



Smithsonian
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Oral history interview with Erik Hans
Krause and Gertrude Herdle Moore,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Erik Hans Krause and Gertrude Herdle Moore on January 23, 1965. The interview took place in Rochester, New York, and was conducted by Joseph S. Trovato 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.

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. The original transcript was edited. In 2022 the Archives retranscribed the original audio and attempted to create a verbatim transcript.

Interview

Joseph S. Trovato: This is a three-part interview with Mrs. Gertrude Herdle Moore and Mr. Erik Hans Krause and is taking place at the home of Mrs. Moore at Rochester, New York, February 23, 1965. [Recorder stops, restarts.] I should have said January, of course. [They laugh.] [Recorder stops, restarts.] Before we begin to discuss your respective parts in connection with the Federal Art Projects, I want to record a brief, sort of, outline of each of you. Of your backgrounds that is to say. So, we'll begin with you, Gertrude. Where were you born and what was your training?

Gertrude Herdle Moore: Well, I was born in Rochester. And I'm a graduate of the University of Rochester. But I represent a form of museum administration training which I think was probably the only available source of professional training at that time, in the early '20s. It was the apprenticeship system which I had, very directly, and as instruction from my father, the first director of the Memorial Art Gallery in Rochester, a part of the University of Rochester, its Fine Arts Department, with particular direction toward community service. And it was an introduction—a working introduction to all of the problems of administration as well as scholarship and connoisseurship. I think that is it. I'm a very local product in many ways.

Joseph S. Trovato: Well, I want to be sure that we establish here that you were the director of the Rochester Memorial Art Gallery for quite a number of years.

Gertrude Herdle Moore: Yes, for 42 years, actually, retiring in 1962. And in that time, the growth of the gallery was, not only in terms of its collection, which became the skeleton of the history of art, but also in many branches and directions of community service. I think that is probably the outstanding contribution of my years of administration to our community.

Joseph S. Trovato: That's fine. Well I'm glad that we have put this in because it is most important. And now, Mr. Krause, let us establish your beginnings before we go into our main topic. So, you might tell us where you were born and something of your early training and such and so forth.

Erik HANS Krause: Well, I was born in Germany, city of Halle. I studied art, fine arts, classic arts, and applied arts in Germany at the Academy of Art in Leipzig and Dresden. Later on, due to the conditions that caused a lot of confusion in Europe, I decided to look for a new future in the United States. Well, I started to work for several years in New York City, as art director and consultant in design and later on circumstances brought me to Rochester where I continued working as a professional artist and consultant.

At the time, when professional artists and craftsmen found it very difficult to find commissions, the government decided to do something for these people. I was asked to take over the structuring and development of an art project employing artists, craftsmen, and related artisans. When I started there was nothing whatsoever as yet developed in a tangible way. It was a wonderful idea. The people I worked with were wonderful in their interest and enthusiasm about the idea.

It will later on come out in our further discussions how these projects had to be structured and how the sponsors contributed to the final outcome of the Project.

[00:04:56]

Joseph S. Trovato: I see, Mr. Krause. Before we go too far, I would like to establish your respective parts in connection with the projects here in Rochester. And according to what Gertrude told me the other day, I understand that you, Mr. Krause, worked very closely with her in administering the projects here in your area. Now what were the projects?

Gertrude Herdle Moore: We were very fortunate in having Mr. Krause as the supervisor of the local WPA Art Project. The personnel of the committee was a representative one, with representatives from the library—the public library system—the Art Club of Rochester, the Society of Architects of Rochester, and various art educators. We used Mr. Krause in full capacity, not only to direct but to envision the projects, because we found at the very start that because this was so new a concept to the role of government in art, that we had to expand the possibilities in people's minds before they could even conceive of their wants in the form of projects. And I think that was one of the very important parts of his great service to this Project.

Among schools, among libraries, even county airports. He developed a concept of what contribution the artists of Rochester could make under his direction, to their teaching tools, as well as to the beauty of their establishments. And the nature of our projects during the eight or so years in which I was the chairman of the committee, ranged from architectural models to great mural projects, to a wonderful campaign of poster education in public health. And we found that the wisdom of his choice and the skill with which they were executed served as a kind of pilot project for many other units in the state. And our production was called upon for placement elsewhere in many other communities.

