



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Kenneth
Callahan, 1965 March 9

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions
www.aaa.si.edu/

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Kenneth L. Callahan on March 9, 1965. The interview took place in an unknown location 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: Well, perhaps you might tell me first about what you had done just before you had your connection with the Federal Art Projects. I know you said in print that the period of 1928 to '38 was the most influential period of your formative years as a painter.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Yeah. Well, but it didn't have to do with the Art Projects.

DOROTHY BESTOR: No, I know.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: That—but and I was never connected directly with the Art Projects.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I realize that.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: I had a job all during that period, a part-time job in the museum which provided a living. And I did have connection with it indirectly in that I knew practically all the artists from this area who were on the Project and things that were happening with it, but I didn't—no direct connection with the Project.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Who were the artists that you knew, particularly?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Well, later, Mark Tobey went on the Project, but the earlier Project there was Morris Graves and Bill Cumming and Guy Anderson. And along in there is Carl and Hilda Morris. They came out from Chicago first to the Spokane project, but then they, later on, came over here to Seattle. And Jacob Elshin and Ernest Norling, and oh, there's so many now I can't think of all of them. And then later, Mark Tobey was on it. And, anyway, that's some of them.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. Weren't you one of the judges who helped pick out people to work on the Project at one time?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: No, I never had any connection with the Art Project. What I was—I did do some murals.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: And one mural, in particular, I was given a commission to do a mural for the Marine Hospital, and I was asked to employ—take as many people as I wanted as assistants from the WPA roll.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, that's what I had in mind.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: That was before the Art Project.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, I see. Yes.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: This was on the WPA, and they had artists signed up under the WPA. There was no Art Project that was in effect, I believe, at the time.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I see.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: And so, Julius Twohy, a Ute Indian artist here, and then Hobey Ritz

[ph] the second man. They are both on the WPA Project. And so, I took them as assistants in doing the Marine Hospital mural.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Could you tell me a little bit about the Marine Hospital mural?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Well, I did a—they—I couldn't use them directly in painting on it, but I had them doing work related to it, and I used the theme of the merchant shipping. I had been at sea for a time earlier.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KENNETH CALLAHAN: And on merchant ships mostly, and a few passenger ships but, and so that I use that as the theme of the mural, and it was—anyway that was it. And it was around the foyer, the lobby. I don't know what they call it, the lobby or the foyer—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: —of the hospital. And on the walls, it was no longer there. They removed it.

DOROTHY BESTOR: That's the one that's been taken down, and then it's had a mysterious history. You don't know where it is now, do you?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: No, except that someone told me that it's—the [Washington state (ph)] museum has it rolled up in their in their basement. Whether they do or not, I don't know.

DOROTHY BESTOR: At the moment, they think it's somewhere else on the campus, and no one at the university knows quite where it is. I'm trying to track it down.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Well, I think it's the other museum, the industrial.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: What do you call? The Museum of History and Industry.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, history and industry. I see.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Yes, I understand that they have it.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Someone told me that. And whether it's true or not, I don't know because I intended to ask someone, you know, them or something. But I haven't thought of it until now. But it's possible they have it.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Had you painted any murals before you did this one?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Well, I did. Yes. I did one for myself. And that was a big one. It was 12 feet high and about 75 feet long. And I did that just to—because I wanted to do mural, I mean.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: And it was in—

DOROTHY BESTOR: What was the subject of it?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: It was logging. And that mural is exhibited around and—then, when my studio burned up in the mountains, it was up there, and it burned up at the place.

DOROTHY BESTOR: After you had this commission to do the mural, for which you hired the two assistants, did you do any more murals for the government or for—

[00:05:02]

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Yeah, I did several under the Treasury Department which wasn't—again wasn't WPA, but this was a—

DOROTHY BESTOR: The Treasury Section on Painting and Sculpture. [Cross talk.]

