Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Joseph A. Danysh, 1964 December 3

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Joseph Danysh on December 3, 1964. The interview was conducted by Lewis Ferbraché for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. This is a rough transcription that may include typographical errors.

Interview

LF: Lewis Ferbraché
JD: Joseph Danysh

JD: Do you want to test this first to see if I'm talking loud enough and that? I'd rather be comfortable about this because I think I can last longer if I -

LF: Right. Good. I'll see if it is recording. Mr. Danysh, would you tell me when and where you were born and some of your early art experiences?

JD: Well, I was born in San Antonio, Texas, in 1906, July 15th. I went away to New York for high school and was graduated from the De Witt Clinton High School in New York City. Then I went to college at Columbia University.

LF: Would you continue, Mr. Danysh? You went to Columbia University?

JD: Yes. I first began to get interested in the field of art at Columbia. I took art history courses, aesthetics, and became fascinated with contemporary art at the time. There were quite a number of good examples of contemporary art easily accessible, about this time. This was in 1928-1932. I began to write on the subject during my senior year; wrote articles for the college magazine, also reviewed important exhibits for the daily paper, the Spectator. I think the greatest impetus to my growing interest in art was the opening of the Museum of Modern Art. It appeared that without necessarily directly espousing a career in art, more and more of my interests and more and more of my time during the last couple of years at college were devoted to the art field, and I took some courses in creative art and painting, and since those days, in the intervening years I have don't considerable work in sculpture, the crafts, and some painting. However, most of my interests of late have been in poetry. Perhaps the last six or seven years I have been writing poetry fairly consistently. But during the early years after college my interest was in research, in administering art activities. I found that I seemed to have a hesitancy, an inability to express myself directly in any of the creative media but I at the same time couldn't stay away from the field. And I found myself involved with a great many art activities and then finally it evolved into a full-time career for a good many years.

LF: Did you work in New York City in a gallery, or museum, shop or -?

JD: No. Very shortly after I was graduated from Columbia I left New York City and came out to California, and although I did present a number of lectures over WMIC [news/talk radio station] in New York on the subject of contemporary art, I felt very much like a missionary in the field, and when I got out in California I felt like a missionary out in the bushes, because in those days there was very little interest in what was then the contemporary art expression of the time and - at the risk of carrying this out to extreme lengths - I don't know how much you want me to go on in this vein -

LF: We like spontaneous expression.

JD: Well, naturally I made the rounds of the galleries as soon as I got here, and was disappointed to find that there was nothing being shown - or nothing of the work of contemporary artists being shown. I knew some artists in California from my contacts in New York. People in California who'd been friends of friends of mine. I had come out and I had met them in New York, and heard about others out here, so I was acquainted with some of the living artists, and I was surprised to find very little of their work - particularly artists who were exploring, who were not content to be painting cowboy paintings and the usual soft romantic landscape scenes [found very little of their work WHAT? Explorational? New? Or was it?] - one of the things that sort of catapulted me into the art picture in San Francisco rather suddenly was the fact that there had been an exhibition scheduled - I guess the first of its kind - an exhibition of the work of the more exploratory younger group of artists in San Francisco - for a showing at the Palace of the Legion of Honor museum. When the pictures were viewed by the then director, who later became a very good friend of mine, but with whom, as you'll see, I tended to feud in the early days, they were viewed with some alarm and they - the directorship of the Legion - decided not the exhibit them. Well,

there must have been about forty or fifty of these artists -

LF: Were they the local --?

JD: They were San Francisco and Berkeley artists. People like Glenn Wessels [painter, 1895-1982], Benny Bufano [sculptor, 1898-1970], Warren Cheney [sculptor, 1907-1979] - the names escape me for the moment, but as we get into this they'll come back. They were good people, good artists, alive, young, and of course their work was rather strange looking to people who weren't acquainted with seeing beyond the easy aspects of art. So the exhibit was thrown out and the result was a good deal of resentment and consternation on the part of these artists. They were looking for a spokesman and I supposed I was looking for a cause and I - it evolved that I was sort of elected to try to find them a place to hold this exhibit. It was something that I thought would be worthwhile doing, particularly because- well, Matthew Barnes [painter, 1880-1952] had several pictures in the show and I was at the time very high on Barnes. I still am. I think he is one of the great painters.

LF: I like his work too, his night scenes.

JD: Yes, tremendous, and, of course, Barnes - I knew Barnes from the East. As a matter of fact, when I was still in college he had sent a group of his paintings out to me, and I actually succeeded in selling some of them to friends and patrons that I knew, and so Matt and some of the other people, Glenn Wessels and some of the others, asked me to get into this thing to see if I couldn't - they needed somebody who was not necessarily himself involved as a painter, but somebody who was fairly aggressive, who was looking for a cause. So I was to the City of Paris and discussed this with Paul Verdier who was the president of the City of Paris, a department store in San Francisco. Mr. Verdier had been a patron of art for a good many years. He was a good friend of Benny Bufano's. He was not, I don't think, too thrilled about having to do something like this - to provide part of his store for a gallery, but it was the depression and it may be that in addition to wanting to help with the cause, this might have been a good way of getting people into the store. As this thing evolved, there was a good deal of newspaper comment generated on the subject. Artists were calling the director of the museum names, and there was the usual sensationalism that goes with something like this.

LF: Yet the paintings were not as "far out" as we say they are today.

JD: Oh goodness, no, I mean today ---

LF: They were very wild impression paintings.

JD: Yes. Well, they looked pretty wild to the people who were not used to looking at them. They looked pretty tame to me, and many of them looked very good to me, but I'd been schooling myself for three or four years, seeing things that were was beyond these. Many of these were derivative of the strong French School, Cubists and Post-impressionists, and so on. So the upshot of it was that Mr. Verdier gave us the gallery. He built one. He took a section of the rug floor, which was an entire floor of the store, and put a burlap wall around the length of it and gave it - provided for a showing place on the two sides of this wall, and as a result we were able not only to show all the pictures that were exhibited, but to go out and get a few more that had been presented to the museum and rejected. I don't know if we'd do handsprings over that exhibit if it were hung tomorrow, because it was an expression the time, which art always must be. A few, I'm sure, would survive and look like good art today still. The artists considered this showing a tremendous success, and of course I got to know all of them pretty well, personally, and found myself right smack in the swim of the art group of the West Coast that I admired the most, and found myself fighting with those who were spokesmen for the academic and reactionary type of art that was going on.

LF: Were these newspaper critics and spokesmen for the different art organizations?

JD: Yes. The newspaper critics in those days, and for a long time - art reporting was sort of a tongue in cheek thing, a little bit snide, tending to create conflict, so that the story could be more exciting. The critics, I think, had little training, little perception, some had some appreciation, but it was an amorphous kind of appreciation, not too schooled or too experienced. It was the kind of thing you see in various small town newspaper art criticism today. But mainly the thing I observed - to digress a moment - the difference I observe in art reporting today, as against the reporting of the early Thirties particularly, is the stand that journals, magazines and periodicals like Life and Time have taken - a serious stand on art reporting, and have gone to the trouble to show good art without snide comment. They can be snide when they feel like it, or when there is an occasion for it, but generally -

LF: They are objective.

JD: They're objective and they're - well, I guess that's the best way of putting it - competent. They're objective and competent and qualified. They're not seeking to build circulation on the subject of a fight in the field of art, always. I mean they are not always seeking this. Sometimes this happens, but this was the pattern of art

criticism in the Thirties. Many of the old-times wrote letters to the paper during the period of this exhibit and it was well-developed controversy, and I must say that I didn't do anything to quell it. I felt that this was good for the cause. Actually we sold some pictures. I sold the first Matt Barnes out of that show the day that the banks closed during bank holiday.

LF: In 1932?

JD: Yes, it must have been '32. It was sort of interesting and ironical that the man came in and bought the picture and he said, "Here is the check. Officially it is no good today because the banks are all closed, and I don't know when it will be good, and what will we do?" So I called a man that I knew at the then Wells Fargo Bank and asked him what to do, and he said, "Well, just accept the check and don't date it." And I said, "Is the check valid?" And he said, "I don't know. It's as valid as the man." So we did and we sold that one, and a couple of other pictures that day, which is sort of an interesting little historic highlight. Shortly after this, Ansel Adams [photographer, 1902-1984] - or during this time, as a matter of fact - Ansel Adams leased space that had previously been held by an art group called the - this will have to wait too. But it was a group of artists who had formed an association mainly for the purpose of renting a gallery and showing their works.

LF: Was it Beatrice Judd Ryan?

JD: It was Beatrice Judd Ryan's original Beaux Arts Gallery, of course, and Ansel Adams took over the leave from the Beaux Arts.

LF: Was that on Geary Street or the Maiden Lane?

