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Oral history interview with Hyman J. Warsager, 1965 October 14

Contact Information
Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington. D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Hyman Warsager on October 14, 1965. The interview took place in Hackensack, New Jersey, and was conducted by Harlan Phillips for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Give me some insight prior to the 30s, as to what you were doing, what you sprang from, what was in the air by way of opportunity, what sort of interests you had, how it developed, something along those lines.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Well, I always drew. I was always drawing and this was the only goal I ever had, to draw, and of course, coming from a poor family, meant work and study.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Was there an aesthetic thing in the family?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes, my father painted and his grandfather -- it must have been quite a few generations.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: All along in this --

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes, my grandfather painted portraits, not as a professional thing, but a kind of semi-professional thing. As I understand it, there were quite a few people in the family, many generations, but I don't have any real information on it. So at my venture my father, of course, was tickled silly because he wanted a son who liked the same things he did.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: He would take me off to museums, I remember, ever since I was practically old enough to walk. Since I responded to this, this was wonderful for him, and we have very much in common, consequently.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: A kind of bridge --

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes. So it was just, you know, natural that I go to art school and aim this way. There was never any controversy in the family about becoming an artist. Then I lived in Connecticut and came to New York to study and did it the hard way -- seven years at different schools.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Any teachers along the way that kicked open windows?

HYMAN WARSAGER: No, unfortunately, I think that's the greatest regret that I have. I don't believe I got the slightest bit of guidance from anybody. I mean I went to the Grand Central School of Art to study illustration, which was my inclination at the time. We worked from the figure, and we learned to do this and to do that, but also with no insight into anything, you know, no aesthetic insight, not even composition, not even an awareness was conveyed that the picture is the thing and the drawing. Then I went to Pratt, which was pretty much the same thing. Some teachers were excited about painting, but they were very academic, or not liberal -- they were very limited in their thinking.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Weren't open to something new?

HYMAN WARSAGER: No. Though I was astonished when I joined an artist group and found out what there was. At first I looked down on them because I thought the work was crude, that they would do anything. After a couple of years I realized that it was the other way around -- that I was the crude one and the crude work -- well, this was the way I saw it, coming from a strictly academic background, in that the crudeness was not crudeness at all. Gradually I evolved the hard way. I do everything the hard way, you know. I tasted music, too, that way, you know, very light music all the way up to very esoteric things.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, when you want to make a statement, even in school, you cut the pattern of your statement then consistent with the academic norms, or the standards that they set?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Well, yeah. It's a matter of ignorance, you see, I was a fumbling art student, despite my father's interest in art -- his was an old-fashioned French attitude, you know, you make a painting, like romantic literature, so he couldn't help me aesthetically, you see. And I knocked around from one school to another, and it was only when I joined an artist club that I became exposed to different points of view, began to develop my own tastes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Where was this artist group?

HYMAN WARSAGER: In New York. It was in the Artist union which became the United American Artists and so on.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, this is --

HYMAN WARSAGER: I don't want to go back earlier because, it's things you don't mention.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, as far as I'm concerned it was the ideas that were in the air.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes, it was a social school of painting, which I first got interested in, and I felt the vigor of the whole thing. I realized now it was very a sectarian point of view, but it had at least life to it and there was an honesty to it, whether it was good or bad. It really didn't matter to that extent -- at least it was honest to my way of thinking as compared to now, where these styles are flipping around like crazy. It's merchandizing more that it's anything. Even though foolish, sectarian subjective, but at least it came from honest convictions right or wrong.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I think there was probably an easy translation between what was done, what was thought and what was experienced out in the street. There is that.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes. There was that relationship, yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Also, I think there's something about a collective, a group of people thinking aloud which is different than trying to do it alone in an attic.

HYMAN WARSAGER: It was the world of difference. If you've experienced the other, the exchange of ideas, the cross-stimulation, and the excitement you know, then the attic will never do.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No, it doesn't.

HYMAN WARSAGER: In the excitement of working differently, and of "let's paint", but it's not as exciting and I don't think you learn as much. It was a tremendous exchange, it helped the younger artist to improve tremendously. I think we made big strides only because of this exposure to the group, and there was lot of real honesty, because the experienced artist with real knowledge were very free for the most part -- both in techniques and expressing their aesthetic viewpoints. We had symposiums going and, you know, everything took place. We had our own publication which I was an art editor.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh, were you really?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes. I don't think this would have ever happened to most of us in growth, at least the excitement, if it wasn't for the group.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes, it's like a seminar.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes. And I think that's what happened in Paris, you know, it was an exchange.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Much as they developed separately, and contributed their own geniuses, still there was this cross stimulation and exchange.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Besides, I think there's something to the fact that growing points of society, are the lunatic fringe, whether it is in music, or art, or idea. It's the experimentalist frankly who are not comfortable yet, you know, and the happy thing is that they never quite get comfortable.

HYMAN WARSAGER: That's right.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Because they have a built in -- it's like being a walking seismograph for other ideas --

HYMAN WARSAGER: Emotionally, it's uncomfortable, but artistically, its very good.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. It satisfies -- it's like trying to balance the polarities of satisfaction and dissatisfaction all at the same time, rather than being blind to possibilities which are beyond oneself by sampling some other -- just in the air, or setting themselves a narrow path instead of a free lunch counter.

HYMAN WARSAGER HYMAN WARSAGER: Somedays the beer is good, somedays the beer is flat, but you all get stirred up and churned up in the process and this is good.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I think in a very strong way, the nature of the group which doesn't have to be nameless, is almost a kind of early forerunner of what becomes the Federal Art Project, because they too were seminars, only with perhaps a kind of economic floor. It was different before, when you may have been involved in many odd jobs in order to sustain your major interest, but nonetheless the flavor is carried on, there is continuity --

HYMAN WARSAGER: Oh yes, yes in that sense, we had the experience of joint exhibitions and discussions and symposiums and all the was pretty familiar.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It's like sharpening your blade.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: On someone else.

