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Oral history interview with Harry Bonath, 1965 April 3

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Harry Bonath on April 3, 1965. The interview took place at Mr. Bonath's home in Seattle, Washington, and was conducted by Dorothy Bestor for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's New Deal and the Arts project.

The original transcript was edited. In 2021 the Archives created a more verbatim transcript. Additional information from the original transcript that seemed relevant was added in brackets and given an -Ed. attribution. 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

DOROTHY BESTOR: Now we're recording. You can go on talking about the house or anything just while we test the volume of sound.

HARRY BONATH: Well anyway, there's even a button here that you press that opens the front door.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Really? You mean opens that door?

HARRY BONATH: Opens the one that you came in down below.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, oh nifty.

HARRY BONATH: But people don't use it, even though the door will unsnap down there.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: They don't seem to know. Probably not enough of them have lived in San Francisco or New York.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

HARRY BONATH: Or that type of thing, you know. Before you can even get into an apartment—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, you mean like a New York apartment, yeah.

HARRY BONATH: Yeah, where you press a button here.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: And then there's a little buzz and it opens the door below.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: So, I have a merry old time running down—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

HARRY BONATH: —the stairs [laughs] there half the time.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: And—

DOROTHY BESTOR: I didn't think of it, I just—

HARRY BONATH: Yeah, a lot of people come in the back. They come in the back way there, because—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: —I guess those stairs are more evident.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, I wasn't sure. There seemed a delightful choice of stairs and doors.

HARRY BONATH: Yeah [laughs].

DOROTHY BESTOR: But I heard a dog barking near that one, so I chose that one.

HARRY BONATH: Pauses and whatnot that come from an unprepared—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

HARRY BONATH: —talk here. Or at least I do sort of—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh—

HARRY BONATH: —meander around. And there seems to be—

DOROTHY BESTOR: —everyone—

HARRY BONATH: —an awful lot of gaps.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I know. Everyone meanders. But that doesn't turn up in the typescript and it really doesn't matter. I think one has to—

HARRY BONATH: [Clears throat.] I did an interview with somebody from the Art Museum, when I had a one-man show at the Seattle Art Museum. And it was some sort of a program that is reproduced over one of the TV—radio stations.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: And I, to begin with, I didn't recognize my own voice.

DOROTHY BESTOR: One never does.

HARRY BONATH: And to end with, I was greatly annoyed by all the pausing that I did. But—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

HARRY BONATH: —several people had heard it and they seemed to think it was pretty good. Are we on here?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah, we're on.

HARRY BONATH: Yeah.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Now, why don't you tell me—

HARRY BONATH: Do you want to ask me any questions? Or shall I just tell you about, briefly about my—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, why don't you just tell me? And if I interrupt with questions, why, ignore the interruptions—

HARRY BONATH: As I said, my connection wasn't of very great length. There was a mural that was going to be done for the University of Washington. The drama department, I guess. I don't—I have a reproduction of it someplace. I don't know whether the mural is still existing there or not. But I think that the research on the costumes and whatnot—we had books of all descriptions. Old Japanese prints and photographs of Japanese costumes. And in some cases, actual costumes. And the thing was supposed to be authentic. It was pretty informative rather than being creative.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: It wasn't a creative type of a mural. Of course, in those days very few murals

were. So—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

HARRY BONATH: —what it got to be was just a series, or a montage you might call it, or a grouping of rather long proportion, possibly five, six feet tall by four times that or five times that long. I think there were two of them. And there was oh, Cambodian and Japanese and Chinese, and people with sword dances and things like that. I suppose drama and dance in those countries are sort of intermingled.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

HARRY BONATH: So, while it was for the school of drama, I think most of these things were dance attitudes. I think that John Ashby Conway did the actual research on the things.

And sort of masterminded it.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: I don't know whether you talked to him?

DOROTHY BESTOR: I haven't, yet. I'm going to.

