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Oral history interview with Peter Pollack, circa 1964

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Peter Pollack in 1964. The interview was conducted by Harlan Philips for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. The sound quality for this interview is poor throughout, leading to an abnormally high number of inaudible sections; the first five minutes of the interview are mostly inaudible.

Interview

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible] perhaps a, uh, a [inaudible] where you were, what you were doing in '29.

PETER POLLACK: '29! Oh, you're going back much too early. Let's go into the period we're discussing. '29 goes back much too early.

HARLAN PHILIPS: I don't want you to spring fully-formed like Botticelli's Venus from the half shell. I'd like to have some antecedent at some point [inaudible] Chicago.

PETER POLLACK: [Inaudible] time when I was identified with Chicago [inaudible] practically a hyphenated name [inaudible] identified myself so completely with it.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PETER POLLACK: And the two things that really meant a lot [inaudible] Chicago [inaudible] vaudeville houses which were good in those days [inaudible] Chicago [inaudible] I was about 15 or 16 when I walked in [inaudible] I was given a box of Rembrandt prints [inaudible] I was doing something [inaudible] probably one of the greatest thrills of my life was that I was handling something he handled [inaudible] by extension from the etching into the engraving into the mezzotint and into lithography was very simple.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PETER POLLACK: [Inaudible] basically [inaudible] photography, which later developed into a book as you know.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Yeah [inaudible].

PETER POLLACK: [Inaudible.]

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible.]

PETER POLLACK: No [inaudible] I walked in [inaudible] print department [inaudible] my successor at the Art Institute as curator of photography.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible.]

PETER POLLACK: [Inaudible] brilliant, laconic, satiric, and sarcastic, prickly fellow. But what a brilliant gift [inaudible] and a man who has a tremendous knowledge of prints, said, "What do you want?" [inaudible] first word I could [inaudible] okay, but don't put your grubby hands on the—on the mat and don't lift it [inaudible] remarks he made, he handed them to me [inaudible] then I discovered the print study room at the Art Institute of Chicago and that was it.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible.]

PETER POLLACK: [Inaudible] no, the print study room was marvelous [inaudible] sat down [inaudible] still do it the way [inaudible] used to [inaudible] successor and I have many years of work, more than a dozen years of work [inaudible] and 20 years of friendship [inaudible].

HARLAN PHILIPS: What [inaudible] to the print room?

PETER POLLACK: Uh, I later studied [inaudible] in the house.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible.]

PETER POLLACK: [Inaudible.]

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible] household.

PETER POLLACK: Not at all.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Not at all.

PETER POLLACK: Not at all. my family didn't have any Art Institute of Chicago background. My father [inaudible] and he was a socialist, agriculturalist from North Dakota [inaudible]. And I was young and very happy I did.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible].

PETER POLLACK: No, no reason for it.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible] you took some classes?

PETER POLLACK: I took some classes [inaudible] classes University of Chicago, later studied a couple years and took some classes at the Institute of Design.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PETER POLLACK: But formal training in the [inaudible] I've had very little of compared to what I should have had [inaudible].

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible.]

PETER POLLACK: [Inaudible] there was none.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible.]

PETER POLLACK: Yeah [inaudible] for yourself and find out for yourself.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible.]

PETER POLLACK: Father was dead by the time I was 12. And my mother had three other sons besides me and she took care of all four of us.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible] print and photography. What were the alternatives [inaudible] '35.

PETER POLLACK: In '35 I was doing very well, I was young. My beginning 20s. I had done some work [inaudible] studied nights and studied for accounting because Mother said, "You've got to have some kind of an education to make a living." So I studied accounting [inaudible] and when I left I did some investigating of credits and did some little bit of accounting and a little bit of collecting of bills, and then got into the selling of food products all over nine states in the Midwest. That time I [inaudible] time I—'37 I started a print gallery. At that time, I knew something about prints and I bought two lithograph presses and took 17 Chicago artists and [inaudible] Chicago Artists Group [inaudible] offices at 645 North Michigan.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible] pause. Having made that statement [inaudible] go back and pick up the development [inaudible] Chicago art market [inaudible].

PETER POLLACK: [Laughs.] That's very funny [inaudible] that's very funny.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible.]

PETER POLLACK: [Inaudible] at that time, Edgar Britton, a very good artist made a nude [inaudible] unfortunately because we were such bad lithography printers I, you know, it was a dying craft, art in those days, and today it's being [inaudible] Tamarind Workshop and a few other interesting experiments through the Ford Foundation and through individuals who are not blessed with that much money like Tonya Grossman [ph] in Long Island [inaudible] lithography is coming back, it's coming back big, despite the problems of no paper and inks and the presses and stones wearing out and so on. But in those days we had a hell of a time because we didn't have anybody to print the things and we had one man who I found who said he could do it, but he'd never get more than about 12 or 15 prints before he'd clog up the plates [inaudible] stone, that is [inaudible] in those days [inaudible] certain amount but that's technical. That's unimportant. Important thing here is that the artists that I had in my group [inaudible].

HARLAN PHILIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PETER POLLACK: [Inaudible] some social significant work [inaudible] we're talking about the time of the Spanish Civil War. When any person—we're talking about the time the Nazis were coming into power—when any person

of any consequence at all, with any heart and mind [inaudible] the world problem [inaudible] really were intrigued and interested. Uh then from liberals to the extreme left [inaudible] depended on what [inaudible] wanted to do [inaudible].

HARLAN PHILIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PETER POLLACK: I could never carry a card because I never believed in dictation of any kind, government dictation. And so I despised people who tried to go [inaudible] the answer was through a form of government when they knew nothing about our own form of government [inaudible] they were sick and hungry and they could embrace any kind of revolutionary movement. That [inaudible] not that I couldn't understand what they were doing, not that I didn't [inaudible] respect [inaudible] for what they were doing out of idealistic motives and emphases, but the artists also were of other persuasions of pink to red. And [inaudible] respect for words because what you had on the opposite side [inaudible] destructive [inaudible] murder and [inaudible] uh, destruction [inaudible] Barcelona and the Spanish Civil War [inaudible] pick a side [inaudible] you were not human.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible.]