HYMAN WARSAGER: But in this case, we were brought together not by economic requirements, but by sharing in common social ideas.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Oh yeah, which were alive -- you know --

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And which were --

HYMAN WARSAGER: Of the period.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Certainly, and symptomatic of the period. If nothing else, in the legacy of Saco Vanzentti, it's the Scotsboro Boys, I mean you could go right down the line. Those impulses which indigenous to America. The IWW out here in Patterson was the same kind of thing, so I don't look upon it as some do. Let's put it this way, I'm no Senator McCarthy. I know that richness comes from just this kind of thing -- even to the point where one becomes critical of oneself in the passing scene too, and this grows out of it, otherwise there isn't any growth, I think.

HYMAN WARSAGER: I admit honestly that I don't know what is happening today, you know, except what little I read and my own reactions. There is a lot of excitement as far as the museums are concerned. They're very excited about this period -- great American art, America leads in the art world and so on, to me maybe there's validity to it, and I'm sure there's some, but basically it's a form of tastemaking and -- what should I say -- merchandizing, a new merchandize. This is what we face in business. Everytime we see our sales representative, he says "what do you have that's new?" This reminds me so much -- but again it's very subjective and again not on tremendous knowledge, or anything that I have seen. To me, I would be going the other way from it, instead of stimulating me, I think it would send me the other way. The only thing that I am personally experiencing is that I want to see, you know what's in this thing. Is it my own ignorance, so I'm training to find out. You know, what I mean, you can't think it out. You have to kind of feel it. So I'm painting these different ways, although I can't identify with it, I'm going to school.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, you didn't have any sense of really identifying with the early group in terms of your own work, it was the criticism, wasn't it? Well, the group with whom you worked was an opening, an awakening.

HYMAN WARSAGER: You mean, a social -- well, I was very much taken with the idea of the changes, the social changes. I had no reservation about that. That's why I could participate. Then whatever style I had evolved from my limitations, by abilities, and trying to cope with material, it's very hard to express ideas about subjects that you know in any inventive way. I don't think anybody really succeeded, perhaps except the Mexicans, in combining social ideas, about doing this in a very inventive manner. I don't think the artist, as a whole, and myself succeeded. I think Ben Shahn does a much better job now than I think Orozco, you know, Sequiras, Riviera did. But I don't know that that failure was too serious.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No. No. The 30s, for what other reasons, you know, we were high centered. Everything that had the gaudiness and joy of the 20s was discredited.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: The old Wall Street firms, the banks, the corporate reorganizations, the freezing of people, look at the books that were published in those days about this thing and the other thing, I mean we had become enamoured of the bubble, and whamo -- it vanished. Maybe it was because our pocketbooks were thin that we rolled up our sleeves to find out what made the situation tick. This led into various avenues, whether it was economics, political, or social organization, or just organization -- look at that whole period in the 30s from the point of view of --- may bargain collectively?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Oh yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That had not been answered yet. It was open still, what until 1937 in the Supreme Court case, so it was a fluid period. We'd never bothered to examine what the hell America was. This gave us the opportunity to do so.

HYMAN WARSAGER: This was a tremendous transitional period.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. In which we had to take stock as to what we were really doing --

HYMAN WARSAGER: There was even the question of --

HARLAN PHILLIPS: The older groups contented themselves with talking about labels on bottles instead of dealing with content, their experience did not enable them to be open to a new suggestion. It was an almost automatic "no". Well, the nation moved. From '29 and thereafter, somebody had to do something. This was in the air, even for people who didn't share those social views -- the necessity of doing something, you know. Of course, it led to fantastic experimentation, which is always good. I like that kind of period. I think in many instances the artist led the way. Don't you have that feeling, that is -- how did you get involved with the government sponsored art program?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Well, I guess some of the older artist who were more involved, you know, had the names, led the way and the younger artists just kind of followed. In other words, if a friend of mine had not told me, "Why don't you try it," I wouldn't have thought about it. I don't think they would have considered the younger artists to begin with, the unknown artists. I think there was a group that was almost automatically taken in.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That was the New York PWAP thing.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes. Anyway, they were closer to the Museum people and the other people who were in the art world. They were kind of invited in, I guess, and they had the social contacts, and could mount some pressure.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes, you were a youngster in those days.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, that grew into -- later -- replaced by the WPA.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes. The Federal Art Projects.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. The Gibson committee, the College Art Associations, Audrey McMann, then I think there was the CWA, PWAP under Mrs. Force.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Oh that's right, I was going to mention this Mrs. Force, but I didn't get into it at that point.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No, no. Well how were you sustaining yourself in those days?

HYMAN WARSAGER: I was working. I was cartooning. I was house painting, grocery clerk and whatnot. I did just about everything.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I think it's certainly true, at least from the artists that I've sampled, they're the most resourceful from the point of view of doing something in order to sustain their interest, whatever it was, part-time, half-time, whatever it was, they've done it. They were jacks-of-all-kinds of trades.

HYMAN WARSAGER: The most popular thing was to marry a school teacher. I guess this was the height of affluence (hahaha).

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I guess it was done too, wasn't it?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But, you know, the WPA opened up a much wider gate -- did you get on that initially, or not?

