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Oral history interview with Lee Hunt, circa 1965

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Transcript

Interview

HP: HARLAN PHILLIPS
LH: LEE HUNT

HP: Incidentally this transcript will be in the Archives of Art's files. I think ultimately they're going to do some suggestive writing about the period leaving to scholars, graduate students, to mine _____mass of information they're collecting. But I don't like them -- you know, to read like a criminal court record and in that sense we perhaps need a little staging. I don't want to convey the impression that you sprang -- you know fully formed like Botticelli's Venus. Perhaps you can tell me where you were, what you were doing in the 20s, what the interest was, what the alternatives were.

LH: Yes. I was teaching art in the public schools.

HP: Here in the city?

LH: No, no, this was all in Iowa. This was in Newton, Iowa. I became very dissatisfied with teaching and at the particular moment the directorship of the Des Moines Art Center became available on a WPA arrangement. It was sponsored by the Des Moines Association of Fine Arts. They furnished the other-than-salary funds. I suppose it was because we were all younger at the time, but we were enthusiastic -- you know, in those days.

HP: Sure.

LH: But over and above that it does seem that there was a feeling in the air in the arts that, to me, hasn't been quite recaptured since those days, an enthusiasm, I suppose, partly a feeling that an artist, or the arts were part of, or could be part of American life, possibly for the first time. At least that was my thinking about it. A great many wonderful things were done, an awful lot of horrible things too, just frightful stuff.

HP: In a sense growing pains. There was a kind of sharing in this period among artists. . .

LH: Yes, there was.

HP: . . . which in a way is lost. --

LH: Yes.

HP: It's perhaps reflected more expressly in New York City where the numbers were legion.

LH: I expect so.

HP: I wondered, you know, had you always been in Iowa?

LH: Yes, until the war -- well, just before going into the service. My wife and I taught in one of the war relocation centers for West Coast Japanese out in Wyoming. Oh boy.

HP: I went into the service from there, and Mrs. Hunt came to New York during that period, went to Columbia and got her degree in library science and has been here ever since, so I joined her here when the wars were over. Then any number of strange and wonderful things have happened since.

LH: What took you into art in the first place?

HP: Well, it's something that's always interested me, I hoped at one time to be a painter and discovered that I -- well, at least I couldn't make my living as a painter partly because of a modest talent and partly because very few people at that time could make their living as painters. So I taught in the high school in Iowa and then went into the Art Center as director. Had the Art Center had a certain historical background of its own prior to you joining it as director?

LH: Yes, it had. The Des Moines Association of Fine Arts had been in existence for some time and such people were on the board as J. Darling, Gardner Cowles, Jr. -- people of that sort. My feeling, of course, at that time was that it was rather an ingrown organization. I tried to give it to the people and was fairly successful, I think, in that way.

HP: Did you have facilities?

LH: Yes, yes. Well, no, they did not own the building. We rented space upstairs over a store. It had an outside stairway and -- oh, five, or six rather large rooms part of which was used for classrooms, teaching painting, lithography, sculpture, and the various crafts. Large enough, however, that groups could be brought in for lectures and that sort of thing, parties, teas. And awful lot of tea was drunk, of course, and we would bring VIPs in occasionally for a lecture. Together with the Association of Fine Arts was an organization called "Friends of Art. "It was made up of younger, more enthusiastic people, and they also had a part in the organization. Now, of course, the Association has a beautiful building designed by Saarinen in a lovely greenwood setting and is well attended, apparently. I was out there this summer and went over to see the Calder show, which happened to be there -- I had missed . In New York -- and extremely well attended, and apparently they're doing great work now. But I've gotten so completely away from that sort of thing that I made no effort to renew acquaintances and so forth.

HP: How did the opportunity come to you?

LH: The director of the Iowa project, the whole state of Iowa's Federal Art Project, was a schoolmate of mine in university, Harry Jones -- you may have run into the name. He was very active in Iowa at that time. He preceded Leonard _____. He knew I was looking for something other than teaching and suggested I come and take the thing over.

HP: What did you fall heir to by way of staff?

LH: Our staff at the time I went in consisted of a sculptor, Glen Chamberlain who is now at Boulder, I believe. When last heard from he was. He had an assistant, John Lindbloom, I believe was his name. It goes back so far I can't remember for sure. Then we had a children's teacher who was chiefly a puppeteer; a painter whose name was Johnson --

HP: A woman?

LH: No, no, a young man -- gee, gosh, his name escapes me at the moment, but anyhow he was fairly good Iowa painter. He handled most of the teaching and served as assistant director. I did a bit of teaching too, naturally.

HP: Is this part of the -- I understand it had a continuity before you arrived on the scene as an institution quite apart from WPA?

LH: Yes, oh yes, yes. What was his name -- Parker? No, he followed me -- my predecessor then went to, I think, it was the Minneapolis Museum, Institute. I didn't know him. He was a scholar as well as museum man and not the kind of person that they needed in Des Moines. That is, if, for instance, the story was told that someone gave them some paintings -- I know one was a Demuth, or one of the watercolorists -- and before showing them, he had to do all of the research on the things, you see, and it was that kind of thing that he did best rather then actually showing the pictures to the people and letting them enjoy them.

HP: Yes.

LH: I think we may here, or I may have gone a bit too far in the other direction not having scholarship in that sense. I was more interested in bringing people in having them participate in activities of the Art Center.

HP: Did this operate under state leadership -- that is, I understand that you had sponsorship locally?

LH: Yes.

HP: It wouldn't necessarily, but I think what is called the Art Center movement sprang into being partly to spread WPA art project beyond an artist. I mean in Mississippi, they couldn't find a corporal's guard and yet they had an Art Center movement. It was a kind of educational gambit.

LH: Yes.

HP: I don't know how this fit because it all lurks in inference. The Des Moines one had been in existence prior to the WPA.

LH: That is correct, yes.

HP: The WPA apparently was a means of continuing it and maybe tying it in with these touring shows. Danny Deffenbacher is a name that --

LH: Yes, the name is somehow associated with it. I can't remember just in what way.

HP: He was, so far as I am able to find out, a representative from Washington. . .

LH: I think so.

HP: Who was -- oh, like a cheerleader in a way.

LH: There were one or two other such people. One was an artist, gosh, I can't remember his name now, sort of a hail fellow well met who came to cheer us on to greater achievements. Yes, there was state control, of course. I worked under Leonard _____.

HP: On, did you?

LH: Yes, although I certainly was allowed all the freedom that I might want, although we did discuss things occasionally. He's a good man. He's a good _____ and was a good administrator I think. That's another kind of surprising thing. I thought, at least, that the artists who were pushed into these administrative jobs very suddenly did an extremely good job of it. They're and his predecessor, Harry Jones, were very good administrators I felt.

HP: There's something about their being in tune with the atmosphere.

LH: Yes. That's right.