JD: Well, it went from - it was in the Bedell Building. It was on the corner of Geary and Stockton, and I think it was the Bedell or Wadell or some such building, and it was good space, beautiful space. As a matter of fact, it was the best gallery space in San Francisco, and Ansel has associated himself in a specific enterprise with Edward Weston [photographer, 1886-1958]. He'd been associated with these people for years but specifically to exhibit their works. Edward Weston and -

LF: Their photographs?

JD: Their photographs. Willard Van Dyke [1906-1986], Dorothea Lange [1895-1965], Imogen Cunningham [1883-1976], and they called themselves the F64 Group, and this was going to be principally a gallery for photographs.

LF: F64?

JD: F64 which is a stop on the lens of a camera.

LF: I see.

JD: And they were doing all right. They had some art exhibits, but after a short while it developed that these people who are creative people, highly professional, were interested in the art techniques of photography and not interested in running a gallery. About the time of this exhibit at the City of Paris store - I had know Ansel ever since I'd first come out - Ansel suggested that I buy a partnership in the gallery with him. We talked about this at some length, and this I did. We turned it into the Adams-Danysh Galleries and then later on Ansel decided that he wanted to give up the gallery business altogether, so I took it over. I operated this gallery for, oh, until about 1935. In the meantime, I can't remember the dates on this exactly, but during the time when I still had the gallery I got a job on The San Francisco Argonaut, which was a weekly, which was then the oldest weekly west of the Mississippi. That was its greatest claim to fame. I can't say that its editorials were very great, although its art and music coverage for a while, I think, was quite distinguished, since I handled both of those jobs, and I can say without blushing too much that I still feel that I had a certain qualification for the art reporting, and I did the music column under an assumed name. I had to scratch to do a conscientious job of music reviewing, although I had some competence in the field. I had some knowledge of music, had become friends with Henry Cowell [pianist, 1897-1965], and had heard all of his music, and had been introduced to a lot of contemporary composers in San Francisco. So I did the best job of reporting on modern music that had ever been done up to that time, because everyone in San Francisco was somewhat afraid of it and -

LF: Well, that didn't understand it, too.

JD: Just didn't understand it too well. They hadn't been exposed to too much of it, and except for a few people, didn't care too much about it. Here again it just seemed like my métier. It was something I understood and felt more directly then I did other classical music, although I must say that I had some background in that. How in the hell did I -

LF: You're on the Argonaut staff.

JD: Oh yes. I was -

LF: This must be about '33 or '34?

JD: It was that time. It was probably in early '33 that I went into the gallery, and I kept it until probably the middle of '35, something like that. I had an awful lot of fun with it. I had some good shows; did the kind of things that I felt benefitted the cause of the then contemporary art and the living artists; had a lot of group shows. I showed practically all the people that were in the original Legion of Honor rejection show. It was about this time while I still had the gallery and was writing the two columns for the Argonaut that I was asked by one of the local relief projects to think up a project to put professional people - this was before the national Federal Art Project - and I suppose you have these pretty clearly differentiated yourself?

LF: State Emergency Relief?

JD: That's right. And there was a very bright, differentiated, young man by the name of Jim Sharp, who, while he was involved in the controlled or statistical projects and the statistical aspect of this whole program, nevertheless has a very fine feeling for the cultural and human aspect of this whole thing. He seemed to see beyond the just "make-work" kind of job or direct relief aspects of it. And in his way had quite an influence on the whole program as it developed later through the federal agency. He came to me and asked if I - well, he didn't come to me, we happened to be very good friends - and he asked me if I would try to think up a project that might help some of the statistical projects that he had going, and also have some significance beyond that.

Well, for a long time I had been preoccupied with what were the actual aspects of the "starving artist" idea in America. It was romanticism, it was a legend, a myth, it was reality in many cases, but how did it shape up in reality? What percentage of the artists in a given period made a living? How did they make a living at all? How much time did they actually put into their art, and then, of course, there were qualitative aspects, factors that could be derived from this. Were the better artists the ones who had more security or less, and these were concepts that had preoccupied me before for a long time. And I sat down with Jim once and I asked, "I wonder if this couldn't be converted into a study since we have the hands to do the research." We were taking people off relief, and making reporters out of them, and having them ring doorbells and ask questions, and so on. So we developed a schedule of questions to reflect this, and actually this evolved into a completed report. I don't know where it is; I don't have a copy of it anymore. And I don't know how significant it really is, although certainly the report hasn't had any influence to my knowledge - because the whole development of the project itself and its, later into the war period - I think some of the real potential of the program became so diffused that it has resulted in nothing now but a nomad reminiscing about what happened.

As a result of this particular study, the - well, this was a combination of factors. One day Jim Sharp came to me and he said, "I understand there is going to be a federal agency to take over this whole art project - not take over, but create an art project, and I've sent them some of the correlations of this report, and so on, and they are using this among themselves, at any rate, to justify and develop this thing and we ought to keep sort of in touch with them." Some months later, it could have been six months or a year later, someone out here - I received a telegram quite out of the blue, as a matter of fact, asking if I could come to Washington to discuss the art project of the West Coast. I checked with my friend, Jim Sharp, and he said that they had been in communication with him. They were looking for someone to direct - if and when - the project for the northern part of California.

LF: Would this be about the fall of 1935, do you think?

JD: Could have been. Could have been a little earlier than that.

LF: This was the beginning of the Works Progress Administration?

JD: Yes.

LF: Rather than the earlier Public Works Project?

JD: Yes. It was about the time that the Works Progress Administration project - and so I flew to New York, or to Washington, and talked with [Holger] Cahill [National Director for the Federal Art Project of the WPA, 1887-1960] and Tom Parker [Assistant Director of the Federal Arts Project, 1905-1964] about what was going on here. I wasn't particularly looking for a job or for any association. I felt like Barnard Baruch sitting on a park bench enjoying life. I was fairly broke, but I was enjoying it, and I wasn't particularly anxious to do anything. I was living on the two columns and the gallery, and it was a nice lotus eaters' sort of life. In any case, however, the more we talked about this thing, the more exciting it got to be, and I did become very much interested after a while and hearing more about it. So I asked to be associated with it. Well, several months went by after I came back, and one day I got another telegram asking me if I would take the directorship of the project for this area. I did. Of course, but this time I had an idea of what it should be. I had been thinking about it a good deal.

LF: Would you remember about what date this would be, offhand? Would it be towards the end of 1935? Early '36?

JD: No, I have an impression that it was before the end of '35. I'm pretty certain it was in the summer and it was probably early '35. It may have been March of '35. You'll have to get these dates. I suppose there are records somewhere as to just when this Federal Art Project started, because I was associated with it from the very, very beginning of the Federal Art Project.

LF: That's what I wanted to establish, that you were in at the beginning.

JD: Yes, I was the first one, as a matter of fact, the only one for this whole region during the early thirties directing the regional aspect of it.

LF: Yes. All of Northern California?

JD: Well, that was in the beginning, and then very shortly - oh, they asked me to go down and take charge of the projects in Southern California. And then as the program crystallized, I would say within six months, they had formulated a region of -

LF: Several states.

JD: Eleven Western states. Of course, most of the states were sparsely populated and didn't have a great number of artists, which meant that there wasn't too much going on there, except in a way they represented more of a challenge, because later on we developed art centers, teaching centers, children's art centers, art galleries in such places as Phoenix, Butte, Montana, and -

LF: Sacramento.

JD: Sacramento is one. And in the State of Washington - oh, I can't think of the city right now, but it will come to me. Well, now what?

LF: Were your headquarters located here in San Francisco all of the time, or in the beginning?

JD: Yes, the headquarters were in San Francisco the whole time. We used to get a government travel scrip for the airlines. The airlines were anxious for government employees to use air travel as much as possible to build up the habit of air travel, and I suppose to develop their own statistics for air travel. Of course, I enjoyed it, and I found that I was in outer parts of the region almost as much as I was in San Francisco. The Northern California project had a state head; the program was organized with a national director, a regional director and a state director. It so happened in California that there were two, because California was chopped into two states. Stanton Macdonald-Wright [painter, 1890-1973] had the directorship of Southern California. And Joseph Allen was the state director for Northern California. Wright was a far more exciting personality and somebody that was a lot more fun to work with. Although I don't think Wright looked for and developed the - well, Wright and I didn't always agree on who were the good artists, and who were not. However, we always managed to get along beautifully, and to have an exciting time about the project, as well as some very exciting times personally. I had a great deal of respect for his general knowledge of art.