HYMAN WARSAGER: The Federal Art Project. Yes. I was in on that. I was in the graphic arts section.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, you hadn't mentioned the graphic arts before. Is there some background to this too? Painting you've mentioned.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Well, yes. Actually I was a graphic artist. I started in lithography, but I changed and did

etching, wood engraving and wood cuts, finally serigraphy.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Well had you done this before the WPA came on?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes, I think I studied with lithography -- my start was in lithography.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You did?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Is there a teacher there that was helpful?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Well, I went to a small school, you may have known it -- American Artist's School.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: It was associated with the Artists Union. So I studied there, and then I taught there.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Lithography?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes. The other things I picked up on my own, plus the discussions that were held. This is where we had the exchanges. I forget how many different ways of doing etchings there were, but I think I knew them all. Gonso was very -- do you remember him?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: He was very wonderful to the younger people.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Was he?

HYMAN WARSAGER: That man knew so much, had a tremendous amount of knowledge. One meeting with him was enough to set you off, and all you had to do was experiment, and develop. There's all kinds of variations of each technique. I got enthused about color woodcuts. I saw an exhibition by Kirshman and that sent me off -- and the projects were flexible enough, so that you do this thing, so I got some big pieces of white wood or popular, and set myself up. All you needed was a spoon, and some knives and one artist saw it and before you knew it there was maybe forty artists doing color wood cuts. We created a whole movement which is still going strong. We had a couple of people doing colored wood cuts, but I'm afraid when I got interested in that deception I made sure that everybody knew about it, and it seemed to stimulate a lot of other people. Then I sold a lot of woodcuts to the museums. In fact, I did some woodcuts for the project and the museums saw them and wanted to buy them. I would get permission from the project to do another wood project, but after about three occasions, I thought they passed a new rule, so that you couldn't do this. well, we had -- oh incidently, I don't know if Tony mentioned color prints, but I think the whole interest in the United States, that exists even today, very much came from the Federal Art Project -- the graphic group. We had an opportunity to experiment. We had the printers. We had the lithographers. We had the man to print wood cuts. We had the men to print etchings -- all of them, very fine printers which is so important to the making of a good print. I mean a good artist is not necessarily a good printer. They are sometimes separate skills.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It is a separate technique.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Exactly. The artist is an exception if he does a good print, or makes a good print from his own plates. So we had the convenience. I worked on the serigraph with Tony and I worked on a five-color lithograph with the lithographer. Then I worked on woodcuts, five-color woodcuts, with the woodcut printer, and you would have to be a very wealthy artist in order to be able to do it, you know. As a matter of fact, you couldn't, so you can see how much we learned in a relatively short time by having these resources and facilities.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, at the time you joined, in terms of lithography, what was the state of the art?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Well, it was a lot of the French artist. There was a lot to go on and a nice long history, so it was very much the study, the French were doing color work, but there was very little color work in this country. There are very few artists who could afford to work on fire stones, because you have to retain your drawings, you can't just do a color printed -- you can, but it won't lead to good results. Because after you print each color, you want to modify your plates, your stone, and so it means that you have to keep five stones tied up, so this was beyond the reach of anybody. There's quite a few articles -- I don't know if you've collected that material. It was a great stimulation to do color work.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: I think there are a lot of color prints being made today because of this -- you know -- tremendous push.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: What was it that made you want to push the color?

HYMAN WARSAGER: I don't know. It's a matter of seeing the exciting things done by somebody else. It was contagious. Many, even your conservative artists, were encouraged by the fact that so many were doing it, and it didn't represent a great risk to do it. Many people who would be too conservative to even consider it were encouraged to do this by the supports they received and by the help. You know, they'd come out and see what you were doing and ask questions. I remember Harry Sternberg started in silk screen prints -- this is when we had our own business -- and he'd come up any time he'd want to do a print. He'd pop in and learn more about it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Like going to school.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes. I mean, you had ready access to almost any information you wanted. The project was better because you had many people. We could pick somebody who was close to you point of view, you know, and get help from him.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: How much did you learn from the printer himself? Wait, I'd better turn this over.

(Part two)

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You indicated that you had worked with several printers.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes, in each medium.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Well, we had Frank MacAvel, I think, who was a very famous etcher it his own right, printing these etchings, so you could get tremendous knowledge from him. I mean all these things expedited your accumulation of experience. You might spend a lifetime accumulating that on your own.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: And the lithographers, I think, were commercial lithographers, but very good ones, and they had worked with artists and they had a combination of experience. We did work on Zinc plates as well as stones and you have to know what happens if you going to learn it strictly by doing them, then you might do a hundred before you had full knowledge of what happens. This way you do a couple, plus the conversations and suggestions, it's almost a lifetime within a couple of months.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And moreover, he was ready at hand where you could watch.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You could see what was going on.

HYMAN WARSAGER: You could switch around, you could -- the only problem as far as I was concerned was we were only allowed to do one a month, one print a month. I would prefer to do something like three or four. I had more motivation, being fairly young, I found that when I did things for myself, they were poorer, you see, and when I worked for the project my work was better. I didn't quite have the drive when I was left to my own devices. I would prefer to submit three per month. They wouldn't hear of it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: What was that, an administrative problem, or --?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes. Yes. Your requirement is one, and that was it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Was this a question of stones available, or what?

HYMAN WARSAGER: No, because you could have used your own stones as far as that goes. People got into it, to do your own work in it, could have their own stones.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, what about the content?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Well, if you mean a sort of censorship?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Was there any?

