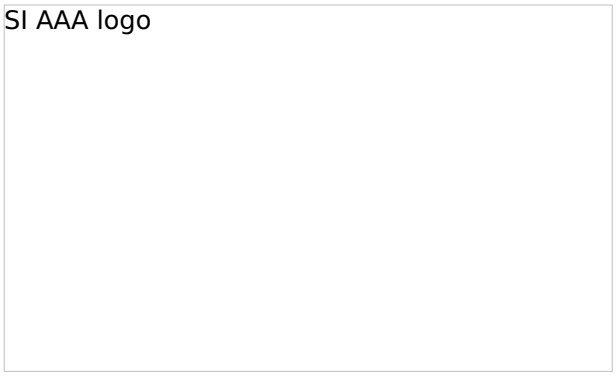

Oral history interview with Ted Egri, 1965 March 22

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Transcript

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Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Ted Egri on March 22, 1965. The interview took place in Taos, 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. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

SYLVIA LOOMIS: This is an interview with Mr. Ted Egri of Taos, New Mexico, on March 22, 1965. The interviewer is Mrs. Sylvia Loomis of the Santa Fe Office of the Archives of American Art, and the main subject to be discussed is Mr. Egri's participation in the Federal Art Projects in New York City during the 1930s and '40s. But first, Mr. Egri, would you tell us something about yourself, where you were born and where you received your art education?

TED EGRI: Yes. I was born in New York City in 1913 and grew up there until I was about 25, I guess. And my art education came when my sister and myself both were given scholarships to the Master Institute of the Roerich Museum—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

TED EGRI: —on Riverside Drive, 310 Riverside Drive, we used to go there. [Cross talk.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes. I used to go there. It was a fascinating place.

TED EGRI: Very fascinating place. And this was in dynamic symmetry and color designs. So, we went there for three years. We got the diploma from there, and of course became most excited through the—what we gained, and we learned not only about color, but also the Oriental arts, Chinese, Japanese art forms, which were introduced to us for the first time. I had never studied it or thought about it, so—or I wasn't even interested in it—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: —until our—Howard Giles, who was our great teacher, brought all this new world to us. But also the dynamic symmetry principles, which were supposed to have been derived from ancient Greece. And it seemed for—to us that was important because it gave you some fundamental geometric principles to work with, and we needed some foundation, we felt. We needed some structure.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

TED EGRI: And we were floundering for a period. I started painting when I was seven, in oils.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh?

TED EGRI: My father, who was a writer—my father and mother both from Hungary—insisted his children—three children, a brother, sister, and myself—had to be talented in something. So, we tried out styles of the various forms of arts, and first I wanted to be a singer. My mother sang, and when they discovered my hearing wasn't so good for music, we continued on in other forms and finally in drawing. My father would put out pennies on the table after every night for those of us three children whose drawings were the best.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: And every single night we were encouraged to make these drawings for these little prizes. So, one, two, and three penny prizes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

TED EGRI: And—but he was a writer, and he was excited about training us. And then I went and took violin for a while, and that didn't satisfy me, and finally came back to painting. And that was the complete—well, that form, and I stayed with until I went into sculpture later, when I got here to Taos, New Mexico—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: —in 1950.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, that was the first you did sculpture, was after you came here?

TED EGRI: Well, in 1948, when I went to Kansas City for the first time to teach in the Master Institute of the Roerich—pardon me, that's the wrong place. I mean, in the Kansas—the—what do you call it now? The Institutes of KSI. Isn't that funny, I can't recall the name of it. The institute—the Art Institutes in Kansas City.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

TED EGRI: I taught there in '48 and '49, two years, and then I was so frustrated by teaching too many hours and too many students that I turned to sculpture at that time—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: —as a release from the tensions that I'd got from teaching too much and not being able to do my own paintings.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

TED EGRI: You criticize—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That was before you came here, though?

TED EGRI: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

TED EGRI: You criticize 150 people's work, and by the time you're through you can't do anything with yourself, with your own painting.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: [Inaudible.]

TED EGRI: So, you give out all your creative energies in that direction.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yeah, surely.

TED EGRI: At least that's been my experience.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. Well, as you've—what was your sister's name, by the way?

TED EGRI: Ruth Egri, then [now Ruth Egri Holden –Ed.]. My brother, Charles Egri, never got onto the Project. He already had gone into commercial arts, and later, after—well, in the earlier years, before the WPA, I joined him in his commercial arts studio to learn something about commercial art to make a livelihood. And I did some commercial arts at that time and learned somewhat about it. I never really took to it too well. I did well while I was with it, but I tried to keep going back into painting.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

TED EGRI: And finally, I did—I did get on the WPA Project after I had been painting many years. As far—and then, let's see—on the Project, I got onto the poster project first.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, do you remember when it was that you got on to—

TED EGRI: I think I got onto the—1936, I believe it was—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: '36.

TED EGRI: —that I got onto the projects. The poster the—I suppose, because I was working in commercial art at the time.

[00:05:03]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: And I suppose it was the easiest for me to fall into. I don't know whether there were openings in other projects or not at the time, but I recall a man by the name of Weaver, some kind of Weaver, who was the head of that at the time.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh. That was—were they doing silk screen then?

TED EGRI: They did silk screen. They took our posters, and they really were working primary for the libraries, making posters for different events at the libraries.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: And then they'd take these, and if the—if the design was accepted for silk screen reproduction, then, of course, it was translated into the medium, and the artist had to help translate that into the medium, and others would do the silk-screen work. And there were numerous New York City library projects that I did designs for, at the time.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: Also, there were some other postal, telegram, and other type of things that were also done, and—gee, I wish I could remember the name of a man who was in charge of it. I made designs for this postal service and air mail—or air service, or something.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: They did a lot for the Theater—the Federal Theater Project, too, I remember.

TED EGRI: Yes, they did—they did a lot for that too, but I had nothing to do with that part of it. I never got in on that. I would have loved it, since my father was in theater all his life. He was a writer, and he taught acting and writing, in between pressing women's coats in a factory during half the years. He had half-year slack periods, and he would write his plays during those half-year slack periods. At any rate, the whole family was always encouraged to artistic endeavors, as in Europe they always do. The parents want the children to be artistic somehow.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Excuse me.

TED EGRI: Sure.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: You said your sister was also on the Project for a while, is that right?