HP: A sensitivity which, I think, by and large surprises most people that they can turn in that way. Incidentally, I talked with Stuart Davis for a long period of time and the whole notion of Stuart Davis carrying bundles of papers under his arm and attending meetings is almost -- it's unbelievable --

LH: It's unbelievable.

HP: Yes.

LH: It's also interesting how well they managed themselves at all these hearings and also managed the political scene pretty well too, you know. After all, it was -- WPA was highly pokitical, and of course that was one of my crosses in that I think my Board of Directors, who were furnishing the other-than-salary money were staunch Republicans to a man in Iowa. We had -- well, as I say, J. Darling, who lampooned the Roosevelt administration daily until his successor took over who was also on our board of directors, Carlyle, who is an awfully nice guy, Tom Carlyle; and Gardner Cowles; -- well, everyone on the board was a staunch Republican. So there was friction there. I felt as though I were walking on eggs between the Democratic politicos and the Republican dinosaurs, you know. I felt that as a very difficult situation for me.

HP: What interests me about it is the fact that you can get volumes of testimony of the New York situation --

LH: Yes.

HP: Now, here's a state, Iowa, famed for marvelous corn, etcetera, ad infinitum, conservative to the last cell, Republican to the last cell, quite proud of it _____

LH: I mean to criticism _____. It's just descriptive. And yet to mount something of a cultural nature is a twist and a turn for a were conservative _____.

HP: It is. And of course Des Moines wasn't the only Art Center that was active. There was one in Sioux City --

LH: Yes.

HP: And a couple of others - Ottumwa, I believe.

LH: Ottumwa, yes.

HP: I think there was another one.

LH: Yes. Well, it demonstrated in any sense that there was -- what -- a body of interest that could be massaged into being.

HP: And I believe, at least judging from what I saw last summer it seems to have continued. Of course, now art is the thing. People do it. It's sort of the thing to do. At that time, of course, when it started, it wasn't, and the fact that we made any progress at all I think was worthwhile. Of course, I did work very closely with Leonard _____. He roomed at our house while he was in Des Moines, and he, of course, was in charge of this craft project, among other things.

LH: Yes.

HP: I suppose he has told you about that. I was awfully good.

LH: Well, what is interesting I think, there was -- _____ some problem developed in Iowa so that Leonard _____ , who is a Nebraskan --

HP: Yes.

LH: And was a newspaper reporter, or a writer, as well as a painter, was sort of pressed into service.

HP: You know, I don't know just how that happened, I really don't. I know that, or at least I sensed that Harry Jones was having a bit of difficulty with the part of the WPA organization that the thing was set up under. I gorget what it was called now, Public Service or something of that sort. Why they selected _____ I don't know; I don't know how that happened. It was a good selection.

LH: But then, you see, what is so marvelous about Iowa, as it is about a lot of states once you begin to dig into it, that is, in the 30s all eyes seemed to turn to Washington, D.C. to answer their problems.

HP: Yes.

LH: And it's true that we developed administrative agencies to handle our problems, whether it was stocks and bonds, Securities Exchange and so on, ad infinitum. Well, in one area we turned discretion back to the local communities, in effect, it was the WPA and certainly so far as the Federal Art Project was concerned.

HP: Yes.

LH: Because it was tailor-made locally.

HP: It was.

LH: It allowed for opportunity on the local level without this _____ overriding dictation from Washington.

HP: There was never in my time with the Art Center there was never a feeling of big brother is watching you from Washington, nothing at all of, that sort, although on a local level I felt that the director of the Public Service branch, whatever it was, who was a very impressive woman, felt that I was not giving the Democratic Party and the WPA enough publicity on the thing, and I said, "Well, all right, if you want a publicist for the Party, your Party, and the WPA, you want someone else. I'm an artist. I'm going to give art to the community, if I can. That is my purpose, and whether I'm a Republican or Democrat should not matter." So I never did, and I endured a few tongue lashings because of that.

LH: Well, that's an internal thing, but I think in terms of floating an idea in Iowa, you certainly wouldn't take a Madison Avenue genius out to Iowa.

HP: No, no.

LH: It just doesn't make sense.

HP: No, no. That's right, that's right. It was a very grass roots thing.

LH: Indeed it was. Which is the interesting thing about Leonard _____ work. It was a kind of shop for the manufacture of all kinds of things --

HP: And it was awfully good.

LH: Toys and furniture.

HP: Now I don't of course, know whether you have been able to see any of those things or not, I suppose -- I hope you have. Dan and Lillian Rhodes were connected with that. Lillian is an excellent designer. Well, they're both at Alfred now. She worked up a textile printing department that was first-rate, very, very good and -- well, there was bookbinding and all that sort of thing, toy design, toy making. Bill Friedman was there for a time.

LH: As a designer?

HP: Yes, a designer.

LH: Furniture.

HP: And woodworking of various sorts. Well, he was a kind of general over-all designer, and of course Bill is a good man -- I've always felt a little theoretical and a little cold, but a very good man.

LH: But it does demonstrate I think that Iowa in cutting its pattern fit that pattern to what it found on the rolls, which was the design of WPA.

HP: Yes, I think so. I think a lot of that may have been due to Harry Jones who had a very good mind. He may still have. I don't know where he is now.

LH: I don't either.

HP: I'd like to know very much. He is a good painter and a very creative thinker, and he did not really want to see a bunch of painters together turning out portraits of General MacArthur, let's say. I believe that much of the fact that good work was done there was due to Harry Jones. I really do. He thought in terms of what public institutions could use, and it wasn't a lot of watercolors. It was: drapery fabrics, it was toys for therapeutic use in hospitals, and children' use in hospital, and it was -- well, lectures on what art is all about and that sort of thing rather than just the production of a lot of indifferent, but the craft work was first-rate.

LH: Yes, superlative. But this is the part of genius that makes us run when we run.

HP: Yes.

LH: It is our ability to adjust our opportunity to the needs as we really know them and make them jell. Leonard _____ had to -- what -- do that which would find acceptance among his own sponsors.

HP: That's right.

LH: Well, I found it different in Iowa from any other state where I talked to people.

HP: This is Iowa?

LH: Yes. Kentucky is a wholly different show altogether, completely different. There was something comparable going on in the state of Michigan again with a shop, again with skill, again with craft and _____ _____ craft. Not so much on the artist easel painting, whatever, but this effort to make something marketable, available, acceptable within this state that is wholly different from New York, wholly different than New Jersey. This is in a sense is the sun of the WPA because it allowed for this.

