is given equal dignity. It's not just the painter and the sculptor. But the painter, the sculptor, the silversmith, the ceramist, the textile designer, the industrial designer, and I would, this was, this didn't happen all at once. But it developed where—

ROBERT BROWN: Was this quite astounding at the time, to people?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Not, not astounding. Uh, this is a logical thing. When you'd get somebody who was good, see, you don't teach unless you can do it. And you had to have professional experience in order to be able to teach the professional that thing, advertisement design or illustration, which is a different area. Or ceramics. Ceramics is not just throwing pots. Ceramics is merchandising your pottery. Or you are doing silversmithing. It's a matter of not only producing but selling it. And if it's, if you sell it, the hand piece, that's one thing. If you sell it as an industrial product, that's another thing. So you have to know the machine, too, as a part of this process, and of course the strongest department of the whole group was the industrial design department.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you, did you, this was there when you came, was it? All of these groups were there?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No, there was one, there was one good instructor who used to be a ceramist. And that was Viktor Schreckengost. And he was training industrial designers. And he maintained that position. Of course, what I would always, in that case, this gets you into trouble. Because I would have as much respect for him as I would for somebody else who was a painter. Now, this is bad taste. Somebody else who was interested in advertising he's just as important, as far as a student is concerned, as somebody who's a portrait painter or somebody who was just a painter in the sense that he was painting what he sees.

ROBERT BROWN: Well would—did you have a hard time convincing trustees of this?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Uh, only insofar as—in fact, trustees would support the idea. The problem always came when you started to spend money. So you, so many of these people needed equipment, and that was a matter of going out and raising money. And I could always try to interest people in the ceramics department or somebody else in silver or somebody else in textile design. You'd also get industry involved in that.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you spend a good deal of time in doing this?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh, yeah. Yeah. That's where you, that's your spare time. That's where your research time went.

ROBERT BROWN: You couldn't do too much writing and research in these years, could you?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No. Well, I did—Cleveland, I had a hard time doing that kind of thing. Well, let me go back to that. I mentioned the approach to all of the arts. Uh, the secondly, the emphasis on art history and the humanities is associated with it. Remember I had the argument that the art school, the professional art school, should be treated in the same way that the institutes of technology were developing. Case, MIT, they, at that time, they were developing strong departments of humanities. And I said the art school should do the same thing. You take these people with an aptitude, with a drive. These artists are made there. I mean, they are that way. Like musicians, they're born that way. They have this urge. And you've got to make use of that, just the same as an athlete. You've got to make use of that the first day in the school. And if you put that off to the

graduate, make them take an undergraduate program before they get into the art school, you lose them. An undergraduate liberal arts.

ROBERT BROWN: Really? Because they, what they're they're—they've lost their impetus, or lost—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Sure. You can't take a football player and let him do football in the graduate school. And you people say the analogy is wrong. It's not wrong. See, these people have a certain amount of training and equipment, which they can use. And this is an expression. Uh, any of these athletes have that peculiar drive. An artist has got that. I learned that in football. Uh, art history and—and expansion from the studio and the professional handicraft to the realm of history and ideas. And I found, see, I taught right along there. I taught a survey and then an advanced course, which was required of everybody. They couldn't get out of it.

ROBERT BROWN: In history, right? In history, history of art.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Uh, but you'd be amazed the amount of work that you could get out of those people, reading, studying, historical investigations. And, but I think this has to go—come with and after the art has been established.

ROBERT BROWN: After they are, they've got their own—you didn't begin them on art history.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No. But as they, you didn't begin them on art history, but you do the things simultaneously. So they don't—the idea is that they are here in the general drawing class, they're drawing from nature. Well, they're not the only ones who draw from nature. Now, you can—it's the same process of the artist, the teacher himself uses. Uh, well now, the third aspect of this Cleveland enterprise was a social and public relations. Uh, you had to keep the public coming into the school. And that's one reason why, in that particular, setup, the gallery was a central room and the studios were around it. Uh, so that we'd have visiting shows, traveling shows. We'd have one-man shows of distinguished artists. The artist would come in as an artist, not an artist in residence but a visiting artist. He would talk about his work. He'd talk, go into the studio, and there'd be this interplay back and forth, both with students and faculty. Faculty needed rejuvenation, too. And—

ROBERT BROWN: [inaudible] Were they used to doing things—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No. Well, they didn't resist. They may not like this person or that person. For instance, George Grosz came one time. And there were people who kind of thought he was pathetic. He's was a frustrated bourgeois artist. Well, certainly George Grosz had a certain degree of frustration here at that time. This was after the war. Uh, he was certainly anti-Fascist. He was anti-war and was anti-German because of the war. And yet, what tore him inside out was the great tragedy of the misery that millions of millions of people were going through. Well, there are people who can't stand that. And can't stand it—couldn't stand the way Grosz was drawing and painting at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: He was an example of a visiting artist?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: He was one. Kyle Zerbey [ph] was another. Ogden Pleissner was another. Jack Levine was another. And you'd keep a variety of people. Some people would like this one. They wouldn't like that one. But they had to get acquainted with them. And—

ROBERT BROWN: Were the students there any different from those you'd taught previously? Because they had been, you'd dealt with as an historian. Now, you're dealing with people studying the artists.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: First of all, there was a strong scholarship program. I forget what the percentage was, but we had a very elaborate scholarship program. The school was set up to provide an opportunity for local students. This goes way back to the 1860s. Uh, the students who went to the Cleveland Institute of Art were not the ones who went to Yale, Harvard, or some such college. They may have come back after they couldn't stand the Ivy League, because they wanted to do something else. Um, as far as brains and character is concerned, they, these people, I think, were superb. Uh, sometimes—and it's not, perhaps, not the right way to say it—I always had the feeling these are the people who came from the other side of the tracks. But they had a reason for going to the art school. They were grateful for the opportunity to go. Uh, years afterward, they always maintained that connection and that gratitude. So in many ways, there was a very rewarding—it was a rewarding experience to see what happens to these people through four years. Uh, there was also a strong foreign population there. There was a Polish section, Italian section, Hungarian section Bohemian. All French not so much. Uh, English. These were absorbed. There was a German section there. These people would come in. That foreign background often had something to do with the orientation of the youngster from home as far as the arts are concerned. Then came many people from the service. Oh, I remember some of these outstanding people who, one had gone through the Bataan March. And he sat in a Japanese jail or prison for years and years. And he was so—he came in with drawings that he had done from memory of that imprisonment. His one objective was to go to school so he could express it. Well, this was an obsession with this fellow. And he worked

and worked and worked. And I understood, years afterward, he was very much interested in George Grosz for one. So he was doing imitations of George Grosz's for a while. Uh, but years afterward, he got it out of his system. He went back to Montana, or his hometown, and he's an art teacher there, perfectly adjusted. And so this was a kind of release for him. Uh, many—they got out of that after a while, but this was something that they worked through. Well, the part, the public relations there. There was a great deal of fundraising. Uh, which was, as far as I was concerned, was always directed at specific projects. People, students who were in need, a studio, equipment, pictures, works that could be sold. And we used to have these shows and receptions, in which public, students, the trustees would have a meeting place. And the building that was built there afterward, it was completed after, which I had had designed. I didn't design it, but I worked—I set up the program for it and worked with the, with Ed Flynn, the architect. Uh, that was a direct result of this program. It was one of the proudest things I think I I've done. And what was done then at Syracuse was the same kind of thing in a different, in a university surroundings, which were difficult in a way because you were competing with other branches of the university. Everybody else is after that.