Joseph S. Trovato: I see. And how far an area did you cover beyond Rochester? Do you have some general idea?

Gertrude Herdle Moore: Well, this was conceived as about a four-county project, as I remember. But our works went as far as Newark, New Jersey. That I remember. I mean that placed—of course, they were delivered for final placement to the state head, and assigned by that officer to the place of greatest need.

Joseph S. Trovato: I see.

Gertrude Herdle Moore: In fact, in many cases they were created for that place. Um.

Joseph S. Trovato: I see. Well, you mentioned that the projects consisted of posters, visual aids, mural painting, and easel painting.

Gertrude Herdle Moore: Decorative hangings.

Joseph S. Trovato: Decorative hangings.

Gertrude Herdle Moore: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Joseph S. Trovato: And I can see from the photographic record that Mr. Krause has here, that you did all of these things here. As a matter of fact—now, is this a photograph of an exhibition of some of the work here at the Rochester Memorial Gallery, is it? It looks like a gallery exhibition.

Gertrude Herdle Moore: Yes, yes. Yes. This was a visual report of our work. This was held, as I remember, about 1940. And it gives some of the range. As you'll notice the great scale of these Proscenium curtains—

Joseph S. Trovato: Well, [laughs] I can see, yes.

Gertrude Herdle Moore: --which were placed in the principal high schools and junior high schools of Rochester. There were mural decorative panels.

Joseph S. Trovato: Yes?

Gertrude Herdle Moore: There were experimental techniques, for instance, in the medium of mosaics.

[00:10:00]

There were—the posters were printed in considerable editions so that they had to be made with the press in mind. And there we drew upon Mr. Krause's very distinguished experience as a graphic artist and designer. I think all of our work had a sense of style.

Joseph S. Trovato: Well, I can see from this work that there is a certain refinement and a certain professionalism about this. Now, did you—, Mr. Krause—in addition to your supervisory work, did you also actually instruct some of the artists who participated and who actually carried some of these things out?

Erik HANS Krause: Well, yes. The nature of the whole Project, which was determined to be of service to the community, rather than make-work for no reason, made it necessary not only to develop ideas for presentations to sponsors in the field in which they would be interested. Education, for instance, museums, even the Indian Reservation in Tonawanda. But also to develop techniques to carry these designs out. Because many of these people were prominent artists and craftsmen. Many of them were not prepared to carry out some of these large-scale projects. Therefore, I had to go ahead and develop new techniques that were applicable, to be used in large groups of people, some skilled, some not skilled. But the main thing was that we produced acceptable work for the community with the people that were sent and were supposed to be kept busy in a constructive way.

Joseph S. Trovato: I see. According to the inscription—I suppose there's an inscription on that photograph that we just referred to—the exhibition that was held at the Rochester Memorial Art Gallery, displaying some of the work that was done. I think you said that this was held in 1941. Could you tell us when your projects here actually started? Or just in a general way?

Gertrude Herdle Moore: I think the committee was organized—and it was some months in organizing—late in 1933 as I remember. And I think it continued as a very active enterprise for eight or nine years. That is my memory. I haven't checked this in any documentary way, but I think that was the length of the project--

Joseph S. Trovato: Right up until the war.

Gertrude Herdle Moore: Yes, yes. Mr. Krause was our supervisor in all that time, and the personnel of the committee changed, but not of the institutions represented.

Joseph S. Trovato: I see.

Gertrude Herdle Moore: I think the—in fact some of the productions are still in use. Which speaks for the wisdom of their conception as well as the scale and thoroughness of their manufacture. And I'm speaking, very personally, about some very valuable visual educational material which the gallery still uses, sends it out many times a year to schools in the form of architectural models. The Parson Capen House, for instance, in Topsfield, Massachusetts, a beautiful example of the direct transference of medieval English architecture to the American landscape. We have a beautiful model of it. The Parthenon, the Gate of Ishtar, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon; those were done in three-dimensional illusionistic perfection and done with such good engineering that they still stand solidly today. That was done by Mr. Richard Bills. I think he was employed for about four years until he left Rochester. And he represents the kind of opportunity that we were—by supplying the materials, were able to contribute to the educational tools of our community.