PETER POLLACK: So [inaudible] stuff in which I couldn't sell [inaudible] mother and child [inaudible] destroyed. Cartoon sort of things [inaudible]. A man like Julio de Diego, who was more mature, and 10, 12, 15 years older than [inaudible] stuff [inaudible] because [inaudible] politico [inaudible] could see himself being ruled by the politicos and [inaudible] play their game because he was an anarchist if anything [inaudible] but it was good. It was a good time to grow up in. It was a good time to go and have faith and a good time to identify yourself with causes and with movements and with ideas and ideals and the artists were good too. They could have been better perhaps. But, uh, those who were good [inaudible]. Mitch Siporin up at Brandeis [inaudible] who just recently died [inaudible] Julio [inaudible] was of the leftist persuasion [inaudible] doing second-rate prints but he meant so well and was such a good human being.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible.]

PETER POLLACK: [Inaudible] Edgar Britton, and so on [inaudible] have to rack my brain to come up [inaudible] each one of them.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible] stimulation you received at the institute or [inaudible].

PETER POLLACK: No, no [inaudible] no, despite the institute. The Institute paid no attention to us. And—and no galleries did, and we sold some pieces. A few things. I tried to market it by mail. I put together exhibitions. And took [inaudible] tours [inaudible] livelihood. Uh [inaudible] products [inaudible] selling [inaudible] money because there was money to be made if you had things for that particular market and I wasn't interested.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible].

PETER POLLACK: I was interested [inaudible] go into a small town or big towns, Minneapolis, or Green Bay, Wisconsin. Or anything else [inaudible] simply see the museum director or gallery or [inaudible] sell some few things. Come back, and have and opening, work in collaboration with [inaudible] the artists' union which at that time [inaudible] strong [inaudible] around the corner [inaudible] Chicago [inaudible] gallery. I got to know the problems of the art world well with the city of Chicago.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PETER POLLACK: I got to know the artists. I got to know the museum people.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PETER POLLACK: And it was soon after, about 1939, when George Thorp, who'd come into Chicago to be the director—or supervisor I think the word was—state supervisor for the WPA Federal Art Project, came to my gallery [inaudible] "Would you mind coming to work for the government?" I said, "Doing what?" And he said, "Well to build art centers in the state of Illinois." [inaudible] He said, "What do you make a week?" And I says, "Oh, between 250 and 300 dollars a week." He said, "I can pay you $175 a month." [Laughs.]

HARLAN PHILIPS: So you learned the second viola part.

PETER POLLACK: [Inaudible] I decided to take it.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Yeah.

PETER POLLACK: But fortunately [inaudible] making their own livelihood and I had the responsibilities of a

family, perhaps I couldn't have indulged myself. But I did then. [Inaudible] and worked at it for three and a half years with Thorp as the supervisor. And I running art centers.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible] uh, what's the origin of the art center movement?

PETER POLLACK: Well, there was no art center movement. Cahill, Holger Cahill, came to town. And I spoke with him. Cahill said, "Uh, George, get him, because this is a guy who can do something for us." [inaudible] second thing I was able to do was think, talk, and organize. It took some doing though. I mean, to go and tell Negroes in the Depression [inaudible] make enough [inaudible] and permit us, the WPA Federal Art Project, to renovate that structure for them on a temporary basis. Meaning you use a screw rather than a nail, which you can do a hell of a lot better with a screw than you can with a nail if you know what you're doing, whether it be a ceiling or a wall. Just takes a little longer. But we did [inaudible] proceeded with the redesign [inaudible] building. I got [inaudible] raised [inaudible] money, begged, borrowed, stole, gave talks, tried to talk, learned everything I could about the history of the Negroes, I think I was, uh, read every book that was available, became acquainted with Professor [inaudible] of Howard and every other intellectual [inaudible] who knew the subject.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PETER POLLACK: Became fairly steeped in all aspects of Negro problems that pertained to what I was studying, meaning [inaudible] went to New Orleans and studied the [inaudible] and the, uh, because somebody had been saying that all the balustrades and the ironwork was done by Negroes. And after a slight bit of research I found it was a bunch of bunk and most of the stuff was bought from Boston, Massachusetts, and was bought from a—sort of a mail-order catalogue at the time [inaudible] catalogue of 1820, 1830s, and all that iron railing is still being made somewhere around Massachusetts. But it was that sort of research that I was doing because I was interested in the subject. A slave ship, and how it was made [inaudible] the history of slavery, the history of the [inaudible] Natchez, Mississippi River Valley. All that sort of thing interested me because just why didn't the Negro do something in the plastic and graphic arts all during the 300 and some odd years [inaudible] United States.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Hmm.

PETER POLLACK: [Inaudible.]

HARLAN PHILIPS: Well, did Thorp suggest a Negro iron [inaudible].

PETER POLLACK: Thorp suggested nothing, he just gave me my head. I came back to him after about six, seven months. I said, "George, this is impossible. You can't build. These people are hungry, these people are without housing." [inaudible] and he says [inaudible] quitter. Well, he knew enough to go and call me a quitter, so [inaudible] dirty word [inaudible] back to work [inaudible].

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible.]

PETER POLLACK: So this is what happened. It took some time. Took some doing.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Well, why did you choose the Negro [inaudible].

PETER POLLACK: Because I knew if I [inaudible] you take the tough one first.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible.]

PETER POLLACK: [Inaudible] I saw so much talent there. There were so many talents that were going to waste.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible.]

PETER POLLACK: Kid named Eldzier Cortor and Charles White. And guy named Charles Sebree, and fellow named George Neal. There were a whole bunch of people who I knew. I knew their work. They were young men and they were so talented.

HARLAN PHILIPS: How would you become aware of Charles Neal [ph] [inaudible].

PETER POLLACK: Charles Neal [ph] was a dancer and an artist. George Neal was an artist. Charles Neal died if we're speaking—if we're speaking of the same man. Are we?

HARLAN PHILIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PETER POLLACK: Charles [inaudible] I think Charles Neal is dead too. I met him through his uncle. He used to be one of editors of the *Chicago Defender*, is that right?

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible] As I understand it you were working in, uh, food products.

PETER POLLACK: Yeah.

HARLAN PHILIPS: And you were also [inaudible].

PETER POLLACK: That's right.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible].

PETER POLLACK: [Inaudible].

HARLAN PHILIPS: What would get you over into the South Side? [Inaudible] what would make you aware of—

PETER POLLACK: Of the Negro artists there?

HARLAN PHILIPS: How [inaudible].

