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## Oral history interview with Charles Bunnell, 1964 November 10

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## Transcript

### Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Charles Ragland Bunnell on November 10, 1964. The interview took place in 3527 West Colorado Avenue, Colorado Springs, Colorado, and was conducted by Sylvia Glidden Loomis 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

SYLVIA LOOMIS: This is an interview with Mr. Charles R. Bunnell at his studio, 3527 West Colorado Avenue, Colorado Springs, Colorado. What is the date?

CHARLES BUNNELL: November 10th.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: November 10, 1964. The interviewer is Mrs. Sylvia Loomis of the Santa Fe Office of the Archives of American Art. And the subject to be discussed is Mr. Bunnell's participation in the Federal Art Project during the 1930s and '40s. But first, Mr. Bunnell, would you tell us where you were born and where you received your art education?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Kansas City, Missouri, 1897. And I had most of my training right here under Boardman Robinson and Ernest Lawson.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, was Boardman Robinson here?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah. Sure was. You bet he was.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Is that right? I studied with him in New York.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Did you?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

CHARLES BUNNELL: At the old League. Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That's right.

CHARLES BUNNELL: No, Mike and I were good friends.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

CHARLES BUNNELL: He's a wonderful guy. You knew him, Fred?

FREDRICK BARTLETT: Of course.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Who was the other one you mentioned?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Ernest Lawson.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Ernest Lawson. And were you a private pupil or did you—

CHARLES BUNNELL: No. I started in classes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What school was that?

CHARLES BUNNELL: It was the old Broadmoor Academy, up here before it became the Fine Arts Center.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes. When did you come to Colorado?

CHARLES BUNNELL: 1917.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And what were you doing before you became involved on the Federal Art Project?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Painting. This, that, and the other, keep going.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. Where did you exhibit?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Well, I've exhibited all over, as far as that goes. One man shows in a lot of places, one man in show New York City, Fine Arts Center, everywhere.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And did you do anything beside easel painting?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Teaching. I taught at the Art Institute in Kansas City four times.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: When was that?

CHARLES BUNNELL: First time was '29 and '30. Then I taught there in '40 and '41.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. But you came back and forth from Colorado Springs?

CHARLES BUNNELL: That's right. That's right.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah. My home was here.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. Yes. And what were you doing at the time that the Federal Art Project started?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Nothing. Just painting.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Just painting?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And how did—which one did you become involved with first?

CHARLES BUNNELL: The PWAP. That was the first mural projects. And I did one on that. And then —

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Where was that?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Here.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What building?

CHARLES BUNNELL: For a West Junior High School. And then I got on helping Frank Mechau as an assistant. He was on the same project. And he did two murals for the post office. And I assisted him then, about three months. And then I wanted to easel paint. So, he swung me over to the TRAP [Treasury Relief Art Project] out of Washington, D.C. And I painted right here in my studio and sent the pictures back to Washington.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Do you know what year that was?

CHARLES BUNNELL: I'm not certain but I think it was around '35, around in there.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. I think the PWAP started in '34.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah. I was on that.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: You were on that.

CHARLES BUNNELL: That was the first one. Yeah. And I think I went with Frank, assisting him, I think it was in the '35. Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And then you went from that to the WPA?

CHARLES BUNNELL: The TRAP. That was the one out of Washington.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That was the Treasury Department.

CHARLES BUNNELL: That's right Treasury Relief Project or something.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

CHARLES BUNNELL: And then I was on that about two years, and then they run out of money or something or other. And Frank got me transferred to the WPA. And I worked on that about, I think around a year and a half or something when Donald Bear was head of it up in Denver. And then it got so bad that they wanted pretty pictures. They didn't want art.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How did that happen?

CHARLES BUNNELL: They got ahold of a whole flock of high school teachers and so forth, thought they knew something about art. And they didn't want art. They wanted pretty paintings. So, I was on the Project. So, I got fed up with it. And I told them I wasn't gonna paint any more junk for 'em. And so Mesick [ph], he was head of it then, and he said, Well, can you teach? I said, Certainly, I can teach. So, he says, All right. I'll put you on that. I said, All right. So, I was on that for about a year and a half, teaching.

[00:05:20]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And did you teach at the Fine Arts Center?

CHARLES BUNNELL: No.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh. Where'd you teach?

