



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Louis
Bunce, 1965 October 29

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Louis Bunce on October 29, 1965. The interview took place at the interviewer's home in Seattle, Washington, and was conducted by Dorothy K. 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. 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: Certainly don't.

LOUIS BUNCE: Now here's when Carl was director.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: Yeah. They say Carl and Guy Anderson was there, huh?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, he was there for, I believe a year. I—

LOUIS BUNCE: Yeah, Inverarity was state director.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: I had forgotten that until you mentioned the other day.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: You know those are a very interesting aren't they. [Laughs.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, why don't we get—

LOUIS BUNCE: All this ancient history. [Laughs.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: But it's not ancient history. It's part of the living past.

LOUIS BUNCE: Oh.

[They laugh.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: You just read the Billington article. You agree, I presume, that this all still does have bearing on the American scene? But anyway—

LOUIS BUNCE: Oh, very much so. The Project in Portland was probably a little different than here.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, tell me about how—

LOUIS BUNCE: I didn't, I wasn't on the Project—

DOROTHY BESTOR: I know.

LOUIS BUNCE: But very briefly.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: In Portland.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: As a matter of fact, the reason I couldn't get on, I couldn't qualify for the relief status—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: —at that moment. Then I did get a non-relief, what do you call it?

DOROTHY BESTOR: You were one of those non-quota people.

LOUIS BUNCE: Non-quota people.

DOROTHY BESTOR: You were certified as being needed, but your professional qualifications and your economic status were really better than those of—

LOUIS BUNCE: Supposedly, better.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —people on it. Supposedly.

LOUIS BUNCE: I thought they were pretty bad. [They laugh.] Anyway, I couldn't qualify for the moment, so I did get on this quota.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And started in at the Salem Art Center which had a, was just being established. And I went down there as an instructor.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And later became assistant director of the project.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah. I have you down as being the assistant director from '37, '38. So, you must have gone down before that.

LOUIS BUNCE: I went down a little bit before that apparently.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Maybe we should go back for a moment and get the chronology running from the beginning. After you studied with the Art Students League—

LOUIS BUNCE: Yeah.

DOROTHY BESTOR: In New York. Then you came back to the Northwest.

LOUIS BUNCE: To the Northwest, yeah.

DOROTHY BESTOR: And along in '36 or ['3]7 you got the Treasury Department Mural Award. For the—

LOUIS BUNCE: Oh, that's right. I had forgotten that.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —federal building mural at Grants Pass, which I've seen.

LOUIS BUNCE: Yes.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Incidentally, long before I knew I was going to do anything about this. Very impressive.

LOUIS BUNCE: There were two murals in that building, the federal building—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: —in Grants Pass.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: And Eric Lamade had the other panel.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

LOUIS BUNCE: He was a Portland artist.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: He's still around Portland, I believe. I haven't seen him for many years.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And we were quite close friends at that moment and worked together quite well. So that—and we kind of entered this competition together.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, I see, didn't know that.

LOUIS BUNCE: Did that, and finally we got it. I also worked at another mural project with John Ballator.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, where was that?

LOUIS BUNCE: Now that's in St. Johns' post office. And this came under the—

DOROTHY BESTOR: St. Johns, Oregon?

LOUIS BUNCE: St. Johns. It's a suburb of Portland.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

LOUIS BUNCE: It's a district of Portland.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, I see, didn't know that.

LOUIS BUNCE: And that was under the building program that the government had.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: At that time.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And as you recall, there was one percent of the building funds put aside for decoration.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

LOUIS BUNCE: So, this was also under the Treasury department.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

LOUIS BUNCE: John Ballator was an artist from Portland that had studied at Yale and had returned to Portland.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Incidentally how was that spelled? B-A—

LOUIS BUNCE: B-A-L-L-A-T-O-R.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: And he had this commission, which was under the Treasury Art Project. And he hired, he was allowed to hire two artists under the Treasury Relief Art Project—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: It was called TRAP.

DOROTHY BESTOR: TRAP, yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: And actually, that was my first experience in doing any mural work.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

LOUIS BUNCE: And both, Lamade and I were on that project.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And we learned a lot from each other.

DOROTHY BESTOR: You did?

[00:05:01]

LOUIS BUNCE: We really did. Because John had graduated from Yale and had quite an extensive background in mural painting. that he had received at school.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: And he introduced us to tempera techniques, and actually it was like a little school.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, you actually assisted him, you did parts of the mural?

LOUIS BUNCE: We did parts of the mural and we painted on it.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And there's some sections that both—all three of us painted.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

LOUIS BUNCE: John was particularly good with a certain kind of figure.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And you can see his stamp through it. And you can almost pick out the other sections that were done by both Lamade and myself. There are self-portraits in there. They're all figures that had something to do with the community.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: That little community of St. Johns. And there are two large panels in that post office—

DOROTHY BESTOR: I'd like to see that. What—it was in a post office in St. Johns?

LOUIS BUNCE: Mm-hmm [affirmative], post office. I'm sure it's still up. Now this is in egg tempera medium.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: And that's, also that one in Grants Pass is egg tempera by the way. So that occupied us for about a year, I guess.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: I can't remember what the commission was. It wasn't too much, but it was a lot in relation to the times.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: It meant quite a bit of money in your pocket. And the experience—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And the experience—

LOUIS BUNCE: And the experience was something. I think this is very important, for everyone felt you were really using your talents in a new way.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I think that in as far as you feel it's true is one of the most important things about the project.

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, to me I found it very, very important to myself. Then as we say, later came the, the job at Salem Art Center.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: Now the director was a man by the name of Charles Clear who had come out here from Florida.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

LOUIS BUNCE: And he had had experience both in—as a painter and as an administrator in an art center in Florida. Now, I'm not sure—

DOROTHY BESTOR: A government art center?