HYMAN WARSAGER: I don't believe so. I think the inclination was to avoid certain subjects, but I think this was

only self-policing. I don't remember any pressure at the time.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, were there all shades of persuasion in the office, I mean in the shop? From the point of view of interest?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes, I think so, yes. I don't think there was any implied pressure, or strict guidance.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That in itself is a boon.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Oh yes. I think in my own case I had done so much social themes that I wanted just to do something else to make sure that I could do it, because, I don't know, it was a peculiar limitation of my own but I always used to wonder, "Well, all right, supposing I leave this type of subject matter, what can I do? Can I really do something else?" I think I wanted to experience this. Some self-doubts, you know. Perhaps we leaned on subject matter, I don't know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It may well have been, you know, some of the sense of insecurity even on the project, because Congress kept them on a financial snaffle bit.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Oh yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: They never knew what quota reductions were going to be, and could you turn your hand, you know?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Or, were you going to confine yourself, restrict yourself? Could you make a different pattern walk? That may have entered into it. You know, eating is a comfortable commodity.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: A necessity.

HYMAN WARSAGER: But I don't recall too clearly. My impression is that there was no implied intimidation of any kind. People I think perhaps, to some degree, were concerned with having the different institutions, public institutions, pick our work, so we may have varied our subject because we were told occasionally, "This place has requested your work," or "It's in this collection," and so on. A lot of work was placed in collections through the WPA, as I recall.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: So whether that had any bearing on it, you know, to have things requested, I don't recall.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It may have been, in part, that the administrators --

HYMAN WARSAGER: Pushed certain work, you mean?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No. Well, also artists. Like Burgoyne Diller --

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: --in the mural and, you know, and to get him to think in censorship terms, although with the murals it was a whole question of having it acceptable to a sponsor.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: He would be arguing, in a sense, for acceptance of ideas even which he didn't like perhaps as mural things.

HYMAN WARSAGER: I believe so. I think all the supervisors were that way. They weren't screened out for any particular opinions, or anything like that. No, they represented a group, on the whole, of people we respected. They were liberal and progressive, if not in their work, in their attitude.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Like Glen Ward, who was extremely conservative in his own work, you know, an illustrator, but idea-wise was a very liberal man.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: That he was open to conviction?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes. He didn't care for abstract type work himself, but I don't think he opposed any ideas because they were different than his own.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. This may have, you know, allowed for greater experimentation, too.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Oh yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: The climate was creative.

HYMAN WARSAGER: You could tell him to fly a kite, for that matter, which I did. For instance, Glen Ward insisted that I was a lousy woodcut artist. He was an engraver, you know. He just hacked away with big chisels. He thought I was a very good etcher. There was a little contention between us on that score because I had a lot of approval of my woodcuts in museums, and there were shows.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Your work was shown.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: In conjunction with others.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: To illustrate the, you know, development of the new processes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Well, the project work was sent around as a group to show, but we also exhibited individually where we weren't known. You'd just wrap you prints up and send them off to some exhibition, which is a tough way to compete. You have nothing going for you except your work.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Not influence or anything. I mean you send it off to Seattle, they didn't know you from a hole in the wall. I mean it was a very good test, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It's the ultimate test.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, what were some of the problems in the development of multi-color prints?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Well, the use of color as color. That's one of the aesthetic problems. Well, mastering the technique you had to visualize and you had to work with as many colors as many blocks. Not every artist could do this. But basically I mean that was just technique. That's only a tool, but the big problem, I don't know if it was quite resolved was using color not as an addition to the key block, but as color. I think most of us were inclined to make a key plate and then use color. I'm not sure that we answered that color. In other words, are you simply putting colors in the background to go with the plate? Or are you doing what a painter would do, make the color do the work itself? The color is the picture. Of course I don't think I'm satisfied with what I did, and I'm sure I'm not satisfied with what most artists did. The exception, I think, was Louis Schanker. He was way ahead of us in that respect.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Is he still alive?

HYMAN WARSAGER: I don't know. I haven't -- you see, I haven't been in touch with anybody for a long time. I don't know. I hope he is.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I'm trying to get in touch with him.

HYMAN WARSAGER: You are?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. He was up at some school on the Hudson. The name escapes me for the moment, when I called up there they told me he wasn't associated with the school any more, and Fritz Eichenberg --

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes, he was --

HARLAN PHILLIPS: -- indicated that he was dead.

HYMAN WARSAGER: That he had died?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. But he wasn't quite sure, you know, sufficiently hazy. But I mean his thinking was

projecting with the tool, the technique was ahead.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes, Lou, yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. That is a marriage of both the technique and the notion of color.

HYMAN WARSAGER: He was more of a painter, I would say, than most of us.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: He thought in terms of painting instead of being just a printmaker. We were a little too specialized because you put more emphasis into the printmaking. Most of us started with black and white printmakers, too.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: I wouldn't to that now. I mean --

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You wouldn't?

HYMAN WARSAGER: As I think back, you know, I realize Lou was way ahead of us in that respect.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But this was in terms of opportunity, a whole new period, new opportunity for you --

HYMAN WARSAGER: Oh sure.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: -- to come to grips with the question even if it went unresolved.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes. Well, the whole economics of color prints, you know, was way beyond most of us unless they happened to be very, very unique in technical abilities and had the means of doing this, and so on. But for the younger artists who were both learning and had no means, this created a whole school of color print people. I believe there's a lot of people doing color prints today. This is, you know, very much the accepted thing. At that time there was no gallery even that would handle you as a printmaker, except perhaps the Weyhe Gallery, but there wasn't any so-called big gallery that would handle printmakers. I mean today I understand there's more than one -- that will sell color prints and print.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: The market generally for American artists in the late twenties and the early thirties is all but non-existent.

HYMAN WARSAGER: That's right.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: In a sense it led to the development of clubs because at least they could have a show.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And show their work. Of course, that whole thing is changed now, there are all kinds of places to show one's work. It may not even be good, I don't know.