[00:15:00]

Joseph S. Trovato: Mr. Krause, I see that you have a list of some of the actual projects that were done. And we have already mentioned quite a few of them. Are there any others on that list that you might include in this record?

Erik HANS Krause: Well, we had to be diversified for two reasons. First, to meet the needs of prospective sponsors and secondly, also, to render service to the community. It was found that the use of posters for educational purposes was a very urgent matter. Both schools as well as other institutions, like the Academy of Medicine and health institutions, state schools, wanted educational posters, especially in matters of hygiene, of health service, and various other matters that were of interest in the public service. Museums, for instance, received posters in relation to the natural science presentations. The gallery—Memorial Art Gallery received several posters announcing special exhibits. These posters, again, required the invention of new techniques. It made it necessary to train people in processes that made it

possible to reproduce and produce large numbers of posters for distribution in a very inexpensive way. These rendered a great service.

Another important project were textile designs, textile hangings, and curtains for various public institutions including the Indian Tonawanda Reservation. That project alone, in cooperation with Dr. Parker's museum [the Rochester Museum -Ed.], required a great deal of research and Indian design. Seneca Indians, especially.

So, it led to many new aspects, which again were exploited by other branches of the Art Project, like the museum project. Which, again, specialized in particular areas of interest to the museum. We also did quite a few designs for the Index of Design.

Joseph S. Trovato: For the what?

Erik HANS Krause: Index of Design. Which was—

Joseph S. Trovato: [Inaudible.] The American Index of Design.

Erik HANS Krause: Yeah, that's it. Yes, mm-hmm [affirmative]. This was one of the most important projects, but it was very difficult to find people with the proper skill to learn the various interesting subjects which we could collect here.

Joseph S. Trovato: I see. Well, I think that this is working out beautifully and you are giving us so much valuable information for this important record that the Archives of American Art are now engaged in. At this point I'd like to ask you, Gertrude, what would be your evaluation of the Federal Art Projects? Do you think that it was a good thing, say, for American art?

Gertrude Herdle Moore: Yes, I think it was a very good thing. I think there were hazards, as there would be in any experimental project of this kind. But, in good hands— and I think we were in excellent hands under the supervision of Mr. Krause—we were able to adjust the project to the skill, the talents, and, I'm going to say the lack of experience of many of the artists who were assigned to us, so that it had a constructive value throughout. It has left an important legacy, even to today, in visual materials, in some of the decorative, even the monumental decorative items in some of our public schools. Proscenium curtains, for instance, in the theaters and auditoriums. That, in itself, is evidence and I think very satisfying evidence.

But in human terms, I think its greatest value lay—and that was in discovering unknown and surely unused talent, directing it to constructive purpose, um, which was an educational experience for the artist. We know of several cases where their later careers definitely stemmed from that experience and from the direct instruction which they got from Mr. Krause. It was exploiting the human values which otherwise would have been wasted. And I feel that the great value came in the quality concept, which was predominant throughout.

[00:20:25]

Joseph S. Trovato: Well I know that you have a very active art program in your whole Finger Lakes Region—is that what you call it, your region? And I'm thinking now, of course, of your regional show that I've seen. Would you attribute some of this to—you know, to these earlier days? In other words, as a sort of a beginning and as a source that developed into your present activity?

Gertrude Herdle Moore: I am, of course, interested in several specific cases in answering that question. What I think it did was to introduce some talented people to the whole satisfaction of creative experience and led to their further education. I think it probably didn't prepare them completely for vocational use of their talents, but it led to their further training. And I think, in that way, it has been a very important influence. We see it in the case of specific people now who contribute annually to our exhibition. They definitely got their start in those days.

Joseph S. Trovato: Well, I think that you have given us a most complete answer to my question. I don't know that we have left much for Mr. Krause. [Laughs.]

Erik HANS Krause: Indeed, Mrs. Moore has expressed it so beautifully and succinctly that it's difficult to add anything to the situation. I would like to state one observation. I felt that

during these years when we—when close contact with the public, through our artwork, that the public became, for the first time, aware of art and craft as part of their life. Not only that, but one of the incidental benefits I observed in the schools—much of our work was done in schools. We sometimes permitted children to watch the process of painting murals or printing. And the young people, of course, being much more impressed by it, retained this experience and I think they definitely also made the creative process an important aspect of their future life.

