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Oral history interview with Aaron Bohrod, 1984 Aug. 23

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Aaron Bohrod on August 23, 1984. The interview took place in Chicago, Illinois, and was conducted by Sue Ann Kendall for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

AARON BOHROD: AARON BOHROD
SUE ANN KENDALL: SUE ANN KENDALL

[Tape 1, side A]

SUE ANN KENDALL: You were born in 1907, I understand.

AARON BOHROD: Yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And were the second son in the family?

AARON BOHROD: Well, I was the third child in the family, second son. November 21, 1907. And I've always been looking for anybody else who was born on that particular day, and it was only a few years ago I discovered that [Rene] Magritte, the Belgian surrealist, was born on November 21st. And I celebrate that particular thing in a painting that I did.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Uh huh!

AARON BOHROD: I have it in Milwaukee; maybe you saw it in the little case there. It's called *The Magritte Conversation.*

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yes!

AARON BOHROD: Because I was playing with this idea that he used, of that great big black pipe, that he said this is not a pipe. . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: Ce n'est pas une pipe! Right.

AARON BOHROD: How do you say it in French?

SUE ANN KENDALL: Ce n'est pas une pipe!

AARON BOHROD: Right. So I painted the image of a pipe, which I asked, "Is this a pipe?" And you know the idea is _____ that was one pipe removed. But the funny thing was the coincidence of dates, which I discovered in reading about Magritte, and I still haven't discovered anybody else who was born on November 21st. And so I signed the painting with the date that it was finished—perhaps one day or two days off of November 21st, 1981, I think.

SUE ANN KENDALL: There was a connection there.

AARON BOHROD: But ordinarily, yes, I don't put the dates on my paintings. Thinking, but gosh, the historians in the future have got to have something to work on.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right! (both chuckle)

AARON BOHROD: Let them find out what the date was. But when it means something. . . As in one case, I used the date 1969, because it's a date which if turned upside down still reads 1969. And I forgot what the rest of the painting was, but I remember that [part of, by] my signature.
So, true, I was born November 21, 1907, in Chicago.

SUE ANN KENDALL: When did you start thinking about becoming an artist?

AARON BOHROD: Well, of course I knew that it was fun to scribble, to draw on pieces of yellow paper, ordinary ruled paper, that kind of thing, with a pencil. And I did that for a couple of years without knowing that there was a classification of people who are called artists. Once I found that out, when I was eight or nine or ten years old, I decided since that's all so easy, I might as well aim to become one of them rather than anything else in life. So

in my life I had no streetcar conductors or cowboys. I did want to play ball in a professional way for a while, but I realized my own limitations so that wasn't a real serious ambition.

SUE ANN KENDALL: You became a Cub's fan instead, I understand.

AARON BOHROD: Well, yes, in high school vacations I spent many months for several years, two or three years, selling scorecards at both the Wrigley Field, the Cubs' park, and Musky Field, the White Sox' park. So that baseball became part of my blood and I still need good shots of it consistently. While I paint, I listen to the games, even watch for an inning or two on television. And I'm having a good summer because the Cubs are doing relatively good this summer, [making] their year, 1984.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Not quite as good as the Tigers! (chuckles)

AARON BOHROD: And _____ survive. . . Oh, the Tigers got off to a much better start.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What did your parents think about your wanting to be an artist?

AARON BOHROD: Well, they were completely neutral, if I could describe their feelings that way. My mother. . . My older brother showed inclinations to become some kind of doctor, and he achieved that very early by the proper scholarships and so on. My mother thought that it might be a kind of balancing auxiliary profession to be a pharmacist, on the theory that he would be sending me all the patients to fill their prescriptions.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I see.

AARON BOHROD: But I really didn't care very much for that direction. And she wasn't very heartbroken that I didn't pursue it. And about my painting I think that they were neither very encouraging nor discouraging, but they allowed me to do what obviously I seem to be enjoying. As a matter of fact my father, when I was away, because I had found that little ad: "Copy this girl, send it to Minneapolis, and win a scholarship," which means two dollars off a three-hundred dollar correspondence kind of course. But when the salesman, which I was too naive to know about, came to the door, he listened and he signed me up after ascertaining the fact that I would have liked that. And I survived with that course for a few of the lessons until I discovered that I had gotten somebody else's criticism, which I returned, and when I got mine, I discovered mine was identical to the criticism I had returned under somebody else's [hand]. And which is the way these people criticize this stuff: 32A, 46B, you know, and so on.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right.

AARON BOHROD: And then substitute art for the types that [know a lot; are a lot]. However, there's no real damage done, and I found out how to sharpen a pencil and how to enlarge a drawing for reproduction. And I can't say it was very inspirational, but at the same time didn't drag me down into the depths, nor did I lose my love for making images.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm. What kinds of things did you draw?

AARON BOHROD: Oh, just very simple stuff. They supply the photograph, make a picture of this farmer carrying a basket into the _____s, you know, that kind of thing. And you struggle with it, and without the background, which you really need. It was that background that's no more than much drawing, drawing, drawing, that kind of thing. It was a kind of struggle then, and it wasn't too much fun, because there's nobody else working on the same problems, and no teachers or patting you on the head or telling you what's wrong, or that kind of thing. So it isn't really a very good form of art education. But as I said, there's really no great harm in it either. I don't think they ruined any incipient talents that I know of.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right. Was the Art Institute the first formal training that you had, then?

AARON BOHROD: Well, yes. I went to a children's class at first, and it was a little bit of a struggle to hop on a streetcar and go down there. My teacher there was a fellow that I got to know later on, because he was a colleague and working artist in Chicago.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And who was that?

AARON BOHROD: Francis Chapin.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh yeah.

AARON BOHROD: Very fine painter.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm.

AARON BOHROD: And he taught, and the way he taught was to take the brush out of your hand and really show you how it's done. And I think that in a way it's kind of valuable, although it ruins that particular painting for you, because you can't say in all honesty if that was your painting, because it was Chapin's, with little things that he forgot to cover up.

SUE ANN KENDALL: How old were you when you went down there?

AARON BOHROD: Oh, I was thirteen or fourteen [and went] for a year. Elementary school days, really.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And so they had children's classes on Saturdays, I assume?

AARON BOHROD: Yes, and that was my first introduction to the collections upstairs, which I hadn't known anything about, and it was kind of interesting to see the full-scale paintings by full-scale world-renowned artists.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Did you look a lot at them?

AARON BOHROD: Oh yes. Every Saturday after the class was over—and it only lasted an hour or two—I went upstairs, and also discovered the art library—Ryerson, I think it is, in Chicago Art Institute, which was probably better located than it is now—and studied, read, all the magazines in art that I could lay my hands on, and some of the monographs on individual artists and so on.

SUE ANN KENDALL: So that was during your teens, then.

AARON BOHROD: Yeah.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And a lot of education on your own, it sounds like, through that contact.

AARON BOHROD: Yes, without knowing that it was education, just a kind of self-exposure to these things. And I really didn't know how to use it and so on, but it was interesting to see what other people, grownup people, had done with. . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm, obviously you were very interested already.

