



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with David
Morris, 1964 May 4

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with David Morris on May 4, 1964. The interview took place in Kentfield, California and was conducted by Mary Fuller McChesney for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Helen Morris and Robert McChesney were also present at the interview. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's New Deal and the Arts project.

In 2024 the Archives retranscribed the original audio and attempted to create a verbatim transcript. Additional information from the original transcript has been added in brackets and given an -Ed. attribution. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MARY MCCHESENEY: This is Mary Fuller interviewing David Morris, a potter who lives at [. . . -Ed] in Kentfield. Present also are his wife, Helen Morris and Robert McChesney. The date is May 4, 1964. David, first, I would like some background information. Where were you born?

DAVID MORRIS: Washington, DC.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What year?

DAVID MORRIS: In 1911.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And where did you get your art training?

DAVID MORRIS: A lot of different places. I got my art training after I had already been an artist for a number of years. I have been a painter I should say for a number of years.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Where did you go to school, art school?

DAVID MORRIS: I went to art school after the war on the G.I. Bill to the Institute of Contemporary Art, Washington DC, and the University of Guadalajarain Mexico.

MARY MCCHESENEY: So earlier, before the WPA days you hadn't gone to art school?

DAVID MORRIS: No.

MARY MCCHESENEY: When did you first got on the WPA Project? Or any at the government projects and—

DAVID MORRIS: Well, first I was on as a model.

MARY MCCHESENEY: When was that? 1933, when it was first set up?

DAVID MORRIS: Shortly after it began, whatever the date of the beginning of the WPA. As a matter of fact, I worked as a model for the two projects which preceded the Federal Art Project that also employed artists. It was EWA and FWAP, Federal Works of Art Project and Emergency Works Administration. Both had artists employed in small numbers in the Washington DC area and I have been working as a model at this time anyhow, during the Depression, of course. And then, I discovered that I could be employed as a model. So at that time I get certain amount of work as a model. So I guess I was on that category right at the beginning.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And that was the PWAP or—

DAVID MORRIS: And I wasn't—that was—the PWAP and EWA that I worked as a model. I didn't work as a model on the Federal Art Project.

[Tape stops, restarts.]

MARY MCCHESENEY: We're talking about you having been first model on the government art projects. How long did you work at that?

DAVID MORRIS: I think it was about eight months or a year.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And then what did you do?

DAVID MORRIS: And then I got a job on the WPA but not connected with the Art Project but as an office worker, operating an adding machine.

MARY MCCHESENEY: That was in Washington DC, also?

DAVID MORRIS: About which I knew absolutely nothing.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Where did you work? What kind of an office?

DAVID MORRIS: It was statistical office.

MARY MCCHESENEY: A government office?

DAVID MORRIS: Government office doing just a general statistics on employment in the WPA, employment figures

MARY MCCHESENEY: And how long were you with that job?

DAVID MORRIS: Oh, I guess about six months.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And then what did you do?

DAVID MORRIS: Well then, my work was so bad that they sent me up to the top office—

MARY MCCHESENEY: [Laughs.]

DAVID MORRIS: —to be interviewed by the head man who was subsequently arrested for embezzling funds from the WPA [laughs].

MARY MCCHESENEY: What was his name?

DAVID MORRIS: Unfortunately, I don't recall [laughs]. I'm very bad at remembering names; I'd just love to give you his name, but I can't. But at any rate, this hadn't come up in the time, he was still entrenched. But he was, in fact, a rather nice character I thought. And I had a long talk with him, and he said, Actually the situation is you're really not getting anything done down there. And I said, Well, I know I'm not. By this time, I had been given a job of proofreading numbers. I sat across the table from a young Hungarian girl, and we had lists of numbers of at least 12 to 15 digits. She'd take one sheet and I take another and either I would read the list of numbers and she would verify the ratio and vice versa. We did this all day long for eight hours a day. That was pretty [laughs] devastating work. And finally, it got so that I was making a lot of mistakes, just not getting the work. I was looking out the window instead [laughs].

MARY MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DAVID MORRIS: And so they called me up to the top office and asked me what the trouble was and I told him that the same thing that I just said. And he said, Maybe you'd like to work in some other department of the WPA? Apparently, the policy in those days was not to fire anybody if they could help it because—

HELEN MORRIS: Unemployment figures were bad—

DAVID MORRIS: They wanted, you know, the thing was intended to employ people. This, of course, was not a project that I was on this was a federal WPA and I wasn't on relief.

[00:05:03]

So they said—they asked me what my background was and I said, Well, I'd done some painting which I hadn't done too much of that at time but I had done quite a bit of drawing painting. And they said, Why don't you go over and talk to the people in Federal Art Project which has recently been set up. So they gave me the name of someone to see and I went over to talk with him. And while walking through the hallways and look at the doorway of someone's office and I saw someone sitting at a desk that I recognized. One of the people

who'd been in the sketch class that was modeling for at one time, and he recognized me, and he called me in. And so we passed the time of the day. And I said, What are you doing? What's your job here? And he said—well he said, I'm the regional director for Maryland, Virginia, and Washington DC, and West Virginia—regional director for the Federal Art Project. I didn't ask him how he got the job. He said, What are you doing over here? So I told him—I said, I've just been sent over here from this other department to see if they could find some job for me. And he said, Well, I've got just the job for you—District of Columbia supervisor for the Federal Art Project [laughs].

MARY MCCHESENEY: Just like that?

HELEN MORRIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DAVID MORRIS: Just like that. So that's how I got this job, which was just being set up at that time. And actually, I wasn't qualified for it, really at all. But for that matter, neither was he.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What was the name of the man? Do you know his name?

DAVID MORRIS: Yes, Russell Parr.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Russell Parr P-A-R-R?

DAVID MORRIS: Yes.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And he was the supervisor for those states that you mentioned?

DAVID MORRIS: Yes.

MARY MCCHESENEY: So you became the District supervisor for—the head supervisor for—

DAVID MORRIS: —Washington, DC

MARY MCCHESENEY: For Washington, DC

DAVID MORRIS: Just for one area.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Just for the town?

DAVID MORRIS: Yes.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What were your duties?

DAVID MORRIS: Well, the duties— yeah, snooping. One of the duties, of course, was checking up on the artists to see whether or not they did what they were supposed to do.

MARY FULLER: These were artists who were on the easel project who were painting at home?

DAVID MORRIS: Yes, artists and, artists and—well, the thing was in its initial stages at this time, so that, actually, [clears throat] it had not really been clarified exactly what the artist was supposed to do. The artists had just been employed and only a rather small amount of that time had been employed at the beginning.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Do you know how many—

DAVID MORRIS: Yes, at the very beginning, at time that I went in, there were only about 16 painters and sculptors on what they would call the easel project. And then there were another probably 10, who were employed as teachers. For the most part, the ones who were employed as teachers were people that they were uncertain about, as far as qualifications were concerned.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Where did they teach?

DAVID MORRIS: They taught mostly in children's—in schools, in the high schools, and grammar schools, and neighborhood houses, and places of that sort—

HELEN MORRIS: —the Americanization School.

DAVID MORRIS: —through the Red Cross, the Americanization School. Classes were set up to teach art children. [Clears throat.] Some of the people on the Project were doing both easel painting and teaching, part-time one, part-time the other. This held all the way through the Project. Whenever we get in the beginning there were a lot of people that haven't approached and they were uncertain. In fact, a lot of people on the Project that had, some of them practically no qualifications as painters at all. We even had tattoo artists attempting to sign up on the Project. We didn't let them in.

[They laugh.][Cross talk.]

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh, they did?

HELEN MORRIS: And a nightclub artist—

DAVID MORRIS: We did let a nightclub sketch artist in.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: We had house painters on our project.

DAVID MORRIS: We had a number of house painters—

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: —the only house painters we had were house painters who actually had done a little bit of easel painting on their own. No house painters came to the Washington DC Project to sign up that they had never done anything.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Do you recall the names of any of the painters who were on the Project?

DAVID MORRIS: Well, yeah, if I stopped to think about it, I could recall lots of the names. The best-known painter we had, who already had an established reputation was Polish Russian painter, Cikovsky.

HELEN MORRIS: Nikolai.

DAVID MORRIS: Nikolai Cikovsky, who was very well known during that period in the East.

MARY MCCHESENEY: How do you spell his name?

DAVID MORRIS: C-I-K-O-V-S-K-Y

MARY MCCHESENEY: Cikovsky.

DAVID MORRIS: Cikovsky.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Do you know if he is still in Washington?

DAVID MORRIS: I don't know where he is now, but he was a very well-established painter, very proficient painter, he studied in Europe originally and was a very qualified painter.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Was he the only professional painter—

HELEN MORRIS: No.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: —on the program?

DAVID MORRIS: As far as I can remember Cikovsky was the only painter who had developed a reputation.

[00:10:00]

There were a number of other painters who would be categorized in the same way as if you suddenly started a project here in San Francisco and you chose, say, five or six painters who had shown in a couple of shows here and there and were painters in the area but did not have a lot of publicity, had not had a lot of publicity so far. Hugh Collins was another painter who was definitely a professional painter, who was on the Project. I could give you lots of names, Fritz Fuglister.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Fuglister?

DAVID MORRIS: Fuglister from Rhode Island, moved to Washington. And Charles Darby, another painter from Rhode Island. They were on the Project from the beginning but got off of it.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What type of work were they doing? Can you describe the painting, what style?

DAVID MORRIS: Yes, Cikovsky was doing—Cikovsky was doing almost not entirely landscape but mostly landscape and some portraiture. And I don't know exactly how I would describe the style of his work.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Very realistic?

DAVID MORRIS: No, not very realistic. It's really hard to describe. [Cross talk.] You might say it's impressionism. The closest you could say was impressionism and all else. The same type of work as—do you remember the work of Boucher [ph] in the period of the WPA? Bushe was on our New York project. Very similar style to Boucher. And in his portraits, very similar to the Soyer brothers, Moses Soyer. Moses and his brother Soyer—

MARY MCCHESENEY: Raphael, I think.

DAVID MORRIS: —Raphael and Moses Soyer, similar to theirs in his portraiture. His landscapes were much more on the impressionistic style. The Fuglister and the people from New England were doing, abstract, mostly abstractions.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Geometric abstractions?

DAVID MORRIS: Yes, geometric and in the case of Fuglister, geometric abstractions and Collins's work, Hugh Collins's work was mostly work on tempera but it was impressionistic. There were lots of other painters.

HELEN MORRIS: I can name some if that's all right.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Yes, please do Helen.

HELEN MORRIS: Swanson, the mad man [laughs] and—

MARY MCCHESENEY: Do you know his first name?

DAVID MORRIS: Harold.

HELEN MORRIS: Harold Swanson, he is in Chicago now.

DAVID MORRIS: He is a primitive.

HELEN MORRIS: And there was Lamke whom we were speaking about a little while ago, sculptor and painter. And Carl Nyquist who became quite well-known—

DAVID MORRIS: Lamke was doing assemblages, and he was doing abstract sculpture as abstract as anything you'll see today.

MARY MCCHESENEY: This was in the late '30s?

DAVID MORRIS: Yes, in fact his work was entirely unique in that area. No one was doing anything like that, in or outside of the Art Project.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What material did he work in?

DAVID MORRIS: He worked—his sculpture was done in some in cement, cement and fire clay and in wood. He did a lot of things in wood. He worked in welded steel, and oil, and lithograph and in watercolor. Every medium that he could get hold of.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What was his first name?

DAVID MORRIS: Harold.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Harold Lamke?

DAVID MORRIS: Lamke. He changed named during the Project to Lamke. So he may be known by Lamke now, L-A-M-K-E.

MARY MCCHESENEY: You don't know where he is now?

DAVID MORRIS: No, I have no idea.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Did they have a mural project?

DAVID MORRIS: Yes, we had mural project, too. We had muralists, who like muralist in those days, were influenced by the Mexican school of painters and doing social realism. Nelson Rosenberg and Al Flavelle [ph] who was not doing that type of work, but he did do murals. Alex Flavelle was painting in France and his work was much very in the level of—

HELEN MORRIS: Degas?

DAVID MORRIS: No, Cézanne. His influence was Cézanne. A professional painter. He's now living in California, not painting.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Could you tell us something about the murals? Where were they? What buildings?

DAVID MORRIS: They were in public buildings in Washington, DC, in a number of new federal buildings, and in the Department of Justice. And in the—well, in several of the federal buildings, and high schools. Most of these paintings have been arbitrarily painted out since.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Were you in charge of the mural division, too?

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah.

[00:15:00]

MARY FULLER: Can you tell us something about what the murals look like? Do you remember any of them? What the subject matter was?

DAVID MORRIS: Yes, the subject matter was almost entirely on the theme of industry in the United States and fairly patriotic subjects done in the Mexican style, but there were also folk theme, a lot of folk theme work of Paul Bunyans, and things of this sort. Large, almost illustration-type murals depicting early American folklore.

MARY MCCHESENEY: When you say the Mexican style, do you mean influenced by Diego Rivera and by Orozco?

DAVID MORRIS: By a mixture of the two. The Mexican school of painting in general, that is the—

HELEN MORRIS: Oh, one of the painters had studied with Orozco, that was Rosenberg—

DAVID MORRIS: Nelson Rosenberg.

HELEN MORRIS: Rosenberg had studied with Orozco, he was in the Project.

DAVID MORRIS: But his influence was more on Rivera in spite of having studies with the Orozco.

MARY MCCHESENEY: He had been in Mexico studying with Orozco?

DAVID MORRIS: No, he hadn't. He studied with Orozco somewhere here in the States when he—

HELEN MORRIS: When he was doing in the New York school—

DAVID MORRIS: In New York when he was doing the Rockefeller Center—he wasn't in Rockefeller Center—

MARY MCCHESENEY: I think that was Rivera. But I think Orozco did a mural in Dartmouth College.