PETER POLLACK: [Inaudible] gallery, uh [inaudible] belong to it. Dick Wright [ph] coming to town, there was a lot of—a real lot of activity [inaudible] Chicago always has had.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PETER POLLACK: Chicago was one of the fecundating cities of the world. It never could keep its artists because it couldn't support them. They always ran away. But it was there. The writers were there. The '20s, the '30s, the '40s, it was always [inaudible] couldn't support [inaudible] they ran away to New York or went to the west coast. I can name you 50 guys in the city of New York and in Los Angeles, San Francisco who are originally from Chicago [inaudible] Chicago *Tribune* reactionary policy wouldn't support [inaudible] never was—keep—build Chicago, keep Chicago [inaudible] all that was a bunch of nonsense [inaudible] never supported the artists. Now [inaudible] big galleries there, now there are a lot of ways for the artists to make a livelihood. But in those days [inaudible] and so I [inaudible] Negro print group. Negro artist print group . today you can't speak of Negro artists without being insulting because they wanted to be identified as artists per se and not Negro.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PETER POLLACK: But in those days it didn't make much of a difference because they were not known as artists and to speak of Negro artists as a group was not resented by the Negro artists. Today you can't do it. And I can easily understand why. And I concur with them. But the identification then as Negro artists was not resented. And they would [inaudible] woodblock and sent it around. And we showed some Negro prints [inaudible] as works by Negro artists. Furthermore, I was very much involved with African sculpture at the time as I still am. I have a fairly good collection [inaudible].

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible].

PETER POLLACK: But I learned [inaudible] African sculpture, couldn't buy much of it because there was not much that was available in the Midwest. Uh, Frank Buck [ph] used to bring some in and sell it to a fellow I knew by the name of Kerzee [ph] [inaudible] and I got one or two pieces from him.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible].

PETER POLLACK: Kerzee [ph] was also an artist, an undertaker's son. And, uh, this went on like that [inaudible] I would go see African sculpture [inaudible] artist from Chicago. In fact there was none. There was no department of that kind, but there were some beautiful things at the Field Museum. So I studied there, stuff on view and stuff behind cases [inaudible] director [inaudible] curator. And got to know a little about African sculpture and read every book that was available, there wasn't very much. Mostly ethnological books rather than books on the art [inaudible].

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible.]

PETER POLLACK: And today there's a lot.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Why would [inaudible] why would [inaudible] why—why would [inaudible] Chicago [inaudible] African sculpture?

PETER POLLACK: You can't explain [inaudible] I don't know what makes a person what he is. You have four brothers and each one of them so distinctively different, you know, I don't know.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible.]

PETER POLLACK: I don't know, but, uh, it is just that when you see a work of, uh [inaudible] African sculpture [inaudible].

HARLAN PHILIPS: Yeah. Yeah.

PETER POLLACK: [Inaudible] psychological motivations of myself to even try to find out why I would do it. I did [inaudible] Currier and Ives brought me into the print department.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Yeah [inaudible].

PETER POLLACK: Uh, but they weren't satisfying enough. I looked at them.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible.]

PETER POLLACK: I should have started to collect at that time, with so many of your friends and mine collecting [inaudible] green [inaudible] greenbacks [inaudible] little engravings, the finest engravings to collect [inaudible].

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible.]

PETER POLLACK: [Inaudible.]

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible] your own.

PETER POLLACK: [Laughs.]

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Laughs.] Yeah. But, uh [inaudible] I can see how [inaudible] challenging task [inaudible] the most difficult aspect [inaudible].

PETER POLLACK: [Inaudible.]

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible.]

PETER POLLACK: [Inaudible] one other aspect too. The Spanish Civil War, Hitler, the diatribe which was starting in the American Fascist Party. Liberal thinking, being a Jew, identifying with the minority groups that could become [inaudible] minority group, Jew [inaudible].

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible.]

PETER POLLACK: [Inaudible.]

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible] Plus, you know, satisfaction of being, uh, interested in something that no one else could really talk about.

PETER POLLACK: [Laughs.] Well, that's vanity.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Doesn't explain everything but it helps [inaudible] well, you know, what [inaudible] did you fall heir to on the South Side of Chicago by way of the Community Art Center?

PETER POLLACK: [Inaudible] nothing. Nothing. No, there wasn't really much. There wasn't really much [inaudible] I found a few people, which was important. But there was no movement of art.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PETER POLLACK: But there were individuals who knew what I was talking about, and who identified easily, once I showed them that there is no race prejudice among artists. That artists, as Pat Prescott who was later president used to say, "The only two segments of society in which there is no race prejudice that I could find is among the criminal element and among the artists." [Laughs.] So [inaudible] very fond. Well, the criminal element can't be discriminatory when they're sleeping in the same cells. But among artists, we can be, if we should want to be. But we don't want to be, because of the way we—you know, because of the way the artist sees things. But whom did I find there? Yes. I found a Doctor Metzlo Shard [ph], who was a Haitian [inaudible], who was editor of the *Chicago Defender* at that time. I met, through him, a Mrs. Pauline Reed, who was a united charity social worker. Through her, I met a Mrs. Hermadine Moore [ph], whose husband later was appointed by the—our president Roosevelt as judge of the Virgin Islands. Uh—not that any of these people knew anything about art or even cared to. What they did realize is art was a medium of expression in which they'd like to see their people go. And it was an ideal [inaudible] as well. [Inaudible] organized a group—but this meant talking every night of the week. This meant lectures. This meant slides. This meant historic grabs to go and show, speak of Phyllis Wheatley and

Skiphill Moorehead [ph], speak of the history of the Negro and the chances that the freemen had in the 19th century, something which I had forgotten completely. If you speak, you—some of it comes back.

HARLAN PHILIPS: But [inaudible] was selling an idea.

PETER POLLACK: That's right. An open hand, and I wouldn't take any money from them. I was getting paid by the Federal Art Project, $175 a month. I was driving a car. I had my whole life, spending a hell of a lot more money than I had, but I was enjoying it. So this righteousness led me in, later, into the Red Cross for four years. All right? I know something of that feeling of righteousness. You don't have to have a damn dime, you know? Long as your mind is well-satisfied with a day's work, you're all right.

HARLAN PHILIPS: But in selling an idea, or, what is it, I guess it's creating momentum for an idea—this is under the Federal Art Project?

PETER POLLACK: That's right.

HARLAN PHILIPS: And, effectively, your task then was to create art that is throughout Illinois?

PETER POLLACK: Throughout Illinois. I started with the Negro. When that was successful, jumping ahead, I went out to the West Side of Chicago and taught there, and there was working with the Jewish People's Institute. And then I went to a couple of towns down in Harrisburg, Illinois and met with some people there. And I went once to East Saint Louis, Illinois and met with some people there. But I kept writing all the time and sending material out from Chicago. But, actually, I was busy most of the time—practically all the time—with the Negro art center. Didn't have time for anything else. Because when that thing was built, we bought Charles Comiskey's old home for $7,500. And Charles Comiskey was head of the—owned the Chicago White Sox in those days. Or a little earlier, a decade earlier. And this mansion of his, at 3831 South Michigan Avenue, was, oh, a ballroom on the top floor, and some 14 or so rooms on the other floors. And a garage and stable quarters in the back, and a garden. And I bought that thing, I remember, for $7,750. And there was something like 85, 90 people living in there. And the first thing they did was to go and seal the place up and have it fumigated and killed something like three billion cockroaches and 300,000 rats.