CHARLES BUNNELL: It was in a private building on North Cascade. Only time you might say I [coughs] taught was when I—I really did, too. I run Lawson's figure class for him. He didn't know anything about figures. He didn't know a damn thing. But he wanted to stay out here and paint mountains in the winter. So, I was his monitor, hired, fired the models, and everything else, and taught them. He had a little Van Dyck [ph]. Ernie'd come in, he'd say, "Put a little color there, a little red there. Take over, Charlie." So, I did. But you know how I learned my art?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Drinking Scotch. [Sylvia Loomis laughs.] After class every day, I'd go in there, and we'd have a drink or two of scotch. He'd be painting, and we'd talk. And see, I was with him there all that winter. And I learned talking with Ernie about it. And believe me, he knew color. One of the few Americans that did. But he really knew color. And I learned my color from him.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Who was this again? I lost—

CHARLES BUNNELL: Ernest Lawson.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Lawson.

CHARLES BUNNELL: American Canadian [ph]. [American Academician - member of the National Academy. - Ed.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, now you said that these schoolteachers were the ones that wanted you to paint the pretty pictures. Were they—

CHARLES BUNNELL: High school teachers.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Were they the supervisors?

CHARLES BUNNELL: No. They weren't supervisors, but they had drag. Different ones around the state. And Mesick [ph] was in charge of the Project.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: That was after Don left?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah. And they allocated pictures, see. And we all painted to these schools.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, I see. They were the sponsors then?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Evidently. Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That's what they called them. And because the setup at that time was that the Project paid the salaries—[Cross talk.]

CHARLES BUNNELL: It just got too—the pity of it was, it was a good thing. But the way a lot of it was run became bad, because they just run it into the ground. Like, one time there was about 20 of us on here, and Mesick [ph] come down, had us all up there talking, at the Broadmoor Academy then. And he says, I want four pictures, he says, The next time I come down. He says, That's one a week, 24x30s. I says, Mesick, you know damn well we can't do that. He says, You got to do it. He says, Do it. He says, What it looks like, that's your business, he says, but do it." He says to take my tip and do it. I says, Okay. I'll have 'em. So, I did.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Where did these instructions come from? Did he tell you?

CHARLES BUNNELL: No. Washington, I reckon. So anyway, about 20 of us on the Project. So, I did 'em, turned 'em in. They weren't any good, and I knew they weren't. And so, two weeks later, 11 of the 20 were taken off. They hadn't turned in, see. That slowed up, and we got back to normal again. [Laughs.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Do you remember what stage of the game this was? I mean, about the later period or—

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah. It was towards the last.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Towards the last.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah. Around '38, '39, something around in there.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And what year was it that you went into teaching? Or did you go back to painting again?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Well, I was on the Project, I went in teaching in '40.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, I see. That was still later.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So, this didn't last very long, this time where you had to paint one a week?

CHARLES BUNNELL: No.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, it's very interesting, the different regulations that I've—

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah. And another thing, being as we're talking, when the new murals come up, like Archie [ph] got one, and the twins, they had a meeting up there. Some of the big boys from Washington, I don't know who they were. Didn't pay much attention. So, I was on the TRAP, painting easel pictures, which I wanted. Well, they wanted me to do a mural. I told them I didn't want to. This boy—I don't know who he was—he says, Well, why not? I says, Well, I'm going to tell you why. I says, Frankly, none of us are trained real mural painters. And I says, You're going to get a lot of crap. That's just what I said. I says, And they're going to be whitewashed off the walls in less than 10 years. Oh, boy. The twins were right there and so was Ed.

[00:10:09]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Who were the twins?

CHARLES BUNNELL: And they didn't like it a bit. Ethel and Jenne Magafan.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

CHARLES BUNNELL: And they were doing them—and I will say they were doing good ones, see. They really were. They were two of the ones, Ethel and Jenne, that could do murals. But most of

'em that were doing murals weren't fitted to do 'em. Manny Bromberg done one. Oh, brother.  
[They laugh.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Were these fresco?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Huh?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Were they fresco, any of them?

CHARLES BUNNELL: No, except the one that Frank did for the art center. It had horses out there in the patio. That was fresco. Mechau did.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: But these ones that the twins did, they were just oil panels?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah. They were oil.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Wasn't that one Frank did a commission, though?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah. I think that was for the arts center, I think.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Yeah. I think that was a—

CHARLES BUNNELL: I don't think that was a project. No. But the post office murals were.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: They were oils. I'm sorry, [inaudible].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No. I'm glad to have your comments too.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Then, of course, Frank did the big one in the Denver Library. Which I think was the finest thing Frank ever did.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Certainly one of the finest.

CHARLES BUNNELL: The *Horses at Night*.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Yeah. *Horses at Night*.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah. I remember the comment on it was, the whole Project was worth it for that one picture.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Is that right?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Frank was a wonderful person.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: —Bruce was supposed to have said.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, Ned Bruce?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Did you ever know Frank?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Mechau?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No.

