**Timothy Mitchell** [00:00:02] Good to go? All right. It's July 19, 2006, and we're speaking with Walter Leedy, CSU professor of art history and architecture. This is the second of our conversations with Dr. Leedy. And we actually I thought about our last conversation, one of the things that I didn't have the transcript to listen to when I asked you about what sort of sparked your interest in the WPA art. It was almost like, I think sort of the quote of the interview. There's a quotable moment. It was it was a woman you know,

**Walter Leedy** [00:00:46] It's true.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:00:46] Like film noir. So I guess, you know, was it, you know, if you could just explain that just a little further than me, sort of. We know that Karal Ann Marling was involved in this project at Case Western Reserve. But what interested you about it, I guess?

**Walter Leedy** [00:01:14] Well, I mean, it was something that I didn't know about. And, you know, curiosity plays a role. I think I think if you're interested in the visual environment, you know, the way the visual art environment is articulated in terms of interior spaces as well as exterior spaces, that's really important because, you know, architecture is a place for living, you know, the rituals of daily life. And when I was at the University of Michigan in architecture school, you know, they began to do psychological studies about how, you know, how people reacted in different environments. For example, here, I would never put my desk facing the way this table is if I was going to sit where Justin here is sitting, because my back would be to the window. You know, I would place my propably by the window to my side so I wouldn't be distracted by what's going on outside, but I could have a feeling of control of the space and my environment. So, you know, that, you know, goes on into color and articulation and imagery and so forth. So I think the interest in interest in wall murals was always something that I was interested in, also or could have easily become interested in. Also, when I was growing up, I never really went to the Detroit Institute of Arts too often. But my father always remarked that the great thing about the Detroit Institute of Arts with Rivera murals and the court yard showing the Ford Motor Company workers and so far it's I was interested in that, I think, also, that kind of, you know, image, the images of those murals, you know, were in my mind. So it's probably a complex, you know, number of reasons why I was interested in them, interested in murals. But I had never thought on my own to go around and, you know, to look at them and whatnot. That hadn't occurred to me at that time. I was trained as an architect, but also my degree was in art history and it was in medieval English architecture, basically. And so at that particular moment in my career, I was focusing on the development of light Gothic architecture in England. But as I mentioned, you know, you're stimulated by what's around you. And the more you know about what's around you and, you know, the more rich your life is. It wasn't till later in the 1970s that I became really interested in Cleveland architecture and started to teach a course on the history of urban development, the history of the city over time. I thought that would be a good class for Cleveland students and also for in subpart of the Urban Institute before it was the College of Urban Affairs. So I began to teach that class in support of that of those programs, because at that moment in time, the programs really didn't have a strong visual component. They were mostly interested in economic planning and land use and things like that. But I thought the visual environment was important, too. If planners were going to be making decisions, they should have some visual, critical thinking, so to speak. But that's how I became interested. And then there's Karal Ann, which is a story and all of in itself. I don't know if I want to do that on disc, but. But basically I was in the. I'll tell you one one story, yeah. and I think you'll it'll convey to give you a sense of why she was one of the most popular instructors at Case. And then maybe I might tell you another story or two, not for the record, but on this recording, the first time I met her, actually I was in the cafe at the Cleveland Museum of Art. We had to go, at Cleveland State the art instructors were renting slides from the art museum. So we had to go to the art museum all the time to get slides. Now, that was a great disadvantage because of the time involved, but the advantages were immense because I soon got to know all of my colleagues at Case Western who were using the slide collection as well as colleagues at John Carroll. So it was a great enriching experience to know everybody in your discipline in the city. But I was in the cafe having lunch, and I had met Karal Ann that day. And then, she was, of course, making a lot of noise at the table and laughing at what not. And one of the curators, Schuster, who is sitting at another table and she said, "oh, oh, you're just shushing me, you just can't get it up". And needless to say, needless to say, that just made me smile. And I figured uh oh, uh oh, I'm going to, I'll know Karal Ann pretty well shortly. And that's how it all it all started. But, of course, you know, her her straightforward mannerisms just absolutely continued when she came to give a paper in the night early 1990s in Cleveland after she had only been in Cleveland for three years in the early 70s, but when she came to give a paper at the for the Artists Foundation in the nineteen nineties, they had a dinner for her. And of course, I was at the dinner. And then she was also going to give a talk at the city club. And I said, "oh, are you going to be showing slides"? And she immediately said at the top of her voice, "Don't be stupid, Walter, you know, slides can't be used for a radio program." And one of my colleagues from Case Western, Professor Gladys Haddad, was there, and wanted, I guess, to sit next to her, but she, and Professor Hadad said, "you must be Karal Ann Marling" and Karal Ann responded, "I know who I am. Who are you"? Then she demanded, I sit next to her, and when when Professor Haddad wanted to sit down next to her, she just told Gladys that, you know, this chair is for my Walter, and she was padding the seat. So it showed her her vibrant personality really carried through also in her about Elvis Presley's house, Graceland, too, with its shag carpeting on the ceiling. And needless to say, it was it was not only a funny talk at the city club, but it was also well, it was scholarly as well. I think that's enough, before I tell you anything else. But it gives you a sense of her vibrant personality, and I think you could see why students just loved her in class, because she was but she was she is very scholarly and she does know her material very, very well, much more so than most Americanists.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:09:15] That charisma goes a long way.