AARON BOHROD: . . .a pencil and a piece of paper, you know.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well, then you went into some kind of formal training, did you not, in the late twenties, at the Art Institute?

AARON BOHROD: Well, after my high school graduation, and a couple of weeks of experimentation with junior college education, which really didn't take, and about which I was really too restless to get anything out of, I went to the Chicago Art Institute as a full-scale student and studied there, well, for a couple of years, with a kind of truncated periods. I think my. . . I had a job at the [Cunio] Press in Chicago, which is a big printing house, but they had one division with well-made books, _____ _____ books and so on, and I did some work for them. I don't really know how I learned to do it, but I did it. Oh! I think I was a part student; I went to Chicago Art Institute for half the day and worked the other half the day. And a little design of mine—a zigzag thing that repeated itself several times—was on display in the lower school exhibition. They had their, one of the. . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: At the Institute, you mean?

AARON BOHROD: Yes. And one of the designers, their managing designer of the Cunio Press, saw it, and he sought me out and he offered me a job, and I worked for him for a number of months and even designed a typeface which achieved his name, not my name, which was called McMurtry Bold and McMurtry Modern. It was a kind of thick and thin sort of letter, which was used for a number of years and you still see it sometimes in use in typefaces or in cheap newspapers that have not gone along with the tides and purchased other newer, more glamorous faces that have emerged afterwards.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Did you know at that point you didn't want to go on in commercial art?

AARON BOHROD: Well, I wasn't sure what form of art I would finally get into, because I did a lot of experimenting, and I always had the need to earn some money as I went along with my education. So I got into working for department stores, primarily the Fair Department Store in Chicago, which is. . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: The Fair Department Store?

AARON BOHROD: Yes, it's deceased now. Some other store is its shell.

SUE ANN KENDALL: F-a-i-r-e, are you saying?

AARON BOHROD: F-a-i-r, yeah.

SUE ANN KENDALL: The Fair.

AARON BOHROD: Fair. And I was in the advertising art department, did a lot of stuff, and as a matter of fact I became the director of that thing, although I really didn't enjoy it too much. However, again, there was kind of technical demand on a person working there which didn't harm me in any particular way. Later on, after I'd had a bit of training at the Art Students League in New York, I also returned to Chicago and continued working at that same place, the Fair store, and tried to draw advertising stuff in the daytime and at night do some painting, but that was awfully difficult because it was using the same kind of materials and the wrist and the hand didn't go in the direction that you meant it to go because you had done all that other work, which was of a different nature and a different philosophy _____.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What made you decide to go to the Art Students League? I think that was in 1929 and '30 you were there, I understand.

AARON BOHROD: Yeah, well, I had read about New York, the mecca for all young artists—still is, I think; or it's supposed to be—and I'd always wanted to see what New York was like, and after going to the Chicago Art Institute for a couple of years, I thought that, "Gee, isn't it odd that all these famous teachers at the Chicago Art Institute aren't even known in the national setting, whereas everybody knows John Sloan, Kenneth Hayes Miller, and all these people that even I had heard about, you know, you read in art magazines and so on. So I thought the best kind of education would come from New York. And I'm not sure that that was the case, because my training at the Chicago Institute was very valuable. I think it was valuable in that there was a kind of smorgasbord of education, they kind of spread out almost everything that there was to know and a direction that almost any kind of artist would later take, whether it was sculpture or watercolor or painting or design or lettering—or whatever it was, they gave you a little taste of it.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Was there anything in the history of art at all?

AARON BOHROD: There was something in the history of art, and I discovered very early that the history of art, taught in the afternoon under the monotonous tones of a Texas lady, lulled one to sleep. (chuckling)

SUE ANN KENDALL: (laughs)

AARON BOHROD: But even that wasn't disastrous, because it entailed looking at the collections in a specialized sort of way, reading about art, and that too was part of the array of educational offerings that was pretty good. But it didn't have that very professional sort of tone, so that later on when I went to the "League" and tasted a little bit of, say, John Sloan, a very dynamic, romantic teacher, you know, whose works were known, and who talked about Rubens as though he was a next-door neighbor, and. . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: Talked about Rubens, did you say?

AARON BOHROD: Yeah, well and all the other great artists that even if you didn't known them or hadn't heard of them, you made a note to look them up in the, look them up at the Metropolitan and the Frick, or whatever was available, and you became knowledgeable about the great heroes of painting.

SUE ANN KENDALL: That's one of the big advantages of New York, I think, is all of that is right at your fingertips, of course.

AARON BOHROD: Yeah, I think it is. And of course there was the scene of the current galleries, you know, the galleries showing not necessarily the greatest work that was ever achieved by man, but stuff that people were doing right at the moment. And it was an introduction to modernists in Europe at the time, and so on—the Museum of Modern Art was just beginning when I was a student at the League.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm! Was there a fairly vital atmosphere then, among art students there?

AARON BOHROD: Yes, it was. And, you know, a lot of eager beavers—like me—were there, and there were some older people who were perennial students who went back year after year, testing this _____ teacher or that teacher, with the forlorn hope that they would find the fountain of youth or the mystery to what painting was all about: "Maybe this year, maybe next year," that kind of thing. But very nice people and helpful to your own struggles. But the idea of being in a class with forty other people kicking around for studio, for standing space. Most people converging on one problem at a time, you could learn as much from your fellow students, both positively and negatively, as you could from the instructor, in most cases.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What was the prevailing attitude towards the European Modernism that certainly was beginning to have more and more influence?

AARON BOHROD: Well, I can't say that the student body was very sophisticated about it. They were tolerant, I think, as I was certainly, and even to know everything that there was to know about it. John Sloan himself was very critical of what he called the Modern School of Paris painting. He was kind of respectful of Picasso because Picasso was a great innovator. He purposely mispronounced his name so that it would come out Pi-CASS-o.

SUE ANN KENDALL: (laughs)

AARON BOHROD: But he wasn't devastating about it, and he felt that much of the so-called "modern" painting was overkill, and he said true enough that the work of the Salon, you know, Bouguereau and all of the people of the. . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm, in the Academy.

AARON BOHROD: . . .French Academy, yeah, was a kind of dead issue—although now it's popping its nose up again, not to my dismay, because a lot of interesting work was done on it—but the antidote to the Salon painters was a kind of Expressionist, you know, dynamism, which turned its back on the niceties of the realization of form. And he felt that, having achieved that and pointing it out, that you could have vitality in painting, and guts, you know, and a kind of a departure from the photographic realism that he detected in the Salon painters. Having come to that realization that you don't have to kill yourself with the medicine, that it was a kind of overkill of taking nasty medicine over and over again, once having made that point. So I think that was his basic theory about it. But he was knowledgeable; he knew Matisse and so on. But his heart was in the Renaissance painters: Rubens and Titian and all those people who used to paint with that underpainting and an overlay of glaze and so on. And he demonstrated glaze methods, which I used for many years in my own work, until I came to the still-life period in my work.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Did that shape your thinking a lot? Did you accept pretty much John's _____?