He was particularly interested in oriental art. For many years, he had dreamed of going to China and Japan. He spoke Chinese, or at least he spoke a creditable restaurant variety of Chinese, because every time I went to a Chinese restaurant he spoke at some length with the waiters and the owners and so forth. This was sort of impressive. I'll never forget the disillusioned letters I got from him after he'd made his first trip to Japan, to the Orient. He'd gotten ill aboard ship, and Wright was - and I suppose still is - a very fastidious gentleman. Never one to - well, he wasn't an earthy type of guy, and he wrote about having gotten on this Japanese boat. He became ill and had to have a shot of some kind. I wish I'd saved the letters, because they were charmingly, wittily written, describing how this Japanese doctor took a hypodermic out of his back pocket, wiped it on an apron that was full of fish scales and shot him a few times, not knowing quite where, with this needle. And he has to be in the sick bay of the boat for a few days and he described his experiences and sensations while there.

Well, Wright, I think, because he was an exciting personality attracted interesting people around him. Not always the best artists, but he had - of course, I don't think the artists of Southern California at that time - I don't think there were as many people who were good artists. I think there was a much shallower level of art. I think they were - well, there were a number of people who were influenced by the French School - but there weren't as many, I feel, in Southern California as there were in Northern California who had something really to contribute. They were enthusiastic. They worked hard. They developed some interesting techniques, but they didn't take the Northern California people very seriously. They thought that they were kind of grubby, and hard-working, and too serious-minded. And, of course, the people in San Francisco didn't think too much of what was going on in Los Angeles.

Joe Allen knew a lot of the artists here. He'd been associated with a print and framing show for a good many years. I don't think he had any real convictions about art. He was a fairly good administrator. He knew the people and the artists and seemed to have their confidence. He was a jolly and easy going sort of chap with people, and could get sponsors fairly readily to put up money for various jobs. I don't think it mattered a great deal to him whether a job of real artistic importance went forward ahead of one of secondary importance. But after all this was my job to see that the good artists had sponsoring to match the scope of their talents and abilities, and to see that such sponsorship was forthcoming. I would say that Wright probably contributed more artistic insight to the job than Joe Allen did.

LF: Did you set the policies and the type of jobs that were to be done? I was wondering if you would describe your functions as administrator.

JD: Yes. All right. Naturally, we took a good deal of guidance and direction from the national directorship. I had a tremendous respect for Holger Cahill. It was a happy circumstance that we saw eye to eye on a great many things. I think he was a much more competent man in the field of art than I was, with much, much broader background, and a great deal more vision. He had the whole national picture, and was an extraordinary man. It was another example of Harry Hopkins's [FDR advisor, 1890-1946] great gifts of administration to be able to find, to pick a fellow like Cahill to do this. I've been disillusioned with a great many of my associates and contemporaries of that period and I would have to qualms about re-evaluating the people that I knew in terms of my maturity of today, and grading them down, and I shall if this occurs in the course of these comments. But this would never happen with Cahill. He had tremendous vision, tremendous ability, and commanded the respect of the most critical people in the whole art field in the country. There was no one any greater than he. He was a fabulous art historian. He knew probably as much about American art as anybody, and this includes Francis Taylor [art dealer, 1897-1968], or any of the others that I had any association with, or contact with. He had the confidence of the top museum directors of the country, not only in his position as director of the Federal Art Project, but before that as a counselor on American art. When some of the top museums of the country were looking for objects, examples of good American art, they had no hesitation in going to Cahill. I think he handled his staff very, very well.

The policy development was done on a consultative basis. Once the general policy for the country had been set, for example, when establishing a subsidiary program for the Index of American Design, what the goals of this were, you were left alone to pursue it. You didn't have someone breathing down the back of your neck to tell you what to do about it tomorrow or the next day. You were depended on for your own ingenuity and responsibility to get the job done. It was a very broadening experience for me at the time. Meeting and working with the other regional directors. We had numerous conferences in various parts of the country, sometimes in California, sometimes in the East, sometimes in the South, and Middle West. We got to know each other's problems and projects very, very well. We took heart from some of their problems and we took a great deal of inspiration from the good things that they were doing. I'd always come back with a tremendous urge to improve the quality, to find ways of broadening the base of our art activities, of getting the more remote sponsorship into the picture. So the policies were general and broad and then we formulated our own policies. Of course, I tried to stimulate and inspire the people working with me in my program in the way he did, by consulting them and trying to expand their capabilities - helping them to break beyond their limitations. From the humanistic point of view, it was one of the most exciting periods that you can imagine could have ever happened in American Life.

LF: Sort of a "renaissance" type period you might call it, the way I look back on it.

JD: Yes, yes. Well, of course, you were associated with it, you know, and it was - you felt that this was a renaissance, you talked renaissance, you saw it happen. You saw aspects of American art that had never existed before developing. You saw a mural - the murals proliferating, and you say good ones happening among them. You saw the interest in print making develop to a degree that had never occurred before. We looked all over the state, and all over the area, for old lithograph presses, and etching presses, and lithographic stones that had been used, and found them and ground them down, polished them up, learned the lithographic technique and made hundreds and hundreds of beautiful - God knows where they are. I can't believe that they were flushed down or taken out to sea and dumped. I daresay that they'll re-occur somewhere in American life at some future date, or each in its individual way have some influence that every individual work of art has had and will have.

LF: I have found some in the Berkeley Public Library, and the San Francisco Art Museum has some. The San Francisco Museum is giving them to the Oakland Art Museum. We are going to be the depository of the Federal Art Project art as we can find it. You know we're having a new museum built.

JD: Yes, yes, I -

LF: There will be an exhibit section for the Federal Art Projects.

JD: Well, you people ought to be congratulated. I know Paul Mills has done a great deal to bring it about. Well, so

what other questions do you have?

LF: Well, you would go to the different parts of the eleven Western states and confer with the state and local administrators on what should be done in their areas to meet - in other words, based on what artists were available and what --?

JD: Yes.

LF: And what work they could do, I would imagine?

JD: Well, there was a fundamental concept in the structure of the art project organization which called for participation by the community, and I think the originators of the program were very wise in doing this, because they wanted to get away from the feeling at the community level that this was something superimposed upon the community, and that this was some more federal boondoggling. They wanted responsible collaboration ion the local areas, and so the principal responsibility of the regional director was to see that the state people and the local people were broadening the base of their projects to bring in the communities. We would accomplish this by, first of all, setting up the community committees, state and local committees. These were advisory committees. They functioned rather loosely and indirectly, but more direct and more purposeful were the functions of the sponsorships. The project was set up so that a certain percentage - and I don't recall what that was - but at times it seemed to be awfully high - of funds were going into the projects which had to be supplied by the community.

LF: At least for materials and so on, I would imagine.

JD: We set up a separate project for Benny Bufano to do a 187 foot figure of Saint Francis, which never got done, and incidentally I'd like to talk about that somewhere along the line, too, if we have time. Then we had to go out and find some organization, public-spirited, non-profit, local political or public organization, governmental organization which was willing to dig up funds for rent, light, heat, materials; and sometimes the materials could be fairly expensive. When an artist was commissioned to do a mural, for example, somebody had to find the wall, somebody had to find the materials for this. Sometimes this could amount to a fair amount of money. In those days money wasn't too easy to come by. A good part of my job was helping the local people find the money, to go with them to break the ground for them with groups and organizations in order to get the sponsorship.

LF: Boards of supervisors, and councilmen and -

JD: Exactly. And mayors and officials, and also local historical societies, local art groups, local women's clubs. This involved endless speech-making, endless meetings, developing of committees, and pinning it right down on the dotted line, getting the money.

LF: Did you ever have any problems with these groups from time to time as to the type of art they wanted, these local committees, or these sponsors, and supervisors?

JD: Yes, yes. There were some. Well, I remember up in Seattle, Morris Graves [painter, 1910-2001] was on the project, and he had very recently been graduated from the University of Washington or from one of the art schools. I don't remember which one, but he was just out of school, and he was painting and drawing on an easel project for which there was no sponsor. And my problems came from the local WPA [Works Progress Administration] administration. You see, you probably had this explained to you before on your other tapes. The Federal Art Project funds were allocated in Washington as such, and then the monies were sent to the local state administrations. The art project had no administrative body to keep payroll time and to do the bookkeeping, and so on. All of this was done by the WPA state program for construction, and so on. So we drew upon the general services of the program to process our paper-work, and to process our communications, and our costs, and allocations, and expenditures, and so on. So quite often a state director for the WPA, or a county supervisor, would take it upon himself to save the taxpayer from the burden of these terrible artists by telling us we had to take this guy off the art project, that this wasn't art. And I'd have to prove it was art, and so on. And, of course, this is where I think I earned my salary for the project, because I would become pretty adamant, and this is where the support that I had in Washington would come in very handy. We had showdowns of this kind where I would say to somebody, "Well, I don't want to take him off, but if you insist, you take him off. This may result in you being taken off yourself, because it is out of your province, and this minute I'm sending a wire through your county channels to the head of the project in Washington demanding that you be straightened out as far as our relationship in concerned, and I'd just as soon you didn't visit this artist's studio. It upsets him. Don't even show your face around there." It gets in the way, and I never lost sight of the face that this was one of my principal responsibilities to the program. We had some of that with the sponsors, but not too much. It became pretty clear - well, in the first place the - we didn't have a great deal - it never occurred to me that our art was "way out." I always felt that it was my job to encourage the artist to go further out and be more personal, be more direct, be less concerned about what the sponsor was going to think. I somehow tried to throw a cordon around the artist

to keep him from being too influence by what the sponsor wanted. And I had some very, very good people here in Northern California working with me on this. Bill [William] Gaskin [co-director of the Northern California Art Project for the WPA, painter, 1892-1968], for example, had a wonderful way with sponsors. He, in his sort of relaxed way, couldn't be pushed. I saw him yesterday on the street for the first time in five years, I guess, and there was just a flood of memories that came back to me. When I saw him we didn't have too much time to talk but -

LF: What was Bill's function? I taped him, I had a three or four hour tape with him but perhaps you could describe your idea.