LOUIS BUNCE: I'm not sure whether that was a government art center or not.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Is that C-L-E-A-R?

LOUIS BUNCE: C-L-E-A-R. Charles Val Clear.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I see. Was he sent on one of those exchange—

LOUIS BUNCE: No.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —things you mentioned?

LOUIS BUNCE: No, he was hired to—to start this art center and it wasn't the exchange basis. He was there for a number of years.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I see.

LOUIS BUNCE: He was a very lively guy. He had a lot of imagination, lots of drive. And he was very good in a community in that he was able to talk to people. To get them enthusiastic and to get the support of the community which was necessary to establish that.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Very, very necessary.

LOUIS BUNCE: So, we were housed in a portion of the basement area of the old high school in Salem.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh?

LOUIS BUNCE: And WPA labor did the galleries over the classrooms.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And we had a nice space there, a beautiful space. We had two good exhibition halls and about as I recall, about four good classrooms.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, that's marvelous. That's much bigger than they had in Seattle when they were in Seattle.

LOUIS BUNCE: Oh yeah, excellent, really an excellent—it had a street entrance.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

LOUIS BUNCE: And were able to put some signs outside, and a bulletin board where you could announce new shows.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Great, and then that was your permanent home, the permanent home of the arts center, all the time it was there?

LOUIS BUNCE: Of the arts—through the whole time it was in existence. Of course, this led later to the Salem Art Association.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: Which is still existent.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: We had lots of classes going for very young people and for adults. Both day and evening programs. There were good traveling shows came through, which I think all of the centers participated in—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: —this traveling program.

DOROTHY BESTOR: It was a nationwide program of traveling shows.

LOUIS BUNCE: Yes.

DOROTHY BESTOR: And then Mr. Inverarity started a northwest regional circuit of traveling shows too.

LOUIS BUNCE: Of traveling shows, mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOROTHY BESTOR: I don't know whether Oregon got in on those or not either.

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, I don't recall, we had—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oregon and Idaho and Washington.

LOUIS BUNCE: We did have lots of shows that came from the East.

DOROTHY BESTOR: And some came up from California.

LOUIS BUNCE: Some from California. I remember some print shows that came up from California. And again, I thought this was a good program because it allowed things to be seen in a community that they normally wouldn't see.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And there was always a freshness about it.

DOROTHY K BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And along with local shows of painters in the immediate area, it gave kind of a quite a rich program.

[00:10:17]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, it would. Was Salem as a community already interested in art, were there painters there?

LOUIS BUNCE: There were not so many painters there. Actually, there were very few. But out of that project a number of young people had a first chance of learning to paint. And a number are still very active.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Do you remember the names of any?

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, let's see. There was one boy that went to New York. I can't recall his name now. I know that he's—for many years he painted. Ames was his name, his last name.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

LOUIS BUNCE: Can't get his first name now. Anyway, he worked in the arts, and he still is.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: He has a design shop in New York.

DOROTHY BESTOR: The name Clifford Ames comes to mind.

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, Clifford Gleason. Now Clifford Gleason is a painter. He had his first training there at the art center. Later went on to the Museum Art School and is still an active painter. I think he had a show just this past year at the Portland Art Museum.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Did you have—two of the kinds of problems that plagued some of the art centers, that is local criticism based on anti-New Deal sentiment—

LOUIS BUNCE: We didn't experience too much of that in Salem.

DOROTHY BESTOR: You didn't?

LOUIS BUNCE: No, not very much.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Good.

LOUIS BUNCE: I think it was due somewhat to Mr. Clear's ability to gather the community around this project. We had a very good response, really.

DOROTHY BESTOR: You did. Well, that's fine.

LOUIS BUNCE: We also did some work with the public schools, which I thought was very interesting. We did some murals for a couple of public schools. One was in the Bush School in which—the way we handled it, we had the children of the Bush School involved by suggesting what they would like as a subject matter.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And it finally came down that we were going to do two problems involved around *Alice in Wonderland* and around *Arabian Nights*.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

LOUIS BUNCE: As the subject matter for the library. Well, this became a project for the advanced painting class at the center.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Very nice.

LOUIS BUNCE: And the whole class did sketches. And out of those sketches the end collaboration with the school, that is the Bush Public School, two of the designs were chosen. And then the whole class worked on the project. And we did them in tempera and then we placed them in the library. And I'm sure they're still there.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Wonderful.

LOUIS BUNCE: You might look into those.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I will.

LOUIS BUNCE: Because they're quite successful. Now those are—that's a school project.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, that's the Bush Public School?

LOUIS BUNCE: At the Bush Grade School, in Salem.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative], yep.

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, this kind of community relationship was quite excellent. You can see I—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, that's fine.

LOUIS BUNCE: —they found this was very meaningful for them.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And as a result, we had very good relations.

DOROTHY BESTOR: And the newspapers were willing to give you good publicity?

LOUIS BUNCE: The newspapers gave us good publicity all the time, excellent publicity.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mr. Fitzgerald and again, Mrs. Truman Reed [ph] who was on the board over in Spokane, have both been telling me recently that over in Spokane, no matter what

gorgeous, splashy show the art center would have, and how much publicity they sent in, they'd just get a little bare factual notice of one sentence. Presumably because the newspapers were heavily Republican and looked askance—

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, I think Salem was pretty Republican.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I thought it was.

LOUIS BUNCE: But somewhere we broke that.

DOROTHY BESTOR: You broke it.

LOUIS BUNCE: Where we were able to get in the—oh every little opening for instance was pretty well written up.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: In the society column as an event.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Very good.