AARON BOHROD: Oh yes; I was young and he was old and successful. He was not old; I think he was about 65 when I met him. He smoked a pipe and he wore a cape, and I'd never seen anybody like that before nor had I heard anyone talk like he talked. He reminded me of an old, what an old actor would have looked like, you know, like John Barrymore, if he was alive, or. . . But he was entrancing and, I don't know, he spoke mental images and he kind of dreamed dreams. When I was a student of his, I don't know, I was inspired to work all the time. I used to have a room in a rooming house—on 58th Street and the school was on 57th Street. So the minute I got out of school, I bought a bag of doughnuts and some buttermilk, devoured them and then began a course of doing five or six paintings every night.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Hmm, that's really intense, then!

AARON BOHROD: And I think I used to overwhelm him, you know, with the things, because he invited things that weren't necessarily done in a classroom. And I was accused by the monitor—who later became Mrs. John Sloan, Frances. . . Her name was [Strength]. No! Frances something else. Nice lady, with whom I'm still in a little touch—that I was collecting all the drawings done by my friends and bringing them for John Sloan's criticism. (laughter) Because she was very conscientious. As a matter of fact, he seems to enjoy that, you know, looking at something—a path in a park, two people sitting on a bench—more than the nude model that people did and the next person did and the third person did and so on, and which he felt should be done and was interesting and a good way of learning, but he had the idea of. . . Picture ideas, you know; people looking at life and extracting from the vision something that was applicable to the talents of the person involved. And that seemed to make a point, and there's a momentum that comes from doing it over and over again, unlike certain people who have ponder and weigh this thing and weigh that thing, and "This isn't good enough," and "That isn't good enough." Where even a famous artist like Edward Hopper I thought suffered a little bit from that business of [having—Ed.] completed a painting, but it took him three months sometimes to get going on another painting because nothing he saw interested him to that extent. And I think that's reflected a little bit in the coolness of his approach to looking at life.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm. There's a distance in his work.

AARON BOHROD: Yes, there is, although I admire what he has done. I don't. . . But I'm talking about temperament. I think that Sloan was a [passion, passing?] guy and can't say that he always succeeded tremendously, and certainly I really did some things that were more suitable to the wastebasket than to the framers, you know, hanging on the wall, that kind of thing.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well then, that's what being a student is.

AARON BOHROD: But just doing it has a tonic effect.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well, so you were already doing scenes that you saw in the city, for instance?

AARON BOHROD: Oh yes. I did a lot of sketching, a lot of things around the school, subway things, the parks and the beaches, and _____.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Were there a lot of other students doing that also, or was somewhat unusual?

AARON BOHROD: Well, I can't say that there were too many. Of course a lot of those students may have been occupied with jobs. I really don't know what handicap they were working under. I'm sure that a few of them did. I remember one fellow student, Don Freeman, in a Sloan class, that was drawing all the time. Hardly ever painted because he was bitten by a graphic bug, and he did things that were in the line of a kind of a modern Daumier. He didn't have the particular [art type, archetype] that we admire in Daumier, but his works were kind of good. He was an illustrator; he illustrated William Saroyan's books, [*My Name is Aram*?] and, you know, those other things where he got cute characters in it, and cartoons and what not. He did a whole series of backstage theater things, which he was very conversant with.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What about the influence of some of the other teachers, like Miller, for instance? Did they have as much impact on you?

AARON BOHROD: Well, I think demonstrated an approach to painting which was different from Sloan's. Matter of fact, I. . . No, I think I had Miller and Sloan at the same time. And he was very careful. He had a system of drawing on the canvas with charcoal, and fixing the charcoal drawing so it wouldn't rub, and then putting medium tones everywhere in a local color, and then working light into the medium, and then dark into the medium, and then glazing it and achieving a certain finish that came from, oh, a set process of eight or nine steps. And I don't think that's bad, and his good students deviated from that and found their own way—people like Reginald Marsh and Kuniyoshi and Peggy [Bacon]. He had a whole array of wonderful students that came from him. Yet his own work was a little on the stodgy side. He drew well, but even when he filled out a form, you felt that it was filled with air instead of bone and muscle. But that's a kind of private view. I think that his work is very well respected right now. And his approach to criticism was a lot different from Sloan's, who would stand in front of an easel, he didn't give a damn who painted it, and give everybody the benefit of his findings, when he looked at the painting. Whereas Miller had a kind of bedside or easel-side manner. He'd be afraid that the student might be offended if somebody else hears him say, [whispers:] "Now I think that this is [imitates Miller's mumbling—Ed.]. . . So he'd whisper in your ear.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Uh huh, a little more gentle.

AARON BOHROD: It was very private, yes. And I think it was appreciated, that approach, but it wasn't as dynamic and it didn't excite everybody, and nobody knew what he said about anybody else's; that kind of information was denied the students.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Did you pal around a lot with the other students that were there?

AARON BOHROD: Ah, yes, with some of them. I suppose most of them were unattached, unmarried at the time, and for various other social reasons, you kind of find a milieu that you are comfortable with. And you know everybody and there were a lot of good students I think at the time.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Was it mostly social friendships, or did you actually discuss issues that were in the art world at that time?

AARON BOHROD: Well, I can't say that we got deeply into discussing issues. And I haven't. . . Maybe on the streets of Paris, Picasso and Matisse had some discussions about how you paint a pomegranate or something like that. . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: (both chuckle) Right, a Gertrude Stein.

AARON BOHROD: Though somehow, and especially later, in professional life, artists never talk to other artists about painting—unless there's a kind of group or school of, I don't know, maybe Andy Warhol and Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns and those people get together like a convention and talk about income taxes or something like that, that is, interests and concern all of them.

SUE ANN KENDALL: (laughs)

AARON BOHROD: But, I don't know, it seems to be a matter of embarrassment to talk about [eames, means, aims] of painting.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Really? Why do you say that?

AARON BOHROD: Although that isn't always the case. I think in Chicago, after my New York education, and I lived on North Avenue, West North Avenue, in a building that was occupied with a bunch of artists, we got

together in sketch classes and so on. And there was even an older artist, [Edgar, Edward] Miller, who somehow had appointed himself, or had been enticed into, a kind of discussion group where we brought our paintings in at his studio—we lived around the corner there—and he discussed on the basis of his wider experience, you know, what the artists had brought in, where it succeeded, where it might succeed better, and where it had failed, and things of that kind. But as an ordinary thing, artists aren't inclined—and especially now, I think, as time passes on, artists are less and less inclined to exchange notes about the art of painting. Because it becomes a matter of idealogy. It's like two people, one a Democrat and one a Republican, who could talk about how well the Cubs are doing and so on, but when you're beginning to talk politics it becomes personal and bitter and, "What the hell do you know about it?" and things of that kind, so that. . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm, and you sense that even back then, in terms of student days it was that way, you're saying?

AARON BOHROD: And ___ talk about religion, you know, it's the same kind of thing almost. I won't say that there weren't minor matters discussed—classroom problems, that kind of thing. Who was a good teacher, who wasn't a good teacher, that kind of business.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm, sure.

AARON BOHROD: There was a lot of excitement going on at the League when I was there when introducing. . . George Gross was asked by a certain element in the League to come over to teach, to conduct classes. He was from Nazi Germany in the early years of Nazi Germany.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm, right.