JD: Well, he was the closest to the artists. Allen's was an office function more than anything else. To keep -

LF: Allen was a business dear more?

JD: Well, it developed that way. Allen really just didn't have the qualifications to judge a work of art. He could judge the selling price of a print, and I think he knew a good deal about classical prints. But classical I mean everything up to the time of the project. I think he knew what was going - but there wasn't very much of an American print tradition, and I mean he had been a print dealer and he knew the dealership of prints. How much he actually knew about creative art is a question. Actually, he didn't have a scholarly background. He didn't read a good deal about it himself. He had, I think, what it took to be the catalyst in this thing, but when the basic chips were down and judgments had to be made about whether -

LF: What to put on a wall, for example?

JD: Yes. Or whether or not an artist was a good artist, or whether this artist or that artist was going to do the best job in the long run, etcetera. It was - he had to fly by the seat of his pants. He had to do an awful lot of guessing, and I don't think he had the inner confidence, but Bill Gaskin did. Bill lacked the administrative interest. He didn't care. Some very amusing things happened as a result of Bill's very offhand approach to administrative problems which I might be willing to discuss off the tape with you sometime. But these were -

LF: Was Gaskin, then, more of an idea man?

JD: He was the man; he was the artists' alter egos. We tried to keep him free of administrative things. If an artist wasn't producing work up to what I thought was his potential, I'd ask Allen to have Gaskin go and spend some time with him and sort of see what was bothering him, to see him, to have a consultation, to see if he could bring him out of this. To see if it was something technical, personal, or what. And Bill was fabulous at this. He had a touch that very, very few people had in any of the other regions that I know of. And, as a matter of fact, Cahill observed this about Gaskin also. In many ways, Bill Gaskin had the best judgment, the keenest insight, and the most creative relationships with the artists of anybody in my region. Of course, you know, I had a lot to do with the New York Art Project also for a couple of years. I don't know if you knew this -

LF: No.

JD: Well, I was the administrative director of the New York Art Project. And then I directed the New York World's Fair during the year that the Federal Art Project operated in the American Art Building. This was the second year of the New York World's Fair and I directed that. So I guess - then, of course, I got to know the supervisory personnel in every project in the country, and I don't think there was one man anywhere that had this quality. Now I mention this at length and make these comparisons among people like Willard - not Willard, but Stanton Macdonald-Wright, who, by the way, was Willard Huntington-Wright's [author, 1887-1939] brother - and Allen and Gaskin and others, because I think this is a tremendously important factor if there should ever be another art project. I think there has to be. There has to be someone like Cahill, who has a tremendous scholarship, but also a respect for the artist on the scene. There has to be a quality of mutual respect. I don't remember hearing among all the artists - and there were hundreds out here, and thousands in New York City and at the Fair - I don't remember one saying, "This guy is a bum. They really should have gotten someone else to run this art project." There may have been politicians who blanketed everybody in the WPA as bad, but I don't ever recall hearing a serious criticism by a qualified person anywhere in this country of Cahill. It is important to have people like that, a person like that. And I think it is tremendously important to have someone like Bill Gaskin who had the sensitivity, tremendous knowledge and background, which all went off to one side when the creative thing came. I mean he didn't - his creative relationships were intuitive, they were soft, they were generated, they made an artist bigger than he was. He took an awful lot of people in. He took Dong Kingman [painter, 1911-2000] when Dong was just out of California School of Fine Arts, and spent a lot of time with him, worked with him, improved him, helped him along. And I'm sure that if Dong were asked about this, and I haven't seen Dong since those days, he would just have to admit it, would have to recognize it. So that was pretty much - of course, Glenn Wessels did a certain amount of this also for the East Bay side. Glenn, I think, probably had more personal and inner problems, as we all have our share, each of us. Bill didn't seem to have any. Bill seemed one of the outgoing people. One of the people whose sensibility, sensitivity, goals and capacities all seemed to be working

together, and it took me seven years of psychoanalysis to get mine halfway geared, but Bill seemed to be able to do it without spending all that money.

LF: Someone has said that Bill Gaskin was a Zen Buddhist or something. Or, he had a philosophy that made him calm and philosophical.

JD: Well, I've never heard Bill refer to Zen Buddhism. I'm sure he read a good deal of Zen. It is my impression that Bill quit school somewhere around the third grade - or seventh of eighth - but I believe he is one of the best-read people that I know, because he has a natural talent for knowledge and has pursued a lifelong search for the kind of thing that the artist is looking for, or that the Zen Buddhist is looking for. I don't think he is an official, authorized Zen Buddhist. I wonder if we shouldn't stop now long enough -

[INTERRUPTION]

JD: Perhaps it would be well if you started out with a question again to get me going.

LF: You were telling me about Bernard Zakheim [painter, 1896-1985], Mr. Danysh, on the project and -

JD: Well, it is an interesting story. Actually, yes, Zakheim was on the project, but the story I mentioned to you briefly happened before the project started. This had to do with an incident involving the Coit Tower. The PWAP [Public Works of Art Project], which somewhat antedated the Federal Art Project and was considerably limited in scope and numbers, authorized some murals in the Coit Tower, and -

LF: This was the spring of 1934?

JD: Could have been around there, yes. Zakheim was one of the people who painted a mural in the Coit Tower. Well, you know Zakheim and you can probably fill in his background as well as I can. He was a Jewish boy from Poland who had come to this country and had been a butcher, and had an insatiable drive and desire for art. He taught himself, as nearly as I can tell, and became a creditable painter, muralist, mosaicist. He did a picture showing a library scene for this commission or assignment in the Tower, and somewhere along the line about the time the picture was to be finished, I had arranged to give him a one-man show in my gallery. He had some good watercolors, strong, vivid, brilliant color. The same sort of quality of painting as he is a man. He's vital, full of life, has a - well, he is a little hard to describe, as a matter of fact, because he is impulsive, he's colorful, he's friendly; he's not big, but he is strong and impressive. I've always liked Zakheim.

During the time I had the gallery I arranged to give him this one-man show. So about the first week of the show, the San Francisco Examiner came out with a photograph, obviously a composite photograph showing a hammer and sickle over Zakheim's mural, with a caption something to the effect - as nearly as I can remember - it is still in their files, I'm sure - "Soviet emblem tops Tower painting," or "Hammer and sickle tops Tower painting." Of course, these were pretty bad days for things of that sort to be said about anyone, and I never did particularly question Zakheim's politics. I know that he was liberal, and I know that he felt humanistic, that people came first in his painting and in his consideration, and I'm sure what they were officially just never occurred to me. I certainly can't say that I knew he was, or wasn't a communist. But he came in with this paper in his hand, and I'd seen it. I knew darn well to begin with, that this was not part of the mural. There was a hammer and sickle in one of the arches, whether it has been painted out or not, I don't know. But this hammer, this other hammer and sickle had been photographed and superimposed over Zakheim's painting, over this caption. He said, "We'll sue them. We'll sue them for a million dollars. You'll take half a million and I'll take the other half. They ruined your show." Well, I said, "Are you a communist?" He said, "No, I'm not." I said, "Well, that's good enough for me." I didn't care too much whether he was or not.

It did seem pretty bad to me that anyone would take liberties of this kind, or could get away with it. So I called up Doug Short, who was an attorney, and a good friend of Benny Bufano's, and a good friend of Bernard Zakheim's and mine, and I told him what happened, and I said, "We want to sue him." He just laughed and said, "You don't have a chance to get anything because you have to prove damages. You have to prove that as a result of this specific action on the part of the paper that you were damaged in some way and to that extent you - if you can prove it you can recover damages."

I said, "Well, probably a lot of people didn't come to the exhibit and etcetera."