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah.

HELEN MORRIS: Princeton—

MARY MCCHESENEY: Was it Princeton?

DAVID MORRIS: I've forgotten which place it was, but he studied with him there—

MARY MCCHESENEY: Some university, I think.

DAVID MORRIS: He still may—he may still be working, I don't know.

HELEN MORRIS: He really conquered the fresco technique, you know, which was very new to us at that time, and taught him—

DAVID MORRIS: He had some very interesting sculpture was done by Hugh Collins, one of the painters I mentioned who did abstract watercolors. He had an assignment—a lot of assignments were suggested by the artists themselves and when they got an idea of something they want to do that would be presented to someone who might want to use this work. In fact, one of our biggest jobs was to try to sell the art. By sell, I do not mean selling for money but to try to interest the various government agencies and so forth in the Project and tell them that they could come and get paintings and hang them on their walls or they could have sculptures done, or panels done, or illustrations, or anything they wanted—

HELEN MORRIS: Or mosaic for the front of the building—

DAVID MORRIS: All free and we had a hard time convincing them. We set up a gallery where they could come and select things—

MARY MCCHESENEY: You got a gallery that had just WPA artists?

DAVID MORRIS: Yes.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Where was that located in Washington?

DAVID MORRIS: It was located on the grounds of the Smithsonian Institute, in the old part of Washington—downtown Washington on the Mall. And it turned out to be very successful. Because a gallery of this sort in the circumstances was very good because a lot of—the heads of agencies and people, who were in charge of decorating their buildings, a lot of them were unfamiliar with doing this at all and they'd come down so that everything managed to get chosen. We had all sorts of amateur work, and semi-professional and professional work. We had work in all categories, and almost all of it managed to get allocated because of the varying taste of the people that happen to be sent down. It wasn't a question of having any committee, any government committee to come and decide what was adequate and what wasn't adequate. Paintings were chosen on a personal level.

HELEN MORRIS: Any man in an office could come and select—

DAVID MORRIS: Yes, anyone in an office could come in. If you want to—

HELEN MORRIS: If he worked in any office—

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh!

DAVID MORRIS: Yes, he could come and get whatever he wanted.

HELEN MORRIS: A lot of paintings were taken home too.

DAVID MORRIS: But the artists themselves never discouraged that because they figured that the more the guys took home—

HELEN MORRIS: —the more demand for their paintings

DAVID MORRIS: —and the idea was to keep the thing going.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Tell them about Hugh's project.

DAVID MORRIS: I started to tell you about Hugh Collins' project. Hugh was very competent,

in my opinion, very competent artist. His sculpture project was for a kids' playground, in which he did a very comical concrete animals, enormous, life-size concrete animals, which were intended not only to be amusing to kids and everybody concerned but also, they were using for kids to climb all over the slide down and play on. But at the same time, Hugh being very a sincere artist—

HELEN MORRIS: —made them beautiful.

DAVID MORRIS: —made beautiful things. I imagine they are still there because it would take an awful lot of work to get rid of them. Some of the artwork they managed to eliminate quickly but—

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: [Inaudible.]

DAVID MORRIS: They were solid.

[Cross talk.]

HELEN MORRIS: And then the zoo. Tell them about the zoo.

DAVID MORRIS: There was a zoo project. Beautiful stuff was done for the Washington's National Zoological Park it's called. It is the federal zoo.

HELEN MORRIS: What was the name of the fellow that did the anteater?

DAVID MORRIS: I don't know. He wasn't on the Federal Art Project; he was on the Treasury—National Treasury Project, which was a separate project, these artists got paid full wages, they weren't on relief.

[00:20:00]

But the WPA artists also did a lot of dioramas for the Washington zoo, some of them were very good, but a lot of the artists didn't know their pigments very well and they didn't study the situation, which was a bad thing because in the zoo, you have very peculiar climatic conditions set up for the animals and some of the cages have certain humidities—high humidities and others were extremely dry in one thing or another, some are exposed to too much sunlight. Some of the diorama backgrounds came apart very quickly because the artists didn't know the techniques that they needed to know.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What materials did they use?

DAVID MORRIS: Well, unfortunately, in the zoo project we wanted to put frescoes in the zoo, which would have been very adequately permanent, but the directors of Zoological Garden were fairly conservative, and they wanted absolutely naturalistic backgrounds painted. Fortunately, we had a couple of painters on the Project, who had been painters of the Western scenery and were familiar with that type of painting, very naturalistic paintings in the desert with trees and background. These memories are very adequately suited to paint dioramas backgrounds, as far as giving a naturalistic effect is concerned because the zoo gardens have plants and things planted in the foreground and background which carries the thing on back and this was all exactly what they wanted. How good it was is another matter but unfortunately, it all peeled off very fast.

MARY MCCHESENEY: They were painted with oils on concrete or—

DAVID MORRIS: Yes, they were painted with oils on either plaster or concrete background, mostly on the concrete.

HELEN MORRIS: I think here you should mention, Judy Renford [ph] and this—

DAVID MORRIS: I want to say something else about the zoo thing, I just want to mention that there was one painter, one sculptor he did bas-reliefs on wood, stained wood for the zoo project. They were extremely remarkable pieces. He did a panel for almost each section of the zoo.

MARY MCCHESENEY: They were carved in wood?

DAVID MORRIS: They were carved in rather high relief and bas-relief, fairly high relief which

he used the grain of the wood together, very strongly by staining it; he used the grain of the wood to bring out the textures. He did sort of semi-abstract groups of monkeys for the monkey house and different animals. For each department in the zoo, and they were really beautiful things. It is too bad that they had to be left out in the weather indefinitely because —

MARY MCCHESENEY: Where were they placed?

DAVID MORRIS: They were placed outdoors at the entrance to each of the sections in the zoo.

MARY MCCHESENEY: On the door? On the building?

DAVID MORRIS: No, on posts—

HELEN MORRIS: The monkey building, the elephant building—

DAVID MORRIS: —on posts set away from the building; really they should have been on a wall under the caves or something. They should have been protected just a little bit better. Just the natural wood without any protection at all has a tendency to weather and check an awful lot.

HELEN MORRIS: But the last time we saw them it was still beautiful, they faded slightly, you know, they become greyer but it's still beautiful.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Dave, you said that these fellows were paid full wages. What do you mean by that?

DAVID MORRIS: Well, by that I mean that artists on the Federal Art Project were paid a minimum wage, which was really a relief payment; at first, it was 70 some dollars and went up to 90 some.

HELEN MORRIS: \$96 a month.

DAVID MORRIS: But the artists on the Treasury Project were paid two to three times that much. But they were mostly artists who had already established quite a reputation one way or another. Either that or they were people who happen to know—

MARY MCCHESENEY: What kind of projects did they do on the Treasury?

DAVID MORRIS: They did mostly mural projects in federal buildings and there was an easel project, too. I don't know what happened to the painting they did on the mural project. I never found that out, but they did mostly—

HELEN MORRIS: They got big commissions, a thousand dollars for a mural.

DAVID MORRIS: They were not—

HELEN MORRIS: The WPA artists did a mural for \$96 a month.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Were these Treasury murals done by competition, did they submit drawings?

DAVID MORRIS: Some of them were, and some other were just almost like a grant; for some of them, they would just appoint a certain person to do it. Some of them were on the competitive level.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Do you remember how many artists were on the Treasury Project?

DAVID MORRIS: I don't know, not having been on it myself, I attempted to get on this project one time but didn't have any luck. After I'd been on the other project for several years; it was not easy to get in there—

HELEN MORRIS: You had to know somebody.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: That job of Refregier's down at the Rincon Annex Post office is a Treasury job.

DAVID MORRIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: That was a competitive job. I mean he submitted designs for it—

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah, mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY MCCHESENEY: —to a jury. It was supposed to be—

DAVID MORRIS: Well, that was going on in the East definitely, the same sort of project was going on. They did have people on the payroll, artists on the payroll definitely.

[00:25:00]

MARY MCCHESENEY: Are these murals still in existence in Washington?

DAVID MORRIS: Some of the ones were once done on the Treasury Project are. Most of the WPA paintings were painted out. One interesting mural that is worth mentioning was one painted in Children's Hospital which isn't exactly a mural because it was painted on the ceiling. It was done by Allan Flavelle. I worked with him personally on this mural, because we had to do a lot of research. The mural was in the children's tuberculosis ward, and it was to be viewed by children while they were getting their violet ray treatment. It was on the ceiling, and they had to see it through amber glasses. And so we had to do quite a study to find out what kind of color range you could get looking at things through amber glasses. I imagine we could get ourselves some real nice ultraviolet ray burns [laughs] in the process of doing this. And now all the painters had to lie on his back on boards in a scaffold that was set up underneath the ceiling. And it was really a pretty difficult job—

HELEN MORRIS: It was done in a circle under the main light.

DAVID MORRIS: And he put a lot of work, he put in about six months on this job and it was really pretty nice job in the history of medicine. And this was also painted out too, because the head of the Washington DC Health Department decided that the mural contained certain political aspects that he didn't like, so he just arbitrarily told the painters to paint it out.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: And what were the political aspects?

DAVID MORRIS: Well, the painting—I don't recall exactly, because I have a bad memory for such details, but his base was that it showed certain things and that he—

HELEN MORRIS: Poor people couldn't get medical care—

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: Something to that effect. I don't remember exactly but anything that didn't show the acceptable conservative viewpoint in the WPA paintings was all painted out in Washington DC; all the federal artwork was painted right out, anything that—

HELEN MORRIS: Just like they tried to do in Rincon Annex, you know.

DAVID MORRIS: And it was all done entirely illegally too, I might say. In every case that I know of that the murals were destroyed; they were—it was done illegally because all of this was federal property and anything that was painted on the Federal Art Project, regardless of where it was painted in public buildings in Washington DC, since Washington DC is a federal city, this work was all federal work but the people. Everybody shut their eyes and they realized that if all they had to do was just to tell the painters to go up there and paint it out. And once something was painted out, what could be done about it? In fact, in the case of Flavelle's mural being painted out, we got a committee together. The Washington DC Artists' Union which we formed during this period, sent a grievance committee to the District of Columbia's supervisors to protest the destroying of Flavelle's painting. But we didn't get anywhere with it. They just told us to forget it. and they said, Well, the best thing to do—

HELEN MORRIS: He said, He's much more powerful than you are.

DAVID MORRIS: He said, There's no use your complaining and in Washington DC since you don't have any vote or anything else. There's no representation. Once you've gone to the District of Columbia supervisors and complained—DC commissioners rather, not supervisors, they're appointed, of course, they're not elected, and after you've complained to the

commissioners, there's nothing else. There's no further body of appeal. So we just back off. We got a little publicity in the papers but that's all there was to it.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What year was this?

HELEN MORRIS: About '36 or '37.

DAVID MORRIS: I can't tell you the year, it was—

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh, it was during the Project days?

DAVID MORRIS: This was pretty close to the end; it was towards the end of the Project that they began to paint things out because the thing was tapering off.

HELEN MORRIS: It was later than that. It went on until the war.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Out here in San Francisco it went on until 1943.

HELEN MORRIS: We stopped in '41.

DAVID MORRIS: And in Eastern High School there were a series of about 10 murals painted by Fuglister and—

HELEN MORRIS: They were painted when I went to high school. I watched them being painted. [laughs]—

DAVID MORRIS: Darby and—these were painted under the WPA but they were all painted out.

HELEN MORRIS: They were very abstract; music was the theme—

DAVID MORRIS: How many valuable works of art were destroyed, it's hard to say.

HELEN MORRIS: They were painted in the hallways and entrance to the high school. And the whole thing was music and very abstract—

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: They attempted to eliminate quite a few of them out here but apparently—

[Cross talk.]

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: —the protests were great enough to stop and quit, time after time.

DAVID MORRIS: I know, I heard of that.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Of course, Zakheim's mural there at San Francisco State—

[00:30:00]

MARY MCCHESENEY: At the [University of California -Ed] Medical Center?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Yes. They wallpapered that and—

DAVID MORRIS: I know.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: —which isn't so bad actually.

DAVID MORRIS: Could be gotten off—

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: It could be gotten off, just steam it off. That was the only one I can recall that was removed out here—

MARY MCCHESENEY: No, there were several that have been painted over, especially in smaller towns in California; murals that were done in high schools or post offices have been painted over.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Oh, that's right. I just heard that the mural I worked on with Clay Spohn was painted over. This is disgusting because this—it's nothing but an Indian legend.

There couldn't be any politics in it. It isn't anything controversial.

HELEN MORRIS: Henry Varnum Poor had a lot of [inaudible] done under the Project, the Treasury Project—

[Cross talk.]

HELEN MORRIS: They were terrible.

DAVID MORRIS: He wasn't on the—

HELEN MORRIS: Oh, they were just awful.

DAVID MORRIS: Well, when Poor started painting—he was here just began to paint, but for some reason or another, I don't know.

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: He already—even knew it before he had a reputation. Actually, all of those projects back there were completely shot through with favoritism of the rankest sort. As far as I know from direct contact, I could go into it at great length if you were interested, but from direct contact I happen to know that most of the directors of the Treasury Project and of the Federal Art Project on the federal level were homosexuals, and they were playing—

HELEN MORRIS: Footsie with each other [laughs]—

DAVID MORRIS: Footsie with each other and with the people they could get in there, they were put in. As a matter of fact, the director—the regional director at the Federal Art Project was homosexual and the reason he employed me was because he thought we were going to get somewhere. So that was the only reason I worked with his office and got a job just like that, because I was definitely not qualified.