**Walter Leedy** [00:09:19] Right, right.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:09:25] Having had a chance to read through this and get a sense of the wide variety of different programs that were part of the federal art's palat, if you will. How how do you or do you, can you identify particular characteristics that you would say are typical with federal art projects?

**Walter Leedy** [00:09:52] Well, usually the subject matter. And, you know, because they are all done at the same time, there is a kind of a time style factor. You know, when you look at art and if your eye is trained and we know it's possible to train one's eye. For example, if I showed 10 students, oh, I would say paintings by 10 different artists and I asked them to group them. You know, if I show 10 students, sort of 10 impressionist paintings and then if I showed them in eleventh one that they didn't know and I put it in a group of other paintings, they they could on their own, pick it out as an impressionist painting. But there is a certain theory of style. You know, there's kind of a time style that everything done was done at a certain time period might share a certain visual characteristic of a regional style that, you know, things done in a region might share a certain characteristics. Now, for Cleveland, that's very, very difficult. By the way, you know, art historians who deal with Cleveland material have been trying to define a Cleveland school of art for example. But since most of Cleveland art is done primarily in the 20th century, although there are some notable 19th century examples, by the 20th century, art had become internationalized and Cleveland artists traveled to Europe and were greatly influenced by Europe and then by other American artists, that this idea of regional style isn't as prevalent as it would be, for example, in Renaissance Italy, where it might be easier to tell the difference between art in Florence and art in Venice at a particular time. And then there is the third criteria for style, it's personal style, that artist, everything done by a particular artist might have some characteristic to it that might give it away as by that artist. Now, here again, you know, this is a theoretical model. And if you're probably been reading in the newspaper recently about Rembrandt's birthday celebrations and whatnot and, you know, there were six six hundred and fifty or so paintings attributed to Rembrandt, but now scholars have gotten that down to around 300, you know, based on technical studies as well as stylistic ones. So, you know, all of these stylistic categories, you know, have some problems involved in them. But in the 1930s, there was a kind of a 1930s style. And these murals would generally fit into that that category too, in terms of, they're realistic, you know, they're very realistic because, you know, part of the program was to do some representational paintings that convey certain iconographic motifs like, you know, the influence of technology on society. The advance of technology, the advance of civilization and culture and so forth. It might be possible, for example, to make the case that at Collinwood High School that the iconography, the history of transportation was there, you know, through trains and planes, because Collinwood was had a big railroad yard, and the workers there would in the railroad yard oftentimes lived in the neighborhood and whatnot. But frankly speaking, there were murals in cities across America that had the same iconic graphic motifs. So I think these motifs are more general rather than specific, although with hindsight, you might make that connection. But whether people at the time made that connection or not, that would be the thing to investigate. So there's the whole question of of style.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:14:23] You know, you talk about the time style aspect. realistic, reflective science, technology, culture, civilization. How would you describe the regional style? I read in this that they describe something called Cleveland Scene Painting.

