



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Lorser Feitelson
and Helen Lundeberg, 1965 Mar. 17

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Helen Lundeberg on March 17, 1965. The interview was conducted at Helen Lundeberg's home in Los Angeles by Betty Lochrie Hoag for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

Date: March 17, 1965 Part I

BETTY HOAG: This is Betty Lochrie Hoag interviewing Helen Lundeberg Feitelson in her home in Los Angeles on March 17, 1965-St. Patrick's Day.

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes

BETTY HOAG: That should be a good omen for us.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes, it should.

LORSER FEITELSON: Oh yes.

BETTY HOAG: And I've been looking forward to this interview so much, there's so much material that's fascinating about your life and your work and I know that you did a great many things for the project and instead of going chronologically through your life we're going to go when we get to the project period skip it and then come back to it, if that's all right with you.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh, whatever you like. You probably know more about it all than I do anyway. You know one forgets.

BETTY HOAG: Well, if you remember it would be very unusual, nobody ever does. But I hope some of this will remind you of it. I'd like to ask you first about your life, when and where you were born, if you care to tell us, and about your early education and so forth.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I was born in Chicago on June 24, 1908 to be precise. Since I've given out the date before I might as well do it again. My family moved to Pasadena about the end of 1912--

BETTY HOAG: You went to public school--

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I went to public school--

BETTY HOAG: -- in Chicago?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No, no, I was only four and a half then.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, I can't count.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No, I went to school in Pasadena.

BETTY HOAG: And was this through high school or --?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Through high school and junior college.

BETTY HOAG: And did you have any art training in junior college?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh, very little, you know, oh, two or three courses, which I didn't care too much about as a matter of fact.

BETTY HOAG: Weren't Earl Lee and Lanson teaching there at that time, or were they--?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh no.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, this would be before that.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: The only teacher I remember as an art teacher and whom I got along with very well was a Miss George-Laura George, she's probably long since gone to her reward. That was a long time ago.

BETTY HOAG: And then did you go on to art school or --? I'm going to have to add up here quickly because I know that you had a fellowship with Mr. Feitelson, an art fellowship about that time in 1934.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, I had a sort of scholarship. Actually it was privately endowed so to speak at the Stickney School of Art in Pasadena, which no longer exists. And I'd been going there about three months when Lorse took some classes there and so from that time on--

BETTY HOAG: You've worked together--

HELEN LUNDEBERG: He's been my teacher.

BETTY HOAG: Now let's see, I'm really mixed up on my dates here. The project work that you did was around 1937 so we still have a way to go here first.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, actually I was on that - what was it - WPA or PWA or PWAP or Federal Art Project that began - oh, it seems to me I was interviewed about December 1933 and then in 1934 I was actually on it. I really don't remember how long this lasted. I did some easel painting.

BETTY HOAG: Yes, I have - in 1933 the Los Angeles County Museum exhibited The Mountain. Do you remember doing that? They didn't give the medium in the catalogue.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: You know I don't even remember a painting by that title.

BETTY HOAG: And in the same year they had two oil paintings of yours, The Pioneers and Home Builders.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh yes.

BETTY HOAG: Do you remember those?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I remember the Home Builders. You know I've always been fascinated with building from process of going up, you know, when just the skeleton is up and I did a thing around this theme of pioneer home building. I haven't seen it in a long time. I think one of the schools has it, in Los Angeles.

BETTY HOAG: I think all of those paintings were given to tax-supported institutions, or rather they bought them for the price of materials.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I seem to remember that that particular one went to a school over in the northeast section of the city but I don't remember the name of it.

BETTY HOAG: Sometime I would like to try to track down all of these things. There are a lot of wonderful paintings that must be buried in a lost of different places.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well yes, I guess so. Although as far as mine are concerned I don't know how wonderful they are and I'm afraid to look at them. I don't think I want to see them.

BETTY HOAG: And then in 1935 --?

[END OF TAPE]

[SESSION TWO]

BETTY HOAG: This is Betty Lochrie Hoag on March 17, 1965 interviewing Helen Lundeberg. Our tape cut us off when we were talking about the work that you had been doing for the first Federal project in 1933 and 1934, and I think when they cut us off I was about to remind you of another reference I found in 1935 to an oil on celotex called Planet and Animal Analogies. It sounds like a cartoon for a mural. Do you think it was?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No, it wasn't. It was a Post-surrealist painting about 24 x 30 in dimension, and it was not done for the project. I guess that first project lasted only so long. Then I was off. Then the projects began again, or I got on again anyway. I don't remember what happened. Then I did, I guess, some easel things and I worked at lithographs for a while.