LOUIS BUNCE: And you get good people to come in and pour tea. So, we had good public relations. And the classes were very well attended and very successful. We had about three or four instructors for children's classes, for adult classes, and it was an excellent program as far as I was concerned.

[00:15:10]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Fine. Each class would presumably meet weekly or more than that?

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, we even had—like the advanced painting class was set up so that the students attended every day.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, wonderful.

LOUIS BUNCE: And so, they got—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: —a lot of studio work in.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Then that took their work out of the well-meaning amateur class.

LOUIS BUNCE: That's right, mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOROTHY BESTOR: To some extent.

LOUIS BUNCE: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative]. But there were many amateurs who—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: —came to some of the evening classes.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: Now, you mentioned about the exchange idea.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, after the project had been established, then the WPA decided that there were a number of people on some of the bigger projects, that's just the New York project—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: —that they might be shipped to other parts of America —for a short period of time, like say, six months—or I think it was usually around six months. Well, we, at Salem we had—let's see there was a fellow by the name of Tom Danaher, who was a painter.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: Another painter by name of Harry Bowden, who now lives in San Francisco. And is a very good painter. And a young lady by the name of Jean Houston.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

LOUIS BUNCE: And they came out as instructors.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And as visiting artists. Tom Danaher was particularly good with children, and he worked with children on a large mural project. Which each child did a section of it and he was very good—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Where was that? Was that in a school too?

LOUIS BUNCE: It was never put in a school, but it was just a big project that he involved the kids in. And they came, as I recall, a couple of times a week and worked with Tom. Bowden was one of the painters who dealt with adults better. Jean Houston was in crafts and design. This was a—everyone felt this was very enriching for the community and also for the health of the center.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: To get new people in.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Were all these—

LOUIS BUNCE: There was also, oh, there was one other, a gal by the name of Helen Blumenstiel.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

LOUIS BUNCE: And Helen Blumenstiel is still in Oregon. I think she's around the Salem area. Now some of these people, although they only came out, on let's say a six month's basis, many elected to stay in the communities that they came to. They found it was a little better life for them.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: And she was one that did stay in Oregon.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Were these three or four—

LOUIS BUNCE: [Coughs.] Excuse me.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —people all there simultaneously or were they a series?

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, Mr. Bowden came a little later. The first people came were Ms. Houston, Tom Danaher, and Ms. Blumenstiel. And then Bowden came a little later. Well, that was during my term there.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: Now I think there were probably other people came later but during the term I was there, those are the people involved. Well, this meant a growth of the Project. Other experiences, other talents coming in.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: And again, it was—the community welcomed them, really welcomed them.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Good, I suppose you all had a variety of styles. You weren't—

LOUIS BUNCE: That's right.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —all doing social realism—

LOUIS BUNCE: No.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —or any of the other official WPA stuff? [Cross talk.]

LOUIS BUNCE: No, there was none of this forced on a person. Of course, your interest—propaganda was with you.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: And you tried to do something that you thought would meet people. Now it was a little tighter on that other project you mentioned.

DOROTHY BESTOR: On the mural project.

LOUIS BUNCE: Yes.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: They wanted something that was recognizable.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh. This was the first mural—

LOUIS BUNCE: The Treasury.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah, the Treasury one, in '36, '37.

LOUIS BUNCE: And they tended to—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Tell me more about that.

LOUIS BUNCE: They tended to tell you a little bit about what you should do.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Did they dictate more in the—

LOUIS BUNCE: The presentation.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Subject matter or the treatment?

LOUIS BUNCE: Subject matter, some, mm-hmm [affirmative]. They wanted to either have a historical story about it or a social realism attitude. But they didn't say, well you can do this or get out. But they suggested it.

[00:20:10]

DOROTHY BESTOR: What would have happened if you would've suddenly done something wildly explosive and experimental that just struck your own fancy?

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, I probably wasn't ready for it myself. [They laugh.] So, but, yet you felt you were doing something.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: And it was an experience for you, and you were meeting people on a different term than you had.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: Because there was very little chance to show your work during those days. No one really looked at your work except a few friends. There was no opportunity to show.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Sure.

LOUIS BUNCE: Like there is now.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: The museum did have shows. But—like an annual, and some open shows. But there were no galleries to speak of in those days.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Certainly not around—

LOUIS BUNCE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oregon or very few in Oregon.

LOUIS BUNCE: Very few, very few. Well anyway, the whole Project I though was very healthy and very needed.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Wonderful.

LOUIS BUNCE: And I think the community benefited tremendously from this endeavor. And many of those people I'm sure recall it with a great deal of nostalgia and interest.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I was mentioning two difficulties that some of the other projects had. One you say you didn't have, that is community relations. The other was budgetary difficulties. Up here, when they sent shows around, they continually seemed to be running out of, just small amounts of money to pay the express charges to send it on to the next place. Did you have a pretty liberal budget down there?

LOUIS BUNCE: Yeah, we had a pretty good budget there actually.

DOROTHY BESTOR: The community matched the—

LOUIS BUNCE: The community matched funds with the government, I think that was the ruling.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: And they did, and it carried on quite well.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Who was responsible for getting the community? Was this again the—

LOUIS BUNCE: Clear had a great deal to do with it.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Clear? And then you probably did.

LOUIS BUNCE: Yes, and then I had to also Do a little talking around and—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And—but it didn't seem too difficult at that time. After I left the Salem project, I went back to Portland and again was on a non-relief status for just a short while on the easel project.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh?

LOUIS BUNCE: Now the easel project is, as you probably know—is just—you painted.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: And those paintings are—

DOROTHY BESTOR: You painted what you wanted to in your own studio.

