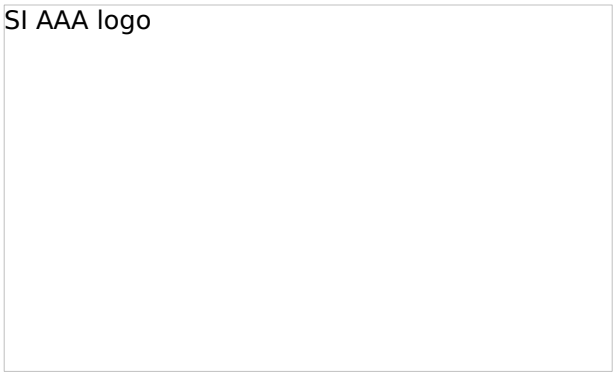

Oral history interview with Roland F. Dickey, 1964 January 16

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Transcript

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Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Roland F. Dickey on January 16, 1964. The interview took place in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and was conducted by Sylvia Glidden Loomis for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's New Deal and the Arts project.

The original transcript was edited. In 2022 the Archives created a more verbatim transcript. Additional information from the original transcript that seemed relevant was added in brackets and given an –Ed. attribution. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

SYLVIA LOOMIS: This is an interview by a representative of the Santa Fe Office of the Archives of American Art with Mr. Roland Dickey, director of the University of New Mexico Press in Albuquerque, New Mexico on January 16, 1964. Mr. Dickey is also the author of the book *New Mexico Village Arts* published in 1949. During the WPA days, he was a supervisor of the art projects in Bernalillo County under the state director, Vernon Hunter. And later, director of the Roswell New Mexico Museum and Art Center. Also, present is Mrs. Joy Fincke who worked closely with Mr. Dickey on the Project and who may supplement his recollections. Before we start talking about your work on the Project, Roland, would you tell us where you were born and educated? And when you came to New Mexico?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: I was born in New Mexico. I was born in Clovis, and grew up there. And I came to the University of New Mexico where I went to school. As a matter of fact, Vernon Hunter was influential in my coming to the university. This was Depression times, and Vernon wrote a letter to President Zimmerman, the president then of the University of New Mexico, and recommended me for a job. And, as it turned out, the president was able to get a place for me. And this led to my coming to the university. This was in 1934.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, you're almost the first person that I've ever come across who wasn't Spanish or Mexican who—or Indian, who wasn't born somewhere else outside the state.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So, you're rather unique. When did you start work on the Project?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: As I recall, this was in the summer of 1937. Vernon had been interested in my work at the university and I was still earning my way as a student. And there—I had completed some work for the university, funds that expired, and I was available for a job. And Vernon asked me if I would be interested in a supervisory job as county supervisor for the Federal Art Project for Bernalillo County. As it happened, the supervisor who had the job previously was leaving to be married. That is, she was resigning the job. This was Virginia Dinkel [ph]. What—I can't recall her first name.

JOY FINCKE: I don't remember her name.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: But, at any rate, this was something which coincided. And, as I remember, this happened that summer. And I began immediately under Vernon Hunter's direction to supervise the work of a number of artists in Bernalillo County. I don't recall—there were probably somewhere 15—between 15 and 20 of them.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROLAND F. DICKEY: There were a number of kinds of things going on at that time. We had all sorts of people. And something I was very proud of—found very interesting and exciting, was there was a great deal of remarkable talent. One of the problems, I think, everyone on WPA had

was that people assumed that because this was related to public welfare that the people were no good. And this particularly at the supervisory level this was a constant kind of contention and campaign, trying to explain to people that you did have people with genuine talent who were on this because of economic circumstances. That particularly artists, and this applied to writers and other people, had great difficulty in finding jobs anywhere near their training and talent. We had —we had sculptors and painters. Had a Negro boy who was going to the university, a man by the name of Oliver LaGrone. A very talented sculptor who's now, I understand, teaching sculpture in Detroit, I believe with the public school system.

[00:05:00]

There was an Indian boy who was also going to the university, a painter, I believe Joy has mentioned him, Paul Goodbear who's—was a Cheyenne whose name was—his Indian name was Chief Flying Eagle. Very talented boy and a very astute person in terms of commercial possibilities, of developing his talents and taking an opportunity. We had, of course, many Spanish—people of Spanish descent and what we called Anglos. And—for instance, Howard Schleeter under my supervision for a time. Brooks Willis was another one. Then, there were people who were doing minor things, such as projects related to the Index of American Design.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you remember anything about the wages that they received—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: The—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —[inaudible].