BETTY HOAG: And sculpture --

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, sculpture was my design, but I didn't do it. I designed for a woodcarver who lived way out in Hemet or somewhere out there.

BETTY HOAG: That was Robert Klose, wasn't it?

LORSER FEITELSON: Crossey, that's right.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Crossey? – was that his name?

BETTY HOAG: Yes.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It was very near to Coffee.

BETTY HOAG: I've seen photographs of this, a girl with a shell, in wood.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I did two designs I don't know whether he carried them both out, I don't remember ever seeing the carving of the other one. I don't remember what the second one was. I only remember the figure with the shell.

BETTY HOAG: Well, since this is all project I think we should come back to it and I want to get on with this work in 1934. You and Mr. Feitelson were -- you had developed a style called Post-surrealism at that time, hadn't you?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes, that's right.

BETTY HOAG: And would you like to describe it for the tape?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, I imagine Lorser has already described it for the tape.

LORSER FEITELSON: Well, I think it's probably best described in that Museum of Modern Art --

HELEN LUNDEBERG: The Modern Art catalogue of "Americans 1942" has a pretty good statement as to what I was trying to do at that time and really as to what Post-surrealism was all about.

BETTY HOAG: You called it Subjective Classicism, I remember.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: That was sub-titled "Subjective Classicism."

LORSER FEITELSON: And that's an accurate description.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: It seems like it. And those things are just very, very beautiful. I know one of the first shows you had, I believe, was in the Los Angeles Museum in 1944 in which you had The Red Planet. Do you remember that -- the table with the door knobs reflected--?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes, I remember the painting but I don't remember that particular show.

BETTY HOAG: Red Planet.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: The Red Planet, yes.

BETTY HOAG: The picture leaning against the stack of books.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: I'd like to get the names on this of other artists who were in this group with you, who were working with you, for the tape because I think it's interesting. There was Grace Clements --

HELEN LUNDEBERG: In 1944?

LORSER FEITELSON: No, it must have been earlier than that. Grace Clements--

BETTY HOAG: See, this is the third group show. Would it have been earlier? It was reviewed in Art and Architecture.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Did the group have a show at the Los Angeles Museum? Because the first Post-surrealist group exhibition, a big one, took place in 1936 in San Francisco Museum. Then that show went to the Brooklyn Museum. I don't remember which was first, as a matter of fact.

LORSER FEITELSON: I think Brooklyn was the first.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Brooklyn was first perhaps.

LORSER FEITELSON: It was there five months.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It was there five months. They held it over and it got some international notice. It was really

quite...it surprised us.

BETTY HOAG: Really! I don't know why it should. I've seen photographs of the things.

LORSER FEITELSON: But 1944 -- there's some mistake there, there's some mistake there.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes, there's something -- see The Red Planet was painted in 1934 and I don't remember... by 1944 everyone was doing something else. See, the whole project --

LORSER FEITELSON: Unless this was a show gotten up -- I'm just trying to figure out just what was happening at the Museum. This was the time when Jarvis was asked to put on little group shows, remember, upstairs, California group monthly shows and he may have made a sort of "then and now"...

BETTY HOAG: That's what it was about, yes.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Was it a "then and now" show?

BETTY HOAG: Well, I don't know about the "then and now" but it was to acquaint the public with what the avant garde artists in the area were doing, things they ordinarily wouldn't be seeing.

LORSER FEITELSON: It sounds like a Jarvis follow --

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Perhaps so, I've forgotten that completely.

BETTY HOAG: Your paintings at least had been done earlier?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: The Red Planet was painted in 1934.

BETTY HOAG: Well, Grace Clements was in this show and I want to ask you one thing. Miss Hardy today said that she had married an astronomer here and I wonder if you happen to know what her married name is because I should contact her, as she was on the project.

LORSER FEITELSON: The last time we saw her she had just married an astrologer.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh, where did you hear that? I don't remember that/

LORSER FEITELSON: He died?

BETTY HOAG: You don't remember?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I don't remember his name.

LORSER FEITELSON: Peter Krasnow would know.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Peter Krasnow would know, I guess.

BETTY HOAG: I'm still catching up with him -- if I can find him.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes, I think he's still in touch with Grace more or less.

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: Good. And then there was Gina Knee.

LORSER FEITELSON: I only knew her-- she wasn't on the project out here.

BETTY HOAG: No, no, these were in this group show. I was just going to put together because it's interesting for the tape to know what people were showing.

LORSER FEITELSON: Oh, Gina Knee became Mrs. Alexander Brook or Brooks or whatever his name is.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: But I don't know what's happened to her now.

