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Oral history interview with Dora Kaminsky
(Gaspard), 1965 Apr. 22

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Transcript

Interview

SL: SILVIA LOOMIS

DK: DORA KAMINSKY

SL: This is an interview with Miss Dora Kaminsky, wife of the late Leon Gaspard, at her home in Taos, New Mexico on April 22nd, 1965. The interviewer is Mrs. Sylvia Loomis of the Santa Fe Office of the Archives of American Art and the subject to be discussed is Miss Kaminsky's participation in the New York City Federal Art Project in the 1930's and '40's. But before we discuss this, Miss Kaminsky, would you tell us something about yourself? Where you were born and where you received your art education?

DK: I was born in New York City, in Manhattan, and at a very early year I went to an art school in a settlement house provided for children of immigrants, mostly eastern Europeans. And, of course, having been at the tender age of about 10, I had been going to another school there when I went up a staircase and opened the door and I saw these casts and students sitting and painting. And, of course, right then and there, I resolved that I would be a painter. And, although I've had a lot of trouble, leaving school at certain times, I really decided that that was for me and so

SL: What settlement house was it?

DK: It's called, yes, it's in New York City on the Lower East Side on East Broadway near Jefferson Street and it's called the . . . now let me see if I remember it correctly, the Educational Alliance, the Educational Alliance at that time run by a very interesting man, a painter himself, Mr. Abo Ostrowsky. At that time it seemed like a little Renaissance in New York and men like Peter Blume, Averbach Levi, Adolph Gottlieb . . . they were all students there at that time.

SL: Is that right? Well, I know so many of those New York settlement houses

DK: And so were the Soyers, Moses and Raphael Soyer.

SL: Well, that's very interesting. I knew several of the settlement houses in New York and I just wondered which one. I remember that one, too.

DK: And then there was the sister of Mr. Ostrowsky who had a design group and I joined that design group, painting on cloth, decorative work, and by the time I was about 16 I then enrolled in the Art Students League.

SL: Who was your teacher?

DK: I couldn't enter . . . I wanted to enter the class of Boardman Robinson, who was very popular then, but it was so crowded that I was relegated to one of his students. I can't remember his name at this point, but he was very good and at that time, in the 20's, they began to introduce the French Impressionists to the Art Students League. And 1930 I went to Europe, that was my first trip to Europe, to study.

SL: Where did you study there?

DK: I went to Paris first and enrolled in the, I think it was Grand Chaumier, that was sort of a free and easy sketching group without an instructor but a man who came in once a week and criticized. From there I went to Brussels and Antwerp where they have the International Auschtellung, well the great International Fair, like they had in Brussels a few years ago. I saw rooms and rooms of Rembrandts, and all the Dutch painters of that time. From there I went to Cologne (Koln) and took the Rhine trip, took the whole trip down, of course, like all Americans do, got off at Bonn to visit the birthplace of Beethoven, kept on and on until I came to Stuttgart and of course, being very very young, this was 1930, and not realizing the implications of what was going on in Germany, I happened to be in Mainz-on-Rhine, July the 4th and all the Americans there were invited to attend the July 4th celebration. But from the windows of my hotel I could see these long lines of German youth and that was of course the pre-Hitler movement going on. Great processions with torches in their hands, but after all I was here for art, and from there I went to Garmisch-Parten Kirchen, a beautiful place for skiing in the winter and this was the summer -- very very, very beautiful. Lived in a little garret there and then I went on to Vienna. Oh, I did study, yes, I'm sorry, I missed Stuttgart -- that's Swabish. In Stuttgart I enrolled in what was then called the Glass-Palatz Auschtellung Schule and I began to see the work of men like the Expressionists, the German Expressionists like Otto Dix, and of course George Grosz and Beckman and it took about 15 years, I believe, for

these men to be introduced to the United States later on, but I did get to know them there. Then I went on to Vienna and took a course, strangely enough, in the Statz Museum there in Persian miniatures for the simple reason that the man who gave the course spoke English and I was in Vienna about a few weeks I think at that time. Oh, I'm sorry, I missed one of the finest cities in Germany -- Munchen, Munich -- and there of course I did take a lecture course in the Pinocetek -- the museums there. From there on the Vienna and back to Paris and home. I was away about six months.

SL: Had you had any exhibits before, in New York?

DK: No, I wasn't exhibiting then, it was only years later that I started to exhibit. I was still too young to and I didn't think my work was entering any phase of exhibition.

SL: How did you become involved in the Federal Art Project?

