

Schanker, WPA, printmaking

Excerpts from Oral history interview with Hyman J. Warsager, 1965 Oct. 14

Warsager, Hyman J., b. 1909 d. 1974

Painter, Printmaker

New York, N.Y.

An interview of Hyman J. Warsager conducted 1965 Oct. 14, by Harlan Phillips, for the Archives of American Art New Deal and the Arts Project, in Hackensack, N.J.

Conducted as part of the Archives of American Art's New Deal and the Arts project, which includes over 400 interviews of artists, administrators, historians, and others involved with the federal government's art programs and the activities of the Farm Security Administration in the 1930s and early 1940s.

Oral history interview with Hyman J. Warsager, 1965 Oct. 14, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

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

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

HARLAN PHILLIPS: But I mean his thinking was projecting with the tool, the technique was ahead.

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

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

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

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

HARLAN PHILLIPS: Yes.

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

HARLAN PHILLIPS: You wouldn't?

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

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

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

Complete interview:

<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-hyman-j-warsager-13185>