ROBERT BROWN: In Cleveland, you could focus your attention on the one need and one community, or at least —

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: And people who came to the school were—focused their attention on you and what you wanted.

ROBERT BROWN: At Cleveland, did you develop a very close relationship with your faculty?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Because you have a number of their pieces, things they've done. That's when you began doing things, right?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well no. They're, as far as myself as an artist, are concerned, I was always—we always had a faculty show. Or we'd have new, we'd have a student, show. And every time we had a faculty show, they'd say—well, I was helping with the arranging of it—"Well, where's your stuff?" And I couldn't get out of it. Or I could have, but I—

ROBERT BROWN: But you wanted to do it.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I wanted to be in there. So I would do the, do something. And they're always very sympathetic. They'd start worrying about me before, a month before the show, to make sure that I had something ready. And then they'd criticize, and then we'd get into discussions. So I, actually, that was fun. And they were always very, very sympathetic.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you try to do when you'd begin?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Wood sculpture.

ROBERT BROWN: Wood sculpture. Had you worked with anybody, or—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, no. The, I got started doing wood sculpture with John Rood, who came out to, whom I invited out to Minnesota. And he gave me a set of tools, a couple of beautiful pieces of mahogany. And can we get started. So then I was a trial and error proposition, and that's the way it went. And also, it's good therapy. Good exercise. Uh, while you're involved in that, you forget about everything else. All the headaches go somewhere else.

ROBERT BROWN: At Cleveland, you were responsible for virtually everything, weren't you?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, why did you, how did it come about you went to Syracuse from Cleveland?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well—

ROBERT BROWN: Because at Cleveland, you could run your own show, as you said earlier.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. I still am—was a university person. And I felt that there was a great deal of time spent on largely extracurricular activity. And I wanted to do research and get back to writing. And yet I also felt that this kind of thing could be done in a, should be done in a university setting. Syracuse was the ideal place to do it, because they had an art school that goes back to the founding of the institution. And the art school's as important as any of the branch of the, any other college in the circle. And also there's a group of outstanding administrators who I liked and you felt that you were working with a strong and enterprising team.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you know much about it before you went? Syracuse, you knew of its reputation.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I knew the reputation. I knew Norman Wrights [ph], who was my predecessor there, who then went to Pittsburgh, to Carnegie University. Uh, well, that was a large step. Once I got into it, I got into all kinds of other new problems.

ROBERT BROWN: You came in as both dean and teacher?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. I taught, I continued to teach through the whole time. I went there in '54 and left in 1970. But I taught usually a seminar and a survey class. Sometimes an advanced class. I taught Italian art a couple of times.

ROBERT BROWN: Is that exceptional for deans to do, to teach as much as you did?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well—

ROBERT BROWN: Or was it expected of you to—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No, it wasn't expected. You did what you wanted to do. But I always felt it was necessary. And I wanted the contact with the students. Uh, what's more, see, the art history class was a required freshman course. And when you have access to the whole group, there'd be 2[00], 300 students in the freshman class, you do a job of orientation. Uh, see, one thing, it's a history of art, but another thing is a kind of a definition of what an artist is, in a given setting or a whole series of settings. And I thought that was a tremendous advantage. Uh, what's more, you were able to give them information. For instance, I always used to, you start with contemporary—I'd do it backwards. I'd start with contemporary art, largely because the faculty and, in the studio, they're always talking about contemporary art. You did this the way, this is the way Moholy-Nagy did it, or this is the way the Bauhaus—this is a Matisse or Picasso or what. They used these words and names and concepts. And you might just as well organize these, this material and these concepts before or during the time that they're working with the—and I thought, also, that the business of using the contemporary approaches—you don't talk about art appreciation then, because contemporary art is not art appreciation. Contemporary art is a concentration on means. That's as good a definition of the contemporary as you, well, it's useful anyway.

ROBERT BROWN: And it was part of the process the students could, would know, or could know about directly, too, wasn't it?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. I mean, this is something that they—you talk about color field, well, you, there were examples, right.

ROBERT BROWN: Were these students fairly well versed? They'd seen things, they'd—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh, this is entirely different from what I was talking about in Cleveland or in Wisconsin and Minnesota. First of all, they were Eastern. They were at a different time. Uh, one thing people don't realize what a vast difference in communication and travel and, what the pre-university education of a youngster was in the 1960s, let's say, as opposed to the 1930s. Now, what the end result is, I mean, whether the contemporary result is better than what it was in 1930, that's a different question.

ROBERT BROWN: One thing, you had to deal with students who are, in a way, much more sophisticated, weren't they, when they came to you?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: That presents problems, or has that generally saved you trouble?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I think it's—No, no. I think it prevents problems, because then they, so many come from New York New York City. They knew everything. Uh, they would have a much better foundation in drawing, let's say. But they'd get into a freshman class in drawing. They would just whip out these tremendous figures. And then when they were obliged to do something other than just that particular mode, then they'd be lost. They knew how to do that one thing and nothing else. And an artist has to tackle any problem.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have, among your faculty, people who would take them, make them go through their paces very, in a very diligent and disciplined way?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Some. Uh, but these people—well, that gets into another part of the story. These people got into, um—the number of these people declined. Or, put another way, there's a certain creeping cynicism that developed rather than—the stronger students, the more independent students, many instructors say, "Well, you want to do it that way? Go ahead, why should I bother making you do something?" And in the

history of art even I used to have a struggle to get people to work. "Why should I learn names and dates and periods and pictures? I want to be an artist." Well, that's a kind of an immature approach to things. And, I think this is a matter of student style, and I think that is changing and students—

ROBERT BROWN: But then you had to argue. You had to be able to explain and—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, that is the point. Whatever assignment you would give them, you would explain the reasons for this particular assignment. And you don't just give them—give them projects for just discipline. Or if it is discipline, you explain it.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, as dean, as an administrator, what were some of your main tasks there? Because you had fundraising a bit, didn't you, still as you had—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh everything no.