ROLAND F. DICKEY: As I—as I recall, my great ambition on the Project—and this was when I was finally at Roswell, which came later—that I reached the grand sum of $95 a month. And one of the supervisors got $100 a month and I never reached that stage.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROLAND F. DICKEY: But the wages, as I remember, began about $66 a month. And that, as I say, $95 was—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: A top salary.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: —the top salary—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: —almost, in the supervisory area. And so, this was no—this was no bonanza. That this—you were—people were really struggling at these wages. And yet, people were very grateful to have something on which they could live.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Provided the necessities.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: I—yes. I had—I had worked up a system where as far as possible I ate on 50¢ a day. And I, most of the time, managed this, you know. But it was possible to do that [laughs].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Seems impossible today [laughs], doesn't it? In fact, it would be. How many other supervisors were there?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: As far as I know, I was the only county supervisor. That is Bernalillo had—was the only county with a large number of artists. However, shortly—well, about this time, you had gallery set ups in which you had what were called art centers, federal art centers, which were part of a national plan. And in New Mexico there were four of these. One at Gallup. I—Mary Eleanor Thoburn [ph] was the director there. And I believe she was replaced later by Anna Keener Wilton. Then, there was one at the little town of Melrose near Clovis and Martha Kennedy was the Director there. This was a very small gallery. One at Las Vegas, and there was one at Roswell. At the time I was in Albuquerque a man by the name of Robert Sprague was the director at Roswell. And a little later on I replaced him in that job.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, what was your first assignment? Do you remember when—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: My—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —the Project—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: My first assignment—well, I began immediately in the supervisory thing in which I contacted artists on the Project, collected their timeslips, recorded their hours, gave them supplies, and began almost immediately in the kind of qualitative evaluation thing. Vernon did most of this; had extremely high standards. But it was made quite clear what the standards of the Project were. And one of the tough parts of the job was the rejection of unsuitable material, where people—there wasn't a great deal of this. But, nevertheless, there were people who wanted, for instance, to paint and to set—hold back their good—the paintings that turned out well. And to—and to give you the lesser works. This didn't happen very often, nonetheless, there were people who felt this way about it.

[00:10:00]

But this was the beginning of a very—almost immediately, with this, I was in a parallel work, which took actually a great deal of my time beyond the actual assigned hours. And this was research, and planning, writing in relation to the portfolio of Spanish Colonial Design in New Mexico. I was—I was working with the actual manuscript on this and doing some revision and work and providing certain technical information. And also, at one point—well, I finally saw the whole thing through. The printer, who was an old man at Clovis who—the entire job was done in handset type. And he could set about half of—these were very large pages—but he could set about half a page of type in a day. And the problem was that—because handset type had long ago gone out, he didn't have enough type to go very far, so he had to stop and to print this before he could go on.

Well, this got to be very tedious because I would get a page or so of type to proofread, and to check out, and he made an awful lot of errors. And so, finally, I went over—the man was at Clovis, and finally I went over there for, I think, two weeks and stayed. And [laughs] I got tired of waiting, and so I set type too in order to move [laughs] the thing along. And I would proofread as he got things done.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yeah.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: And we'd get corrections in a page. And this—and, as I recall, we finished the thing off except for a few businesses. This was the text that went with the portfolio.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Did E. Boyd Hall [Elizabeth Boyd Hall] help you at all on the text?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: E. Boyd had prepared the original text, and the original—and the drawings, and plates for this. I'm not certain that she did all of these, but I think almost all of them. And then, I did some revision on her text and, particularly, some changes in the identification of some of the material.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Was she involved in the later aspects of this work?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Not as far as I know. Joy may know on that. I don't—

JOY FINCKE: E. Boyd you mean?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. Did she do anything further on the Index?

JOY FINCKE: I don't think so.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: I don't believe so.

JOY FINCKE: No.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What were some of the problems in administering this particular project?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: The—one of—well, the greatest problem was that this had never been done before. That the literature on this was very sparse and very scattered. That the materials had already begun to go, that is, the actual Santos, the original colchas, pieces of furniture, and so on, had already deteriorated, or disappeared seriously because the—many of these things had not been done importantly since before 1850. And also, collectors had begun to spot them and the fact that it was Depression times, communities, individuals were selling these at ridiculous

prices. You used to be able to get a Santo for $10 or $15, a good one.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Now, they're up to $250—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —$300, aren't they?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: So, that these things were beginning to go because people who had even a little money recognized that this was an investment. And, of course, this whole thing, the revival of the handicaps was a—handicrafts was a kind of rage of the '30s, related to the problem that handicrafts provided work for people and what was needed was more work, not the matter of getting more things produced faster, but to provide labor for people. And so, this encourages the handicrafts very much. So, the whole thing was kind of fashionable.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. Maybe you could interject something here about the Native market in Santa Fe. I know that was not a WPA Project. But it did emerge during the—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: It was—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —same period.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: It was a kind of typical activity and of, I think, limited success. However, it was a kind of grand gesture that was worth doing. They did beautiful things. This was an endeavor on the part of a number of public-spirited people to provide some income for artists. Some of the Federal Art Project people, craftsmen, participated in this.

[00:15:00]

And this did enable people to get work and to do quite beautiful things. The things at the Native market were ridiculously cheap. You could get a chair, a hand carved chair, for [$]20 or $25. You could get a piece of weaving, hand done—hand spun wool for, oh, less than $25, often much less.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, there was—there was no official connection, though, between the WPA and—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Not—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —this project.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: No, not as far as I know. The kind of thing which a great many people who were working to encourage. The state vocational department encouraged this and brought some of the workers to it. It was a—it was an overall thing. Joy, you probably know more about that because I was not in Santa Fe then. Do you recall?