**Walter Leedy** [00:14:49] Well. Well, you can imagine in Chicago you would have Chicago scene painting in New York, y6ou would have New York scene painting. Is that. I mean, I think there was an emphasis, you know, to to do things in the WPA period and put these murals in buildings that people could relate to. I think it was a matter of audience, you know, who was your audience and what would your audience like? Oftentimes, you know, people people get their audience wrong, get away. It's it's it's amazing how that how that can happen. You might the museum, for example, might have an exhibit of Elvis and Marilyn in high art as they did. But attendance wasn't so great for that exhibit. I mean, had they had Elvis's leather jacket with his studs on it and everything, they might have had a greater audience. You know, so it's so it's hard to predict with certainty what the general public is going to respond to. There are certain things that we know the general public responds to. And if there was an exhibit of Egyptian art, it would be very popular, for example, at the art museum. When they had treasures from the Vatican, that was very popular. And it was the only exhibit that I've ever been at at the museum in which I saw people crossing themselves and praying in front of objects, actually in the galleries. So I don't think that that would have been anticipated, actually, although the audience was anticipated.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:16:39] So regional solace, it's simply that, you know, renderings of images and (Iillegible....)

**Walter Leedy** [00:16:47] I think that for Cleveland, that would probably be true. You know, it's not only rendering, but its use of color, use of atmosphere, use of line and whatnot. And I think that if you looked at a Cleveland painting and asked where it was painted, if you asked that question, it would it would be hard to answer that, you know, for the 20th century. However, if you looked at a Florentine painting from the Renaissance, you might say that it was painted in Florence because the artist formed to school and they did things in a similar way. But there have been attempts to define a Cleveland school. But I don't think any of them have been greatly successful.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:17:50] Do you know how they have tried to describe that?

**Walter Leedy** [00:17:56] Not specifically. I think you should ask Bill Robinson that. I think he would be be hard put to answer that questions, too. You know, you can describe a group of works of art, but how different they were from other groups of art and other cities as it is another story,.individual artist, you may you may be able to pick out because the artists tend to do ordinary details the same way in different paintings. But the details that aren't so important. This theory goes back to an Italian by the name of Morelli in the 19th century that if you want to attribute a group of aintings to an artist, you'd look for the insignificant details like how the artist may paint hands, for example, or fingers, because the other parts of the paintings may be controlled in large part by the client and what the client wants. And I think in Cleveland, in that in terms of the WPA murals, you know, the subject matter is circumscribed. You know, they're, these paintings are none of them are really critical of the social structure. You know, they're all would form, you know, they all would fall into a positive view of the city, a positive view of civilization, a positive view of how people are going to come out of poverty and into into middle class life. You know, they don't focus on crime, although in the Elmer Brown murals at Valley View, there were a couple of G-men depicted and also in the Elmer Brown murals. They're very interesting because one of the murals actually has a self-portrait of the artist painting the mural of Elmer Brown himself. And since Elmer Brown was an African-American, I don't know how many of the WPA murals across America would actually have a self portrait of somebody in them of the artist. But that idea of putting the artist into a painting goes back a long time. That's not a new idea to art for sure.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:20:36] You're not a aware that it was done in a widespread fashion.

**Walter Leedy** [00:20:40] I don't think it was done. But also, I think, you know, in Cleveland, like the Shaw mural, I think that's fairly unique, too, in that it depicts the history of Shaw from when it was founded to the current day, and it gives an idea of the curriculum at the school. So that's, you know, rather a site specific, rather. And also the murals at Kirk show they kind of they glamorized history of the area from a Dugway Brook, all the way up to the present, all the way up to nineteen thirty two. But it's very romanticized vision of history.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:21:38] It's interesting, I'm trying to get a sense of where decision making around these these pieces was, came from, you know, we, you know, we teach high school history to our students, you know, about the New Deal, you know, as a watershed, the assertion of federal power and certainly the unique support for the arts came through, you know, federal arts programs generally. But other people have sort of emphasized in the significance of local decision making around this. And, you know, it's been interesting to look at the connection between, you know, William Milliken and local consumers, I guess we'd say maybe consumers of this or, you know, people like the Ernest Bonn at the Cleveland Housing Authority, and Linda Eastman at the public library who, and the variety of school projects that are part of this. What is your sense that, what is your sense of the relationship between sort of federal and local decision making?