MARY MCCHESENEY: He admired you as a model.

HELEN MORRIS: Hm-mmm [affirmative]. Definitely [laughs].

MARY MCCHESENEY: You were talking about Henry Varnum Poor I want you to tell where he did murals in Washington?

DAVID MORRIS: He did murals definitely in the Treasury building—

HELEN MORRIS: A high school.

DAVID MORRIS: He did them—I don't know about the schools, but I know that he did them in the treasury domain and he did them in, I think the Archives building. The Archives building was built at that time. His murals, his work at that time, I don't know whether improved later, but his work at that time, compared to me, as a matter of fact I got the very distinctive impression that he was a complete beginner. That's the end.

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MARY MCCHESENEY: We're just discussing, David, the murals that Henry Varnum Poor did in Washington. I wonder if you could describe them for us.

DAVID MORRIS: Yes, as I started to say, I got the distinct impression that his murals, at the time, that he must have been admitted to the Project when he was just beginning. An absolute beginner because he was assigned these murals to do and what they really were drawings, if you know what I mean.

MARY MCCHESENEY: You mean—

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: They were frescoes; in fact frescoes were being done; some of the murals were frescoes, and some were actually oil paintings done on canvas and then glued to the wall afterward, which may be called murals by some people. But frescoes were being done. Seriously, quite a few true frescoes were being done, and some dry fresco. But the murals

that I saw of Poor's were—actually appeared to me to be completely out of any scale that he had ever worked in before. I don't think he'd done murals before at all. He was given the wall space, maybe ten feet by four feet panels to do. And what really happened was that he just sort of did sketches on the thing, and in one color and tinted over the areas so that— How can I put it?— they seem lost as though you'd taken a drawing and put it on a propriate eight by ten piece of paper, and just blown it up and blown it up and put it on the wall. In other words, they weren't paintings in my feeling at the time.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Where were these located?

DAVID MORRIS: Well, they were in federal buildings. I can't remember exactly which building that these were in.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Do you know if they're still there?

DAVID MORRIS: But I don't know if they're still there or not. I can't say. I haven't been in those buildings since that time.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And he was on the Treasury Project?

DAVID MORRIS: He was on the Treasury Project. And some of the painters that did the murals had been trained to do mural painting and really knew, as far as the technique of doing mural painting, they knew what to do with the wall, in the sense of doing a true fresco and lining up part at a time and putting the thing up in cartoon, and the technique that is used for doing mural paintings. Other painters, Cikovsky, for example, was given the job of doing two murals and had never done a mural before, had never done anything but easel paintings. So what he had to do was to paint them on canvases, which were glued together in sections and put up on the wall. And they were just sort of blown-up oil paintings and were extremely unsuccessful. Because he was a very competent oil painter, very confident, and very, very well trained in that field. He's a painter. But everyone wanted to get the mural assignments if they could get it because this is the thing that got you to the publicity and the prestige. But a lot of those paintings were done by people who were just not competent, had not ever worked on murals at all, and in my opinion, should never have been given this type of assignment.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Where do the people who had fresco training get their training? In Washington?

DAVID MORRIS: The only ones that I know of that—Rosenberg was the only one who was really qualified. And Rosenberg worked with some of the other people with the—

[Cross talk.]

—to help him with the technique. But he knew that true fresco technique and knew it very well. In fact, he was a color expert on the Project for anybody that wanted to use pigments. We made a lot of our own pigments on the Project, too. Rosenberg was very helpful in this respect. In fact, I worked with him on that, too. We did a lot of research together on making pigments.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: You say a great number of these muralists were influenced by the Mexican artists? Mexican muralists?

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah. Yeah. In the content, that is.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Yeah. And also in their techniques?

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah, in their techniques, only in so far as they got help from Rosenberg. Because some of them who had seen the murals were influenced by the trend. In fact, I think, as I suppose most people would agree, that a very large percentage of the painting during the WPA period all over the country, visually at least, was influenced by Mexican art, not necessarily the techniques, because most people had not actually seen the techniques. Most people had not seen the Mexican murals themselves and know exactly how they were done. The only person we had around there that even knew the technique was Rosenberg.

[00:05:00]

But there are other painters whose easel paintings even were in this vein.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Did any of the Mexican muralists do work in Washington, DC?

DAVID MORRIS: I don't think so. I never saw any. I don't believe they did.

MARY MCCHESENEY: But probably painters on the Project would have seen murals in New York.

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah. They'd seen them in New York, I'm sure.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Of course, the influence out here, you know, was direct.

DAVID MORRIS: I know. Yeah. I know that.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: A lot of the artists worked with Rivera here.

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah.

MARY MCCHESENEY: He was at the Institute, which was the California School of Fine Arts at that time?

DAVID MORRIS: In general, I'd say that the Washington, DC Project was a fairly amateur project. We only had about, I would say about, eight artists that you could say were qualified, established artists, or painters, or sculptors at the time the thing started.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Why was that? Were there—

DAVID MORRIS: I don't know why. Perhaps because there weren't very many artists in Washington—

HELEN MORRIS: Many of the artists in Washington had other—

DAVID MORRIS: Well, a lot of people—

HELEN MORRIS: —things to do and—

DAVID MORRIS: Something a lot of people—

HELEN MORRIS: —than making a living.

DAVID MORRIS: —don't understand about Washington, DC itself, is that Washington, DC, actually, is a federal city which doesn't have—which has a native population, which is extremely small. Probably not more than 10 percent of the population are actually Washingtonians. And all the rest of the people residing in Washington are people there on federal business who come because of political appointments and stay for a certain period of time, and not really Washingtonians. And most of them are engaged in some sort of federal pursuit and don't stay around very long. And no artists involved in this group at all. So that Washington is really a small town when it comes to the native population. And these people that were on the Art Project, none of these people had anything to do with the federal government, none of them and so because of that they were there just because they happen to be Easterners and they happen to be in Washington. As a matter of fact, only a small percentage of them were the native Washingtonians. And they just happen to be in Washington during the Depression. People came and went. In fact, I'd say that probably two-thirds of the people were definitely not from Washington.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Washington has a very large Negro population, doesn't it?

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Were there any Negro artists—

DAVID MORRIS: We had Negro artists on the Project, but none of the Negro artists were qualified artists when they came on, except one Negro, who was a potter, who'd studied at the University of Ohio. And he was on the Project for only a short period of time, but he was very well qualified. And he was a graduate of the Ohio State ceramic department. Ohio, of course, has a very well-recognized ceramic department.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Did you have craft projects in Washington?

DAVID MORRIS: We had craft projects, too. Yeah.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Do you know anything about those?

DAVID MORRIS: Sure. They were under my jurisdiction, too.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh, they were?

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What crafts were involved?

DAVID MORRIS: Well, actually, the only craft we had was ceramics. That's all we had.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: No weaving?

DAVID MORRIS: No weaving. There were no weavers. We had ceramics. Unfortunately, the ceramic project—we didn't have anybody that was qualified to instruct. And the man from Ohio stayed on the project for only about six months, and the ceramic department was in the process of being set up when we were building a kiln for the artists to use during the time he was there. And by the time the thing was finished, he had gone. So unfortunately, the ceramic—craft project developed into a thing mostly for—

HELEN MORRIS: Sculpture—

DAVID MORRIS: —sculptors to fire an occasional piece or for classes to be brought in from various—children's classes to be brought in, and kids are allowed to play with the clay and make small pieces. But there was no bona fide pottery being made or any pottery class being conducted. It was really very limited. We had the equipment, but we didn't have the personnel to handle it.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Did you have a separate building for the pottery shop?

DAVID MORRIS: The pottery department was in what ultimately turned into our headquarters building which contained the gallery. We had a whole building. I guess a three-story building, maybe 20 or 30 rooms. And in that, we had the ceramic department was in the basement. And we had a lithography department. And painting studios for anybody who wanted to use them. And the gallery, and the offices.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Did most of the painters on the easel project, do they work in their own studios?

[00:09:57]

DAVID MORRIS: Most of them did. And it's very interesting; the most interesting phase from the social point of view of employment and everything, was that in the beginning, when the Project was first set up, the tendency was for the federal WPA to want to regiment all the artists on the Project to paint by the numbers. In the beginning, they all were allowed to paint in their studios. But this was mainly because when the thing was first started, there wasn't any—nothing had been decided about how they would work, so they were simply—first, they had to be on relief; after they got on relief then they were told to go ahead and work. And at the very beginning, they were extremely free in this respect, because they didn't have any control set up.

So as the thing gradually began to be set up, the voice came from above as to what these artists were going to be required to do. And all sorts of violations of what the artists considered to be their proper work began to show up. There were calls from different sections of WPA when they needed a few people to do some kind of a job that had nothing whatsoever to do with artwork, and people would be assigned from the art department to go over and put up some sort of an exhibition that had nothing whatsoever to do with art.

And then, the artists were also told that they were going to be required to go and paint in a warehouse, which had been taken over by the WPA. They were going to send all the artists down there at 8:00 in the morning, to paint it by the numbers from 8:00 till 4:00. And when this other thing began, the artists decided to do organize the art project.

HELEN MORRIS: Artists' Union.

DAVID MORRIS: Artists' Union, I mean.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Just a moment. What do you mean paint by the numbers?

DAVID MORRIS: Well, it's an army expression. In other words, you get in, and someone counts and says, pick up your brush, one, two, three, four, you know, make a stroke, two, three, stop painting—

MARY MCCHESENEY: An hour off for lunch.

DAVID MORRIS: An hour off for lunch and all of that. Of course, there wasn't a single person on the Project, even the ones who had never painted before, that had managed to get on. There were none of them that would stand still for this.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Was there regimentation as far as subject matter was concerned?

DAVID MORRIS: No. There was absolutely no regimentation on that Project as far as subject matter was concerned. None.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Well, this business of putting in work, doing things other than in your own field. It happened out here too. I remember being sent over to one of the schools, the Project had been using; about six of us were sent over. We had been on a mural project, and they put us to painting—

DAVID MORRIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: —painting the interior of a school.

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: We spent about a week over there—

MARY MCCHESENEY: Actually, doing house painting?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Yes.

DAVID MORRIS: Well, we had two techniques for fighting this sort of thing. One was to goldbrick, which we did. And our leader at goldbricking was Lamke, the fellow I mentioned before that did all the assemblages and things of that sort. He was not—by no means an organizer, but when it came to goldbricking, he was an expert. And so they sent us over to paint something or to move some boxes around or something like that. He'd yell across to everyone behind him under his breath, "Goldbrick, now's the time to goldbrick. Goldbrick, don't move it, drop it, bump into something, break something." And he was always doing this. And we also had a British West Indian, a Negro, on the Project, who had been a communist organizer in either Jamaica or Trinidad, I've forgotten which. He was the most violent guy we had. He would absolutely refuse under any circumstances doing anything except what had to do with the Art Project. And he'd just make a one-man strike the minute anybody would try to do something, which was very effective, actually, because for most of the officials, all we needed to do was to be a little bit embarrassed and they'd back right down. We didn't have too much trouble at all. We finally, through the management of the Artists' Union, we established through a committee by meeting with the—this was after I had gotten on the Art Project myself. I was a supervisor at the beginning, but after about a year, I quit that job and went on to the project.

MARY MCCHESENEY: On the easel project?

DAVID MORRIS: On the easel project.

HELEN MORRIS: Because he wasn't getting any painting done.

DAVID MORRIS: I wasn't doing any painting. I didn't want to stay on the other end—

HELEN MORRIS: —and the snooping that he didn't like either.

[Cross talk.]

HELEN MORRIS: He was supposed to go to studios to see if the artists were really working.

[Laughs.]

MARY MCCHESENEY: That happened out here too.

HELEN MORRIS: Straw boss.

DAVID MORRIS: I couldn't put up with that. But on the Project, we arranged it so that the agreement was reached as to how many works would be turned in per month by each person.

MARY MCCHESENEY: This was for the Artists' Union—

DAVID MORRIS: The Artists' Union. And we didn't have too much difficulty in getting it because we had a grievance committee that was always big enough to carry weight.

[00:15:05]

And we were willing to hold sit-in strikes, which we did on several occasions. Whenever we couldn't get what we wanted, we'd just move into whatever office was concerned and sit down and stay there until we made up their minds to do it. In fact, when I went on the Project, we used the same technique. After I stopped being supervisor on the Project, I wanted to get on the project, the easel project. And they wouldn't let me on. They said, Well, obviously, if you were on the federal WPA and you had this kind of job, you don't need to be on relief. So they wouldn't put me on relief. So I went to the Union. And I had already joined the Union, which they, fortunately, the Federal Art Project had not thought to make any ruling that the federal employees couldn't join the Artists' Union, and I'd already joined the Artists' Union quite a few months before. And it wasn't restricted to members of the national easel project. So I went to the Union and said, Look, I've got to get on relief, because they won't let me be on the project otherwise, and I had no money at all and no income of any kind. And so we got the labor organizers from the Workers Alliance with whom we were affiliated. The Art Project in Washington was part of the Workers Alliance of America.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Yeah, that's the same out here.

HELEN MORRIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DAVID MORRIS: And at least it was not the whole time, but it—

HELEN MORRIS: Then we went to C.I.O. later.

DAVID MORRIS: —it was—

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Yeah,

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: —all during the early stages, it was part of the Workers Alliance.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Office workers.

DAVID MORRIS: And we had some very, very effective—

[Crosstalk.]

DAVID MORRIS: —organizers in the Workers Alliance, extremely left-wing, militant organizers.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Were they the ones who organized the Artists' Union in Washington?

