**Timothy Mitchell** [00:00:02] [sound check] It's July 13th, 2006. We're speaking today with Professor Walter Leedy of Cleveland State University. We're going to be talking to him about a variety of topics and questions, including WPA art. This is sort of my first time, so be generous with me.

**Walter Leedy** [00:00:30] Oh, yes. My first time, too.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:00:35] Professor Leedy, why don't we just start with sort of an easy question about a little bit about your background, what drew you into art, into our history or your original?

**Walter Leedy** [00:00:44] I don't know how far you want to go back, but in high school, I was both a math and science major and an art major, which is a kind of a unique combination. And I decided that I'd try to combine those two and go into the study of architecture. And I did do that. But along the way, I went to Europe one summer and I got very interested in historical architecture. And eventually after completing two degrees in architecture itself, I started in on the history of architecture and focused on that. I was particularly interested in the human element in architecture, how one perceived architecture, how one walked through it, how it determined how you felt in terms of feeling and expression rather than an architectural theory, which now of course, is the leading center for architectural thought is theory.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:01:58] And, I'm trying to think, I know you published books on.....

**Walter Leedy** [00:02:00] I published. I published on a wide range of topics in the history of architecture. My first publications were actually in the architecture of medieval Poland and I became very interested in a church type. I managed to get a grant to go to Poland for one year in the 1960s, in the mid-'60s, and I spent most of my time traveling around Poland, looking at buildings and talking to architects and architectural historians. I was very interested in Poland because after World War II and the destruction in Poland. Even if Poland was a communist state, they had the largest number of architects working in historic preservation, which in the 1960s was not a very popular subject to study. The programs in architectural preservation were just getting started in America. at that time, Columbia's program dates, for example, from the '60s. So it was a really understudied field in America. And so I got great insights into preservation problems, both economic and political and primarily and what should be preserved and what shouldn't be preserved and how it should be preserved and to what extent you should really rebuild the past to create a mythical past and and how much of those kinds of issues and questions which are really quite theoretical. Now, of course, with cultural tourism today in America, those questions are all very relevant as to how you rebuild the past in physical form. I mean, for example, on a southern plantation, do you really rebuild the slave quarters from scratch when none and very few have actually survived? And if so, you know, how do they look inside? How do you... What are the problems of presentation? Do you avoid the harsh truth and reality by making them fairly clean and attractive inside? Or was the reality different? And how do you present that? And I also grew up in Dearborn, Michigan, right next to Greenfield Village. And as a kid, I would go under the fence and into Greenfield Village and look around at the buildings and exhibits and everything. And of course, they have that problem of how do you present the past. But I was fascinated by Edison's laboratory and those kinds of things.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:04:39] Were there some projects here in the Cleveland area that you consulted on the presentation, besides the WPA, because we'll get to that...

**Walter Leedy** [00:04:46] Yes, I have. I've been a kind of a quiet person in that respect. I would say that I have taught a Cleveland seminar now for about 20 years or maybe more. And I became interested in, you know, my surroundings just as naturally you would, I think. And I began to publish on Cleveland architecture, but also students of mine that were in the program. I have gone out into all aspects of the community, whether they be at the Cleveland Restoration Society, the Cleveland Landmarks Commission, or at any of the neighborhood development centers. The nonprofits in the neighborhoods and then I had some students that are actually in real estate like Brown from progressive real estate, who managed to take one of my classes, although I can't claim I influenced him any way. I mean, you don't really can't claim that you've influenced a student because students have interests of their own. Sometimes you can support those interest. And I think that's the best thing to do.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:06:03] So, but is there a restoration project in Cleveland, or preservation project in Cleveland that you...?

**Walter Leedy** [00:06:12] Well, there are two projects at the moment that I guess I'm kind of involved in peripherally. One is what the Park Synagogue, although not officially. I, there, a few years ago I was asked by the Cleveland Heights Landmark Commission to give an opinion to an addition to their building, which resulted in a totally different concept for a building that they hoped to add. And also, I've tried to stimulate interest in that congregation in preserving their Cleveland Heights building. And over time, I think I was probably a little bit influential, but members of the community have decided that they would try to keep their Park Main, and they did build a second synagogue out on Shaker Boulevard, which is a fabulous building. But it was built small enough that people would still have to use Park Main, which I thought was quite ingenious of them. But before all of this interest started, I was asked by a member of their congregation to give a talk to a few of her friends, and five hundred people showed up. And it it didn't fill the sanctuary at Park Main because it holds a thousand. But I was flabbergasted at how many people and how many architects in the city came to see the building. And I think it showed the congregation, those members who weren't there, but many were, that there was an interest in an importance to that structure. Presently, there is a controversy centering around the Breuer tower attached the Ameritrust Building, which was originally Cleveland Trust at East 9th and Euclid Avenue, and that's a fabulous building, and I went through it last week to to see the inside. And the architectural details are are phenomenal, actually. The building is from 1971. And so there has to be an interest in preserving the best buildings of our recent past, too. Besides those that are a hundred years old. Whether that will be preserved or not, but there are ways to work with that building and make it efficient. But there are many cases are smaller items that I've tried and been unsuccessful with, too, because sometimes people are just determined to tear their buildings down. But oftentimes people will call me up and ask me how can I find out, you know, when my house was built or who built it or why is it important or things of that nature. And I always have tried to be as helpful as possible. And also the historic preservation people in the community call and ask for advice to, do you know about this building or that building, and where can I get information on this or that? One of the other preservation projects in Cleveland of recent time was the inside of the Union Club, which has been superbly restored by Paul Westlake's architectural firm. And the project was spearheaded, I believe, by Charlie Bolton, whose family has long ties to the Cleveland community going back well into the 19th century. And it became, I think, a personal fight on his part to get that Union Club to stay downtown probably, and to really try to fix the building up, to make it more, to increase the cash flow as well, as well as to preserve an architectural gem on Euclid Avenue. And it's fabulous, now on the inside too.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:10:34] I'll wait for my membership.