**Walter Leedy** [00:22:52] Well, I think there is a lot of local decision making, and I think that's what really hasn't been fully explored. And for example, in the murals at Valley View, Ernest Bonn was very important, I think, and very important decision maker. You know, the whole idea of that of that program was to build the housing and then this idea that Christian virtue and his whole projects and murals were based on the ideals of Christian virtue, that somehow the goodness in people would come out and they would rise above, you know, crime and poverty and all of that and be great citizens and good people. And one of the murals by Grebenak actually shows an idealized version of the bill of a building of a project. And one can see this is our actual there is an actual door in the mural and the building. And the mural was designed around that door with masons actually constructing the door. But the whole mural is an idealized vision of the project itself. And also, Charles Sallee at OuThwaite Homes shows that there is a wonderful mural there now in a conference room, well-preserved that shows that the one of the directors or subdirectories of the housing, you know, leading people out of poverty, too. So I think that was definitely part of the whole idea of uplift and and and whatnot. But public housing in the late 1930s was thought to be a temporary residential situation. In other words, if you were out of a job, you might live there for a while, but eventually you would get a job and then you would move out and on. And, you know, I've known many people in Cleveland who said that they grew up in the projects, so to speak, and soon left. But over time, we know that that's has not turned out to be what's happened in the long term. There are people that live in the projects that have been there all of their lives and can't escape and are on the fringes of sort of the economic benefits of society. And there will always be need for public housing for those people. But there was a different attitude about public housing in the '30s than there that there is today.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:25:42] So you're suggesting that in this case the messages of public art here were locally determined, not.....

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:25:55] Were locally determined, right, to a large extent. But they do fit in to the general program of the WPA. You they're not. You're going to find similar messages in other cities. You know, like the history of technology and so forth and so on. But each one of them, there will be a slightly different twist, which, you know, which makes it important that we preserve our cultural heritage.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:26:31] I know you. You researech and written about The Cleveland Museum of Art. Are you are you very familiar with William Milliken's role with the federal art's project?

**Walter Leedy** [00:26:39] No, I'm not, really. No. And, you know, Milliken was an interesting, interesting person. The museum was built under Whiting and Milliken then was the second, really the second director. But Milliken came in and worked at the educational programs and the Cleveland Museum of Art had one of the most extensive educational programs in America. So I think that idea of public outreach was part of the museum culture. For example, with the development of the armor court in the original building, from the onset, the armor was borrowed in the hopes that it would appeal. Although this is not totally documented, but one can read between the lines that it would appeal to metal metalworkers in Cleveland, for example. And of course, the armor court is still one of the most sought after galleries in the museum when people go to visit the museum. They find it fascinating, partly, I think, it's because it's horses and medieval and armor and warfare and all of that. But I think Whiting and other directors, you know, saw that as a way to bring people into the museum. So then they might discover something else that they could be interested in. And also, the museum started early on before 1920. The idea of the May show and in the beginning it was really an out. It was partly outdoor. Is it? It was more much more inclusive. It had had ethnic ethnic groups would display things in the various early May shows. Only later did it become really highly, highly judged and sort of, so to speak, high art rather than being totally inclusive. So I think there was a culture at the museum that fostered the idea of bringing art to the people through their educational programs and through putting exhibits of works of art in schools and cases which they did and bringing then children into the art museum. So it was a natural that Milliken would want to be involved, I think, in this kind of work, too. And also, Cleveland, you know, had a remarkable school of art. Now the Institute of Art. And so the institute not only had professors, but they did produce students, you know, who needed jobs. And, you know, the museum through the Huntington Trust also supported the education of students, and Milliken would have been directly involved in that, too. So Milliken was the obvious choice for a WPA program. How that came to be, I'm not sure. And I have not looked at the archival material relative to Milliken and the WPA, but it would fit in with this general with a general philosophy of the museum, with the educational philosophy of the museum, in that in the 20s and the 30s and you know, especially through the May show, and they you know, they did try to foster local talent in art, too. And that's at a time, of course, before the museum became really wealthy and the museum became wealthy with the death of Leonard Hanna and the big Hanna bequest. And I think that happened in the late 40s, early 50s. So, you know, you could with a limited budget, you know, you're going to have a different kind of a program than you would if you had almost all the money you needed. And the museum did charge admission, initially. It was not a free museum, although it was free on certain days, The city, kind of forced that because the museum needed to exchange land with the city to build the building and the location that they did. Their original site was parallel to East Boulevard and they wanted to have their site really parallel and looking into University Circle. So they in order for this land exchange to happen, City Council did demand that they have a free day, a week. Although I think they may have been thinking of that already. But it was only later that admission became free when they became wealthy, quote unquote. So but at that time, you know, they also did have patrons in the city who if something came up on the market, it might be possible to call up somebody and say, you know, could you? You know, buy this object for the museum or could you give us fifty thousand dollars or whatever. Today, that's not as not as likely to happen.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:32:30] It was interesting and in Karal Ann Marling's description of Milliken and his role May Show where it seems unusual that there would be such an emphasis on, sort of, the practical arts and design of furniture and other kinds of things that would be that high art structure.