"You can't prove it so" -

There was a good friend of mine whose wife was the daughter of a rabbi, and since I don't know the circumstances, etcetera, right now, I won't mention his name, but I did mention it to you privately off the tape. I said Zakheim is Jewish, and it seemed to me that the Jewish community in town would resent someone of their faith being treated like this. So Julie picked up the phone to call her father, who was a rabbi. And I asked her to find out if he would read a letter to this effect protesting this to his congregation, and he said he would. Whether

he read it to them, or sent it to them, or how, but in any case he said he would communicate this letter. He checked with other rabbis in the community, and they agreed that this was pretty bad and that they would make this thing known. So I drafted a letter and got it mimeographed, and had a whole stack, literally a foot high anyway, and called up Doug Short, the lawyer, and told him about this and what I planned to do. He said, "Good."

I said, "Would you come down," - his office was nearby - "Would you come and take a look at the letter and then I want you to walk over to the paper with me."

Well, we went over to the editor's office and were admitted immediately, and I again proposed that he run a retraction - which I had asked for earlier. Actually I didn't mention this to you earlier that Doug Short had gone up to the Examiner. He said, "We'll try it anyway," even though he thought it would do no good. The editor just laughed at us. He said, "Well, you know, the young man's scissors slipped. Sure, this could happen any time."

I said, "Sure, it happens every day. Somebody takes two pictures, one in one place and one in another, and you slice them up and put them back together and -"

"Well, it could happen," he said. He was obviously just playing cat and mouse. He knew we probably couldn't gain anything in a lawsuit. And protesting that you are not a communist is a little like protesting that you don't beat your wife anymore. So the second time we went, to my surprise, we were admitted immediately and I said that we had come back to discuss this again. We got the same reaction. I said, "Well, in that case, read this letter and here is a stack that I am having addressed at the gallery right now, and we will mail these out to the entire Jewish community and various rabbis are to communicate with their congregations."

And he said, "Well, do you know Ada Hannathan?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Do you think she is any kind of a critic?" She was their art critic and I said, "Not very much of a critic. She's conscientious. She makes the rounds but she doesn't have the scholarship, she has no background or anything. Her opinions don't stand for very much, but she does her job." He said, "Well, I'd like to have her come over and give Mr. Zakheim a very favorable review of his show."

I said, "All right."

So he sent her over and got something on the order of a quarter of a page on a split page section. It was the day, as I recall, that the general strike was announced in the headlines. I remember Mr. James, who was the gallery director at Gump's, calling me up and said, "Who do you know at the Examiner? How do you get this kind of review for your artists on a day like this a position like this?"

I said, "Well, you just have to select good artists, because you know we have a paper here in town that really understands art and when you see a good artist, they don't want him to go unheralded."

The amusing part of this story is that about three years ago, some twenty years later at least, Zakheim came into my shop and we were talking. I didn't seen Zakheim in fifteen years easily, and he said to my wife, "Here is a man who ruined me. We had a chance to make a million dollars and he let me down." And my wife, who has a pretty good memory, remembered my telling her about this. Zakheim said, "If you'd only sued. If you'd only sued, we'd have got all this money."

Well, this is the dear and wonderful thing that I've loved about artists that I've known. Benny Bufano - I can tell you a hundred stories about Benny.

LF: Maybe we can get him on the next tape. I know that you know a great deal about Bufano and he was quite a controversial figure.

JD: And I had a wonderful, wonderful five, six years in it.

LF: We still have a few minutes on the end of this tape. Is there anything you'd like to say about Barnard Zakheim's work and the progress of it while we're discussing him?

JD: Well, it is so many years since I've seen it. We're talking about thirty years ago, you know.

LF: That's right. Perhaps you remember the medical hospital, the U.C. Hospital Medical Center murals. Some of them have been covered up for several years. As I understand it, they are going to uncover them.

JD: That would be a good thing because Zakheim had a powerful and direct point of view and this came out in his paintings. He was fairly instantaneous in his art. Not in the sense of instant art today, or a directness of

abstract expressionism, or any of the direct approaches to art today, but he had it in his personality, and things that got in the way technically he bulldozed out of the way; he got rid of. He had a fine perception. I think Bernard was a little bit one-tracked socially. Man is social, but man is also private, and it seems to me that the social and sociological drive in his make-up, in his personality, dominated his art to a certain extent. But so did the others; so did the humanistic; so did the powerful inner personal things. And, unfortunately, his social convictions were as vital as his own vitality, and they make a happy team, which is good for living and it's good for art. I don't know what he's doing today. I understand that he's had a fellowship to paint in Poland, and nobody can dislike him.

LF: How did you make out with the exhibition and sale of his paintings after the retraction?

JD: It didn't do any good.

LF: At least it cleared the artist of a falsified photograph.

JD: That's right. At least I gained the undying reputation of having let him down at - I don't think we sold but one or two. Of course, those were very bad times. The general strike had a tremendous effect on everything. People trying to figure out how to get groceries home and into their basements or into their cupboards for the next month. People were stocking up, fully expecting that this was going to - this was something that was going to become, was going to stay in effect. This meant everything was on strike -

LF: Beginning with the longshoremen, and the seamen, and because of the police shooting down some of the pickets, they had a general city strike in San Francisco, or everything.

JD: Yes, that's right.

LF: In 1934.

JD: So there were- it was a job to keep a gallery going in those days.

LF: Did you have anything to do, Mr. Danysh, with the PWAP at all, the first works -?

JD: No, no.

LF: You weren't - you didn't attend any of the meetings at the De Young Museum which was then headed by Dr. [Walter] Heil on the project?

JD: Dr. Heil worked with the Federal Art Project, on the citizens committee, I believe. I know we always had excellent cooperation from him.

LF: He was originally the regional director during the PWAP period.

JD: Yes, I think so. There was a fellow named Ned Bruce [attorney turned artist, 1879-1943] who was at the head of his.

LF: Yes, Edward Bruce.

JD: Yes, he was the head of this.

LF: It was sort of a short-lived period of about seven or eight months.

JD: Yes, good, good. No, I think it carried on after the Federal Art Project went in, but separately. They were only -

LF: Sort of Treasury Department, TRAP [Treasury Relief Art Project].

JD: Yes, I think the Treasury Art Projects was sort of the -

LF: The thing for murals in post offices and federal buildings.

JD: Yes, that's right. I think they inherited the mantle of the PWAP. Strangely enough, we had - there was very little confusion about it at the time, and we had no intercommunication about it at all. There were actual art commissions. They were commissions that were granted to a given artist for a certain sum of money.

LF: Contracts.

JD: Whether he was in need or not. The Federal Art Project was, as you know, a -

LF: Workers from the relief rolls.

JD: Exactly. This was an attempt to differentiate among professional people who were on the relief rolls, and to find work for them in the field of their competence.

LF: Whether they were artists or plumbers or draftsmen or -

JD: Yes, yes. There were many interesting ways in which we integrated the crafts and craftsmanship of different people into valid art projects and in this program. In one classic case we had a number of people who were not capable of producing fine art on their own, but had developed craft techniques sufficient to qualify them for the art project. Rather than encourage them in the pursuit of these craft-like techniques, we developed one project. It is a little unfortunate that the design wasn't of a higher caliber for this, but we developed a project for a mural, an enormous mural for which these people each contributed in terms of his particular skill. Cutting tesserae for the mosaics, for example.

LF: Do you remember the name of the mural, or where it was located?

JD: Yes. I'm laughing because my wife just walked in. This is Mr. Ferbraché.

LF: How do you do?

JD: Mrs. Danysh.

Mrs. D How do you do.

JD: And she had never seen this, and we were married about six years ago, and I had told her about this project, and it had taken on a rosy glow over the years in my mind's eye, and of course I'd forgotten that I'd grown, and that art had changed. And we got to Long Beach where this mural hangs on the front of the Long Beach Auditorium, in this enormous arched space. It is something like 35 feet high, and 18 or 20 feet wide. It was a magnificent collaborative project.

LF: Was that designed by Macdonald-Wright?

JD: I'm afraid it was, yes.

LF: He did so much of the designing -

JD: Well, he did this one, and it's pretty Saturday Evening Post cover in design. It was an attempt to create a genre atmosphere in the mural and to keep a simple - well, actually it wasn't simple enough design, but to make it an illustrative sort of thing. It is the kind of thing Gaskin never would have done. He never would have allowed it to get by. This was the different between the two men.

LF: Do you recall the subject matter?

JD: Yes. It was people. It was a common subject of the time for the artist. It was a picnic in the park, or people in the park, and it is just a little too illustrational.

LF: Too much Norman Rockwell type of thing?

JD: Exactly. And I daresay if we had another five years to go, we would have recognized this ourselves. However, I don't recall whether I disagreed with Wright, or whether I compromised to the extent of getting this thing going. I think it may have been fairly well on its way before I got down the next time. But I was very much impressed with the fact that here were some twenty people working collectively on sections of this thing, and certain areas of it were developed in terms of sort of standardized clippings of the tesserae so that one person could do that. Another person could glue them onto the paper and follow a design which was fairly easy to follow.