TED EGRI: Yes, about the same time I was. She went right on into the poster—into the mural projects, and did various designs until she had a design accepted for, I believe it was, the Lincoln Hospital in New York City. And a large mural was painted there, and it had something to do with some Asiatic countries where certain diseases were being wiped out.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: And so, she had a very handsome mural up there. Recently she went back to see—let's see, to find out whether that mural was still around.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Was it?

TED EGRI: And I believe it was gone.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh dear, that's too bad.

TED EGRI: Yes, yes, it was too bad.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And where is she now?

TED EGRI: She's living in Wilmington, Delaware, now.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, well, maybe some of our eastern representatives have picked her up.

TED EGRI: Oh, I see. Maybe so.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: [Inaudible] nice to know, because when they move from the territories, see, then we don't have—

TED EGRI: You don't know.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —we don't know where they went.

TED EGRI: That's true.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Unless somebody gives us a lead—

TED EGRI: Some lead. Well, she also had become a very fine easel painter. She's continuing with that and is becoming quite well known in her area, in Wilmington.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes, I see. Well then, perhaps they have found her by this time.

TED EGRI: Probably.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, what sort of thing did you do after the poster project?

TED EGRI: Well, I went on to the easel project after that and did numerous paintings, easel paintings, as required per month, or two months, or three, whatever it was, and turned these in on schedules as they were set.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: You don't remember the schedules, do you?

TED EGRI: I—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Was it different? Did it change?

TED EGRI: I think they required one every two months or one every three months—I don't recall —something like that. It was quite generous—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: —because easel paintings you were able to do fairly rapidly, compared to a mural.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well apparently, they had different standards throughout the country because some—I know, one of the artists in Colorado that I interviewed, he had to do one a week.

TED EGRI: Oh, really?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: [Laughs.] Yes.

TED EGRI: Good heavens. I think ours was two months.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I think that—

TED EGRI: I felt a sense of leisure.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, well, I think that was what Chuzo Tamotzu said—

TED EGRI: Oh, really?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —about that time, so I was just wondering—

TED EGRI: Oh, I—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —if it might be different under different supervisors.

TED EGRI: Yes, I see.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: But it obviously was different in different areas.

TED EGRI: Different areas too. Well, I think that would have been pushing it too hard at once a week.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, I do too. [Inaudible] would be awful.

TED EGRI: I thought they gave us a little too much time on our easel paintings. For mural, you need the research and time to work out all the preliminaries, but in easel it's very spontaneous, and you do want to keep that spontaneity in it. So, it could have been a little less time, perhaps. But I was on this for quite a while, and the funny thing was I wasn't sure whether I got onto the—whether—or when I got onto the mural project because all I could tell from the photographs that I had showed you here, I was involved with a mural. And here I was doing murals for the—at least mural sketches, for the Brooklyn College campus, or someplace inside.

[00:10:02]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That was 1938?

TED EGRI: Yes, that was 1938 already. So, I assume I got onto the mural project at the end—near the end, of my time on it. And—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How long were you on the project? Do you remember that?

TED EGRI: Well, it was probably just about two years because—when did the Projects fold up? Pretty soon after—'38 was it?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: It wasn't until—no, no, it was '40, or '41? I [inaudible].

TED EGRI: Oh, well I didn't stay on to that—I didn't stay on that long. It was someplace, probably, '38, '39 I was on.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Was that the last mural, or was that the only mural you did?

TED EGRI: Well, this was just the sketches for the murals— for the projects, I never got that one done.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, you didn't. Those are just sketches.

TED EGRI: No, that never was done. I was off before that was finished.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: So, I never completed that.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. But was it accepted, and somebody else finished it?

TED EGRI: No, I don't recall. I don't think it ever got that far as to getting acceptance, yes. We kept working with it and kept being studied, and I kept doing more, and I don't recall any sense of finality about the thing. So, I think it terminated sooner than I—well, before I could get it to a later stage.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: Matter of fact, as I recall—now I recall something else. I don't know where those drawings are. This piece—now, the whole subject matter of the Negroes' contribution to music, which was the things I was going to do for Brooklyn College. Originally, they were going to be for the Rikers Island Penitentiary.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, oh.

TED EGRI: And I went over to the penitentiary to visit it, to study the wall space out in the hallways and near the eating rooms, dining rooms, and then came out with these ideas.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Are those the sketches that are—

TED EGRI: Those sketches that—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —to that plan for that particular wall space?

TED EGRI: Well, no. The wall space changed.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: And somehow, that project was done away with or, you know, either not accepted, or whatever it was, I don't recall. But, at any rate, then it was shifted over to the Brooklyn College, as it says on the back there—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

TED EGRI: —of these photographs. But it was first done for the Rikers Island Penitentiary. Isn't it funny how that name comes back.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

TED EGRI: And that wasn't done either, because I got off before this happened. Actually, I had this frustrated feeling about murals. I had desired to have walls to paint on—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Of course.

TED EGRI: —and never got through any of those projects.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, that was too bad. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: So, the portable mural that we have in that photograph was the only near mural-sized thing I'd done on WPA. And this was also the Negro and his music, the modern jazz at the time.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: But you don't know what happened to that, you said?

TED EGRI: No, I have no idea where it went, but so much of this was, let's say, taken, and they were going to find a place for it. It was portable in that manner. And I don't know what happened to it, just as I don't know what happened to the easel paintings. One of them, Monkeys, I recall, went into McMahon's office at one point.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

TED EGRI: But what happened, again, after that, I don't know. I don't know whether they destroyed these, or distributed them, or put them away in files.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, that seems to be one of the mysteries of what happened to a great deal of this work.

TED EGRI: Really? People don't know?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: They just don't know what happened to it.

TED EGRI: I see.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So, we're trying to track down as much as we can—

TED EGRI: I see.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —but a lot of it—the artist, they never knew what happened to it.

TED EGRI: No.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: It would be the administrators—

TED EGRI: That's right.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —that know where those went.

TED EGRI: Well, though—McMahan, is it? McMahan, McMahon?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: McMahon, yeah, Audrey.

TED EGRI: McMahon. Audrey McMahon. Was she consulted, or was she alive to consult?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, she's been interviewed.

TED EGRI: She has?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, I noticed it in one of the reports.