HARRY BONATH: And a man named Glenn Sheckles, who is since passed away, and myself did the small sketch on this in color. Then it was projected up onto large pieces and—onto a large canvas. And I think it was done in the Terminal Sales Building. And there a whole group worked on it. And how they arranged that I don't know, whether one person did the outlining and the faces and whatnot.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

HARRY BONATH: Because they're pretty much of varied abilities. Some of them were not too finished artists—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: —even to reproduce another person's work on a large size.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: And some of them were very confident. Would've been confident to have created the whole thing.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Who were these people? Do you know?

HARRY BONATH: That worked on it?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah, do you know any of their names?

HARRY BONATH: Well, no I don't. There were—

DOROTHY BESTOR: There weren't any of this group? [Indicating a photograph? -Ed]

HARRY BONATH: [Inaudible.] There was nobody there. The only name that comes to me is Tadama, who's been dead many years.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, I've heard of him.

[00:04:59]

HARRY BONATH: And other than that, we went down there a couple times and watched them. And other than that, I don't know who the people were. And as I say, that's about my only connection with the thing.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]

HARRY BONATH: There were—the pay was seemed to be in units of \$90. Whether that was—I think that was a monthly stipend. At any rate, I think there was a—I keep remembering the

figure of \$90.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, everyone—

HARRY BONATH: —the thing that we got—

DOROTHY BESTOR: —seems to remember \$90.

HARRY BONATH: —for a unit of work.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Or \$94, some people remember.

HARRY BONATH: Yeah, whatever it was. It was \$90 something.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

HARRY BONATH: And I don't remember whether I got one \$90 or two \$90 as it was kind of a lengthy thing.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: With a lot of little fiddly detail on the—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, how long did you work on it yourself?

HARRY BONATH: Oh, I don't know. It was one of those things that wasn't in any too big a hurry and I had parttime work at the time. So I wasn't—this was actually an assignment for them.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

HARRY BONATH: Because apparently there wasn't anybody that was on this thing for a full time that they thought could've worked on it.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Who gave you the assignment? Do you remember?

HARRY BONATH: Well, this man Sheckles seemed to have the thing originally. And we worked together on it.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]

HARRY BONATH: But it might've been Mr. Conway for all I know. But on the other hand, he was with the university.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

HARRY BONATH: So, where it came from I don't know. I don't think Inverarity was here at that particular time.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Was this before 1939, then?

HARRY BONATH: Oh, heavens yes.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh. '36, '37, '38? According to the correspondence, Mr. Inverarity came here in '36, I believe.

HARRY BONATH: Oh this was earlier than that. When was the Federal Art Project started?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, it seems to—

HARRY BONATH: I thought it was part of the WPA, which came during the Depression.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah. The Federal Art Project in general was started in 1933. And I haven't found exactly when it began out here, but I think '34.

HARRY BONATH: Oh. Well, this was pretty early in the game.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

HARRY BONATH: Possibly '35, thereabouts.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I did find out that—

HARRY BONATH: I didn't realize that the thing had run on that late.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, it ran on as the state—Washington statewide art project from 1939 on. There was a transition, and there's a great deal of correspondence about the change of sponsorship.

HARRY BONATH: You mean it was not a Federal Art Project, then?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, after that, after '39, the university was the sponsor and it was statewide. But it was still under the administrative supervision, and some of the protocol of the Washington, D.C. office.

HARRY BONATH: Yeah.

DOROTHY BESTOR: And correspondence still went to them. The state wasn't an autonomous unit.

HARRY BONATH: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What was Inverarity? Was he working for the government, or—?

DOROTHY BESTOR: He was the head of the statewide art project after it became a Washington state unit. But as he writes in 1939, for three years before that he had been the regional head of the federal project.

HARRY BONATH: Oh, so he was the—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah. So, there was [inaudible]—

HARRY BONATH: —original head of it then? And then he just went over on to—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

HARRY BONATH: —the state. Was he the first regional head of the federal?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Apparently so.

HARRY BONATH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOROTHY BESTOR: The—

HARRY BONATH: Did Mrs. Roosevelt have a connection, or was she just interested?