HARLAN PHILIPS: You murderer. [Laughs.]

PETER POLLACK: And pulled out every one of these partitions and made it into 14 classrooms. And we had lithography presses, etching presses, a photography darkroom. Gordon Parks, who is now the big shot of *LIFE* magazine and an excellent photographer, was in charge of my dark lab, teaching photography. David Ross [ph], who—some excellent people. We have colored and white people, boys and girls, teaching. We have a thousand students a month coming in there. This was no Kinderspiel, this has been really something important. We were the only educational—art educational institution in that whole area. And the high schools and the colleges and all the rest of them, the grammar schools, they were all for us. Maids would come, housemaids would come, we had great variety of people coming in there. And every night, it was used for a lecture or a dance or—there were poetry-reading classes, there were poetry-teaching classes. Uh, had the Met's Cunningham Stark [ph], who really became a [inaudible]. She brought Gwendolyn Brooks, that published her first book at Harper. She got—who later became a Pulitzer Prize winner, as you know. Uh, Bob Davis [ph] was a poet, published him. We had a—Bob—Ranks News [ph] came, gave some classes. Peter De Vries [inaudible] classes. Um—the artists were legion. Best artists in the city of Chicago were teaching there, at one time or another. I'd borrow exhibitions from artists. I'd get them from the WPA. I assembled them [inaudible] from museums [inaudible] worked with existing museums. Daniel Catton Rich, who was Director of the Art Institute of Chicago, for whom I later worked a dozen years, was on my board. [Inaudible] from University of Chicago was on my board. I got some real activity going. [inaudible] supported it.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Yes. This is the nature of sponsorship.

PETER POLLACK: That's right.

HARLAN PHILIPS: And it was required [cross talk] for floating an idea.

PETER POLLACK: Well, but we built it so well. It's still going.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Yes, I know. And the [inaudible] art center [inaudible].

PETER POLLACK: Some of them are not doing this. Some are. There's, uh, one in both [inaudible] and then one just in Oklahoma, Oklahoma City Art Center, no more than three weeks ago, and that was still [inaudible] whom I knew then, 25 years ago, is still there, operating it. And she'll be going soon, she's retiring, and then it's going to take a great step forward, because the man who's running it as an art center [inaudible]. And now it's time for that organization to become a museum. But it took all those years to establish and get a building. And here, this

organization in Chicago, it's been operating as a small center. But at least in the area of itself, in that Negro neighborhood. It has had a tremendous influence on the cultural level. Because we not only had exhibitions of painting, we showed them how to—the housing projects were being built. We showed them [inaudible] buy them in department stores. What you can borrow for the cheapest possible price and what you could do with it. Or how to make a bedroom, how to use certain fabrics. I'm not an economist, and I'm not [inaudible] I don't like furniture very much [inaudible] can't stand either [inaudible] and I'm interested in what goes on the walls, rather than on the floors. But I know full well this was an important facet of art and life. That's the good, professional person who knows how to make a household at the most reasonable prices and using the material that exists along with pictures, to make a very charming home. And these people came and learned.

HARLAN PHILIPS: How much, uh, expensive [inaudible]

PETER POLLACK: George [ph] was all right. George was a fellow that was from New York. He didn't know Chicago. He [inaudible] quiet, silent, egging man. He knew enough about certain people who worked with him, um, to know how to urge them to do their best work. [inaudible] John Lawyer [ph] and John Vestle [ph] or any of the chaps who run—Ralph Graham [ph]—chaps who were running various departments, from mill painting to the craft program, uh, poster projects and so on. George always respected professional people and gave them their head.

HARLAN PHILIPS: How much direction [inaudible] did you get from Eddie Kale [ph]?

PETER POLLACK: Um, I used to see Eddie, and he was—what I liked about him is he was an excellent coach. Direction, no, but he gave a good pep talk. And you liked to be in Eddie's company. Because when he left, you were—[inaudible] doing something which, no matter how respected you might feel about what you were accomplishing [inaudible] you knew you were in something which was important in our time, at that time. It was an essential movement. I knew a lot about this, too, because I was raised on socialism. I was raised on the belief in man. And my father was a socialist, as I think I told you, who took a homesteader in North Dakota and built a [inaudible] socialist colony out there. So, I know something about it. And he taught me this as a boy, and I was a very young boy, or a young man, 20 years old. But this was part of my background, and so this was, again, something which I believed in. And Eddie has [inaudible] to do the same thing. Eddie came from my part of the world. He came from the Red River Valley, up in North Dakota. Wrote a book on that subject. Once interviewed my mother and talked about this whole [inaudible]. So I liked this. I liked what Eddie had to offer. Uh, Eddie played politics, which was good. George played politics. But by so doing on state and national level, he left us alone to go and do our job.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Did they, uh, defend your right to do [inaudible], too?

PETER POLLACK: Yes. Yes. Yes. They—they—they backed me up.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible] There's only uniqueness in the art world, anyway, and I suspect that there's only uniqueness in working in the South Side of Chicago. You know, but for this train of circumstances. But [inaudible].

PETER POLLACK: [Inaudible.]

HARLAN PHILIPS: But—because there in Washington, or there wherever they are, they're not on the farm any more, and that's [inaudible].

PETER POLLACK: Yeah. But, you see, the difference was this: They wanted—meaning Eddie, Harry Hopkins [ph], that whole bunch—wanted to see that the Negro would do this, and in Harlem, especially, wanted it done. But they couldn't get anybody dedicated enough to go and work their ass off, to go and do the job. So, it isn't—in Harlem, all I could do, there was Augusta Savage [ph], I remember, who was the director then. She was a sculptor who was very ambitious as a sculptor, and she was a lousy sculptor, at that. But she ran this place. And she, um—the government bought the space and paid the rent, which was against the art center movement idea, because then you had a temporary thing. We—and I believe this—were trying to build something which was definite, which was constructive, which had a chance to last. You see it? Not just a temporary payment to go and give a few classes. So you had to build it with the community's funds, so the community would own it. Then that we gave them instructors, or gave them material, or assistance of one kind or another—meaning the government—then it was of no consequence, because the community would still have to go to—if they started classes and had obligations to the community—would necessarily have to go and continue those classes if the WPA pulled out. Which is what happened. [Inaudible] Harlem closed the minute the government stopped paying rent. And they've never been successful with any kind of a project like this. Therefore, again, I had to go and show up in New York, because I had to go show them how to do this in Chicago. So we proceeded to go and build this thing, on the—from the book, as it were.