DAVID MORRIS: No. They and the artists together organized it. I have to give the artists credit for doing a great deal in their own behalf, in this case. They organized it, but if they hadn't had the help of the of the Workers Alliance organizers to show them, you know, the techniques to use, and to show them the proper degree of militancy, they wouldn't have been able to make it. But they were definitely, sufficiently organized to be ready to get together. But in my own case, it was a rather interesting case of getting me on the project. Because when I went to the organizers, and I said, What are we going to do about getting on the project? They said it was very simple; we just go over to the relief headquarters and see

what happens. So we went over there as a body and—four or five of us—there was a woman in charge of the Washington, DC relief at that time. And she was probably the only person who had the word as to who would be allowed on relief and who wouldn't.

HELEN MORRIS: Society [inaudible].

DAVID MORRIS: She was—Yes, she was a society matron type person. And so we went into her office, and Dixon, who was the organizer for the Workers Alliance, said that we have a client here who applied for relief and had been delayed for three or four weeks. And we don't understand why he hasn't gotten put on a relief because he has all the qualifications but demonstrated that he was not employed, and he doesn't have any other source of income, and so forth. And she said, Well, she said, My hands are tied, and I can't do anything until I've talked to so and so and so and so. So Dixon sat on her desk and put his hand on the telephone. And he said, Well, he said, Shall I call up the *Times-Herald*, and tell them we're holding a sit-down strike in your office, or will you put him on the relief? [Helen Morris laughs.] Which I felt was a fairly militant move. She turned red in the face and switched—twitched around in her seat, and then two or three minutes, she said, I guess we'll put him on the relief.

MARY MCCHESENEY: So you were put on a relief?

DAVID MORRIS: I was put on a relief right then; it was the quickest sit-in you ever saw. [Laughs.]

MARY MCCHESENEY: [Laughs.] You held some other sit-ins though, what were they about?

DAVID MORRIS: The same thing. They were all on the basis of—

HELEN MORRIS: Artists' rights.

DAVID MORRIS: —getting people qualified for relief. And, every once in a while, they would try to disqualify someone for relief. And we would have to go down there and threaten them again, but after this—In fact, the first sit-in is the one that concerned me. And after that, they were afraid of us. So every time we go down there and make a demand, we'd get it.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: That's how it turned out here, you know, these people spent all their time trying to eliminate people from the Project.

DAVID MORRIS: That's right. Exactly.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Trying to find some way to get them off.

DAVID MORRIS: Same thing. Same thing here.

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: Everything they did—

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: It's awfully hard to locate an artist in an artist's job.

DAVID MORRIS: It sure is. It sure is.

HELEN MORRIS: I don't know if they may be interested in that one very important thing the Art Project did there, which was the Index of American Design. Their project did that entirely themselves.

DAVID MORRIS: Our project didn't do it entirely at all.

HELEN MORRIS: Didn't you? I thought you did.

DAVID MORRIS: You probably know that the Index of American Design, didn't you?

MARY MCCHESENEY: Yes, I've heard about it. Tell us.

DAVID MORRIS: Well, the Index is American Design was a project taken on by the Federal Art Project itself. And a lot of separate money was allocated for this purpose. And it was a very good thing, and unfortunately the book that was published it should be reprinted

because it was printed in a limited edition.

[00:20:05]

I don't know; under the auspices of the federal government, I don't know who printed it. But it was a beautifully done thing in which teams of artists in each area and people who were qualified to do so were sent around to find and classify examples of American art forms— colonial and earlier and later, early American art forms. And this included everything. For example, things such as weathervanes and—

HELEN MORRIS: The side of a barn.

DAVID MORRIS: —American early bottles, glassware, American furniture, anything. Mostly we didn't deal with colonial things. We took a few examples of colonial things to show the trend. But we took it mostly from the end of the colonial period. And then certain artists who were very skilled at doing color renditions of things were employed. In fact, we employed on our own project in Washington, we had two or three people working on this. One, the Negro woman, in particular, who had never done any artwork at all, except to teach some little art class somewhere at some point is all she'd ever done; she got on the project. And it was discovered, very quickly, that she could do the most beautiful color renditions of anything you gave her to do. You could give her a bottle, such as one of these, a brown glass bottle. And she could do such a perfectly beautiful color rendition of this thing in an opaque watercolor that it would be better than any color photograph you can imagine. She'd bring out all of those qualities that some kind of entire group would spend three weeks taking a 100 shots to get. And all they had to do is reproduce this one thing, and you'd have a beautiful work. And her in the Index of the American Designs book has many such examples. In fact, there were excellent, photographs—

HELEN MORRIS: Was she given credit?

DAVID MORRIS: She was given credit. She is Mabel Ritter. She was really a terrific illustrator.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Mabel Ritter?

DAVID MORRIS: Mabel Ritter, a Washingtonian, actually.

HELEN MORRIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DAVID MORRIS: A Negro woman from Washington. A very, very competent worker.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: It's mostly—

DAVID MORRIS: Didn't consider herself an artist.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: David, it's mostly stuff done in, is it art work or—

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah, almost all of it was done was hand illustrated.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: There was more of that than there were photographs?

DAVID MORRIS: Oh, much more. Yeah. But we had a photography section, a small photography section too in the Art Project, very small. And they did some of the work, but the Index of Design was a nationwide thing. And it had a whole federal staff separate. It was under the auspices of the WPA. But our project was much more closely involved than any of the others because, at the time it started, our District of Columbia office was in the same room as the Index of Design room. So they had direct access to our artists for anything that they brought in. And if they brought in these objects, then or there was a question of going out to Maryland or Virginia somewhere to make a painting of something that they wanted to use, a piece of furniture, whatever it was, anything, the artist was right there to do it. In fact, I worked on the thing myself for about six months, classifying furniture, and household effects, and old colonial houses around the area.

[Cross talk.]

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Did the artists back their work on the State Guides?

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah. The Writers' Project did the route one guide for the United States, which is still probably one of the best things on travel in the United States that you can get—the DC Writers' Project.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Yeah. These state guides are terrific, you know?

DAVID MORRIS: Very, very good. Well, the Route One Guide is not a state guide; it's a guide for the—

[Cross talk.]

—route one main all the way from Maine to Key West. And it gives you no other Three-A guide would ever give. These guys took the trip themselves and in each area—the writers took the area that concerned them, and they found everything along that route that was really worth seeing.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Well, too, they didn't have to push motels and hotels [cross talk]—

DAVID MORRIS: That's right. In fact, they weren't—they weren't even—

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: —commercial aspects—

DAVID MORRIS: —mentioned. Everything else was mentioned but that.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Speaking of the—

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: It's very—

MARY MCCHESENEY: Pardon me.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Well, I was just going to ask David; I think it's very interesting the number of Negroes you had on the Project back then.

DAVID MORRIS: We had about five.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: And I can't recall but one out here.

HELEN MORRIS: Well, you didn't have so many here.

DAVID MORRIS: You didn't have the population.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: No, I guess not.

DAVID MORRIS: We were, fortunately—

HELEN MORRIS: Before they came in droves.

DAVID MORRIS: —in Washington, we were definitely proportionally represented. But, of course, this is due to the fact that was a federal project. Because Washington, at that time, and it hasn't gotten over too much, but Washington at that time was the biggest Jim Crow town in the United States.

[00:25:02]

And if it had been anything but a federal project, there'd been no Negroes on at all. In fact, we had lots of different colors because the Negroes around the Project, because the artists, a lot of the artists, like I say, were not from Washington. And there wasn't any feeling whatever on the Project. There, in fact, there was no feeling on the Project. And many of the members of the Art Project; including the officials, there was absolutely no feeling of any prejudice whatever. This was one of the cleanest things about it. And when I include that there were all kinds of corruption involved in the higher echelons of the federal level WPA in Washington, DC at the federal entity, and to some extent, the District of Columbia Project. I'm sort of committing myself when I say that. I should say—

MARY MCCHESENEY: When you say corruption, you mean mainly favoritism?

DAVID MORRIS: Favoritism and that sort of thing. But as far as the treatment of Negro was concerned, it was impeccable. You couldn't complain. It was very, very good. Because this

was the period of the Depression and during the Roosevelt administration, and the attitude was very good. But we used to have a lot of difficulties like I started to say, because the artists on the Project associated a great deal with the Negro artists. And if we wanted to go to some restaurant or anything like that, there was always this problem. And on quite a number of occasions, we used to just deliberately go in a body, and we'd take the Negro artists, who were on the Project along, we'd just go into these restaurants. And at that time, this wasn't being done in Washington at all. But we never had any problem when we did it in a body. Because they just didn't dare to say anything. We always got away with it, and they were always served. But we didn't have—

HELEN MORRIS: We had difficulty with them in the Union because they were scared to death of the Union.

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah, they were pretty scared of the Union.

MARY MCCHESENEY: You mean, the Negro artists were—

HELEN MORRIS: Because they were afraid that they would get in trouble or where the white man knew more his rights, or he knew he could get away with more. But the Negro was afraid that he might lose his job or be thrown off the Project for joining the Union.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Yes.

HELEN MORRIS: And they were worried.

DAVID MORRIS: Actually, our Negro members on the Project, except for the potter from Ohio, and the Jamaican, the other Negroes on the Project, I think there were four or five all together. Most of them were unemployed people who had been to high school in Washington and had majored in art. In fact, the certain number of people that on the Project were people who had only had that much contact with art, about the same amount of contact that I had myself. I'd never majored on it in school, but I had just been interested in art, and I've done a lot of on my own, and a lot of it, and I felt that this was something I was qualified to do. And many of the other people on the Project, in fact, some of the people—we had one outstanding example of one on this Project, Carl Nyquist, a Swedish American.

MARY MCCHESENEY: How is his name spelled?

DAVID MORRIS: N-Y-Q-U-I-S-T. Carl Nyquist was a middle-aged house painter, who had a periodic job painting and doing house painting, or rather painting the Capitol—Washington Capitol Building. He'd get this job for a certain number of months every year, which had given him a little bit coming in. But he didn't have anywhere near enough. And he got on the Project because he just made a few sketches or something. And he immediately, he was an extremely diligent, hardworking guy when it came to painting. He got the idea that he wanted to paint. And you never saw any such development in all your life. This man had developed into a professional painter. And in the course of three years, when he had all his materials given to him, he set his studio up, and there was no foolishness. Nobody—

HELEN MORRIS: He carved his own frames and everything.

DAVID MORRIS: —came around to his studio and fooled around and did anything that wasn't business-like. He painted, and he went on for hours and hours and hours a day and painted everything he could see. And by the time that Project was over, you had completely professional painter who had never been to school. But a completely professional made all of his own—

HELEN MORRIS: One of his greatest triumphs was to paint the Capitol building as a painting —

[Cross talk.]

HELEN MORRIS: —and made a painting out of it.

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah. He had this—

HELEN MORRIS: Made a beautiful painting, because for years he'd painted it, itself, you know?

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah. He wanted to make a painting of the Capitol building that would be a painting, not a tourist postcard. And he finally managed. At first, his work was just as clumsy as you can imagine. But he really developed as an artist—

HELEN MORRIS: He was a real primitive in the beginning, and then he developed a very sophisticated style—

DAVID MORRIS: He died about three years ago.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Mary, do you have—

HELEN MORRIS: —well-known now, in the east.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: —Thelma Johnson's street on your list [inaudible]?

[00:30:04]

MARY MCCHESENEY: Yes, I have. I don't have her address yet.

DAVID MORRIS: I wish I could remember half of the people that really developed into competent painters. And I wish I also knew whether or not these people continued to paint or whatever happened to them. But America is a place where you have hundreds of painters of competent painters. America has too many painters.

MARY MCCHESENEY: But this man Nyquist went ahead and became a professional painter.

[Cross talk.]

HELEN MORRIS: Oh, definitely!

DAVID MORRIS: Definitely, and he became a very good portrait painter besides. And I don't mean that a portrait painter in the sense of a hack, you know—

HELEN MORRIS: He did portraits for the—

DAVID MORRIS: He did portraits of society ladies, but he did very, very good portraits. Very good portraits. He was interested in painting portraits, and he wasn't interested in whether he sold them or not. He would get anybody he could to come that he could paint to do a portrait because he really wanted to paint people. For what he saw in person. It's an old-fashioned idea, but he is an old-fashioned man [laughs].

MARY MCCHESENEY: It's coming back into style now.

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah, and very good. Portraits are something we haven't seen for a long time.

MARY MCCHESENEY: I was here to ask you a question about the Index of American Design. In Washington, do they collect the material from all over the United States? Was that sort of their headquarters?

DAVID MORRIS: It was all brought there.

MARY MCCHESENEY: It was all brought there.

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Then you put it together?

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And made the final book.

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Do you remember when that was published?

DAVID MORRIS: It was published during the WPA period towards about two-thirds of the way through. I'm very bad on dates.

HELEN MORRIS: It must have been 1939, 1940.

DAVID MORRIS: It's really a beautiful thing, and it's available for anyone to see if you go to the right libraries, I'm sure. It's just too bad it couldn't be reprinted because right now, there's much more interested in design. And some of this stuff, a lot of very good work was done in finding this stuff. So that some of the examples are really terrific.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: I don't know whether that worth going out here or not. Did Shirley [ph] say anything about it?

DAVID MORRIS: Well, it's probably less because, you know, the further West you go, the less easy it is to find this stuff, and then there's less of it scattered around because the newness of everything.

HELEN MORRIS: Well, in the East, they have a treasure trove.

DAVID MORRIS: Well, let me tell you what. You go to Ellicott City, Maryland, and everything you see in Ellicott City, Maryland, is early American, you know. It's still all there. It's unchanged. You find so much of this stuff, there's a wealth of—you find hundreds of these old stone buildings full of things that were still in there.

[Cross talk.]

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: You were talking about this man who became an artist—

[END OF TRACK AAA_morris64_270_m.]