BETTY HOAG: And Ray Eames became Mrs. Charlie Eames. Isn't that Charlie Eames' wife?

LORSER FEITELSON: What's her name?

BETTY HOAG: Ray Eames. Charlie Eames' wife.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I don't know.

LORSER FEITELSON: I don't know them at all.

BETTY HOAG: You know the Eames Chair --?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes. We know of him, but we don't know him personally. I don't know his wife.

LORSER FEITELSON: We've never met them.

BETTY HOAG: I didn't realize that she was that much of an artist in her own right.

LORSER FEITELSON: Was she a painter before she was married?

BETTY HOAG: Apparently so. She was in this show and it showed one of her works.

LORSER FEITELSON: Under the name of Ames?

BETTY HOAG: Uh-hum. E-A-M-E-S.

LORSER FEITELSON: E-A-M-S?

BETTY HOAG: E-A-M-E-S - same as he spells it.

LORSER FEITELSON: Otherwise I would think it would be Jean Ames, A-M-E-S. What's her first name?

BETTY HOAG: This is Ray.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No, this must be someone else. This is a show somebody got together you know-

BETTY HOAG: And there was an Antonine Hyphen, and Frederick Kann, Knud Merrild, and Vincent Ulery.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Vincent who?

BETTY HOAG: U-L-E-R-Y.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No, I don't know him either. I know Merrild and Fred Kann, but -

BETTY HOAG: It's strange that these names come and go.

LORSER FEITELSON: Merrild of course was a very famous artist. He was innovator of the "drip" school and went back to Denmark and died there about ten years ago almost.

BETTY HOAG: I think you showed me one of his works that you have.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: The Museum is planning to have a show of his work.

LORSER FEITELSON: He was a very prominent figure, he was just ahead of his time and never was given full acknowledgement.

BETTY HOAG: That's interesting. It was with this show incidentally, Mrs. Feitelson, that you made the statement that, "Since 1934 I have been associated with Lorser Feitelson in developing a formal order of the use of psychic phenomenon as material and method. This subjective Classicism was born in 1934 and has since been known as Post-surrealism."

LORSER FEITELSON: That's a good statement. You can go to a lot of detours and it wouldn't clarify it.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No, we could keep talking about it but I don't think that it would -

BETTY HOAG: Well, since the project period comes in about this time we'll jump ahead to the fact that you, as your husband has it, you've been exhibiting regularly in Los Angeles and all over the United States, probably all over the world - I haven't all the rest of it - information about where you've had shows. And there were a couple of things I wanted to read in the tape about your work because I thought they were pertinent to it. Mr. Wight in Art Digest in 1953 - Frederick Wight - called you the Emily Dickinson on canvas and I think that is a wonderfully descriptive picture of your work.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh yes, Frederick Wight.

BETTY HOAG: Yes, Frederick Wight. And also, of course, he was talking about what a marvelous team you were

as painters and how interesting it was that you could be non-competitive and both strong in your own right for a husband and wife team; and he said it was like moonlight and sunlight contrast. And I also thought that was something that it would be nice to have in the Archives. There isn't really much point in going ahead and describing any of your paintings since they are available in the material that we want to have microfilmed, and also there's no point in going into all the prizes and awards that you had because they have been many, and this material is all documented. One thing I did want to point out here – I think we haven't before – is the fact that you both have been very active in the Los Angeles Art Association, which I understand is a sort of non-profit thing to help other artists too, isn't it?

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes, it's a non-profit organization. With one or two small exceptions, I think it's the only kind of club or organization I've ever belonged to and that's since about 1940.

LORSER FEITELSON: Non-art-partisan. All groups are really partisan groups, you see; they're middle of the road, or they're abstractionists or whatever they may be. And this is the showcase of their work – the Art Association. And I'm president. And every artist is an individual and if he's good we are going to show him in his context.

BETTY HOAG: That's a wonderful thing for –

LORSER FEITELSON: And we've done it and we've had a lot of fun doing it.

BETTY HOAG: I think it must be a thrill for the younger artists to be able to show.

LORSER FEITELSON: It's their only showcase.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, except for the City, you know, the Museum Annual, which we used to have and which we haven't had for quite a few years now, there was very little opportunity for artists to show in this town. Even though a number of galleries have sprung up, there are that many more artists. Still they have to get a start so –

BETTY HOAG: Yes. Well, you've had several galleries. I know Paul Rivas was your gallery in 1962; and Joan Ankrum handles both of you now, doesn't she?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes.