KENNETH CALLAHAN: The Treasury Section [inaudible]. And I did one in Centralia and one in Ana—in the post office. One in Anacortes' post office, one in the Rugby, North Dakota post office. And I did a private one in between for a Weyerhaeuser Mill in Everett.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KENNETH CALLAHAN: And seems to me I did some other—oh, and then I did one. Yes, more recently, I did one for the Washington State Library in Olympia.

DOROTHY BESTOR: What were the subjects of the earlier ones?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Well, the Anacortes one was fishing, which related to their [purse seine-ing (ph)]. And then the one in Anacortes was the industry—kind of an industry things of Lewis County. In Centralia, yeah. And then the one in North Dakota was farming, again, I mean, related to that. And it seems to me, I did some others, but I can't think what they there now.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Did you feel that these assignments forced you into a sort of illustrative kind of painting or—

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Well, I don't think they forced me into it, but I think that I tended to feel it necessary or at the time or something. And it may have been that it was a good thing to go through. And but I don't think they amount to much as—I did see the Anacortes one recently. And I don't think — I think that's quite good. And I think the one in the Centralia has some merits in its design, I think. It's more than just an illustration, but it—well, they're less mature things. I mean, that's what it amounts to. And I think the first really mature mural I did was in the library in Olympia.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KENNETH CALLAHAN: And then I think this one in the—it's a good one and the—this mural panel in the little theater over here.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. I'd hardly call that a mural. It seems like a painting. I don't know why I made the distinction between the two but—

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Well, I think it has to do with the placing of it in the—in the building, and then the shape of it, being—but the I think the really the best mural I've done is for Syracuse University I did last summer.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: And I think that's really—that's a good painting. I feel very confident that it is, and I think someday it will be—it'll be recognized as—

DOROTHY BESTOR: I'd like to see that. What's that like?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Well, it's much more—it's fairly highly abstracted and—but it deals with the—with people and the interrelationship of man and nature and the movements of nature. And the creation of forms and disappearance of forms, and this flux and flow that takes place in life of life to death and death to life in this process. Well, that sounds very—covering a big territory.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, yes.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: But that is the—is the idea of it. And I don't apologize for the fact that it's a—it's a—it's a very complicated and big, widespread idea. Because I feel that if a thing is no better—if it succeeds in the big idea, or it succeeds with a small idea, they're equally good, or they're equally bad, if they don't.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KENNETH CALLAHAN: And so, it doesn't make any difference whether it's a—it's a bowl of fruit that's being painted or a complicated—more complicated thing.

DOROTHY BESTOR: It's the intensity, not the magnitude.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Yeah, [inaudible]—not the magnitude. Either it works or it doesn't. If it does work well, then it's good. And if it doesn't, it doesn't, but.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right. Well, from your position as sort of detached observer of the various government art projects of the '30s and '40s. Do you think they worked out well around here or that you have any criticisms that you—

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Well, I think they've worked out very poorly in this state.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Why?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: I think it's been through the directorship. I think the thing was very badly mismanaged here. And I think the—well, it's the two. It's both. I think it was a good thing in that it actually gave employment to quite a number of talented people. And in that sense, it was very good.

[00:10:10]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Because it gave them so much money, which permitted them to go on working in their own way. But the—I think the result of what they did under the Project, except when they were working solely on their own, was nothing. Because of the directorship — when they were directed to do certain things, it all came out as just junk. So, nothing of any consequence was done. I've asked a number of people around if they can think of anything that the Project did.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Under the Project, that was really good. The only things they could think of were individual paintings that some of these artists did—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: —when they're not being directed. Well, I mean, it seems to me in a thing like the Art Project, that was an opportunity to do—to take a group of artists, to produce something of real consequence.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Because they were available, and the talent was there.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How do you think they could have been directed better?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Well, simply someone—if someone was in charge of it, was a person with a—did not have narrow—and ideas of building their own self-importance and considered the Project's importance greater than their own. And it seemed to me that the person directing it operated on the basis of trying to make himself important and to keep down the importance of the artists on it. Because what would happen if some artists on it did something or a group of them that was very spectacular? They would get the credit—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: —and not the director. But if the director could prove to everybody, he was running things. Then if there was any credit, it would be the director's. And these fellows would be just guys working for him.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah. Do you think there were examples of deliberate thwarting of individual excellence?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Oh, I think there were—well, I'm sure there were just from the fact of what these artists—so many of these artists said and complained about. And—

DOROTHY BESTOR: I know Bill Cumming has a number of complaints that he's coming to

print with recently. You probably read that article?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Yeah. I did read that since I saw you, the [inaudible].