TED EGRI: Oh, good. Well, she is the lady who we, of course, were involved with all the time. And she probably was in the middle, but every six months or so the Congress tried to destroy the Art Projects, so every six months we'd find ourselves picketing on the streets again or sitting in at the college arts center where Mrs. McMahon was. And we had these actions that had to be taken place to save the Projects.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, [inaudible].

TED EGRI: So, this was a part—you'd paint a certain number of months, and then you'd go on picket lines for a certain number of weeks. [Laughs.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, there was a lot of that in New York. I remember.

TED EGRI: Yes. Did you remember that too?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes, I do.

TED EGRI: Yeah, it was a problem.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: They were always threatened at the end of each fiscal period.

TED EGRI: Yes, to take it down, yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I remember, they were going to cut down, or wipe them out, or something of the sort.

TED EGRI: That's right, the—Congress never believed that it was important to have any art projects. And yet, of course, I recall how many wonderful people were developed during those days, and how important it was for me, too, to continue working at art during those years.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Do you remember some of the men you worked with, or other people?

TED EGRI: Well, no. There weren't any—there were no names that I knew of who I worked with who became well-known later, except the—Tony Velonis was in the poster project, and he became quite important later in the development of silk screen techniques.

[00:15:15]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh. Didn't they develop silk screen [inaudible]—

TED EGRI: Yes, during those times and on WPA, Tony Velonis developed the photographic reproduction techniques to a very high state.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

TED EGRI: And he was able to photograph on all kinds of things. Eventually he photographed on bottles and all kinds of strange shapes, and he did a very, very skilled job of it. He was extremely clever. That's the only name that comes back to me of the artists.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. Do you remember who your supervisor was in—on the easel project?

TED EGRI: Alas, no. He draws a total blank.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. [Laughs.]

TED EGRI: The [laughs]—the mural supervisor that keeps coming to my tongue and disappears. I see him. I can—he's a—he was a blond—sort of balding, blond man, and very gentle, and a blond beard, had a charming personality, and I can't catch that name.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: All the girls in the project seemed to have—get a crush on him—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh. [Laughs.]

TED EGRI: —including my sister. [Laughs.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, I see. You don't remember him.

TED EGRI: But I can't remember his name.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, you must have had a pretty good relationship with your supervisors.

TED EGRI: Except with the first supervisor. I did [inaudible] the others, but Mr. Weaver somehow was a politician. And he somehow played artists against each other, and played favorites and did all kinds of things, like transferring people out of his place if he didn't like them, or they didn't do what he liked them to do, without notice and would make things very, very arbitrary—arbitrary decisions were made and made people very insecure and very unhappy. And so, I and numerous others on the Project signed petitions to get rid of him, and we had hearings with Mrs. McMahon. And after a few of these hearings, he was removed. Of course, we were told he transferred over voluntarily someplace else, but we did succeed in getting someone else in his place. But then I moved on too. I got pneumonia [ph] at one point and was off the projects for a few months, and then when I came back, they gave me a choice of what I wanted to get back onto. And I think it was that time I came back onto the easel project—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

TED EGRI: —which was a different situation where you worked at home, there. I recall, though, on the—on the mural projects, we were given a listing of a book of models that they had at WPA there, and we were able to select whichever models or any number of models you wished to have at one time for certain periods, and then they would assign them to you for as long as you needed them for your project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes. I had forgotten about that model project [inaudible]. [Cross talk.]

TED EGRI: Yes, it was a quite a wonderful service. Honest, I never had it so good with being able to select models from a book and just get them to work.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, what did you do after you left the Project?

TED EGRI: Well, I went back to New York. Well, I was—I was in New York, but I went back to the New York commercial arts. I went into it more seriously than ever before, to try to make a livelihood with it, and in my spare time kept on painting. It was—oh, when was this—well, then it came to about 1941, just before the war. Well, I married about 19—when—well, it must have been—well, it was well after the WPA I got married, and then I was married for three years and got myself a job with the *Time* magazine at one point. I was—I was the art direct of the promotion department of *Time* for just a period of a few months. But it turned out to be just more or less of a lettering job. After I looked at all my creative designs that I created for all the commercial art projects, they then reduced it to lettering, and of course, this was not my specialty. I had hired an assistant at the time for a period, and then they decided that this was not the person they wanted. I was not the person they needed, and they asked me whether I could replace myself with someone.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: [Laughs.] They didn't know who to get either, and I told that they had made a mistake. If they looked at my creative things and then gave me lettering to do, this was not right at all.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Of course.

TED EGRI: But I knew a genius letterer, an Arnold Banks [ph] in New York City, and this man they called, and he turned out to be so satisfactory that he lasted there about 10, 12 years, and he finally resigned himself from that to do better things. But he was very creative and very wonderful in the work.

[00:19:57]

And so, I moved on from there into further commercial arts, freelancing with my brother, until the beginning of the war. And, as a matter of fact, before—during that time before the war, I found a young man, Irving Geis [ph], who was doing work for *Time*—not *Time* magazine, but *Fortune* magazine. He was doing statistical survey charts, little bits of figures that told how many people do so-and-so, and so on, and researched things, and a great big map once he did on

"Canada Emerges as a World Power," things of this nature, all for *Time* magazine, and for *Life* and *Fortune*. And I worked for him then, and doing all of these large maps and renderings and figurework for him. And I had a very nice situation with him because he couldn't draw figures at all, and he was very clever with ideas, and he was a good promoter. So, I worked for him on by the hour, and he paid me, oh about four and a half dollars an hour at the time, which was quite good in those days. And whenever I didn't have work with him, I was able to paint full-time.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

TED EGRI: So, for—but one month I'd have work steady with him and earn quite a good amount because we worked day and night, practically. And then when the work was through, for two or three months I had nothing, and I didn't look for anything. I just painted. And—until the war came about. I got divorced just before the war and went down to Mexico on a trip, and the war broke out—Pearl Harbor occurred while I was in Mexico. And then I finally came back East, to my folks in New York, decided I'd better enlist, and from New York, I went down to Washington, D.C., and worked for the hydrographic department first, before enlisting. No, sorry, I wanted to work without enlisting. They said I could a civilian job and doing—making maps, or I could enlist, one or the other. And they said if I enlisted, I'd get a better rate, and I'd be in. And they put me right back into the drafting work on maps for overseas battles.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: So, I said, Okay, I would enlist, and I did enlist into the Navy and went away for 10 days of what they called boot camp training and came back to Suitland, Maryland, where they had the hydrographic department. And I did maps there for about a year, and I was given a second-class petty officer's rating. And I was—I became a draftsman on maps for invasion purposes, Europe at the first.