DK: Well, of course, when I got back from Europe - I had been married too early, of course, and emotional disturbance - but I tried to keep the marriage together so we went upstate in New York and bought a big farm. Two artists - my husband was an artist too; he had been born in Basse-Arabia, was Rumanian,- and then came the bad years, '31 and 32. Things were very, very bad. We sold the farm, separated, and came back to New York City. I took a little studio I remember on 31st Street and Lexington Avenue, paid about \$25.00 a month, including all utilities, but there wasn't any money. It was really hard going and I was quite skilled at that time, from the design course I went into batik and painting on cloth and a professional person like myself couldn't get a thing to do at that time. Well, of course, as you very well know the history of the Project, the artists began to get together and protest and this movement started in Washington and we attended talks by [Holger] Cahill, I believe was the man who was very sympathetic with the work. And then of course I think we went to the old Whitney Museum on Eighth Street where this woman, oh, dear, I should remember her name. She was very good and very sympathetic to the artists. She was living up on top of the Whitney Museum at the time. Well, anyway, they got this Project going. I didn't get on the first which was the Federal Project, but when it became sort of localized, I got on it and was sent out to some school in, I don't even remember where it was, Queens, I think, and of course all I did there, and I must tell the truth, was clean out huge closets in this school. I found sable brushes, hundreds of dollars worth of brushes destroyed by moths and all I did was cut paper. Cut paper for the classes. Well, of course, I didn't like that very much, it was an interlude; but then I got on the Graphics Division and was sent to King Street, where they had the big building there and I liked that. We began to work on silkscreen and then, of course, a group of us, a very early group which included people like Pitlak who was, I believe, received the first Guggenheim on Serigraphy and other artists and myself formed the first group called the Serigraph Society.

SL: Did you know Beatrice Mandelman?

DK: Beatrice Mandelman was one of the charter members, and many of the others who are doing some very good printmaking now. I was a member of the Serigraph Society for 13 years until I finally came out to Taos and then didn't find it valid to still be a member of the group. So I am no longer a member of that group.

SL: Well, was there any other medium that you worked on while you were on the Project?

DK: Well, on the Project of course - Oh, I was in the Illustration Division before teaching. Oh, yes, and of course worked on children's books and things like that. My final position, though, on the Project ended at a Brooklyn . . . I was on the staff of the Brooklyn Museum for three years under the WPA. And I had a creative workshop in which I taught leather tooling and repousse work, you know, using metal and other decorative things like that. I also had an outdoor sketching class. We'd go out into the gardens of the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens and sketch there. This took place in the Brooklyn Museum. At that time, it was still part fine art and part, let's see, domestic sciences of all kinds. They had animals there too; they had habitat groups and, of course, we didn't have very much space so they put us in the Butterfly Division and there I was, having this creative workshop among the great cases of butterflies and other specimens. Finally, as you know, they built a new Science Building in Brooklyn, and then they transferred all the animal groups and everything and the Brooklyn Museum of course today is one of the great museums of art. And they still had a great staircase in those days up which we used to climb and that was taken down and now you walk right in, as you know, into the Brooklyn Museum. The Projects ended about '40, just before Pearl Harbor, about Pearl Harbor, and, of course, that was the end of my teaching job on the Project.

SL: Did you do any easel painting at all?

DK: No, I never was part of the Easel Division. Tried to get in there, certainly. Every artist hoped to be able to be in that division but somehow I always got put in the teaching end of it.

SL: Well, do you remember who your supervisors were?

DK: Yes. Oh, I should remember her!

SL: Mrs. McMahan?

DK: Mrs. McMahan, yes. Eileen was her name?

SL: Audrey.

DK: Audrey McMahan, yes, certainly. And we attended little soirees at her home and, yes, she was head of that Project.

SL: What did you think of her as an administrator? **DK:** Well, I thought she had a heavy load and she was very agreeable, as I recall. And, although artists are very prone to criticize, she withstood a lot of that criticism. And we were, except maybe for a few people there . . . The sculptors in the sculpture division, I know, did not like a woman at the head of the Project, and whatever criticism was there came from that group, among which they had some very fine sculptors like Ben Schmuell, who won one of the awards at the Artists for Victory show after Pearl Harbor at the Metropolitan Museum, in which I had a print bought by the collection there at the time. But otherwise everybody liked McMahan very much. MacMahan, wasn't it?

SL: That's the way it was spelled but everybody pronounced it McMahan.

DK: I remember her very agreeably. I think she did a good job.