DOROTHY BESTOR: She was interested. As far as I know she didn't have any connection with the various regional workings out of it. There are letters from her encouraging the local activities and praising the exhibits. And she had something to do, I think, with the choice of the paintings that were ultimately sent to the White House.

HARRY BONATH: Of course, her daughter was living here then.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

HARRY BONATH: And he—the son-in-law was the publisher of *the Post-Intelligencer*.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: So, I imagine she got around this part of the country—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, I imagine so.

HARRY BONATH: —more than she did other places.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I imagine the PI has a good bit about it in his files. I haven't—

HARRY BONATH: Yeah.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —combed them yet.

HARRY BONATH: The paintings themselves on this easel-painting thing, I don't know. I guess you shouldn't call it easel painting, but for instance, Ransom Patrick here. He would—he had to turn in so many paintings a week. Well, he was a watercolor painter—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: —this was a real fine thing, because he could go out on the—pick the sunny days, few that they might be here. [Inaudible] paint them in the studio, but he preferred to paint outdoors. So, he painted most of these things out on the spot. And then he'd bring in possibly—well there was a quota that he had to bring in.

[00:10:03]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, I understand.

HARRY BONATH: If a man was fast, I guess he could paint them all in one day. Or he might work the entire week on them, but he had a quota of so many per week. Or so many a month. And then he got his pay, whatever the unit was for that type of work. And they were, of course, supposed to be common public buildings and hospitals and things like that. I haven't seen too many recently. There's still some down in the city hall, I believe. In the mayor's office.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, I must look there. I haven't—

HARRY BONATH: At least there was, the last time I was there. Pomeroy was mayor, which was probably before your time out here.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, it is.

HARRY BONATH: But there were some of them down there then.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

HARRY BONATH: And I remember the little gold brass plate that was—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: —on them.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

HARRY BONATH: And I think, the orthopedic, I think, is too new. I don't think there'd be any in there. But I think you might find some of them. Have you been to the public library?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

HARRY BONATH: Do they have any?

DOROTHY BESTOR: They don't have any actual paintings at the moment.

HARRY BONATH: Oh.

DOROTHY BESTOR: They have files of material about some of the paintings.

HARRY BONATH: But the paintings were hung in the library and they were around in quite a few places.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I'll check again there.

[Yes, they have paintings by Forkner, Maller, Shkurkin, Tadema, and Ziegler. They also have several other block prints, watercolors and sketches; for example, by Chester Cobb, by Elizabeth Colborne, Vera Engle, and Ernest Hurley. They have files of material about some of the painters, too. -Ed]

HARRY BONATH: The value of them today wouldn't be too great, because the quality in some cases wasn't too great to begin with. There were some mediocre and some fine.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

HARRY BONATH: And, but a 35-year-old painting, or a 30-year-old painting, is not any— unless it's by some very prominent artist. I suppose a Tobey in that age would be quite—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

HARRY BONATH: —a valuable thing to come across. But most of these were not—wouldn't be too valuable today. Although, it seemed to me there was a tremendous amount of stuff turned out by people like Graves. And I often wondered where some of these people, or where these paintings went. Because they were quite valuable—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

HARRY BONATH: —even at the time.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, there's several stories about that, and you may be able to add to what I've heard. But I've heard that a good many of them, some of them among the finished paintings and some just cartoons for larger—for murals, were destroyed when the project moved its location as it had to several times. And any—

HARRY BONATH: Destroyed on purpose?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Destroyed on purpose just because it was too much bulk.

HARRY BONATH: Oh, heavens.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Now, this may be a rumor, but it's been told to me by Bill Cumming and by Mr. Elshin.

HARRY BONATH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOROTHY BESTOR: And then others were sent to Washington, and seemed to have been sent back here. And there's a story, which I believe can be authenticated, that a lot of them turned up at St. Vincent de Paul's by an accident. No one is quite sure of the date of this. But Mr. Cumming heard over the radio, it may have been 1942, sometime along then, that there were a lot of federal artworks going for sale at St. Vincent de Paul's. And people who wanted bargains by well-known Northwest artists should rush down. And he rushed down and bought back some of his own works and some of Tobey's and Graves's.