MARY MCCHESENEY: Before recording the second tape of interview with David Morris, who is a potter now, and who was on the Project in Washington, DC—was a supervisor, and then, later, was on the easel project. Present, also, this afternoon, are Helen Morris, his wife; and Robert McChesney. Mac [ph], you were just meaning to tell a story about Thelma Johnson Streat, who was on the Project in San Francisco, I believe.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: When I was transferred from the mural job on Treasure Island, and then, it was the Pickle Factory on Columbus Street, Thelma was there. She did—was in—evidently been on the silk screen project. She, at the time, like all the rest of us, had been transferred there because of lack of jobs, and we were just doing odd jobs. I was working on a model of a building, and so forth. But Thelma was doing a tremendous amount of painting at the time, as I was telling Dave. She was working in tempera, as the—just watercolor tempera, you know, the show card coloring. And she did, really, an amazing type of sort of primitive thing, you know?

Well, she lined up a show at Stendahl's in Los Angeles. Stendahl is the collector of pre-Columbian work down there. It's a tremendous collection, and then, he also had a gallery. And this show of Thelma's was sponsored by Diego Rivera. Well, it'd been up a week, I think, when I was there, and I went over to see the show, and I was telling Dave, these—the tempera—whatever she had painted on—the tempera wasn't sticking, at all, and started curling up and falling off in flakes. And then, each one of her paintings, it was a little sort of little pile of tempera shavings [laughs]. I don't know where Thelma is now, but if—she'd be wonderful, if you could get ahold of her to interview her.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Well, I could try to look in—

HELEN MORRIS: Yes, and my brother—

MARY MCCHESENEY: Go ahead. What were you saying, Helen?

HELEN MORRIS: My brother-in-law, Allan Flavelle, was on the Project.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Yes, David mentioned him.

HELEN MORRIS: He lives here, in California, now.

MARY MCCHESENEY: You want to tell us some more about the Project in Washington, David? I've forgotten exactly what we were talking about.

DAVID MORRIS: Yes, there—yeah. There are a couple of other details that happened to

come to my mind.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh, earlier, before we began the tape recording, you were talking about the sculpture—Lembke?

DAVID MORRIS: Lamke.

MARY MCCHESENEY: How do you spell his name?

DAVID MORRIS: Well, his name is—at the time that he was taking on the Project, was spelled L-E-M-B-K-E. But Lamke, being a very individualistic sort of person, decided he didn't like that spelling of his name, and he decided that he would henceforth be L-A-M-K-E. Of course, didn't go through the formality of registering this change, but it was not in his nature to do things that way. He was a very individualistic sort of person, a very fine person, and everyone liked him very much.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What kind of sculpture was he doing at that period?

DAVID MORRIS: Lamke was a completely out-and-out experimentalist. He was not limited, this doesn't sound today like anything. But at this particular time and in the particular atmosphere, it was regarded by most of us as being a very important thing, because he didn't—he was not—or didn't allow himself to be limited by any preconceived notions on what sculpture consisted in. He'd take any material at hand and begin to construct something. And one of the best things he did was a large, wood construction, which was halfway between assemblage and, I suppose, a construction—what would have been known in 1917 as a construction.

And the carpenters who were working on our WPA building which contained the gallery, and they're cutting a lot of mill ends off in the back, and Lamke got all these pieces of wood, these blocks of—small pieces of wood, and glued them together, and made a very large assemblage, or a construction—it was in between—probably four or five feet high, and very, very sensitively done. And I think we mentioned before, the—that he worked in almost any medium that he could get, and his things were entirely abstract, all of them. Some of them, you might say, were more than abstract. Lamke was a— Lamke also worked in the lithography project for a while, but he wasn't—he wouldn't submit himself to the discipline of learning the technique of lithography, which was a rather interesting—in fact, when we opened our lithography department, we inherited a complete studio of lithography equipment.

[00:05:07]

In the old sense, we got about 20 very beautiful German stones. Some of them were up to 18x24 dimension, which, stones are kind of hard to come by.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: And presses?

DAVID MORRIS: And presses, the works. And no one knew anything about it, whatever—no—there wasn't an artist on there that had ever done a lithograph in his life. So I picked a Project on—myself, to find out how to do lithography. And I spent about two weeks in the Library of Congress, doing research on a technique of etching the stones, and grinding the stones, and so forth, and what you had to do to produce something. And then, when we got this, more or less, figured out, we invited the artists to come over and go to work, and it was very interesting to see what came out of it. Some of them were just a little bit too careless to handle it, because the stone—a lithography stone, you just can't smear across it with your hand. You have to not touch that stone at all, because the stone—and once the stone has been ground and treated, it is extremely sensitive, and even a fingerprint, you know, will come up and make a big smear on the stone.

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: So you have to—you just can't touch it at all, and it has to be done a certain way. And certain artists were a little bit hasty, and we had to pull an awful lot of dirty prints. Sometimes, we wouldn't get more than three copies in an edition. The best we ever got, I think, was 50 in one edition. We should have been getting, maybe, 100, 150 out of the—from each stone. But one of the most interesting things was Lamke—was one of those who, even though he was very good at most of the other media that he worked in, lithography was

entirely too limiting for him [laughs]. He couldn't stand the idea of not being able to put his finger on it. And if anyone suggested that he didn't put his finger on it, he'd put his foot on it immediately.

[They laugh.]

And naturally, nothing much came up, except that the day that he decided to quit, he said, Well, he said, I'm going to do one quick sketch on the stone, and then, I'm going to quit. And he did his sketch, and then, when it came time to print it up, he took his shirt off and ran his shirt through the press, and printed—

HELEN MORRIS: And printed on his shirt.

[They laugh.]

DAVID MORRIS: The print was on the back of his shirt, and he quit, and never came back to lithography class.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh. You actually—

DAVID MORRIS: He wore the shirt for weeks after that.

[They laugh.]

MARY MCCHESENEY: Beautiful. That's very good. After you learned to do the lithographs yourself, then, you instructed the other artists in the technique?

DAVID MORRIS: In the technique, yeah. We really got some very good things.

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: My wife, Helen, who's here at the present time, too, served as a disciplinary factor in this measure. Because a lot of the artists, when they got to—around to doing the lithography, discovered they had to spend about 45 minutes grinding the stone with a carborundum, and then, running it through this press, which is operated by hand, and took a little bit of strength to do it. And then, there were two or three lummoxes we had there that said, Geez, I don't know if I want to, you know, go through all this. I can't turn the press. It's too heavy. So I got my wife, who weighed about 100 pounds, and she started running the things through for them, you know [laughs]? So after a couple of days went by or something like that,—they decided to—

MARY MCCHESENEY: Grind the stone [laughs]?

DAVID MORRIS: —turn the press themselves.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: I think some of the best stuff that was turned out here on that Project was on the—was out of the photography section.

DAVID MORRIS: We got some—

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: We got some very good stuff. We didn't get much because there weren't enough artists who felt like they wanted to devote the time to it. But the best we got was from the artists who were already established—who had already been established when they came on the Project, and consequently, were very—glad they had the opportunity to work where they were—it was a question of respecting a medium. Some of the newcomers—the people who'd only been students, and so forth—didn't really see the point in going through the effort. But the artists like Collins and Cikovsky —

HELEN MORRIS: Nyquist .

DAVID MORRIS: —and Nyquist, and a few of the other artists who took their work seriously were very, very glad to get this opportunity, because most artists don't get the chance—

HELEN MORRIS: You have to set up a—

DAVID MORRIS: —to have this—

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: —equipment available to use. And they got editions, which they were able to keep a few copies for themselves, and—or distribute it through the gallery.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Did they set up a school back there, too, an art school?

DAVID MORRIS: We had the—only schools for children.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Oh!

HELEN MORRIS: They sent the artists out to teach children—

DAVID MORRIS: But we had the—a very, very successful program for children. And some of the work that was produced was remarkable work. Some of it should have been preserved. Unfortunately, none of this work was ever preserved. Most of it was thrown in the trash by the regional director, and other people hire up along the echelons. I actually saw it thrown that way. And actually, when the work came in, an exhibition would be given of the work, which was encouraged by the federal officials, and it got a lot of publicity.

[00:10:04]

And this was all to show that the Art Project was very productive, but the work of children was actually not taken seriously. And some of it should have been taken seriously, because in certain cases, we gave them good materials. We didn't always have to let them paint on construction paper. And in some cases, we gave them pretty good materials, and certain children, they did very, very good work. Particularly, we had a project—one painting project that was taught by Rafael Saysa [ph], a Mexican-American artists who I had mentioned before, and who is a very competent art teacher, and also, as a painter. He lives, now, in the Bay area, and still paints, to some extent. But Rafael taught the Americanization School in Washington, which was a school for children of foreigners who'd just come to the United States, and the children, in these cases, wouldn't know English, and they hadn't had any American experience.

And Rafael, being Mexican, himself, they felt that he was a little bit more—could find a little more in common with these kids, and he did a magnificent job. And the work produced by these foreign children was somehow rather fantastic. The reason, I have never been able to determine, and nobody ever bothered to make a study of it. But the concepts that some of these kids had—they were Chinese kids, and Italian kids, and kids from Poland—and they worked on a very large scale, and they were completely uninhibited, and did things on a scale that we would have—you would have thought was very adult—not in the handling of the pigments, necessarily—anything like that—but the scope and size of the paintings.

All these things should have been saved somehow. Most of them weren't. I saved a few pieces myself that were—that I pulled out of the trash and kept for many years, as long as I had some way to keep them. Photographs were taken. Some of them work done by the Chinese students was unusually good, because some of these kids had had elementary training in basic Chinese calligraphy. And then, the Chinese stylization forms—I don't know the technique they used in teaching in China, but I know that from the way they work that they had learned a technique of stylization of certain landscape forms—riverbanks, trees, mountains, and things like that. And these kids were able to put together, when they were given the right materials, they were able to put together very large and very beautiful paintings. And they were kids of eight, ten years old.

We had, really, some—and especially when they interpreted this sort of thing into the idiom [ph] of American landscape—because at that time, people were painting factories and backyards, and things like that. And then, to use these Chinese techniques to reproduce backyards—you got something that was really special. It was a very, very good aspect of the Project.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: I'm surprised they didn't set up one of the schools back there, though, for adults—

DAVID MORRIS: You had a school for adults here?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Yeah, they had a regular art center.

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah, we didn't have that.

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: We should have had that here. That would—

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: And night classes, and I know etching—

DAVID MORRIS: They are.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: —class. I took etching in school.

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah. We had the classes within the school such as the lithography thing—

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: I mean, within—

HELEN MORRIS: Within the Project.

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: If we—within the Project. We had classes within the Project, in which artists could come down to the main building and, say, a little life drawing, and so forth. But it was—but it had various—limited scope.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Yeah, another aspect of this program, too—they had trained artists. I don't know how much training they got, but they would send Eastern artists from New York, for instance, out here. I know Helen Randall, Byron Randall's wife and several others, they sent to—who was it, Portland, at the Barnett School [ph]? He studied—Byron studied at one of these Art Project schools.

DAVID MORRIS: We had a little bit of exchange on that basis—a very, very little bit. There were two or three instances in which artists had transferred to our project from other areas, in order to do a certain amount of work in that area—very, very little of that. I, myself, was allowed to go on a few painting trips out of the area. And other artists were, too, if they really wanted to do it, especially landscape artists, who wanted to go somewhere else and do something a little different. And there was a considerable amount of freedom in this respect, but mainly due to the Union—due to the fact that we limited with—and another thing I forgot to mention earlier, which is fairly important—about the role of the Union in the amount of work that was done.

[00:14:55]

I mention this because I think it's interesting that a group of artists, organizing a union, can get together with a bunch of officials and actually come to an agreement about—not about the merit of the work done by a given painter or a given sculptor, but that they can actually come to an agreement about the amount of work that a given artist is supposed to do, and the value of this work, and so forth, and how much he should be paid. Since we were all paid at the same rate per month, it seems likely that a great deal of animosity might appear when one artist might take six months to produce a painting, and somebody else is making watercolors, and taking a couple of hours to do it.

But actually, we worked the thing out very well, and everyone seemed to be quite well satisfied. We asked everyone how much time it took them to do their work, and if we thought, in general, after discussing it, that an honest answer had been given on the amount of time, we would allow the person that much time, you know, to produce that much work. In the case of—we had one painter, whom I didn't—hadn't mentioned—Stotler—

MARY MCCHESENEY: How do you spell that?

DAVID MORRIS: S-T-A-T-L-E-R.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Statler.

DAVID MORRIS: No, this was the other one—S-T-O-T-L-E-R. And Stotler was a—had been trained in mural painting of the type that had been used in federal painting, and then, in city

planning painting, such as you see in the San Francisco Library today—this type of thing—large, wall illustrations which could be called murals, in one sense, but they're not—they're more decorations than what we would consider to be murals today. But since we had every type of painter on the Project, we had this type, too.

And Stotler was assigned to do certain large wall illustrations, and these things were extremely large. Some of them, 100 feet long, for certain government buildings, and there was—intended to represent some phase of government activity, which had absolutely nothing to do with—really, with art, in the sense that the rest of the work did. But a person on a Project like this would be given six to eight months on such a job, because he had to make any number of cartoons, and sketches, and submit all these things, and there was not a—it was not a controversial matter about content, or anything else for illustrations, actually. People like this were given limitable time to produce these things.

MARY MCCHESENEY: So for each individual artist, then, the Artists' Union would set up the—

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah.

MARY MCCHESENEY: —interview them, and discover how long it would take them to do work —

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah.

MARY MCCHESENEY: —and then, set up a quota for them.