JOY FINCKE: The Native market?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yes.

JOY FINCKE: To me was mostly a theater group I belonged to, and we had an outside theater there. But I thought of one story. During the days when we were putting out a lot of craft work on the Art Project, a man from the Merchandise Mart in Chicago came and looked me up, not at the office, but at home one weekend. And he wanted me to be the intermediary between some tinsmiths, like Eddie Delgado, in order to produce lots of little tin things for them to sell in their shop. But I couldn't quite convince him that nobody in New Mexico [laughs] went on a timeclock. And that if Eddie wanted to make tin candlesticks, for instance, he'd do them like mad, but if he wasn't in the mood he wouldn't.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yeah.

JOY FINCKE: And so, I couldn't guarantee him any supply.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Right.

JOY FINCKE: He went away shaking his head. I don't think he ever quite understood what I was trying to tell him. [They laugh.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, the tempo was a little different out here than it is—[Cross talk.]—in Chicago, isn't it? Well, I remember a Mrs. Curtin and her daughter, Leonora Curtin.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yeah. She did the thing on herbs of the Rio Grande [inaudible].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yeah, this is the elder Mrs. Curtin.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And then—but wasn't her daughter, who was also Leonora Curtin, involved in that Native market?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: I think so.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yes, I didn't know either of them. I knew—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROLAND F. DICKEY: —of the work.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, now in administering this portfolio of Spanish Colonial art I know that from what Joy has told me, and also E. Boyd, that these plates were sent out to be done by some of the lesser artists, or maybe some of the better qualified artists, to fill in the color. Did you—did you have anything to do with that aspect of it?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yes, I had a number of people who were working on plates. What we would do is bring them a group of plates. These would be sent out from Santa Fe with an original. And we would take the original to the artist and ask them to make a rendering based on the original watercolor. This, generally, called for a light and shade. And it was rather difficult to do well.

I remember one girl, she was going to the university, a girl by the name of Edna Pierce who was a—might say—I might say a devout Protestant. And not really being aware of this—I suppose this happened accidentally anyway—but she had been given a large number of crucifixes to reproduce, Spanish Colonial crucifixes. And I came, and she looked—and I came to pick these up, and she looked very ill. And she said, I feel so terrible. I've done 7,000 drops of blood today [laughs].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh. [They laugh.] Some of those crucifixes were pretty gory as I—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —remember seeing them.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: The standards were very high on the Index of American Design. One—a great deal of material was rejected for minor imperfections. By rejected, I mean this was returned to the artist to redo or to work with because the—it was endeavored to get very accurate things. And the graphic standards were tremendous. Then that, on a national basis, these were very exacting.

In addition, the kind of thing that was done on the portfolio there was a great deal else done. For instance, some of this was reproduced in *Fortune* magazine, along with other Index of American Design things. But such pieces as chess, and tin work, and santos, these were—well, for instance, Majer Claflin [ph] in Taos had a magnificent realistic technique.

[00:20:14]

Incidentally, a number of the people who were, you might say, Natively surrealist painters were simply marvelous at the realistic kind of thing needed for the Index of American Design.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Was there quite a bit of variety in the rendering of these various plates?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: The—yes. The endeavor on the—on the printed portfolio, that is the one which E. Boyd designed, was to try to standardize these as much as possible. Sometimes this could not be done because of the availability of correct pigments—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROLAND F. DICKEY: —that you—this was a genuine problem where you did not have the, shall we say, the exact blue or the exact green you needed, and it was not [laughs] forthcoming, and you did the best you could. But a great deal of effort was made to overcome this. On the individual renderings, which went into—went to Washington, and most of these are now in the National Museum, I've seen the collection there and the other collections on the Index—the standards were very severe and the things that were accepted for that were, in general, of very high quality. The kind of quality that is now—nowadays occurs in such things as advertising illustrations.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Where you need, for instance, a tremendously realistic painting of a shoe or a picture or something—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: —that way. It's the same qualities, the same kind of work that you see now in expensive advertising.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, that was the type that I was familiar with before I saw this portfolio, which I thought was quite different, in technique.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: The best pieces of the portfolio were very good. There were ones which—there were ones which were deliberately chosen so that they could—because they didn't demand great skill.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROLAND F. DICKEY: There were others, which we had redone so many times that it was frightening. You know [laughs]?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yeah [laughs]. Well, when did you go to the—to Roswell to start the museum and art center there?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Well, I went there in, let me think, this was in June of 1938. I—the art center had been in operation approximately a year. I was the second director. And I went—I went down to Roswell at the close of—after I'd finished the university. I had done a year of graduate work and this was at the end of this year that I went to Roswell as the director.

The Roswell situation was quite different from the Bernalillo County one. This was essentially supervisory job, but much more complicated. The museum had a small staff at the time I came there. It had a woman who operated the gallery. Had a secretary who, by the way, was just marvelous. Do you remember Katherine Higgs [ph]?