ROBERT BROWN: You had the program catalogs that you developed, exhibitions.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, now if I go over that whole thing I'd like to explain the Syracuse situation first. That's what was, a dean's job. First of all he has to—has to coordinate lots of ideas and personalities and problems. He's got his college. He's responsible for that. Uh, he has a faculty. He has the students. He's got to make sure that students who are—who apply to the university, apply to the university first, and they maintain a university standard. Now what those standards are, that's a general thing, but they have certain entrance requirements and in addition to that they had to have certain artistic—

ROBERT BROWN: Aptitudes or?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Aptitudes. And the idea there is not to say that you have to have gone to art school before. But rather, they'd always, the way you go after this is, they come in, you interview them, I usually interviewed them, by the hundreds. One year, I think the worst year I had, I interviewed somewhere between 900 and 1000 students in—from September to the following summer.

ROBERT BROWN: Just for a brief chat with them? Finding out—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, no, I, would interview, it would be anywhere from 15 minutes to a half hour. Uh, and you'd ask them to bring in a portfolio and they'd show what they were doing. And the objective is to get the student to talk, see what he was doing, what his interests are. And you could always tell whether he has a flair for it or not, how his perception is, and what skills he may have. But my interest was always in talking to the student, the emphasis on the student rather than on the work that he showed, because there are some people who live in New York who had first-class instruction at the Art Students League or wherever. Uh, somebody else who came from the northern part of the state, who hadn't had any instruction and yet had this itch to be an artist and that he would do some kind of doodles or what. And for one thing you try to analyze the drawings and along with that, you get something of the attitude of the candidate. My own personal interest was judging the individual rather than his work.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you particularly look for in the individual?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, what do you—what do you look—

ROBERT BROWN: Any number of things? I mean endurance?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: What, what do you look for with any student? Uh, you look for intelligence. Uh, you look for a certain personal pride and inner dignity or confidence. And then you look for what—see what kind of ambition. What does he want to be? What does he expect to be 10 years from now? Five years from now? What is your aim in life? Uh, it's not why he says, because almost invariably they change. It's one of the things in a university setup there, they come in as artists, "I want to be an artist." And then they, in this amazing maelstrom there they get different ideas and they switch into radio/television or sometimes these are related and sometimes they're not. People discover that they're biologists, after having started out as artists. We find all kinds of variation. And that's what I think the university is—why the university setup for an art school is valuable. It also works the other way around. So there's many people who, who are obliged to go into forestry let's say and discover that they want to be an artist. And you would set up courses for these people to try their hand at it. Uh, without being obliged to take the whole program. And—

ROBERT BROWN: Uh, did you—the studio faculty also of course interviewed them, didn't they? Look at the portfolio?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. Well, I tried to do it all myself and that was really too much and then we would divide it off. And we would be pretty consistent about—I used to spend a lot of time in studios where an

instructor would be criticizing or reviewing work and I have found there was very little conflict. Uh, perhaps I might stress—be a little more rigid on academic aptitude. But then that's something that's flexible too because if you—a good artist is always a smart one. I mean an intelligent one. And, uh, the degree to which he develops his intelligence is a matter of drive, application. And artists can spot that. An instructor can spot that.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have did you set up a new program there before you—during the years you were there? Uh, was it essentially reworked?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah, that was one of the problems. Because instead of a more open point of view that was characteristic of the organization before, I tried to, to tighten it up. And also I was and still am very much interested in the artists who might work with silver or metal as just as valuable to our society as somebody who works with paint—

ROBERT BROWN: You came upon something of a hierarchy. That correct?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, you always do that if there's a—

ROBERT BROWN: So you, you shook this—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: You have—you have a committee system. I mean faculty had committees, and advisory committee—almost all these people are concerned about their own areas first.

ROBERT BROWN: And the fine artists were entrenched more or less when you got there or did you have to—did you sort of even it out a bit?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh, I, I—

ROBERT BROWN: Uh, as among craftsmen?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I wouldn't say everybody's entrenched but—

ROBERT BROWN: If they can, sure.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Uh, what—the one thing I would try to do is to have each instructor who was a head there have one class of advanced students in which they would specialize in that area that he is best equipped to, to handle. And in selection of a staff I tried to get an advertising designer with professional experience, a fashion designer who's worked in the fashion industry. Uh, a fashion illustrator who's done those jobs. Uh, see, that's fashion design is one thing, fashion illustration is another. Advertising design is another. Illustration is still another. And these are particular jobs that are available in industry. And they're all artists. They're all trained basically the same way. Uh, they have to be designers, they have to know how to draw, they have to know color, and they have to be sensitive to the relationship of things. The silversmith, I stressed. Well, now people complain because silver is so expensive, you can't work. Well, they go into metal. Silver is more expensive. I mean everything else is expensive, so what's the difference? Uh, there are people in Cleveland—John Paul Miller still works with gold. His prices just go up. You can get it, all right, but his prices go up. And, and in Europe the goldsmith is very important. Uh, the industrial designer is also an artist. One of the things I was able to accomplish was, the art educator is an artist first. And he is a performing artist. And he can—he knows the educational lingo, he knows all the administrative workings. But he is skilled, at least in one particular branch that is his. So when he teaches art in a public school he or she is teaching as a performing artist rather than as somebody who knows about it.

ROBERT BROWN: Did that take some doing or was—to to correct this latter condition? Had to be [inaudible].

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, you run into resistance. There are people who have been teaching art education who have never touched a brush to a canvas. Or may have done it at one time but they haven't in many years.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, and most of these areas, did you have reasonable success in altering things?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I managed it. I managed it.

ROBERT BROWN: Probably partly because you did a lot in yourself. You taught. You set an example.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I set an example, and as I say you get into problems there. But whatever I asked everybody else to do I was able to do myself. Also you have to remember I spent a lot of time in studios. I was interested in silver. I liked to work with metal. I was interested in enamels and I got stuff all around that I had monkeyed with. I hadn't done much pottery although I liked to—I'm doing it now. I like to work with concrete. I was interested in textile design. I hadn't done any weaving but I liked advertising, I liked to monkey with layout

and some sort of—where you're planning a—notice you make some kind of a plan, you talk to somebody else and he does it over, but at least when you set the basic idea you have to sense what's going to come out of that idea. You only do that by hand.