HYMAN WARSAGER: But for printmakers there's the Weyhe Gallery.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure. Yes. Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: They would handle printmakers; but otherwise prints were very incidental. I think the status of prints was furthered tremendously.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, while you were going through this in the thirties, did you see up around the corner as to what, you know? -- preparedness came on the scene. The WPA was sort of an investment that could terminate. It never was happily looked upon as a vehicle by Congress, you know, Hallie Flanagan was cut off without a nickel in '39. Congress shifted WPA back to the states so that the states got their hands in it. Incidentally, did you see much of the Washington people? -- Eddie Cahill?

HYMAN WARSAGER: He was very friendly and very encouraging. There wasn't too much he could do.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: No. Tony and I, in our case, we didn't have the resourcefulness to figure out what things to do as printmakers. I saw in my case, I sold work to museums, placed work in quite a few museums. I had something of a reputation as a young printmaker. I think there was a survey of American printmaking in which I

was singled out, but to look for any kind of an income was very, very frustrating. So without any real confidence we figured we'd better try our hand at something that sort of bridged things, some sort of craft utilization of printmaking. Serigraphy, of course, lends itself to commercial exploitation. So, I guess Tony told you we went into Christmas cards and so on. But it was a matter of having confidence, you see, and we didn't have the confidence despite recognition.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: I guess that's a personal type problem.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, look, with the background that you had, in some respects the WPA, though it gave opportunity, was also an unreal world, you know?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes, it was --

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It was a subsidized way. And, you know, for an idea to walk and get itself accepted, it's tough. It's not easy, so in that sense, the WPA while it allowed for the expanding of idea and possibilities, making them walk in a commercial way and putting groceries on the table is a different problem.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: So we started in business and kept up with our printmaking until such time as we couldn't do printmaking, but there was no outlook. I guess we could have taught because Tony, of course, was the so-called originator of this application, and I was associated with him, and we taught all kinds of artists - Sternberg and Vito Castallon

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Castallon, I think --

HYMAN WARSAGER: A whole group - Adolph Dehn and so on. But I think we decided on commercial work because we felt more comfortable doing things with our hands, and so on. If we had to do it over again, I think we should have been teaching, because we would have stayed in contact with everyone. This way we gradually drifted away from being artists.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, this is a far cry from the 23rd Street loft that you had?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes. And we're quite unhappy at this point, too.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You know, an idea goes and it develops, I suppose, its own vacuum that sucks you in --

HYMAN WARSAGER: Oh yes. It's a very unfortunate thing.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It's been successful, though, and in a sense it's also led the way in quality, in standards.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes, in that respect it has. I think we've used all our training, all our know how, and we've applied it to business. I don't think we've compromised in that respect. It's recognized today. As a matter of fact, even in the commercial tumbler business, we're considered the leaders in that, too. So whatever we've gone into in the market, whether it's reproduction of paintings, which we did originally, we've always been able to exploit our training, craftsmanship and so on. I mean it's been a valuable type of thing. As a matter of fact, I even do my business systematically.

(INTERRUPTION)

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You also got involved in the war. What did this do to your technique?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Oh, pretty much the same. I taught aerial photography -- I went through the school because I didn't know anything about photography. At the end of three months I became an instructor, and I really had to learn photography. I only had to study six hours a day in order to teach. Half the class were professional photographers. That's a familiar story.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: But after about a year or so I was designated to start a poster division. I started on my own and, again, this experience came in valuable. I started with a hammer and some nails and put up a piece of wood and made a screen and pushed it myself and eventually I wound up with a large department. My training is as an artist and I simply used it, that's all.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, did it deepen? You know, you inidcate the thirties is a sort of breakthrough in new idea, new thought, new approach, new technique, fumbling, you know, for some kind of solution. What about the war period. Did this add to it, or was it just sort of like an eddy?

HYMAN WARSAGER: I think it simply as a human experience, it had value for me.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: I don't think -- well, of course I wasn't painting, or doing anything of that kind at that time. I think I grew in the fact that you grow from experience.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: In my own case, and I don't know how pertinent it is to the discussion, I found that I had to grow up, even with painting or no painting I just had to grow up in order to have something more to say, to offer, to think. It's a matter of growing up.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You mean like the cold shower approach?

HYMAN WARSAGER: No. You mean from the war experience?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You know, the sense of growing up as a stocktaking thing sometimes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes, well, I suppose it varies very much with the individual. Maybe it's a matter of accumulation and just, I don't know, getting experience in problems, situations, just living.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, the Army was not, you know, a particularly entrancing place in which go grow. One has all kinds of problems that are equated with the Army men and the Army approach, it's own method -- that sort of thing.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Oh, as far as the frustrations, yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Eternal. Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes, I ran into that. I was almost courtmartialed because of some of the trivial, stupid things which finally I couldn't stand.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You have to draw lines even though some of us don't understand them. Yes. But, you know, this has grown enormously and it's funny that you both should have a kind of nostalgic view about the thirties, maybe not so funny. A more or less dissatisfied attitude toward the present, although this is an extension of that, isn't it? I mean what you're doing here. When the requirements are commercial they're not non-aesthetic, are they? Not in you case? The glass is marvelous.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Well, I think we've done the best with certain limitations.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: I think for the most part we haven't compromised. We've simply gone about it in the way, I mean we're as creative about it as we can be.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: In other words, designing tumblers, I imagine if I had more latitude, I'd really be doing more exciting things, but within what we consider market requirements, which we always try to nudge along, we've done exciting things. At least it's considered exciting. And every year I hopefully do something that goes beyond it and occasionally it's accepted. At this particular time with the general improvement in taste I'm pushing much more variety in designs in tumblers. Now the whole process is questionable because if you like nice plain glass, it really is offensive in that sense because we over- decorate it. This is what we have to do, but I think it's valid to some extent to decorate glass. I mean, a lot of things are decorated, I tried to approach the Brooklyn Museum because I honestly felt that there was a validity to decorated glass, not that everybody has to like it, but the decorative appearance of things, ceramics and so on, is valid and there's a certain validity to the enamels on glass, because if they're used properly, not commercially as we do them, I mean if they're even something like this (indicating something), it's quite valid, it's appealing.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: It can be exciting, I mean even though I like beautiful plain shapes, too. But there's a