[JOY FINCKE: No. –Ed.]

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Well, she had been—she was—she was a member of a local family, been there for years. She had been a telephone switchboard operator in town. And she knew, not only everyone in Roswell, but, in general, she knew the [laughs] telephone number, you know. And this was a very great boon to me as a new person coming into the gall—into the museum because she—someone would be coming up the walk and she could tell me—she could brief me very quickly, This is—this is Mrs. Jones and she has three children, and one of them has the chickenpox, and so on—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see [laughs].

ROLAND F. DICKEY: —you know? And I was fully prepared, and I could go out and say, And how is little Elsa today, you know or something [laughs]. This was an immense help because the—this idea was not fully accepted in Roswell. You were, to begin with, bringing modern art to a community which had seen very little of it. I will—I'll never forget my first director's meeting. I—the—I came into this. This was, oh, three or four days after I got there. And I came into the office to meet the people who were on the board of directors. And every one of these people had snow white hair, you know? These were the elders of the community. And they were, obviously, horrified at this little boy who had come to run—[they laugh]—their museum, you know? Well, I was very proud that the—one woman—really, the most difficult person on the board, cried when

I left Roswell [laughs]. I had—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: You must have made a good impression—[Roland Dickey laughs]—

[Cross talk.]

ROLAND F. DICKEY: [Inaudible.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —in the meantime.

[00:25:16]

ROLAND F. DICKEY: But I was starting to say they had people on this, they had a secretary, there was a janitor, and there was a woman who was a gallery attendant, and then there was a kind of handyman who was a peripheral assignment that is—this is a man who did crafts. He was a Spanish chap by the name of Tehada [ph], very good carpenter. And he made a loom, —constructed a loom entirely by hand in the old manner. And he could do things like that. The—later, the staff was enlarged some. And there were—there were artists, teachers, both New Mexican and from outside.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What classes did you teach there?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: We had—we had a considerable program of classes. We had afternoon classes and evening classes. And we taught painting, and sculpture, design. I gave lectures in art history. We gave—I gave a public lecture at least once a week. And we also had extension classes. You had, in Roswell in those days, the interesting segregation system in which in the public swimming pool, the school—the city of Roswell, no Negro and no Spanish-American ever entered the public swimming pool. But we sort of brought down the rafters. We had the—a presentation of *Los Pastores* with a Spanish cast from the other side of the tracks, which was—made an immense success. This was—people were delighted with this. One member—one member of the board of directors protested this violently. And another member of the board of directors stood up against her on this and this was it.

But we had classes, also—this section of Roswell was, and probably still is, called Chihuahua. Spanish section of—at that time, at least, a very impoverished section. And we had classes for children there. Juanita Lantz conducted some of these. Do you remember Juanita?

JOY FINCKE: Yes, very well. She's now married to Fred Layton and—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yeah, in New York. Yes. Well—[Cross talk.]—Juanita conducted these classes for a time. And these children had never had any kind of exposure of this sort. And they did wonderfully exciting things. The—this was a kind of just a gushing of freedom. I went over one day, and they had been working with clay. These children never worked with clay before. And she had simply encouraged them to anything they could or would do. Well, every child had not one thing, but half a dozen things. There were bird nests and birds and figures of people and all sorts of very imagiNative, charming things. And Juanita had a particular facility for getting the youngsters excited about it. Their paintings were just glorious. We supplied paint for them. And I would persuade people to donate paint and paper and this kind of thing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: They didn't come to the center—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: They didn't come to the center.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —in Roswell though.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yes, because of the Roswell situation.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: But we also had classes for adults. And there were high school youngsters, and children came. And these classes were quite successful, but none of them as free or as exciting as was done in this—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Were there any Spanish Americans in the adult classes?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: No. No.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, that's too bad.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Well, it was unfortunate. But, however, we did make care— take care of this in their own community. We did have—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROLAND F. DICKEY: —some adults, Spanish Americans.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What sort of facility did you have there?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: The Catholic Church, which had a parochial school in that neighborhood, gave us really quite good facilities, there were rooms we could use and so on. And they were very cooperative on that.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What happened to the Roswell Museum after the Project closed?

[00:30:01]

ROLAND F. DICKEY: The museum—as a matter of fact, this was something we tried to anticipate. One of the aims of the art center idea was to set up something which the community could perpetuate. And we worked very hard on this particular problem. The museum is still going strong. It has enlarged many times. The city of Roswell has voted, I believe, twice $25,000 in bonds towards this. We endeavored to set up something to build in things so that this could happen. It did not happen at Las Vegas or Ros—or Gallup or Melrose, as far as I know. Well, Gallup continued some in this direction.