SL: Well, it was certainly a difficult job.

DK: Very difficult and a heavy load all the time.

SL: What were your feelings about your work on the Project? Did you enjoy it?

DK: Well, truthfully speaking, lots of it was an awful waste, I think, although the artists that really got the most out of it were the easel painters, because they had the time, and then the lithograph people who could work in their own studio and have the stones brought to them, and the stones taken away to be printed. But those of us who were in King Street I must say, you know, of course, why we were so disturbed. We were prey to the timekeepers rather than to the overall art leaders. The timekeepers seemed to have more to say about our time and what we did, and that disturbed us no end. We had to stand on line for a long period of time; they watched us checking and checking out. They harassed us very much. But despite that, of course, we got our weekly stipend, would you say? And a lot of the artists, those that don't appear today in the field of art would never have appeared anyway. I'm quite realistic about that and it did help, I will say, those artists who were on the Easel Project. They really got the best of the time and the work. In the Brooklyn Museum when I was there, there was a very amazing woman, a woman dancer by the name of Maura Dehn. She was the wife of Adolf Dehn -- former wife -- and she and I collaborated at the Museum. For instance, she had this dance group and I would do the costumes for the group and the Brooklyn Museum staff was very sympathetic, very fine, and they allowed me the very precious African costumes and work the paper mache from the original costumes and the heads -- the masks. Of course, I was very careful and that, of course, gave a lot of color and character to the dances created by Moora.

SL: Then you were more than just a teacher there?

DK: Well, that was extra-curricular, that was on my own time. And the students we had were mostly adults and again, truthfully speaking, a lot of very uninteresting women who just came to fool away the time. But there were some talented people too.

SL: But your assignment there was that of a teacher?

DK: Oh, yes, and then of course after that I was asked to join their own staff, but I had other things to do so I did not. But it was a very fine staff at that time and they helped us and were very sympathetic to the WPA teachers.

SL: What did you do after the Project closed?

DK: Well, of course . . . let's see, that's the war years, yes I did my bit, I must say. I almost joined the WACS. This is a surprise to you, but I went to the office and enrolled and they told me that with my art background I would not be just a, what would you say, a WAC? I would be an officer, of a sort, and I don't know, for some reason I never went back. They called me and asked me whether I would think it over, but I never joined them. But to make up for that I sort of had a guilty conscience. As I remember, I would travel to Orange, New Jersey, the Edison plant, and work there. I worked there for several months on some kind of putting a little hair in a little clock that went into a bombsight, I think it was. It was night work and . . . shall I go on with this?

SL: Oh, yes, yes, it's very interesting.

DK: And the one reason of course, the first reason, was to do my bit, I mean after all I felt I had to do something, you know. Civilians did work as well as the armed men. Well, it didn't work out for me because they had a system, a clock system. They had promised that they would give us double pay working at night after our 40-hour week, but I never could make it quite in time and I was always from 5 to 10 minutes late and they And when you were late 5 minutes the clock punched red, so I was never able to make overtime. I never was able to and it didn't satisfy me coming there. I did stay with people, stayed all week, and took my lunch with me and, of course, we were searched before and after. It was really important work at the Edison plant. Then finally I said, "If you don't transfer me to New York or somewhere, I'll just resign." And, against their protest, I said, "Well, I'm an American, it's a free country and if I don't want to work anymore in this place you can't compel me to." So they reluctantly released me and that was the end of my duty, you see. Well, that took me in Let's see, that must be about '43 I guess, let's see if I recall those years. Oh, yes, I began to be an ardent and serious printmaker at that time. And the little group that first started, they didn't really start on the Project, they started afterwards. After the Project folded, these serigraphers got together and we became what is now known as the National Serigraph Society, and they still have their gallery on 57th Street. I think Doris Melter, who was one of our group, is now the head of her own gallery there, and the Serigraphs Society. I was a member for 13 years and did quite a number of prints, of course, in that time, perfected my own way of working and have been working in serigraphy ever since.

SL: What type of prints were they? Lithographs?