But while I was there, I became very disturbed by—the war's going on, and I was not a part of it. The maps were being made for the war. So, I decided to ask the admiral of this outfit if he'd let me go abroad on some ship. And so, he waited awhile, and finally they found a new group of ships which were being developed. They were amphibious command ships for the Southwest Pacific, and they were to carry the flag admirals, and so on, who would direct the battles. And so, I got on one of these ships, then, and I was down—I was taken—I went down to, first, to New Guinea on one of these amphibious command ships. Of course, I was a little regretful after a while that I had even asked because it looked kind of frightening for a while.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yeah, [inaudible] rugged there for a while.

TED EGRI: Yeah, it was pretty rugged. But then, I began to feel good about it. I figured if I ever survived it, it was a tremendous artistic experience. And at one point, on the landings in New Guinea, I asked—I'd asked the admirals to let me go ashore and do drawings of the shore, because my work—our map work was finished when the landings occurred. The invasions occurring [ph], so they let me go ashore, and they gave me instructions as to what to look for to draw for their intelligence.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

TED EGRI: So, they wanted me to notice what kind of fauna there was, what kind of sea life, and what kind of surfacing for the beaches, and then they wanted me to look back to the invasion crafts to see what they looked like from the shore. And so, I did this one or two—a couple of invasions, and then they decided it was too risky to let me go on this kind of mission because they needed me on the ship for the maps. And on the ships—on the ship, my job was to be in charge of the map reproduction, and right on the ship we made—drew maps and reproduced them right there to distribute to the air force and the navy before invasions. So, the frogmen and other aerial reconnaissance people would bring us information. Our officers would reduce these to chart level, and we'd draft these up, and then we'd reproduce them—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

[00:25:00]

TED EGRI: —and then distribute them out to the armed forces. And then our ship would go and lead the invasion, as the admiral was aboard, and—Admiral Barbey, as a matter of fact—and we were—we were a part of the—we were the Seventh Amphibious Force of the Seventh Fleet. But I had wanted to keep on painting in my spare time, so I had asked the admiral back in Suitland

yet, to get me a letter to the captain of my ship to give me permission to keep painting while we weren't doing anything else.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: Which he did, and then the captain of the ship called me to his office to tell me that this—he received this letter from the admiral, that I was perfectly welcome to do as I pleased aboard ship.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, isn't that nice. [Laughs.]

TED EGRI: So, all through the navy days, I painted aboard ship. Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What did you do with those paintings?

TED EGRI: Well, that's just it. Now, because I was worried about the ship being sunk from time to time—we were a flagship—and the Tokyo Rose kept talking about sinking our ship, I decided that the admiral ought to hold my paintings for me. So, every time I had finished some paintings, I sent them off back to Suitland, Maryland, to the admiral.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, I see.

TED EGRI: [Laughs.] And he promised to keep them safely for me. If I ever returned, it would be there.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. Did he?

TED EGRI: He surely did. He did a beautiful job of preserving them for me.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, isn't that nice.

TED EGRI: And while our ship was being bombarded all the time, and the suicide dive bombers were coming down on us too, and they tried to get it all the time because it was a command ship. We carried the—what do you call it—the Philippine government back in the reinvasion of the Philippines, on our ship. And so, they wanted this—the ship pretty bad, but they didn't ever get it. So, anyway, we were lucky this way, and we came back home, and I retrieved my paintings from the admiral.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

TED EGRI: But I was able to continue working in art throughout the navy days.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Isn't that nice that you could.

TED EGRI: Yes, this was very good.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And quite a few of the men that I've talked to were able to.

TED EGRI: Were able to?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I mean, because they were artists, you know, they got some sort of assignment where it was helpful.

TED EGRI: That's—that's very good. Which isn't always the case. In the army, you—I understood that they usually did not use the very talent, necessarily, that you had, but where they needed somebody, they'd fit you in. And [inaudible] as good as it should be, but I was glad to hear that some of the men did get [inaudible]. [Cross talk.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, some that did camouflage and things like that.

TED EGRI: Very good. I wanted to do camouflage, but—I applied for it before I even went to where I did for mine—for my assignment, but there was no opening at the time, then. That was in the Engineering Corps, and those Engineering Corps people were sent out very early, down out into New Guinea and Bataan, and so on. And they just all—were all just about wiped out, actually, those first groups. If I had gotten in with that group, probably I never would have come back. It was really a bad place to be.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I should say so. Well, when—what did you do then, after the war? You were in—

you came back to New York?

TED EGRI: Yes. I went back to New York. I picked up commercial art again for a short period, where I had left off with the same chap who had—with whom I had worked so well, but soon after that I was offered a job to teach—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

TED EGRI: —in Kansas City, Art Institute. That's what it was, Kansas City Art Institute. KCAI, that's what it was.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: AI.

TED EGRI: KCAI. Kansas City Art Institute. And I took this job. I had never taught before, except on privately, individuals, and was pretty excited by it. The director of it who was a Rosenbauer, Wallace Rosenbauer, a sculptor himself, sort of just picked me instinctively just by seeing my work and asking me questions about education, and so on. And I turned out to be a pretty good teacher there, and—but pretty soon he had to retire, or at least, he was forced to resign, and a couple of years of that job I didn't like what was happening, and I resigned. And resigning that job, at that point I had married—I had met my wife and married, and we came off to Taos, New Mexico—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

TED EGRI: —in 1950. Where I started working on the G.I. Bill. I decided after teaching two years in Kansas City that I was jealous of the G.I.s who I was teaching, the time they had to work. And I just said, I'll go back on the G.I. Bill myself and try to develop my own work in painting, at that time. So, I did, and the Louis Ribak School of Art accepted me and gave me full freedom to develop my own directions, instead of giving me a curriculum—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

TED EGRI: —to follow. And I worked there for a couple of years with him until his school closed up, and then I went on to Emil Bisstram's school by—in the same town, another half a year, when my time, I think, was up in the—on the art projects.

[00:30:02]

And then we just tried to survive on whatever little odds and ends we could do, selling little paintings or doing little jobs. I learned—in the meantime, I got very excited about doing welding work, sculpture, welded sculpture. I started to do welded sculpture, and the welding came in handy to do little odd jobs with welding too, and—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. You can be a welder as well as a sculptor.