CHARLES BUNNELL: He's quite a guy.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I've known his name always. But I never met him.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah. Quite a guy.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Was he a Colorado Springs artist or Denver?

CHARLES BUNNELL: No. Well, he lived here; he lived in Denver. I think his family lived in Denver. I think originally, Frank had come from Kansas.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Who were some of the other painters on the Project?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Lord, I can't remember all the names.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: But a few of the outstanding ones.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Tabor Utey was on. And Archie [ph], I guess, was on. Stanley Mullen was on. The twins, Ethel and Jenne Magafan, and Ed Chavez, they were on. Manny Bromberg and Tex Carnahan [ph]. There was quite a few of them.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Bernard Arnest wasn't, was he? He was a student—

CHARLES BUNNELL: I don't think Bernard was, no.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: He was a student.

CHARLES BUNNELL: I think Bernard and, oh, that other fellow that did a big mural a few years ago, remember the friend of Arnest [ph]?

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Evett.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Evett. Kenneth Evett. I don't think they were on the Project.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: I don't believe they were either.

CHARLES BUNNELL: No.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How did you like art teaching?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Well, I've always liked teaching. Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Did you continue to teach after the Project closed?

CHARLES BUNNELL: More or less. Yeah. Mainly, I've taught private right here in my studio.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Yeah. You've had students all your life.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yes. Yeah, I've taught for years. I used to have 10 or 12 right in this room. I don't anymore. It slowed up. And I went to Texas, and I taught for my dealer down there several times. But last time I went down there, my health broke down, and I went in the hospital about two weeks. And after that, I just haven't—I've taken it pretty easy. Got this darned emphysema, that just slows me short of breath and so forth.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: During any part of your work on the Project as an easel painter, did you feel that you were given free rein to experiment?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yes. On the TRAP.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: You were?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah. That was good. That was the best, to me, of all the projects because they left us alone completely. And we'd send them in about every three or four months, a bunch of pictures. And we painted what we pleased, how we pleased. And there's no telling you or anything.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No time limit on it either?

CHARLES BUNNELL: No. No.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Well, that was the case in the earlier days of the WPA too, wasn't it?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yes. In the beginning. Yeah.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: As I recall, about the time Mr. Mesick [ph] came along, the thing was sort of petering out.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah. When I was moved on, I did what I pleased too, when he was head of it, Bear.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, do you feel then that it actually helped you in your work to be on the

Project?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Oh, yes. Definitely.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I mean aside from just the fact that—

CHARLES BUNNELL: I feel everything I've done in the various different things, so forth, I've done, has all helped. Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: It allowed you at least to continue to paint so that you didn't have to stop it to do something else.

CHARLES BUNNELL: That's right. That's right.

[00:15:05]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, what did you do then after the project closed entirely?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Just kept painting, and then got private students.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So, you've been able to support yourself on your painting ever since then?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That's a pretty good record.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yes.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Charlie's one of the few in town that has.

[They laugh.][Cross talk.]

CHARLES BUNNELL: I guess I have.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. There aren't very many.

CHARLES BUNNELL: The last seven or eight years in Texas, I've really done wonderful.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, have you been in Texas?

CHARLES BUNNELL: I've painted, I've got a dealer down there sells for me, and so forth, and handles me. And I've had, I don't know how many, one-man shows down there. And he's got pictures of mine all the time.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What city is this?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Amarillo.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes. What's the name of the gallery?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Dord Fitz, D-O-R-D F-I-T-Z, Art Gallery. And he's a teacher himself too, and painter. Mainly a portrait painter. And he's a live wire, he's a dynamo of energy. Boy, he knows everybody.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Do you have an outlet for your paintings here in Colorado Springs?

CHARLES BUNNELL: No, not here. I used to sell here, in the old days, when I painted realism. Now it's more modern the past 20 years, and you don't sell here. At least I can't. And I guess maybe I'm too expensive, too. They want them for nothing, and I won't do it. Other people—

FREDERICK BARTLETT: This isn't much of a market.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, it isn't?

FREDERICK BARTLETT: No.

CHARLES BUNNELL: No. I've had people over here from Broadmoor. And I don't know when it was, six months ago, some people were over one Sunday. And I wasted all afternoon showing



them pictures. They liked them, sure. Well, how much are they? I says, 200 for that size, 16 by 20. And says, Well, isn't that awfully expensive? I says, Look, I says, I've been in this game 40 years. I says, I don't give them away. Burnt me up. [They laugh.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, what do you think was the reaction of the public to the Federal Art Projects, in general?