LOUIS BUNCE: What you wanted to do, and those paintings were turned over to the Project. And they allocated them to tax supported institutions.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right, what happened to yours, do you know?

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, the museum has a number of them and in turn I think they loaned them to some agencies around the Portland area. I haven't tried to keep track of them actually because some have disappeared entirely. I don't know what happened to them.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Perhaps somewhere in Washington? People could put in requests—

LOUIS BUNCE: Yes. I think a few [cross talk] things went out of the state.

DOROTHY BESTOR: If yours traveled around in shows.

LOUIS BUNCE: Though I was never given a list of those things, where they really went.

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

LOUIS BUNCE: I haven't bothered to try and trace them down. Sometimes I get a little curious about—you remember something you did.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, wonder where it is now.

LOUIS BUNCE: Wonder where that is.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: [Coughs.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: I think they meant to keep much more comprehensive records than they did.

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, they had—they couldn't allocate everything.

DOROTHY BESTOR: No.

LOUIS BUNCE: There was so much produced and particularly in the East. You know, the New York project was huge.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, it was.

LOUIS BUNCE: And there was so many things produced and a lot of that was just put into warehouses and later was sold just as junk. There was a big scandal about that.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, up here you probably heard there was a big scandal.

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, I hadn't heard about that here.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, some of the things that were done up here were, oh, stored as you say and mislaid. There's one mural of Kenneth Callahan's that he did for the Treasury Project that was in the veteran's hospital. And then was taken down and now it's stored in the basement of some building. He doesn't know where. No one knows quite where.

But the other kind of scandal, the thing that people make more fuss about here is that somehow a great consignment of paintings done on the various projects appeared nine or 10 years ago at St. Vincent de Paul.

[00:25:18]

LOUIS BUNCE: Oh?

DOROTHY BESTOR: And it was announced on the radio that there were paintings by such and such noted Northwest artists for sale at moderate prices. And lots of people, including the artists' friends went down and either bought them or looked at them and decided this wasn't after all their best work and didn't buy them. But on the whole, people tended to snap them up, but wondering how in the world they got to St. Vincent's.

LOUIS BUNCE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Whether they were sent back from Washington D.C., or whether they'd been here and were just thrown out. St. Vincent's didn't know, nobody knew.

LOUIS BUNCE: They never found out?

DOROTHY BESTOR: No. So, Fay Chong, who was on the Project, has a very nice Morris Graves that he bought. At that sale.

LOUIS BUNCE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOROTHY BESTOR: But as you say, there was so much that [cross talk] you couldn't track

down.

LOUIS BUNCE: Well in New York—I wasn't around New York when they finally sold all these works. But I remember that it was quite a scandal there because I think they were baled up, you know, oil paintings just baled up and sold as junk.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, heavens.

LOUIS BUNCE: And many of the artists and the dealers in New York tried to rescue a lot of these things. And I think did succeed. But many, I'm sure, disappeared entirely. I don't know how anyone would ever trace those things down. I mean, that's alright. [They laugh.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, it seems an awful waste.

LOUIS BUNCE: You know, the Oregon project didn't have as large of—well like, a mural division or an easel division.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

LOUIS BUNCE: Or a printing division I think as they did in Washington.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: A great amount of the project there was around the Timberline Lodge.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: And Margery Hoffman Smith was director then and that was a great interest of hers.

DOROTHY BESTOR: She was director of the—

LOUIS BUNCE: Of the project.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Of the project.

LOUIS BUNCE: So, she kind of pushed many of the artists that were on the Project into that project. In which they did work for the Lodge. It was work done under the American Index of Design.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: Of paintings of flowers, and these were put in the rooms. Framed and put in many of the rooms there. C.S. Price did some murals that were for the Timberline Lodge. I think a couple of them were refused and the museum has one of those murals now.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

LOUIS BUNCE: It's hanging in the library.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, how about that.

LOUIS BUNCE: At that time Mr. Price was not as well known.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: And probably regretted their decision at that time.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: In relation to the big reputation he achieved later. Mr. Lynch, Douglas Lynch, did a mural in the coffee shop there in the lodge. I believe it's still up. Many craftsmen worked on that project. All the newel posts, for instance, were hand carved and there's lots of wrought iron. So, it involved many, many people and many crafts in that project.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Is most of that stuff still there?

LOUIS BUNCE: Oh yes, much of it is still there.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I thought they had a fire that damaged some of it.

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, I think there was some damage but much of it is still there.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Good. Let's see, you said several things that opened up areas I wanted to ask you about. About the crafts, were they done so that the artists respected them? Or were they thought of as busy work? Sometimes they—

LOUIS BUNCE: Well—

DOROTHY BESTOR: In the projects there's some very good things done in crafts.

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, there were some very good things done there. I think Mrs. Smith, you know, she had a very good knowledge of this area and the artists respected her. And I think they tried to do—and they did get involved and they did a very excellent job. Lots of the weaving for instance, it was all hand loomed materials for that part.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Did they use Northwest designs such as Indian things or?

LOUIS BUNCE: Not in every case. I think, of course now I didn't have, I was never on that project.

[00:30:03]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: So, I don't have a first-hand knowledge of it. Except what I remember and seen at that time. But a lot of those original designs—I think she encouraged them to express themselves in all areas. As a result, I think it was a very good Project.

DOROTHY BESTOR: One thing you said, there weren't so many parts of the project in Oregon as in Washington. It wasn't so complicated apparently. Perhaps that was—

LOUIS BUNCE: Well—

DOROTHY BESTOR: —one of the reasons for its working so harmoniously?

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, probably so and don't I think there were as many artists in Oregon as in some of the other states. It was a small project.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: And—although they did have—as I said I was on that easel project for a short while.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah, how long about were you?