HARLAN PHILIPS: You had much to do with Tom Parker [ph]?

PETER POLLACK: Tom was Eddie's assistant. I used to see Tom. Tom—our—you know, the art world is so small that paths cross so strangely. Tom Parker later became director of the American Federation of Arts. And then, years later, I became director of the American Federation of Arts. Tom was an architect. He's now down somewhere in Carolina or Virginia. Uh, I like Tom. Tom, again, was a charmer. He was a Southern gentleman and he was a in Flor—in Washington, where he could take care of both sides of the fence, you see. But Washington meant very little to us until the dedication of the arts center, when I had Mrs. Roosevelt come out. And that was a little trick that we pulled, where I raised $7,000, charging $15 for membership so you could attend the dinner we were going to give her at one of the halls and also to come to the arts center and we put a nationwide hookup on. So this was great, because this was the sort of thing—well, then is when all the boys came out and all the brass came out from Washington, and they had a perfect right to. Because we had a nationwide hookup, and Mrs. Roosevelt came, and we raised, I'd say, $7,000 on that night. Just that day. And Mrs. Roosevelt said she had to leave and we talked with her, pleaded with her. Didn't have to plead much. Mrs. Thompson [ph] wanted her to go [inaudible] but, um, [inaudible] Mrs. Roosevelt always gets $1,500 for a lecture and gives it to charity. And I remember saying to Mrs. Thompson, "Mrs. Thompson, and what do you think we are if not charitable cases out here?" Mrs. Roosevelt decided to stay.

HARLAN PHILIPS: You had a coup on your hands.

PETER POLLACK: Yeah, that was a great coup.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Yeah. What did all this mean in terms of the, uh, schools?

PETER POLLACK: Schools—those with whom I spoke, the—Mrs. Prescott, who is the judge's wife, who was assistant principal of the big high school, and other people of that caliber were proud. They sent me to town, said, "Call me," and say, "We have a very talented young man here,"—middle and high school teacher saying, "Only the most ignorant and the buggy ones are the ones who have talent in art, so we'll send you those." This was the attitude Negro teachers had about their own brilliant students. [inaudible] their way. And talent is still there. I don't doubt that the Negro will take his place in the graphic and plastic arts the way he has in the musical arts. He has it. You know, the Jew, after all, was never known for his ability as an artist, as a plastic and graphic artist, until Pissarro. And because of the laws that prohibited him from doing so. [inaudible] men of the Jewish talents today that are coming up. It's no different. The prohibitions are the things that kept him from the expansion of their expression.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Yeah. [inaudible] creating [inaudible].

PETER POLLACK: For myself, I suppose, more than anybody else. [Laughs.]

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible] I mean, you know, you got a lot of kids and people who have a statement to make [cross talk]

PETER POLLACK: There's no kid in [inaudible] a lot more of it should be done. You wouldn't have delinquents. I've always believed that. I really—I believe in public education and the assets [inaudible] I really believe that you've got to—maybe it stems from the day I walked into the Art Institute. But I do believe that art is not for the rich man's son alone.

HARLAN PHILIPS: No. Did you run the school entirely on [inaudible]?

PETER POLLACK: The whole place was run by the community's funds. The community had to raise the money. The salaries were paid by the government.

HARLAN PHILIPS: So it was the people [inaudible]—

PETER POLLACK: That's right. The material had to be bought, the chalk, I don't know, I conned barrels and barrels of chalk out of various chalk companies, and reams of paper out of paper companies. Oh, we were professional moochers of all time at the arts center. But that was the way we worked, and we lived that way.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Did it have any political overtones at all?

PETER POLLACK: No. No, I am glad to say it never did. There was a time when the Communist Party tried to take us over. They wanted to go and take the place over, make a cell out of it, and I kicked them out, and I had a hell of a fight. But this was the only time there was a direct attempt to go and take it over and make it into a place where they could hold their meetings and they could run it and so on. And they got into the board, and they tried to railroad a meeting with—fortunately, Judge Prescott and Mrs. Vickerson and Mrs. Reed and the rest of these people could see through it. And so they simply called for a vote of confidence, and the director and the trustees, and there was no problem.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Yeah. [Inaudible] in those days, you know, the board of trustees [inaudible] represented sponsors.

PETER POLLACK: Well, they didn't give much money. They didn't give much money. But at least they were ostensibly, an acting board. At least they'd come to meetings and talk once in a while.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Well, was the—was the search for funds from [cross talk]—

PETER POLLACK: Constantly, yes. And I was—constantly going on. And then, afterward, the WPA closed up and I wasn't getting paid, and I still ran the place for six, seven months. And I know they raised my salary twice what I was getting and then never paid it. [Laughs.] And I just stayed on.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible] grew well. Green or otherwise.

PETER POLLACK: Never paid it. Just a little money. We'd raised some money from the artists [inaudible] and I got some money from another—from a sponsor, and so I had a little money, but that was it.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Uh-huh. Get much chance to see the changes that were effectuated, if any, among youngsters who came there?

PETER POLLACK: Yes. Yes. You could see it. Yes, you could. You could see it going. You could see it really developing. Um, one kid, I remember, who was—it was so obvious, a piece of therapy would've worked. Uh, gave him—there was a good Negro sculptor named Perkins who liked to carve away on stone. And this kid was about 15, 16 with huge shoulders, and violent. I gave him to Marion Perkins. Piece of his hangs in the Art Institute of Chicago. I mean, his piece of sculpture, and there's a piece at the Museum of Modern Art here. Anyway, Perkins gave him a chisel and a mallet and had him carve away on stone. And that guy, in a year, was—really knew what he was doing. He was just a big, healthy, violent young man who had to channel his interests and his energies, and he was. He was learning.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But this, uh, you know, in short, you tailor-made the program to suit the local situation.

PETER POLLACK: That's right. You can't superimpose it, that was our whole thing. You don't superimpose an art museum or an art center on a community. Becomes too precious. You found [inaudible] found what the community wanted and then develop it there. For example, with my love of African sculpture, I put together an African sculpture show for that community. And Mrs. A, Mrs. B., and Mrs. C made no bones about it. Mr. Pollack, we're as educated, we're as talented and sophisticated as you. We don't have to be shown these savage works. And you tell them, "Well, look, Picasso was influenced by it, and Braque and Modigliani, and this is a good thing." And, "We don't care who was influenced by it. It's nothing but savages' work, and we don't want to see it. We want to see the same thing that they see at the Art Institute." And I said, "Well, come with me to the Art Institute, and I'll show you." Well, that's when meetings were—and excursions to the Art Institute began.