CHARLES BUNNELL: I frankly don't know how to answer that. As a whole, I don't know whether the public was actually interested or not. They started something, but it never panned out, never worked out. They were going to have WPA, or something or other, art galleries all over the country, and it fell through. But that could have been a good thing. It really could. But it could have been a place for the artists to display their wares and so forth. And it could've helped.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, do you think by exposing the public to the art of American artists in this way that it helped to, well, raise the general appreciation of art?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yes. I would say that did. Yes. I would say that did, definitely.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Because before that, most people, unless they were quite wealthy, thought that art was only for—

CHARLES BUNNELL: It made the average person more aware. It really did.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, do you think of that has being reflected in the sale of your own paintings?

CHARLES BUNNELL: I'm not certain on that now. At the time, I guess it did. I sold some, of course, even when I was on the Projects. But I don't think it helped too awful much.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I think in some cases it has, and in some cases—[Cross talk.]

CHARLES BUNNELL: That's right. It'd depend on the locale and so forth. I heard it helped quite a bit in Taos, down there.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. It did.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Of course, that always is a art community anyway, see. They get behind the artists and all that. Which is good.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, until recently though. But my recent interviews with artists up there now, they say that they're just selling junk in the galleries. The good artists—

CHARLES BUNNELL: I know.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: The good artists don't have a chance anymore.

CHARLES BUNNELL: I know. I know.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, what do you think about the present trend in art?

CHARLES BUNNELL: I think it's very healthy.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: You do?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Definitely.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Why?

[00:19:57]

CHARLES BUNNELL: Because essentially, to me, art is a creative thing, from inside. In other words, I've told my students I could take 100 students out on a hillside, tell them paint Pike's Peak. Well, with a little training, they can copy that peak. That don't mean a thing. What they felt about that peak does mean. That's the whole value of modern art. Of what the feeling is, not just representation.

Now, don't get me wrong that I'm just plumb modern crazy 'cause I'm not. I mean I can paint real even today if I want to. And one of the greatest American painters is Andrew Wyeth, a realist. And a good one. But he loves his backyard. And he paints it. That's the whole thing. Well,

it's the same in modern. Once you get into the modern, really feel it, it's a whole new world. And I think it has been proved, mainly through the New York crew.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Would you say that the art center has now switched from Paris to New York because of this?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yes, definitely. Definitely. It's the mecca of the art world today.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: But now, when you were talking about modern painting, you were talking about abstracting the essence of a situation—

CHARLES BUNNELL: That's right.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —on the canvas. But what I meant was these latest trends out of—

CHARLES BUNNELL: Well, some of the trends, I admit, I don't like.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: The dribble and drip school.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Well, and yet I respect Pollock, very highly because I knew Jack personally and because he freed, not only America, he freed the world to try anything. And lots of it wasn't any good. But he told them not to be afraid, to go ahead and try anything. And he did it. So, he's got his place.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. But don't you think they've gone a little too far with it? [Laughs.]

CHARLES BUNNELL: Well, in many cases. Like, the trouble is—sorry, I'm not as good as Hans Hofmann. But I was a realist for years, so was Hans Hofmann. And we learned our trade and learned how—I can paint a portrait if I want to, a good one. Okay. Too many of them today just feel, "Well, look at me. I'm doing it." And slap it on there. And they don't know a darn thing. There is too much of that being done. And this pop art is hopeless.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, this is what I was getting at because I—

CHARLES BUNNELL: Well, I had friends that were sign painters in the old days that did better actually fine art pop art than they do it today, for theatre boards and Hollywood and so forth. It's just a fad.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, that's what I wanted you to talk about—

CHARLES BUNNELL: It won't last

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —because of it has sort of swept the country.

CHARLES BUNNELL: It won't last. I don't think there's going to be a return—there may be a return to semi-realism, that is with something recognizable. But I don't think we'll ever go back, except in isolated men, to the old that objective art, realism, is all. I don't think we'll ever go back to that.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I don't think so either.

CHARLES BUNNELL: I think modern's here to stay. But I wish there was more know-how taught with it. There's not enough.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, that's my objection to what's going on these days is that anybody can slap something on canvas and say—

CHARLES BUNNELL: That's right.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —I've got as much—

CHARLES BUNNELL: Take it or leave it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And there isn't the discipline that there was in the past.

CHARLES BUNNELL: That's right.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Because there was—Picasso was the example—

CHARLES BUNNELL: Well, just like I spoke of Hans Hofmann. Hans is a trained artist, a master draftsman. He knows all of it. Well, when he does modern, he knows what he's doing. That's the thing. So, for that matter, so did Pollock, so did Franz Kline. So did Bill de Kooning. They all know it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I saw that big show at the Museum of Modern Art of Hans Hofmann just last year.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And I used to know him and know his work very well in New York. [Cross talk.]