DK: No. Serigraphy is a bona fide graphic medium, the youngest of the accepted graphic work. Up to many years ago, they didn't accept the serigraph in the large national shows, but they do now. It's worked through a silkscreen, but instead of the commercialized way of adhering a profilm which is cut, my people who are skilled in this, the artist must work on his screen from beginning to end without anyone interfering. Now the word "serigraph" was coined by the Society. "Seri" is Greek for silk, and "graphy" to write, and being a mesh, the little holes in it are not discernible to the naked eye. But instead of using a needle like you do in etching or a palette knife or brush like you do in painting, you use what we call a squeegee. It's a very stiff rubber put into a handle and you squeeze this thick prepared paste -- pigment -- through the mesh onto paper registered underneath. And, of course, those of us who consider ourselves ethical serigraphers, and I am one, I'm sure, work in small editions. We don't run into the hundreds. Sometimes I work only in 30 -- a very limited edition. Very fine paper and, instead of using commercial paint, we use the base but mix pigment out of tubes, real good pigment like cadmiums, and umbers and siennas, and paint like that which created an artist. It's an artist's medium, and another thing about serigraphy is, instead of using the profilm, as I have told you, we use "tush" which is liquid lithograph crayon with a brush for the delineation of the forms, and then block out with glue. Since there's no affinity between the glue and the tush, the tush being viscous and sticky and the glue a water base, one resists the other, and in the end you can wash your screen out and work on it over again.

SL: Well, I didn't realize that serigraphy was that specialized.

DK: It's very specialized. It's lengthy, it's messy, it's smelly, but I love the process. SL; Do you still do it?

DK: Yes. Since my husband died a year ago, I have not completed some of the prints I started at that time, but I am certainly going to do that work. I'm working now on a series of collages, which I like very much -- using papers and, you know, I always say there's one thing I would steal and that's paper, wherever I see it. And right now friends of mine all over the United States know that when they have a little role of not printed paper in any design, but an embossed paper that has a grain, if they have a little bit left over from papering the wall, I receive it. They send it to me for my collages.

SL: When did you come to Taos?

DK: I had come to Taos originally -- the first year -- in '44. I knew nothing about it. A friend of mine, a schoolteacher, she said, "Dora, you go ahead of me. When I get out of school, I'll join you." And of course I had worked then in a paper mache studio on McDougall Street in the Village, worked very hard that year, walked back and forth. I lived in St. Parks Place which was about a half an hour walk, was very frugal, something which I am not by nature. But I decided I have to save this money because I'm going to Taos. I had no conception of it. I thought it was a wilderness and something very primitive. Well, I saved \$700.00 that year, working hard, day and night, packing a lunch, walking back and forth. And then I was ready to go and this friend of mine who is mentioned in Frank Walter's book, too -- Viola Schwedell -- was going to follow after. She was a schoolteacher and she was going to pay 60% of the expenses and Dora would pay the 40%. Well, I made my way . . . it was the last year of the war -- 1944 -- the war was still on, you see. I couldn't get a seat on the train going from New York to New Orleans. I was going to see New Orleans at the same time, do it the hard way. I sat on a sailor's duffel bag all the way down to Montgomery, Alabama, Jacksonville, or someplace like that. And of course the only women who had seats were those with babies who were going to see their men off to the war. Well, finally we

got to New Orleans, another girl and I, our legs were swollen up from lack of circulation but we were met at the station by these bodies of women, I forgot what they called themselves, but they were the helpers.

SL: Traveler's Aid? **DK:** Traveler's Aid, and they said, "Well, don't worry about it. Go to a hotel and get some epsom salts and hot water and soak your feet and they'll be all right." Well, so it was. Well, there was a to-do, of course, in New Orleans and everything was wide open. From there, I went along on a, if they call it a railroad, it certainly is a travesty. It's the Gulf Line Railroad. I got to El Paso and you could breathe in El Paso. Then I took the train up to Albuquerque and really I must say that I had a physical sensation in my lungs. My lungs seemed like they were cleaning themselves out. The air was so wonderful. Then I came to this little place called Lamy and in those days, in '44, they didn't have a nice bus like they have now. They had an old rickety bus and they would pick up people all along the way from Lamy to Santa Fe and then again from Santa Fe to Taos. We had a woman with a crate of chickens on the bus, live chickens. One man carried a little pig with him, but they don't do that any more.

SL: Like Mexico!