UNIDENTIFIABLE SPEAKER: [Inaudible], yeah.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: But this was done on city land. The city owned the building. And the city council was persuaded to furnish heat and light in the building itself for this. So, that the city to begin with had a stake in this. The museum had been sponsored by a group known as the Chaves County Archeological and Historical Society, which was something which took a whole line across a letterhead when you typed it, [they laugh] you know?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: And this was a group of citizens primarily interested in local history and in archeology. But they were willing to cooperate with this movement. These people were not very interested in art, although many individuals of that group became interested. So, at—when I was there, oh, six or eight months, something like that—and this was with the cooperation of Paul Horgan [ph] who was on the board of directors and he was very helpful—we organized a second group known as the Friends of Art, with the idea, not only for the perpetuation of this idea, recognizing that the WPA thing would not necessarily continue, but also, to get increased sponsorship in the terms of more money for more exhibits, for building things, for enlarging the building, doing all kinds of things. See, these local groups paid all the minor expenses.

And I believe—I'm not certain on this—but as I recall, they paid the transportation one way on exhibits. That it—we would receive an exhibit from another art gallery, and then we would ship this on. In addition to the exhibits arranged nationally, which were absolutely marvelous exhibits, we had very fine shows, not only contemporary artists from the Project itself, but all sorts of other things. There were contemporary painting shows, for instance, of—by Project artists which were very carefully selected in Washington, including such painters as Kuniyoshi, for example, who was—who was on WPA.

I don't know whether I told you the story about the Kuniyoshi painting. They had this very exciting contemporary art show. And there was a man from one of the little towns down in the valley, from Hagerman, I think, a rancher who came in and hadn't been in the gallery before. He wandered around. Looked very carefully at everything. The only thing he said when he looked at these Kuniyoshi painting was very typical, a kind of bucolic landscape, with a cow done rather impressionistically with heavy paint, and he went out shaking his head and said, That sure was a poorly cow. [They laugh.]

But, for instance, there was an exhibit of mosaics showing all the various mosaic techniques. And—from realistic to abstract and in various materials. This was an expensive show because it weighed so much to ship. There was—there was an exhibit of Currier and Ives original prints.

About—remember there were about 35 of them. This was one where I had to switch my lecture mid-stream. With each exhibit, I gave an opening lecture and, usually, another lecture during the course of the exhibit, but this was taking about Currier and Ives. And this was a very sentimental kind of show. And I was, I think, as a youngster barely out of college, prepared to make a little fun of the sentimentality. But what happened was, the people came in and looked, as usual, looked around the exhibit, and were saying things like, Oh, Mama had one of those on top of her piano, you know. And, Wasn't this marvelous, you know. And they were very excited about the show. And so, I had to extemporaneously change my lecture to on the theme of Currier and Ives as kind of the illustrated news of the Victorian [laughs] era.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That's quite a switch—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: [Inaudible.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —from contemporary art.

[00:35:17]

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But there were—there were all kinds of things. There was a very exciting show of original drawings by important artists, both European and American, not necessarily contemporary. For instance, there were some things of Ingres in this.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROLAND F. DICKEY: There was—and a major problem was to get community involved in this, to help them to understand it, and to soften the blow as it were for modern art. We had many ways of working at this. And, in general, we got very little criticism. But sometimes, people did criticize us. But we endeavored always to explain. This was done by preliminary publicity, and by labels, and lectures, and so on. And also, to have an alterNative, so that people would not feel that they came—that an exhibit of modern art was all they had to show—to see, when they came to the museum. Once a week we put in a local show. The amount of work in this was incredible. I—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: It sounds that way.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: —wouldn't think of undertaking it. But we had one part of the gallery which had a local show. These might be paintings by someone in town, this could be antiques, this could be hobbies, coin collections, stamp collections, glass, archeological materials. Well, you know, I must have done more than 100 of them while I was there. And each of these had its own publicity. But, you see, each of these brought people into the gallery because their friend had this coin collection, or this clock collection, or whatever it is. So, the first year we got twice the population of Roswell into this gallery. And—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And while they were there, you exposed them to the contemporary—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: We exposed them—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —art.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: We exposed them to other—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROLAND F. DICKEY: —things. So, we tried to do this very gently. And it worked. It was a case of accustoming them to. The previous director was a kind of—a rather moderately avant-garde artist and he used to fight with people, you know? He would—he would be incensed if someone criticized a modern painting. And one of the—one of the earliest jobs was to overcome ill will, which he had created by fighting with the populace.

JOY FINCKE: Well, he hadn't been a southwesterner, as I remember. Hadn't he come from the east somewhere?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY FINCKE: And this—you know, it makes a difference on those— especially Roswell people [laughs] because they're—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Well, I can talk their language—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yeah.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: —you know [laughs].

JOY FINCKE: And they lived there for so long. [They laugh.]

ROLAND F. DICKEY: There were definite advantages for the local person. I had an edge, you know, that he didn't have. And I took full advantage of it, of course [laughs], you know.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I think it was fortunate that you did.

JOY FINCKE: We were lucky to have Roland, really. Because he—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I should say so.

JOY FINCKE: —did more trouble shooting.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Oh, it was very exciting. [Cross talk.]