**Walter Leedy** [00:32:51] Well, I think that I think that this idea, you know, of doing all of this was to encourage creativity, and, you know, this this idea that a Picasso might be more valuable than the design of a Bugatti car. Although both are high class, you know, is largely a mental construct. But, you know, there's an old saying that goes back to Ovid, you know, that excellence in art is when the craftsmanship surpasses the material. So the idea of craftsmanship is something that people respond to, especially if you think about the 20th century and machine made objects and whatnot. And then you have the arts and crafts movement in America. And William Morris in England, you know, stressing the handmade artist's designed objects, not necessarily one of a kind of objects. But at least handmade. And, you know, Americans do respond to find craftsmanship as well as too expensive materials, right? So, you know, this idea of craftsmanship and skilled craftsmanship is part of what defines quality and art. Today, we would say that an artist can do anything they want to. A good artist can do anything they want to. And if they choose to throw paint at a canvas, they're doing it not because they can't paint realistically, but because they have a different artistic objective and motive in mind. So a good artist will always be able to handle their materials and make them do what they want to. But Americans do respond to craftsmanship. And just if you took a survey of your students, I'm sure that if you, a lot of them, looking at a painting by Jackson Pollock can say, oh, I could do that. And so that's just a kind of a gut feeling on the part of the general population, although I'll let them try. So that's a different story or a Mondrian. But those paintings like Jackson Pollock and Mondrian, you know, they're after solving visual and artistic problems. And the general public on the whole may be not be aren't interested in that. They're interested in, you know, sort of sort beautifying their home interior and or whatever. And and handmade furniture is something that, you know, good handmade furniture people respond to.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:35:47] Going to change direction a little bit ,and just ask you to reflect on what you think the legacy of the federal arts program has been generally, but also specifically Cleveland and Cleveland art.

**Walter Leedy** [00:36:03] Well, well, I think the legacy is probably twofold, not only in the imagery that still preserve that gives one an idea of how people thought and lived at that time and what they thought to be important at that time. But I think the legacy is much greater in the fact from the point of view that the WPA period allowed people to remain artist and to be artists and supported artistic endeavor, people whose creative abilities might have been lost to society in the depths of the depression. And I think that those artist after the WPA program was over, you know, went on to find careers in art, which have enriched not only their lives, but those lives of the lives of Clevelanders and so forth. It it also trained artists to work in as illustrators and whatnot. So it's hard to really over, it's hard to, you know, one might underestimate the impact of the WPA art when you just look at the murals, but when you look at the artists that went on to contribute in many different ways, whether they be teachers later on or artists themselves, their contribution is much greater probably.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:37:44] Are there people in particular thtat you're thinking of?

**Walter Leedy** [00:37:50] I'm thinking of Elmer Brown. I think just. I think if you look at the "Transformations in Cleveland Art" book and look at the biographies of the artist, you'll find that most of them went on for careers in art and contributed. Charles Sallee is another artist that was important and had a major career in Cleveland. But just about every one of them did. John Puskás, Edris Eckhardt. the sculptor is very important. She developed all sorts of technologies for doing sculpture that were unusual, such as cast glass. The print makers. They're just really, really dozens of artist that I think you could you find.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:39:10] And these are important not just as local localized, but people with a reputation.