HP: Well, my pet project never quite came off but, of course, it was during the depression, and I had hoped that we could develop through my ability to ____ out and I used to call it "sell art to the public", or whatever it was, in lectures and visiting women's clubs and so forth to introduce the idea of making use of printed fabrics and so forth in their homes. Then I had available from the workshop part of the thing, the Iowa Art Project, some pretty good craftsmen, and I had the artists who were working with me who could conceivably design, and more important than that, I found a business woman who was interested in the whole thing too, and we were going to print drapery fabrics and sell them. The woman was the wife of the head of one of the hotel chains, the Tangey-_____ Hotels, and they were to be our first and most important outlet. The whole thing was progressing very nicely, and we had hoped that we could then actually give people some jobs, you see, people who were being eliminated from the WPA, or else people who were not connected with WPA, but still needed a job. We hoped to be able to build up a kind of business on the side that would be independent of the WPA, you see. Well, everything was going smoothly and then came Pearl Harbor and our hotel manager decided to draw in his horns and so nothing came of it and that almost became the end of the project because there was no longer any need for WPA workers.

LH: Yes.

HP: So what we did was turn the thing into a W.A.C. center. Fort Des Moines was the training place, the first one for the Wacs, and so we turned the Art Center into a service center with doughnuts and that kind of stuff and invited the Wacs to come in and make use of it, and thereby saved it from its demise. At about the same time I left to go to Wyoming to teach in the war relocation department. My job was taken over by a young lady from the Ottumwa Art Project. From then on I don't know quite what happened.

LH: You know, as originally established the Federal Art Project of the WPA series you know, the roadbuilders, _____women's professional group _____ _____ the Art Project itself was the only Federally-organized project in the sense that funds were allocated by the central office for given quotas, and the state administrators who had everything else on; the WPA within their orbit did not have the Federal Art Project.

HP: That's right. That's right.

LH: This caused, I suppose, in varying degrees in different states certain amount of _____ depending upon how testy the state administrator was.

HP: Yes, yes, that's right.

LH: I don't know whether there was any difficulty of this kind in Iowa or not.

HP: There may have been. If there was, it was at a level above mine. I wasn't aware of it.

LH: Then there comes a time when the Congress, I think, at the time of the opening of the World's Fair here in New York expressly mentioned the Federal Theatre Project as being no longer in the good grace and therefore no longer receiving funds.

HP: Yes.

LH: And in so doing it turned the administrative aspect for the final decision back to the state and away from the center, _____ _____ you had almost parallel administrators, one for content and idea, and the other for the stake in the state.

HP: Yes.

LH: This meant that suddenly -- I know in Michigan, for example, appeals were made to the director of the Federal Art Project to put more people to work. He didn't fill up his quotas, he had carpenters, etc. etc. etc. which made him in his thinking adjust to the point where he was running a shop. I don't know whether the demand was a great in Iowa as it was in the state of Michigan particularly in Detroit and in Lansing, for example, but in Iowa I would imagine something of the same thing took place.

HP: I expect it did, yes. I don't know. That would have happened really in the crafts project more that in the Art Center Project.

LH: Yes.

HP: I suppose our reason for being was considered to be educational more than anything else, and although it gave some artists some work it was really thought of as a cultural sort of business educationally.

LH: Yes. Well, did you put on shows?

HP: You mean exhibitions?

LH: Exhibitions.

HP: Oh, yes, certainly. Oh, yes.

LH: Were they designed at the Art Center?

HP: For the most part. Occasionally we would get a show, one of the stock Federal Art Project shows. Occasionally we'd get a show from, oh, say, the Wyatt Gallery, a show of prints, that sort of thing. Or we'd make use of the Guggenheim's traveling shows, The Peggy Guggenheim Gallery, for instance. Or we'd have a show of paintings from the American Federation of Arts, or a show of prints, or something of that sort, but many of them were locally designed. One of anything from arrowheads to quilts, you see, and hooked rugs and that kind of thing. We even thought of the industrial arts, the home-made scythe or sickle, or something of that sort. It was a sort of hodge-podge, but it was interesting.

LH: The Newark Museum did it in 1910.

HP: That's right, yes.

LH: _____ in a sense. What makes us tick.

HP: Yes. Then, of course, we would have one-man shows of local artists or state artists. Have you run into Ben Polk? Yes, I've run into the name. Let's see who mentioned him, Clement _____, who was the _____, yes.

LH: He was one of the regional directors.

HP: Oh, yes, he was the hail fellow well met whose name I was trying to remember, yes. Yes. _____ _____.

LH: Yes. A good huckster.

HP: Yes. Yes. Well, we gave Ben a one-man show -- , any number of young people in Iowa, but I would say

offhand that our shows were about equally divided between the canned things and local. Usually we'd have one gallery with a one-man show, or group show, and then another gallery would have, oh, a Federation of Art Show, or something of that sort.

LH: Sure. But it was a stopping place for something to see, which they may never have seen before.

HP: That right, that's right.

LH: Yes. This intrigues me because when you look at it from the point of view of Washington, D.C. and the proliferation of Art Centers as part of this movement and, you know, with a knowledge that they're in a position where they can be on the circuit for a sharing of content, or results, and it varied. In the state of Washington, for example, _____ used to can local shows and instructions with it -- _____ and how he'd do a print, this kind of thing. It had a training thing for just the general public as well.

HP: Yes, that's right.

LH: The kind of thing which I doubt very much ever had been entertained before in a general kind of way.

HP: Oh, I'm sure. Well, one show that we had. Harry Jones, for instance, designed it. It was shortly after war was declared, and it had to do with civil defense. It was a most imaginatively-conceived show. We'd gotten some things from Britain, you know, the gas masks and that kind of stuff, and Harry worked the thing out as a kind of film strip idea. It was an excellent show as a show of exhibition technique and one which was of interest to the public in the context of the war and Pearl Harbor. We didn't really limit ourselves to an ivory tower kind of thing at all.

LH: No. I find that it has fantastic relevance. Cincinnati is the same way.

HP: Yes.

LH: Louisville, the same way.

HP: Mhmm.

LH: You know, an effort to expand local horizons by bringing in something foreign but nonetheless relevant to the passing scene, an effort to also aid local people who were artists, and then the teaching of children, seeding children, giving them opportunities that they'd never really indulged in before, all of this is quite mystifying, you know, a kind of patchwork quilt throughout the United States but nonetheless all of it adding to the sum and substance of our understanding about art, however, you know, I don't know how to measure it but I'm sure it's there.

HP: Oh, yes.

LH: Tell me this: in terms of local sponsorship is this a continuous thing? That is you have indicated that there is a board of directors to which one pays court, I suppose?

HP: Oh yes, yes.

LH: That is, to keep a show on the road requires a diplomatic negotiating position as distinct from a final one?

HP: Yes.

LH: It's not an umpire, but an agent.

HP: That's right.

LH: And this varies, which is a happy thing. IT's fantastic the way it varies. It's an education of boards of directors -- also going on.

HP: That's right.

LH: Hard to measure, but this boom, however, it was originally spawned in Washington had ramifications that were cut tailormade to fit that local atmosphere, to keep it alive, to keep it marching. What about the general spirit in terms of the constituency that you had? How much enthusiasm was there ?