AARON BOHROD: And Sloan was an advocate of his coming over and there were other people, more conservative people, who were afraid of him for some reason. He was too political, even though he seemed to be on the right side of where we were going, you know. But still he was considered to be too political and there was a big long fight about it. And so our man Sloan prevailed, I think, and Gross talked and he was a very popular teacher, and a lot of artists are. . . I never studied with him, although I met him there. A lot of artists owe a good deal of the way their art developed to instructions [from him]. And later on, I think they went through the same kind of business with Hans Hofmann, although I think that Hofmann taught at the League for a very short time and then did his own teaching in _____ style with his own school.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right. Well, at some point in there—I think it was 1929, wasn't it?—that you were married in New York.

AARON BOHROD: Umm, that's right. [And so I'm married to this dame in here who loves me,] who was home teaching in the school system in Chicago.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh, she was from back here?

AARON BOHROD: Yeah, we. . . Matter of fact, though I didn't know at the time, we were born next door to each other. And the families, her family and my family, had kind of drifted apart, and finally wound up my dad had a grocery store and her family lived on Independence Boulevard a few blocks away where more secure people lived, and I delivered orders to them and got to know [Lucy]. And we decided to get married. It was at a Christmas break that she came to New York, and we got married, and I stayed on, and she came home, worked, and then later on we were married again, for the sake of the folks, in a religious ceremony, _____'s _____.

SUE ANN KENDALL: When you mentioned coming back and living in an apartment in Chicago, who were some of the artists that were living there?

AARON BOHROD: Well, that was somewhat later on, after the League was all finished with. Well, Francis Chapin, strangely, is one of them, and Edgar [Brittin], Davenport Griffin. And Dave McCosh lived there; he later moved to the Northwest. And, oh, a handful of other people whose names haven't survived with me. There was one nice Czech guy who was as much a musician as a painter, not too much of a painter, who had a talented dog that he taught to tap the keys on his piano.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well, I notice you. . . It's been said, at least, in the reading that I've done, that you came back and did for Chicago what Sloan had done for New York, in terms of the kinds of paintings that you were doing. Do you agree with that statement?

AARON BOHROD: Well, I agree I probably formulated this thing that's [there]. (laughter). . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: You were the source!

AARON BOHROD: . . .in the sense that Sloan, who was interested in backyards and alleys and garage eaves and

rooftops, and the parks, and the setting for the life of ordinary people, I found Chicago to provide that same kind of setting. Architecturely it was different, and the tone of the life was a little bit different, but essentially was the same kind of thing. At that time, there wasn't a vase of flowers, there wasn't a romantic landscape, there wasn't a pretty girl—it wasn't that kind of thing, you know. So I think our work resembled each other's work.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Were you alone in doing that in Chicago, pretty much?

AARON BOHROD: Well, I couldn't possibly have been alone; there were other artists doing it, but somehow nobody had really dug into it. I think that whoever was doing things was choosing the more elegant parts of Chicago: the North Shore, that kind of thing. You know, broken glass on a pavement on a pavement always had to be swept, and it was really a kind of sanitized, [____thing] it up sort of landscape, rather than the raw guts of the thing.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What did the critics have to say about your work at that time?

AARON BOHROD: Well, I think there was only one critic who counted for anything. In New York, a fellow by the name of C. J. [Bulliet], whose. . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: You mean in Chicago, don't you?

AARON BOHROD: In Chicago, yes. . . .whose book, Apples of Adonis, had been the first real book on art criticism in the country, even though it came from Chicago. Well, for that book, I was going to say, I had drawn banner headlines and things of that kind, although he didn't know about it, and I didn't know what kind of book he had written either. But when he began, when I was. . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: What do you mean, you had drawn banners? For the book?

AARON BOHROD: Well, for the Cunio Press, the press that published that book.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Ah hah!

AARON BOHROD: And they had chapter headings, you know.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh, you did!

AARON BOHROD: _____ the zigzags, and the idea was he was interested in modernism, and I did what I thought was modernistic, that kind of thing, with the hand-lettered titles, and things of that kind. Well, anyhow, when he saw my things, he wasn't enamored of it. He accused me of being—let's see, what did he say—a midget Matisse and a puny Picasso and too tied to the manners of the School of Paris. That is, my work did have some [plate] and some agitation and some kind of expressionistic departures from the visual aspects of nature. I don't know when Chicago art was _____.

SUE ANN KENDALL: But then he tended to champion, then, did he not?

AARON BOHROD: Well, he did, but when somebody else does it, you know, and he lives in Chicago, it's something else. It's like not seeing merit in exactly what the guy prescribes as being the kind of thing that an artist should do. Well, that happens over and over again. I remember—if you don't mind my jumping around. I was on a jury, three-man jury with Ivan Albright, whom you know.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm.

AARON BOHROD: And who was a good friend of mine, because he was around that North Avenue area and he used to wake us up when he wanted to play ping-pong on my table, that kind of thing.

SUE ANN KENDALL: (laughs)

AARON BOHROD: I got to know him very well, and he's a good guy. But I was on this jury at the, it was the Union Club in Chicago. It had an annual exhibition—I don't know whether it continued—of Chicago artists, Chicago and vicinity, who would bring [seven, several] of their works, you know, for inclusion in the big annual exhibition. And I noted to my dismay that any painting that had a door in it—or a window—was jerked out no matter how interesting the painting was, no matter how different it looked from Ivan Albright's [Door and Bleudon; Door Em-blu-don], it was sent out, because he had the feeling that he had a trademark, a registered trademark. Nobody else could touch a door, nobody else could touch a window!

SUE ANN KENDALL: (laughs)

AARON BOHROD: And I felt that was very odd and very. . . [Sound of airplane obscures part of next sentence—

Ed.] Well, it was pompous, I thought, to have a feeling that once I put my stamp on a certain element of visual life, it's tantamount to everybody else having hands off. So I think that. . . Well, [Yetz, yet] felt that Picasso painted a good Picasso, Matisse painted a Matisse. But nobody else could [give them to the same circle; get into the same circle], especially if he had no pretension to having the same European base, so that anybody else. . . And I must admit that my work had a kind of extraneous, external look, not necessarily to be pinned to any particular artist, but to [the moon], you know, of a departure from reality of kind of imaginative reality, which those artists were doing. And if had been a good critic, I think he should have given me a pat on the head for that and encouraged me in that direction. Of course, I went on for a number of years without his pat on the head. I think the only time that he began to see some merit in my work was when he saw some things that I had done during the war when I was employed by *Life Magazine* and by the Army to record visual aspects of the war, and he did a big piece that he called Coming Out of the Jungle, with reference to my stupid early work and my present good work. As a matter of fact, I had met him on one occasion. James Chapin, an eastern artist, who wanted me to, who had good things said about his work by Bulliet, had wanted to meet him. And he came to visit me when we lived on the South Side of Chicago, and he insisted that I come along. I told him it's going to be embarrassing as hell both for me and for him to sit there, but he insisted on doing it for some strange reason. I almost thought that Bulliet had said that he wanted to see me, or something. And we did have a kind of embarrassing afternoon of talk. You know Chapin's work.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm.