**Walter Leedy** [00:39:18] A regional a regional reputation at least. But it's regional artists that really make the largest contributions to any visual environment in any city. So, I mean, how many major buildings are you going to have in Cleveland by architects from outside. By comparison to the number of buildings that are built in the Cleveland area.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:39:56] It's not just true with our architecture.

**Walter Leedy** [00:39:59] Architecture too. Architects of Cleveland architects, of course, complain that commissions should go to Cleveland architects. But, but I wonder how they would feel if they got the Cleveland firms have commissions in other cities. I wonder how they would feel if those commissions suddenly dried up in exchange for one Cleveland commission. You could imagine. You can just imagine.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:40:44] I'm always interested over both these conversations with the way the way you discuss the artists, sort of, how it appeals to people, how it connects to people, even when the postcards seem to resonate so unusually with folks. But when we think about that connection between people and art and you think about the themes that you see in the WPA art. What do you think it really tells us about ourselves? Does it only tell us about ourselves in the context of the 1930s, does it say more than that?

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:41:32] Well, it probably gets back to the, you know, to the human spirit in a way. I mean, there's something there's something non-verbal about art that can raise the spirit. And I think that's the most important part about art is the non-verbal, you know, oftentimes in school curricula and whatnot will include art and music. And they tried to teach what a painting means, of course. But when you think about it, ultimately, you can analyze a painting from the point of view of style, from the point of view of color, from the point of view of iconography. You can put the painting into the history of the artist, total production. You can talk about the artist's role in society and that of that particular artist and everything. But when you come right down to it, when you put all of these things together, you still can't explain in words necessarily how that painting is affecting you, totally. No matter how far you push an analysis, a verbal analysis of the painting, you'll eventually get to the point where that painting might mean something else that you can't quite put into words, something that, you know, affects the human psyche and this in the human spirit. And that's what's fabulous about the visual arts and other arts, too, is that they're nonverbal. They there are different means of communicating than the written word. And so therefore, they're important for society and and for all societies, by the way, you know. We can go back in time and the urge to make imagery goes back to the Paleolithic period. The reasons for making imagery may have changed over time. But still, there is this urge to make imagery. I noticed that neither of you are doodling here, by the way. But if I looked around my class when I'm lecturing some students are are doodling. You know, the urge to make art to make images is something probably innate. And I think it's Gestalt psychologists such as Rudolf Arnheim, who wrote a book called "Visual Thinking", talks about how we think in terms of images like if I ask you what is an elephant, you suddenly get an image in your mind of an elephant. You didn't see it. Don't say elephant, e-l, whatever, and spell it out. You actually see an elephant. And so we think, of course it's hard to prove that this is true, by the way. but it's a theory of Rudolf Arnheim's, in any case that we think in terms of visual images and therefore the visual imagery that surrounds us is more important than is probably much more important than people actually psychologically and consciously recognize in their daily lives. But then we know that some people are very fashion conscious. So people, they will emphasize one part of their visual environment over another. You know, there there are some women and some men that I know that would have totally color coordinated everything. They would never think of wearing something that wasn't color coordinated. So that's that. So they are presenting an image to the world when they go out.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:46:05] Or they focus on their interiors, or automobiles,.

**Walter Leedy** [00:46:09] Or whatever, but there is usually some aspect of their life that's very visual. It doesn't necessarily have to be clothes. It might be something else like their automobiles, but they have, there is something there.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:46:25] This idea of WPA legacy theme that's reflection of human spirit, you know, the many stories that you've been involved with your restoration, sort of suggests that there is now a sort of a resurgence in the publication of this book in the 1970s, a good generation was the creation of this art. What do you think is driving the resurgence of the upcoming exhibit that they're planning at Cleveland Artist Foundation?