HP: There was a great deal, a great deal of enthusiasm, I felt; a great deal.

LH: Did this come from all walks of life, too?

HP: Yes. I think that that appeared in our class program, you see, our teaching program. There again I inherited a group of ladies who met once or twice a week to paint together, and they became a kind of springboard for developing classes in painting, sculpture, and the crafts. We had people from all walks of life coming in to take instruction in painting and the crafts, and anything from the head of one of the department store to -- well, there were some real bums off the street came in to get warm, I guess.

LH: So it was a place to gather.

HP: Yes. And then, of course, I felt that any trick to get people in was justified almost, and so we served tea and cookies every afternoon and advertised it. Ladies would come downtown to shop, they'd drop in for a refresher. Now I don't know how much art we sold them, but we gave them some tea and they must have absorbed something.

LH: Yes. That's interesting, you know, to keep a show going.

HP: Yes.

LH: It depends upon the imaginative vision of the people who are managing it.

HP: Of course, the director has the problem of statistics. You report your success in terms of attendance. You can't report it in terms of what art experience someone might have had by coming in, buy you report it monthly interns of attendance. So a smart director tried to get as many people in as he can.

LH: Well, he becomes a drumbeater.

HP: Sure. Sure.

LH: Sure.

HP: So I was sometimes accused of resorting to that sort of thing too much. Well, I'd do it again.

LH: When you say "accused" is this locally, or -- ?

HP: Yes, yes, locally. Yes, just, you know, kind of grapevine business, they'd say, "Well, Hunt is more interested in pouring tea and distributing cookies than he is in educating the public." But you've got to get the public before you can educate them.

LH: Yes. But it is, you know, it's a funny thing with all the atmosphere that's going on, a kind of almost a crusade in a way -- I mean people are marching in columns of four, you know, for an idea. Within the group, it's like any other collectivity, the history of which is the history of, you know, the clash of personalities. . .

HP: Oh, yes.

LH: The almost inane things that come out by way of criticism, you know.

HP: That's right.

LH: It's part of the job. I suppose it toughens your hide somewhat.

HP: Yes. Mine didn't seem to need toughening on that score. Well, for instance, we had a sign "Art Center. . ." and so on, and one of the parts of the sign said, "No Admission." Someone suggested that that was a bit difficult to understand -- "Come in, stay out," you see. And so I thought, _____ well, this is something that can be used for publicity purposes, so I called one of the columnists of the local paper and said, "Look, I don't know whether you noticed or not but my sign is a bit crazy. It says 'come in and stay out." He wrote a piece on it, you see. Well, I would use anything of that sort to get our names in the paper in other than the art column, you see.

LH: Yes. Was this encouraged nationally, or were you. . . . ?

HP: No, it wasn't encouraged, not that I know of. No, no, it was just my idea of trying to make use of any possible way of bringing people in.

LH: Well, did you have a comparatively a good press?

HP: Oh, yes, yes. I had a very good press. No problem.

LH: _____ allowed that the press was quite receptive. . .

HP: Yes. Yes.

LH: That the general community was not hostile, but after a period, 1936-1937, the general public had swung back into the Republican column. The farm program had been enacted, and there was a switch in thinking, but somehow or other it didn't dampen the ardor of the papers, the press, that what was going on in New York City, the organizations -- Artists Union, Artists Congress, and so on, or what was going on in the Federal Theatre, quoting senators correctly in plays to their embarrassment on the subject of housing, for example, while it created a furor in the East didn't seep into the West.

HP: Well, we were more naive, you know, about things of that sort. I don't believe that most of us at that time had much political sense or --

LH: I don't think it was important, do you?

HP: To me, it wasn't. No, not as a director of an Art Center. I think now that I was certainly awfully naive politically, but I believe all of us were at that time in Iowa.

LH: In a sense, that was the strength of the time.

HP: I think it was. I think it was. Oh! we had a magnificent press for the reason that one of the members of the board of directors owned all of the publicity outlets in the state _____. I mean Gardner Cowles.

LH: Sure.

HP: One of the reporters on his paper was a amateur artist and was a member of the Association and was a member of this Friends of Art Association, a very good friend of mine. One of the editorial writers was a amateur artist, and so on. The personnel of the Register-Tribune, which was the paper, was infiltrated by artists, or people interested in art. Whether their political leanings were Republican or Democrat, didn't seem to matter so far as their reaction to our needs was concerned.

LH: Well, Iowa had, I think, an interesting and imaginative Writers Project -- Jay duVon.

HP: Yes, sure.

LH: They did -- well, they were one of the first groups, I think, to work out the means for the sponsorship for publication of the Guidebooks --.

LH: The Guidebooks. The work that was going on although they themselves were young writers, looking for a renaissance, I suppose, in writing, you know, the world is your oyster when you're young. And they had, I suspect, certain political leanings that made them suspicious.

HP: Yes.

LH: But be that as it may, nonetheless they turned out the work. It may well be that in the state of Iowa the state administration had more difficulty with the Writers Project, let's say, than it had with the Music Project, the Theatre Project or the Art Project.

HP: Yes.

LH: But be that as it may, nonetheless they turned out the work. It may well be that in the state of Iowa the state administration had more difficulty with the Writers Project, let's say, than it had with the Music Project, the Theatre Project or the Art Project.

HP: Yes.

LH: I don't know. That is, the service aspect of art through the craft, and the service aspect of the Art Project through the Art Centers seem to be more important in the total product than putting an individual artist to work on a painting.

HP: Yes.

LH: I don't know. That is, the service aspect of art through the craft, and the service aspect of the Art Project through the Art Centers seem to be more important in the total product than putting an individual artist to work on a painting.

HP: Yes. Well, I really -- there again, I believe that that was due to Harry Jones's thinking _____ organization. He was really a good man. He analyzed what the function should be of an art project in Iowa and set it up, and that aspect of it was first-rate certainly. I think it was better than the Art Centers, although they contributed something too. They were very good.

LH: Well, you know, that's a movement and an effort that had a certain beginning and had a certain growth, and you know, when you plant a seed it takes a little cultivation.

HP: Yes.

LH: I often wonder but for Pearl Harbor, you know. . .

HP: Yes, I've often wondered about that too.

LH: Have you really?

HP: Let me refresh your drink. [INTERRUPTION] I've often thought and wondered what would have happened to it. It's difficult to say, of course, because under the setup, quotas were constantly being reduced as defense requirements increased. So what would have happened had the depression continued, goodness knows, in any of the areas.

LH: Yes. I often wonder that myself; that is, the necessity for defense and preparedness shifted the nation's sights away from internal affairs.

HP: Yes. Oh, yes.

LH: Although the great debate that raged between -- what was it -- the Committee to Aid America by Aiding the Allies, William Allen White's crowd, as opposed to the America First group under Lindbergh and others --

HP: Yes.