JOY FINCKE: It was a wonderful time.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, now was this—was the actual building there before? Or was that one of the ones that was constructed under general—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: This was constructed under WPA. I don't recall the details anymore. But as I remember, this is what happened: the building was there, virtually finished, by the time I arrived. But the building had been built by WPA with the city of Roswell furnishing the materials, with certain individual sponsors furnishing this. This, like a very great many things, was a wonderful creative effort on the part of Vernon Hunter. A Roswell architect had been used for this. Probably employed on a limited basis by WPA, but was not—that is, he was an outsider hired by—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROLAND F. DICKEY: —WPA. This was done in Spanish Colonial style and Vernon planned all the details of this. And I'm sure [laughs] fought with the architect until he got these. But Vernon had a very remarkable talent, and this was the ability to visualize real things before they happened. He could—he could sit down and draw an entire room, or a building, or a mural, or a piece of furniture as it was going to look. And, if you were lucky, it turned out that well. But he would do something exciting, very beautiful.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:40:11]

ROLAND F. DICKEY: And then, he had the ability to give artists and craftsman something to work with that was real enough that they could achieve this. That he could convey this picture to the craftsman. Well, for Roswell he planned this—there was a stage, which was to serve as a—for lectures. And the stage also was to double as a kind of small gallery. There were stage curtains embroidered for it in the—in Melrose, I think—pretty sure—done Spanish Colonial design based on the Habsburg double-eagle. Quite a beautiful job. And with a wonderful boldness that a stage design ought to have. It was something that, with the right distance, knocked your eyes out, you know, it was a beautiful thing.

Well, on either side of the stage were two tall candlesticks made out of wood and gilded from—copied from Spanish Colonial wooden ones. There was a lectern, which was based on a—one from a church. And one of the charming things, the ladies powder room was done as kind of a Spanish Colonial room of the middle 19th-century period, when American influences were coming in. When you got the Spanish Colonial version of the American mid-Victorian furniture.

And Vernon designed this room. And this was—this was—had a—around the walls were painted in imitation of a kind of gingham related to colcha embroidery. The furniture was upholstered. It was all handmade. The mirror what—had a tin frame and so on. And the whole room came off as just a gorgeous piece. We used to—you can imagine, we always showed the ladies powder room to visitors, you know?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Because it was a perfect kind of thing. But this was the cooperation of a number of projects. The architectural thing, the overall WPA concept of providing labor, of employing craftsmen, of doing public things which were intended to be permanent and to be beautiful. This was a very strong feeling, which I think everyone on the Project had. Don't you think so, Joy? That this—that everyone felt strongly that we were trying to make something permanent, even under the difficult circumstances, in such things as the building and the art.

JOY FINCKE: I think that's true. And isn't it too bad we couldn't have a continuation of that so that all the buildings in Santa Fe, for instance, would follow.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. Well [phone ringing], this was very much the same process that was followed at the community theater in Albuquerque—

JOY FINCKE: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —then, too.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yes, exactly the same kind of idea. The community theater was much more elaborate. Very often, with these things, people didn't appreciate them in the long run. For example, the—in the little theater at one time—I don't know whether it's true now, the tinwork which was so beautifully done was all painted over to match the wall.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, dear.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: There were things—the curtain, I believe, is now missing. Things like that which people didn't know what they had and didn't care about. I'm afraid many things that were good have been destroyed by people who didn't appreciate them or didn't bother to take care of them. They were in public buildings, you had changing administrations, you could not, of course, assume that every county employee would have any appreciation of art at all, and who might prefer something much more prefabricated, you know?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: And so, that many of these things have been lost just from that kind of neglect. However, thousands of these things still are preserved. You can see in institutions all over the state—and, of course, in other states—paintings and pieces of sculpture and things which were created under this, and which remain as decorations in public buildings. Of course, there are many of these where—that people were able to recognize because they were done by prominent artists, by artists with names. For instance, over my desk in the museum on Roswell was a very handsome Olive Rush painting. A real stunning and good Olive Rush piece.

[00:45:09]

The office at Roswell was very handsomely done with a Spanish Colonial fireplace and a *trastero* [ph] with inlaid straw. And there were two chairs, which were done in colcha embroidery, which were sent to the New York World's Fair. And we had a devil of a time getting them back. Then, later the—one of the later curators of the museum during the war had cats who destroyed them.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, no.

JOY FINCKE: That reminds me that at the time the WPA Art Project went in, Clyde Tingley was governor, and he wanted his office very fancy. So, Father Hunter designed a colcha embroidery piece to put on all the handmade furniture in his office. And it was only about, oh, five or six years ago, I guess, that I was working in the legislature one session, and I happened to see a sort of settee thing that was still around. It's the only thing I had—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Oh.

JOY FINCKE: —seen, you know, in all those years that still had the blue and gold colcha embroidery on it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

JOY FINCKE: It's awfully delicate wool.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yeah, it was quite fragile, was one of the problems on the—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: For heavy wear—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —with that embroidery stitch. I imagine it would catch occasionally.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yeah, that's true.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Were there any other buildings that were used as art centers or galleries that were constructed by WPA that, aside from these two?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Not that I know of that were constructed. Others were in Gallup and in Melrose and in Las Vegas. I think these were all buildings which were adapted to the purpose—

JOY FINCKE: Well, one in Las Vegas was in Old Town, I remember. And it was part of an old storefront on the Old Town Plaza. And in Gallup, wasn't it the—at the ceremonial headquarters?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: I think so.