HARLAN PHILIPS: In short, you took the South Side of Chicago's horizons and expanded them.

PETER POLLACK: Tried to. Now, the Negro today is so proud of his African heritage. But in those days, he hated it. Because "back to Africa" movements was Bilbo in Mississippi, and Garvey, who was a Negro who was exploiting his own people and robbed them blind, uh, "back to Africa" movement. Well, that's 40 years ago, the Garvey movement.

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible] What kind of press did you have?

PETER POLLACK: The Negro press was with us all the time, and then there were certain individuals that would come by and do, oh, great press. The *Chicago Sun* was coming into its own then. Excellent press. The *Times*, and so on.

HARLAN PHILIPS: What about the North Side of Chicago? How'd they react to the art [cross talk]?

PETER POLLACK: They liked it. They liked it. They respected it. Certain individuals, especially, but they wouldn't give us much money.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Yeah. How about the University of Chicago?

PETER POLLACK: Oh, we were outside of the bailiwick to the degree that no one wanted—only Bullrick Middledorf [ph] of the University of Chicago was on my board. He was head of the department at the time. But he did. He gave us a show, one time, of religious objects. You know, replicas of the Book of Kells and the cross of Saint Patrick's and so on. Uh, but the university per se, as a group, as a university, no, mm-mmm [negative]. No, it didn't do very much.

HARLAN PHILIPS: What about the Gold Coast?

PETER POLLACK: Uh, just Mrs. Stark [ph], Mrs.—and that's Cunningham Stark, and, oh, I remember, she once hid—she had a lovely flat, big flat, on—apartment on Cedar Street. And, uh, we were making a movie, and everything is going on at the center, and somebody was making a film, raised a little money, they're making a film, and they wanted to use a very rich woman's flat or [inaudible]. And so they went to Cedar Street, and first, they had to go up the—the manager of the building tried to get them to go up the freight elevator, and so she went and raised hell about that. She got stuck with a three-year lease because of that incident. It's all right, she fought it. She fought a good fight. But she—they came into the house. And she had this—again, a unique place. Silver walls with little boxes of lights below, just coming up the wall, which she could change from gunmetal to gold. And they said, "No, no, this wasn't rich enough." Some excellent paintings, but they didn't [inaudible] this is not what they wanted, a kind of a French floozy's house or something [inaudible] make it into a—they couldn't use her apartment. So the film was—the film wasn't made there at all.

HARLAN PHILIPS: But you didn't have any, uh—

PETER POLLACK: That was the North Side. She could try—she tried to give them money, which—very little of it. She tried to give them—very little. Marshall Field gave us a hundred dollars one time.

HARLAN PHILIPS: But philanthropy by a lot of—

PETER POLLACK: And we worked at correcting. Had I had the time, another couple of years, and getting a couple of good North Side ladies on the board who would've taken this as their pet charity. Well, I don't doubt all the money we ever would've needed would've been coming in. But it just wasn't ready enough.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Yeah. So in short you saw the possibility of broadening this partnership—

PETER POLLACK: Yes.

HARLAN PHILIPS: —[inaudible] it's not time enough to, uh—well, you only had, what, four years, five years?

PETER POLLACK: Oh, I had less than that. I had those three and a half years [inaudible] four years was the maximum, no. Just about four years [inaudible].

HARLAN PHILIPS: Well, when they terminated the WPA, and they moved a good bit of the works completed to Chicago, to some warehouse in Chicago—

PETER POLLACK: That's right. Mildred Holzhauer knows about that. She distributed them.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Yeah. But so, yours has continuity. It maintained itself.

PETER POLLACK: It maintained itself. Certain number of pictures are still, I wouldn't doubt, in the collection. I left some fairly nice things, especially by Negro artists. I wanted to go and conserve everything I could that was painted by Negro artists on the project. And I left them there, though. What happened, I don't know. [Inaudible] left this drawing I have here, Hosier Carter [ph]. It's an excellent drawing. That fellow lives in New York. He's now, he does the covers for the opera house, the New York Opera. The—their catalogs, and their bulletin. John Carlos [ph] is here. Sebree. There are a number of artists in New York. Charlie Davis [ph] is out the West Coast. Charlie White [ph] is out the West Coast. Henry Abey [ph] went back to sticking pigs at the stockyards. He was a six-foot-four artist—he used to paint the most delicate portraits of his daughters. But he used to be a pigsticker, you know, hamming a 16-pound sledge. And he went back to the stockyards when the—there were a lot of talents that went to hell. Elliston [ph] was a good artist. Whenever that name comes into my mind. There were a lot of good artists who just went to hell. I worked with Alain Locke, who was on my board, Professor Alain Locke of Howard, and did a book on the Negro in art at that time. And I did that whole section on the Midwest. But the talents were growing. But you don't believe—you may not believe it, but there were some extraordinary talents that had gone to waste. They're just no longer heard about.

HARLAN PHILIPS: They were discovered.

PETER POLLACK: They were discovered, and they showed, for a while.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Yeah. Well, how symptomatic was this of the atmosphere that was floating around Chicago? Of this whole process of identifying with a given group, raising the level of interest, if for no other reason than just—come, was it well-attended, shows that you had?

PETER POLLACK: Oh, yes, oh, yes. It was well-attended. Um, by colored and white. Well-attended, oh, yes. But there were all kinds of activities going on, but you've got to realize moviemaking, photography, ceramics, sculpture, and painting. There were lectures. Uh, they had—we had it going. Poetry, the dance. It was all in this

little building. And, you know, when you're young enough as we were, 25 years ago, this thing was, you know, bouncing and—constantly bouncing.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Yeah. Did you run into Catherine Dunn [ph]?

PETER POLLACK: I knew her well. I knew her well. She was out there. She gave us some talks. She was on the Writers' Project in those days. That's when I knew her. I bumped into her recently, in Washington. We were both giving evidence before the Pell Committee [ph] for the fine arts bills. That's when I was at the federation. And she was giving it for the theater, and I was giving it for art. So, we had a long talk. She lives down in New York, at the Village. I'm supposed to call her, and her husband, John Pratz [ph], a Chicago boy, too—I've known him many years.