LH: But this effectively switched our thinking. The whole Spanish War went up in smoke, and while the artists were exercised by it in New York, no other group that I can think of was.

HP: In the Midwest we scarcely realized there was the Spanish War.

LH: Right. We were high center from an industrial point of view, but preparedness, national defense, mobilization, and so on which began in '38 thinking, contract development, airplanes in the air, and so on showed a shift in the wind. The handwriting was on the wall.

HP: Sure. And of course we had periodic what we called _____reductions. I'd have to get rid of staff. Whether they were good, bad, or indifferent I had to eliminate them. That was one of the parts of the job I found very difficult because although in the general picture people were getting jobs, these people that I was eliminating were not.

LH: That must have been -- well, let me put it this way: Congress I don't think ever really sustained the WPA as an idea, or as an instrument.

HP: No! I think you're right.

LH: And therefore they kept the central organization on a snaffle bit so far as funds were concerned. It was almost always a deficiency appropriation, not a straight appropriation, so you never really knew where you _____ _____ how you could plan, and periodically while they sweated out what Congress might or might not do and I guess Harry Hopkins wasn't very effective, although he had a kind of "to hell with Congress" attitude. That's probably too strong, but what I mean is --

HP: Yes. Well, certainly _____ _____ indications of that --

LH: If he was going to do the job --

HP: Yes.

LH: And trust the heat and the whole political pressure to wrest from an unwilling Congress, a Congress that was not committed to the idea, but more committed to the dole approach --

HP: Yes, that's right.

LH: -- to bail him out periodically, but nonetheless on a deficiency basis, which made it rough on the administrators. I haven't run into an administrator anywhere who didn't face the problem of quota reduction.

HP: Yes.

LH: As, you know, and demanded in terms of the funds available.

HP: Sure. Yes. And he hadn't anything to do about it. And also there were these other aspects of the thing: priorities, that is, a veteran had priority. Well, maybe I had a veteran who was no darn good, I'd have to keep him over in preference to someone who was of use to me. Of course, being young and never having been a veteran myself at the time, I was very callous toward these vets who were frustrating me.

LH: Yes. Well, that's the political aspect.

HP: Yes, yes.

LH: And I suspect that this happened with greater frequency after the states took over control.

HP: I expect -- I imagine that it did, yes.

LH: Yes, because what a state administrator understood art to be was an educational project in itself.

HP: Yes, yes.

LH: So long as you had Eddie Cahill in Washington fixing quotas and with funds to sustain them, discretion as to what to do was left pretty much to the local art administrator.

HP: Yes.

LH: When Congress in '39 switched, you know, _____ -- this was a whole slice of American life that was without any control of theirs, or any control of their political forces within a state, and senators were -- it's humorous in a way, whenever you think of it. We couldn't compete with industry, you see. We would build roads and build public buildings. We had public works in that sense, and we could give art -- you know, vaguely defined -- opportunities.

HP: Yes, yes, yes, I see.

LH: It included musicians, writers, artists.

HP: They weren't stepping on anyone's toes.

LH: No. But this is the volatile group, in a sense the lunatic-fringe, the growing points of society, the people who are seismographs for idea and in this sense the most dangerous of the groups --

HP: Yes, yes.

LH: It's like trying to balance the extremes.

HP: Yes.

LH: Hot and cold. And yet you can pride yourself on the fact that you're not competing with local industry.

HP: That's right.

LH: And yet you set aflame, as you did here in New York, all kinds of ideas that people who are sensitive to what's in the air, come up with, and because they are sensitive they take a position. They suddenly found a voice, a collective voice. Imagine artists with a collective voice! It doesn't make sense. It's the first time it's ever happened.

HP: Well, of course, it didn't happen in Iowa to the extent that it happened here. . .

LH: Yes.

HP: We all know, you know. It really didn't. Although individual artists certainly were what you've said, there wasn't that collective feeling. At least I didn't feel it.

LH: No.

HP: I think I would have had it existed. Yes.

LH: I think in some of the Midwestern states -- well, put it this way; let me revise that: New York is not a window on America. What transpired here in New York is related to the time, place, and circumstance of New York.

HP: Of New York, yes. That's right.

LH: And the fact that it was volatile and explosive and "organized" -- for heaven's sake, we didn't decide the great question that men had the right to organize and bargain collectively until 1937.

HP: That is right.

LH: So it is understandable that artists here in the city who have, you know, the unique expression of vision that they have, would hire a hall and argue about sick pay and fight and squabble. Why? Because they had a common employer -- the government.

HP: Yes, yes.

LH: And they had continuity of income, which; the modern American artists had not had in the 20s.

HP: Never had.

LH: It was a wholly new field for them and, you know, this sense of organization, or finding a niche, or the notion that an artist's belly, a hungry belly, was a subject of concern to the Federal government was a discovery which no previous age had ever given rise to.

HP: That's right. And of course it was a great period of organization, I mean of union building and so on. The only union experience that I remember having was a kind of crazy thing. I had a caretaker, or a sweeper, or something of that sort who belonged to the stonecutters' union. And I though. Well, gosh, I've got a guy here who knows how to cut stone. I should have him teaching sculpture, or teaching that technical part of it.

LH: Sure.

HP: So I said, "Well how would you like instead of pushing that broom to handle a chisel?" He thought that would be fine. "Well, okay, you show the kids how to sharpen their chisels and all this business relative to stonecutting." Well, the next thing I knew his union was on my back because I was working him out of his classification. I thought he would enjoy it, you see.

LH: Certainly.

HP: But he had gone to the union and said, "I'm no longer breathing dust from the floor. I'm breathing stone dust, and I've got to be protected and . . ." So I put him back on the broom. I couldn't raise his salary, you see. I was under a quota schedule, so he went back to work as a janitor. it was that kind of thing that --

LH: Yes. Were your financial requirements shaped by Washington?

HP: I don't know. I can't say. I can't remember. I have the feeling that it might have been shaped by the state. I believe it was called the Public Service and Education portion of the WPA.

LH: Yes. Women's Professional and Service.

HP: Something like that, yes.

LH: Yes. Mrs. Kerr was in Chicago initially, Florence Kerr and the regional supervisor I believe. She came out of Iowa.

HP: I think so. The woman who was in charge of the Iowa part of that was quite a woman, but her name escapes me now. She was very good, I think, but rather difficult to work with sometimes.

LH: Well, you know it surprises me that as much work was done as was done when you find and organization _____ springing to arms -- this was without precedent.

HP: Yes. I think so too.

LH: It had no organization in the sense of civil service. . .

HP: None.

LH: It had a group of dedicated people who were prepared to cut all kinds of corners to get the job done because they had that kind of spirit. They were like zealots. That's too strong. What I mean is --

HP: They were enthusiastic people certainly. We all were.

LH: Right. Right. Put it that way. Right. And Harry Hopkins, whatever other limitations he may have had, did not have the limitation of not enlisting the support of his people who worked for him.