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah. In my own case, I was doing mostly landscapes—medium-sized watercolors on gouache landscapes. And I was required to produce about—from four to six—and this was left up to my own discretion, depending upon the amount of time that I felt that it had required, you know, to do it. We actually didn't—we didn't base it on the time that it took for a person to paint a picture in the first place, because many artists, including myself, were very adamant on this particular point. You know, if—we weren't evaluating it on the number of hours it took to do the painting. We were evaluating on the total concept of how much time you devote and study the idea of the subject, and actually, the total process of producing a painting. The fact that a person produces a fine work of art in 10 seconds is a result, we felt, of his total experience in art.

And this was going on all the time. It was something that was—we wouldn't allow them to measure our time, actually. What it really came to is, we wouldn't allow them to measure our—to measure the time it took to paint an actual painting. We simply based it on the length of time and the length of—the usual number of paintings that this artist could produce over a given period. In the case of Cikovsky, who painted oils, and painted rather rapidly for a person painting large oil paintings—but he wasn't required to turn in more than one a month. And at the same time, he had—already had sufficient reputation for his paintings, when they were in galleries in New York—he had, already, sufficient reputation for these paintings—for one of his paintings would have probably brought him considerably more money, if it were selling, than he would have gotten for a month of work on the Art Project, which was—

HELEN MORRIS: He got \$96 from the Project—

[Cross talk.]

HELEN MORRIS: —and his paintings were selling for up to \$500.

DAVID MORRIS: But he wasn't selling so many—

HELEN MORRIS: No.

DAVID MORRIS: —because in those days, nobody was selling too many paintings. But he had established this reputation, and it had to be recognized as such.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Although, he did sell. Was he allowed to sell paintings—

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: He did—he was allowed to sell. He was allowed to sell. We never had the problem, as I—far as I can recall—we didn't have the problem of the—ever of the officials

coming to us and saying, Well, you sold too many paintings or something like that.

[00:20:05]

Nobody was really selling enough work in that area for it—

HELEN MORRIS: To interfere with your relief.

DAVID MORRIS: —ever, ever—

[Cross talk.]

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Wasn't there a limit on the amount that you could make off a painting—

HELEN MORRIS: No.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: —outside of the—

HELEN MORRIS: Not that I remember.

DAVID MORRIS: Well, as far as I can remember, this issue didn't come up.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Well, probably, nobody sold enough to [Laughs]—

DAVID MORRIS: Well, artists were selling—

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: I was selling, myself.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Yeah.

DAVID MORRIS: But I didn't sell enough. I was a beginner, to start with, when I went on the Project. But by the time I—the Project was over, I'd managed to sell—establish a—some of a reputation of painting, mainly, because—thanks to the WPA. Because, in a city like Washington, DC, if you circulated—I was producing a hell of a lot of paintings, and WPA got—altogether, got about 300 of my paintings. And all these paintings went out into federal buildings, and people are going to see these paintings, and also, people are going to take them home.

Hundreds and hundreds of paintings in Washington were taken home, originally, which, as I said before, the artists didn't particularly complain about. They didn't care. The main thing was to get them into circulation. And quite often, people who had seen these paintings in federal buildings or had them in their offices would look up the artist, and the interest began to be aroused, and the artist began to—then, they would have shows and the—it began to grow, and it was a great stimulus to art in Washington, DC—an artist stimulus.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Was there any quota, Dave, so that the artists had to turn out any number of—a certain number of paintings a month, and—

DAVID MORRIS: Well, yeah—

HELEN MORRIS: Well, like David said, he—

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: In my own case, it was four or five, if it was watercolors—

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Oh, I see.

DAVID MORRIS: But there were—in the case of people doing prints of any kind, of course, it was a great deal more. And we did it—we had a silkscreen project, too, which unfortunately got off the ground kind of late. And we started out doing mostly silkscreen signs, and things like that, and we assigned people to the silkscreen project—mostly people who were—so far, had not developed a—very much talent for easel painting, and we assigned them to these to, you know, to get them in—their hand in. And they were cutting stencils with lettering, and that sort of thing, and there wasn't much to use to—at that point. In other words, silk

screening was still pretty new, and we were just getting on to it.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: David, the—did the Union fold at the same time the Project folded, back then?

DAVID MORRIS: I think—if I remember correctly, the Union folded quite a long time before the Project folded. After the demands of the Union had been met, there was also—there was—if I remember correctly—I could be wrong in this, but I'll say it anyhow. As I remember it, after the Union had been in effect for about two, three years, the—there were—a number of complaints came from the federal agencies about the affiliation of the Workers' Alliance, because Workers' Alliance was categorized a communist organization.

And a certain—after the noise started in this direction, a number of the artists from the Project began to get worried. Certain ones didn't, you know, particularly want to be affiliated with it, and the affiliation with the Workers' Alliance was broken off. And the Union, itself, didn't last throughout the entire Project. It ceased. But apparently, the main aims—as I remember it, the main aims of the Union had been achieved, and we didn't have any more trouble, as far as hours, or where we worked, or the number of paintings we did, after that period.

HELEN MORRIS: But I remember something—we affiliated with the CIO Artists' Union in New York—

[Cross talk.]

HELEN MORRIS: —after the Workers' Alliance, but they were in New York, and we were in Washington. And there was never much—

DAVID MORRIS: Nothing ever happened.

HELEN MORRIS: —nothing happened, you know? There was—we were just a union, and we were affiliated with the New York Union, and the New York Union ran everything, and we didn't do anything much after that, union-wise.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Well, there was some attempt out here to affiliate with the office workers.

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah. That was going on there, too. It never happened. There was another attempt at—

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: No, it never—

DAVID MORRIS: There was another attempt at affiliation. Now, the name of the organization, I don't think exists anymore: American Congress of Artists—

HELEN MORRIS: That's right.

DAVID MORRIS: —ACA.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: That's right. That's right. Oh, I remember.

DAVID MORRIS: ACA. Yeah, there was a big attempt to get us to affiliate with them, but—

HELEN MORRIS: They wouldn't take us because we didn't have enough members.

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah, or—yeah.

HELEN MORRIS: We didn't have enough people in the Project.

[Cross talk.]

HELEN MORRIS: We had to have at least 500, or something like that—

DAVID MORRIS: Cikovsky was already a member—

HELEN MORRIS: —to join them.

DAVID MORRIS: Cikovsky was already a member of this, and he was the person that was

most interested in getting the Washington Project affiliated.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: The ACA had an office in LA.

[00:25:00]

We've never had anything up here.

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: I remember that. I remember the ACA.

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah. They had shows in Washington, periodically. And they had—

HELEN MORRIS: And we went to some of their shows in New York.

MARY MCCHESENEY: The Artists' Congress—

HELEN MORRIS: That's the first time I ever saw—

DAVID MORRIS: Well, I might say that we—

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: —speaking of shows—suggest the fact that we—also, the—our project had shows at—a couple of times, outside of the artists—other side of the project gallery.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Where—

HELEN MORRIS: We had two or three.

DAVID MORRIS: A couple of occasions. They were just in small, local galleries, nothing that would be remembered. In fact, I hardly remember the name myself.

HELEN MORRIS: Well, we had one in the CIO building—

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah.

HELEN MORRIS: —in Washington.

DAVID MORRIS: As well—as a matter of fact, the national headquarters of the CIO was a very strong supporter of the Federal Art Project, and they were the first people to initiate a program of rental—of renting paintings from the WPA—

HELEN MORRIS: And they rented them all the time.

DAVID MORRIS: —artists. In fact, they rented them from anybody. They were very interested in putting artwork in all of their offices. And I personally rented—I don't know how many paintings to the CIO.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Through the WP—there were a lot of the—

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: Not through the WPA, no.

HELEN MORRIS: No, just from the Artists' Union—

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh.

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: —pay the artists direct for them.

MARY MCCHESENEY: I see.

DAVID MORRIS: And it was a very good deal for the artists—

[Cross talk.]

MARY MCCHESENEY: They wouldn't have been allowed to take—

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah.

MARY MCCHESENEY: —WPA work, though, for—through the WPA?

DAVID MORRIS: Oh, no, no. There was—only for federal—

MARY MCCHESENEY: Only for federal buildings—

DAVID MORRIS: —circulation, yeah.

MARY MCCHESENEY: —yes. You said that you'd done about 300 paintings—

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah.

MARY MCCHESENEY: —during the time that you were on the WPA Project. Do you know what's happened to the paintings?

DAVID MORRIS: I haven't the faintest idea.

HELEN MORRIS: We do know that some of them are in private homes—

DAVID MORRIS: I know that a lot of them went into private homes. A lot of them went into private homes.

HELEN MORRIS: Because we've been in those homes after—

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: I've read my rumor, which I've read—not this rumor, not from just one source, but from lots of different sources—and that is that sometime after the termination of the Art Project—Federal Art Project in the east, that a very large number of the paintings were sold on auction to someone in New York City. Now, whether this is purely—

HELEN MORRIS: Serge Truback told us this.

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: —I don't know. Truback, perhaps, but others—I've heard this from several different sources, and it may just be rumor. But that—

HELEN MORRIS: You know, Truback was on the Project in New York.

DAVID MORRIS: —that—

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh.

DAVID MORRIS: —hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds of these paintings, after they closed the Project, were sold in bulk, almost for the weight of the paper, to certain people in New York. And this, of course, meant a lot of money to some people, because they managed to get—when this happened—they managed to get the work of a hell of a lot of painters who had, by that time, had already got pretty good reputations.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Yeah.

DAVID MORRIS: And so I don't know how much was made on this, but—

[Cross talk.]

HELEN MORRIS: Well, Serge Truback claims that a hell of a lot of money was made this—in this way.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: This is quite true because it was a newspaper story. I remember reading about it—

DAVID MORRIS: Sure.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: —some odd place—

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: —that some secondhand dealer, or something like that, about—bought up reams—it was paper, and then, held out, to see—

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: —if—many of things, and later on, made quite a hunk of dough.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Discovered he had paintings by Franz Kline and de Kooning, and people like that?

DAVID MORRIS: I'd like to mention also the work of Bernice Cross, who was on the Washington Project. And her work was very unusual in one respect, and that is that she painted—she started by painting—she did a few murals in schools, and these were among some of the murals that were in the same category as the tempera paintings that Mac was talking about. She didn't know anything about mural technique, and the stuff peeled off and rained in a pile on the floor afterwards. Exactly the same thing, but it really wasn't her fault because she'd been assigned to do them, and all—she went and did them.

MARY MCCHESENEY: These were frescoes?

DAVID MORRIS: But these were—

HELEN MORRIS: No.

DAVID MORRIS: No, they was—not frescoes.

HELEN MORRIS: No.

DAVID MORRIS: They was—just painted—

[Cross talk.]

HELEN MORRIS: —oil on plaster.

DAVID MORRIS: —and it just fell off. But she was painting subjects for—

HELEN MORRIS: But she tried.

DAVID MORRIS: —her theme, which was very interesting. And it didn't terribly appeal to me, personally, but I could see how it had an interest, because it was quite something different. She was very much interested in teaching children to paint, and she worked with children. And then, she had classes, you know, under the WPA, teaching children to paint. And she painted entirely in oil, and she'd—gave children oils to paint with, which was very good because it gave something a little different than always having to paint in tempera. And of course, the kids—she had the kids do things that—well, she almost did the paintings for them, you might say. But her own work was much more influenced by the children's work than the children's work was by hers, which became very interesting because she was doing quite large oil paintings, in a completely childlike manner.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh.

DAVID MORRIS: And they were very interesting for this reason. And then—

[Cross talk.]

HELEN MORRIS: —and villages—

DAVID MORRIS: Nursery rhyme themes—

HELEN MORRIS: —and—

DAVID MORRIS: —and you know, Three Men in a Tub—

HELEN MORRIS: —*Pinocchio*—

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: —Three Men in a Tub, and things of that sort, and nursery rhyme-type subjects., which is really quite nice stuff.

[00:30:07]

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Dave—

HELEN MORRIS: She became quite famous later because she married into Phillip's Gallery.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Is she still painting in Washington? Is—

[Cross talk.]

HELEN MORRIS: I imagine. She was when we left. I guess she still is. I don't know.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: To get back to the Artists' Union, did they call any demonstrations or strikes back then?

DAVID MORRIS: We didn't have any strikes. We were prepared, at any time, to have strikes. Strikes—the only thing we ever did was to do sit-ins on the quota—the establishment quota. And grievances—we took grievances to city commissioners on various subjects. But we never had a strike on the—In fact, we didn't need to pull a strike, let's say.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Well, I think we—out here, they attempted to call a strike, but it was called illegal, so we demonstrated. Had a big parade—downtown San Francisco. And you know, I can't remember what it was basically about, and we haven't been able to find so far in these interviews, and the artists didn't notice.

DAVID MORRIS: Whether it was basically what?

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: Oh, I see. Yeah.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: But the strike never really—

[Cross talk.]

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Evidently, vaguely, I think it was because there was a big cut. They had called for a big cut in the projects. Now whether it was around wages or the personnel—

HELEN MORRIS: Well, perhaps—

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: —personnel, I don't know.

HELEN MORRIS: —it was the same thing that happened to us. One thing happened to us back there that I remember, is they started saying, if you had been on the Project, on relief for so many months, then you were forced to go off, and you had to be off for at least—

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: That's right.

HELEN MORRIS: —one month—

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: That happened here, too.

HELEN MORRIS: —and then, re-apply for relief, and re-apply for your status, and get put back on the Project.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: That's right.

HELEN MORRIS: And this happened to us once, and I remember we had to go off.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: And during that period, you could go down and get the big bag of beans and flour and potatoes. I remember—

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah, we used to stand in line for that—

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Yeah [laughs].