AARON BOHROD: He, I think, was a next-door neighbor to Robert Frost, and he painted the kind of ___ type of person, you know, on his way home, with a hammer in hand to mend his fence, become a good neighbor or something. He told me stories about Robert Frost that I didn't like, about his anti-Semitism and things of that type. And I don't know if there's any merit to the things, although as a neighbor I suppose he would know more than I.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Well, Bulliet on one hand. . .

AARON BOHROD: Pretty much of a rambler, am I not?

SUE ANN KENDALL: No, no, that's quite all right. Bulliet on one hand wanted to champion, I think, art in Chicago, and so on, but he nonetheless found much more merit in Europeans than Americans, it seems.

AARON BOHROD: Well, I don't think he had any basic respect for, you know, the people around, just as there are people even in Madison who don't that there's anything going on that merits a glance, or anything of that kind.

[Tape 1, side B]

SUE ANN KENDALL: Did you become involved in—and I don't know much about this—the union, in the artists' union in Chicago in the thirties?

AARON BOHROD: I don't know whether I was an actual member of the artists' union. I know about it. I think I attended one or two meetings. But I wasn't a "card-carrying" artists' unionist. I think the artists' union was active during the WPA days because we then had a common employer, the government, in the manufacture of easel paintings, murals, and things of that kind. And we shared the same supervisors and directors, all of which as time goes on develop in such way that the artist has a grievance. Meanwhile the grievances alter, change a little bit, [from] one artist to another. They come under the heading of grievances, so you get together and you talk about things. Like standard unionists, sharing one boss, and there's always something that could be corrected in the fold. So I was a kind of half-hearted member, I guess, of the union. I don't recall ever paying dues or anything like that. I was never anti-union.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What kind of impact did that have, the artists' union? Was it significant?

AARON BOHROD: Well, no, I think the only impact it had is that they had a few exhibitions, usually a gathering of stuff that had a little bit of a social look to it, into which my work fits very gracefully, I think. And, well, they wrote a protest paper now and again. I don't think there was a tremendous amount to it, because the programs didn't endure to that extent. They were of a two-or three-year period, and then they went by the boards. And there was no point in having a union when you weren't employed by anybody, and most of the artists returned to a kind of free-lance basis that they occupied before the programs had come on.

SUE ANN KENDALL: What was your relationship with WPA?

AARON BOHROD: Well, I was a member of the WPA project and I also painted in Treasury projects, which were a notch or two above the come-one-come-all WPA process, where you submitted a design and you either got the award of a certain specific mural or you were rejected. And I painted three murals in the state of Illinois. I was living in Chicago at the time. And one of them was a real mural in [Galesburg] and the other two are kind of

enlarged, big-size easel paintings.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Now that Treasury, right?

AARON BOHROD: Yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: That was Treasury Department murals.

AARON BOHROD: Right.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Did you do any, were you involved in an art center of any kind in Chicago, or an art. . .?

AARON BOHROD: Well, there was an art center there, with people sitting around making paintings for artists and engaged in the Index of American Design drawings and. . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right.

AARON BOHROD: The headquarters for the supplying of materials—and also the place where one brought his works on completion—that's the only kind of headquarters there was. I think a little exhibition space to show what was available when qualified people like committees out of schools and libraries and so on made selections of paintings.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Was there teaching going on there? Were there classes held at the center in Chicago?

AARON BOHROD: No, I think the only teaching that occurred was in the form of older artists being asked to be subsupervisors to visit the studios or homes of younger artists who hadn't had much background and work and to encourage them and so on, and I served in that capacity for a short time too.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Were you employed elsewhere, or were you a full-time artist at that point?

AARON BOHROD: No, I was a full-time free-lance artist.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And where were you selling?

AARON BOHROD: Well, I wasn't selling very much, but there was one little gallery in Chicago, the Increase Robinson Gallery.

SUE ANN KENDALL: The which?

AARON BOHROD: Increase Robinson Gallery, where I sold watercolors up to about $35 apiece.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh, was that from your trip to Santa Fe, some of those?

AARON BOHROD: No.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I read someplace where you had gone to Santa Fe and brought back watercolors.

AARON BOHROD: Well, there, and I also brought them back from wherever I went, I brought back. But this lady who ran the gallery became the Illinois director of the WPA, and she asked me—because her acquaintance among artists was extensive, having this gallery—she asked me to come on and work there, which I did. And I felt it was a great job. It didn't pay as much money as I got when I was a worker for the Fair Department Store, but it paid something like $24 a week. And I spent two weeks doing a full-scale oil painting, and I did two other paintings for my own collection at the same time that I did one painting for project, but they were happy, because what could they do with that many paintings, in any case?

SUE ANN KENDALL: But so you were able to support—you had a young family at that point! And you were able to support them?

AARON BOHROD: Well, the kids hadn't begun to come yet, but I was married. And my wife, in the thick of Depression, wasn't being paid by the Chicago Board of Education, but she got what was called scrip, which means that they would pay at a future date.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh.

AARON BOHROD: However, there were some enlightened merchants who took scrip, you know, on the theory that sooner or later it'd be worth something. And I remember I got a lot of my pigments from the Shiva Paints people. [Raymont] Shiva lived around this area; he was an artist. And he took scrip in return for paints, which I used in my work.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It surprises me, though, that in the middle of the Depression you were able to sell enough to at least make ends meet.

AARON BOHROD: No, the only. . . It was encouraging to sell because that's a true demonstration of appreciation of your work, whether it was $2, which was the first things I did, or $35. And I couldn't have survived if it was only that. But it seemed to be encouraging that people who—other people were having a tough time too—could find it in their hearts and in their pockets to come up with a few dollars for a painting. And it was encouraging.

SUE ANN KENDALL: You, then, taught at the Art Institute, started around 1940 or so?

AARON BOHROD: Well, let's see; I think I did, but only as a kind of substitute teacher. A friend of mine, Rainey Bennett,, was away for a time. I think he was painting a big important mural, somewhere in Detroit someplace. And I had to be a replacement for him. So for about four months, I think, I taught his class. And it was kind of interesting, my first full-scale chance at teaching, and I thought that I could help a painter here or there, and so I. . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: Did you enjoy that?

AARON BOHROD: Yeah, I did, although I could see that I wouldn't have enjoyed it as a kind of eternal thing. And if I had spent my life as a teacher, I don't think that I would have been very happy. I could take teaching, but in short dabs. It's been that way all my life, despite the fact that I spent 25 years at the university here. It was not as a conventional teacher. I was artist-in-residence, which meant that I was there and if people wanted they came; if they didn't want me, they left me alone. And I didn't have a group of ten or twenty or forty people to meet every day or twice a week, nor was I responsible for their development. So that I had the best of all worlds in that I came. . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yeah, it sounds like it there; that's a good deal.

AARON BOHROD: Yeah, I came because people wanted to know what I could tell them about their work and about painting in general and so on. So for many years it was quite nice, the job as resident artist. The only thing I regretted was that I didn't grow economically with the job, because when I came in, in 1948, I was getting in salary the equivalent of a full professor, but almost the minute I closed the door of my studio and got to work, the full professors _____ _____ (laughs) such a tremendous extent, so that they out-distanced me like mad, you know. And when I completed my round, the 25-year period, I was getting very little more than I was getting when I started.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Huh, so your salary didn't go up with the others.