**Walter Leedy** [00:10:36] All you have to do, all you have to do is pay. But I arranged for a tour of the building, Charlie Bolton suggested it, by the Western Reserve architectural historians, and usually we get 15 or 20 people at a meeting and there were 65 for the Union Club. So there is an interest in that building in the community. You know, what is it like inside?

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:11:00] I've always heard people talk about it from the outside.

**Walter Leedy** [00:11:04] Right. Well, it's fabulous on the inside.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:11:10] I know you've had a strong personal and professional interest in collecting postcards. I wonder if you could talk to us a little bit about that. I mean, I've looked at the collection on-line at Cleveland Memory, as a kid I always sort of collected post cards too, so I'm just curious about the subject.

**Walter Leedy** [00:11:29] Well, there are two two or three things that got me started on that it didn't happen suddenly. I was working on a book on the history of the art museum and a person in the architectural historians. Tim McGuire, came called up and said, I'm on vacation and can I come to your office, and I just want to show you my postcards. And he came to my office. He knew I was working at the Cleveland Museum of Art. He gave me a Cleveland Museum of Art postcard, an old one. And then he had in his notebooks, he had all of his postcards arranged by street. And you could flip through and you could see Euclid Avenue or the side streets or unusual things. And so that showed me that the medium could actually be used for something. Usually you think of looking for pictures of buildings and of course, postcards are pictures. But in fact, they're much more. The second thing that happened is I had worked on a medieval project on Polish Romanesque architecture with Grace Houghton of SUNY Binghamton. And as she had, she called me, and she had purchased the Vestal Press and asked me if I could write an introduction to a book on Cleveland Postcards. And the author had died, and she just wanted to bring this book out. And so I said, well, really, I'm not really the person to do it. But I did write the introduction and she got what I wrote and she said, but it's of a different character than what the author wrote. It's more scholarly. And so there was a question as to whether she, so well, publish it if you'd like, and don't publish it. And but anycase she published it and she put my name on the cover with an introduction by and soon people were starting to call me up and asking me if I could come and lecture on picture postcards of Cleveland. And the Euclid Public Library did that. And I went out there and, of course I didn't have very many postcards and I didn't have slides. But those obstacles were soon overcome. I just called a few dealers up and managed to purchase lots of Cleveland postcards for 25 cents and 50 cents each. And I kind of make it made a lecture out of them, part scholarly, part humorous, part nostalgia that I thought the general public might be interested in. And so I went to the the place was packed with people. There was obviously a great deal of interest, nostalgia was the reason why they came. They wanted to see pictures of Euclid Beach and things in areas in which they grew up as a child. But the most, and I took some postcards for people to show and tell and whatnot. But I soon discovered that because it was a postcard and not a photograph, that people were just immediately enthralled by them. They weren't afraid of them. You know, photographs tended to make people fearful. But postcards. It was a familiar art media because, you know, with a postcard, you get it in the mail, you pick it up and you move it around and you look at it from different angles. And then you put it in your, yeah, you save it, and most people save picture, they're all of their picture postcards. So it was something that they were familiar with. And then I also when I gave that lecture, I talked about art principles and how the imagery was organized visually. In other words, I did a high class formal analysis of a couple postcards, as you would for a fine Rembrandt and you know how your eye moved around the image inside of it and whatnot. And it turned out that Bob Woide, was in the audience and Woide (WOIDE) was in the audience and he was he was a teacher from the Cleveland Public Schools, but he was head of the arts for the Cleveland Public Schools. And he came up to me afterwards. He not only said he collected postcards of University Circle, but he also said, what a fabulous way to teach art principles. And so then I decided, well, maybe I would try his theory out in my class. So I took a couple of slides to my class. And sure enough, the students immediately got excited when they saw postcards, when they didn't get excited about a black and white photograph of the same building. So I thought, well, there's just something magical about all of this. And so I started collecting images of Cleveland on picture postcards and everybody that I talked to about this, because every time I start a new project, of course, I talk to people about it to get their reaction, to see if they have any insights into this that can be helpful or maybe, maybe I'm just gone astray and I'm wasting my time. But is it is it? And people did say, I don't know why you're doing this, Walter. Why are you doing this? This is just silliness. It's not scholarly. It's not going to lead to anywhere. And it just went on and on and on. I kept getting that reaction from people. But of course, I you know, when you get a reaction like that, you have to decide if it's valid or not. And if you're gonna pursue it or not. But it did raise some questions in my mind, although I pursued it in any case. And eventually that led to an exhibit at the Cleveland Museum of Art. I had written the book on the museum's history, so I was kind of a known factor. And I had also lent the museum some objects for exhibits that they had. So the curators knew me and as well as the administration part of