DK: Yes, very much so. Well, when I got to the (Rio Grande) gorge, it was raining at that time, and when I saw this gorge going to Taos it really made quite an impression. When I got to Taos -- which was about July the 8th, I got this lively cottage in what is now the Taos Inn. It was then run by an artistic woman, Helen Martin, whose deceased husband at that time was the famous Doc Martin. She ran this hotel and she had the cottage. I got this beautiful cottage and . . . Oh, before we came, Viola and I went to Macy's. We were going to stock up, you see, this was a wilderness, you have to send everything here. The only thing we didn't send was a mattress but we sent pillows and blankets and sheets, we got 3 hams in Macy's and lots of canned food. Well, that was going to be sent in. When I got to the Taos Inn, there were handwoven linens, beautiful pillows, Simmons Beautyrest mattresses to sleep on. All the comforts that you want. Safeway was just building then, 1944. Fortunately, I will say there were no army bases anywhere near Taos. Not even near Santa Fe, so we had none of that, of course. Everything was very quiet; people knew one another. Well, then I blazed the trail, so to speak, and at the end of June Mrs. Schwedell and her little girl came to stay with me and for the sum of \$15.00 a week, the artists got 3 meals a day and board, room and all of that. But we preferred our own meals. We got this little cottage in the back, 3 rooms completely furnished with refrigerator, and wood for the fire was brought in by one of the young Mexican boys, an Indian woman came every day to make the beds and clean the place. Of course the big sum -- we thought it was a lot of money -- was \$55.00 a month for all of this, service and all. I stayed, of course. I was there for 4 months, worked very prodigiously. I found a method of working. I did 70 watercolors that summer. You have to know the color of Taos. For the artist there's a time of day when all color is annihilated from about noon to 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon. There's a sort of silvery color that spreads over everything, you know, sort of a haze. So I would go out real early in the morning, about 8 o'clock, to one location, sit down and work there. And then in the afternoon, after the siesta, about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, I would work in another location until the sun set and then the next day, if I hadn't finished, I went back to that first place, except for the sky, which was very turbulent then. August is the time of year when the sky has hardly any clouds in it, but other than that, there are great formations. But you can go back and get the same light in the morning that you had the day before and complete the watercolors. And I'd take my lunch and there I was. I remember I made a caricature of myself. I had a large straw hat on, this little folding bench, my wash colors in a case, my lunch, my pad, and there I was, off to work.

SL: Well, how . . . you met Mr. Gaspard there, didn't you?

DK: Yes. In that first year I met . . . I knew a very interesting young man who had been a sort of prodigy of mine from way back -- Ira Moscowitz -- who had been until 2 years ago . . . is now living in Paris with his family, outside of Paris. He had been with the Shorewood Press for 7 years -- had been the head of the Art Department of the Shorewood Press in New York City and they had put out some very fine art publications. Well, he was then in Taos with his wife and a little baby and at that time the head of Indian Affairs was Collier, Senior, who is still alive. He's a very old man, but he's still alive. His name was John Collier, and Ira Moscowitz made the illustrations for this book in ceremonials, the text of which was written by John Collier, Senior. Well, through Moscowitz and his wife, Anne Barry, who was quite a fine portrait painter, I was taken to the house of the Gaspards and I met Evelyn and Leon. But of course it was all very casual, all I remember in those days was this wonderful man, very straight, riding this Morgan, this wonderful horse he called Foxy. He had a string of 6 horses but this was his own, his very own horse that he loved. He'd come riding down and he'd stop and look and nod his head and go on, and that was Mr. Gaspard. And so I was invited once or twice to the house. I never knew it at the time but she was very ill, Mrs. Gaspard was ill for many, many years. Then I'd come back every summer after that to paint.

SL: You'd go back and forth to New York?

DK: Yes, I had my studio in New York where I did my work and I did a lot of batik cottons for Lord and Taylor for many years, contracted and worked my own place. Then in '54, I moved lock, stock and barrel, out here with a

second husband, a Dane who is now living in Copenhagen. A very brilliant artist, a ceramist, his name is Michael Klein. And we came out in the summer of '54 and I've been living here ever since. SL: When was it that you married Mr. Gaspard?

DK: Well, after the divorce in July of '58 -- it is very quick, even for the State of New Mexico -- Mr. Gaspard and I were married. Gaspard and I were married that September. Of course, we had known one another for years and years, and Evelyn, his first wife, after 50 years of married . . . had died in '56. And he was alone for 2 years and it seems never did I think that this would ever happen. I was on my way to California with an exhibit; I had grown a little tired of Taos, to tell you the truth. Something had gone out of it for me, and I was going to have a show at Gump's there, arranged for me by a schoolteacher there in California. But of course this wonderful thing happened so I never really got back for my show, you see.

SL: What were you showing there?