DOROTHY BESTOR: "Look Back in Laughter."

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And I think that he described the situation quite well. You see, all of these complaints, as far as anything I can say, all came secondhand—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: —from these artists.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: So, I experienced nothing of these things personally and directly. And I expressed myself very frankly at the time about what I thought was going on, and the net result was that the person in charge of it defended himself on the basis that I wanted to be the head of it.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, really?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: And that's why you see, I was—that's why I was saying these—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: That was his defense was that I wanted to run it. Well, the fact that I was already working and so forth—

DOROTHY BESTOR: You were busy. That would've not been—

KENNETH CALLAHAN: —didn't have anything to do with it, because that made a—anyone who disliked me, of course, that was a perfect answer. They're just like that, you know. And so. And there's one instance where the national director came out, Holger Cahill.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: And this was when Morris Graves was not on the Project. And so, I got a lot of his paintings up at the museum, and when the—he came in and he was with Bruce, and I had been after Bruce for a long time to put—to get Morris on the Project. He said, no, he wasn't good enough, and so on. And so, I showed these things to Cahill, and I said, I think this is a real artist. One of the—one of the best artists in this area, and I think he certainly should be on the Project. He has no job, and he has no income. And Cahill says, Well, I certainly do. Why isn't he on, Bruce? And Bruce said, Well, I've been trying to get ahold of him. Just like that. Well, this was after a long period in which I've been talking to him and trying to get him to put him on. And—but the moment this happened, then it was that, that he'd already thought about this, but he hadn't been able to reach him.

DOROTHY BESTOR: That seems extraordinary.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Yeah, he's been living way off in the woods somewhere. I haven't been able to reach him, you know. Well, that was—an honest person from my point of view, but it was said, I don't think he's worth being on it. That was a stand that he'd already taken.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: So, and take it with the boss, take it with anybody. I mean, if that's your stand, that's all right with me because taste in art is—it's your own business. And if you think—if you thought at the time that Morris Graves was lousy and shouldn't be on it, that's all right. But as soon as the boss says something to pull this "yes, man" thing, you know, that—it's things like that, that I don't think you can trust anybody that will do those things.

[00:15:21]

DOROTHY BESTOR: No, I should think not. Do you think that the Project was better managed in Spokane, or in Portland, or San Francisco? Any of the other West Coast ones?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: I understand from the artists on the Spokane Project that that section, because—although this man was in charge of the whole state, they had someone in Spokane who was responsible for it. And they did a very good job, I understand, in Spokane. And in California, I understand the thing was very good. And I know that in New York, it operated very well. I mean, I know a lot of—you know, I knew Kuniyoshi before his death and many of the other painters who'd had to do it. And it worked in many places very, very well. Well, there's everything to make it work.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Everything to make it work. Because there are all these artists, practically every artist was—not all, but a vast majority of artists were in a position to be on the WPA. So that meant the best artists in the country, with a few exceptions, were available. And well, that's about all I can think about.