Joseph S. Trovato: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Krause. I think that you both have given us a wonderful, complete answer to my question. Now, I'm beginning to run out of questions, and so I'm going to ask each of you if you—if other things occur to you that we might put down on this record?

UNIDENTIFIABLE SPEAKER: [Inaudible.]

Joseph S. Trovato: Well, I'm very much intrigued by the great mass of material that Mr. Krause has here on this chair. Some of the posters that he is now leafing through, I think, have a great style and distinction. I'm also intrigued by this newspaper clipping from *The Democrat and the Chronicle* Sunday magazine, May 21, 1939. And the heading is, "Uncle Sam, Patron of the Arts." And a subheading, "On the government payroll in Rochester is a handful of artists visibly engaged in bringing the aesthetic out into full public view." And there are several photographs of some fine exhibition posters, and there's another illustration here of a mural in progress, showing the artists up on a scaffold. This must be a tremendous mural, when I consider the size of the figure in relation to the height of that mural.

Gertrude Herdle Moore: As I look through these summary sheets, which were a report of completed work—and this actually is only one year's citation, since September 1940 to the end of 1941—I realize what a tremendous production we had to our credit because, under these various categories, you realize that they required not only extensive square footage to cover, but also extensive research in the subject matter, which was most carefully related to the project and the nature of the institution. I'd like to run through just a very few of them.

[00:25:33]

There was a series of about 10 decorative hangings, some of them as large as 12 by 16 feet, which were made for the auditoriums and the public spaces in high schools and grammar schools of Rochester. A series of easel paintings, which—on assigned subjects which were supposed to have very definite local application, various local scenes, as well as regional activities, which were made for the walls of high schools and grammar schools. A few of them made just at the request of Albany, for distribution to places unknown later to us.

Then there were murals and they were very sizable; 15 by 18 feet would be the largest. Some of them were as small as 6 or 7 feet. But they were definitely related to the architecture of the institution and, in subject matter, to the background of the region. They were assigned to high schools and to the Academy of Medicine. Experimental work was done in mosaic murals. Silk-screen murals were a technique developed by Mr. Krause, which greatly expanded the possibilities of what had been just a small measure of detail printing to monumental size. Silk-screen murals which were assigned to state agricultural and industrial schools, the state normal schools, for instance, and in many cases are still in place and enjoyed. The state conservation department requested some mosaic murals.

Then there were—I think the service of art in public health education is really a very moving record. This is for instruction to parents and children; prevention as well as cure of disease. These were assigned subjects to us and developed in a very effective use of the printing medium by Mr. Krause and carried out by his artists. Personal hygiene, prenatal care, a number of posters on cancer detection, syphilis detection, the—eye preservation, child behavior, all of those definitely educational in their purpose.

The curtains and the hangings I think were one of the largest and richest areas. They were extensive in size, adapted to the decorative character of the institutions with great care; assigned to such large schools as East High School in Rochester, Newark State School, and a number of auditoriums in the local high schools. They were really very beautiful things done mostly by stenciling, I believe, against—with a repetitive design and very effective borders, drawing upon American imagery largely.

And its page after page lists the type of project, which was designed for such institutions as, oh, Rockville Center, which is on Long Island, a place we had had described to us, and which we had to visualize in these monumental terms.

[00:30:21]

And then a large group of curtains and hangings which were assigned to Albany, at the state headquarters' request, for later placement throughout the state. I think that covers the largest categories of the Project. I think both the museum and the art gallery still possess and use very actively the rich, three-dimensional objects which were made at that time.

Joseph S. Trovato: Well, this is just wonderful. And it strikes me that the outstanding thing about your projects that were done here was their local application of the work itself, the actual application in your—in the whole environment in the way of art for life's sake.
[Laughs.]

Gertrude Herdle Moore: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Joseph S. Trovato: Well, I want to thank both of you, Mrs. Moore and Mr. Krause, for giving us this wonderful information for the Archives' record. Thank you very much.

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