snobbishness attached to it with the museums. They can't see it. They don't see it as enameling. They just see it as silk screen glass. But I wouldn't beat my breast about it, I don't think it's that important aesthetically that you have to make a case of it. In packaging, too, I would very much like to see designers do more with it because they admit that's the direction to go. Packaging is to do decorating because there are certain limitations to form and shapes and what you can do, but, of course, they have a concept of cosmetic design which I think is completely wrong because in a year or so they'll accept another criterion as cosmetic design. But it takes time. However, I don't feel this is a cause I'm going to get terribly agitated about. You know what I mean. Improvement in package design, improvement in tumbler design, I don't care for it really down here -- it's not going to --

HARLAN PHILLIPS: It doesn't grab you.

HYMAN WARSAGER: It doesn't grab me, no. I can't get really fired up about it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, what, you know - printmaking in that sense has gone out, you know, here?

HYMAN WARSAGER: See, if I understand you --

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, you turn a hand to this process, you know, this may be - - not doing the prints as you formerly did them.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Maybe the lack of satisfaction, although this gets demanding as hell from the point of view of feeding that oven in the back, with its three ovens.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Oh yes. No. There are a lot of things, but here you have to follow through on equipment and techniques and schedules and so on and so forth. What you do has to be able to fit into the realistic requirements. In other words, you may have to do three million, you can't have somebody just dusting things down by hand.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No, no.

HYMAN WARSAGER: You don't dare show anybody anything you can't produce.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Right.

HYMAN WARSAGER: But I think this contributed to a tremendous knowhow on our part which, I believe, if we worked now would express itself in some fashion, you know. Maybe these things all add up, and particularly when added to the emotional growth.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, that's the occasion of your going back to paint, isn't it?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes, it's an emotional need but, of course, I don't identify with anything I've done. Of course, I have to bring in more of my own neurotic problem, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: And I realize I have some problems with this sort of thing. I'd like to do something. I'd like to be noticed. I don't understand what the hell they're doing. I have it, and yet I'm drawn by it. Maybe I'm just ignorant. Maybe it's something I don't see. Perhaps I ought to try it. Perhaps I should do a popular thing. I have all kinds of peculiar mixed-up feelings about it.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: But in all honesty when I come right down to it, take away all the need for recognition and join the crowd and so on, I honestly think most of it is not good. I don't think it's going to contribute to the - what shall I say? - I think it's making contributions to art even if it's in a negative fashion, things you should do, and things you shouldn't do. But I don't think it's anywhere near as significant as the museums make it. In other words, I think that's false, I think it may have a contribution because when a museum hangs up a fresh pile of steel you know, and cars, it's repulsive, the idea, and yet coming away from that exhibit you realize it's made you think differently. In that sense I think it's accomplished something. But I'm not sure that the museum's purpose is to really open you up that way, or whether they're just trying to create the style and go on to something else. I'm not sure about the validity of their intentions. I also resent very much the fact that they could put some of this money into some worthwhile artists, not me in particular, but I mean just in a general way, that there are a lot of painters who don't get taken up, but who are quite valid, I'm sure. I think this mass of good painters, or good artists rather than a select few should be helped, because they do need help.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: I think the money could be spent that way and perhaps museums should continue with this new direction on a more limited budget.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, the whole process of announcing a show in advance shapes and configures thinking out in the hinterlands to meet the requirements of that show.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Sure.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Which isn't necessarily creative, I'm not saying it isn't.

HYMAN WARSAGER: No.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But the idea doesn't occur necessarily in the hinterlands but for this beacon tastemaker in that sense.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes, and I resent that very much. The artist can't help, but, you know, be tempted if he feels - because I mean I feel the same way, and I'm repulsed at the same time by the very thought that I don think about it, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Because it makes you dishonest, because it takes courage to just plug along in what's considered, say, a dated style. I went to see a gallery recently just for the hell of it, a local gallery. I showed them my old prints that I have in many collections and so on, and he said, "It's very good, it's dated 1940."

"What about the paintings?"

"Too abstract, too extreme."

So I said, "What would you like? Something in the middle, I'll paint something for you like hell."

But I did feel, well, maybe I should fit right into this thing. Of course upper Montclair, New jersey is running ten or fifteen years behind New York. I mean they go for semi- abstract work, like myself. Prints do not sell yet in New Jersey, and I saw some very fine prints in the gallery. So they're running behind New york as far as taste, but more advanced than they used to be.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. But something has dropped out of the artist, the thumb- your-nose approach, "I'll paint what I want to paint."

HYMAN WARSAGER: Well, they're doing it, but they think they're doing it by being avant-garde, you know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: This is the daring, but actually it's conforming to the market. Nowhere do the op artists spring from in such numbers? And the pop artists all of a sudden? They couldn't have existed. They must spring up like mushrooms, I suspect. I just wondered where they suddenly discovered all these op artists. Did they exist in an underground, or are they created overnight?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I don't know. But the experience is vastly different. Stuart Davis told me of a kid who came back from the Korean war and came up to him, he was at the new School at the time teaching, and the question was, "How long do you think it will be before I have a one-man show?" Davis said in substance, "Well, have you done any work? Have you got anything to look at?" "No, but how long will it take?" Davis said, "Oh, you know, thinking from his own experience, "Oh, about thirty years." And the kid said to him, "Go on!" You know this is a different attitude entirely. They don't have that, I guess, they are being manufactured, possibly, by a number of factors.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes. As I say, I have no real contacts with artists. I mean before we used to see hundreds of people. I mean you were in touch, so, of course, how I don't know. I read a little bit, but that doesn't tell you too much. You know I don't have any real opinion based on facts.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No, but you feel the need of tiptoeing back into this somehow?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Oh yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. For whatever purpose.