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah. I know him [inaudible].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And I was kind of shocked by it. I just thought it was—

CHARLES BUNNELL: Well, he swung over.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I thought it was a shame that he'd gone—

[00:25:01]

CHARLES BUNNELL: I know. Well, sometimes you do regret where they were so good before. I know. That enters. But now, like, this, whatever you want to call it, return to figure. A certain amount of that being done. The Bay Area crew. Diebenkorn, Bishop, all that bunch. They're not doing anything new. They think they are, but they're not. Manet did it. Sara Latrec [ph] did it. Daumier did it. They all did it. And they did it better than those guys too. In other words, Diebenkorn paints abstract background then puts in a sloppy figure. It's neither one thing or another. I mean if I was going to do a figure, I'd do a figure. I got my prejudices.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, it's good to have them, and you have to have if you—

CHARLES BUNNELL: Now, I admire a search, I never could do that. I got to paint a thousand different ways. I don't paint any one way. But I admired Franz Kline very much. He searched that black and white thing through, and he got it. He was really great at it. But Pollock, who started that dribble stuff, Jack was very disappointed because he wanted—in the last few years, he wanted to search and give that all up, see. And the New York dealers wouldn't let him. He was selling for fortunes. So, Jack would bat one out, a great big one, and get drunk for three weeks.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, really?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Oh, boy. He could too. Quite a guy, Pollock was.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, are there any other comments that you'd like to make about that period of the Federal Art Projects?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Well, one thing that I was impressed with, there were people on it who were grateful. After all those were hard times—and were grateful for the money they got. And they turned out the best they could. Really worked. A lot of them goldbricked it. They really did, which was bad. I remember Tex Carnahan [ph], who was a painter, and he turned in some very fine things for 'em.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, do you think that part of the reason for their turning in—or goldbricking was because they were asked to turn them out so quickly? Or do you think it was something within themselves?

CHARLES BUNNELL: No. A lot of them just—I don't know., they just took it for granted. I don't know whether they figured they had it coming or what. A lot of them didn't really try. Turned in little old washes, eight by 10s, for a whole months work, you know, and stayed drunk the rest of the time. [They laugh.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Seems to me there was quite a lot of drinking going on.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Oh, yes. There was in those days.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Everybody was younger, Charlie.

CHARLES BUNNELL: That's right. That's right.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: They could take it better then. [They laugh.]

CHARLES BUNNELL: That's right.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, are there any other comments that you'd like to make about art in general? It's been very interesting to hear you talk about these painters and what you think about them and their work.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Well, I think art, in general, is truly driving at a greater realization in creative art than we've ever had. That there is far more awareness today of many factors into the making of a great painting. Before, the old days, the Renaissance, the Dutch, all of 'em, were so concerned with objectivity or a religious message that instead of it becoming great art, it became really a reflection almost of—I don't know what you would call it, a literature or something, there was storytelling. Of course, the great men were so great they transcended the storytelling anyway. Francesco, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, they transcended anyway, see. That's why I say Andrew Wyeth's so great because he feels what he paints and moves people. His sister's pretty good too, Henrietta Wyeth, Hurd's wife.

[00:30:13]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yeah, I've have done—interviewed Peter Hurd, but I haven't interviewed her because she wasn't on the Project [inaudible].

CHARLES BUNNELL: Personally, I think she's a better painter than he is. [Laughs.] I really do.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I enjoy her paintings more, myself.

CHARLES BUNNELL: I do too. They're more—something, I don't know.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: There's a sparkle to them—

CHARLES BUNNELL: I like them, yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —and more originality, I think.

CHARLES BUNNELL: I'm sorry to hear too, I think it was last year or so, wasn't it, that Lockwood died.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Yes. [inaudible] yeah.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah. He had his place, he had his place.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Ward was a good teacher, I guess, from all I've heard.

CHARLES BUNNELL: He taught up at the center, years ago.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Yeah. Then at New Mexico, and then Berkeley.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah, I know it. Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Are there many practicing artists in Colorado Springs?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yes, quite a few, quite a few.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: About how many would you say? Just as—

CHARLES BUNNELL: Oh, there's—they're not all good, but there's, I would say, seven or eight of them pretty good.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

CHARLES BUNNELL: I really would.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, this being a little bit out of my territory, I had to get information from you.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah. I think that—

FREDERICK BARTLETT: We have about 25, I think who call themselves artists, and I think Charlie's about right. Seven, or eight, or 10 who are serious about it and—

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: —turn out some pretty good things.