ROBERT BROWN: And of course you, you eventually got in a professional to do designing.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh yeah, yeah. Well, of course. [Tape stops, restarts.] Otherwise—

ROBERT BROWN: Well, we can continue now. The as Syracuse dean some of the policies you had you mentioned you had, quite a large acquisition policy.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, let me start with the beginning on this dean's job. Uh, in the first place you're responsible for the program. Secondly, you're responsible for the staff. Thirdly, you have to concern yourself with the admissions policy. And one of the factors that is kind of unique here, at least compared with other art schools, is that certainly you want to take talented students, but they were admitted to the university first. And the university set a certain intellectual standard. It was by SAT scores and, and that and this might vary. But it's the admissions office that would accept that student regardless of what college he wanted to go into. And then, I used to work with the—and insist our faculty would back always back me on that—that we should have something to say about the selection of these students so they don't just land in our classes. Or in other words, that we have a scholarship program that would be aimed at attracting the good student and the talented student. And that people who would apply to the university might apply to the art school but they would have to meet the university standards and in addition they would have to be interviewed with a portfolio so we could choose those students that we wanted or at least get the good ones, the talented ones. And, and that took a lot of—lot of doing. Uh, as far as time. Both on my part and then there are other times when I got too much and I would divide it off with—

ROBERT BROWN: Could you toss them back into the general pool if you said, "They really aren't suited for our school" [inaudible]?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. We would discourage—often there's somebody who would, who was interested in music and in art let's say. There are lots of them that way. Then I would say, "Well certainly she—he or she is talented. But maybe you'd do better in music." If the music people would want him. See there again they did the same thing. They had auditions.

ROBERT BROWN: It was a lot more complicated than at Cleveland, right? I mean because here you had to trade off and work with—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, also there were many more. Uh, in Cleveland we had a freshman class of 150, 200 at the most. And here you have—now I'd say 100 to 150. Here you have 300, three to—well, 300, and that is more now. Uh, the job of dean—you have to oversee a program. And now it's perfectly all right for somebody to come in from the outside and say this is the way the program should go. But you can't just legislate that. Uh, you have to get faculty groups and committee to agree. And that is often a slow process. Uh, the question is should you—what should the requirements be? Should everybody take one year or two years of design, one year or two years of figure drawing, or three years of figure drawing. And I was—would always stress, the not necessarily conservative point of view, but the old-line arts professional school that you have to have a firm foundation, usually a two-year more or less established program, of drawing, painting, and design. So if somebody would go into industrial design, he should know how to draw a figure. He should know how to draw. And the best way to learn how to draw is to concentrate on the figure. Maybe you're not going to draw figures afterwards but there's a skill that's a perceptive skill and, and a manual skill, let's say. Uh, it's not just one, it's not—it's not just mechanics, you know, it's something that is much deeper than that.

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you say the figure? Because it's so subtle and, and complex?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Figure. Because it's the most comprehensive piece of machinery we have in the world of any kind. And if somebody can't draw a figure then I like to do a little more interviewing, and, what's his problem, you see. Because then he's shying away from something.

ROBERT BROWN: The same applied when you were interviewing faculty, right?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh yeah. No, see, they—even with an industrial designer, so many of them, the good industrial designers, you don't just say figure drawing on that. But I've seen portfolios of industrial designers that are really exciting, where they would do figures, they would do designs, they would do landscapes, they had everything, any kind of an idea they'd be able to put down like that. Uh, those are the people who control their future. Uh, well, too, when you're hiring people, you always have to—you like him but you always have to make sure that the colleagues like him too. So it usually is the faculty would come up with somebody and you look at him, and he goes around and he has to go to the top administration too. That takes a

lot of doing, lot of time.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you usually have pretty good firm ideas yourself as to say in curriculum what you wanted?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Which of course you then [inaudible].

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: But that said, there are reasons sometimes you can't implement a given idea because you haven't got the staff.

ROBERT BROWN: Right, but I mean [inaudible] and you had to wait though for a vote and a—and joint decision. Did you try to press your case first? You mentioned a little earlier you thought of certain things a little before other people had.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, I resist the idea of formalizing that, have a vote. Now, you can't—you can't produce a work of art by a vote. You can't produce a faculty by a vote. You can't produce an educated person by a vote. I even resist the idea of a master's exam or an examination by a vote. I think you should be clear before that candidate ever gets into an exam whether he's capable of standing up to a committee or jury. So you say this is undemocratic, but you—see, Ochikubo, the Japanese American, they got rid of him by a vote. Nobody, nobody, was—had to stand up and face him. And that I think is immoral. If somebody doesn't belong here, if this—they said that Ochikubo was not a good teacher, and yet no one ever stood up in front of him and told him he wasn't a good teacher. I don't think anyone had the guts enough to. What they did, they had a closed session and the committee voted that Ochikubo's reappointment would be not approved. And so that case had to go to the university tenure committee and they reversed it. So Ochikubo was on the—

ROBERT BROWN: So you believe in—not in faceless decision making but—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: No, sir.

ROBERT BROWN: People coming up and standing up and giving their reasons.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: If I don't like you then I've got to tell you. And I think if you have that idea, a disagreement or a misunderstanding, can be resolved long before it ever becomes an issue. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Now other facets of the policy you had there, you also followed a pretty open way, you tried, through discussion?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, acquisitions, you have an acquisitions committee.

ROBERT BROWN: But you had one when you got there, Syracuse.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, the—we had—we had an acquisitions committee.

[END OF TRACK]

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, you talk about an acquisitions committee. Uh, you have to understand at Syracuse we had a university collection. We had a very modest little budget. It was practically nothing at all. Uh, but we did have a collection. We had a lot of enthusiasm among our—the friends of the university. And then the question there was, well, do you accept these, if somebody gives you money to—with which to buy something, does that go through a committee? Well now, so often somebody comes up with a picture, he'd like to give it to the university. Well, I think of one, it's supposed to be he wrote a—no, Pieter Lastman it was. Somebody gave a painting attributed to Pieter Lastman. Uh, was it a Pieter Lastman? No. I knew that right off there. Do you accept it then? Or refuse it because it is not a Pieter Lastman? Uh, well, it's a picture, it belongs to the period. It had been repaired many different ways. Uh, it'd be an interesting problem to find out whether it was Pieter Lastman or someone earlier or later, or nineteenth century restoration of a piece of a Lastman or something. All kinds of things. In other words that picture would be useful. And if there—if it's a—has no name at all, just as a picture, you could explain a lot of problems, of condition, of preservation, of technique or lack of technique to—it's an original picture, it's not a photograph. And therefore that would be valuable. Now should that go through a committee? Well, yes. Uh, it's being given. I would have somebody else look at it and voice an opinion. But if somebody's—would say, "Here, we want only genuine works of art here, we don't want any fakes," then I'd resist that thing because, it's not a question whether it's genuine or fake, most old masters that we have today are—have been doctored in one way or restored or tampered with in one way or another. I've heard so many scholars. Think of my friend, Middeldorf in Florence who said, "The greatest of them have only about 20, 25 percent original paint," and so that happens so often. But anyway, with a committee, if you have a group of people, two or three, who work with you and understand what you're doing, fine. If you're going to have a formal committee in which you meet at a given time to review this and this and say vote that's hopeless. There has to be

somebody who is in charge and who is building the collection. A committee can guide him, say, "Let's not get so much modern stuff, let's get or not get so much old master stuff, let's not do this or that." But at least so a person can—is not just working in a void, he's—

ROBERT BROWN: But he must have a direction [inaudible].