HARLAN PHILIPS: So, there was, you know—you expanded acquaintanceship beyond your wildest dreams, probably [inaudible]—

PETER POLLACK: Oh, no question about it. We knew each other. This was part of the art world in Chicago.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Yeah. But, you know, I wanted, um—I asked initially what kind of art market there was. Anything come out of this from a market point of view—

PETER POLLACK: No.

HARLAN PHILIPS: —from the local talent?

PETER POLLACK: No. No. Very little.

HARLAN PHILIPS: How come?

PETER POLLACK: People weren't buying art. People were hungry.

HARLAN PHILIPS: And then the war took over, and they didn't care.

PETER POLLACK: And the war took over. It was something else. People weren't buying art. They were—were working. They were working for the art projects, and they were giving the stuff away to schools and eleemosynary institutions.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Yeah, yeah. But you had that same program of distribution? In the center?

PETER POLLACK: No, no, no. Because, you see, that was at the project downtown. The center was running itself, in its own ways. We use those artists. When they talk, they didn't have to go giving this—as many paintings to the easel project. But the projects were the great impetus to the education of the great mass to the arts.

HARLAN PHILIPS: How many centers were you able to get started?

PETER POLLACK: Well, started—

HARLAN PHILIPS: [Inaudible] effectively [inaudible].

PETER POLLACK: Effectively was the Negro center. But there was one going at the Jewish People's Institute, by the time I showed them how to do it. But that was a technical problem. That wasn't the kind of an emotional tied-up problem that I made with the arts center among the Negros.

HARLAN PHILIPS: So, far as you're able to recall, was the vast percentage of support, in terms of sponsorship, Negro?

PETER POLLACK: I would say yes. I would say that 80 percent of the money that came into the arts center came from Negro people.

HARLAN PHILIPS: That tells its own story [inaudible].

PETER POLLACK: And most of it came from the Artists and Models Ball, my membership campaign, and that was it.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But you said—you effectively set up these fundraising things, didn't you?

PETER POLLACK: Yes.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Yeah. But you didn't have to follow any—what?—requirements as from Washington, D.C.? This was your own problem.

PETER POLLACK: Bud, I no more paid attention to what Washington was saying. I was running a center. And ostensibly, I was the director of a museum, is what it really amounted to. I had a board I was much more concerned about. When it came to Washington, it was George Thornton Cahill [ph]. Let them give me directives. And this is exactly what their jobs were. They were the politicos. I was one of the professionals, the same as any one of the other supervisors or artists running their own jobs.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Did you have any other contacts with the non-community-arts-center art projects in Chicago? Was—

PETER POLLACK: Yes.

HARLAN PHILIPS: —there such a thing? Group of painters, mural painters?

PETER POLLACK: When I was trying to build a center and I wasn't—took months and months, took practically a year before I saw light—uh, I would be doing everything downtown. Taking in pictures and working with the artists and the regular kind of job. It wasn't necessary to be the easel supervisor. But their work, I could see. I always did look at them. I had to go see it regularly, later, to go and pick out exhibitions from it.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Yeah. Yeah, you could—[laughs] in short, you were key to Negro art, as far as—

PETER POLLACK: It wasn't Negro then. Later, it was all—

[Cross talk.]

PETER POLLACK: —Negro, white, it maybe made no difference. I didn't believe in those—distinguishing only Negro artists and show Negro's art—artists to Negros. It was all kind of work. But I was—wanted to go and get on tour, which I did, sending throughout the United States an exhibition of Negro artists' works. That was something else. That was an important show.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Well, sure. What I meant was that you—through this arts center, through your earlier contact and through your interests, you were able to, you know, develop a directory in your head of where these people were and what kind of work they were doing.

PETER POLLACK: That's right.

HARLAN PHILIPS: I mean, it's like a catalogue, which but for this arts center, might not have existed at all.

PETER POLLACK: That's right.

HARLAN PHILIPS: In short, preserving talent is distinct from letting it go down the drain for want of some sustenance.

PETER POLLACK: Well, the catalogues, as you can see—

HARLAN PHILIPS: You know, even [inaudible]—

PETER POLLACK: —here, the catalogues we put out in connection with the shows, were as well printed as any museum catalog. Tried to write as well as anybody could, and—so that it would explain to people who would see it, and get a catalogue free, as to what the exhibition was about. Whether it be Richmond Barte [ph], or whether it be a solo Negro sculptor from New York, or whether it be the engravings of Skiphill Moorehead. In reproduction, you could hardly find the originals. This was a very important thing. We'd also bring historians in, who were, you know, important historians, to talk to people. But we'd also show them the prints of Max Kahn and that group, or show them the paintings of, uh, abstract paintings that were going on in New York.

HARLAN PHILIPS: You did?

PETER POLLACK: Sure.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Sure. Who set up the traveling show business to [inaudible]?

PETER POLLACK: In our case, we set up our own.

HARLAN PHILIPS: You did?

PETER POLLACK: That's right.

HARLAN PHILIPS: So, you did run a museum, then.

PETER POLLACK: Oh, sure. We're running a regular center.

HARLAN PHILIPS: But it didn't sound like the centers in Nevada became only, uh—I saw [inaudible] where artworks would come to be seen and then move on. And yours wasn't like that.

PETER POLLACK: No, we had activities going—

HARLAN PHILIPS: All the time.

PETER POLLACK: —constantly.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Yeah. What effect does New York or San Francisco have on this? Any at all?

PETER POLLACK: What did it have? I came out to New York. I gave a talk at the Harlem arts center. And saw their single floor, at 125th and Lenox, and could see that they were very busy and occupied with showing artists' works, having some classes. But they knew we existed, and they were very proud of what we were doing. But there was little rapport between us, because they were running their little show under problems where they couldn't possibly cooperate with us.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Hmm. I'm sure you didn't have much in the way of visiting firemen to find out—

PETER POLLACK: Rarely.

HARLAN PHILIPS: —what the experience had been.

PETER POLLACK: Rarely.

HARLAN PHILIPS: And much more the newspaper coverage, and the reports of the catalogue.

PETER POLLACK: There was nothing going on.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Nothing.

PETER POLLACK: [Inaudible.]

HARLAN PHILIPS: Even from New York, well, I'm thinking of it in this term. Even today, people think that New York is a window on America. Well, I don't know.