HARRY BONATH: Really?

DOROTHY BESTOR: And the person in charge at St. Vincent de Paul didn't know exactly how they were dumped there. But they were just found in a bunch of stuff. And whether they were just left in a basement of some building here or whether they really went to Washington and came back, no one knows for sure.

HARRY BONATH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOROTHY BESTOR: And Mr. Elshin was pretty annoyed because some of his worst work that he had done, just to put in his time and which he didn't want to go out signed with his name, and he thought had been put in the wastebasket, got somehow back to St. Vincent de Paul. And people bought it up, and people have fifth grade Elshins around.

[They laugh.]

HARRY BONATH: Well, it's natural for a man to improve. I get the shudders when I go in people's houses and find a painting that I gave somebody for a wedding present 30 years ago.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: My inclination is to want to trade them for one that I've done recently. And yet, I think I—a person certainly should improve in 30 years. And I think Elshin has improved.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

HARRY BONATH: And I don't think a man should ever turn out inferior work, regardless of whether he's working for the Federal Art Project or who he's working for.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

HARRY BONATH: It's just a—you shouldn't do it. And I don't feel very sorry for Jake. [They laugh.] There was another story about the paintings down there at the Bailey Gatzert School that Groves told me one time—Wellington Groves—about these paintings are supposed to be hung in public buildings.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

HARRY BONATH: And in schools and things like that.

And Graves painting one, I guess it was about four feet by six feet. A tremendous big thing. But it was a dead mouse covering near the entire canvas with the blood running out of the mouse's mouth.

[00:15:11]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Why?

HARRY BONATH: Well, I don't know. He was on a mouse kick about that time before birds, I guess. And the things that he did later. And this thing couldn't conceivably have been hung anywhere. Today that thing might be quite a prized thing. I don't know whatever happened to that.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: But there was, some of these people were quite temperamental. And there—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

HARRY BONATH: —was no way to control them. But it was a marvelous thing, because these people—it was a stopgap for them to enable them to live in a fairly decent manner. In those days you could live pretty well for that amount of money. It enabled them to be able to continue painting. Some of them may have never have painted again.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: Possibly Jacob Elshin might have been forced to become a longshoreman. He was a pretty big, strong man—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

HARRY BONATH: —in those days. And maybe he would never have painted.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: I'm quite sure if Ransom Patrick hadn't of made it through those days, he'd been to sea before, he might've gone to sea and become a purser and maybe he would've become an officer on a ship or something like that. And a merchant marine. And as it was when he finished there, he went back to college. And, as I told you a while ago, has his doctor's degree now.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: So, I think that the thing was a real great thing for these people. As well as for the recipients for these murals and paintings. I think the thing's probably that last the longest are the murals in the post offices.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

HARRY BONATH: And things of that sort, in public buildings.

DOROTHY BESTOR: And perhaps the carvings over the—or the sculptures over the gates at the end of the toll bridges.

HARRY BONATH: Yeah.

DOROTHY BESTOR: And the public monuments and markers.

HARRY BONATH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOROTHY BESTOR: They did a good deal with historical markers.

HARRY BONATH: Do you have sculptors in this grouping here?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. I haven't talked with any of them yet.

HARRY BONATH: Of course, some of—most of the old-time sculptors are gone now. Dudley Pratt was around at that time.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: I think DuPen was a little young for that.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, I don't believe he was connected at that time.

HARRY BONATH: So, I don't know who they would be. There aren't very many.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, Fitzgerald was.

HARRY BONATH: Oh, Fitzgerald. Yes, that's right.

DOROTHY BESTOR: And apparently James Washington wasn't connected with it at all. I first had heard that he was.

HARRY BONATH: I don't think that he started doing anything until not that many years ago.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: He started—first he started painting, and then he got off into the sculpture angle.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Looking at that group picture again, do you remember anyone else?

HARRY BONATH: Well, I remember this fella, Julius Twohy, who was a full-blooded Indian. I went to life classes and sketch classes with him back in 1928.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, where did you take them?