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, has to—has to take the responsibility. And if he doesn't accept that responsibility or doesn't perform, get rid of him. Uh, that's true of—there should be no tenure for deans or administrators of any form. Give the man power to do it and if, at one time he abuses the power or doesn't do his job, he can be removed. He, if he understands that to begin with then that's perfectly all right.

ROBERT BROWN: Why is—why, why do you say this—they shouldn't have tenure?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: As dean you shouldn't have tenure, no, because—

ROBERT BROWN: Because they must be—so why should they—why should faculty on the other hand have tenure?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: [Laughs.] That's another question, why should faculty have tenure? I don't know that, in this day and age, that faculty should have tenure because so many people work like beavers until they get tenure and then they can—they can coast on their oars for the rest of the next 40 years.

ROBERT BROWN: And you're saying administrators should, if they coast on their oars then the whole—a lot—all the [inaudible].

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Then, then everybody else suffers. Whereas, in our academic system if somebody wants to rest for the next 40 years, the rest of the institution can carry them without his doing any harm. And certainly that's what's happening in the—in academia today.

ROBERT BROWN: But in your accessions policy then over the years at Syracuse you developed it so you were—you acquired a great deal of art in a great deal through gift.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And did this involve a director or yourself approaching the collectors or—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well there were—it was mostly myself. I did the promoting. Uh, somebody often the development office would say, "Here's somebody who has a number of old masters. Or contemporary painting. Or he's got a Robert Motherwell. Uh, would you be interested?" I said, "Sure." "Well [inaudible] so-and-so go down and see him?" And I'd talk with him. I would do it. Uh, but this was, would—often would be somebody who was interested in the university anyway, he's been giving gifts, cash, and other things and that—they talk about art. This is one of the things that I always thought was interesting, that the development people would realize that art is one of the most stimulating things to talk about in promoting the institution. Engineering is interesting. Political science is interesting. Education is interesting. Uh, forestry is fascinating. But of all these areas, art is one of the most appealing. And since the artist and culture is usually in the—out in left field or behind the eight ball, handicapped—it needs extra support and this is one way to get it.

ROBERT BROWN: And you found these people who had the art were—liked to talk about it.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Certainly, yeah. Talk about it more than lots of other things. Uh, not that I have anything against politics but I think discussion on art is apt to be much more permanent and much more stimulating than discussion of politics. Especially in the last couple years. Uh, even though I like to talk about politics but—

ROBERT BROWN: What—how—what control did you have over, say if a gift were given entire a collection? What control did you have over selection from, from the selection, say if you didn't really want it all, if you needed to weed it out? Did you have problems there [inaudible]?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, there's nothing, nothing wrong with a—very often a collection is given, you don't go through and weed it out and say, "I like this one and this one, and then you keep, somebody else, you keep the dogs." You do that, then you don't get them. You take the whole thing, and there are good ones and others not so good. When you're showing an exhibition for instance of medieval ivories, you feature the good ones, the important ones. And the other ones become interesting comparisons. Not so good as opposed to a good one. There's always something to it. Uh, there is no such thing as a bad work of art, see, if it's bad, that it affects you in some insidious way, then it's apt to be good, because it's effective [inaudible]. [Tape stops, restarts.]

ROBERT BROWN: Did the school begin to give more money for accessions while you were there?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Uh, the school did not. The university did. I was able to get some funds. And this was often used as kind of seed money, very often. You would—you would buy a given picture. Uh, and because it was going in the university collection the artist was interested in that university. He might give a drawing or preliminary sketch to go with that just to have it together, to have it, to enhance the value of the painting itself. Uh, very often a dealer in—will give a one-man show. You would be able to buy a picture. Now this business of just going out and buying didn't happen very often, because it never had that much money. But often you did get somebody who said, "[inaudible] there is a show of so-and-so, [inaudible] go down and pick out one, I'll pay for it." And that would be counted as an acquisition. Uh, now here talking about the committee business the—there you have to have your accessions committee, kind of, agree with what you're doing, you don't—you can't formalize that. Because if you get stuffy then they'll say, "Well, thank you very much, I won't give it to you."

ROBERT BROWN: And you were able to orchestrate this well, so you, you didn't have awkward situations.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: You have to avoid the awkward situation, certainly. Well, this is what administration is. This takes a little tact and, and enthusiasm, not only on your part as the administrator but on the part of people who are working with you. And if there is anything wrong, if they don't like it, then they will say that is expressed ahead of time. Uh, but, well, I can show you in the catalog. We did two catalogs. Uh, they kind of listed some of the collections that were that were given to the university.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, your exhibition program. Did you initiate that? Or was there one going when you arrived at Syracuse?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: They had occasional shows.

ROBERT BROWN: But you developed them [inaudible]?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I made it a regular part of the educational program. My argument was that the exhibition gallery is the front room of the—of the art school. This is where you see faculty work. This is where you see student work. Uh, this is where certain pictures or collections or exhibitions are arranged, often to coincide with a set of problems, for the benefit of the students. And then these can be arranged in such a way that they are of interest to outsiders. Both the university community and the town. And then the—this should be planned on a year-to-year basis, with a variety, so you'd have sculpture, you'd have painting. You'd have design, textile design maybe or interior design, have prints. We had a number of national print shows, which we organized in competition with other national print shows. Gave prizes, gave purchase prizes. Uh, which then added to our—added works to—prominent works to our university print collection.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you—and then you developed a publication program of catalogs.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, no, wait, now the program, very often you'd bring in contemporary artists and one of the things I liked to do is to put up one-man shows. Uh, we had one of George Grosz. And George came up from New York, gave a lecture, talked to students, talked about his work. We had a reception for him there. And this was a very successful affair. At that time, I got the chancellor interested in him and in the show. And got him to buy one of the paintings for our collection, and then George gave us a watercolor to go with it. Uh, which is a very nice work. Now in that case we didn't do a publication but in the case of Zoltan Sepeshy, we had a one-man show and we published a catalog of that show which was kind of a retrospective, we got works from various museums, some from his collection, from the Cranbrook Academy Museum. And from a dealer in New York, Midtown. And then this was the first time a comprehensive statement on Sepeshy and his career was given. A chronology, which was the basic facts of his life were given. Uh, the reproductions, selection of work reproduced early to late, with the dates and sizes and that. So that any time anybody wants to do a monograph or study of Zoltan Sepeshy, they would have to use this because—and that information I got both from the literature, from his catalogs, announcements of previous shows, and from him.