the museum for that reason. And it was coming up to Cleveland's bicentennial and in '96. And so I proposed an exhibit on Cleveland postcards in the education wing downstairs in the basement. And I thought, well, this will be you know, I'd never thought that. And I didn't hear back. I didn't hear back. They, I didn't think they would be interested. Then they finally called and they said, if you could do comic books and posters along with the postcards, you know, we could do that in the education thing and while, and of course, the time frame at that point was very narrow, and I knew that Cleveland had a fabulous tradition and lithography and poster making, but I didn't have the time to do the research and pick out the images and whatnot. So I thought that this was just a dead in the water to do a postcard show because curators thought, well, is it's not art, it's advertising, it's not high art. It's not this, it's not that. But I reminded them that the Metropolitan had a exhibit of baseball cards that was, that was very popular. And I think that the chief curator, Diane Degrassi and Bob Bergman just said, we're going to have the postcard show. And then I got together with the director of Exhibits Strain. And and and I asked about how we were going to do this and how many I could have. And he said you could either have just a few frame, just precious objects, or you could have a thousand. And so I said, where was this going to be? And he said in the in the hallway outside the cafeteria. And I had said, oh, fabulous. Everybody's got to get to see them then because not hidden in the basement. I was just as pleased as could be. And then he said, we'll make the frames to size, you know, figure out how many postcards along the bottom and up and we'll make these frames and we'll hang them on copper wires from the top. I said, but people are going to touch that Plexiglas. And as soon as Pete one person touches in one area, the whole wall is going to wiggle because everything is going to hit into each... each thing. And so before you know what, they were building a permanent wall there over the tank travertine, too, so they could screw the panels on to the wall. And sure enough, people were touching the plexiglass and sure enough they were cleaning the plexiglass every day. And, you know, in an art museum, you're not supposed to be touching the works of art. But the guards just gave up. They couldn't they couldn't control that things. But in any case, it ended up fifth, having fifteen hundred postcards. I laid them out here at home on craft paper on the floor. And then of the museum policy is that you give a numbered for every object that's borrowed. And so they're their registrar came to my house and they have fixed up a removable number to the back of each postcard and did a complete list of every postcard exhibited. And I said, that's not necessary for you to do that. And then they did photographs of each of the mock ups. And then they their framers went to work. And at first, I suggested they be framed on black. But their framers decided it would look better on Creem. And they did six of the panels. And I went to see how it was coming along. And I thought black. But. But the installation designers said, didn't professor ladies say black? And before you know what, they had to reframes six big panels. I don't think I was too popular, but the exhibit was popular and it was the largest exhibit of single items that the museum has ever had. And it was the longest lasting because it extended way beyond the Cleveland transformation show.It went for over six over six months. And so then I knew for sure that postcards were a deal. The question was, is how do you make the imagery accessible for research? And because you can't publish that many images in a book or anything like that that would be impossible. And so that's when the digitization project at Cleveland State started. And, you know, researchers, you know, there's nothing over the print that says CSU or anything like that. So teachers can use those images and their students can use those images at low resolution without, you know, for free. And if you want a high level high resolution print, you can also purchase that or the electronic data for a fine publication.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:23:05] Was the exhibit at the Cleveland Museum of Art, organized in the same categories that they have on the Cleveland Memory by location... sort by location?

**Walter Leedy** [00:23:13] No, well at Cleveland Memory, they're just digitizing sort of alphabetically, except for the Cleveland Public Schools. Most of the postcards are there, but we're only up to the up to the G's or H's at the moment. There are forty-one hundred done, but there are six thousand more to go. So I arranged the Cleveland postcards at the museum by life activities like health, education, work, play, entertainment, people, things like that. I arrange them by subject matter because I thought that would kind of give a history. Like if you wanted to study the images of women, you could look at the panel on people and see how women were depicted. You know, from the 1890s to the present day. And of course, you know, people made their own connections and they came back to the exhibit. And, you know, with so many images, you look at what you find attractive first. And that defies all museum theory, by the way, that a person, you know, exhibits should only have 200 items in them. But here was an exhibit of fifteen hundred. And, you know, the people would come back and they saw what they were interested in. And just as you as a person does when they walk through a museum, they don't look at everything in a room. But you know, the museum profession has a kind of have certain rules and practices that this exhibit just violated. Blatantly. And it worked.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:24:56] You know, you talk about how much more compelling these postcard images are of a building, perhaps the Terminal Tower, for example, than an untouched photograph. But, why is it? I mean why is it that people are drawn...