LOUIS BUNCE: Oh, I can't remember now, maybe—it wasn't very long—just a very few months.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Who else was on it do you know when you were on?

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, let's see. I really can't recall. I think that Lamade was one, that I had mentioned before. Price probably did some things just, I'm sure he did some straight easel painting. Oh, I remember, Darrel Austin.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

LOUIS BUNCE: Now Darrel Austin was a resident of Portland at that time. Later he went to New York and has been there since. And achieved quite a bit of fame as a painter. But he worked on the easel project. Sure, he worked also on the Timberline project. His wife, Margaret Helser, also did some work. She since that time became quite well known as an illustrator for children's books. Let's see, Ed Sewall was another name I recall.

DOROTHY BESTOR: S-E-W-E-L?

LOUIS BUNCE: S-E-W-A—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

LOUIS BUNCE: S-E-W-A-L-L. Yes, Sewall. Heaney. Charles Heaney would be another. Runquist brothers, you've probably heard of Arthur and Albert Runquist.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I'm sorry, I haven't.

LOUIS BUNCE: Now they did some easel painting, they also did a mural which is at the University of Oregon.

DOROTHY BESTOR: At Eugene or at the branch in Portland?

LOUIS BUNCE: At Eugene. There wasn't a branch in Portland then.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, I see.

LOUIS BUNCE: That's pretty recent.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh. You found the months on the easel project satisfactory, then? You weren't bossed too much, or—?

LOUIS BUNCE: No, not at all.

DOROTHY BESTOR: You were on what they called a peer remote control, you could just do your own—

LOUIS BUNCE: Do your own, mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOROTHY BESTOR: —stuff and take—

LOUIS BUNCE: And that's the way it operated pretty much everywhere.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, here they did have a studio for a while.

LOUIS BUNCE: Oh, did they?

DOROTHY BESTOR: And—

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, you worked in your own studio, under this.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And then who was your supervisor or boss?

LOUIS BUNCE: Mrs. Smith was the—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mrs. Smith.

LOUIS BUNCE: Yes, she was the supervisor.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. In Oregon, then what did they have besides they had the art center at Salem, they had the easel project in Portland, they had the Timberline Lodge project, did they have any other art centers or exhibition galleries—

LOUIS BUNCE: No.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Or anything else around the state?

LOUIS BUNCE: No, no that was about it. So, it was relatively small.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: I'm sure much smaller than Washington.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you happen to come up to Seattle much during that time and see what they were doing here?

LOUIS BUNCE: Not too much, no. It was a little difficult to travel at that time.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, yes, it certainly was.

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, you know, I knew Kenneth Callahan during those days and Graves and later, Carl Morris and [inaudible]. But I knew Kenneth perhaps as well as any of the people that were here. Then later, as I said, I was there about six months probably under the easel project and then I went to New York.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, I want to hear about that.

LOUIS BUNCE: Decided to get out of Oregon.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Before we start the next paragraph, why don't I see if the coffee's still—

LOUIS BUNCE: Okay.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Would you like some coffee?

LOUIS BUNCE: Please.

DOROTHY BESTOR: We can turn these off if you want.

[00:35:00]

[Recording stops, restarts.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Now, were about to get you to New York and you don't remember how you got there. But you remember why presumably.

LOUIS BUNCE: [Laughs.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: You'd had enough of the Northwest, for the time being.

LOUIS BUNCE: I went by bus, that's right. [DOROTHY BESTOR laughs.] Which was a long trip then. It seemed endless.

DOROTHY BESTOR: It must have been what, 10 days?

LOUIS BUNCE: Both my wife and myself arrived there not feeling too healthy. [Laughs.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: I should think so. Did you have this post before you went there?

LOUIS BUNCE: No, no. No, we just—I quit the project here.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: And I think we decided that we wanted to test our wings somewhere else.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And so, we just left with very little, we just took a chance.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Your wife was a painter too?

LOUIS BUNCE: No. No, she was not a painter. So, we just took a chance, and we went to New York. [Coughs.] I knew numerous people there because I had lived in New York before.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah, mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And had many friends there. So, we had to get on the roles there in New York, which was quite a problem, believe me.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, but wouldn't you have had to be a resident there for a while, or?

LOUIS BUNCE: Yes.

DOROTHY BESTOR: They let you just float around? [Laughs.]

LOUIS BUNCE: Yes, you're supposed to be.

DOROTHY BESTOR: But there were ways to get around it?

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, there were some ways of getting around it. Anyway, we finally, I think after a number of months did qualify for home relief.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And eventually I got on the Project. And the Project—well, you had to take what was open, of course.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: You didn't have a choice actually except they tried to place you on what you were qualified for, what they felt you were qualified for. It was kind of a funny set up there in some ways.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Who actually were the 'they' who decided what you were qualified for? [Cross talk.]

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, first, you see, you had to qualify for relief which gave you a little security for the moment.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: Then you had to wait until an opening came. Well theoretically you were supposed to accept any job that came along in WPA, it didn't matter what. I mean, whether it be digging a ditch or what.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Being an electrician or digging a ditch or anything.

LOUIS BUNCE: That's right. But if you wanted to get on the Art Project you just had to insist that that was what you were qualified to do, [Dog barking; continues through end of recording] that you were not a very good ditch digger. So, you waited until an opening came. Which meant going up to Columbus Circle and checking to see if something was open or you could check through the Art Project itself.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And they might refer you up to Columbus Circle, to go through the hiring process, you see.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative], yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: So—and they had a little qualification bit there which I thought was kind of funny.

DOROTHY BESTOR: What was it?