ROBERT BROWN: These were statements then by the artist, then?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. Statements from the artist. And of course, Sepeshy was a very important contributor to the American tradition beginning with the early '30s. Uh, he came over as a young Hungarian, and was—became a devoted American. And a devoted educator. Tremendous influences he's had through Cranbrook.

ROBERT BROWN: And then these publications are perhaps the way that what you've done at Syracuse becomes most broadly known, right?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah, and that case, see, we took the initiative. Cranbrook had the show afterward. Uh, another one that we would do exhibitions of faculty people. I had—now you couldn't always do an elaborate

catalog but at least, we would do something, depending on how much material was there. Uh, and how much money we had. So nearly every faculty member had a one-man show if he had something to show. Uh, and there are various ways of getting money to do a catalog. Sometimes you would—I would get a department head to support the raising of funds from his budget. Uh, but as far as the educational program is concerned, this is important because this shows the students and the public that this man who was teaching this particular subject is an authority. And the whole career is laid out on the wall, you can't lie, can't hide anything there.

ROBERT BROWN: It's akin to the your insistence that the academic teacher publish.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Do research.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: And, of course we do that in the faculty show too, with each faculty—and this is kind of sticky sometimes. I would say every faculty member must be represented. They would say back to me, "Well where's your stuff?" And I would have to have something.

ROBERT BROWN: That's right. And you began putting in things.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: But no, I did that regularly, I did that before—[laughs]—but the, if somebody in art education, you see, he's not obligated to produce, let's say. But, they mostly did.

ROBERT BROWN: Did they feel a pressure from you to at least in the future try? Because you wanted people to [inaudible]?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, pressure, you see, you don't say, "You have to." Uh, you coax them. And if you get along and if you're conversing, well, it's very easy. You want to please them, they want to please you, and you're not—it's not a personal thing, it's the whole enterprise. Now if somebody wants to resist, "I refuse,"—okay, you refuse. But your absence is noted then. And come committee time, for salary raises and promotions, one notes that. I think—I think that's a crude way to put it but still you put it the other way around, "He's done this, he has sold this picture, he had a New York show, he had a one-man show in Lowe [ph] Art Center, this is to his advantage." And many pieces, shows that we've put up there then turned up elsewhere. Also, try to manage a purchase from the show too, for the university collection so every faculty member was represented in some way in the university collection.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, akin to this was the mural program you, you instituted, didn't you, at Syracuse?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Now the mural program is, I felt very very fortunate, and I described before. Uh, there was a time when we had—we used to invite a visiting artist during the summer to bring in fresh blood and of course artists were available more easily during the summer for a short period of time. We had Josef Albers one summer, who did a terrific job of, in his particular area of color and, and—

ROBERT BROWN: Working in a studio workshop.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Uh, that was teaching. Studio workshop. But then I—and he wasn't doing any murals at that time, otherwise we would have tried it. But then, there were other people. This started with Charlot, who happened to be in New York on leave from University of Hawaii. And I had known him before, found out that he was there, asked him whether he would come up. And he came up for a visit, and I said, "What are you doing?" And he said, "Oh, nothing, I'm just here, I'm on leave, going on to painting." I said, "Is there any chance of your doing a fresco just to get people interested in fresco painting?" He said, "Sure." So we arranged that he would come. This happened to be in the spring. And the idea was he would be a visiting artist on the educational program. This was—budgetwise, this was for special lecturers. I had to—had to get the approval of the proper authorities as the buildings and grounds and the lady who ran the dining halls. Mrs. Pettingell [ph], she was a real stickler. She didn't like to have any of this art stuff around because that interfered with her food service. Uh, but I got the chancellor interested and the chancellor passed the word on to her, then she was very agreeable. And, so this worked out. Uh, they, we got a plasterer from buildings and grounds. We announced that this was going to happen. Uh, asked were there any students interested in painting—advanced painting classes, wanted to work with him for the four weeks, five weeks that he was there. And we got a bunch of applicants. When he came, they presented their work and drawings. He selected four, five. And he set to work. He said, "Well, don't worry, it won't be anything controversial. It'll be regular stuff that I've done before." [inaudible] Mexican subject. He called it *Mexican Fiesta*. And then he proceeded. The regular fresco technician's approach there, with a little patch each day and then they would fill that. They had the whole contour already, done. And the kids learned how to plaster, they learned how to—how to mix paint, they helped him, they got on the painting of the wall themselves. And they were thrilled. And then people were watching. This was in the dining hall, Shaw Dormitory. And people were watching that everyday. So this is the regular process. The same process as they have had here 1930, '32, '32, '33, '34 with Dartmouth, with Orozco.

ROBERT BROWN: Dartmouth.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: And now this was no Orozco, wasn't that kind of a—of a thing. It had no strong idea. But it was Charlot. It is as fine a work of design as Charlot ever did. And what I was interested to have there is to promote the idea not only of an artist at work but of mural decoration. See, this had gone out of style. It was terribly exciting to have murals done, now you don't think of it at all. Then we did—on top of that, I got the film department interested. And they did a documentary at their expense, you see, they had the money. They did a documentary describing the whole process, the artist, the idea, the conception of the—of the design, the technical procedure, one step after another. And finally the dedication which, Charlot gave a explanation himself on videotape as to what he was doing. And that is available in the film library at Dartmouth. So I think we got good mileage out of that was done way back in '50, '58, or '59, and it's still—

ROBERT BROWN: And that was the beginning of a series?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: That was the beginning. And that film is still available. Then we got people like Marion Greenwood, who did a superb job. I think it was the last major work that she did. Anton Refregier.

ROBERT BROWN: And Ben Shahn did something slightly different, didn't he?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Then, then—well, Ben Shahn was a little later. He did the mosaic. And this was an exterior mural on H.B. Crouse Hall, on the theme of Sacco and Vanzetti. And this—he got no, no compensation for that at all. Uh, largely because he wanted the job done, he was always in love with the Sacco and Vanzetti theme anyhow. Uh, of social justice or justice. And there were several other friends of the university who financed the technical side. That was rather expensive. But it was done by this French mosaic concern. It was beautiful color. That's still very effective. Uh, faces the whole campus there. And it makes the courthouse mural look sick. The old style. Then there was I mentioned Refregier.