HP: That's right.

LH: They marched -- even people like Ellen Woodward.

HP: Yes.

LH: And there's nothing in Ellen Woodward's background to prepare her for sitting astride artists, writers. Nothing.

HP: That's right.

LH: And yet these were her kids.

HP: Yes.

LH: If you read the testimony that she gave in defense of the Federal Theatre Project, it's marvelous, you know, even though she was expected to say this, but there's nothing in her courtroom background in Mississippi -- her husband a judge --

HP: That's right.

LH: -- that would lead you to believe that she would have this kind of understanding of the artists as people. But Harry Hopkins is the bridge.

HP: Yes.

LH: He enlisted this kind of thing, inspired this kind of enthusiasm plus the fact that suddenly artists were being paid to do the thing they loved best when in the 20s, the late 20s and the early 30s they couldn't -- they had to work in a hash house --

HP: That's right.

LH: -- to scrape together _____ funds in order to do the thing they really enjoyed. Suddenly they had the opportunity to do it.

HP: Now they're having to do it again, although artists are probably better paid now than they ever have been. Still there are many artists who are still being building superintendents and that kind of thing.

LH: Sure. Yes.

HP: Yes, it was a magnificent period.

LH: I like the way it burgeoned, you know. It's like getting a telegram, as they did in San Francisco, "Put 400 people on the payroll tomorrow." I mean even in 1965, that's humorous, so you can imagine what it must have been like in 1934. "Get checks to them by Thanksgiving. Worry about what they're doing later."

HP: Yes.

LH: You know, something's going to happen. Then to have artists from, oh, from all kinds of diverse backgrounds sharing a loft, working together, peeking over each other's shoulders. You know, that's the kind of influence that is never articulated -- broadening.

HP: Well, I've always felt that that was our period in our -- where we're leaders now in a sense, art in America, has become important, but there is a kind of, to me, Madison Avenue approach to it now that didn't exist then when it was really a strong, hones-to-God kind of movement that was healthy.

LH: You know, something that is often overlooked __ the NRA as an agency brought manufacturers together to create a code for their _____ whether it was chickens, or what _____.

HP: Yes. Yes.

LH: A man in Maine suddenly understood that there was a person in Virginia who had exactly the same kind of problem. There was this kind of communication going on, which in the late 20s, certainly in the early period of the depression did not obtain.

HP: That's right.

LH: Suddenly there was this built-in necessity for communicating.

HP: Yes.

LH: I think this is true of the artists who suddenly found through a succession of things, through the FERA --

HP: Yes.

LH: There was the switch to the CWA.

HP: Yes. And the PWAP.

LH: Which was an aspect of the CWA.

HP: Yes.

LH: This had to be destroyed in a sense because they had worked into the understanding a minimum wage of 25 cents and hour. Think of it!

HP: Yes.

LH: And Southern sharecroppers were leaving the sharecropping farms and going to the city for 25 cents an hour, put pressure on Southern senators and congressmen -- and roosevelt needed them in those days --

HP: Yes. Sure.

LH: So they had to scuttle the CWA. And I think he turned to Ickes ____ the general theory that the Public Work Administration would solve all our problems. But Ickes was, I guess, obsessed with the thievery of politicians and tried to write contracts which would keep their hands out of the public _____, so he never came up with a contract. So FDR had to turn to Harry Hopkins, who was brought down as an overall coordinator, and was suddenly pressed into service in desperation in '35 to float a WPA somehow because so many people were really on their uppers.

HP: Oh, sure.

LH: It was a common boat in which everyone had an oar. That's what it amounted to, and you had to roll your own.

HP: Do you remember John Faulkner's "Men Working?"

LH: Oh, yes, yes.

HP: We read it when _____ was living with us, and it became a kind of thing with us. We were working with the WP&A, as it was called in John Faulkner's book. And so Leonard became our Rinow (?) -- you remember the one that was born under very adverse circumstances. It was a magnificent book, we thought. But your mentioning the Mississippi aspect of it reminded me of that -- the sharecroppers leaving the farms, going to the city, and really living the life of Riley on 25 cents an hour.

LH: Sure. But think of the pressure on Congress because of the longshoremen in New York, for example, who were invading A & P with their wives and simply taking things off the shelves.

HP: Yes.

LH: And who was going to quarrel with a group of longshoremen?

HP: That's right. Who indeed?

LH: Take the farm _____ riots in Iowa.

HP: Sure, sure. Or the _____ strikes and all that sort of thing.

LH: It was a desperate time so something had to be done.

HP: Yes, it was a desperate time.

LH: Right. And they floated this WPA which Congress was never really happy with but nevertheless it got afloat and it had -- well, with Hopkins it had to have certain political overtones.

HP: Oh, sure.

LH: But the surprising thing, I think, is that the funds that were expended took _____ like rubber bands and exercised them. This is the real happy thing.

HP: Yes, that's what happened; that's what happened.

LH: And idea became -- what is it -- they couldn't compete, but they could play with the creative aspects of America, the creative mind, and massage them into a sharing of experience, a general kind of camaraderie among all them where you'd think they would be at each other's throat. When it came to talk about style, you know they would be, or who was going to hang what where, but nonetheless the total effort is a sharpening of technique, keeping the technique alive, creating opportunity for people to continue in that to which they had really dedicated themselves without trying to go into some bypass like making roads. Imagine. It's incredible. I think we stumbled through it in a way.

HP: Oh, yes. It was kind of a day-to-day judgment of what to do next.

LH: Yes. But the net effect has been positive, although you know, the reaction that sets in the abstract expressionism after the war -- the seeds are all present in the 30s, the seeds were present in the 30s in the very camaraderie that existed.

HP: Oh, sure. Sure. Yes. There's no question about it.

LH: And out of this kind of self-limitation because you are part of a group comes this almost explosive expression of individuality with the war. It's an exciting period. There's no book anywhere that indicates the substance of what the devil this atmosphere really was like and what kind of seeds it really planted.

HP: Well, now in your present study, presumably a book will come out of it?

LH: That's the hope for it.

HP: And your book will be limited to the Art Project?

LH: Yes. But we have some material on the theatre. The theatre is volatile, you know.

HP: Yes.

LH: And you can paint a painting and you can have a lot of criticism of it and different views of what it is, but when Hallie Flanagan gets up with her newspaper you know, and says a few things which are related to the passing scene by way of philosophical commitment, this is dynamite.

HP: Sure. It sure was!

LH: It's marvelous.

HP: A friend of ours was with the Federal Theatre. Phil Barbour, you may have run into him.

LH: Yes. Run into his name, yes.

HP: Well, he's in public relations now and he also runs Music Inn up somewhere in the mountains, the Berkshires. We've sort of lost contact, but I know he was very involved in the Theatre newspaper program. It was magnificent.

LH: Sure it was! I mean, you know, it was a wholly new style.