CHARLES BUNNELL: We have one woman who's been a student of mine who, I think, is going to, in time, go places, and that's that Mildred Scott. I think she's got something on the ball.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: She's got something to say, all right.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What sort of thing are you doing right now, Mr. Bunnell?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Oh, various, various things. Want to see a few?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, I would. All right, tell us about that painting that Katherine Kuh was interested in.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Well, as I say, she came over to pick one for this surrealist-abstract show in Chicago. And she goes for everything I have, I think. I had a bunch of them over here, there were some of them kind of wet. And she was wandering around, helping herself, looking—saw that, says, That's it. I says, What do you mean? That ain't done. She says, Don't you dare touch it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, really?

CHARLES BUNNELL: She says, That's the one I want. She says, What do you call this? I says, Why? She says, All right, that's a good title.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, my [laughs].

CHARLES BUNNELL: That's what it was.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That's it, huh [laughs]? That is a very distinct one. [They laugh.]

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah. It's a crazy darn thing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, with such variety in your paintings here, these are beautiful.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: That's a nice one, Charlie.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Thanks.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: This one is taking my eye. What's the name of that one?

CHARLES BUNNELL: I don't name them, honey.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No.

CHARLES BUNNELL: My dealer does, and—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Which is awkward, too, because they sell and then I can't remember the title. [Laughs.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh [laughs]. You know, you should some—have some way of identifying them.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Numbering system or something, Charlie.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: [Inaudible.]

CHARLES BUNNELL: [Inaudible.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, I love these yellows.

CHARLES BUNNELL: I like yellow.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, have you—

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Now, that's particularly nice.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Have these been exhibited in—[Cross talk, inaudible.]

CHARLES BUNNELL: He's had some of them down there. He was up about a month ago and took back thirty of them of this size, and some of the canvases.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I can see what you mean about searching and experimenting because there's—

CHARLES BUNNELL: That's right.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —even though there is a—

CHARLES BUNNELL: I never work any one way anymore.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Your style, though, is—your sense of form appears in all of them.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I think anyone could tell that they were yours—

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yes, I reckon.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —in spite of the variety. Lots of beautiful things.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: I've always been very fond of the one I have, Charlie.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah, yeah.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: The [inaudible] holds up very well.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Good.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: And that's, well, that's 15 years old, I guess, at least.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: And quite similar to some of these, actually.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh my, these are fascinating. [Pause.] [Inaudible.]

FREDERICK BARTLETT: We've got quite a literal bunch.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. [Inaudible.]

[00:35:00]

FREDERICK BARTLETT: People at an exhibition [ph].

CHARLES BUNNELL: Couple of kids go in the modern museum and look at the pictures.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, here's a—

CHARLES BUNNELL: That's a head I made. I don't know why, but I just did.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I suppose every so often you want to get back to—

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —something that is more realistic. These are just beautiful. Well, if you have a show of Mr. Bunnell's work at the Fine Art, I think it would be worth a trip coming up here to look at it.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: We had—we had—it's been quite a while, hasn't it?

CHARLES BUNNELL: '56.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Was it '56?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah, Frank gave me a real show. I had the best gallery, and we had a feed and everything else. [Cross talk.] It was really good.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well—

FREDERICK BARTLETT: It didn't end too well on the sales, although I guess that two or three sold.

CHARLES BUNNELL: No, I didn't expect them—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How much—how much did those sell for?

CHARLES BUNNELL: \$200 apiece.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: \$200. Well, they really are beautiful.

CHARLES BUNNELL: And my dealer, of course, gets—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: You've got a nice white paneling on one, too.

CHARLES BUNNELL: My dealer gets a third.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

CHARLES BUNNELL: So—but he sells some big ones for me too, every now and then.

[Pause.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Where did you say this one was exhibited, that one that Katherine Kuh liked?

CHARLES BUNNELL: It was exhibited in the—

FREDERICK BARTLETT: At the Art Institute, Chicago.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, I see.

CHARLES BUNNELL: —surrealist-abstract show at Chicago in '47. The biggest abstract-surrealist show America ever had. Then, it was picked to travel around the country. There was 300—it was all invitation—there was 300 picked for the show, and then, after that, 50 of them were picked to travel. 10 leading museums, and mine was picked for that, too. Went all over the country.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, do you have anything else that you'd like to tell us before we shut off the machine?

CHARLES BUNNELL: No, I don't exactly. No.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, we're certainly very glad to have this opportunity to talk with you.