AARON BOHROD: No, I [was, wasn't] getting as much as a good intelligent class D stenographer was getting.

SUE ANN KENDALL: (chuckles)

AARON BOHROD: And it was somewhat my fault. But the system of being a one-man enterprise and one-man department was such that you couldn't function the way they functioned, you know, where it was Smith's turn to get the raise this year and Jones's turn next year and Brown's the third year, and then it went back to Smith again.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right.

AARON BOHROD: So that they all did pretty well, when they took turns at it. But I couldn't do that same thing. And I didn't understand the process and I really wanted to be let alone, anyhow, in the economic area, hoping that I would be taken care of, but of course I wasn't. So now when I receive a pension from the state, it's. . . I weight it in my hand and it always falls to floor—it's like capturing a damn feather, you know.

SUE ANN KENDALL: (chuckles)

AARON BOHROD: But I don't want that to sound like a gripe, because fortunately I've been able to make my painting work for me. And I'm afraid that some of the people who have spent a long time in the art department at the university and have gotten their raises, you know, year after year, and so on, never have been able to make their painting or sculpture, whatever it is, work. Not that it was entirely, but somehow they hadn't struck a note that had a corollary in the minds of people who buy pictures and so on. So that they could take it or leave it, you know. And while maybe they sold a painting or two a year, it wasn't that they had do it and they never learned how to do it, and. . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: Right, right.

AARON BOHROD: . . .and they didn't do it.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And they were tied down with teaching too, as well.

AARON BOHROD: Well, some of them did, although I think the younger people who carried on their own work, and teaching as a kind of parallel activity, were always able to do more work than those other people who were relieved with the thought that they had to go to class rather than they had to do something on the easel.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yeah. Well, I'd like to talk some more about that, but before we get into the artist-in-residence program, I wanted to ask you about your work during the war, and what prompted you to take the position that you did with—I guess it was at first *Life Magazine*. Was that your first _____?

AARON BOHROD: Well, the first part of that was the. . . Well, I had done some work for *Life Magazine* off and on, work that you might call commissioned work, where it was suggested I go here and relate to this thing, relate to the other thing. They somehow liked my work and were interested in it. And those were more innocent days; they hadn't discovered the Warhols and all the stars that have glistened since then. And their viewpoint was that the artist should look at life and respond to it and work accordingly. And their heroes were Grant Wood and Tom Benton and my predecessor at the university, John Stuart Curry. They would produce their work over and over again, and I kind of was dragged along with that general tenor.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Was there a particular person at *Life Magazine* whose orientation was in that direction?

AARON BOHROD: Well. . . Yeah, I think Daniel Longwell was the inspiration for it all. And he had an art director, Margaret Varga, who was also working in and interested in that particular thing, and she was something of a painter herself. But Longwell came from Neoshia, Missouri. And he was a good friend of Tom Benton's, who also lived there close by. And he conceived the notion of the artist being put to work, by him, in *Life Magazine* as one other arm of telling the story of America, you know. So that he had a lot of the artists involved there. I remember I did a painting of Idle Hour Park, or something, in Fort Benning, Georgia, the roughest part of the world, almost you know, with the beatings and murders and so on. It was near a camp and that was their recreation of the boys, you know, with the drums of war beginning the beat, you know, just before we got into it then before Pearl Harbor. And then later on when the war started and Russia was one of our allies, *Life Magazine* envisioned a trip for me into Russia, painting whatever I wanted to paint: the country, the military activity, whatever I could see. And that entailed such an extended period of negotiation, largely of course between the magazine and whoever it was in Russia that was talking to them, that they never could see it. So that when a gallery that I was with, the Associated American Artists, had gotten together with such people as George—I've forgotten his last name. A few public-spirited artists who had come out of the WPA schools had worked with the Associated American Artists, of which I was a member—you know, Wood, Curry and Benton were also members of that group. Now they're a kind of print organization, different from the painting organization. Well, anyhow, they had gotten together and started what they called the War Art Units. We were in the war already, and artists were beginning to be sent out to these scenes of action to depict, in any way that they were familiar with, the activity of the war, in an effort to build up a collection of art which would eventually be an adjunct to the photographic materials that were being collected, and which would show the nation what the war looked like at least through the eyes of a certain number of painters, artists.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Did they seek you out, or did you seek out. . .?

AARON BOHROD: No, I was sought out, because I was known to the Associated American Artists group and so on. And I was sent to the South Pacific originally. In San Francisco, where we were waiting to be dispersed in several different directions, I met a whole bunch of artists who were going, like David [Freedenthal, Friedenthal], who did some wonderful work during the war, mainly in the European Theater later on.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm.

AARON BOHROD: And Henry Varnum Poor went up to Alaska and Edward Lanning was among that group. Cummings, William Cummings was there, and, oh, in my group Charlie Shannon, from the south, and Howard Cook was also part of my group that went to the. . . Our group was called the South Pacific, or the Southwest Pacific, which was New Guinea and Australia and my group was headquartered in New Caledonia, and we went up to Guadalcanal and places like that. And then there other groups that were in the European Theater, although things hadn't, you know, been activated to that extent yet in the European Theater. And I did one spell of work there gathering materials, painting on the spot, and then developing something when I came back to Chicago. And then, while I was in the Pacific, the army dropped its interest in the program, due to some Michigan, I think, congressman—forgot his name—who discovered that these left-wing artists were being supported by the army to paint the war, to give us a distorted picture; I don't know what he had in mind.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Good heavens!

AARON BOHROD: But the army, which didn't care that much about it—they started it, but they didn't think that was worth a fight with this congressman. And you probably know all this stuff, don't you? (chuckles)

SUE ANN KENDALL: Some, not all of it. I guess I'm curious I'm curious to know what prompted you to go do that.

AARON BOHROD: Oh, well, at the time it was going on, the most vivid thing in the world was what was happening in the war. Gosh, you read reports of it, saw photographs of what was going. As wars go, it was a good war. It was a war that had to be fought; it was a war that had to be won. And there were certainly no feeling of queasiness about things associated with it. I was proud of the [whole darn process].

SUE ANN KENDALL: Not like Vietnam, at all; it was a very different kind of war.

AARON BOHROD: No, and that was of course the last good war; after that there was nothing I was, seemed worth it.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Was it mostly for the chance to do something artistically, or was it more out of patriotism, maybe something?

AARON BOHROD: Well, no, I didn't have any delusions that what I was doing was good for people to see. I felt that I was the chief beneficiary there, because just if things were used, if they were reproduced, well, fine; an artist always likes to see his work spread around. And if he has confidence, he wants people to look at it [because] he's proud of it. But it wasn't for patriotic reasons. It was just that I was always the kind of person, artist, who looked around me and saw what there was interesting in life that I could translate onto my papers or my canvases. So that I couldn't think of anything that was more interesting, more dynamic than what was going on in the war. Of course I really didn't know what war looked like; it was just like what war would sound like, what Tolstoy would put into his War and Peace, you know, that kind of thing.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm.