DK: I was going to show . . . I did come back in the Spring of '58. Oh, I had a little gallery in town for about a year on Bent Street and through the gallery these very nice people came in from Texas -- Texas Tech College in Lubbock -- and arranged a show for me the following year. So I took serigraphs and hangings, batik hangings, and I showed at the Midwestern University at Wichita Falls and I was there the guest of this very interesting woman, Mrs. Griffin, who died a few years ago. She was very well-known in those parts and I stayed with her while I had the show. From there I went -- not knowing Texas -- I should have gone to Lubbock first and then into Wichita Falls, but I did it the hard way. Then from there I went to Texas Tech and had the show in Lubbock which was quite successful. Well, I didn't sell very much and, of course, that was one of the objects, I just had to sell. But when I got to the Dallas Public Library things picked up and I did. I did very well there, I had a show there for 2 weeks at the Library, and the Library itself bought 3 or 4 hundred dollars worth of serigraphs for the Circulation Department and we still have a friendship. I still communicate with them. And then when I got back home, with emotional trouble. I divorced my husband in July of that year and Mr. Gaspard and I were married.

SL: When I talked with you before you said something about the "in group" here at Taos -- that was a little difficult during those early years?

DK: You mean the early years of mine or Mr. Gaspard's?

SL: I don't know if it was yours or maybe Mr. Gaspard's.

DK: No, it was Mr. Gaspard's.

SL: Oh, it was his? It was much earlier then?

DK: Yes, way back in 1916 or '17/

SL: That was when he came here first?

DK: And Frank Waters does tell in his book a little about the hostility and lack of friendship except for 2 artists, Phillips and Dunton. Dunton befriended Mr. Gaspard. He said, "If you will teach me painting, I'll show you the very fine hunting and fishing places." And they became very good friends that way. S: I remember you said something about . . . ?

DK: No, on the other hand, when I came in '44, there was no art association but when Michael and I came in '54, I'm sorry, we did come here before. But in '54 when we moved out here, there was already established an Artists Association and we became members immediately. The requirement of course was that one should be a resident of Taos and we became residents of Taos and I'm still a member of the Stables Gallery, which is the official gallery of the Taos Art Association.

SL: What do you think of Taos as a place for an artist to earn a living?

DK: Well, of course, more art is being sold today than ever before but more art merchandise is being turned out than ever before, very mediocre, very ungifted work. There are a few dedicated artists despite everything that's going on. They're the ones that sell the least. There are a lot of drifters coming in; people who take advantage of the unique selling power of Taos. Taos is magic yet. When you mention the word "Taos," it still has a great magic, especially for people from Texas and Oklahoma who come up here for the good air in the summer months and they all have been great buyers of work. But the caliber of art and the quality is very poor.

SL: What do you think about the trends in art today?

DK: In art in general, all over the world, including Europe? Or course, when Mr. Gaspard and I came back from our honeymoon trip He always laughed, he was a great realist, you know. And he said, "At our age, it is really not aesthetic to call it a honeymoon." But nevertheless we went on an extended European trip in 1959.

We were in Moscow, we were in Egypt, in Cairo we went to the great museum, we went to the British Museum in London, we visited practically all the capitals of the world and saw all the art that's going on. And we worked it so that instead of going to Paris first, we went to Cairo first because it was getting warm and then we worked back to Paris and as we went we saw more and more, and I'm brought up in the modern school of painting and Mr. Gaspard, the older he got the more he took from the modern school of painting. His worked opened out, I mean he took for himself rather than a lot of these old time academicians who don't want to expose themselves. No, no, Mr. Gaspard had been a Cubist and a Fauvist in his day in the early years in Paris. Well, anyway, he said, "It cannot be . . . when we get to Paris it can't be like this." You know, in these great exhibitions there were a hundred artists showing perhaps and you felt there were 2 artists showing. Cliques, groups, fashionable, it was fashionable to paint so they painted. We got to Paris, le meme chose, "the same thing" and the galleries that opened up. Every other day there were new galleries opening up, you know. I love, I love any form of painting that evokes something and some of the great nonobjective work does that. It evokes a feeling of dimension, in an entirely different way, it opens up areas, it provides texture. And Mr. Gaspard up in his studio, all over the walls, there are Italian nonobjective painters and Frenchmen. He got a great deal from that, but today I will say when you think of the Venice Biennale and you think of the San Paulo exhibitions, where they compete for the big \$10,000 rewards, it seems to me something's wrong, it's become a theatre. It's become a display for the artist instead of, as in Emerson's words, and I think I can quote him. He says, "The artist must be conspicuous in his work and not in the streets of the cities." Well, it's just this, the artists themselves are now putting themselves on exhibition. They go in for colored shirts and ties and wear one eye covered with a patch and then I think the work suffers on account of that.