DAVID MORRIS: —over and over again. It worked out very well. Hey, I want to tell you about Judy Rayford. Judy Rayford—

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: —was a very—

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: You want to have time, or—shall I start?

MARY MCCHESENEY: No, I think we better turn the tape over. It's—

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah.

MARY MCCHESENEY: —about finished.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: You're wasting a lot of tape.

MARY MCCHESENEY: I told you, it's not finished.

[END OF TRACK AAA_morris64_271_m.]

DAVID MORRIS: On the—

MARY MCCHESENEY: David Morris, you were just looking over a list of some names of artists who were on the WPA Project in Washington, DC, that you remembered. Would you like to say something about some of those people?

DAVID MORRIS: Yes, I have a few more to discuss, here. One thing I'm reminded of is that we also had a model building, a diorama project, which naturally was a—very much in demand, especially in Washington, DC because of the large number of federal museums, such as the Smithsonian Institute, which, very frequently, need large models of one thing or another—much more than most cities would need. And most of the people employed on this part of the project—there were two or three people—two, in particular, that I remember—was Newton Cantor and Charles Aruta. And Aruta was an expert diorama model builder.

MARY MCCHESENEY: How do you spell those names?

DAVID MORRIS: A-R-U-T-A, Aruta, and Cantor is C-A-N-T-O-R. Cantor was a much younger man who had just gotten into the field, but he was sort of a general handyman along this line. He could work in almost anything you gave him, and very good at working with—used to work with Aruta. And they would make very, very large models of part of Washington, DC planning, with buildings, federal buildings, trees, parks. And they built the trees out of sponges, and made the contours, and painted the grass on. And some of these projects were a year long, and it was rather, I guess, boring work for some of them. But it was useful.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: We did that here, too, that—

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah, there was a great deal of that sort of thing. And—but I particularly wanted to—prefer to mention one artist that I'd forgotten to mention, Judy Rayford, who was from Biloxi, Mississippi.

MARY MCCHESENEY: How was her name spelled?

DAVID MORRIS: It's a he.

HELEN MORRIS: He.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh.

DAVID MORRIS: Judy Rayford, R-A-F-O-R-D [sic]. And Judy was a very interesting person because he was also a writer, and he had written a book called *Cotton Mouth*, which was published—I think, just before the Project. And it created quite a stir in the United States

because it was simply a direct quotation of his experiences in his own words, somewhat on the level of the writing of Kerouac or Salinger today, in this type of almost—just a—almost a stream-of-consciousness type of writing, which was a little unusual at the time. And his book was published, but due to the fact that it was in the very depths of the Depression, it was a failure, and he never made anything out of it.

And I don't know whether this book has ever been republished, or not, but the—you can get an idea of the type of personality that Rayford was by the fact that he came from Biloxi, Mississippi, from the absolute depths of the Deep South, and then, from a poor family, and he had no reason whatever for viewing things in a different way from people in his surroundings. But he wrote in a completely unbiased and unprejudiced way about the relationship between Negroes and white people. And after he wrote this book—I don't know if it was after he wrote the book, or not, but he left the South and came North, and it was—just riding the rods, and he was just a sort of bum. And he happened to be in Washington at the time the Project started, and he got interested in painting, and started working at that, and he was also still writing. But he was an eternally, entirely free spirit, sort of a Woody Guthrie of the writing field, and a free soul.

And I don't know whatever happened to Woody, and whatever happened to Rayford, but he's a person that should go down as a part of American folklore, because he just didn't care whether school kept or not about anything. He did and said exactly as he thought, and he'd say that anywhere, at any time. He got very interested in doing—carving very large, bas-relief panels of American folk characters, such as Paul Bunyan, and John Henry, and so forth. And these, he painted with bright automobile enamels. He covered the wood completely and painted them all different colors. And one of the most interesting things about his use of color was the fact that he was totally color-blind.

[They laugh.]

It didn't seem to make the slightest bit of difference to him. But color-blind artists are not so unusual as one may think. There are some in the Bay area.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: What—did he use the—distinguish his color for the tonal value?

DAVID MORRIS: He didn't worry about anything, at all. He just called the colors what he thought they were and used them.

[00:05:00]

And to put a little incident in about—to show you how he thought about color—I visited his studio. He was working—

HELEN MORRIS: When he was supervising.

DAVID MORRIS: While I was supervising, when I first met him, I visited his studio. He was working with Aruta, whom I mentioned earlier, and they were building a diorama. And he hadn't—at that point, hadn't been allowed to start his own creative work yet, and he was assisting Aruta to build a diorama. And he had a smock on that he had dyed himself, and he was very enthusiastic about everything. And when he—I came in, he said, Hey, David. He said, How do you like this green smock that I dyed myself? Isn't it terrific? And I said, Yeah, it's a great smock, only trouble is, it's mauve. It's not green.

[They laugh.]

And it was a—just a fantastic mauve color. And he'd mixed up some stuff, thrown it together, and dyed it, and he didn't know what color it was. And it—but the point is, it doesn't seem to make any difference. It actually doesn't make very much difference. We have a painter here, in the Bay Area—Skip Melcher [ph]—who is just as color blind as Rayford was, and he does some very nice things. And he's—if you don't discuss with him what the colors are, you'd never know. It's just not a question of agreeing with him on what the name of a color is. It's simply a question of looking at it and seeing if you like it.

At any rate, Rayford was a very—one of the most active artists on the Project, and his work was very much in demand. In fact, some of his things were sent all over the country on a big show at that time. There were—especially the things that—he had a lot of things to do with the west, and he was interested in American history a great deal. He also composed poems,

which he would never write down, and they were endless poems about American folklore—about Abraham Lincoln and so forth, and they were almost like talking blues. And he'd love to have somebody—

HELEN MORRIS: He played a guitar with them.

DAVID MORRIS: He didn't play the guitar. He had a guitar, and he would just bang on the strings. He'd get sort of a halfway tune on the thing, and just bang up and down on the strings, without hitting any specific chords. But he wouldn't make a lot of deliberate discords; he would just pick one tone, and he would strike over and over again, to get himself sort of a rhythmic background. And then, he would begin to recite his poems about old Abe Lincoln, or about whichever American historical character he wanted. And—

HELEN MORRIS: Tom Jefferson, and—

DAVID MORRIS: Tom Jefferson, or whatever. And he was a natural man. He—all of this, he came out of the—

HELEN MORRIS: He played all over the United States.

DAVID MORRIS: —came right off—all of it came off the top of his head, and he just came straight out of Biloxi with this stuff. And like I say, he—very much like Woody Guthrie. He just produced—

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: —and he just couldn't be—he couldn't be restrained. He couldn't be restrained, and—

HELEN MORRIS: As a G.I.

DAVID MORRIS: He couldn't be restrained in any way. And I'd like to tell a little story about him, if stories are in order.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Yes, certainly.

DAVID MORRIS: A little story about him—I saw him periodically after the Project—not very often. The first instance—one day, I was walking down F Street in Washington, DC, which is a main street—very busy downtown thoroughfare. I was walking down the street, and suddenly, something hit me in the middle of the back. Something landed on my back, weighing about a—200 and something pounds. And it was Rayford, who'd taken a run about halfway down the block, and just jumped up on top of my back and grabbed me around the shoulders and around the neck, and almost threw me down on the street.

[They laugh.]

DAVID MORRIS: I hadn't seen him for about three years, but this was his way of greeting me. And on another occasion, I ran into Rayford a few years later, and he invited me to go with him immediately—he said nothing would stand in the way; we had to go immediately to see this wonderful place where he was staying. So we went to his house, and turned out it wasn't his house, at all, but it was the house where he was living with some people—fairly wealthy people, on the outskirts of Washington. And so we went in, and he opened the refrigerator and cooked us up a big meal, and everything went great.

And then, he says, You've got to spend the night. It was quite late, and he says, You've got to spend the night. And he put us in the master bedroom and put us to bed. And the next morning, when we woke up, we were awakened by the owners of the house coming in. And they had not been informed by Rayford that we were there at all, and Rayford was not there, and he was not really staying as a houseguest at all. He had just been sort of a visitor, and he'd gone. He wasn't there, and he hadn't left a note to say we were going to be there. These people came home and we were in their bed.

[They laugh.]

DAVID MORRIS: And this is the sort of thing that you might expect Rayford to do. But in general, he was a fantastic personality. Where Rayford is today, who knows, but—

HELEN MORRIS: He's creative, wherever he is.

DAVID MORRIS: —really, a very—a very creative person. The last thing about Rayford, I'll tell very quickly, and that was that he was committed to St. Elizabeth's Insane Asylum in Washington, DC

[00:10:00]

When he was drafted in the Army, the Army couldn't cope with him in any way, whatever, because he refused to recognize any Army regulations, rules, or anything else—officer's rank, or anything else. He wouldn't recognize it, at all, so they regarded him as crazy. He said, I'm a very democratic. He was the absolute essence of democracy. The spirit of the '30s was embodied in this man. He was just completely democratic, and he took everything democratically. He'd go among any people, he says—officials meant nothing to him. He'd just put his arms around anybody at the drop of a hat.

And so they sent him to St. Elizabeth's Asylum. And while he was there, and he was in a military ward, and some general came to review the place. And as soon as he saw the general coming, he ran right up and put his arms around the general, and he says, Hi, Gen. He said, How's everything going? [Laughs] Sure glad you came over to see us. And this was a very formal inspection visit, and they just had to tear him off of this general— [They laugh.]

DAVID MORRIS: —which is typical of Rayford. But of course, he's not insane at all—just a democratic human being—the finest you could find. And he just loved everybody. Loved everybody—a great soul.

HELEN MORRIS: He was a great tank man during the war. He was a great tank driver.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: You mean he actually got in the Army?

HELEN MORRIS: Oh, yeah.

[Cross talk.]

HELEN MORRIS: But they had to give him the blue—discharge—

DAVID MORRIS: He didn't know which side he was on.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh.

[They laugh.]

HELEN MORRIS: Oh, he knew from—he knew what side he was on, David [laughs]. That's not a fair thing to say—

DAVID MORRIS: Well, he loved everybody on both sides, is—

[Cross talk.]

HELEN MORRIS: —but he loved all the generals.

DAVID MORRIS: But he loved the Germans, too. He loved everybody.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Did he go to the European theater?

DAVID MORRIS: The—I can't remember the details—

HELEN MORRIS: They never—

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: I can't remember the details, but he couldn't have, because he would have—actually, would have had nothing—he could never have been made to feel that he had anything against the Germans. He could never have been made to shoot a German, or anybody else, because he loved everybody. And he really did. He was just a great soul.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Do you know if any of his recordings are still around in Washington?

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: It must be, because—

HELEN MORRIS: Those are the ones—the monkey, the elephant house, everything—that's what Judy did.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh, yes. You mentioned those earlier—the ones that were placed outside the buildings.

DAVID MORRIS: They—his work is just fantastic, and enormous pieces he did. And as I said, a lot of them were toured during that period. They were so impressed with them, they were toured clean out here, to the West Coast. I know they sent some of them to Oregon to art exhibits because they were just this Paul Bunyan sort of the story. And some of this stuff was taken out there on a traveling show. But he was completely untrained, and he—and I must say that it was only the atmosphere of the WPA that got him into that. It was only the fact that he was getting—allowed to work, and giving him time to do it, that he immediately went into this. But he wasn't—didn't bother to be influenced by any other painters or anybody else. He just went right ahead and did exactly what he wanted to do. Very, very great—

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Did he ever get any more books published?

DAVID MORRIS: I don't know.

HELEN MORRIS: We don't know.

DAVID MORRIS: I don't know.

MARY MCCHESENEY: You've mentioned, in the process of the conversation this afternoon, several sculptors. Was there a separate sculpture project in Washington?

DAVID MORRIS: No. It was all part of the same, and we had—let's see—as I remember, only one—Leonore Thomas [ph], as I remember, was the only full-time sculptor on the project—a woman sculptor. And she's the only full-time sculptor that I can think of. Several of the artists were sculptors and painters.

MARY MCCHESENEY: I see.

DAVID MORRIS: Several of them.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What type of work did she do?

DAVID MORRIS: She did mostly wood carving, but she also worked on some of the school projects, doing sculpture for schoolyards, which were cast in concrete. They didn't do the actual casting, but they designed the pieces and assisted in the direction of the casting.

MARY MCCHESENEY: These were play sculptures for the children to play on?

DAVID MORRIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: How's—it'd be interesting to know how she handled the surface of these animals. I can't—

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: Actually, the surfacing was smooth, you know, troweled cement. Which, from the point of view of the sculptural aspect, left a little bit to be desired, I think, but—

[Cross talk.]

HELEN MORRIS: It was great for the children to slide down—

DAVID MORRIS: There was a movement among the artists in the Project, and various other people, to try to allow some of the work on the Project to be used permanently in Washington, because Washington is notorious for having a lot of, sort of, stagnant works of sculpture. But, of course, this never got anywhere, because this would be something that would have to go through the governmental heads of Washington, and that would never do

for the Federal Art Project.

MARY MCCHESENEY: You mean they wouldn't have works of sculpture commissioned?

DAVID MORRIS: No, not—none of the work was—none of it was ever sculptured, except certain sculptural work was commissioned for federal buildings.

[00:15:01]

But it was actually only such things as large eagles to adorn the edge of buildings, and things of this sort, which—

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Government—

[Cross talk.]

HELEN MORRIS: Well, New York—didn't they do the front of that famous building? You know, the man and the woman?

DAVID MORRIS: RCA?

HELEN MORRIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DAVID MORRIS: No, they didn't do that.

HELEN MORRIS: I—well, that wasn't—

DAVID MORRIS: Mm-mm [negative]. That's entirely different.