HARRY BONATH: Well, it was in the Hoge Building annex. There was a studio with a skylight up there. It was called the Seattle Art Institute or some such name.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

HARRY BONATH: Although it wasn't really, it wasn't a private sort of thing.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: They just gave it a nice name. And quite a few of the people used to go down there. Not many of them around anymore.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: I think Ernie Norling probably would remember it. Was Bill Klamn on the Art Project?

DOROTHY BESTOR: K-L-A-M-N?

HARRY BONATH: Yeah.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I don't know for sure. Mr. Cumming mentioned him.

HARRY BONATH: He was a wood engraver at that time. He's retired now. He went to work at Boeing in later years. But he's completely retired. I think he's 72.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

HARRY BONATH: But—

DOROTHY BESTOR: And still in Seattle, is he?

HARRY BONATH: Yeah. He lives out in this area.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

HARRY BONATH: But Bill Cumming I know. Then there's this Correll, I don't know if he's—

DOROTHY BESTOR: What's happened to him? I can't seem to find anything about him.

HARRY BONATH: There was one man in this group that was working on a project. I don't know whatever happened to this, but this sounded like one of the greatest things I'd ever heard of. And I never saw a—I've never seen any of the originals or a book published. Whether it was ever published, I don't know. But there was a couple people in this group at the Bailey Gatzert School who used to do very painstaking things. You've seen color photography that you'd swear it's so real that nothing could improve on that.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

HARRY BONATH: Well, these people could do work that was tighter than color photography.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

HARRY BONATH: And much more informative—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: —because it was interpreted and you weren't governed by the light and the mechanics of the camera.

[00:20:03]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: And their project here was piggy banks. Not necessarily banks with pigs, but banks where, if you dropped in a penny, a baseball batter would swing his bat. And if you dropped in a penny in another one, a little character, possibly a caricature of an Irishman would dance a little jig. This formed entertainment for children who'd put all their money in there.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: Because they'd see the stuff. And these things were made out of cast iron.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

HARRY BONATH: And of course, the paint had begun to—they were painted cast iron. The paint would crumble off. Where they got these things from, I'll never know either. But they had the same quality that these colored boys that have a ring in their hand—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

HARRY BONATH: —that they used to use for hitching post. They're gaily painted.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

HARRY BONATH: And this particular group in Washington had this particular thing on these banks. And I understood that, in other parts of the country, there would be possibly doorknockers or doorknobs.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: And possibly in another part of the country it would be, oh, say for instance watches or clocks.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: And then the composite of this would make many volumes or a huge thick volume, and it would become a record of Americana.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, the *Index of American Design*?

HARRY BONATH: Well, I don't know what they called it or what it was for. It was for some sort of a record of this early—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, I'm pretty sure that was the *Index of American Design*.

HARRY BONATH: —pieces of art. But I don't know—yeah. Was that ever completed or finished? Or—

DOROTHY BESTOR: It wasn't brought up to date, but a good many years of it were completed.

HARRY BONATH: Yeah. That was—but this Correll, I don't know. As I say, some of these people might've even been here sort of in an interim sort of a deal.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: And they may have been from Ellensburg or some other place.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

HARRY BONATH: And they may be back out of the state or gone or something.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: I don't recognize any of these ladies, either.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Do you think there's much contact between the Federal Art Project and the other things, like the Writers' Project and the Theater Project? Did people feel they were all part of one movement?

HARRY BONATH: Well, I don't know. Just from my knowledge of it and being around, I used to go up to this Bailey Gatzert School quite a bit. Because Groves was a good friend of mine and I used to go up to see what they were doing.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: But I'd never felt any connection with the thing. I'd known there was a Writers' Project, but it was years later when I needed to do some research on different parts of the state of Washington was the first time that I ever actually came in firsthand contact with one of the books.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

HARRY BONATH: But I knew that the thing was going on. And as far as the Theatre Project is concerned, that couldn't have been very much of a thing around here. I presume the university had the Showboat, or some form of—one called the Penthouse, which was downtown in the district there.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

HARRY BONATH: They had a few things like that going. They always have been pretty heavy on drama out here. But whether that had any connection, I don't remember any outside little theaters or anything of that sort.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: Well, I don't say that it didn't go on.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah. I believe they put on a couple of Hallie Flanagan's plays.