**Walter Leedy** [00:25:14] I think it's... I think it's because people are familiar with it, because they actually handle postcards and they get them in the mail. They buy them when they go on their vacation. They say, "Wish you were here," right? And I think it's familiarity. You know, I think it's a matter of just familiarity, that makes something acceptable. So, you know, it's when I first came to Cleveland, there was a bakery in Parma that made fabulous chocolate cream pies. And, you know, once people discovered that, they just went there and it became a kind of a tradition. You know, people became familiar with it and, you know, their faces would light up. You know, when you got chocolate pie from the Parma Hometown Bakery, you know that that just was immediate acceptance. It's not that it was necessarily fabulous.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:26:18] It's not the, like the, you know, I noticed many of them are sort of colorized photographs?

**Walter Leedy** [00:26:24] No, I don't. Well well, the one of the things about postcards is most of them are kind of idealized in a way. In other words, when it's... it has to do partly with the printing process. Cards before World War I were oftentimes printed in Germany and before they were actually printed, awnings, red striped awnings might be placed on the buildings. All of the electrical wires could be airbrushed out of the image and and whatnot. The picture could be cleaned up. In other words, before it was done. So in a way, postcards don't reflect reality, just as photographs don't reflect reality. No photograph really reflects reality as we know, right? So there's that aspect. And usually when you went on vacation, these images usually depict the most important aspects of the community at any particular moment. And that's another reason to collect postcards. I mean, by looking at the dates, I mean, if you find, I mean, I don't know how many tourists go and see the Garfield Monument these days, but at the turn of the century, there were just dozens and dozens of different postcards of the Garfield Monument. And it shows, you know, what people were interested in at that particular time. Disasters are another. The fire at Lakeview School in Collinwood in 1908. I have 23 different postcards of that, and I just have stopped getting postcards because there are there are just many more. But disasters are something that other people that people were interested in. Although most postcards are very boosteristic, and there are some postcard producers in the city that would never produce a negative postcard. New Vista postcard. You have never seen a negative postcard or a disaster postcard in in their racks in know out in the community. But but the owner of that of that postcard company told me explicitly he would never produce a negative image of Cleveland. So you get rather uncritical images. Simplify, simplified images uncritical images yet, but they're very documentary because I've tried to focus on interiors, and so I probably have the largest number of postcards of Cleveland interiors because I'm very interested in where people lived, where people worked, where people stayed when they came to Cleveland. And so I go out of my way to look for interiors of buildings, too. And you can imagine it with a big database how those could be studied by social historians and so forth. So the whole database at CSU is to create, you know, our research base for other people to use in the ways that they see fit. Each generation will ask different questions of the past. And here is a huge resource archive that will be online to use. That's different from photographs.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:29:55] I used it in a very unscholarly way. I showed my father-in-law the pictures of Euclid Beach, and he was very, you know, which was his childhood growing up.

**Walter Leedy** [00:30:03] Well, see, that's what people are interested in. And you know, when people get interested in something like that, their interest may develop into something else, too. You know, you just never know where somebodies interests are going to lead them in the future.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:30:21] Do you have one or two of the postcards that are special favorites for you?

**Walter Leedy** [00:30:26] Well, I don't know. It's favorites for what, I mean, that's a great question that's asked Americans all the time. It's like, what is your favorite color? And then you would have to say for a tie, for a shirt, for a piece of furniture, for this or that.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:30:41] So, the most representative for the soul of Clefveland

**Walter Leedy** [00:30:46] Well, of course, the most known image is Terminal Tower. I mean that because. And I. And I think that that's so because it has, you not only see it downtown and when you look up you you get an idea of where you are downtown when you spot the Terminal Tower, but also from the distance, you can see it way out when you go way out east or way out west. You know, you can see Terminal Tower and you can say, that's Cleveland. I was sitting next to somebody coming in on a plane, once, and and the woman was telling her child. Now, look there. There's the Terminal Tower, that's downtown Cleveland, as they were looking out the window. So it's, it's really a good cognitive marker, partly from design and whatnot. So, I have a huge number of postcards of the Terminal Tower, you know, taken in all different times of the day, different perspectives inside, outside and whatnot. But now, of course, downtown isn't as well known to people in the in the outer suburbs. If I asked where the mall is downtown, they'll say, what shopping mall? They have no idea of where Cleveland City Hall is, or the Cuyahoga County building, unless they've been there for a particular reason. They just don't have knowledge of downtown, outside of Terminal Tower. And maybe the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:32:23] Do you take you take any of your students like walking tours, or architectural tours?

**Walter Leedy** [00:32:27] We sometimes, we sometimes have done that. One time I taught a class in First College in which we went to houses of each different decade. So we went a house to a house from 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940. And you know, we went inside and whatnot, but it was very difficult to arrange that, by the way. So all the students could get there in time and whatnot because they have to work and had limited time frame and class and whatnot. But for my Cleveland class we tend to go to the historical resources like we go to the Historical Society, we go down to the Cleveland Public Library and things like that, rather than individual tours of buildings. Although I'm hoping to do that this fall. I'm Into some of the buildings that are normally open to the public.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:33:26] Let's switch over here and talk a little bit about some of the WPA (OK) federal art (OK). First question I had was, what originally, sort of, sparked your interest, or caught your attention about WPA art?