HELEN MORRIS: Private.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Are there some other people on the list that were on that WPA Project in Washington you haven't mentioned? Or we covered most of them?

DAVID MORRIS: We haven't covered—we probably only covered about half of them, mainly because my memory is failing me after not having thought of it for so long. This just about covers—I might like to mention one person again, that I mentioned before—one aspect—Stotler, who was a trained—you might call, a trained art expert. That's what we used to call him. And he really was, in the most modest sense of the word—words. He was a very mediocre painter, himself, and never claimed to be anything else. He mostly did governmental illustrations, large mural illustrations and so forth for buildings. But this man was really a very, very qualified—he would be a person that—an excellent person in charge of a museum collections, because he knew—

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: —this man knew—he also was a restorer, an excellent restorer, and we used him in very often as a docent in—as Helen had just mentioned—

HELEN MORRIS: Well, he was docent for the modern art gallery when it had a branch in Washington, DC.

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah, he'd worked for lots of—

MARY MCCHESENEY: A what?

DAVID MORRIS: Docent.

HELEN MORRIS: Docent.

DAVID MORRIS: You know, the person that takes care of—

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: —sits at the gallery and tells people what—

HELEN MORRIS: —tells people what paintings are all about.

DAVID MORRIS: —what's going on when you come to a show. But at any rate, his knowledge of art was absolutely incredible. And not only that he had a personal collection. He'd been in Europe, had spent a lot of time in Europe, and he'd gone to the areas where the best reproductions are made. And he had acquired an—enormous and beautiful reproductions of French modern painting from about 1900, going up, and he had a collection that just couldn't be equaled, and—

HELEN MORRIS: —of reproductions.

DAVID MORRIS: —all for a personal collection—full-size reproductions of the Fauves and the Impressionists, and everyone else. And he had a remarkable collection of this stuff, and he was employed by Phillips Gallery, when Phillips Gallery first opened. And this is very little to do with the Art Project, but Stotler told me a very interesting story about Phillips. Phillips was a dilettante, who opened this gallery, and he has a great reputation because he had millions of dollars and opened the gallery, and bought a lot—immediately, bought lots of Cézannes and Van Goghs, and so forth, and he has many famous paintings in the gallery.

But Stotler, of course, really knew about paintings, and he knew every painting that Phillips had. He knew exactly when it was painted, who painted it, you know, whether it was authentic, or not, and whether it had been retouched, and if so, in what period. In other words, he was a person who was completely competent, and if you wanted a lecture in five minutes, he'd—or if you want someone to lecture on Cézanne, this man would really tell you something about it—

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: —without too much foolishness. A lot of people lecture on these subjects with it and include a lot of foolishness, but he really would give you the fundamental information, and he knew exactly what was going on—the type of pigments that were used, everything. But he told me, which is very interesting, and it's sort of off the cuff, and I think it should go down—and he told me that when Phillips first started, that he really had no concept, whatever, of what was going on.

But he wanted to open a gallery because it's something he wanted to do, and he had the money to do it, and that people would bring things there—they would—collectors who had certain things would bring things there, and then, Phillips would frequently buy these things, you know, without consulting anyone. And he told me that once Phillips bought a whole series of tinted photographs that he enlarged and—enlarged, tinted photographs that had been passed over—passed off on him as paintings [laughs]. This is a fantastic thing—

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh, that's amazing.

DAVID MORRIS: —and that he really bought this collection of tinted photographs, not knowing what they were.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Well, if there aren't any other artists that you'd like to talk about, perhaps you can sort of summarize, and make some kind of a general statement about the Project in Washington. How long were you actually on the Project, until 1921—

DAVID MORRIS: I was on it from the beginning to the end. The exact dates, I can't give you, but from the time it started—

HELEN MORRIS: He went on in early 1936.

DAVID MORRIS: I was one of the last people to leave the project—

HELEN MORRIS: And he went off when the war came.

DAVID MORRIS: I transferred—no. I transferred—

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: —to the Writers' Project.

HELEN MORRIS: And then, he transferred to the Writers' Project.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh, what did you do on the Writers' Project?

DAVID MORRIS: Well, I worked in the Civil Defense, as an editor of foreign language interpretations for an Index—Civil Defense Index, which was being compiled from foreign sources.

[00:20:04]

Because at that time, we didn't have any—United States government didn't have any compiled material on civil defense techniques. But there were certain other areas in the world where things had already happened, where the problem of bombing and defense from bombing had actually occurred, so that civil defense techniques, such as building shelters and everything, had actually been set up. Especially literature from the civil war in Spain—one of our primary sources was that, and we also had a great deal of Russian material from the so-called Finnish war, and we had material from China.

And we had a staff of 13 interpreters, and I was in charge of editing the interpretations of the documents that we got—that—we worked in the Library of Congress in Washington, which has access to all this material. And the interpreters' job—the job of the interpreters was to go into the stack of Library and find the material, and look it up, and write resumés on it, so that we could put it into this directory of civil defense material. And my job was to edit the translations, and this went on for, I guess, six months, something like that—

HELEN MORRIS: A year.

DAVID MORRIS: —maybe, six months to a year. And that was the last—then, the Writers' Project was folded, and I was terminated from the Project at that time. But to summarize on the Federal Art Project, in general, the main thing that I was—always remember and like to feel about the Federal Art Project —and that was that it was an extremely good thing for art and America, in general, because it stimulated art, and it also found—it also gave the painters a feeling that they were not just working in a vacuum, and that they weren't working really just to compete on the gallery level with anyone at all, but they were simply working to try to develop their own ability as painters.

They were encouraged to do whatever they wanted to do, but to do it, and to produce as much as possible. And they were the—in spite of the very small amount of money they got, they were still economically, more economically secure than many artists are in other periods, when they have to depend upon some other type of work, or they have to depend upon certain types of prestige. In this case, they knew they were going to get a certain amount of money and they knew they were going to get all their materials in excess of that, and they were encouraged to go ahead and work. And they also knew that their work would be shown through the gallery there, and any place else that they wanted to show it. And so that it did stimulate in the—in our area, at least, it stimulated work a great deal, and it made quite a few artists out of people who had previously been only—perhaps had high school art training, or they—maybe, they'd taught art in some small level. That's the main thing I have to say about it.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Out here on the Coast there were—many people have told me that they felt a great deal of insecurity on the Project, that from week to week, they didn't know if they were going to be kicked off the Project, and there was always a lot of talk and rumors about the closing down—the possible closing of Projects.

HELEN MORRIS: Well, this—

DAVID MORRIS: We had—

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: —all the way through. And the—

HELEN MORRIS: All the way through.

DAVID MORRIS: The principal function of the Union was to maintain—

HELEN MORRIS: See that they didn't do that.

DAVID MORRIS: —to maintain a—running committees on fighting various issues that were brought up. Periodically, something would be brought up, and as a Project was being brought

to a close, this occurred more and more. And people were—the requirements—relief requirements were being made more and more strict, and people were being removed from relief, and very often, not for legitimate reasons, but for any reason that could be dreamed up, just to cut the Project down. And every—

MARY MCCHESENEY: Did you have a social worker who came and checked on you?

DAVID MORRIS: No.

MARY MCCHESENEY: No. They have that out here on the Coast—

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah.

MARY MCCHESENEY: —which I haven't heard before.

DAVID MORRIS: No, I didn't—

HELEN MORRIS: David, do you want to say a few words about Reggio [ph] before you stop?

DAVID MORRIS: Well, I might say something. We had models—

HELEN MORRIS: Reggio was the main one.

DAVID MORRIS: —hired by the Project. And one model, who was a professional model, had been—all of his life, had been a professional model, and he'd started in Italy. His name was Aurelio Reggio [ph], and he was sort of a comical, pathetic figure on the Art Project—

HELEN MORRIS: Tragic, really.

DAVID MORRIS: —because he could—he spoke very little English, and he was thinking entirely in, during the time he was on, he was thinking entirely in terms of his extreme poverty, which he was experiencing, he hadn't been here long from Italy, and he'd sort of thought when he came to America, that things were going to be different. And he'd come there just at the wrong time, and here he was, in just as bad poverty as ever, and they only paid the models, I think, \$60 a month—

[00:25:01]

HELEN MORRIS: \$58 a month.

DAVID MORRIS: \$58 a month, they paid the models, and they had about—so many kids, I couldn't count. There'd be nine children. And the little guy was also—he'd been taught in the classical schools in Italy, and he knew more about modeling than the artist who were going to use them, so that the—he wouldn't really allow them to tell him what modeling was supposed to be. And so that when they would call Reggio to model, he would strike some heroic pose, and he was a little, dried-up old man [laughs]. And he would take all of his clothes off, and he would strike some heroic pose, and he says, This is the way you model, do it. And he would strike his pose, and that was it.

And the worst hassles went on continuously between the artists and Reggio, and Reggio and the Project, and they wouldn't pay him because they thought he didn't belong on the Project, and it was a constant fight to keep Reggio on the Project. Everybody wanted him, even though he was living in an entirely different period. We had two or three other models that came and went. The models were not—Reggio was the only one that was consistently kept on the Project.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Were they the—

DAVID MORRIS: They kind of went the—

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: These men, or these models—they worked—the artists used them as —

DAVID MORRIS: The artists used them, yeah.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: —in their mural work?

DAVID MORRIS: The artists used them in—whenever the artist wanted a model, they just called, and from the Project office, and they'd send them up to their studio. And they'd have to be—have something to do with the paintings that they were working on.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Oh, I see.

HELEN MORRIS: The murals or whatever—

DAVID MORRIS: Usually, for mural projects, when—you know, figure studies for the mural projects. Or for—sculptors used them quite a bit, too—

HELEN MORRIS: And the class—some of the classes—

DAVID MORRIS: The classes used them, too.

HELEN MORRIS: —life classes used them.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Life classes! Now you said there was no adult schools—

DAVID MORRIS: These were—no, we didn't have any adult life classes. Reggio couldn't have worked for—

HELEN MORRIS: Reggio worked practically all the time.

DAVID MORRIS: He did? Well, he had high school kids, yeah. High school classes used the model.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Well, there were art—I assume there were art schools in Washington, DC, and have—yeah, would hire models.

DAVID MORRIS: Reggio—Reggie used to work in the art schools, too.

MARY MCCHESENEY: You're not a ceramist and have your own pottery shop in San Rafael here. I wonder if you could tell us, did the WPA have any influence on your career? And when did you begin doing pottery?

DAVID MORRIS: I started doing pottery after World War II. I went to art school after World War II on the G.I. bill, in—

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: In Washington?

DAVID MORRIS: —in Washington, DC I didn't go to art school because I was particularly interested in going to art school. I just went to collect my money.

[They laugh.]

And so sort of a bore, actually. And they happened to have a ceramic department. It was a—the instructor was John Pietra [ph], who was a graduate of Alfred, which is a big ceramics school in New York State. And I got very much interested in ceramics during this time. They didn't have very good facilities there to do it, but just to—fooling with it at all aroused my interest, and I got started that way.

HELEN MORRIS: And Leach came there, too.

DAVID MORRIS: Bernard Leach, of course, who is a famous English potter, probably the best-known in pottery fields, the best-known potter.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: What school was this, David?

DAVID MORRIS: The Institute of Contemporary Arts. It was an offshoot of the Chicago Institute of Design. Most of the—

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Oh.

DAVID MORRIS: —instructors were graduates of the Chicago Institute, and we got a few people from New York from the various schools in New York—from the Museum of Modern Art. We had an—Ed Weiner [ph] came and taught art—one of the people from New York. He commuted to teach. But mostly, people from the institute—Chicago Institute. The school only

lasted for the duration of the G.I. bill. It was sort of one of those fly-by-night G.I. bill schools.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Well, would you say that the WPA Art Project had any influence on your career as an artist at all?

DAVID MORRIS: Oh, definitely, yes. Definitely. I mean, it'd be very hard for me to say how much painting I would have done if the WPA hadn't come along. It's difficult to say because of times being what they are. I had already started to paint before I went on the WPA, and I was—I had already decided that this was what I wanted to do. And in other words, not so much painting, but I had decided that the art field was the field that I wanted to work in, and I had already started to work in it at the time. Actually, getting work as an artists' model—the reason I got work as an artists' model was mainly because I was very much interested in art and doing artwork, and being in contact—I had been in contact with lots of the artists who'd gotten on the Project before I was on the Project.

[00:30:08]

I knew a number of the artists who were later on this Project and on other projects in Washington before the Project started. They were friends of mine, and I was already in this milieu, and this was how I happened to start modeling because knowing these guys and not having any work to do, I started modeling in order to pick up a little money.

[Cross talk.]

DAVID MORRIS: And really, when you work as a model, you begin to really see what's going on. Because if you work in a—I had as much experience in art schools as almost any—much more than most art students, because I spent hours, and hours, and hours, and hours in art classes, listening to the criticism of the instructors and watching what the painting—and watching what the students were doing. So I was quite familiar with what was going on. And all the art schools in Washington—I had posed in all the schools for a number of years before I—and I was—at the same time, I was beginning to paint myself. So I—actually, this was quite instructive to me. I was able to make comparison, and see what was going on, and getting interest in it. But as far as ceramics is concerned, I really switched to ceramics more because the monetary aspect of it. And painting never paid me off too well, and when I came to California, I got into the ceramic field largely because I had a feeling that it would be more of a way of making a living than painting.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Are you still doing painting?

DAVID MORRIS: No.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Well, I guess that just about covers it. Okay.

DAVID MORRIS: Yeah.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Thank you very much, David Morris—

DAVID MORRIS: Thanks.

MARY MCCHESENEY: —Helen Morris, and Robert McChesney.

[END OF TRACK AAA_morris64_272_m.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]