HYMAN WARSAGER: I've been painting for the last year. I've done a few prints on and off in recent years, but now I feel like I'm going to do some. I think my painting experience is going to help me in printmaking. I'm ready to do something. I wish the heck I had an honest conviction of what I want to do. At least when I had a theme before I felt a real identity with the theme. But that's a matter of working every day and living with it. That's the difference between doing occasional work --

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Continuity of effort.

HYMAN WARSAGER: --and continuity, and contact with other people.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Because you get a chance to sift out other ideas than you own. Sometimes you just need that help. I think it's important for artists to turn and lean on each other. You can help the other fellow when you're not strong for yourself. You can be a very strong support and see very clearly for somebody else where you can't find the answers for yourself.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. That's an old buzzsaw, you know, it's like balancing improbables, hot and cold. I'm surprised myself at the quality of work that came out of here, which is aesthetic and has the artistic impulse and it's also marketable. That's a hell of a balance because -- well, the experimentation in the thirties was the Bauhaus idea was whether an artist had a role to play in industry, if you could find a niche.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Only to discover that it was the salesman and Mrs. Murphy who determined the nature of design, not the artist. He was just sort of a tool to use. But to do it here and, you know, and maintain a balance, a satisfying balance, in terms of a product that you can live with, and at the same time have it go, is not an inconsiderable feat, I think.

HYMAN WARSAGER: I suppose not. I guess we're a little bit too close to it. We know that we're considered the best by the trade, and so on, and they know we're artists primarily and so on, and there's a certain amount of respect.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: But actually, I think we're too close to really evaluate what we're doing. We did prints, you know, for museums which was different. The judgement was right there.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I just got a big shot in the arm looking at the stained glass windows in the building block form.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes. Now this is something we'd like to do as a medium.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: They're alive!

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes. Unfortunately, we can't give it the time, but this is something -- one of the things I'd like to do with Tony, if we ever get this place organized and I'm trying to do this now for us to step out of the picture in a way and perhaps fool around in those areas.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: And we have people who are very interested in plaques and wall decor, and you know what the market is -- incidentally, that is a fantastic thing with the department stores having an art gallery --

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: A so-called art gallery, but some of the places surprising. There's a lot of junk sold, but there's a certain amount of very nice things also.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: At Sears Roebuck, and that's an astonishing --

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Development.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Whether it's good for the artists or not, it's a market for the average -- I mean the real artist, and that's the whole question of whether they should work for that money and whether it represents a market. I was up to Stern's a few weeks ago, and they had some good competent work there among other

things, prints, and so on. Whether they're actually selling those things or the imported paintings from $2.98 to $200.00, you know, which are painted by numbers, whether the others are only trimming, I don't know. I didn't look into that because automatically I shied away from it. If Stern's asked me whether I wanted to sell my work I'd react vigorously against it, and yet I don't know. Perhaps it's a legitimate market. I don't know.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. It seems as though that demand has changed on the artist. It's imposed a kind of restriction on him, you know, someone else is putting the record on the victrola in that sense, whether it be Stern's, or Sears Roebuck or the marketing facilities or galleries. There are four hundred and some-odd galleries in New York, their demands, the biggest in the world.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Most of the galleries try to pressure the artist into working in certain ways, and if that happens, if he decides to commercialize to that extent, he might as well do it through department stores

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: I think at least it would be more legitimate. It would be merchandise.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But it's also a psychic death from the point of view, I would think, of originality.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Well, I don't know. Maybe tastes will change sufficiently. I don't know whether the more original pictures actually sell now.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: I don't either.

HYMAN WARSAGER: They may be there as window dressing as is so often done - the fact that they're there in a commercial way doesn't mean that they sell.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Our representative has beautiful enameled lines, I think, "Gee, this is exciting." "Yes, we sell about $5,000 a year!" This is a little studio, you know, but it's not really selling. It's not merchandise. Many wonderful lines that he has and very beautiful things, but they don't really sell. So the same with the paintings. I'm not sure the paintings, or prints are actually selling. I can find out, though, the case of Stern's.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, look at the variety of tumblers that you have, and the one with the pennant, that one you --

HYMAN WARSAGER: The one with the coins, you mean?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes. Who would have thought which one takes off, and which doesn't?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Oh yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Float a number of horses in a race. It's a different requirement, I would think, than making something lovely for its own sake, isn't it?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Oh, of course, yes. Well, I did some patterns this year. I don't ask my representative any more what he thinks. I let him think that he's got something to do with it, but it's exactly what I want to do. I may do half a dozen or three that are just fillers. They have to be good enough so they don't let down the standard. I don't expect anything from them because you can't produce six and have them all sold. It's impossible. But there are two out of the three that I definitely have a strong feeling for even though it's completely opposite to what he thinks is going to sell. I mean I can tell better than he can, and I'm still, of course, guessing.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And besides, an item that doesn't market well in one context will run like mad in another context.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes. Well, sometimes you can be a little ahead of the trend, three years, or we may frequently reintroduce a thing with nothing but a change of color to have it go.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Really?