JOY FINCKE: I think it—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yes.

JOY FINCKE: —turned into that, or was originally. I can't remember how they were—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: There were not many of—projects of this nature in New Mexico. This called for a considerable community effort. And there were not many places who—in the—which had the money, or this kind of point of view. It took—in Depression times, to get community support was very difficult. Albuquerque had it because it was large and because you had enough people interested in the little theater. Roswell had it because it's an enormously publicly spirited town, an amazing kind of place in this respect. One of the few communities in the country with this—that has this kind of community pride. But most communities simply did not have this, financially or otherwise.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, I know the Roswell Museum is still one of the outstanding museums and art galleries, the most progressive in the state.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yes. Well, it's one of the best small community museums, genuinely community museums—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Right.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: —in the country. It's a rare kind of thing. And it was able to perpetuate itself because people in Roswell cared.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, they got off to a very good start. I can see that.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: This—now, in the—in relation to this—by the way, you were speaking of good start. The museum, as such, had—the idea had existed for 20 years as a candy case in the public library.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: So, that you can see, even with this community, which had the obviously this spiritual and financial facilities for it, didn't do anything really about it until someone else got together, got it started, planned it—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: This was the impetus that really got it going.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yeah, got it off its feet. And then, having seen this and knowing what it could do they went ahead with it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Do you know what happened to the work of—well, the other artists on WPA? I mean, these are the large buildings that stayed. But some of the smaller pieces?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Oh, the Project made an effort to place these in situations where they would be kept. But, obviously, because these were public property and not having very strong legal ties in most places, this was dependent, to a great degree, on the whim of the individuals in charge.

[00:50:19]

For—people simply would not take a responsibility for taking an inventory of a painting for the next 20 years. So, if people happen to like a painting in, let's say, a public school room it might stay there indefinitely. If somebody took a dislike to it, it might be stored away, or destroyed, or broken, or abandoned. I think a reasonable percent of this material still exists. But there was a case I heard of, of a county treasurer—I don't know if this is the office, but this was the way I heard it—who disliked WPA paintings very much. He probably disliked paintings, and who had a large number of paintings in county courthouse gathered up and burned in the incinerator. He probably thought this was radical modern art and, you know—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Should be done away with.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: As a matter of fact, a great deal of WPA painting was quite moderate, even conservative. However, the Project did endeavor to encourage abstract and non-objective artists. But you had—the tendency on the part of the public sponsoring some kinds of things was conservative and realistic.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. Well, those were their standards.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: This is certainly before they were—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: I think—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —exposed to—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: I think the—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —modern art.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: —WPA did a very great deal to bring the—bring modern art to the American public, to accustom the public to this. In the '30s, the kind of abstract material that you see every day in any magazine did not exist.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: This wa—an advertiser who did a series of modern paintings, like American Can Company [American Container Corporation –Ed.] and some of those have done as advertisements, could not have done this in the '30s. And I think the exposure to the art has helped break down this prejudice, really, the 19th century living [laughs] kind of thing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. Well, [inaudible] quite right.

JOY FINCKE: Can you imagine in the 1930s buying a piece of art from the Sears Roebuck catalog, such as Vincent Price has originated?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY FINCKE: To me, that's one of the greatest things that's happened.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yeah, this is—this is an exciting kind of thing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I do think that the WPA Art Project had a great deal to do with that change in the tastes of the American public. Well, now what would you say were some of the special problems that you came up against? You mentioned some of them. Are there any others?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Well, there was a problem which, in my experience, almost never existed, and which people assumed existed. People assumed that there was political influence in the appointing of people on the Federal Art Project or on any of the projects. In my own experience, to begin with, I was never once, by anyone, asked my political affiliations. Never in—well, this

was never asked or implied, nor I—was I ever expected to find out whether any artists working under me was a Democrat or a Republican.

I know of only one instance where political influence was evident. And, in this case, there was an artist who was not competent. This was interesting. It was assumed that incompetents were employed for political influence. The only political influence case I knew of was a man who was not competent, and who had such a rough time from us because he could not paint, that he quit. We were concerned with the quality of his work. I would say, had he been a competent painter, he would have been retained for that reason. But he couldn't do the work.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That was one of the questions I was going to ask you before. If the—a person was accepted on the basis of their portfolio, and then the—their subsequent work was not up to standard just because, for some reason, the portfolio indicated more talent than there was, what did you do about, well, either firing them or putting them in a different category?