HARRY BONATH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Around [inaudible].

HARRY BONATH: Well, that's quite possible.

DOROTHY BESTOR: But there wasn't the sense that they're all part of one movement?

HARRY BONATH: No, they were definitely—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

HARRY BONATH: —unrelated as far as my knowledge would be.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Do you think people reacted to this Project in terms of whether or not they were for the New Deal? Or was it strictly on its merits or demerits?

HARRY BONATH: Well, the people that I knew were all people who had felt the Depression. And there may have been people in the upper financial categories [laughs] who looked down on this sort of thing and thought it was some sort of Roosevelt boondoggling sort of a thing.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

HARRY BONATH: But I didn't know any of that type of people. All the people I knew thought this was fine and was a sincere effort.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: And particularly all these people—there may have been a few goof-offs in there. There would be in a crowd that big—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

HARRY BONATH: —if I worked for the telephone company.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Sure.

HARRY BONATH: But on the whole, it was pretty well thought of and a very fine thing. I don't remember any criticism. Although, as I say, I didn't mingle with the upper crust.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

HARRY BONATH: [Laughs.] And so, I don't know what the other people who were of that type were saying.

[00:25:01]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. There—

HARRY BONATH: They used to make jokes about leaning on shovels.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

HARRY BONATH: And one WPA worker was mad at the other one because he had two shovels to lean on [DOROTHY BESTOR laughs] and all that sort of thing. But there was nothing, none of that type of talk going on. I didn't remember one person who ever thought he had a slick deal here [inaudible].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, good. Good. There are suggestions currently for possible government intervention in the arts. I read in the paper the other day a plea for government aid to the performing arts. And then in *the Christian Science Monitor*, a couple of weeks ago there was a suggestion that in Johnson's Appalachia Project, there be a new Federal Art Project incorporated. Do you think that anything like this could work again? Or should work again? Or should be a continuing thing? Or not?

HARRY BONATH: Oh, I think possibly at the student level or something of that sort. But as far as encouraging or helping financially artists nowadays, I don't think the artists have ever had it so good.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: People like Andy Warhol paint great big Campbell soup cans and—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, don't mention him.

HARRY BONATH: —and they get—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Isn't he terrible?

HARRY BONATH: —\$25,000 for it. If you just read some of the reviews of some of the New York shows, they're—the types of paintings that there are and the sales, or even looked at it on a local level. Of people who are pretty competent, have been painting all their life. All of a sudden now they're making \$25,000 a year for their paintings. And people like Tobey don't like to sell them because the taxes are so high.

That doesn't prevail all the way down to the lower level, but in these days of the Federal Art Project, it did, all levels were hurt. Nobody made any money, it didn't matter who you were. I don't know whether Picasso was doing [laughs] very well at that time or not. But I can't quite see how it work now. And then who would they help? It would become a matter of influencing this school or that school.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

HARRY BONATH: And these days, everybody was working pretty much along toward the same aim.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: Some were working in different manners or styles, but there'd be a tremendous, most tremendous upheaval and criticism that you can possibly imagine. I think—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, there would.

HARRY BONATH: —if the government started furthering some of the types of things that they're doing now. And some of it even reaches the stage of being pornography. Just let the government get involved in some of that type of work and see what happens. I just can't see. And then if they do it on a conservative basis, well then, they would become art critics like Khrushchev.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

HARRY BONATH: Who says, No, you can't go modern.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARRY BONATH: So, I don't know, it could be done, but I would hate to have any part of it. It would have to be a very wise man who would administer it.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, it would.

HARRY BONATH: I think.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, I think you're right. Well, thanks very much. Anything else you have thought of or want to get on the record?

HARRY BONATH: Well, no. I can't think of anything else. I can give you Groves' phone number. And I'm quite sure that he can probably be of some—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, fine. I'd love to have that. Thank you loads.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]