HP: As far as I know, we had no Federal Theatre in Iowa.

LH: No.

HP: Of course, we had no talent.

LH: No, but this is a thing over the horizon, the whole notion of touring companies is beginning to emerge. Iowa had a service art organization and an educational art organization plus a Writers Project.

HP: Yes. The poet -- what's his name -- I seem not to be able to remember names today. It was a very good project, the Writers Project.

LH: Oh, enormous. I mean this group of people who published a magazine before the WPA came because they wanted a --

HP: Yes. Bill Strong and people of that strain.

LH: Yes. Yes.

HP: Yes, very good people.

LH: Yes. And alive. But this is the age of the popular front, the legacy of Sacco-Vanzetti. I mean, you know, it was all in the air.

HP: It was a great period.

LH: Of course. Well, was there any preparation so far as you know in Iowa to -- I think you've indicated some -- to meet the preparedness? You turned the whole thing over to the WACS as a kind of --

HP: Well, that's what we did. That's about all the Art Center could do. Also we did have one show, this civil defense kind of show. The day of Pearl Harbor, or at least that week, I had opened a show of Japanese prints.

LH: That's marvelous. Isn't that wonderful!

HP: I forget when we got it. It was one of the traveling shows and it happened to be scheduled to us at that time, and we hung it. Then Pearl harbor came. I made some kind of publicity usage out of that, I gorget just what approach now. Then we also right following that had -- a fellow from Alaska came in with some paintings, and he had paintings of the whole coast of Alaska including some of the Aleutians, and so that was of interest too. I mean we related things in that way. But we didn't do any chauvinistic kinds of things at all. I wouldn't do that.

LH: You tapped local resources anyway?

HP: Yes.

LH: Such as crafts.

HP: Oh yes, yes. Crafts and paintings. Oh, certainly, yes. Yes, we certainly did. _____ in terms of the total product of WPA was the contribution of Iowa because of the amount of craft. Yes, we did. We certainly did. And of course we had some pretty good artists in Iowa, too -- Grant Wood, for instance. I studied under him, worked for him as a youngster, and his whole school of painters, which were fairly numerous. They had them. Then some of the older people and the youngsters, so there were some fair artists in Iowa at that time.

LH: When you moved from Iowa into the Japanese center was this an extension of WPA?

HP: No, no, it was not. The strange thing was that for us, in a sense, it was in that Bill Friedman, who had been at the Craft Center designing was one of the first people to be connected with the War Relocated Authority out in Wyoming. His job was to superintend the production of various things by these relocated workers. Dan and Lillian Rhodes were also there in ceramics, the intention being then to make insulators and dishes for the Army, you see. They also had a lens grinding plant. Bill was more or less in charge of those industrial things. And so he asked me if I would be interested in coming in the school as an educator and developing the industrial design and art in the high school level, you see, among the young people coming in. Of course I was. But it was -- the funds came from the War Relocation Authority, and it was operated under the Department of Forestry for some reason or other. I don't know just why, but i guess they were set up in those areas. They would have been the organization in those areas that could handle it. We went out there, and my wife also taught in the schools. But it was not an extension of the WPA.

LH: No.

HP: I felt, or course, at that time that my job under WPA salary was a very tenuous thing because it was obviously going to be no longer needed, so I was looking for another job.

LH: Yes, I think it had as part of its logic the fact that it could do itself out of a job -- the WPA.

HP: Sure, sure, that was the idea.

LH: That was its aim.

HP: Sure, that was its aim, yes. And that is one reason I was so keen on this development of a craft project that would be self-supporting, not using government funds.

LH: When you left Iowa, the Des Moines Art Center, there was in existence provision for continuity?

HP: Yes, yes, yes.

LH: That is, locally there was sufficient interest to maintain it, as far as you are aware?

HP: Yes, there was; there was.

LH: With great strength too?

HP: Yes. Part of that was due to the fact that the Des Moines Association had money available from a will to build a museum. I forget now just why they hadn't built it sooner. I think there were conditions in the will that they couldn't build it be fore a certain date. A man by the name of Edmondson left this money, and a collection. So they had that hope of building a museum. As a matter of fact, I helped somewhat in the planning of it in the early stages. It was one of the local architects there, John Brooks was his name. He and Harry Jones and I and various other people connected with either the Association of Fine Arts or this Friends of Art organization got together and discussed what we wanted, what the building should have. That was certainly in the wind at that time, although of course the building wasn't built for many years afterwards. I suppose it was ten years after I left before the building was completed.

LH: Has the experience in the 30s with the Art Center movement had any continuing vitality?

HP: Oh, yes. Oh, I'm sure it has. Oh, definitely yes. I'm sure it had.

LH: How about in your own thinking?

HP: Well -- you mean my own professional work? No. I decided I really didn't like education and I wanted to do my own work with my hands and so since the way I have done, I work in various design fields, textile, and metal, and so forth. During the war I was in the Topographic Section of the Corps of Engineers and a mapping job opened up at one time, and i took it, and I'm still drawing maps. At present I'm drawing maps for the city of New York. Then as a free lance job I do calligraphy.

LH: Oh, really?

HP: Make these testimonial scrolls and illuminated thing of that sort. So I've completely gone away from education. My wife is at Columbia. She's a librarian, and I'm just a hack artist.

LH: Having a ball.

HP: Yes, I think so. I think so.

LH: Yes. But you know it would have been altogether different but for the 30s.

HP: That's right.

LH: You might still be teaching in Iowa.

HP: Yes. Well, I'm sure the WPA project started many people off in new directions.

LH: If nothing else, it kept skills alive so that they could take advantage of an opportunity when it arose.

HP: Yes.

LH: Sure.

HP: The whole project was magnificent, I thin.

LH: Well, you know, you have endless human problems anyway and the function, I suppose, of an administrator in part certainly is to create a greater degree of order out of the chaos he finds.

HP: Yes.

LH: And you know chaos is endless as the human story is.

HP: Particularly at that time chaos was awfully endless and awfully prevalent.

LH: Yes. And yet, you know, the sense of being in a boat and not alone --

HP: Yes, I think that brought a lot of people back to earth and gave them certainly a big impetus to do things.

LH: Did you have anything to do at all with the Treasury Department?

HP: No, no. The only thing I ever had to do with the Treasury Department was to compete in the mural design things. I never won one, But Edward Bruce wanted to buy one of my sketches, and then he got sick and didn't buy it. No, I had nothing to do with that at all.

LH: That was going on at the same time.

HP: Yes, it was going on at the same time, and some pretty good things were done under it, I think. Some portable things, too.

LH: Yes. In the state of Iowa were they kept pretty much separate? HP:Yes. You know that isn't quite so clear in Washington, but it is clear in a state the separate quality of the Treasury Department Project, though it utilized WPA funds in some way -- Yes, there was some way, I don't know just how it was set up -- it did utilize _____. I think that perhaps if a mural was designed, that the WPA paid salaries of mural assistants, something of that sort.