DOROTHY BESTOR: In your looking back at the effect of the government Art Projects in general, would you agree with E.P. Richardson, who says in his *History of Art in America*, that the Projects may have helped a good deal in America's revolt against the influence of French art and its rediscovery of the excitement going on right here in America?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Yes, I certainly agree with him. I think that that was true. And it did that and the—and it—because it did cause a break with this adoration of the Paris School, which was a subservient—to the subservient point. And I do think the Paris School painters were of the greatest consequence. But there was a subservience that was not good. I mean, it was the American artists, and so many of them just accepting the fact that they were second class, and the French were first class, I mean, it was nonsense. And the breaking way, and what they did when they broke away, was—didn't amount to much. But it's the fact that they did break away. Let them move into their own thing.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You probably saw yesterday, in the *PI* [*Post-Intelligencer*], the notice of the Rockefeller report that's coming out about the need for aid to the performing arts. Do you think there is a need of continued or renewed government aid to the visual arts? Or that the performing arts are in a special situation?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Well, I think that all the arts are—I don't think the performing arts are in any worse situation. And I do know that even in the old days, and I was thinking the other day in San Francisco and the Montgomery building, they—the artists were the people in the building that were the best off financially.

DOROTHY BESTOR: That's the one—

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Yeah. The people that were the best off economically and financially in the building were the musicians.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, really?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Because they could, for one thing, still, I mean, women's groups and so forth, are constantly asking artists to come and give a talk.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: They never expect to pay a nickel.

DOROTHY BESTOR: They don't?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: No. Very rarely do they pay anything—offer to pay anything. And because they feel—and they will call, and they will say over the phone, we're going to get publicity on this, so, this is going to—you're going to get your name in the paper, you see. And this is going to be good. And—but what happens if they call a fifth-rate violinist to come to their meeting? They expect to pay him at least \$15 for that thing, or they don't even call him. And when it comes to calling a first-rate violinist, they expect to pay him \$100 for this appearance at their meeting, playing his fiddle. But a painter they expect him—or a sculptor—to—because they're going to get his name in the paper, and maybe somebody in the audience might be interested enough to buy a picture or something.

DOROTHY BESTOR: So, that's fantastic.

[00:20:12]

KENNETH CALLAHAN: But it still goes on.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Really?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: And that's the—and from that standpoint, why the people in the painting or artist in the visual arts, I mean, are just as badly off as any of them. But I don't know about the performing—from the standpoint of the theater. I don't know enough about it to know whether, you know, how badly they need it.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, do you think government supervision or intervention, or aid or support would help? Or is needed now?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Well, I don't really know, but I don't—I don't. The only—I'm always afraid of the thing of some two-bit bureaucrat becoming the head man, just as happened here.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KENNETH CALLAHAN: I mean, if it was a good—I mean, a good administrator who—it seems to me a thing like this could operate very well if there was some person whose administrator, say, a person who knew nothing about art and didn't pretend to know anything about art. He was state director, and then he would hire artists or sculptors who would be responsible for the work of other artists and other sculptors and so on. And, but he would be the administrator. And his job would be to see that the people that he had working under him directing these different facets produced work of quality and, if not, get rid of them and get somebody else.

But when you have a one-man dictator, who feels, a person who feels he is an artist and happens to be a thoroughly and gifted person, and he wants to be a little tin god, well, you're going to get nothing. And the—I think that's inevitable, and that is what I'm kind of afraid of. That when you have public money to spend, well then, I mean, how much politics will enter into it? Who's appointed? Whether he's a relative of some congressman or senator or a friend of somebody's or something. You know, or rather than a—but things like the post office certainly operate and these other things, so this, there's no reason why this couldn't, if it's—

DOROTHY BESTOR: It works out better in France, perhaps then, with Malraux?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Yeah. I mean, a man like Malraux, I mean, a very knowledgeable man and a discriminating man and a man with a real humanitarian feeling aside from other things and understanding of art. And—but it takes a big person to—but see, one thing though, that France is one thing.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Malraux is the head of that.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: But France is one thing, United States is not one thing.

DOROTHY BESTOR: True.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: It's a great many different things. And Edward Bruce in this country was a wonderful man and marvelous person as the head, and Cahill was the associate head or something like that, I guess. But and I think he was probably—Cahill was probably a very effective man—

DOROTHY BESTOR: He seems to have been.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: And yeah. But he'd made—there'd just be periodic trips.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KENNETH CALLAHAN: And the red carpet would be rolled out, and the state director would

get everything, you know, polished up and looking nice. And so, he just comes in, and he'd be entertained, and it would fine for, you know, for the few days, a couple of days to visit, and then off he'd go, then the thing would go right back the next day to the same old business. And in France being one thing. I mean—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: —there was a consciousness of what was going on. Malraux probably knows what's going on in the total, exactly what's going on and it, and it probably works very well. But this country is awfully diversified in different areas and different—and there's this—and there's these antagonisms of San Francisco feels are very important, you know, by themselves, you know, and Los Angeles feels they're themselves.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: You know, in these different parts of the country.