**Walter Leedy** [00:33:40] Well, I guess I would say it was a woman, Karal Ann Marling. When I came to Cleveland, Karal Ann Marling was teaching at Case Western. And I I met her quite by accident because she had said something very rude at the Cleveland Museum of Art lunchroom. And whatnot. And before you know it, I was going out with her and she at that time was working with doing an exhibit on WPA art for the Cleveland Public Library because the art museum didn't consider it to be worthy enough for a display.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:34:31] When was this?

**Walter Leedy** [00:34:32] This was in the 1970s, so '72 to.... I think their exhibit might have been '73 or '74. And it was quite something because then I would, she had all of her students at case, her PhD students working on the exhibit, and they gathered an incredible amount of material, WPA art in Cleveland, which is now at the library at Case Western in their special collections. And then they had their exhibit downtown at the public library. And the library was a patron of the WPA art. So it was an appropriate spot to have the exhibit. And it was also appropriate, I think, because WPA art was meant for the population as a whole. So that's how I became interested in. I kind of got dragged into it, but it was interesting and that's how I became interested. And I really didn't do much with WPA art at all until they were going to tear down Shaw High School in East Cleveland. And I remembered that there was a mural at Shaw and I had asked about it, because I had started going to the school board meetings trying to influence the architects and the school board to do a much better design, first to save Kirk Junior High, but also to help them realize that architecture was very important in creating a good learning environment. And I was very critical of one of the elementary schools prospect that had an addition to it, because I could see from the outside that there were there's very few fenestration or windows in the building and the inside rooms looked like fluorescent boxes to me as I walked by the school to the bus stop. So I got very agitated, of course. And I mentioned all of this. And I told them it looked like a jail, and did they want their kids really to... And this, of course, went out on East Cleveland cable. And before you know it, they weren't taping the school board sessions, I guess, as an economy measure. But I went to every school board meeting and I encouraged my neighbors to do it. And then when the decision was made to tear down Shaw....uh, well, Kirk, there were murals in the lobby, and I encouraged them to save the murals in the lobby, and they knew what they had there. And there was somebody who worked for the school board, their media relation's person who brought in somebody to assess the situation and take the murals down. They told the school board that the murals were on masonite boards, the canvas was on masonite boards, and they could take them down themselves. And there are these nine murals from Kirk, which are now in storage that the school board has. What they're going to do with them, I don't know. But then I remembered that there was a mural at Shaw. Although I had never seen it, I knew about it. And when Shaw was being demolished, they had a open house sale in which they invited the public in to buy used furniture and whatnot. And so I said, my neighbor next door, I hadn't even thought about going to the school that day, but my neighbor said, let's go and see what we can buy. And I wasn't really interested in school furniture, but of course, I kind of wanted to see the inside. And so when I got there, though, I suddenly remembered that there was this WPA mural, at one time, in the cafeteria. But I had asked about it before, and I was told it was it no longer existed. So I didn't go there intentionally to find it, since I was told by a school board person that it no longer existed. But getting in the cafeteria. I was bumped into another person, and I'm not supposed to get close to dust or anything since I have leukemia for fear of getting mold in my lung and whatnot. And I told him there's a mural in this room and the logical space was over the fireplace. You know, when you looked at the mural. And so he poked a hole in the drywall. So the mural was this thus then brought to light and then the hole got bigger and bigger and bigger. And actually, that day, the school board treasurer was there, and he said, I can I can auction that mural off and you can buy it. And I said, well, I wouldn't have any way of opening up the wall. It's really not schoolboard property. It belongs to the federal government if it's a WPA mural, you don't want to really get your, you know, get rid of your cultural heritage and so forth and so on, and so nothing happened. And then I gave them the names of a few conservators. And then the building was coming down at the end of the week and that was in a week. And they had a very narrow timeframe. And on Monday, I got very anxious. I called these conservators to see if they had been called. They hadn't. So I got one of them to come out. They assess the situation. And they said immediately that they would come and take it down the next day. It was the Intermuseum Conservation Association, and Al Albano. So the