PETER POLLACK: Well, I just got back from Los Angeles, as I think I told you. And we certainly saw a hell of a lot of good work in the city of Los Angeles, and that's not even counting San Francisco. There are plenty of galleries on La Cienega, and there are plenty of galleries throughout the city. And the universities there are—the bigger art department is as big as the University of Illinois, practically, with 14,000 students, half of whom, I think, take art. That may be an exaggeration, but you know what I mean, is there's [cross talk] activities going on.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Sure. It tells a story. [Laughs.] Uh, but the need is greatest, probably, in the Middle West. Tell me this: what effect did it have on the Chicago Art Institute? Your roots [inaudible]—

PETER POLLACK: Well, Dan Rich [ph] is a liberal, intelligent, and progressive man, and he was with me. He got on the board, and he worked along with us. He gave as much time as he could. He couldn't give any money, because the Art Institute of Chicago just didn't give money. He himself gave maybe some $50 a year, which is, you know, is good. We appreciate it.

HARLAN PHILIPS: But the Institute is a kind of beacon for [inaudible].

PETER POLLACK: The Institute was. The center is—it still is—is one of the greatest collections, you know, in the world, and it tries to be all things to the city of Chicago, from the Old Masters to way-out avant-garde. And it always has somebody who's a curator who's avant-garde oriented. And, uh, there's a big row going on right now, as you know, because there's going to be a museum of modern art in the city of Chicago, now being built. So, Chicago has its own problems. And it wasn't going to—and the Art Institute couldn't possibly support the arts center. It might have; perhaps it should have. But Dan supported WPA. And all the prints that were made on WPA are in the print department. All the archives are in the library, which you ought to know. All the picture library and the archive material of the Federal Art Project, I believe, is in the library of the Art Institute of Chicago, in the Ryerson Library. Check that, bud, because I think you'll find a source of a lot of material there.

HARLAN PHILIPS: But isn't—wasn't the arts center, in effect—in terms of its classes, its teaching, its schools for

people of all kinds—duplicated, in effect, with the Chicago Art Institute?

PETER POLLACK: Oh, but the Art Institute is, after all, giving a degree, and we're not giving a degree. We were just—that's all we were doing there. We were—this is for the dedicated amateur or the student who wants to learn.

HARLAN PHILIPS: But you knew better than that, didn't you, at the time?

PETER POLLACK: Certainly we knew better. But the fact is that the Art Institute was not the competition with us, because they were—had people there who were studying to get a degree, mostly. And then, they had these—they had these people coming for diplomas. And, after all, the Art Institute of Chicago was the greatest art school in the world, something like 9,000 students, of which 1,800 or so went for a degree. The rest of them came on Friday, Saturdays, and Sunday, and Wednesday nights, I suppose.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Right, right. But this, uh—without giving a degree, you were, in effect, were [cross talk]—

PETER POLLACK: I have hope that a lot of people—there's no question were educated. I just hope a lot of people did carry on after we left.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Yeah. Besides, you said something earlier about discovering talented people going to [inaudible]—

PETER POLLACK: There's no question about that.

HARLAN PHILIPS: And in—and developing that talent. Um, this may bear an effect that the Art Institute was a going concern, and largely a conservative concern. Um, it had certain requirements to make for its constituency, mainly its student body. Uh, you could afford to be more, what? Experimental?

PETER POLLACK: We let them work. We really let them work, once we—they'd ask questions and we gave them some answers. We didn't play the, you know, do it our way, compulsory to go and copy the academic way. Nor did we let them go and flounder. Each person who came there to teach was strange but within a very short time became so involved with the students they had. But they really gave themselves. And it wasn't teaching by rote, and it wasn't teaching tricks. It was teaching techniques, and also teaching them to try things. Can't make artists. You know you can't.

HARLAN PHILIPS: I know. That's just one of the reasons why I raised a whole [inaudible] about the Chicago Art Institute. Because it's in the business of making artists.

PETER POLLACK: They're in the business of giving degrees. Whether you'd make—they make 85 percent teachers, and—or 75 percent teachers and 10 percent commercial artists or interior decorators and maybe another five percent to go into portraits. And then 10 percent, perhaps, will go into the making of being painters, sculptors, or printmakers and try and make a livelihood from it.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Were the scene shifts in the '40s—or the—late '39, even, to a concern, or a growing concern, for the new, disturbing voices abroad? Uh, was there any effort to shape the community arts center toward a preparedness? [Inaudible] to keep it in tune with the march of events? You did set out to feed people—

PETER POLLACK: No.

HARLAN PHILIPS: —the WPA. But, you know—

PETER POLLACK: Well, the WPA per se, as an organization, became a—post, became a map project. And they worked for the United States Army, and they were making maps, which they were doing in silk screen and blowing up, making details and analysis of rivers, et cetera, et cetera. All kinds of maps. The arts center, I stuck with it until I left in early '43, late '42. And then went overseas.

HARLAN PHILIPS: But there were—

PETER POLLACK: The center was being run as a center.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Period.

PETER POLLACK: That's right.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Irrespective of what was going on—

PETER POLLACK: That's right.

HARLAN PHILIPS: —in the rest of the world.

PETER POLLACK: That's right.

HARLAN PHILIPS: But you still had the same feelings about the Spanish Civil War, the same feelings about Hitler and Mussolini? [Inaudible.]

PETER POLLACK: Yeah, but it was a different—

HARLAN PHILIPS: It didn't affect the—

PETER POLLACK: —different problem now. The center was going on, because the public—I mean, the people [inaudible] center had been educated to run the center. And they'd run it. And they knew full well it could do very little on a political level or trying to fight the battles, whereas it could be of some importance in the community if they continued to go and teach art as they had been taught to do. And artists, now, were no longer being paid, so they were volunteering their time. Uh, every one of us was. And I left, and it went on the way it did. And when I came back, I was offered a job to get in the Negro affairs with the city of Chicago, and I said no. I'm not interested in Negro affairs. I was interested in Negro art. And that job's been done, and I just don't want to do any more in this field. I'm not going to be a professional in Negro affairs. It doesn't interest me enough.

HARLAN PHILIPS: Well [inaudible] had the great gratification to see this thing float [inaudible]—

PETER POLLACK: That's right, that's right.

HARLAN PHILIPS: If for no other reason than if you know something about—well, the learning process of gaining support, talking, selling an idea, and getting support for it with some continuity is, you know—

PETER POLLACK: Well, it's—you know how difficult that can be, at best. But to get it first thing is, uh—

HARLAN PHILIPS: That's taffy, pulling taffy—[cross talk.]

PETER POLLACK: [Cross talk] art. [Laughs.]

HARLAN PHILIPS: Done.

PETER POLLACK: All right, I'm—I think you've had it. My God, you've had more than an hour, haven't you?

HARLAN PHILIPS: Yeah. Oh, the shift into high gear [inaudible]—

[END OF INTERVIEW.]