DOROTHY BESTOR: And there may or may not be a Northwest School of Painting.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Yeah. And—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Do you think there is?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Well, I don't. No, I don't. I don't. I think the thing is they—I think they're a number of interesting artists working here, but I think the diversity of the character of the artists and there's no—there's no one, two, or three or four people dominating it here.

[00:25:16]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: No one is. And well, just from one standpoint, the three painters who've received much the greatest national and international recognition of any of the artists here are Mark Tobey and Morris Graves, and myself. Well, what public works of art by Mark Tobey exist here? There's the thing in the opera house.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: That's the only thing by Mark Tobey. Where is Morris Graves? It doesn't exist.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: The Seattle Art Museum has works of all three of us.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: But and then, and then I have this thing in that little theater.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: That's all. Well, what brought these about? One person in the case of the Opera House, the Hoppers [ph], one person case of the little theater Ms. Stimson [ph], and nothing of Morris's.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KENNETH CALLAHAN: And at the same time, you find sculptures and paintings and mosaics and things—great many public buildings all around town have these by other artists.

DOROTHY BESTOR: True.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: But so, I mean, if these just say, Morris and Mark, were really the people who were head of this Northwest School, the dominating things here, well, you certainly wouldn't find that's the case. They're not dominating at all. I mean, they just happen to have lived here once or still live here or have moved on or something. But the—from the standpoint, that art centers around them here, around the three of us, why it's just nonsense. And my position here, just like Mark's and Morris', is only one fraction as

important as it is in New York.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: I mean, because of—I'm not regretting it or saying it should—I hope—I wish it was different. But I just simply mean that, that if there was such a thing as—who would—who was the center of if there is a Northwest School? Who's the center?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, you three [inaudible].

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Well, we aren't. We aren't because this disposes of us. I mean, what I've been saying as being the center, so who—where is the center? Well, there isn't any, you, see?

DOROTHY BESTOR: You're the center by reputation, even if not physically located in—

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Yeah, but I mean, if you think of the—you know, a Northwest school, with a—dominated by a certain group or something. It doesn't seem to me it exists. Because—and you can't say the university does.

DOROTHY BESTOR: No.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Because it only has a certain influence, and that's all. And there's nothing else you can point to that is the center around which the general art life—painting, sculpture life, the community—moves, it's all dispersed into different groups and facets. And from that standpoint, in the old days in Los Angeles, when there was a California style of watercolor painting. Well, it was Millard Sheets.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: There it was, immediately. You can just sweep upright like that to Millard Sheets. He was definitely the head of it. It was the California style. There were a great many people doing it. And it's identified by one thing. It was positively the California School of Watercolor Painting. And Millard Sheets was right at the top. That's a real school of painting. But in that sense, there's never been one here. You know, there's never been one person or two or three that have dominated styles, or character or anything.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, you've demolished that concept very convincingly. [Kenneth Callahan laughs.] It's after five, and I said I'd be on my way at five, but I just have one more thing to ask you.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: No rush as far as I'm concerned.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Looking back to the '30s and '40s, do you think that insofar as people reacted, pro or con, to the Federal Art Projects here, it was on the merits of the art that was produced? Or did it depend on people's feelings about the New Deal?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Well, I think out here, there was 99 percent, whether they were Democrats, Republicans, liberal or otherwise—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: —I don't—I think they, at that time, I don't think that there was more than a handful of people here who had the slightest interest in art, whether it was good, bad, or indifferent, or what artists did or anything else.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, really?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Well, in those days, but if I would sell two or three pictures a year, I mean, that would be wonderful, you know. And most artists wouldn't sell any, and I mean, in a—it was selling was just something that was nonexistent, you might say.