[END OF TAPE ONE]

[TAPE 2]

LF: Perhaps today you could tell me something of Benny Bufano's activity on the project.

JD: Well, the story of Benny Bufano and the Federal Art Project is a volume in itself. I was very high on Benny Bufano. I thought, and still think, he is a great artist. He's hard to describe as a personality because Benny is a whole bag of paradoxes, to say the least. But out of this confusion that characterizes his interpersonal relationships, that is sometimes characteristic of his interpersonal relationships, comes a clarity of art

expression that I think is rare in our time. It is almost as if Benny were two people. There is no doubt and no question that when one of his works of art emerges, it has a directness, has a purity, a spirituality, a form that is consistently Benny, consistently great, as if by some miracle of human expression his work happily vests itself in all of the paradoxes of Benny's personality. This is the factor in Benny Bufano that excited me, and thrilled me during the time that I sponsored him on the project. Benny has always been a little bit difficult to deal with. He reminds me a little bit of a dedicated father stealing to feed his children. Benny will do anything he needs to do. I've never known him to do anything illegal or criminal, but I know that he will do anything that requires doing in order to keep working, to have the materials, to have a roof over his head, to have the tools, to keep working. This man represents the mono-manic drive of the artist to work, almost more than any artist I've ever encountered, to a greater extent than any artist I've ever know.

LF: Some of the artists have told me on their tapes that Benny had a tendency to dominate them and the run a project of his own. Would you comment on that?

JD: Sure. He did. He did. Benny has dominated people all his life and he has run a project of his own all his life. I think it would be a poor program, a misguided program that would exclude such an artist from its rolls. Also, I think it would be a misguided program that would try to cut Benny down, or a man like Bufano, down from his own true natural scale, into the scale of a, in quotes, "state sponsored art project."

Benny, at the time of the art project, wanted to do a figure of St. Francis 187 feet high to stand on top of one of San Francisco's Twin Peaks, and I thought this was a very valid project for the program. There was a great deal of opposition to this. There were political interests represented on the San Francisco Park Commission and Art Commission that opposed the use of Twin Peaks for this. There were religious aspects to it. There were a great many angles that had to be looked at, seen through - not angles but factors, aspects. These involved the San Francisco Art Commission and Park Commission. A number of members of both these commissions were frankly quite hostile to Bufano because Bufano had never minced words about "cheap art, bad art, junk art, official art," and he'd stepped on a great many toes. Also, the then prevalent attitude on the part of the public to Benny's work was that it was strange and unusual and overly-simplified. And I recall the head of the art department at the University of California at that time, who had commented on a bear that Benny was doing and dreaming of having put on the California campus, as a symbol of the "Golden Bears," - and there were the usual unseeing and unfeeling comments made by this man about Benny's bear.

Well, this was characteristic of the attitudes of the town, of many people in the town about Benny's work. Well, this St. Francis project, of course, had to have the blessing of the Catholic community, the Franciscan community, and the lay community representing any and all religious groups in the city. At first there was a good deal of resistance on the part of the Catholic community. However, after I'd gotten into the project - well, there are many threads and many, many aspects to this, and it is rather difficult to simplify. But I think probably the two areas, the three areas, that had to be explored, that presented basic problems to the realization of such a monumental project were: the money for sponsoring, to pay for the materials, and the attitude of the Art and Park commissions, and the attitude, the official attitude, of the Catholic Church, which was expressed in various ways.

At first it was somewhat resistant. I think principally because - well, Benny was thought to be pretty radical - suspected to be - for one thing; secondly, Benny's art was unusual. It was not the official Church art of the time. I'm happy to tell you that on the seventh of January of this coming year I'm going to be one of three members of a panel to jury a religious art show sponsored by a Catholic art group at the Navy postgraduate school here in Monterrey. And from talking to the principals involved, the attitude is vastly different from what it was years ago. I mean religious art, Christian art, and Catholic art are much more liberally interpreted today than they were then.

Well, I think it might be interesting to tell you how I approached the matter of these three areas of conflict. The problems of getting the money principally for the materials, the problem of getting approval for the design and a site, and the problems of getting the blessing of the people, of the group in San Francisco who I thought at the time should be most interested in a monument to the patron saint of San Francisco. Fortunately, there was a very enlightened man who was the head of the Catholic group there, Archbishop Mitty [1884-1961]. I think he is now deceased. I know he is no longer the Archbishop of San Francisco. After some difficulty I got - first I was given a personal interview or audience with Archbishop Mitty and was delighted to find him a very easy man to talk to. I had done a little research before my conference with him, and found that he had built a very fine church in Salt Lake City some years previously while he had been either bishop or archbishop of that area. I had seen pictures of it, the church, and also made some inquiries as to the difficulties he had had, and so on. I found that he had really had quite a difficult time bringing this project into realization. I placed myself in his position somewhat and asked him if he'd look at my undertaking somewhat in the light of the problems that beset his own. He smiled about this, and then I pointed out to him that someday, probably, there was going to be a vast and monumental structure on top of Twin Peaks. It might be an apartment house, a statue, it might be anything. Someday, there was going to be something there, and it would probably be a monument or commemorative

thing.

I said to him that it seemed to me that, knowing as I did, and as I'm sure he did, that styles in art change, and that the important thing would be that this monument that goes up there be a monument to his patron saint, to the patron saint of the city over whose spiritual welfare he presided, as it were. If I were in his boots, I'd go all out for this statue of St. Francis. It is a difficult undertaking, that this is the right time for it. It was something that had to be accomplished now, and that for all I know - excuse me, excuse the interruption.

I pointed out that since there was going to be something there, if I were in his boots, I'd make certain that it was a St. Francis. I assured him that I had no religious interest in this except that I thought that St. Francis had been a great person and had established in the folklore and literature of the world an important position for kindness and gentleness and had - this was something - this was an impulse and a spirit that could use a thousand monuments in the most prominent places. Since I knew there were going to be difficulties in raising funds for this, that I thought that the Catholic community represented - the sentiment of the Catholic community was very important.

LF: Was this after he did his Sun Yat-sen monument?

JD: No, no. This was before. In fact, I pointed out, I recall very clearly pointing out to his Excellency that we were working on the idea of a Sun Yat-sen monument for Chinatown, and that the Chinese people had made no issue of what this figure was going to look like. They had put their interest in Benny's hands and assumed he was a great enough artist to interpret their hero sensitively and properly. And I recall that the attitude of the archbishop changed considerably. In fact, I may be constructing this as saying "he hadn't thought about it that way." But his subsequent actions indicated that he had seen the whole project in a new light.

He immediately appointed Father Meihan to act as his representative for purposes of forwarding, or at least for purposes of representing, his interests in the possibility of such a monument becoming a reality. Father Meihan was a very friendly young priest: intelligent, fairly schooled in the liturgical art, a friendly person. He and Benny Bufano and I spent a good deal of time together afterwards, and made considerable strides toward the development of this project.

Bufano had constructed a model head in repoussé copper that stood about four and a half feet high, a magnificent thing. He had no pictures taken of it. We had been trying through the agency of Father Meihan to have the archbishop come to Bufano's studio, or us to take the head over to the archbishop's residence so that he could see it because we felt that there was a sensitivity and a beauty in this thing, that it would be hard to miss on anyone's part.

So father Meihan had called me on a certain afternoon and said, "I have a tentative appointment with his Excellency to see this and I think probably early next week or tomorrow." We'd been trying for months for an appointment. It was ironic timing because the day that Father Meihan called me, about four o'clock in the afternoon, Benny's studio burned down, and this head, along with a lot of other things, just perished, just disappeared. We found balls of silver that had been things he'd done in silver, and balls of copper that had just formed as if molten copper dropped from the second floor to the bottom, just dropped through the floor into the lobby. Well, it was a very tragic thing because so much of Benny's life was wrapped up in this and so much of our project had focused upon this.

We felt that a real barrier would be hurdled in the Art Commission in raising the funds, and so on, in all aspects of this thing, if we truly had the Catholic community behind us on the project supporting it. And we felt that we were just at this point.

Well, the head had gone up in fumes. Benny was nowhere to be found. I had dropped everything, and I just couldn't bear the thought of this little man walking into the park to his studio. He had an old building in one of San Francisco's parks. I don't know if it was then a public part or not. I don't think so; I think it was shortly after that it was acquired by the city. But it was an old two-story building, run-down, and apparently some electrical wires crossed, and burned it down.