**Walter Leedy** [00:47:02] Well, I think the Cleveland Artists Foundation has a particular mission to preserve, and to present, you know, parts of Cleveland's visual heritage, whether it be art or architecture, or sculpture. That's their central mission. So I think that's probably driving, driving it. But also at this particular moment in time, a lot of these WPA images are endangered because they're buildings, you know, they're attached to walls and, you know, their buildings are now becoming obsolete. And the question is, is, you know, what do you do about that? I don't know to what extent the Cleveland Artists Foundation exhibit will focus on the aspects of what to do about all the murals at the Cleveland public schools. But I think it will it will make a greater part of the population aware that these murals do exist. You know, the idea of, you know, why do you see something is kind of an interesting question. I mean, because you could walk by a mural and not even see it. You could walk by it every single day of your life and even be totally unaware of it. But then suddenly you might see something in it that might resonate in you. And then suddenly it becomes interesting. So, and why that happens, and how that happens, I'm not sure, but I do know it does happen. For example, I was working on the Park Synagogue and I had interviewed Dr. Ruth Miller because her father, Leonard Ratner, had Mendelson to dinner on every every Sabbath when he was in the city, and so I was really anxious to hear her opinion of Mendelson. You know, somebody first hand, you know, what was going on at the dinner table and whatnot. And she says, oh, I don't really remember hardly anything because, you know, at that time I was more interested in boys. So, you know, I think that, you know, things mean have a different meaning at different times in one's life. Yet when I, when she heard that I was working on the Park Synagogue, this was in the history of the building, this was the most important thing she said that she thought that I was working on. You know, not the Terminal Tower. And she even said so publicly. So I thought I think it was quite interesting that how your interests can change and suddenly something that is unimportant becomes important. Because, usually for some other reason, I don't know how many students who went to Shaw in the 60s and saw the mural at Shaw, remember it, the ones that I've talked to, haven't remembered it. And yet it was in their cafeteria and they side every day. It was just not of interest to them at that time in their lives. Now, of course, they might be more interested in it.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:50:49] You don't think there's anything about the the icons or the political messages that seem to bring people's interest today back to these murals?

**Walter Leedy** [00:51:00] Well, I think,well, I think that there probably is some some in and some of that. You know, there are there are always a group of people that, you know, work on nostalgia. I know that when I was in Poland, you know, people even believe that aspirin was better before World War 2 than during the communist period. So, you know, nostalgia plays an important role. And just sort of like it Euclid Beach, you know, there's all this interest at Euclid Beach and what Euclid Beach was like. And there's the Euclid Beach, youu know, historians group and whatnot, because they went to Euclid Beaches as kids, basically. And those are the people that are interested in Euclid Beach because it's nostalgia. You know, it meant for them a fun time. They associated that with having a fun time and growing up in an uncluttered world and so forth. And yet we know from looking at the historical record that these amusement parks were, as you know, had problems with racism and whatnot, like other institutions did in the city of Cleveland. So, you know, you have a selective memory, too. I think what the WPA murals mean, they not only record how people felt at that time, at least how some people felt and then how the artist interpreted it, because there is an individual interpretation. And if you look at these murals, they are different artistically. For example, the Grebenak mural from Valley View, which shows the idealisation of the building of the housing estates, uses the latest theories of perspective and color and and whatnot. It's more artistically up to date, so to speak, then the Elmer Brown. But yet the Elmer Brown depicts the history of Cleveland and whatnot and includes his self-portraits. So both are important, but for slightly different reasons. And they're important for, you know, the you know, Cleveland's heritage. I think there is an interest in history, in society, although something old is, you know, before my grandmother was born. So viewed by some students, so it's hard to I think it's hard to generalize because different segments of the of the population in the city will have a totally different attitude towards these murals. You know, some people might say they're totally irrelevant today and other people will take just the opposite opposite stance. Not to, but the bottom line is there are a lot of murals in Cleveland and the buildings are going to be torn down or remodeled and do we, and the question is, is do we want to save this part of our heritage? It's why you may not be able to save the building. You might be able to save the mural. And then who's going to pay for it? You know, who's going to value it enough to pay for it? Well, it will. All the Cleveland foundations come together and do this. When saving art is not central to their mission. The Cleveland Public Schools does not even have an inventory of all the art that it has. I don't know what school system would have that would they would have that inventory. I imagine Shaker doesn't have it or Solon and or whatever. Yet all of them have works of art probably in there or their owners of works of art.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:55:27] Just a quick digression. I actually was really interested that they mentioned creating murals, or that Shaker schools were interested or possivle owners of murals. I'm not aware of any murals, nor did I find any in the listing in the back of the book. Are you aware of any......