AARON BOHROD: So that I was eager and anxious to go, and I wasn't disappointed, ever, in the kind of material I extracted from what I could see.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Did it affect your art?

AARON BOHROD: It might have had some sort of effect on my later work, although I had the feeling that, gosh, it wasn't very much different. What if I did a row of soldiers climbing up a hill, seen from a distance, or pitholes where a cannon shell had exploded and so forth. And a countryside thing where somebody had left some rubble in the lower left-hand corner, and there was one kid chasing another kid and so on. I mean, actually there wasn't very much optical difference there—except that the intention of these figures in the landscape was altogether different. But I really didn't have to learn to do anything that I didn't know how to do. And I went along, either painting good things or bad things, as the case might be. But as I say, while I was out in the Pacific the support was withdrawn, but almost immediately Life stepped in, along with a few other magazines like, I think, *Esquire* and *Colliers*. Which I was kind of surprised, my co-worker in Numia, New Caledonia, Howard Cook, chose to go with *Colliers* for some reason. And I think the magazine lasted another year or so and then it evaporated. But I had had some experience with Life and I knew the people at *Life*, Dan Longwell and so on, and I felt at home and was very proud, and my patch that I was wearing, which said—I forgot what it said when I was out in the Pacific; I think it said "War Correspondent." But I got a different kind of patch which denoted my connection with *Life Magazine* and my prestige went up about six hundred percent, you know, as a result of that connection with *Life*.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm. Well, yeah, you became very well known through the publication of the magazine, I think, through those paintings.

AARON BOHROD: Well, yeah, I guess so, yeah. And I had a couple of trips into the European Theater. And first England, and France up to Paris, you know, a few other surrounding spots. And then later on, with the Third Army, in the direction of Germany and into the first reaches of Germany, not as far as Berlin. But of course the material in the European Theater was a lot more interesting than the basic palm tree backgrounds that I found in the Pacific. But I think I found a lot of interesting stuff in the Pacific and many more interesting things in the European Theater.

SUE ANN KENDALL: When you came back, then, you came back to Chicago first?

AARON BOHROD: Yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And then went to Carbondale. Is that right?

AARON BOHROD: Umm.

SUE ANN KENDALL: At some point you became artist-in-residence there, and. . .

AARON BOHROD: Yes, soon afterward, I think I went to. . . Well, wait a minute. No, I think I went to Carbondale

first, before the war stuff came, because it was from Carbondale that I left to go to the South Pacific.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh, that’s right.

AARON BOHROD: And as a matter of fact, that truncated my year at Carbondale as artist-in-residence. My intention, of course, was to return to Carbondale, but finish out the residency, because they had gotten a renewal I think at that time was financed by the Carnegie Corporation, which was doing such things. And I enjoyed it down there in this little town. The material was kind of wonderful. The people were nice and admiring and flattering, and it was kind of nice atmosphere to be in. My oldest son had been born, and so he enjoyed life there too. But this war thing came up. I left and never did return, although Ruth stayed on till the end of the academic year, for Mark’s sake, and she went up to Chicago, then I came back from the Pacific and rejoined her there. And then I went to the European Theater, always coming back to Chicago, meaning of course to come back to Carbondale. Instead I went up to Madison.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I know you became artist-in-residence here ______, but you had met and known Curry before that point. Is that right?

AARON BOHROD: Yeah, through our connections with the Associated American Artists, I had known Curry.

SUE ANN KENDALL: You were a friend of his?

AARON BOHROD: Well, I can’t say that I was an intimate friend of his. I knew him. I’d seen him around the gallery in New York, and I think on one occasion he was asked to be on a kind of quiz show for kids, and he invited us to come down and joined us in the studio and that kind of thing. But I know of him and his residency up here, and I had always had my eye on the residency as being the prime example of an artist-in-residence in the nation. I think it was [Scotts] had started that residency idea, and the other people had taken it up. Carnegie had sort of come in on the tail end of it, and they were appointing people; and I think that was what attracted the Carbondale people to the Carnegie people, because they offered to finance half the residency and Carnegie the other half and so on. And I think there have always been that kind of thing with the foundations which have supported residencies. However, in most cases when the foundation support petered out, the university itself lost interest in residencies. So there have been a lot of universities, colleges, that have had a two-year, five-year residence and then no more. But in Wisconsin, they did their own support, so that it lasted as long as the administration was interested in it.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It was a pioneering one, wasn’t it?

AARON BOHROD: So between the Curry’s and mine. . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: Excuse me. It was the pioneering one, wasn’t it really; ‘36 is very early for that.

AARON BOHROD: Yes, I think it was the first one.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And I had a feeling that that was the first one.

AARON BOHROD: That’s right; it was.

SUE ANN KENDALL: And that it was so successful under Curry that they then decided I guess to keep it going. Did you seek it out? I know he had died in ‘46.

AARON BOHROD: Well, no, I didn’t seek it out, but I was around. I was a neighbor in Chicago of the Madison people here, and I knew one or two people who were on the art staff of the school here, who may have offered my name as a possibility. But they had a full-scale big committee of professors from the rural sociology department, because we’ve always been connected with the. . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: Barton, was that one name that I know?

AARON BOHROD: John Barton, and Harry Cold was the other one. [I had occasion to think of him the other day.] And they constituted a kind of two-man committee that squirted all over the country, invited people in for conferences. I know I came up here once for one dinner, luncheon or something like that, where I was quizzed extensively and found wanting in only a very small degree, so I was passed on. And I guess I went to a. . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: Do you know who else was considered?

AARON BOHROD: Well, I know they had John [Corpino, Coppino]. He was a very, at that time, very famous artist. And he came back to Chicago and told me that he wasn’t too impressed with the thing up here, and besides he wanted to go back to New York where he was living at the time. And I’m sure that they asked other people who were only mildly interested or not at all interested, because even then the remuneration wasn’t that great, and I

guess some other artists had the feeling that they'd be stuck away. I never had that feeling, because I always felt that [you could make a light] for your own, no matter where you are.

SUE ANN KENDALL: I wondered how you felt about leaving Chicago, though, because that was home to you.

AARON BOHROD: Well, I felt reluctant in one degree, because we had a wonderful house that we'd bought on the south side of Chicago. We worked up a beautiful studio on the top floor by running a lot of rooms together. And I know Dan Longwell came to visit me once, and he caught me painting the walls of the studio upstairs, and he didn't think I should be wasting my time doing that, and on the spot he gave me a year's commission to paint Chicago, as I had been painting the war. And I was delighted in that because Chicago is my subject in any case. And I did; I think I painted about 20 paintings, only one of which was ever reproduced: the beach, Elk Street Beach, you know, the big beach on _____.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Yeah, what happened to the rest of them?

AARON BOHROD: Oh, the paintings were mine. So they were put to work. I didn't have to give them up. And I was being paid weekly or monthly, or whatever it was, just as I had been when I was doing war work.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh, is that right? So he did that. . .

AARON BOHROD: So it was a kind of one-man project that he developed.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Uh huh! As a patron, in a way, really.