Well, I just dropped everything and spent the rest of the afternoon trying to head Benny off, so that he could be prepared for this tragedy. After two or three hours I found that he and Father Meihan had gone down the coast, Los Gatos or some place, and they were due back at Father Meihan's residence. So I stayed there and waited. Benny came and he was raving. He said, "You know, I just heard from Father Meihan today that we have a meeting with the archbishop tomorrow. Now I know this thing is going to go, I feel" - He was like a little boy. I said, "Benny, I feel the same way. I think this is to be the great move. But I have something that I want to talk to Father Meihan about first with respect to this thing, that I have to talk to him about privately, and I wonder if you will excuse us while we go in the other room." So I took Father in the other room and told him what had happened. I said, "I wish you'd come with me." He said, "I can't. I have certain offices that I have to perform at this time."

Well, I said, "See if you can't possibly get exempted from this because I don't think I can handle this myself, and I know I just can't keep Benny away from his studio indefinitely."

So Father Meihan made arrangements to go with me and I said to Benny that I wanted to take Father Meihan with us because there were some things about this head that I wanted to discuss with him, so we would be thoroughly prepared, and so on. Then we got in the car and I had to tell him what happened. Well, he just sobbed. We went there, and here was his studio in which there were many, many fine things gone, nothing but ashes. So we did the best we could to console Benny and assure him that this would give time to do other things, and so on.

I took Benny to my house with me that night. I was living alone, and he became very stoical and very - not particularly communicative, but he was fighting this thing inside of him. I remember waking in the night two or three times and just hearing him sob. I felt so helpless. I just didn't know what to do. Finally, the next morning, I made breakfast and I said, "Benny, this is going to sound like all the Boy Scout talk you ever heard in your whole life, but I spent a good part of the night trying to evaluate this thing myself. And there are some disappointments, not anything comparable to yours, but there are some disappointments of my own involved in this, and all I can see for us to do is to start over again. The fire is put out; it is not going to burn anybody else ever again. And it is a tragedy and probably the worst thing that has ever happened to you in your life, but we've got to start over again."

He said, "That's right."

And every time I heard him express any feelings about the fire, the feelings were expressed in those terms. So it was rough and tough, but here we are and we've got to start over. Of course, it was impossible, it is always impossible to recreate a work of art. There isn't the energy for it. Anything that is great and valid is unique. And Benny tried - he made some drawings - a big drawing of this later and as he remembered it. We showed this to Archbishop Mitty, which of course didn't have the impact that the other thing had.

By this time Father Meihan had become quite enthusiastic about the possibilities of this, and had communicated it to Archbishop Mitty. I remember one other incident that involved the archbishop, and I look back upon it with amusement and pleasure.

Finally, after a good many tries, I persuaded him to come with me to Benny's studio where Benny had made a redwood model some fifteen feet high, I guess, and then he already had a twelve or fourteen foot high plaster of Paris model. One was the cruciform St. Francis that you see now in front of the - well, down at the waterfront in San Francisco, and I believe that is a replica of the original which is somewhere in Oakland, the one with arms outstretched to the sides. And the other one was in the form that Benny had finally decided he would like to see go on Twin Peaks, which was with the arms raised in benediction over the head. We wanted as many people as possible to see these because they were going to be presented to the Art Commission shortly. We felt that the more understanding generally about them before this, the better.

We managed to get an appointment for the archbishop and brought him over and I said, "You know, I wish there was some way we could elevate this piece so you could get a view of it from way down below, so you will get an idea of how this will look to someone standing at the base when it becomes 187 feet high, because there are factors of foreshortening that affect the whole expression and the attitude of the arms, and so on. These have been calculated into the present figures." I said, "Perhaps you could sort of scrooch down and take a look up. This will give you some idea." And I spread a piece of paper down below this one model, and while he was doing it, I said, "I've been in every position and every possible attitude with relation to this thing."

He said, "Except one."

I said, "What's that?"

He said, "On your knees in reverence."

I thought he was awfully quick and delightful, and of course it communicated to me that he had accepted. This was the greatest thing about it. Here he - when you can say something witty, charming, delightful about something, your hostility is gone. You're with it. Because these things come from fairly deep inside, and spring from friendliness and now sarcasm. At least this was my feeling, which was later borne out. He became a very enthusiastic supporter.

Part of the reason for the absence of a Benny Bufano monument to St. Francis on top of Twin Peaks is Benny. Benny is - has some built-in self-thwarters. It is difficult for him to be realistic about any project that he is engaged in. He lives in a world of extremely dynamic fantasy, and applies this sometimes to many aspects of a project or a situation in which he is involved. However, we made great strides, and I think that if the project had continued another two years, this thing would have become a reality. We got the approval, miraculously, of the

Park Commission. One man had been head of both the Park Commission and the Art Commission and had presented a good deal of resistance to the project, but by working with the Mayor, Angelo Rossi [1878-1948], who at first was quite lukewarm and then became enthusiastic about this possibility, we managed to come in contact with more and more members of both commissions and show them the potentialities for San Francisco with such a thing as this because what else is there, besides the Statue of Liberty, Christ [the Redeemer] of the Andes, the figure in Rio. There aren't any great contemporary monumental figures, and this did appeal to a good many people and there were enough people to see this and also there were some very strong supporters of Bufano on both the Park and Art Commissions.

Is this getting to long-winded on the subject of Bufano? Would you want to go on to something else?

LF: Well, perhaps because of our short time, I did want to go on to -

JD: Well, let me just tie it up and say that we did get the support of the city. We went to one of the great steel manufacturing companies and got a commitment from them of a contribution of all the stainless steel that was needed for the body of this figure. We went to another one of the big metal manufacturers and got enough material contributed for the face, which was to be in a copper alloy or something called "Cortev" which is a non-corrosive alloy. This was actually shipped to San Francisco. I don't know what use was ever made of it, but it never went into this project. It may have gone into others, but by this time the project began to reduce, and I left the project in San Francisco and went to the East Coast, to New York, and became administrative director of the New York City Art Project, which I think I mentioned in the earlier tape. And I headed the American art building which was used entirely for the Federal Art Project on a nationwide basis. That is part of the story of Bufano. Where do you want to go from here?

LF: I wanted to briefly ask you about these two buildings done entirely under the WPA during your period, I believe: the Aquatic Park building in San Francisco, and the Timberline Lodge at Mt. Hood in Oregon, all WPA.

JD: Yes, both of those were all WPA produced and both of them were the product of the farsightedness and cultural awareness of the man at the head of those projects. You have the name of the man who was the state director for the WPA in Oregon. I'm sorry to say I don't -

LF: Was it Margery Hoffman Smith [1888-1981]?

JD: No. She was the guiding spirit of the design in the interior of the Timberline Lodge building but the state director of the WPA -

LF: [Emerson J.] Griffith [1884-1965]?

JD: Griffith! Yes, right. One of the state committee, the chairman of the committee sponsoring the art project for Oregon was a man named Barker, and a very helpful person. He was a trustee of the University and came from a pioneer family. He was an elderly man and gave us a great deal of help. Well, Griffith was - it was through the farsightedness, the imagination of Mr. Griffith that Timberline Lodge became a reality at all, and it was rather wonderful to see how he fathered this thing. He had far from a paternalistic attitude, but a very fatherly approach to it. He watched it carefully. He had sensitivity enough to see that the artistic evolvement of it was right, and in the right hands and was a wonderful person to collaborate on this.

Margery Smith had a great deal of skill in the field of design and managed the project beautifully and brought it out to a very successful consummation. I don't know what's happened to it since. I haven't been there in twenty years. I haven't been there since the dedication of it, I don't think, which was quite exciting. We were all snowed in for a few days, which was very interesting. Then Aquatic Park came about very much the same way. You'll have to refresh my memory as to the name of the county supervisor who designed it. He was also the architect who designed it. But it was through the leadership of one man, William Mooser [1868-1962], that Aquatic Park became a reality. Also the man who had the same spirit as Mr. Griffith in letting the art aspects of it, decorations and so on, evolve in the hands of the art project without restraint. It was Hilaire Hiler [painter, 1898-1966] who did the murals. Hilaire is now head of the design department of a very fine school of design in New Jersey. I had a letter from him while I was at the California College of Arts and Crafts. I don't know if you knew that, but I became -

LF: You were president.

JD: Yes. And while I was there I received a letter from Hilaire. I've always admired him, always had a lot of fun with him, and he had a group of people working with him and under him, designing as well as executing, but under the general design leadership and coordination of Hilaire. In Oregon at Timberline Lodge the same spirit prevailed. Margery Hoffman Smith was coordinator of all the designing that went into it. But there were many other people who were designing things. She helped with them. Any other questions?

LF: Yes. You went on to New York from the regional office here?

JD: Yes.

LF: Was that about 1940 or '41?

JD: No, it was '40. I remember this very clearly - I think I left on New Year's Day or very shortly thereafter, of 1940. I had resigned from the project here. The projects were beginning to close down and they were - I can't recall whether my position was eliminated as regional director or not. But the straws were in the wind and this was going to be happening, and it was a matter of stepping into a local situation which didn't particularly appeal to me, and for personal reasons I decided I wanted to go back East. So I did. I left very, very early in January of 1940.