**Walter Leedy** [00:55:46] No, I don't, I don't. But, you know, when I went to Collinwood, I knew about the one WPA mural, but I didn't know before I went there about the mural program in one of the classrooms, for example, of know the Arturian legends that were put there by one of the classes, so it's not WPA, but yet it's a mural program built, you know, it being painted in the 30s. Nor did I know about the grissaile murals in the music room at Collinwood. I mean, it was only after I got there and I asked the teachers, I said, are there any other murals in the building? And then suddenly they said, yes, but they didn't, but they were focused, you know, on trying to preserve their WPA mural as electric conduit was being installed right on the top of it. So, you know, it depends just what you're focusing on at that at that particular moment in time. So it might behoove you to call each school and ask to, you know, if you have if there are any murals. Chances are there may have been some art class that painted a mural and, you know, in a cafeteria or what whatever.

**Timothy Mitchell** [00:57:14] I was just going to say, I was willing to ask you about how optimistic you are about the preservation of these murals and the remaining federal arts pieces that we have in this area.

**Walter Leedy** [00:57:30] Well, I'm fairly optimistic, I think, because I think in the end in the end, people will realize that they are of value. As I mentioned before about the Valley View, I think people recognize that they're valuable. I know the East Cleveland Board of Education recognizes that their murals are valuable. You know, the question is, is what are they going to do with them? Maybe they don't have a solution today, but they are in storage. You know, they haven't been thrown away. So maybe when resources become a little less tight, you know, they'll be able to do something with them. So, you know, it isn't that they have to be you know, these murals were painted to fairly exacting standards. I don't think Karal Ann goes into that in her book, but I think they you could actually you could actually wash those murals with soap and water and a sponge. They're not, you know, they're pretty they're pretty resilient in terms of the technical standards to which they had to be painted, of course. I would never recommend a mural be washed with soap and water, but, you know, and a sponge, you wouldn't want to get it too wet and whatnot. But, you know, if we had some, like if I buy an architectural rendering and it still has some little grime on it, I might go and buy a fresh brand new this erasure stuff in a bag, and I may generally pat the thing, pick up the surface dirt, being very careful not to take off any of of the image whatsoever. You know. so people do clean things themselves, you know. But the murals were were, you know, were painted so that they, you know, so that they, you know, they're in public places. And, you know, they get dirty and they have to be cleaned. What happens is some of them have varnishes on them that have turned yellow and some have been in very humid areas like the Elmer Brown with. And whether this caused the the color layer to come to separate from the grisaille or under-painting, you know, then you have serious restoration problems in terms of how you're going to preserve that mural. Bu the Collinwood mural has when it's had graffiti on it, the graffiti has been taken off, and the art teacher or the students have painted pver it, and so it it would require, you know, all of that would have to be removed and done more professionally. But I think I think there was an attempt, for example, at Collinwood to preserve that mural by the teachers. And I think it really because the teachers thought it to be important, but it's the not only the art teacher, but the history teachers use it to teach history and English. Teachers can use it to write compositions. And, you know, these these works of art can be functional in a school in terms of, you know, being integrated with the curriculum. But still, it's a work of art and it's should stand on its own as a work of art. It doesn't have to have a use to be, you know, to be valuable. A practical use. It could have this the spiritual component.

**Timothy Mitchell** [01:01:13] I hope there are a lot of people out there like you who get involved in these restoration projects.

**Walter Leedy** [01:01:19] Well, I think there are a lot of people that that try and I just just sort of one person out there amongst many, I hope. But a lot of it has to do with informing the public. Also, you know, oftentimes people don't realize what they have and why it might be valuable, you know? Know, what you have is that is always the thing. And my lecture at the Park Synagogue, like five or eight years ago or 10 years ago before they started their restoration program. One of the members of the synagogue asked if she if I could come and lecture and that she would invite a few of her friends to this lecture and five hundred turned out or up or something like that. But the whole idea was centered. She said, you know, they have to know what they have in order to preserve it. Why is it valuable? People don't have time to think about why anything is valuable necessarily. That's outside the realm of their everyday life experience.

**Timothy Mitchell** [01:02:38] I think those are all the other questions I had today. Is there anything else that we've touched on today that you'd like to add to?

**Walter Leedy** [01:02:46] No, Thank you very much.

**Timothy Mitchell** [01:02:47] I appreciate it.