TED EGRI: That's right. And then I—some of the galleries began to sell a few of my drawings now and then, and we had to travel a little bit, once in a while, to try to find some place to sell art. We'd probably traveled out one year to, oh, to California, where we knew some people. And as we visited different friends, we'd show the paintings I had in the car, and they'd invite other people to their house to see the work, and then some paintings would be sold, and this would sort of pay for our trip and little more, and so getting off the G.I. Bill—well, that period, which was quite difficult to establish yourself then, economically. And so very, very slowly and very gradually—we lived in a $20 a month apartment—a house, rather, without plumbing. It was a two-room adobe structure. And in this place, I began to develop my sculpture more and more. And sculpture and painting worked alongside itself, but gradually sculpture began to dominate. The whole area itself seemed to be sculptural, the adobe structures and the buildings, and the massive, impressive mountains. The adobe itself being so sculptural in form, and the space was so wonderful there, too.

So, gradually, I developed, in Taos, into a sculptor, and then pretty soon, even though we kept going out of town to sell paintings now and then, we began to realize—or I began to realize that selling pictures and sculptures was not enough. You couldn't really survive on this. You really would have to go into something else that would be more lucrative, and I began to feel that I'd better go into architectural sculpture, sculpture which would deal with buildings, where people would use these more, industry would use art more in this direction. But as I was even thinking of this, we had to leave the house we lived in because they were going to renovate and start

charging higher rents. And we couldn't afford this, and by this time nobody had reasonable rentals left at Taos anymore, like a $20 a month thing. So, we decided we had to buy a house.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: But in order to do this we'd have to go to work. [Laughs.] Not just depend on arts for a livelihood. So, we decided to try to go and teach. And quite accidentally came across my path a request for me to come up to Wyoming to take the place of man who was taking a year's leave and another half—a year's sabbatical another half a year's leave in order to do a huge 12-foot Lincoln's head in bronze for Lincoln highway up in Laramie, Wyoming.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: So, my next teaching job then was up in Laramie, Wyoming for a year and a half—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: —at the University of Wyoming.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How long ago was that?

TED EGRI: Now that's maybe in '58, '59.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: Maybe '58. And they wanted me to stay on in another capacity, but I refused. I didn't feel I wanted to stay away from Taos so long. I thought I'd try to come back to Taos and see whether I could make it again there without teaching. However, I saw that wasn't going to be too easy, so again, I made some requests through, my art chairman at Wyoming, for another position, elsewhere in sculpture. And he got me—he got the job for me to teach sculpture in the University of Illinois, on the sculpture department there.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: Under Marvin Martin who was the sculpture head. And I taught there a year, and they had this opening and they wished me to stay there, but again I didn't feel like staying more than one year. It was too huge, too enormous a place and, again, I hoped to be able to get back to Taos again.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: See what I could do it with commissions—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: —once more.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: Well, I started getting a few small commissions here or there, but it wasn't still too lucrative a thing. However, very slowly, some commissions did begin to develop. And after the Illinois job, I stayed off the projects and I went up to Denver for one winter—Denver, Colorado to try to find sculptural commissions there. And which I did, very meagre ones, but I kept traveling between Taos and Denver and kept getting commissions and doing them. I went up to get the commissions, came back to Taos to execute them, and returned to Denver to return them.

[00:35:03]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: Deliver them. And this went on for a year. And it wasn't very satisfactory, so I went out to California again to stimulate interest by architects there. And at this point, we had a few trips—I can't recall which ones they were—but there was some trips where I had exhibitions. In one winter or so we'd earn about $1,500 or $2,000 in sales and then that would hold us for a while and then we'd come back with [inaudible]. As you know, to keep going as an artist, it wasn't a very easy thing—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No.

TED EGRI: —to establish yourself.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Never has been.

TED EGRI: Never has been. No. So, finally, some fairly good commissions began to come through—sculptural commissions. And this kept me out of teaching jobs for a while. And then two summers ago I was asked by the State College of Iowa to teach sculpture there for the summer, and I accepted this. And then again, this last summer I accepted it for a second year. But in the meantime, these last two years, my sculptural commissions finally began to come of age, and they are large enough and good enough to survive between commissions, on one commission to the next. And until recently, my last commission—which was for El Paso Temple—was the best paying one so far. And so that I did not consider any more teaching jobs for a period.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: The last—the job before this El Paso one was a large sculpture for the Coronado Shopping Center in Santa Fe.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I was going to ask about that because I've—

TED EGRI: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —seen that one that you did out here.

TED EGRI: That's right.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

TED EGRI: Well, Mr. Nathan Greer, the builder, saw an eight-foot sculpture of mine up at Taos, at the San Geronimo Lodge and he requested that I do this for him. And I had to go up to Denver to do it, because there was a plastics laboratory there which gave me space free of charge and consultation free of charge to work. Because they were trying to develop artists' interest in their medium of plastics.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: And the sculpture had to be done in plastics because it was going to be done in full color. Had to be weather durable, and they had all the knowledge and know-how for this.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh—

TED EGRI: So—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, that was nice—

TED EGRI: That was—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I was—

TED EGRI: —very nice.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —I was curious about—I'd wondered if that was in plastic.

TED EGRI: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I hadn't gotten up close enough to it to see—

TED EGRI: Oh, yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —see the material, but I know it was so colorful that I—

TED EGRI: Very rich.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —was wondering.

TED EGRI: Well, I had that problem of developing color that would be permanent in a hot sun. The burning sun. And two factors I considered, and I hope it works, one was the fact that the plastics I used has what they call UV retarder in it, which is ultraviolet ray retarder. And this was supposed to keep the sun from destroying or cracking or creasing the plastic itself. And then secondly, it was supposed to keep from destroying the color, as much as possible, or as long as possible.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

TED EGRI: Also, I determined I could not use pigment.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: Instead of pigment, I took ground glass, which was—vitreous enamel, which was material you used to bake on copper.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

TED EGRI: Which is enamel on copper. But instead of putting it on copper, I merely took the ground glass which had minimum color in it and merely mixed it—stirred it with my polyester resin and got a very rich color with it then applied this to the sculpture. So that—I believe that my blues and greens, which otherwise with any other pigment would fade, I believe with this vitreous enamel coloring, this should last.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes, it's been up now for two years, hasn't it?