SL: Well, I feel that way myself.

DK: But, despite all that, I think in the studios and in the places there are dedicated artists working away and it's just passing phase, I believe.

SL: I hope so.

DK: And then again I am writing an article now for a very fine publication called The American West that is published in Berkeley. They asked me to write this article on the Taos colony, which I am in the middle of doing now, and I do say at the end of the article, it isn't caustic, I'm not of that nature. I may be blunt, but I do say that in everything I think, and so art has become a sort of, the artist has come down to the counting house. And everything's equated in terms of money and you have these great establishments even like the Marlboro. After all, they're business men, and when you think of what's going on in the precious little back rooms of these establishments, it appalls me, you know. The artist is really a dupe; the artist is now a respectable member of the business society and, because he has become that, he is on a par now with merchandizing, with television, with the refrigerators, with computers. He is now right in the swim and of course there are some rebels. There will always be, thank goodness. I'm one of them myself.

SL: Do you think that this was influenced at all by the Federal Art Projects? That is, lowered the standard?

DK: Oh, no. I don't believe when I said that about the timekeeping system. The only thing I had against that regimen was that they put the artists on a relief basis. Did you know that we had to sign what they called a "pauperization oath?"

SL: I knew there was something of that sort.

DK: Yes, yes. Otherwise we couldn't get the job. Now to me, when I think back, it was terrible. It took me a long time to realize that I had to do it. By signing that oath we were employed by the timekeeping system rather than put in a category as artists. We were just workers who, instead of knitting or crocheting, were doing something in the paint field. You see, we were under their supervision and that really was bad.

SL: Yes, I thought that would be degrading to the artist.

DK: Yes, that was very degrading.

SL: Well, I wondered, because of the fact that some people got on the Project who were not good artists, if that had any effect on what happened later?

DK: Well, an appalling thing did happen many years afterwards. Why or how they permitted this or how it came about I don't know. But of course the war was on. I lived on St. Marks Place and at the head of the street near 3rd Avenue, the "el" was still there; they have torn it down since. A little store suddenly blossomed out with second hand goods, old shoes and things like that. I went in there and suddenly in a corner I noticed some canvas and that man's cellars there were filled with canvasses from the King Street Project of WPA.

SL: Oh no!

DK: And he began taking out these canvasses and showing them to me and, of course, I could tell even well known painters were represented there and when he got a little suspicious, I was so upset that I showed my anger, you see, at this. I said, "Where did you get all this?" He had bought it in lots, just bought it in lots for practically nothing, so I don't know what happened at the end, what happened.

SL: Well, that's one reason for this survey that the Archives of American Art is making to find out what happened to some of this work.

DK: I tell you the absolute truth. I tried to buy some of it but he became very suspicious, and frames too. Well, where he got the frames, I don't know. I don't think they had a frame division in the Art Project.

SL: Well, they had an exhibition department though, so some of the things were framed, I know.

DK: Well, maybe, but anyway this was duplicated, I understand. Other artists saw it in other places in New York City. I was a New Yorker, I don't know what happened in any other city, but I know in New York in several places in second hand stores there were just hundreds and hundreds of canvasses, not stretched but rolled up. And what you say about poor art, well, that's always the way. When you get a Project like that, it's for relief; that was the basis and the basis was bad. But anyway, it did give food and relief to many, many people. If a lot of charlatans and fakers got in on it, well, that's all right, I'm not against that.

SL: That was one of the occupational hazards.

DK: That's right.

SL: Well, do you feel that your experience in the Project helped you in your career?

DK: No, it did not help me in mine; it thwarted me, as a matter of fact. I don't say the Project itself did, or any particular person on it did, but instead of my being able to carry on my own work In the Graphic Division what did we do? We did flags sometimes. We did things like that which were of no use to me personally. Then on the Illustration Division I never saw . . . I never had anything published of mine and yet I worked on book illustrations. So that was a waste of time for me. And, as far as the teaching, yes. Now that was the best part of it I will say, although it meant labor and having a lot of students, it was rewarding because some of them were gifted and I felt I had a chance to help them.

SL: Well, did you learn the silk screen process during that period?

DK: Yes.

SL: So that helped?

DK: That helped, yes, I will say that.

SL: Because I know . . . I think it was Beatrice Mandleman who said this was the first time this had been developed thoroughly.

DK: Yes. Leonard Pitnak and Beatrice Mandleman and Doris Meltzer and myself and a great many really gifted people formed this group and that I will say is a result of the WPA.