[00:30:10]

And one instance, I mean, a group of us got together, and we decided to put on a show. And it's just \$10—one price, \$10. And we had this exhibition, and one wealthy Seattle woman bought this painting of mine and said to me that she was so delighted to see this because

she'd been wanting to buy a painting of mine for a long time. And this is the first time she felt she could afford to. Well, at the same time, she paid five times that for a tire on her car.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Good heavens.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: But she—but it was so unfamiliar, the idea that she could just look right at me and say, Well, this is wonderful, because it's the first time I've been able to afford to buy a painting of yours, for \$10.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Isn't that awful?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: You know.

DOROTHY BESTOR: It's unbelievable.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Well, this was—it couldn't happen now, of course. But I mean that was —

DOROTHY BESTOR: That was in the 1930s?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: —along during in the '30s. And it says—I only speak to this because it typifies somewhat the attitude of buying paintings.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: And at that time, there were people who were doing very conservative paintings, realistic transcriptions of nature. Well, they were selling.

DOROTHY BESTOR: They were?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Yeah, they were selling. But when I'm talking about art, I'm talking about people who are trying to make paintings and sculptures with some quality, rather than trying to make merchandise, which is in the art—merchandise in the art category—and not just being qualitative, just simply of that. And the picture makers, the—and including those who would be down in the market somewhere painting on black velvet. Well, they would sell, you know, those, but they were purchased as novelties or by the people that bought them. It was a novelty. Or if somebody wanted a picture of a—of the sound, you know, with boats in the sound or something.

DOROTHY BESTOR: A sort of souvenir.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: This was not a—a souvenir or, you know, in that nature and not art. Not an expression of an individual.

DOROTHY BESTOR: What do you think has affected the big change in the public's attitude toward buying art? Because now almost everyone of any class or group is familiar with the idea of buying a picture? And an awful lot of them do?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: What has changed, did you—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. What do you think is responsible? Do you think that the Federal Art Projects had a share in that, or is it the general kind of a thing?

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Well, certainly I do think that they had a definitely—had a share in it and an importance. I feel myself that that one of the things that have been a very great influence is *Life*, *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines. Not from the quality of what they reproduced, but just the fact that for so many years, every week, anyone opens that magazine, here's a section devoted to art.

DOROTHY BESTOR: True.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Several pages, so you say one-twentieth of the magazine is devoted to art. Well—every week. So, after weeks and weeks and weeks, anyone is—it's bound to get in your consciousness that that is a part of contemporary life. Art is. And I think the quality of the reproductions, and the kind of paintings that the—or sculpture they used is of less consequence, and just the fact that it appears. Because that's the first time in this country that art has become in a news thing—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KENNETH CALLAHAN: —the idea that art is a part of our lives.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: One-twentieth part of the news value of our lives. Well, that's a pretty big percentage.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. You're right.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: You know, and previously by—it's never mentioned, except rarely a special article about some great collection. Well, that means nothing because everybody knows they're great collections, and that has nothing to do with the ordinary man.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: But every week a thing.

DOROTHY BESTOR: That's a very good point.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: I think that has really had a great—I think that Mr. Richardson saying this about the WPA, I think that's—I think he's a very he's a brilliant guy—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: —I think he's a very fine person, Richardson, I mean. But I forgot what I was going to say, but anyway.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh? [Kenneth Callahan laughs.] About the WPA's having a share in the American's—the American revolt against French art and rediscovery—

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Yeah.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —of our own country?

[00:35:01]

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Yeah. Yeah, I think that was—yes, that was the thing. And I think that that was very true and, and I think that it—that's one of the big things I think that they—that the thing did was to call the American artists attention to the fact that they could—they didn't have to look at French haystacks or French lily ponds or French still lifes in order to make art.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, thank you very much, indeed.

KENNETH CALLAHAN: Oh, not at all.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]