TED EGRI: Over a year. Well, February it was a year.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: March—well, it's over one year. And I have a five-year contract of liability for the color and the whole—workmanship on the whole thing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Is that right? [Ted Egri laughs.] It better stand up—

TED EGRI: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —or else you'll have to do it over again.

TED EGRI: That's right. It better stand up. I hope it does.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, now there are some other questions I wanted to ask about your work on the Project. How do you think that your work on the Project affected your career as an artist?

TED EGRI: Well, I would say that the work on the Project gave me my first steady opportunity to work at art without being concerned about doing commercial art or other jobs, types of jobs—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: —which might have diverted me from the art field. During those years, we were all young, pretty young at the time, and if we had had to go completely into commercial art to keep alive, I could have been diverted like my brother who had never got on to WPA.

[00:40:01]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: And he did have to survive, and he was married and so he went onto WPA completely and had to—I mean, sorry. He went into commercial completely.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: And he lost his fine arts. He became a very fine commercial artist, but he never painted again in oils.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: He came back into some woodcut work in his spare time from commercial arts, but I

feel I was saved from this. By being on the Project I was able to develop.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And were you allowed to experiment?

TED EGRI: You were able to do what you pleased.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

TED EGRI: I was not, alas, not much of an experimental—of sort of nature at that time. I was a bit timid with my art as yet. But this was my sort of feeling my oats. I was trying to find out my capacities. I was learning structure, I was learning design, I was learning drawing, and I was learning how to compose. Mural-sized paintings were new to me and I was just feeling my way and only later did I liberate myself, after the war, with a much freer and richer color and composition and experimental type of work. I did not experiment during the WPA days, but it wasn't because they didn't encourage it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: They did not put any limits whatsoever on what we were to do. They just said, You paint a painting, whatever subject matter you choose, on the easel project. Or even for the mural—with the large portable mural, too. And we'd turn it in by a certain time. Just prove that you worked, you've been working.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

TED EGRI: And this was a very wonderful, no-strings-attached arrangement. I did learn to develop myself during those years, or tried out all the education I got before then in the Howard Giles dynamic symmetry school.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: So, I do feel—I think two or three years I was on the Project—were important to me. Because once I got off the Project, I had to go back to commercial art again—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: —for a few years. And after those few years—let's see, that was, what, about '38? '39? '40? Yes, then the war came along soon after that. And I went back into painting again, but I had determined after the war that if I survived the war, I'd never be a commercial again. I would become—I would remain an artist.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, I see.

TED EGRI: But I think those were crucial years. And you could have fallen altogether, like my brother, did into the commercial field to make a livelihood because—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

TED EGRI: —things were pretty rough in the fine arts field.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yeah, well, I think that was sort of the great value that saved so many artists—

TED EGRI: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —from going into something just to earn a living.

TED EGRI: That's it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, what were your feelings about the Project at the time? I mean, aside from—obviously, you were grateful for this opportunity to work—

TED EGRI: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —but I'm thinking in terms of the—all the difficulties with the administration and the threats they were going to close down and so forth.

TED EGRI: Well, the struggle, of course, always hindered one's direction in working, in art, but I must say that the kind of closeness that developed amongst the fellow artists—musicians,

dancers, theater people, and so on—was pretty exciting even though we didn't know it. But we were developing something, building something, a kind of a culture of America that is so unique and so different than we had ever experienced before. And our first struggles for survival as artists—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: —were carried out in this period. And looking back, I see it as the richest and fullest period I had ever had in my life, by artists working together to maintain a cultural entity in the nation.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: And it was unique in our history and probably in many nations' histories. And to me there was a lot of excitement there and I did not mind the struggle at the time because it drew me closer to lots of other people in the creative fields. And while we always were frightened in this interruption of our possible continuation of artwork, once we did succeed, it sort of welded us together a little better, and made us feel even more grateful for having this opportunity to keep on working in art.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was that—they formed the Artists' Union, didn't they—

TED EGRI: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —during that period?

TED EGRI: I was an early member of the Artists' Union at the time.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And then did that go into Artists Equity?

TED EGRI: No, not right away. Artists' Union, when the WPA projects were over, The Artists' Union recognized it had served its usefulness at the time and for a while, I believe, it started fighting for a municipal arts center where the artists can show their work.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: And they worked for that for a year or two and when that did not develop, it finally disbanded, since it had already fulfilled its usefulness. Then the Artists' Congress developed. Kuniyoshi and a number of other artists got together—I think, they were in the Barbizon-Plaza Hotel or something like that, I believe, about 14 of these men developed a Artists' Congress. Well, that's after the—yeah, this was before the Artists Equity.

[00:45:17]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: And this Artists' Congress was an exhibiting group of artists who developed a group who believed in certain principles of art or standards, and also had symposiums on the place of art in society, as I can recall. I never was a member of that.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, you weren't.

TED EGRI: But—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I think Chuzo Tamotzu was—

TED EGRI: He was, yes, he was.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I think he was.

TED EGRI: Chuzo was. I was a little younger than Chzso at the time. And then later when the Artists Equity came along, I finally joined them, not as a charter member but pretty soon afterwards.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: And I have, I've been a member ever since. It started about 15, 16 years ago and I was twice the vice president, the national vice president. And I just had my last vice president's

office this past year, just concluded a few weeks ago.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: But the organization has served—I've felt so wonderfully—to give a voice to the professional artist. And the Artists Equity developed the conferences, which were later known as the famous Woodstock conferences of the New York art colony with the museums, museum directors, throughout the country, to try to establish a understanding. And our principles of behavior of museums to artists and artists to museums. And the first directives and the first standards of relations of artists to museums were developed out of the series of conferences.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Is that right?

TED EGRI: Developed up there, yes. This wonderful director—what's his name? He was the director of the Whitney Museum? Oh, my heavens. I forget his name. I had it in my portfolio and I took it out.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: A booklet they put out, a little publication, called *The Artist and the Museum*. And the AFA, the American Federation of Arts took the conclusions—the resolutions from these conferences and published them as the standards of procedure between artists and museum. And this is accepted by the artists—by the museums of the United States, by the Directors of Museums organization.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: By the museums themselves and by some of the American Federation of Arts, and the Artists Equity, and all these organizations which were accepted—accepted this as a standard of procedure from here on.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How long ago did you say that was?