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes. One of our best patterns must be eight years old. I simply changed the color, that's all. I had a feeling about it. But you know the department store trend -- has there been much discussion among artist? I don't know really what's happening except that, you know, it's tremendous growth and there's a lot of fakery attached to it, I think, and everything that is selling is usually cheap paintings but surprisingly for either prestige reasons they're introducing some pretty balanced things better than the Village shows.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: And it's possible, particularly for printmakers, color prints, this could be a legitimate market without really compromising. It may be that you need an assortment of subjects, or perhaps no compromise is needed. The trend, you know, the picture- buying idea is sort of strong. There's been a tremendous change in taste and if this continues, if it develops, it may have a lot more vitality than showing in a museum like the Modern Art. I have no real convictions on it, but it would be more honest. Now whether taste actually developed to that extent I don't know. I mean if I had the chance, I'd look into this situation. I may have the opportunity, by the way, because some outfit wants to get into wall decor with us. They have these contacts I'm exploring it with them. I will find out for my own satisfaction what's happening in the galleries with pictures that you see occasionally.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Well, you know, I would think also that the dialectic of it, since the Museum of Modern Art has become a kind of beacon, that sooner or later it's bound to create, you know, an antithetical thing. That's the hot and cold, and it may well be that department store marketing on a wholly different level would be closer to a sense of taste than it does in volume than the Museum of Modern Art.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: In any event, it would be, you know, still excitement in the sense that it expands.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes. Incidentally, this reminds me that this is a subject close to my heart because when I was a printmaker, particularly in black and white, I started a whole exhibition. I organized a lot of artists, I got together a brochure with other people on using the commercial printing methods for doing fine prints. The whole idea was not too new in that you can do elector from a woodcut without losing any quality whatsoever, and run 10,000 of them, absolutely no loss. So I followed it through into etching and lithography and, of course, silk screen is either. There's no difference between commercial and fine art. You can print as many numbers as you want without any loss. Of course the toughest aspect was the etching where we had to use bank note presses and you lost some of the ground, you know, the ink effects that you get from an etching, which never wipes clean. We have a bank note press that came out to make it too clean, but by working within the limitations of the printing method, you know, drawing more into it rather than depending on the wiping, you come up and do a very good piece of work. As a matter of fact, we got together a brochure and printed it and I made the arrangements with the Brooklyn Museum for a show, and Carl Steven, who was the curator, worked with me on it and had Sears Roebuck interested and this is, gee, it must be about thirty years ago and Sears was interested at that time. It's significant that they came into it and that they're the leaders today. The thing that killed the whole thing was I could not, through personal influence, contacts, or through any of our material, or meetings with artists get the better known artists, except a handful, to really do serious work, or any work. Through their sitting on their hands when we judged, I was one of the jurors with Rockwell Kent, the quality of the show was off. While I was too damn mad and subjective to admit it at the time, it was a lousy show and particularly it didn't have the name artists. All the social conscious artists couldn't be bothered with it, so the Museum cancelled the show, as they were afraid to put their name to it. I had a Kelly press arranged to go into the Museum lobby, and we were going to print a well known woodcut by the thousands and distribute those to whosoever was interested. The thing was killed and Sears was going to hold an exhibition of those and probably sell. So my background goes back to the prints for the masses, you know, so that's why if there's no commercializing here, I could see the department store being more of a source for artists, particularly printmakers.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Because you can't paint enough for the department store.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: No, the volume they want and do is too great.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes, but the artists just wouldn't get out of their own way and see the benefit. No, the name guys, Kuniyoshi, and I forget which, most of the guys who we knew, you couldn't budge them. They just couldn't get started. I guess they felt because we advocated lower prices and bigger editions, you see. I guess this went against their grain. I was left holding the bag, and I argued with Stevens because I had to defend this position, which was stupid on my part. I jeopardized a real friendship. It did cool our friendship off, and representing the United American Artists I had to take a more or less an official position, too.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Look, the ball takes funny bounces.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Well, that's a whole area. I wonder if there's much going on about it today.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sears and Roebuck was an object of discussion, an item for discussion.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes?

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But it, you know, it was -- before the announcement it was well organized so that, insofar as I know, it's gone on. But the department stores, you know, it is a fact, as Fortune magazine pointed out, that the national pastime is visiting art galleries, not attending baseball games, just sheer weight of numbers alone. So it's a whole area, I think in large part unexplored.

HYMAN WARSAGER: It's very satisfying to a great extent to see that there's movement there and interest.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

HYMAN WARSAGER: I think this is perhaps the only thing that replaced the period we had, that there is a tremendous excitement and I think a lot of interest. I think these stores are really helping this in a sense, because good or bad you're exposing pictures, even painting by the numbers isn't just people who paint, as repulsive as the idea seems offhand, I think, in a sense it didn't do harm.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: And besides, you know, so long as they still build houses with walls, if you have a choice --

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: --what do you want up there? It depends upon the quality of you own taste, and if you've seen a lot and been exposed to a lot, this is one thing the thirties did, I think. It gave a kind of, you know, nationwide sample, or enriched the air somehow in an educational way for people generally.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes, oh sure. Oh sure. Pictures were available, the loan exhibitions, murals, the teaching classes, a lot of people had their first experience in going to an art class.

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Sure. It was like a general shot in the arm nationwide. Maybe we were trying to define what America was, I don't know. At least we were re-examining what we were.

HYMAN WARSAGER: Yes. I think the artists had as much excitement from having a program like Art for the Subways, or lending libraries, lending libraries, yes, in the public libraries, which at one time was a thing that only the artists discussed in committee. When I think back to it now, I really feel like -- well, maybe we didn't originate it, but I believe it started in our committees.

(INTERRUPTION)

END OF INTERVIEW

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