CHARLES BUNNELL: I really was glad that I did have all the initial Projects experience. And it did do me good. It really did. I never will forget working with Frank, oh boy. [Laughs.] He was a taskmaster.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Yeah.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Boy. I had to take his murals up, see? Little sketches like that, up to the size the mural would be, sometimes 12 by 15 feet. So, I never will forget. I did the first one. So, he—Frank was very good. Called me up, and had me come over. He showed me. He says, Now look, Charlie. He says, I wanted this taken up exact. He says, I don't need a quarter of an inch or an eighth of an inch or a half inch off to scale. He says, I want it exact. I don't give a damn, he says, how long you take doing it, but get it exact. So, I took it back and says, Okay, Frank. Well, I spent three weeks on that.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Was this the post office?

CHARLES BUNNELL: No, it was another one. I forget what one it was right now, but I did take up—I took up one of the post office ones, and I think Jenne took the other one up. Yeah. I forget this

—[Cross talk, inaudible.]

FREDERICK BARTLETT: I didn't realize he had done those in that way, Charlie.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Well—

FREDERICK BARTLETT: I presumed they were straight—they were easel murals.

CHARLES BUNNELL: I know it, but do you know how he worked?

FREDERICK BARTLETT: They were huge, of course.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Do you know how Frank worked?

FREDERICK BARTLETT: No, I never saw him.

CHARLES BUNNELL: This is all between ourselves.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: I never saw him work.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Because I respected Frank. He had thousands of pictures of horses—

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Yeah.

CHARLES BUNNELL: —cattle, all that—small ones. So, he'd get a sheet of tracing paper, he'd put these things underneath them, and he'd move them around, and he got just what he wanted. Then he'd trace that off, and that was it.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Didn't blow it up?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Then you took it up to scale, exact that scale. Like something I shouldn't ever say, and don't repeat me, because as I say, I loved Frank and I respected him. But he did one, the big one for Washington, D.C. *Massacre, Indian Massacre*. Okay, in it, he had to go and get sexy and had five or six nude women laying around in there in the battle, [Fredrick Bartlett laughs] which the Indians never did. They never stripped the women and did that, at all, in all Americana history. And he put them in there. And I told him, I says, They're going to laugh that off the walls, Frank.

[00:40:00]

Another one he did, he puts a guy getting on the wrong side of a horse. [They laugh.] And I told him— No, he said, it don't make any difference. It's good design. I says, All these old cowpokes are going to see that, Frank, and I says, What are they going to say? And he says, I don't care. [Laughs.] Give a damn. He really didn't. Frank should have been an abstract painter.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: He was, in the beginning.

CHARLES BUNNELL: He did a few—I know it, over there in Paris.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Yes, when he first came back—

CHARLES BUNNELL: I know it.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: I had something to do with the first one-man show he had in this country, which was—

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: —Junior League Galleries in Denver.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh?

CHARLES BUNNELL: But he painted, I think, January—

FREDERICK BARTLETT: But they were all—they were all at least semi-abstract paintings, somewhat surrealist.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.



FREDERICK BARTLETT: They looked a bit like Chirico.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

CHARLES BUNNELL: He had his place. There's no question. And when he died, at the last, he got quite intrigued with the Japanese prints.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Yes, and the pictures have a very Japanese-esque—

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yes. And they were—some of them were very beautiful.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: A beautiful line quality, and very thin and almost oil-wash.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yep, yep. Have you ever seen Paula lately?

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Oh, I saw Paula a couple years ago.

CHARLES BUNNELL: I haven't seen her in a long time.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How large was this mural that you had to blow up from these small sketches?

CHARLES BUNNELL: I think it was—I'm not certain. I think it was about six by 12, something like that. See? So, you had to measure. If a line went in, and you know, how do you take it up, and so forth. And if a line hit there in the small sketch, well, it had to hit there on the big one, exactly in that spot, which was work.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Was there any distortion necessary, because it was higher than eye-level?

CHARLES BUNNELL: According to Frank, it didn't make a difference.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, I see.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Which, I—that's just me, see—as I say, I respect him. But I don't agree with doing a mural in that manner. I believe in doing it like Orozco did. Orozco had working notes, and he'd look at it, and then he'd get up there and do them. He didn't take it up to scale at all. It's like Frank had him—

FREDERICK BARTLETT: I don't think Benton did either.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah, well, Benton worked worse than that.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Benton built models and painted the models.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Those clay models.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Yeah.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Which I, again, I could never see. I know Tom very well, been over to his house many times. And I remember Eric was—when I was teaching at the Institute, Eric was working—Bransby was working with Benton on one of the projects, and was doing one. And he had a scale model made that way, out of clay or something and oil painted and everything else.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Yeah.