ROBERT BROWN: These programs were initiated by you. Would you—would you approach the artist in most cases and—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I did that all. My, my—

ROBERT BROWN: Did your artists on the faculty—how'd they feel about this? Having outsiders come in?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well—

ROBERT BROWN: And generally pretty well-known figures.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. Uh, in the first place, they obviously they had—there was some—depends on whom you're—whom you're talking about. There were people who were small-minded, other people thought it was a great idea. People were very interested, well, "why don't you hire me, I'll do a mural for you." "Well, what murals have you done," and here's where a jury would come in. Put that in front of a faculty jury and see whether that's going to impress anybody. And many of them were not up to that kind of thing. Largely because they hadn't done it. These other people had done it many times. Marion Greenwood, she had a long record of murals down in Mexico. And in this country. Charlot, nobody could compete with him. Ben Shahn. Uh, and what's more, if anybody else could do a mosaic design, they had a right to put one up. But there's nobody could compete there. Uh, on the other hand if you—this is the kind of thing that regular faculty people were not interested in doing. And if they were, I would know about it. [Laughs.] And I—and I would promote their work.

ROBERT BROWN: What effect do you think being on a faculty has on an artist? You've been with them now most of your career. As compared with the artist who supports himself by his art alone.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Right. Now there's a—there are two answers to that thing, depends on where you are. In a place like Pratt Institute, or any metropolitan area where you have an art school, the salaries are low, they couldn't possibly live on that, the artists are productive. Why? Because they have to sell. In Cleveland, the salaries were low. Every one of these artists was working like beavers. They all did advertising, I mean the advertising people did advertising, the industrial designers were working and the—and the painters—is one of the unique things about Cleveland, there was a good patronage system there, and the painters produced, they showed their work, and they sold. In Syracuse or in any major university—this is something you can check yourself—a productive artist gets on the faculty, he has the same rights and privileges as anybody else. In other words, he should have the same salary, he's not a second-class citizen. This is one of the arguments I always have, one of my struggles, to get them on the same salary, same salary level, same rank, and same intellectual level. Uh, you get a little problem there. Uh, because—

ROBERT BROWN: It's harder to calibrate their value, vis-a-vis mathematic, right.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: It's harder, harder to pin that down. But I have always argued that as intellectuals, an artist will stand up with any other class of intellectuals. But his medium is a visual one, it's not a—not verbal. He doesn't write books. If he could write books then he would write books instead of painting. The same as the other people could paint—get mixed up in their medium.

ROBERT BROWN: So you got them equality but then what happened? Uh, leading up?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I'm leading up to the simple fact that, here, they want—they want to—in faculty arrangements in the last generation, you have faculty participation, you have committees, you have faculty rule, which takes time, you have all kinds of other extra responsibilities. Uh, you don't have time to put in the painting. And therefore, you put your time in where your heart is. And if it's in the teaching business and the legislative side of it, that's where your time goes, you don't put it in the studio. They get tenure. There's no driving necessity for producing. You're not hungry. Uh, therefore the production is apt to be down.

ROBERT BROWN: Does this then have an effect back on their teaching?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I think so.

ROBERT BROWN: Because you're saying the scholar should be producing.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I say the scholar should be producing and this sharpens his teaching ability, his mind is alert, and he's aware of problems. I think that's true of the artist too. But where you get involved in the—this maze of social and political activity that they have today, I think the artist has two strikes against him.

ROBERT BROWN: But you do—you would, you would always hold to the fact that he should be paid and treated as an equal.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: He has to be treated the same way.

ROBERT BROWN: What if he were then forbidden to be in committees? Or at least, would you, could you compromise by simply strongly suggesting that he not?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, you don't—you don't suggest, he tells you. If you get a good artist, and I can cite examples there, the sculptor, Rodger Mack, there at Syracuse, is a terrific artist and creative person. Uh, who will accept responsibilities as they come, but he's working all night in the studio doing his own casting, and he's had one show after another. Now this is—not only is he a great artist, but he's going to be one of the great American—

ROBERT BROWN: He's exceptional, isn't he under this current, current system?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: That's what we're talking about. See, you—we're not talking about average—

ROBERT BROWN: [inaudible] has that virtue then, it's a way, in a way, weeding out. At the university's expense though. Because the university is carrying the freight on all the others as well, right?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: That's right [inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: Who do go downhill, whose teaching may be affected.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And then you have Rodger Mack.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, I'm afraid education is in a bad way. And it's gotten worse. Uh, there are too many students, there's too much money, there's too much going on, too much legislation, all this thing. And this is a very simple process. Of student and teacher, equipment and the productivity of both. Now this—what I started out by saying, Cleveland had certain advantages there because the faculty's salaries were low. And this was wrong. But at the same time, they would spend their regular hours in the studio and then they'd go home and they'd be working on their own. And they, they would put in a five, six-day week, but this was a productive week at both places. And I do feel that the element of necessity is one way to assist product- creativity. And And you know, too, and I could tell you that story. Why did I work like the devil all summer long without a nickel coming in on of all things German medieval sculpture? Because I hoped to get something published and get myself heard somewhere.

ROBERT BROWN: You got quite involved in the College Art Association, didn't you, in the late '40s and early '50s? You were on some of the boards.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. Yeah, I was very much—I think that's one organization, we used to—I was editor of the *College Art Journal*, and I thought that was—that was a time when it was a very modest little publication and you had to coax people to produce articles or send in articles. Uh, now it's a major art publication. You have good illustrations, have good support.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, what is the history of it as opposed to that of the *Art Bulletin*? Is the *Art Bulletin* always to be for the monographs and—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, the *Art Bulletin* is more concerned—is two classes. Uh, one, that's more strictly concerned with scholarly work such as Ph.D. theses or material growing out of research material that they've dug up. This is the kind of thing that is never published in commercial press. Uh, this is competing—this bulletin, for instance, is known all over the world, it's the American art historical, scientific publication, it's highly respected and treasured by every other library and every other department in the world. Uh, the *College Art Journal* is more for the exchange of ideas, I mean I'm talking about the older one. The exchange of ideas, one of my interests was to get the artist to write, and I had one section called *Contemporary Documents*. I'd always get some artist to comment somehow or other. These were very—Sepeshy wrote one, and he was he's kind of an oddball, all kinds of curious twists to his ideas, which were very stimulating and, and kind of thing he would—he would talk about in class.

ROBERT BROWN: So this was to be a newsletter and also to be an exchange of [inaudible].

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: That's what it was. Newsletter, I think that's as good a word. Uh, there was no great expense involved. None of us got any salaries. Henry Hope did it for years and years and then he—well, he was president of the College Art Association for a while, and then he asked me to do it. Remember one time I was reading, I took the—we'd gone on vacation, were out in Jackson Hole, and I went to the—picked up some mail there and here were the proofs for the *College Art Journal*. And by God if I didn't have to sit out in the—in the tent out in the camp while the kids, and Sa [ph] were going up the mountain on horseback and I was correcting proofs. [Laughs.] To get that darn thing back right away, see. But this was done for love and service or what. And I always felt proud of having been able to contribute something on that.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think there's quite a value in this country for the art historical profession to be able to meet annually to have this interchange? Without it what would be the case, do you think? Without the College Art Association.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh, this is the only—this is the only organization we have. Uh, and what is happening is that the College Art Association is kind of breaking up into regional sections. There's a New England group and there's a Southeastern group. There's a Midwest College Art Association. Where you have a convention, you get a smaller group together, you really can exchange ideas. I'm afraid it's getting a little out of hand when you have 2[000], 3[000], 4000 people meeting. It's a major business. Then you're more concerned with getting jobs rather than exchanging ideas. The job business I think is necessary. Uh, but this goes through I think, a process of evolution. I think they've got a new bureau working, which seems to be very successful. Where you write in your needs from the administrative point of view and candidates will send in their resumes and somehow they get together through this clearinghouse.