LOUIS BUNCE: They put you into a little room and said, Now you say you are an artist, now here's a drawing board and a piece of paper [DOROTHY BESTOR laughs] and a pencil, now draw. [They laugh.] Well, what do you want me to draw? Well, we want you to draw two or three figures in action and if you pass that test, then you're all right. [They laugh.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Really?

LOUIS BUNCE: Now that was their qualifying thing. This had nothing to do with the Art Project itself. This was just the hiring hall.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah, so this was some completely non-artistic person—

LOUIS BUNCE: That's right.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —who looked at this in a literal way and—

LOUIS BUNCE: Mm-hmm [affirmative] I remember I did some children skipping rope. I thought maybe this would be action for them and so they okay-ed me. [They laugh.] And I was immediately put on the roles and then I talked to some of the supervisors at King Street.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And well, got on the mural project.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

LOUIS BUNCE: Now, you were assigned specific jobs that you might design, for but there was no guarantee that those works would actually be put up.

[00:40:01]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh?

LOUIS BUNCE: What they tried to do in many cases was, the artist would be assigned to a job that they felt was needed and that there was some interest in.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And then you prepared sketches and if the agency that you were designing for okay-ed it, or got the necessary funds—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: —to pay for this, you see, then the job might go through but—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Otherwise, your sketches went down the drain.

LOUIS BUNCE: That's right and many cases this is exactly what happened, all the time.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Wasn't that a rather frustrating way of life, then?

LOUIS BUNCE: It was quite frustrating, yes, very frustrating. Because you do a design, and you also furnish maybe a detail of it, full scale.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

LOUIS BUNCE: And this involved a lot of work.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Sure.

LOUIS BUNCE: And a lot of research. And—but you weren't guaranteed that it was going to go out. And none of the projects I did there, actually ever got on the wall.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, how sad.

LOUIS BUNCE: None of them.

DOROTHY BESTOR: What exactly were the sketches then—

LOUIS BUNCE: I don't know.

DOROTHY BESTOR: And detail?

LOUIS BUNCE: Those things always became the property of the Project and just what happened to those things I would have no knowledge of now.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah, you didn't have a chance to keep any of them yourself?

LOUIS BUNCE: No, mm-mm [negative]. But it did employ you.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Sure.

LOUIS BUNCE: And it did give you enough security to continue your own work.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: Now this was one of the great values, I think.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah. Did it give you enough time to—

LOUIS BUNCE: Oh yes—

DOROTHY BESTOR: —continue your own work.

LOUIS BUNCE: Because your hours were, well I'm not sure the number of hours, it seemed to me was about 30 hours a week.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

LOUIS BUNCE: Somewhere in the neighborhood of 25 to 30 hours a week. That was your actual time put in on project work.

DOROTHY BESTOR: And they paid you by the hour, but you weren't supposed put in any more than that?

LOUIS BUNCE: It was paid by the hour, yes, that's right. And they had time checkers. Now I worked in my own studio there. In fact, on a couple of jobs I even had a couple assistants to help on research and to prepare some sketches. And, but we worked in my studio.

DOROTHY BESTOR: You say they had time checkers? You mean people with—

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, yeah, they had a time checker that would come around maybe not every day, but maybe every other day and see if you were working.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Sort of undignified.

LOUIS BUNCE: [Laughs.] Yeah, well it didn't have any time—you're in your own studio so you weren't checking in with the Project.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah, yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: Now you had to check in with the Project occasionally though.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And talk to your supervisor.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Who was your supervisor then?

LOUIS BUNCE: A fellow named Yurchenko [ph].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

LOUIS BUNCE: And then later Bill Palmer. I noticed on your list here you got an interview from William Palmer. Palmer presently is up at Utica at the Munson-Williams-Proctor.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

LOUIS BUNCE: He's head of the school there. But he was one of the mural supervisors at that time. He came in after Mr. Yurchenko [ph] left. Yurchenko [ph] was from Yale.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I see.

LOUIS BUNCE: And, again, they tried to get supervisors that had had a good deal of experience in their field.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And Palmer was very good, I thought he was quite excellent.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, you had a good of experience in your field too. It must have been a change to be supervised at—

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, I didn't mind that because, again, I was really more interested in easel painting. And this gave me a chance to work at my own work and to be associated with another area.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: Which was New York City. And so, I was on that project until it ended.

DOROTHY BESTOR: That would have been until 1941?

LOUIS BUNCE: Somewhere in '41 I believe. Now towards the end—[Cross talk.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: At the same time as Pearl Harbor.

LOUIS BUNCE: Towards the end of the project—they were slowly being dissolved and they tried to make efforts to meet the whole war effort. For instance, many of us did some designs for Fort Dix in an effort to try to utilize our own talents, maybe to help continue the project.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: But it was doomed, there was no question about it. A lot of us also did posters, for recruiting and shelters, and I remember doing one for bomb shelter and this kind of thing.

[00:45:02]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah, was that also under the Project?

LOUIS BUNCE: It was under the Project.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: But so, they were trying to keep everyone on the project and shifting the work a little bit. The emphasis more on trying to meet some of the demands of the time, hoping that perhaps the project might continue. Because it was still a distinct need.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: But you could see the handwriting on the wall. The army was starting to get everyone and, well, the Project was dissolving very fast.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. James Fitzgerald was saying that he lived in New York about that time with Jackson Pollock, who had been working on the Project. Did know either of them there at that time?

LOUIS BUNCE: Jack worked on the Project all that time.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: I was very close friend of Jack's. I had known him for many, many years and he had a studio on Eighth Street at that time. Shared it with his brother who was really his half-brother who was also on the Project. And also, another painter, Jim Brooks—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

LOUIS BUNCE: I think one room in this studio and—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Did he—did Jackson Pollock think the project was rather constricting or didn't he mind?