LH: Yes.

HP: I don't remember just how it was. I did work with Grant Wood on one of the federally-sponsored murals.

LH: Did you?

HP: It's at Ames College, at the Agricultural College.

LH: How much experience had he had in murals?

HP: I don't think he'd had a great deal. He had designed a glass window, but I believe that was about the extent of his mural experience at that time. No! He had done a lot of decorating of interiors, coffee shops and that sort of thing around Cedar rapids and Marshalltown, Iowa. So he had had some experience. But these large murals were, I think, new to him. I think he did a good job too. But I'm a partisan. I like Grant so much that I think his work is nice even though it's not very fashionable now.

LH: Well, that's hard to ascertain just what is fashionable now.

HP: Yes. I saw a painting of his in the Knoedler Ballery, oh, several months ago -- still I thought it was a handsome painting.

LH: Well I can't get over his, never could get over his -- wasn't he the one who did American Gothic?

HP: Mmhmm.

LH: Marvelous. The D.A.R. to ____. And savage really throughout. Is he like that?

HP: Nooo. Pleasant, lovely, likeable. But he was hurt very much by the --

LH: Was he really?

HP: D.A.R. Yes.

LH: Because it's almost an autopsy.

HP: Yes.

LH: That is, the camera representation is almost an autopsy, and in that sense quite savage but I've often thought not intended. That's your view? That is, that he's not like that?

HP: He's not like that at all, no. But he was very hurt, very much hurt by the reaction of the D.A. R. to his stained glass window.

LH: Was he really?

HP: I don't think he ever got over it.

LH: Well, a lot of people have been hurt by their attitudes, not the least of which is Marion Anderson.

HP: That's right.

LH: I heard her, I guess it was 1934, Eastertime, sing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, the song, a simple song "Let My People Go" to I don't know -- it must have been 30,000 people because she was not allowed to sing in Constitution Hall.

HP: That's right.

LH: Remember that controversy?

HP: I remember that.

LH: So she sang on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. And, you know, a marvelous voice.

HP: Oh, yes.

LH: In '34 much younger than she is today -- she's still good -- but in those days -- wow, I mean it just made things run up and down your spine. A very moving thing.

HP: Oh yes. And Grant's pictures of Iowa landscape are I think magnificent. They are the landscape. They're beautiful in my opinion.

LH: Yes. How articulate a fellow is he?

HP: Well, he was not awfully articulate; reasonably so, just reasonably so, yes.

LH: What was his attitude toward a youngster such as yourself?

HP: He loved them.

LH: Did he really?

HP: Yes. And vice versa. We all loved him.

LH: Is that a deterrent on creativity, or _____?

HP: Yes. All of us had to unlearn what he taught us. All of us did, I think.

LH: Yes, I would imagine so.

HP: We painted pictures that were more Grant Wood than his own, you know.

LH: That's the highest from of flattery.

HP: I guess it is, I guess it is. Something like that you know.

LH: Yes. He must have inspired something.

HP: Yes. And he was as a teacher very insistent on a certain type of layout and a certain type of craftsmanship, and his students who did feel about him as most of us did just couldn't help out-GrantWooding Grant Wood.

LH: That's understandable.

HP: We all had to relearn. I suppose most of us did.

LH: It's like getting drenched.

HP: Mmhmm. Although in recent years I've been thinking if I start painting again, which is unlikely, I'm going back to that because it was based on good draftsmanship, and it was based on good design principles, and it was a picture of something that is recognizable and I kind of think maybe we need it -- all of those things.

LH: Yes. Well, you know, to day the fragmentation of experience being what it is, it's impossible, I suppose, for any one person to climb on top of something to know it cold the way Grant Wood would know the landscape of Iowa.

HP: That's right.

LH: So you get fragments which if you're, I suppose, able enough or great enough, you might be able to piece together in some kind of story about modern times, but i rather doubt it.

HP: Yes. Well, he grew up as a poor kid in the woods, so to speak, trapping rabbits to live on, and he knew the

landscape from the feet up, you know, I mean he waded in it.

LH: Sure. Yes.

HP: And I think, as you say, it would be very difficult for anyone to have quite that root in any experience now because, as you say, it is fragmented.

LH: Yes. And you know the non-recognizable thing is being done.

HP: Yes.

LH: It's almost a kind of slap in the face at the 30s where social protest you know --

HP: Yes.

LH: You know, the American scene --

HP: Yes.

LH: With its commentary _____, almost cartoon-like in a way. . .

HP: Almost -- well, yes, Benton, for instance, there was an element of caricature.

LH: Yes. That's not discernible any more to a marked degree.

HP: It's not discernible, I think, at all really, you know, in what's being done now. Well anyhow, in pop art there certainly is some of that.

LH: Even in the abstract expressionists I wouldn't sell them too short. They may be more subtly rooted than I'm gifted to --

HP: Oh, there's -- I'm for it, I like their, work. I can't do it, but I admire it.

LH: I'm not sure that I understand its sense of relevance to the passing scene. It may be more subtle than my instinct tells me.

HP: Well, I think part of its relevance is in what you suggested -- the fragmentation of our experience.

LH: Yes.

HP: It seems to me that's about what is being presented with a kind of hopeful synthesis to it.

LH: We may not discover that until someone discovers a whole new world, you know.

HP: Sure.

LH: Or breaks through the current impasse with a new accelerator and suddenly discovers a whole new universe. I don't know -- I suppose in a way we've turned our back upon -- well, let me dilute this: it's just, I think, in a way that Stuart Davis said, "The only thing that can happen to painting is that it might stop in the sense that we might build buildings without walls."

HP: Yes. That's pretty good.

LH: But other than that it's going to have this individual expression which is antithetical to what obtained in the 30s.

HP: Yes. Well, it will be interesting to see what happens to it. As I say, I'm not painting now, and I'm not very interested in painting. I'm interested in design, and my calligraphy is a kind of an ingrown toenail, it's kind of a turned-in kind of expression, but maybe one of these days I'll start again.

LH: It will be interesting to see, yes. It will be interesting to see. Well, look, thanks an awful lot.

HP: Well, I don't know that I have been of much help on the thing, it's been so long ago and I've forgotten the details.

LH: I hope when you get this back, as you will, you won't be too censorious as to what you said. I like it to just unfold --

HP: Well, it was a period that I thoroughly enjoyed. I certainly did, and have always felt, you know, a sense of regret that it didn't continue. Yes.

LH: It's strange it didn't.

HP: Because there was a feeling of camaraderie, a feeling of oneness not only among artists but all of us poor people who didn't have any jobs, you know.

LH: To have a window. You're right. I think you're right. Well, you'll get a copy of this back sometime in which case you can take a blue pencil and do as you please.

HP: I won't ruin it.

LH: Because part of the joy is --

END OF INTERVIEW