ROBERT BROWN: When you finished at Syracuse did you think you were stepping away from having completed a phase for the school, for yourself? Or is—did you feel you were sort of still in the midst of a lot of unfinished business? Because you mentioned earlier your admiration for process rather than for final results or—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, you have to retire sometime, you can't go on forever, and the 65 rule was strictly enforced there.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you putting things together, kind of tying things up? Did you feel you were the years before you knew you were going to retire?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah. I, first of all, I was not able to complete the job. Uh, one of the things I—that we, we—that was desperate there, one thing was the salary situation, which was not good and a matter of equality of salaries for art school people as compared with others. And this thing was, you see, the, in an institution, the wheel that squeaks the loudest gets the attention and we certainly squeaked enough, but I, somehow there wasn't any real necessity on the part of the top administration. So that didn't work out too well. On the other hand there were many people on there who were not producing and didn't deserve any more than—you get into a touchy problem there too. But those people who were productive and had national reputations, they were—they were doing reasonably well. Uh, so that was one thing I don't think that I managed to accomplish. The business of a museum and a permanent museum staff, to take care of this as a regular branch of the educational program, that I did not accomplish, that was accomplished after I—

ROBERT BROWN: But you did accomplish the acquisition of how much? A great deal of art, right?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well.

ROBERT BROWN: [inaudible] million worth, right?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well this had insurance value of well over $6 million. Now whether you can go out and sell it for that I don't think you could.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you also—you were also somewhat instrumental in the archival thing, which was a project of collecting manuscripts and drawings and the like.?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: That was—

ROBERT BROWN: That was a university-wide—?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah, that was a university-wide program, it went into many different things including political papers and the business institutions would deposit their—the records for instance of the National Association of Schools of Art are deposited there. And then we got into the—among artists. And that was at the beginning was when you were developing Detroit. That was more or less in competition with what you were doing. The difference was that we would accept the manuscripts and the material itself. Uh, whereas you were interested—as the national art—the art galleries were interested primarily in filming, microfilming the things.

ROBERT BROWN: In the very beginning that was true, yeah [inaudible].

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: In the beginning. And then you changed afterwards. But that was the advantage we had. The result—see, this was also tied in with the acquisitions program, so many artists would give their own works, drawings, and paintings, along with their papers. And at that time too, that was before the law was changed. They could deduct both the money cost of the papers, plus the artworks. They would have the appraisals done and that was very good for the artist. And good for the institutions. I think that was one of the great tragedies when that was, changed.

ROBERT BROWN: That's been proven, yeah. Since the change of that law in 1969, yeah.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Because the in—yeah. And I would hope someday it is changed back. But I'm afraid that's going to—you don't get taxes removed, you get only more taxes added.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, now you've got time now. You've been able—you've got these manuscripts like the medieval sculpture and so forth that you've been [inaudible].

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, now I've got time, sure, but, you see, no scholar and no artist can work in a void. See, one of the incentives, and you know that, in your business, you will work on your Olmsted or Richardson problems if you are in touch with other people, if you're in competition. Uh, or there's some degree of necessity. If you're simply doing it for the pleasure of doing it, I'd say this is difficult. It's not impossible. Uh, but it's more difficult. I spent two full years rewriting the *Italian Renaissance*. Uh, the contract for that fell through. So now the manuscript sits on my—on the shelf there. But I, you write to publishers and there's no great interest in this kind of thing. Now if I would get a best seller, about the sex life of Titian's *Venus*, I think I might—I might get something and I am not built that way. I can't, just doesn't work. So what I'm—what I'm saying is that when you're retired and you're up in the—in the woods here, this is a different kind of approach. Uh, an art, a scholar needs—the productive scholar needs the academic environment. The productive artist needs some kind of an environment conducive to production. That's why I think it's necessary to have art associations. It's necessary to have an academic community. Because people influence one another. Now on the other hand we—I love the outdoors—try to get—I'm active most of the time. The days aren't long enough as far as I'm concerned. I have so much work to do. I'm interested in sculpture, I'm interested in the garden. I'm going every day. Till 5:30, six o'clock. So the days aren't long enough. So now, what'll turn out of this thing, I like the sculpture. This is something that somehow just drives one ahead. And people come in and visit. They like this or that. Well, that, you like something, well, then you want to do another one. Or do a different one. And I think this is another phase of life, which I'm enjoying very much.

ROBERT BROWN: You're impelled almost to continue from one to the next, right?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: There's a drive there.

ROBERT BROWN: How long have you been doing these found object things? These assemblages and mounting of—

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: I learned that—I got involved with Louis Bosa. Louis Bosa was an old friend of mine whom I used to know in New York. Uh, we had him out to Cleveland a number of times, he had a one-man show

of his work. And finally I got him to come out and teach at Cleveland. We used to visit him. In Bucks County. And he's a—he's a wonderful person. Always active outside somewhere. And he's doing concrete structures. Uh, he's a great antique collector anyhow. And he likes pieces of iron and old bells and all this junk. He likes to combine them with concrete. So one time we were visiting out there. We stayed, we were supposed to stay one day, and I stayed three, four days there, and then got involved with doing concrete sculpture. And again this is good exercise and keeps you fit. And is a lot of fun. Long as you have a place to put it. So you put it outside [inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, and you do it here.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: So you're, you're creating an environment—it's wholly your own. Or more wholly than it was.

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Well, it's yeah. Anyway Louis is one of these creative people. Another one of these artists with a tremendous background and tremendous [inaudible] and a tremendous influence. And yet, here he's retired, 65, 66, whatever it is—people really don't know about him. And I think that's sad. Because he's just as productive today as he was 30 years ago.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, do you see yourself spending more and more time on your sculpture? Or are you in fact? Certainly more than you could spend at Syracuse, right?

LAURENCE SCHMECKEBIER: Oh yeah. No, no, I'm at it now, whether I'm going to be a famous sculptor or not, that I'm not—have no illusions about. But I do enjoy what I'm doing. And it's—and you, you keep fit. It's much, much more useful than jogging up and down the road or—

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]