LF: You took charge of New York City's Art Projects?

JD: No, a woman by the name of Audrey McMahon [1890-1981 had been in charge of it from the very beginning, and I came in in an administrative position under her supervision, or under her direction. Then I was placed in administrative charge of the entire project, so that it was a co-directorship really. And then during the time I was there I was loaned to the American art building at the New York World's Fair for the period of the Fair during 1940. At the end of the Fair I went back to the project. I don't recall for how long. It could have been a year; it could have been less, or more. I'd have to consult my oracle, I guess, to remember.

LF: Margery Smith, on her tape, also mentioned the New York Art Project building at the Fair. Was she working with you at the time, or earlier?

JD: It could have been. It could have been. I remember she very well could have been. She may have come there representing the artists in Oregon because, while the art project, the national art project, underwrote the expense of continuing the American art building during the second year of the Fair, the conduct of the building, the planning of the exhibits, and that sort of thing, were not necessarily entirely, or rather the exhibiting was not limited to Federal Art Projects artists. As a matter of fact, there were some twenty-one different organizations, nationwide art organizations, that were invited to exhibit and each organization elected a committee to work with the director of the building, of the enterprise, and the organizations ranged in character and creed all the way from the far left to the very furthest right, if you can make such classifications. The Artists' Union on one hand and the American Academy of Arts on the other. Everyone vying for the best dates, everyone vying for the most space.

I think we exhibited as many as two or three troupes at one time. It was quite an active period in my life because there were many, many problems involved with sittings and meetings far into the night adjucating. In fact, I remember Colonel Somervell [1892-1955], who was the WPA administrator for New York City, who later became head of army service forces during the Second World War. He said to me after the exhibit closed that I was now well qualified to be ambassador to the Grand Chaco.

I don't recall too many incidents affecting the exhibits at the World's Fair. It was a job. We had a couple of kinds of ridiculous things occur. One, we were asked - I don't know whether this generated among the directors of the WPA, or whether it came from outside forces, but there was a large mural over the - in the main room of the American art building. The main gallery had a ceiling about twenty-five feet high, and it was, oh, a good three-quarters of the city block wide. It was an enormous room; a beautiful room. In this mural - it was one of the typical themes of the time, workmen and man laboring - the echoing of the social forces that were abroad in the land, the depression, and so on, eulogizing work and so on. One of the workmen in this large mural had on a working glove, which I think Macy's sold under their label of "red star," which is Macy's symbol. This red star became quite a controversial thing. Many people saw communists hiding behind the star. And we were asked to have it painted out. It was one of the permanent exhibits for the whole duration of the show. We were asked to take it down. We got some anonymous phone calls and I think we may have had a directive from the head, from the administrative office of the WPA. But to the best of my knowledge these things were laughed off. The murals stayed in place because we - you have to remember that there are always good people, sound people, and people who are beyond suspicion or reproach who are intelligent enough to see through this sort of nonsense, and whenever we were in a bind or in a pinch we would call on these people to calm the waters and apply the balm of wisdom and intelligence to the storm. Well, you don't apply balm to a storm, do you? To the sore? Let's keep our metaphors clear - unmixed in any case.

LF: You want to leave about 1:00, do you?

JD: Yes. Well, I can stop any time here.

LF: Well, I wanted to sum up. I did have many more questions, but because of lack of time I did want to get the principal things across.

JD: Good.

LF: Such as your opinions of the WPA art project as a whole. Whether the government should perhaps sponsor something like that again and - or whatever you have to say in summation, what you thought about the project?

JD: Well, I think if the government attempted to do that now, they would find very few people available to work on the project. I find that when I go looking for art, most of the good artists are tied up with a dealer and are selling more than what they can produce, and this is a wonderful thing. I'm not sanguine enough to believe that this is a condition that is going to maintain forever. I wish that it would. But the art project was a child of its time. I don't think there will ever be in the foreseeable future an economic situation that would be comparable to one that gave birth to the art project. There could be tragedies and great upheavals and that sort of thing that come from outside the American community, a war on our soil, and so on. But this was something that grew out of our economic confusion, and of course there is no such thing as economics without humanness, and economic confusion is human confusion. People - the aspects of our pre-depression economy that brought the depression about were - there were aspects that involved non-economic, human things. I think there is such a thing as a national longing for a national art. I think that people in a country want to be identified with the art of that country, and want to have a great art, just as they want to have a great railroad system. I think when they go abroad and talk with others about the art of the other people's country; they feel that they are lacking something. They feel that they are not identified. They'd like to identify with a country that has that. I think there really is such a thing as a longing -

LF: To have some national culture?

JD: Exactly. And I think these were feelings that were a part of our economic shortsightedness that gave rise to a depression. I don't know - I think the depression was a happy alternative to a revolution. And the fact that the solution to the depression, making work, had to satisfy also these other longings.

I know that when the federal government began to spend money for the alleviation of economic wants in the country, that there were many, many spokesmen for the alleviation of the spiritual and cultural deprivation. I was one of them. I was not - I was among them. There were many who were more articulate and many who had more presence of power than I had at the time, but I certainly felt that this was part of the deal. I remember in interviewing artists for the earlier project that had to do with the research - now it comes back to me that Jim Sharp had asked me to interview these people. There were many of these people on direct relief and they were going to get maybe ten percent more, or about $1.80 per week more to go onto a work project.

In the popular myth about people and work today in the minds of many people, "people don't want to work; they'd rather stay at home." This isn't true. This is not true. As soon as people know they can't work, they realize that something vastly important is being taken away from them. This conviction was consolidated for me in the days when I was interviewing people to become part of this artists' research project that I spoke of on the earlier tape. They would come in and say, "Please, I don't want the extra money. I want work." They weren't interested in that extra five dollars per month, or eight or ten or three, or whatever. "I need it, of course, but if you'll just give me a job, something to do so that I have dignity and validity, I'll forswear that - you can give that to Charlie or give it to somebody else. Don't even put me on the project, but put me on an assignment. I'll do it, and I'll do it faithfully and as if I were on the project without anything but my direct relief benefits. I want to work." And in a number of poems that I've written, some of which have been fairly spontaneous, I find this theme evolving that man needs to work, he has to work, he has to work in terms of himself; in terms of his feeling, preferably in the profession for which he is trained, but certainly in the area in which he is happiest. But he has to work. And he has just as strong a longing to be identified with a culture that is as good, or better than his neighbors' culture, or the culture across the sea. I think he will fight for this, train himself for this, and put these longings into effect one way or another to achieve this.

LF: Probably the art that was done while you were regional director, some was good, some bad, quite likely, but a lot of it still exists as sort of a monument to that period today that is actually very good, some of the murals, for example. What would you have to say about that?

JD: I would say that the Federal Art Project didn't create any geniuses. I think it was too short-lived to create an atmosphere which produced extraordinary talent.

I read someone's comment about Winston Churchill the other day that - either someone said or speculated about the possibility that Winston Churchill could have become the world's greatest painter. Of course, I don't think there ever will be such a thing as the world's greatest painter. This is one of the old romantic myths about art, but translate that into "he could become a very great painter," comparable with some of the renowned painters of the world. I'm sure that the conditions of the Renaissance channeled the energy and the interest of men of genius, talent, into art because art was a respected and sought-after cultural thing. Artists were men of importance.

I was reading the autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini [Italian artist, 1500-1571], and while in many ways he was treated like a bum, when the chips were down he called the turn for the princes and the kings who wanted his work. There has been a long period of American culture where Benvenuto Cellini would have been doing something else. There would have been a man needing acclaim, needing the space in the culture to live, and the independence that this man needed. He would have died or would have gone into something else. He would have become a railroad man or his genius would have been challenged by some other activity. I say this about Churchill, that if the world culture needed - wanted a man of Churchill's genius to be an artist, he could have very likely become a great artist. Well, the art project didn't do this. It didn't provide that kind of métier for the artist. It didn't last long enough, for one thing. There was a tremendous spirit of opposition to it all through the country.

The opposing political parties used the work projects very brutally in their political campaigns. I don't just mean at election time, but day after day. It took a fairly hard skin not to be sensitive to this pressure that was on all the time. And I think there was a basic - from the point of view of long-term cultural goals I think there was a basic fallacy in the project, and that is, that it was geared only to a work relief program.

If an art project were to be developed today and amount to anything, it would have to represent a vast fund of money, resources comparable to a defense fund in quantity. Billions and maybe trillions of dollars to be available for a cultural activity. This can happen in our country. I think we will always have to have vast defense funds, because always is a long time, but an art project would have to be in a position to tap the abilities and resources of all the artists.

LF: Thank you very much, Mr. Danysh, for giving the Archives and myself some of your time. I know you're quite busy and I think we've gotten at least something on the tape for the future.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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