school board agreed to that. The superintendent and the board members agreed to the removal of it, and they were very actually very helpful in removing it. They had the custodian at the school set up scaffolding for the Intermuseum Conservation Association and so forth. And of course, then I did a no-no and called the papers, and Steve Litt at the Plain Dealer and I called Deborah Lee, I think, at Channel 5, because she had oftentimes come to my house to do postcards for news shows and whatnot. And so before, you know, it was on television and it actually, I heard, made the national news, this discovery of a WPA mural. But now the mural sits in the Intermuseum Conservation Association. And what's going to happen to it? One doesn't know. Hopefully, you know, the East Cleveland belongs to really the school board. It belongs to the federal government. But the school board will have to decide, you know, what it's going to do with its murals from Kirk and what it will do with the mural from Shaw High School. But the mural from the mural from Shaw High is truly exceptional because of its subject matter. It actually shows the 100th anniversary of Shaw High or an anniversary. It was painted in 1939 and it actually, depicts real teachers, real principals and the curriculum of the school and real teachers. And I've been able to identify several of them in the mural, but not all of them. Also, I did look at the Shaw High School newspaper for that period because I bought copies of it on eBay and I have all the copies for 1939, 1940, 1941, 1942, and there's not one article in the school newspaper about that mural and its installation. And I think I have all of the issues of the school newspaper. There could have been a special issue, though, with their volume numbers and and numbers. So it may have not had any impact on the students at that moment, at which I found rather surprising. But the subject matter of the mural for a WPA mural is very exceptional, whereas the Kirk murals, from Kirk Junior High, you know, show the history of the area from prehistoric times forward. You know, they showed Dugway Brook, and they showed the landscape, and more of the kind of subject matters that you would expect in a WPA mural. So that's how that mural came to be, came to be found. And then after that, after I was in the paper, of course, other people called me about their murals in their schools. And how do we save them? You know, and the teachers are very well organized at Collinwood High School to save their mural. Their mural is truly exceptional also because it's over 200 feet long and it goes down a corridor. It probably went around the corridor too, because it looks like some of it's been painted over, but it goes down a long corridor and then around an elevator lobby and a stairwell lobby. And it shows depicts the history of technology relative to transportation. So, you know, the people riding in carriages and then in trains and then it depict airplanes. Now airplanes and WPA murals are very, very common subject matter, by the way, because that was the latest technology for transportation in the '30s was air flight. But the Collingwood mural also depicts television. And so there's the television camera, somebody being televised at that moment, and then their image reflected on a tube. And of course, 1939 was the right year for television. In the New York World's Fair, there was a display of television, although it had been invented a few years earlier really. But so I think the Collinwood School mural is very important in Cleveland. And the teachers are very well-organized there. They've gotten estimates on the cost of preservation and whatnot from three different firms. But the day that I was there, taking pictures of it, there were electrical workers putting electrical conduit right on the top of it. And so, you know, everybody isn't focused on what to do with their mural. But the teachers liked the mural. And that's important. You know, teachers are organized to do it. And the principal loves the mural and is very proud of it. But with the school rebuilding program, there isn't money for things like that. So what will happen to it? I don't know. But also at Collinwood High School, there used to be an English classroom, no longer an English classroom, with great murals over the blackboards that were paid for by, oh, the class of 1939. I don't remember exactly, or '38 with Arthurian legends, which is which is really, they're really fabulous. And then in an oval music practice room there, there are panels depicting the history of music and grisaille, which is painting in black and gray. And the panels are very, the room is very similarly shaped to the entrance lobby of Severance Hall, which displays the history of music. And I think the Collinwood ones may have been a little bit earlier, but no one's ever looked at those, the English classroom or the music room, where because after I looked at the mural and the long mural, then I asked are there any other murals in the building. And it before you know what these other two popped out. You know, the teachers thought of them.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:48:10] What I am curious about the, you know, you said you remembered at Shaw that there was this mural? I was curious where that came from.