LOUIS BUNCE: Rather what?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Constricting, like binding.

LOUIS BUNCE: No, no. Just like everyone else, I think we were all learning to paint somewhat. This was a chance to paint and even allowed quite a bit of freedom really. You were able to experiment with many things that you might not have had a chance to do. For instance, Jack at that time was trying to do some mosaics, believe it or not.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, that does surprise me.

LOUIS BUNCE: And it was, he was not too successful at it, but it was a chance to experiment with other things. He even tried silk screen, I remember. But he was on the easel project primarily.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: Brooks was also. Brooks also did a mural, but he got his on the wall.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, he did?

LOUIS BUNCE: Yes, Brooks did the thing out at—

DOROTHY BESTOR: How come?

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, one of these cases where they were able to sell the agency the design. And this one is in LaGuardia Airport. It's still up.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Good.

LOUIS BUNCE: That's one of the few that have remained.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And some of these things—like Gorky. Gorky's mural for the Newark Airport. It got on the wall but since has disappeared. I don't know if it was painted over or not.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, that's sad.

LOUIS BUNCE: Phil Guston did a number of things and all of those have disappeared, a lot of them.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, I suppose even if you had gotten your murals on the wall in New York they would—might have been in buildings which since have been torn down.

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, either that or maybe the administration might change, and they'd throw them out. There's no guarantee.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I wanted to ask you about silk screen which you mentioned. Because as you were saying the other day, in one of the groups where you were involved, I think on a project, you and some others really developed the serigraph process.

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, I never worked on the project with the silk screen but there were a number that were, and out of that interest, we formed a little group just on our own. It was called the Silk Screen Group.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

LOUIS BUNCE: And we exhibited as a group and started the—what's called the National Serigraph Society.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

LOUIS BUNCE: But in the beginning it was called the Silk Screen Group. And there were a number involved in that.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Who are in that?

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, Doris Meltzer was one. Tony Velonis, Ed Landon, Bernie Schardt, Bernie Steffen, most of those people are still active.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: Doris finally—well, she became head of the National Serigraph Society. And later operated the gallery on 52nd Street which showed the work of those members. But later she branched out into painting and sculpture and operated a regular gallery for a while called the Meltzer Gallery.

DOROTHY BESTOR: This group started in 1939 or '40?

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, it'd be about '39, '40, through there. And Velonis was on the Project, was one who helped to look into this area as having some fine art possibilities. Because it was only being used to produce posters, banners, that kind of thing.

[00:50:20]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: So, they developed different techniques and we used to meet at Doris' studio. And just work at it on our own and discuss the possibilities and experiment as a group. So that was kind of the beginnings of that whole movement.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah. So this is a process or a refinement of the process that really grew out of—[Cross talk.]

LOUIS BUNCE: It came out of the Project, yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOROTHY BESTOR: And you know any other techniques or development of techniques that were the direct or indirect result of painters' experiences in the Project?

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, other print fields were being used, but of course they had been used for many years like the lithograph and etching and so on. In painting I think that just the experimentation that that particular person was allowed to involve himself in certainly had a great deal of value for what happened later to these men. For instance, we talked about Jack Pollock.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, he was able to paint things that were his own actually.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And he went through a great development on the project. I'm sure that if he were alive, he would admit that it was a very good period for him. And certainly many others found a good deal of security in the Project. And there were very few of the artists in the New York area at one time or another weren't on that project.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, that's—

LOUIS BUNCE: And needed the kind of security that it offered to them. I think it was a very healthy thing.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Good.

LOUIS BUNCE: A very healthy thing. It also, I think took American art out of a tight nationalism—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: —that existed. I think it spearheaded the whole modern movement. But it took a while, you know, then we were plunged into the war and after the war, those people found themselves in a similar boat actually.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: Not having any security. And they just painted. But they had gotten quite a bit out of the Project, I'm sure.

DOROTHY BESTOR: There's one thing I'd like to follow up there, you said you thought it took America art out of a tight nationalism. Some people say one of the good things about the Project was that it took American art out of an unhealthy dependence upon Europe for inspiration and—

LOUIS BUNCE: It did that also.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —made America realize that—

LOUIS BUNCE: It did that also.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —there could be native art.

LOUIS BUNCE: It certainly was probably necessary to go through what they call a social

realism, too.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: I wouldn't be able to really say just where it was placed. But a lot of people were involved in that and they weren't suited for it.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: So, something had to happen, and I think this was a chance to really paint and to be pretty much on your own.

DOROTHY BESTOR: So, you weren't suited for it, it gave you something to protest against and grow from?

LOUIS BUNCE: Right. But there was no restrictions on the Project, they didn't tell you what you had to paint.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: The philosophy was that you were a painter or a graphic artist and that you should be able to work in these areas. But allowed the maximum freedom.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, then that does sound as if they treated the artist with a good deal of respect.

LOUIS BUNCE: There was lots of philosophies going on.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: Believe me, certainly some people felt that social realism was an area that was art, was needed.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: Others were quite against it. And you mentioned the kind of break away from Europe.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: That happened through that period to a certain degree.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Especially with a regional emphasis of the Middle-Western painters.

LOUIS BUNCE: And also, later—you take a man like Pollock, he's a good example of this feeling, this need of breaking away from Europe. He'd gone through it. He'd gone through a lot of thought about—and then looked at the European painter. But he felt this need of breaking away and the chance came later, though.

[00:55:07]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: After the war. It wasn't during the project days. It was after the war.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I see.

LOUIS BUNCE: But during the project days, yet, the thought was there too. To try to be an individual and the chance of working at it. Now we took our paintings a couple of times around to galleries—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh?

LOUIS BUNCE: —to see if we could show.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, what reaction did you get?