TED EGRI: That was about 15 years ago.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: In Woodstock. What, 1950? No, earlier than that, I guess.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: It would be about 1950—

TED EGRI: Something like that.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —[inaudible].

TED EGRI: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: Yes, round about 1950 then.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: And then—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Do you think that has helped?

TED EGRI: Oh, I think it has helped enormously in the understanding of artists and the museum. Also, the Artists Equity worked to eliminate entry fees for artists.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: Shows—the entities became larger and larger as the years went on and so some of these were pretty good rackets.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: And they'd get thousands of artists to submit and probably a few hundred were

accepted. And the entry fees that the other artists who were rejected paid for the prizes, it paid for—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: —all the other expenses of this show. And it was a pretty unfair situation.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: [Inaudible.]

TED EGRI: So, Artists Equity began to try to regulate this too. And then there were many dealers —unscrupulous dealers who were taking advantage of artists or taking their paintings, selling them, and not paying the artists. And various contracts were broken and when commissions were given, they were not paid sometimes. And they had no protection of any kind. So, Artists Equity was formed to try to protect the equity or the interests of the artists, economic interest of the artists, to raise the standards and prevent unprofessionalism.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: And Artists Equity then spread all over the nation. First started in New York, the nucleus. That was very powerful and developed beautifully there and did a lot of good with the galleries and dealers. And created standards of relations with galleries too. And finally, it became a national organization. Kuniyoshi was the first president and then it went on to a whole series of others. Louise Nevelson, who is the outgoing president now, and a Paul Smith, a painter from the Cedar Falls Iowa College has now become president.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You're quite active in the chapter here—

TED EGRI: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —aren't you?

TED EGRI: I'm quite active in the chapter here. As a matter of fact, we just now, just the other day succeeded—[through the (ph)] efforts of Artists Equity, united with other cultural groups, succeeded in creating a state arts commission for New Mexico. And we have achieved a $15,000 grant which goes with this, in order to help promote and encourage all the arts in the state of New Mexico.

[00:50:06]

For the purpose that not only do we spread the arts and encourage people to become artists, but also to help the income of the states by bringing in more tourists, more trade, through art and through art activity. The cultural program here, once it's established as a state commission, can then go to the federal government and get matching grants—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: —if necessary, once this becomes law. The federal government now has a Federal Arts Commission. But they only—Mr. Johnson, President Johnson has only now asked for $10 million dollars to augment their commission in order to be able to spread funds out to the different states. Where—they have programs which they can approve, cultural programs which would increase the cultural activity of the nation.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And this has been passed through the state legislature?

TED EGRI: Yes, state legislature just passed it—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: [Inaudible.]

TED EGRI: —the governor has signed it—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, good.

TED EGRI: —and we are ready to select 15 commissioners.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Fine.

TED EGRI: And we're about to begin the program—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: —as soon as possible.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What's the money going to be used for actually?

TED EGRI: It starts out by being used to support a full-time secretary and an office, bookkeeping, reports, and research on the resources—cultural resources of the state. Whatever's left—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: —and it's very, it's a mighty small amount of money—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

TED EGRI: —that we have—whatever is left will go to assist groups, like theatrical groups for example, who cannot afford to travel with their company to outlying areas in the state who cannot see different performances. They could be given a grant to help take them from place to place.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: Or Civic Symphony in Albuquerque, can't afford to bring the orchestra up to another part of the state. And so this kind of a fund might be available to them.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

TED EGRI: Or art organization who wants to put on an arts festival in a community and they haven't got enough funds for this. But it is considered an important thing to do to draw attention and interest to the area, to the community, from the outside of the state as well as from people inside and encourage them in the arts, then the state funds would also go for that kind of thing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: Also, for education crafts. Try to establish classrooms and workshops and so on. Adult and child education to develop people in their understanding from the beginning and also train the older people, especially in the crafts, so they can begin to make a livelihood and also enjoy their lives with the native crafts of the area. To also preserve—it also would help to preserve some of the old crafts and old cultures, like folk songs and dances and various other crafts that—the wood working crafts that they used to have, that began to die out.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

TED EGRI: And so there's a desire to bring these back, and hold on to these and encourage development on these old crafts. Weaving also is a very important part of it. And we have some wonderful weavers right now who can teach and develop further if there's an opportunity to do so.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And what is necessary in order to get these matching grants from the government.

TED EGRI: Well, the different groups, which are non-profit—have to be non-profit groups and they have to show a sustained cultural programs that they have carried out over a number of years on a non-profit basis and have records of their bookkeeping of what they took in and what they tr—what expenses they had, and what deficits, and so on, and what their activities have been, and what benefits they may have brought to the communities. And then they have to prove and show that they had made efforts to achieve grants or money from other areas. And if they have not been able to raise other funds to carry on their work, then the state commissioners can decide whether or not they feel that this is a worthy group and whether they should assist them. But they have to pass certain tests of this nature of performance—past performance. But also, the arts commission can establish new groups. If some new group wishes to develop something that's important in the crafts, and they show a bona fide project with proper and—let's just say, experienced people in the field—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: —the state commission may decide to grant some aid to a starting group. And it could be a musical group, a theatrical group or maybe a movie on the historical heritage—cultural heritage of the state.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

TED EGRI: May be for TV programs to encourage visitors to the state. It may be various forms. May be books to be published—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Hm.

TED EGRI: —treatises, or whatever, to develop and encourage the potential that we already have.

[00:55:03]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. And then from that they could get these government grants?

TED EGRI: Yes, possibly.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Possibly.

TED EGRI: But we're not depending on the government grants, we're depending upon our own resources first. We could also get donations from private individuals and organizations. And the federal government, as well, to assist the work. We could start campaigning to get other people—private individuals—to assist such a program, too.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. There'll be tax exempt, I presume, then.

TED EGRI: Pardon?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: They'd be tax-exempt—

TED EGRI: Yes—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —[inaudible].

TED EGRI: —it's a tax-exempt thing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

TED EGRI: All non-profit. Also, in the architectural field, there is hope that more commissions for architecture, sculpture, and murals and so on would be encouraged.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yeah.

TED EGRI: Again, like the WPA days, to encourage, through the state efforts, the use of arts in public buildings—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: —and for civic beautification generally.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well now, do you feel that this whole movement of Artists Equity really started then with the WPA days and the motivation was set up at that time? That this might not occur now if there had not been the WPA Projects?