SL: Well, what effect do you think the Project had on art appreciation in America?

DK: Oh, there was the Index of Design which I thought personally was the most complete and rewarding Project of them all. Although it meant meticulous work by a lot of artists, I felt that those artists wouldn't do any other kind of work anyway.

SL: Yes, they were of the academic school. It was perfect for them.

DK: That was a very rewarding project and I had always hoped to be able to get some of those plates myself, but where do they have them?

SL: I think those are in Washington now. I think those were all collected in Washington and that some of them at least are available to the public. I don't know whether they all are or not.

DK: Well, that I think was a very worthwhile project.

SL: And there was a book published on it. Well, generally, as far as art appreciation in America was concerned, do you think it helped the general public to appreciate the artists more?

DK: Yes, I think because a lot of people in the teaching classes came from all walks of society and then the docent division, we took them through the museums. I was on the staff; I think I did a little of that work through Metropolitan Museum for the WPA. I really can't remember because we were shifted; if they felt a person was better equipped for that type of work, we were shifted around and I did do quite a bit of docent work at the Metropolitan Museum.

SL: And what about the murals?

DK: Well, that of course I wasn't in, but I, for instance, right here to day in Taos in the old courthouse there are some very fine murals, Clyde Lockwood and Emil Bisstram and several others.

SL: Yes. Those were done throughout the country, of course, in little post offices and various places where people had probably never seen a work of art before.

DK: The only thing, of course, is if they ever tear down this old courthouse -- and they will eventually -- that will be the end of the wet fresco medium. I don't know, did they do it on canvas? No, it was wet fresco.

SL: Yes, it was fresco. Well, we have a little bit more tape; are there any other comments that you'd like to make about that period in your life?

DK: Well, of course, this might interest the group that is doing this work. We got a lot of hostility in King Street from the people living in that neighborhood, strangely enough. I think a lot of different -- German or Irish -- I'm not saying anything about the denomination or the people themselves, but it was a war year, I remember. It was just about Pearl Harbor and a lot of artists were in uniform, you see. A lot of the men, the younger men . . . and some of them didn't come back. But there was a hostility there around us. I remember we would sit . . . we'd have a lunch hour and pour out of this King Street place, it was a big warehouse, you know, really was a warehouse which they fitted up for this work. And it was a very poor, depressed neighborhood and these women, I remember, would look through the windows at us and they'd do things like this: For instance, when we'd eat, we'd have a little time and we'd sit on the steps of these old houses. They'd wet the steps first so we couldn't sit on them or they'd begin to sweep the sidewalks and raise lots of dust. I often wondered to myself why, and then I realized. They had boys in the Army and they saw a lot of these men without uniforms. They didn't begin to think that half of the men were in uniform and they were no longer on the Project, but they would see us laughing and working and that must have brought that on. But we learned to ignore them; after a while we wouldn't sit on the steps. But I just bring this out to show you the temper of the times then and the artists always seemed to these people, and to the average layman, as a bunch of Bohemians, happy-go-lucky, not caring, which you know is absolutely untrue. The battle that the artist fights is a 24-hour long battle not only with society but with himself. I always remember this, though.

SL: Well, that's the first time I've heard about this kind of hostility.

DK: And it was King Street because that was a very depressed, underprivileged neighborhood. A lot of people, you know, they have places there; I happened to go into one where they didn't even have water on tap in apartments. They had a pump in the hall. I mean, that's how primitive some of those places were still. But at that time I even tried to figure it out and I realized that that was the reason. That they thought we were not in the war effort, a bunch of artists and all that and their boys were being sent across.

SL: Well, I've heard of the other hostilities of the political nature, of people who didn't approve of what the government was doing

DK: They thought they were subversive and there was a lot of injustice going on.

SL: But it still, I think, accomplished quite a good deal and it did help the artist during a difficult time to get through it.

DK: Oh, yes, in those days we gave dinners and we ate leg of lamb, and steak was quite cheap at the time and we received \$23.86 a week. I remember the exact figure and for that money we were able to maintain ourselves and eat well.

SL: Well, we're about to the end of our tape so I will thank you very much, Miss Kaminsky, for this very interesting interview and sometime I would like to have you talk about your experiences with Mr. Gaspard and tell something more about him. I know he was a delightful person and he had so many interesting experiences all over the world that he told you about, so even though you weren't present at some of them, you are able to tell about them very vividly. So we'll thank you very much for this interview.

DK: You are very welcome; it's a privilege.