LOUIS BUNCE: None. They were interested but the gallery said, Well I'm sorry, we like your

work, but we just can't take it on because American art doesn't sell. We only deal in European art.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Good heavens, that was in '39, '40?

LOUIS BUNCE: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOROTHY BESTOR: My, what a difference there is today.

LOUIS BUNCE: I remember one occasion where Jack and I packed our paintings uptown and we went to Frank Perls' gallery.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: And Perls' had mainly Europeans. He had a couple Americans that were pretty solid that he was relying some money from, I'm sure. And he looked at our work and frankly admitted he liked it, but he just would not be able to sell it under the times.

DOROTHY BESTOR: He must be ready to cut his throat now.

LOUIS BUNCE: Probably. [They laugh.] Particularly with Jack. Well, even Jack got his first break with Peggy Guggenheim.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: *Art of This Century*.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: And, but there are so many—you know, I'm reading that list that you've had interviews with, and all those people were on the Project at that time. And no one had heard of them. But no one had heard of any of these people. A few had had a little reputation before but— like Stuart Davis for instance.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: But Stuart Davis certainly benefited, I'm sure. I don't know his interview but I'm sure he felt very strongly about the Project. It gave him a kind of security that was necessary at that moment for him to continue his work.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Good. Well, certainly in the New York area then, one would say that the Project didn't exactly coddle mediocrity as it was sometimes criticized for doing.

LOUIS BUNCE: Not at all. I'm sure there were many—in a situation like that, there would be many people that were not particularly good painters or designers.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: Because it was based upon need and you're bound to get a great percentage that produced very ordinary work. But on the other hand, look at how many people that were on that Project at that time and later produced rather extraordinary work—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: —and it became the kind of big American school that we know today. Which has been worldwide in its influence.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, it certainly has.

LOUIS BUNCE: I mean, you look down the list of names here. Holty and de Kooning and Krasner and Kriesberg, and all of these people.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It's really astonishing how, without exception, most of the ones we know today were on it. Do you think—did you find those out here or in New York at the project judge—or the people responsible for running the Project judged the artists on their merits rather than by origin, so that this was one of the early salutary things that helped break down discrimination against minorities? Mr. Billington [ph] makes that point in his article about the project that this was really one of the—indirectly one of the first

fair employment type of things.

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, yes. There were lots of problems of employment, yes. I remember a few sit-down strikes, with the relief and employment. But generally, I think it started to break down these conditions very much.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, you seem to be pretty much for it, that's—

LOUIS BUNCE: Oh, very much for it.

DOROTHY BESTOR: That's fine, that's fine. Can you visualize any way in which, now that there's so much interest in the government in the arts again, any way in which anything like this might be thought of as a continuing thing? Any kind of government support for the individual artist? Or—

[01:00:01]

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, this would be—[Cross talk.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: —whether it's warranted [inaudible]?

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, it's not warranted now. Certainly, the way this was set up.

DOROTHY BESTOR: No, not the same way.

LOUIS BUNCE: But there has been some well, presently, a lot of talk about the—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

LOUIS BUNCE: —government support.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: I think this has some real problems.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, it does.

LOUIS BUNCE: Just how they would administer it— and I really don't know. I really don't know, because I really haven't acquainted myself too much with the present program, at the moment—

DOROTHY BESTOR: It's so tentative and experimental, I don't think anyone knows what they want to do. But with the—well, through the last three administrations, of course, there have been more and more statements that the government is interested in the arts and does want to encourage and foster the arts. They keep getting more and more nearly ready to do something. If you had your say, you don't know what you think they ought to do?

LOUIS BUNCE: No, no. I really haven't thought it out. I think that the government should have some kind of recognition and support, just how it would be handled is the real problem, it seems to me.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah. There are disadvantages in having it administered by artists then also maybe more disadvantages in having it administered by non-artists.

LOUIS BUNCE: How they do they suggest it's going to be administered so far, if it comes about?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, I don't know. Roger Stevens is the presidential appointment who is supposed to—supposed to say and I read more about possible scholarships for talented beginning artists than anything else.

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, I would think this would be one way of helping. A good program that would recognize both the younger artists and established artists. Scholarships, travel, opportunities to develop.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah, it—

LOUIS BUNCE: This is actually the only thing that you need.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah, it could be done something like a more extended Guggenheim fellowship type thing, a wider spread thing like that I suppose.

LOUIS BUNCE: Probably the government could provide, in their own building program, a chance to do sculpture—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: And we'll say other kinds of decoration.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah, mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS BUNCE: Which they don't do—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: So much and even have the states support some of this.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative], yeah.

LOUIS BUNCE: But I think the scholarship thing would be particularly good.

DOROTHY BESTOR: If there were any such thing, do you think it should be federally administered or locally administered?

LOUIS BUNCE: Well, you probably would have to have local set ups, don't you think?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah, I do.

LOUIS BUNCE: I'm sure you would have to have—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, we got off on this, but we left you in New York. Did you come back to Oregon after the Project ended?

LOUIS BUNCE: Yeah, after the Project ended. Well, probably was there another year or so but then came back. I had to either go in the army or get a job. [They laugh.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Same choices seem to be confronting so many people today. And so, then you came back and—

LOUIS BUNCE: I got a job in the shipyard.

DOROTHY BESTOR: In the shipyard, yeah. You were a production illustrator, I believe, at the shipyard.

LOUIS BUNCE: Yeah.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oregon Shipyard Corporation and then you went to the museum after that.

LOUIS BUNCE: After that [inaudible].

DOROTHY BESTOR: [inaudible] museum.

LOUIS BUNCE: And I've been there since, pretty much.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[END OF TRACK AAA_bunce65_8424_m.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]