TED EGRI: Well, I do believe that the artists got their first experience in organizing for the first time and seeing that they could work together for certain causes, certain purposes. And I do agree that they must have had their first feelings of success—of victory, when they were able to demand or work for and achieve arts projects. Because if it hadn't been for their efforts, New York would never have had arts projects.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: And so felt their strength in numbers and they—despite their individuality and differences of personalities, they did stick together to achieve that end. So, I do agree that perhaps after this, when they decide they have to do something else in unison—they worked this

conference out, or what did you call it? The Artists'—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Congress?

TED EGRI: —Congress.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: And then later came the Artists Equity to work in another field, another direction, another stage, where artists needed protection. However, it wasn't as strong and as easy a project to develop, because the artists were much too scattered, and we no longer had unified—a boss. We didn't have a government boss for whom we all worked.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: And you could not work together for one cause. Artists were now scattered and all working individually. And so, the general professional organization to protect all artists was a much more difficult thing to conceive—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Of course.

TED EGRI: —and carry out. And it's had a great struggle in surviving as a professional organization, because of the very fact that we are spread out, that we're individualists.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What effect do you think that the Art Projects had on the appreciation of art in America?

TED EGRI: Well, I think it had a tremendous effect because that was the first time that acknowledgement was given to the importance of culture in our country. At this time, our whole technological advances were the most important things.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: And before then, government had never even shown any interest towards the cultural values in the country. And once this Art Project did come about, they began to discover—and not only discover, but actually develop and train artists in mural work, for instance, in theater, in dance. And people like Orson Welles and other very famous artists came off these Projects, who developed into fine muralists in later years. And gave us, for the first time, I think quite a large number of mural painters and of dancers and theatrical people, actors and producers and writers who had a chance to develop themselves from the beginning. I think many people were given a start—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: —from this, and I think the cultural interest [ph] in our nation took hold pretty well from that, and I think it was about from that era on that people began to take art more seriously.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, they were exposed to it more then.

TED EGRI: They were exposed to it more.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: And murals were spread in public places where they never were before. People began to see art around them more.

TED EGRI: And artists themselves were greatly encouraged by this public display of art and the opportunities they had, I believe they became more aggressive in wanting to be shown and seen in public more. And I think it made a turning point in our country towards—at least the appreciation of struggle for greater expansion of art interest. We didn't get—it didn't go overnight, but galleries began to develop. More and more art galleries began to grow after this period.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: And until, of course, now you have hundreds and hundreds of art galleries everywhere, but the audience became larger and larger for art.

[01:00:02]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

TED EGRI: And I do think it was—the great impetus was from that period. The murals that we painted were pretty bad, I think, a lot of them. And many of the easel paintings we did were pretty bad. But we were feeling our oats. We didn't know what to do with a wall space.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: And this was a training ground for later achievements. And where else could you get wall space? Or when else? And under what other situation?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That's right.

TED EGRI: Unless in training and under a government program. So I do think it was a very healthy thing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Would you say that the art center has shifted to America now, the United States, from France?

TED EGRI: Well, I would say that the United States artists have developed their own art forms for the first time through their non-objective art and Abstract Expressionism is specifically American, and the initiative was taken away by the United States artists from Europe. And that now the Europeans are imitating us as we imitated them—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: —before. We imitated their Cubism and their Impressionism and their whatever other isms, their post-Impressionism, and so on, until the American artist began to develop his form, which was the abstract non-objective forms. And I do believe we are leading, at least in this style or this concept of art. I think that it has spread. Yes, we have taken leadership at this point, definitely.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, that's what I sort of thought.

TED EGRI: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, we have a little bit more time.

TED EGRI: We do.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Are there any other comments that you would like to make on that period?

TED EGRI: On that period.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: [Coughs.] Excuse me.

TED EGRI: Well, surely. I suppose, what could one say other than how important this was to not only survival—let the artist survive as artists, but to have created a body of work that also survives, during an era which was a very important era where there was great struggle and great strife for survival all over the world, let alone in our own country. And I do think it was a very explorative period. Every time there is a depression, people begin to question and explore and try to understand the purpose of life and what are the problems? Why are there depressions? And how could we survive without these? And I got—I think a kind of philosophy also developed in that period of government interest in the little man. And I think that the whole Roosevelt era there of recognizing the importance of the individual, and developing this creed of the individual, was pretty vital. Previously, the government somehow served from above but far away. And did not look down to the struggles of the people, or the individual people. And when Roosevelt had said, "One-third of a nation is ill-housed, ill-fed, ill-clothed", it was recognition for the first time that these people are very important. Every person is important, every individual. And this also was represented later—I think, in later years, in the character of our arts, the individuals that were so important in our art forms. And the common man, as Henry Wallace announced it in one of his lectures, was the vital interest of the nation. And each individual was vital. And I think this was a part of a whole historical development towards the more and more individualized art until the non-objective art forms developed where the statements were personal and private, and where no subject matter existed at all, but where emotional comment

was being made.

And of course, I think that the leading up towards World War II after this period—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

TED EGRI: —was a part of a turbulence that made us, kind of, ready to accept the new struggle and the next conflicts in the war itself. And our ideas were more able to be carried out regarding our reactions to the new world, to the new conflicts, to the new, unified world which could no longer be isolated. No nation could be isolated. And we were prepared, better prepared, I think through the training we had, in national Arts Projects—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

TED EGRI: —towards the international atmosphere that developed afterwards.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, that's a very interesting comment. And I'm afraid we're just about at the end of the tape now, so all—

TED EGRI: Good.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —I can do is to thank you very much, Mr. Egri.

TED EGRI: You're most welcome.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, it has been extremely interesting. I'm awfully glad I found you.

TED EGRI: [Laughs.] Yes, well, I am—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I didn't know that you had been on the Projects, even though I—

TED EGRI: Oh.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —knew about you ever since I've been here. But—

TED EGRI: I see.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —I didn't know before that we talked the other day that you were actually—

TED EGRI: Oh.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —on the Project. So that—

TED EGRI: Well, I—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —gave me a very good excuse—

TED EGRI: Well, good. Well—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —for this interview.

TED EGRI: Well, I'm delighted that we got together.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, thank you very much.

TED EGRI: You're welcome.

[01:05:00]

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]