[00:55:00]

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Well, the first effort, I assume—Joy would know more about this than I would—but the first effort— I encountered this occasionally.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROLAND F. DICKEY: The first effort was to place them into something which they were capable of doing, and also to over supervise them, to inspect their work, to try to help them. There was a genuine effort to help, to teach, to get books for people, to get another artist to show them how, to train them, So that there the training aspect. So, you tried to salvage the man's personality to begin with.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: You tried to find something they could do. Then, if they could not—and I suppose, in rare cases, would not, although I—again, I only know one instance of this—then you would recommend their removal or transfer from the Federal Art Project to something else. That is, they were on public welfare, therefore, they might be transferred to some other labor category. That they—depending on what they could do, this man, let's say, is hired as an artist but he could type. All right, you try to get him into somebody else's area as a typist. That kind of thing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROLAND F. DICKEY: There was no question that most of the people on this, as almost everyone else, needed economic assistance. There just were not—people were not hiring artists.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And even if somebody said he was an artist and wasn't, then you'd try to find some other work for him so that—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: We tried to salvage him—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —he could live.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: —in some way, so that he could live, yes.

JOY FINCKE: There are always CCC camps, weren't there? [Laughs.].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: [Inaudible.]

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, now what would you say were some of the major accomplishments in New Mexico?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Well—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Aside from the Roswell Museum—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: The Roswell—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —which, obviously, was—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: The Roswell Museum and the theater are rather outstanding examples. The Index of American Design thing has some permanent historical influence. Also, a great deal of information was gathered along this line. The most important thing, as Joy has said, is the training of people, preserving their skills, increasing their skills, so that many individuals were able to remain in the art field, and to develop in it to do something which was their natural path. There were others, I'm sure, who had the opposite effect who, by this experience, may have discovered that this was not the natural thing for them and, later on moved into other areas.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROLAND F. DICKEY: There's the effect on individuals and then the overall appreciation of art in America. A very important thing in New Mexico was the development of a respect for handicraft and Native design which has by no means lost. The things that came out of this movement are evident in such things as the Albuquerque Public Library, the university library, many buildings in Santa Fe where the fact that importance was given to Native design and to craftsmanship perpetuated itself as the kind of cultural milieu of New Mexico. This has very far-reaching consequences. That this was—this was made in the sense fashionable or important and continues to affect, especially public buildings, but certainly endlessly in private buildings. Like the ceiling in this house, for instance.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, [laughs] [inaudible].

ROLAND F. DICKEY: And this was part of this thing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, that's very interesting. I hadn't realized how much impetus that—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: This—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —Project gave to Spanish Colonial art [but I can see (ph)]—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: This was not, by any means, the total thing. But it did very important things at the right time. There were many people, like Mary Austin and Frank Applegate and others who were interested in this, who were perpetuating it and particularly trying to preserve it. But the Project gave an—a real impetus to this.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, how would you say that the—your work on the Project contributed to you professionally?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Well, I learned a great deal. To begin with, this gave me terribly practical training in executive work and public relations. Also, the research I did on the Project in my own terms affected my doing a book on the subject later. And that gave me training in background that certainly I followed up.

[01:00:22]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yeah.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: It enabled me to do some things I might not other—might not otherwise have done.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Now, this book of yours on the—*New Mexico Village Arts,* was published by the University of New Mexico Press, which you're now director. But was that before—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: That was—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —you were—

ROLAND F. DICKEY: That was several years before I came—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: —to the University Press, yes. The book was influential in my getting the job but at the time that I did the book, there was no connection. I wasn't—as a matter of fact, when I did the job just writing the book just after I came back from the army. And there was no—the

Press came out of the book in my terms [laughs], eventually.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: You know.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But what are some of the other jobs that you had? Some of your other accomplishments along these lines?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Well, when I—when I left here—I might mention a particular job that was the—after I left Roswell, this was—Vernon asked me to come to Albuquerque and help organize the Quartro [ph] Centennial, the 400th anniversary of the state. An exhibit of, I believe, 500 works of art from five states, which was on the university campus. And I directed this gallery, and we actually rebuilt the building for the purpose. This was a continuation of the art gallery idea.

Well, then I went to Chicago, and I got a job in the art gallery at Marshall Field's. I worked there for, oh, six or eight months or more. I don't remember now. And, eventually, I went to California shortly before the war. And when I came back to New Mexico, I taught in Espanola, and then I went into the army, where I was in France and England. And then when I came back from that I worked on this Spanish Colonial art book.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes. That Coronado Centennial show, that was done under WPA auspices?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Yes. These were not WPA paintings. The WPA supplied labor, supplied gallery attendants, supervision, Vernon did an immense amount of work in planning this. This cooperated with federal funds. Funds granted by Congress for this purpose. And it was a cooperative effort to set up this. But this was to select 500 outstanding works of art from the southwestern states—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROLAND F. DICKEY: —for this show. It was—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Was it staffed by WPA personnel?

ROLAND F. DICKEY: It was staffed by WPA personnel. And carpentry and all that sort of thing was done by WPA workers, not necessarily Art Project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROLAND F. DICKEY: But the supervision and design was WPA Art Project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, thank you very much, Roland, for this excellent presentation of the role of the supervisor on the Art Project, which is something we haven't touched on before. And also, for your very interesting comments on it. Thank you.

ROLAND F. DICKEY: Thank you.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]