CHARLES BUNNELL: And I told him, I says, I know that's the way Tom does. But I says, I can't see the point in it. Why not, he says, then you got it right in front of you. I says, Have you? I says, All right, you get cows there. You get horses. I says, They're dead. They're still lifes. It's true. See? [Fredrick Bartlett laughs.] If you're going to do a horse, go out there and learn how to draw that horse, not set up a horse and then copy it. And that's—as much as I love Tom Benton, and I do. He's a real guy. All his stuff has got that mechanical deadness. See? It really has. Because, I think, frankly from just doing that—he took me in when—I don't know when it was, five, six years ago. I was back at K.C. for a couple of weeks, and went over to his studio. And he was doing the sketches and the clay models and everything else for those two murals for the Truman Library. And—

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Still working in the same way?

CHARLES BUNNELL: Same way, God damn it. He never did change. He worked just the same

way.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Yeah, so, I saw him—I saw some about 20 years ago, at least 20 years ago [inaudible].

CHARLES BUNNELL: The league stuff?

FREDERICK BARTLETT: No, I saw the things which he did for the—for the capital at Jefferson City.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yes, yes. I remember. I saw them too.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: And he was painting from the scale model at that particular time.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yep. Well, he did—I don't know if they're still there or not, but Tom did about a dozen free, and somewhat like Boardman Robinson, a heavy form, but freer. They weren't tight at all. I think they're the greatest things he ever did. He lent them to the Kansas City University. I don't think they own it.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Were they fairly late? Recent?

CHARLES BUNNELL: No, they were his last year or two in New York—

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Oh.

CHARLES BUNNELL: —before he went back to Missouri.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Yeah, pretty early then.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah. But he hadn't become as stylized as he did later.

[00:45:08]

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Well, he loosened up a bit in some of the nude figures that he did, what he called his bar room figures.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah, the bar room nude.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Yeah.

CHARLES BUNNELL: All those is [inaudible].

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Of course, I think probably did those from life. He probably had—

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yes, yeah, he did.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: He probably had a model.

CHARLES BUNNELL: He did. I know it. Yeah, he really did. Yeah, Persephone and the Elders.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Yeah, and *Susanna and the Elders*.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Yeah. *Susanna* and—yeah. And he did several.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: That was the same time when he got so interested in textures, remember [inaudible].

CHARLES BUNNELL: That's right. Yep.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Crawly leaves and flowers and things.

CHARLES BUNNELL: I just—

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Remember Don Bear talking about Benton Baroque. [They laugh.]

CHARLES BUNNELL: I just wonder if—he's a tempura man, you know, Benton.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Yep.

CHARLES BUNNELL: [Inaudible] glazes or using emulsion or something, but I don't know whether his stuff's going to hold up through the years or not.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: A lot of it hasn't.

CHARLES BUNNELL: I know it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, is that right? Already [inaudible].

CHARLES BUNNELL: I know why, too. Jimmy Roth works over at the Nelson Gallery, and—restoring and so forth. He's an old student of Benton's. And he said—again, this is between ourselves—that Benton was very careless, technically. Like dry powder. You're supposed to take that dry powder, tempura, grind it with water until it's really liquid. Well, Benton would take his brush and dip it in the emulsion or dip it right in the jar and paint on. So, I was over at Tom's house one time, and he was talking to some other people, and I sort of wandered around. And I looked at the murals, and there was infinitesimal cracks all through them. See? That's that pull, that tempura strutting, see?

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Yeah, sure, that'll [inaudible].

CHARLES BUNNELL: Whereas, if he'd have ground it—and that's why I don't rate Peter Hurd as an egg tempura man at all, whereas I do rate—what's his name—Sepeshy, Zoltan Sepeshy in Detroit. He knows his tempura, and he does it exactly right. It's—essentially, tempura's nothing but watercolor.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Right.

CHARLES BUNNELL: If you don't like it, scrape it out. Sand it out, and go back to your Jesuit [ph] ground, and do it, free. But not with that—like what's his name—Hurd scratches everything, you know? You've seen him? with crosshatch work.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Yeah, [inaudible] crosshatch work.

CHARLES BUNNELL: That's not really true tempura at all. Like the great van Eyck. Look how his are, flawless. They still are. So is Vermeer.

FREDERICK BARTLETT: Just like glass surfaces.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Sure.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, this has been very interesting, Mr. Bunnell.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Well good.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I'm extremely grateful to you—

CHARLES BUNNELL: Good. Thank you.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —and I know they will be in Detroit, too.

CHARLES BUNNELL: Are you going to interview Archie?

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]