**Walter Leedy** [00:48:15] Yeah. Well, you know, what are they? Well, it came from Karal Ann and working on this project., you know, in the '70s, it came out of my deep memory, I think. And I just I don't know why I remembered it. I just don't there's. How can you explain that? You know, I just don't know for sure.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:48:38] Sometime she had spoken of it, or (illegible).

**Walter Leedy** [00:48:40] Well, I mean, it was some it was something that was being considered. And she had sent people out to look at it and whatnot. Although, and of course, you know, I live just two blocks from Shaw. Although, you know, you can live close to something and not be aware of it. But it but it was already covered up when I moved to East Cleveland, although I can't say that I don't think I've ever been in the school until that day, actually. I think I may have been in the auditorium, but I. But that was in the newer in a newer wing. In a different wing. But one thing about WPA murals is in Cleveland, and I think that people that scholars have missed out on this to some degree is that I also got involved with the murals at Valleyview in Tremont. You know that project is... There's a project by the CMHA that destroyed, now destroyed, all of the 1930s buildings. And they're going to build new housing, some rent subsidized, some for sale and some public housing all together, a kind of a mixed cluster of townhomes and other kinds of things. But they had a community building that had three murals in it, one in the office, a 33-foot-long mural by Louis Grebenak on which shows an idealized building of the housing development. And it's a fabulous mural in the sense that it employs all of the latest ideas in art from the art point of view. Also in that mural, there was a doorway that led from the one room to another in the actual building. And this door was incorporated into the mural as it was being, you know, into the building that was being constructed. And you had the masons around the doorway, you know, piling up the bricks. Anyway, it's a fabulous mural. But when I saw it, it had a partition wall going into it. Although the petition wall, when it was built and actually didn't touch the mural, there was a quarter-inch space. But, you know, you couldn't so you couldn't really see the whole mural from one room. You had to go in one room and then in another because the original room had been divided. Well, that was a fabulous mural. And at that time, it was questionable what the CMHA was going to do with this art. But anyway, the other two murals are by Elmer Brown. And Elmer Brown is an African American artist and a Clevelander. I don't think he was born in Cleveland, if I remember, but he was living, he went to Cleveland Institute of Art, or Huntington. Huntington. I would forget. I forget all the details of his biography, but there is a biography of him in, as well as Grebenak, in Transformations in Cleveland Art, the exhibit at the Art Museum. You know, all of his details are there and their sources. In any case, this there are two murals by Elmer Brown, each about 17 feet long. They're on canvas also and they're in the community room. And they show the history of Cleveland from the founding of Cleveland to the building of Terminal Tower spread out over these two murals. And they're also fabulous, you know, for different reasons because of the subject matter and its composition. One of the Elmer Brown murals is a little longer because, I guess, it looks like when he got to put them up there, one wall was a little longer and this canvas on the back was pieced together, and a little part put in. So you're always made slightly longer, but that's a problem of execution. That mural had very severe conservation problems because it was first painted in grisaille in grays, and then the color layer was added and the color layer was flaking off of the surface, badly. And that presented a very severe problem, presenting a very severe problem because the layer, color layer has to be reattached where the Grebenak mural was in a better state of preservation. I think it might have been cleaned in the '70s and another layer of some kind of varnish put over it to me. But I'm not in conservation and Al Albano from the Intermuseum Conservation Association would have more of a scientific look at this and also perhaps more insights into the problems of conservation. But in any case, it was questionable as to what the CMHA was going to do with these murals. And the cost of conservation of the three murals was in excess of two thousand dollars. And of course, who has money for that? And in the past, you know, somebody would say, well, let some foundation contribute and pay, right? That's the answer to everything. Maybe some foundation will pay or the state will pay, right? One or the other. So. But you know local foundations have paid for the restoration of murals, but only to the tune of one hundred thousand, I think for the murals in the Playhouse Square area and one of the theaters of Playhouse Square, the Daugherty murals, and the rest of the money had to be raised privately. Well, you could imagine how difficult it would be for the CMHA to raise money for this. So they were in a dilemma as to what to do and how to save them and should they should they be saved? The other part of Valleyview are... they're terra-cotta plaques which depict Tremont, which are placed on the outside of the building, which were very interesting, 14 or 17 of them. And then there was a huge wall size terra-cotta mural in the form of a plan for Tremont showing the development on the outside of a building. So they had these outside pieces, too. And in addition, they... [phone rings]

**Walter Leedy** [00:55:30] Well, all right.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:55:32] Well, Professor Leedy, you were talking about some of the WPA murals and pieces in the Cleveland area that were particularly interesting, talking about the terra-cotta plaques that depicted Tremont.

**Walter Leedy** [00:55:44] Right. And also in Tremont at Valleyview, there were full-size animals that were cast, animals that were in the children's playgrounds. So the whole artistic program at Tremont was the cast animals, the terra-cotta plaques on the outside of the building, and then the murals and some other plaques on the inside of the building. So it was totally integrated. And here, I think, is where people have missed a lot, missed the major issues with WPA art. I think that in Cleveland, you know, people tend to put WPA art into a whole national context and they fail to realize that individual patrons in Cleveland had rather different objectives, that they used the WPA art program for. For example. Ernest Bohn, who is responsible, really, for the Housing Authority in the '30s, had a definite idea of how this artwork and how the building up the development should work. The idea was to lift people out of their misery and to become better citizens. But all of these murals like Virtue, Labor and, you know, going from being drunk to being sober and all of that were were deeply, were values that were deeply in-borne psyche as really Christian values rather than the idea of uplifting a general population after an economic downslide, after the depression. Here, Bohn was using the WPA program to really impose his values on the housing development and how he thought people should live. And the art reflects those values and was an important part of it. And in Cleveland, the housing authority had murals in not only in Valleyview, they had murals and art in Lakeview Terrace, and at the Outhewaite houses and so forth. So the art was a very important part of his overall program for public housing and not just mere decoration.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:58:27] I also want to step back, you mentioned that the nine panels from Kirk have been removed and saved as well. Is Al Albano and his organization holding those as well?

**Walter Leedy** [00:58:39] No, those are being held by the East Cleveland School Board in a storage facility, I understand. But I kind of wanted to go see them, but was told that East Cleveland Board of Education hadn't paid its storage fee. And so the owner of the storage locker hasn't allowed them in. But it's not only the murals, it's all of their records and everything. I think they, I was told they had a deficit. They owed about $50,000 or something. I'm not sure of that, but that's what I was told, you know, so when you hear something like that, you begin to understand the problems that's faced the East Cleveland School Board with regard to... Then they're in fiscal emergency. So they really don't have any money to do anything with the murals. I did suggest to them in a letter that they use the mural from Shaw, and have a contemporary artist come in and paint a pendant mural and display both in their new building, but I did not get a response. I was told that they hoped to build an administration building at some time in the distant future and they would incorporate all of the murals in that structure. But I think that's a fantasy at this point, or a hope, I should say.

**Timothy Mitchell** [01:00:17] What is the status of the murals you mentioned at Valleyview...(illegible) terra-cotta pieces?