AARON BOHROD: Yeah, that's right.

SUE ANN KENDALL: For about a year, then?

AARON BOHROD: Yeah, for a whole year. And then I don't know how it was terminated, whether it was awkward in the termination or not. But they continued to be interested in my work until Dan retired, and then, you know, successive generations of people moved in. I did a whole series of cover designs for *Time Magazine*, which stemmed out of my connection, I guess, of the work I did for *Life*. But it really came from a sudden new thing, the still life thing. And at that time, Time covers were all [noodled] out very carefully. They used to have a wonderful old guy by the name of Baker, Ernest Hamlin Baker, something like that. He took an ordinary face and made little ripples out of it, but gave it a sense of form, which was in line with the journalistic aim of *Time Magazine*, that was _____ aim.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Now that was later, wasn't it?

AARON BOHROD: Well, it was after the war, yes, and after I had kind of tapered off with *Time Magazine* . Then when I. . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: But I'm interested in this year-long venture you had painting Chicago. That was prior to working for *Time Magazine* wasn't it?

AARON BOHROD: No. Oh, I had painted Chicago, of course, and they had reproduced some of my work. But this was a special program that they had developed for me, where they would get a look at everything I had done. And as a matter of fact, somewhere I still have a beautiful 16-page layout of what they were going to put in, and of course they never did it.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm!

AARON BOHROD: But, well, that's, you know, in the publication world that happens over and over again.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Sure.

AARON BOHROD: The ideas they have are brilliant, everybody likes them, then when they aren't implemented immediately, they lose interest and something else occurs to them.
[Interruption in taping]

SUE ANN KENDALL: To change the subject again, in 1950, I think, you started collaborating with Ball on ceramics.

AARON BOHROD: Yes.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Could you talk about that a little bit?

AARON BOHROD: Well, Carleton Ball was a west coast potter who came to the university to teach, to conduct the ceramic classes. And he invited the faculty to come in, make use of his pot shop, and to play around with clay, do anything they want, and since every kiln is a composite of the number of different things that come from different sources and so on, there was no handicap in his accepting the things that the faculty had done to amuse themselves. And I attended those early sessions that he inaugurated, evenings, so they wouldn't conflict with his teaching program too much. And I began doing certain things in the shop there, but it wasn't my first taste of pottery; I had done some when I was in Carbondale. There was a young lady, a potter, who fired a few of the things that I was able to build by hand—I never was that good with the potting wheel, potter's wheel. And when I came here I also did things that were limited to the couple inches high that I could get on the turning table. But my interest in it was very evident, and I began making drawings for possible future pottery projects, and Ball seemed to be interested in my sense of design, and he offered to provide some basic pots for me to decorate. And that was a kind of blessing because I had my eye on his tall upstanding jars and vases and so on, that he was able to accomplish in a very few minutes, because he was just about—well, I didn't know too much about pottery at the time, but I couldn't imagine how there could possibly be a potter that was more skillful than he in the creation of an upstanding pot. So that he turned over some certain things to me, in various stages, either a sopping wet stage, which would allow you to do a little graffito work right on the surface, or in the dried first-fired state, where you're able to apply the decoration to overlays of pigment, which are then refired and so on. And all together there are dozens, well, eight dozen anyhow, different varieties of approach by which you could attack the process of decorating a pot. So that I became more and more interested in it and by the end of the year we had achieved enough in the way of mutual pottery to have an exhibition, at the old library in Madison, which was very successful. And we sold things at modest prices and so on, and then he, stangely, he got an offer to go down to Carbondale, my old school, to set up the ceramics shop there and to teach. And I really don't know what happened in a person way between him and the dean of the college; anyhow, he kind of welcomed the opportunity to go down to Carbondale. And several times a year, for about seven or eight or nine years, I went down to Carbondale, spending a week at a time or ten days or three days, whatever I could work out, and really creating a tremendous amount of pottery. I think between us we achieved something like five or six hundred mutual pots in their various series. And I still have some of the pottery, although most of the stuff I have around has got a broken handle here, or crack in the bottom there, and so on. But it was a way of creating a form of art, which I really had not given much attention to. And I had already begun to be interested in my very tightly controlled painting, so that it was a kind of release for me to, after painting for a couple of hours in a way which is very demanding and which extracted every ounce of your energy, to sit down and with a pen or pencil and a sketchbook, noodle out little designs which just poured out of me really, and it's a thing that I never knew I possessed. And I was able to do themes and variations of one kind of horse, which went a dozen different ways, so that in the end you could select four different facades of a pot, that kind of thing—all related, all different—that kind of thing. And I became more and more interested in the process of forming the pot, although I never became really adept at turning the wheel. And of course I. . . I have the feeling that if I must, if I absolutely must create my own forms, I could possibly learn to do it. Now as good as [oil]. . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: It's a whole different thing working in three dimensions. But basically, he was forming the three-dimensional shape, and you were. . .

AARON BOHROD: Yes, that's right. He was doing all the hard work really, and I was having all the fun.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Oh, I don't know as that's true! But. . .

AARON BOHROD: Yeah, that's true. But somehow my work fit with his, and I have the feeling that what I was doing enhanced the pot, although he was doing perfectly good work, and now that we haven't been together for many, many years, he certainly has survived as a potter, although I'm not acquainted with what he has done. Technically, he's. . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: Where is he?

AARON BOHROD: He's on the west coast. I think he's up in Oregon or Washington, or someplace.

SUE ANN KENDALL: He is? I don't know that name.

AARON BOHROD: I'm really not in touch with him.

SUE ANN KENDALL: Um hmm. That was quite a different thing for you to do, was it not? You were still doing surface, painting on a surface, but it was a surface that was moving in three dimensions, rather than a flat one.

AARON BOHROD: Yes. I think the chief difference was that in my painting I was demanding of myself a strict adherance to the visual forms that constituted my subject matter, whereas in the pottery notions, I was consciously departing from the visual aspects of reality and delving into kind of fantastic or unrealistic approach to the forms of nature. I think most of the forms were based on nature, but they were departing from them so that my horses were all fat and distorted and strange and so on and prehistoric looking or, whatever, and all

different. Every _____ had a little different twist to them. Now there seems to be never a reason for repeating anything, because the ideas are so thick and so fast, and I have rolls of sketchbooks that are full of—Did you ever see my pottery sketchbook?

SUE ANN KENDALL: No.

AARON BOHROD: That was published by the Wisconsin University Press. That has some they extracted from my regular sketchbooks, of which there are three or four solid fat books, full of designs, some of which were developed and others just sketches which never saw the light of day, you know.

SUE ANN KENDALL: It's interesting that when you're working on the three-dimensional form, it's a freer kind of. . . What do I want to say?

AARON BOHROD: Well, it was sort of relaxed and. . .

SUE ANN KENDALL: It sounds like it's freer and more relaxing for you, and yet when you're. . .

AARON BOHROD: It's more relaxing because it wasn't, I felt, my real work; it was a kind of by-product of my work. But I think I was as serious in trying to create as beautiful a chunk of pottery as I could, just as in my painting, I'm. . .

END OF INTERVIEW

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