**Walter Leedy** [01:00:22] I hope those those are becoming, the terra-cotta pieces will be reinstalled in the new project and the animals will be recast and molds of them made, and they'll be, there are five different animals, and they'll be fixed and then they'll be recast. The murals, I hope, will come to Cleveland State to be in the new student center on a long-term lease that has yet to be signed. But I understand it's about to be signed. And in exchange, Cleveland State will pay for the restoration of the murals, thus out of their percent, part of their percent for art for the new student center. So, and this is if this actually works out in reality, which I believe it should. From my understanding, because the architects for the new student center have gotten the materials for the size of the murals and whatnot so they can work them into the complex. So this will be a way that the murals can be saved, preserved. They'll they'll be on a long term loan. They'll still be owned by the housing authority, actually, the federal government, and it will be so stated on the wall by the murals. Also the Elmer Brown murals will be digitized and copied full thing and be placed into a building at Valleyview. I suspect that the digital images might actually look as good as the real mural, and people probably won't be able to quite tell the difference. But the housing, that solves a problem for the housing authority as to how to protect the murals. You know, once you have something like that, how do you protect it from destruction and graffiti and whatnot? In a public place? But of course, you have to display it, you know, the display of art, all of it involves risk. But you have to also be prudent.

**Timothy Mitchell** [01:02:32] Did you play a role in the university working out that deal? I imagine so.

**Walter Leedy** [01:02:35] Yes. Yes. Yes. Just the usual determined self, I think.

**Timothy Mitchell** [01:02:44] Could you tell us about that?

**Walter Leedy** [01:02:46] No, it was quite simple. I just called Jack Boyle up, who is in charge of the building projects, and I think the idea just appealed to him. And then we went over to the Intermuseum Conservation Association because at that point, the murals had already been removed. And then he said, that's a great idea, let's see what we can do. And then the question was, is how to work out the lease and what actually what happened and whatnot not. So they said that was it. That's if it's if it if the CMHA board actually signs. But the lease, all the arrangements are being finalized at the moment. One of the things that held up the process is first the student center had to be approved by the board of trustees at Cleveland State and then the act to start actual construction and design that had to be approved and that was just approved on June 23rd. And the contracts led to the architects. So there would be no reason to go enter this agreement if the building wasn't built. So I think that's what took the time is for Cleveland State to decide you know, when the, if the building would be built first and then the contracts for the architects. But I had an email from Jack Boyle a week or so ago saying that they are finalizing the agreement with the CMHA. So as you can imagine, it's a difficult thing to do. But in this particular case, I think it's it's a kind of, I hope it'll set a kind of a national for the nation because, well, how do you save these murals when they're when they're public entities don't have money to save them? You know, the ones done by the post office, you know, the post office has money to fix their murals. But school boards and housing authorities and whatnot, don't. You know, the cost of preserving the murals and finding a space in which they would actually be seen is hard to do. But this way, the murals at Cleveland State will be available to the public, the large public. These are so essential and they're essential and they're essential to this history of Cleveland. So they were worth doing. And Elmer Brown is an African American artist, and there aren't many big murals like that.

**Walter Leedy** [01:05:33] Sure.

**Timothy Mitchell** [01:05:34] And the last question I think for today is if you if there are you've mentioned some particular pieces and I'm going to take a look at what I can see, the things you mentioned. I have seen the outside the terracotta pieces was displayed outside.

**Walter Leedy** [01:05:52] Oh, you saw those at Valleyview.

**Timothy Mitchell** [01:05:56] But I'm curious about other other WPA murals in the area that you find particularly compelling.

**Walter Leedy** [01:06:03] Well, I think you should go to Collinwood High School, Collinwood High School. I think you just need to call, and they'll let you in to see it. I mean, they're probably open in the summer for summer classes. And they're so proud of their murals, but they're so spectacular. And they and they need PR because they need to be somehow they have to be saved. But, you know, there are murals in Cleveland Heights schools and in the public libraries. They're just really all over. But look at Karal Ann's book, Marling's book, and you'll get an idea. But of course, there's more to the WPA than just murals. There's printmaking and other other artistic activities. One of the things about the WPA art that no one really has focused on except mentioned is that it put all of these artists to work during the Depression and there after. And these people were probably would have been lost to art if they weren't employed. They would have gone out, and they've gotten jobs in other fields. And once an artist gets a job in another field, I mean, how do you go back to art? You probably don't. So for Elmer Brown and whatnot who later went on to work at American Greetings, this provided an end to the profession, the WPA working for the WPA on the WPA projects. So for individual artist, I think this was an incredible opportunity to stay in art. Otherwise, they would have been lost to art.

**Timothy Mitchell** [01:07:54] Is there anything else you'd like to add based on the topics we asked you about today?

**Walter Leedy** [01:07:59] Well, depends on your questions.

**Timothy Mitchell** [01:08:01] I actually have Marling's book is being sent to me through interlibrary loan, so I'll have a chance to look at that hopefully very shortly. And actually, there are a few things that you sort of touched on today, but I'm going to get a list of questions and see if maybe I can reconfigure it to be efficient for next time.

**Walter Leedy** [01:08:19] OK. OK. OK. All right.