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: ...in her lovely new gallery. And I was so thrilled, I told one of you on the phone the other day I had a sneak preview of the new Art Museum because my daughter works there.

LORSER FEITELSON: We haven't yet seen it. We didn't get a chance to go down there.

BETTY HOAG: There'll be a big opening in a few weeks.

LORSER FEITELSON: But we'll be down for the big opening.

BETTY HOAG: Good! It's going to be fun. Well, Janey sneaked me in, and there against the wall waiting to be hung were paintings by both of you and I was so excited about it.

LORSER FEITELSON: That must be the red one, was it – my big red one?

BETTY HOAG: Yes.

LORSER FEITELSON: It's probably being reproduced in – which magazine maybe?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh, the Art Gallery.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, the one with the line that wanders through the middle. That was thrilling. In speaking about things that had been on exhibit, oil works that you had done for that early project, we mentioned the Planet and Animal Analogies. And another one was Relative Magnitude, an oil on masonite. What was that about?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Relative Magnitude? Do I have it – no it happens to be in the Occidental show because Miss Perkins asked me for – well, it's sort of retrospective in miniature in the hall in the Art Building besides the show Thorn Hall, you know, the show of recent work. Well, it has to do with viewpoints and it was a Post-surrealist painting and it was painted in 1936 I think, and neither of those were done for the project. These were done for –

LORSER FEITELSON: These are not idea viewpoints but optical viewpoints.

BETTY HOAG: Oh!

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I'm sure I don't know what I said but that's good anyway.

BETTY HOAG: I haven't got over for that show, I was going to before I saw you -

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh, it's a long way to go.

BETTY HOAG: How long is it going to be hung?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I think it ends the 5th of April.

BETTY HOAG: I'll just tell the tape this is for Occidental College, which is having a one-man show of Miss Lundeborg's work. And at the same time another one was "Microcosm and Macrocosm," which is oil on masonite, which I believe has been reproduced in several magazines, hasn't it?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes, it has been reproduced, and it belongs to the same category as _____. That was in the "Americans 1942" show also.

BETTY HOAG: In 1937-1939 you did panels for the Board of Supervisors hearing room in the Hall of Records.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh yes.

BETTY HOAG: And these were very exciting. I brought the catalogue along. It might remind either of us of anything we wanted to talk about.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I have one of those somewhere but I forgot where it is now.

BETTY HOAG: This one is Mr. King's. I have a lot of his things to be returned. I know he wouldn't mind if we looked at it.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes, I remember this Jedediah Smith. I had to learn how to draw horses for that one. I learned a lot about Jedediah Smith too whom I'd never heard of before. You know these things were interesting in many ways, not only the actual work but all the research and so forth that was -

BETTY HOAG: Did the artists have to do their own research on this?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh yes. Oh yes, indeed. At least I did. I suppose there wasn't any staff to do research on these things.

BETTY HOAG: Who gave you the subject matter, or did you choose anything you wanted from California history?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I think the subject matter was given and perhaps the Board of Supervisors chose the subjects to be depicted, you know.

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes, they did, their committee. It dealt with the treaty -

HELEN LUNDEBERG: The other one I did was the Treaty of Guadalupe - Hidalgo - it has to do with Mexican history.

BETTY HOAG: They are both oil on canvas. Did you do them in your studio?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I did them in the studio, and they were mounted on the wall by the project's technical crew, I think. I had nothing to do with that. They were done, you know, on canvas right in the studio.

BETTY HOAG: I bet you were glad you didn't have anything to do with it because they are very large: sixteen, two by six, six; and ten, two by six, six.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes. And they are very high, you know, above the floor so it would have taken a tremendous scaffolding and disrupted all the business of the hearing room to have done them on the wall. I did do a number of murals on the wall in the building where they were to be, later on: at Venice High School, and the Fullerton City Hall, and let's see what else, oh, Patriotic Hall.

BETTY HOAG: Thomas Edison -?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No, I worked as assistant to Lorusser on the Thomas Edison mural.

BETTY HOAG: The history of electricity.

LORSER FEITELSON: But then you worked on your own.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, yes, these were my own design and execution but the Thomas Edison murals were Lorser's job.

BETTY HOAG: These are very beautiful and, you know, I haven't got back again to see; I can't find the building.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: The building?

BETTY HOAG: There's a new Hall of Records.

LORSER FEITELSON: these have been -

HELEN LUNDEBERG: They may have been - the old building has been demolished.

LORSER FEITELSON: It's been demolished.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Has it?

LORSER FEITELSON: I think so.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It was sort of sticking up like a sore thumb there in the middle of all the new buildings.

LORSER FEITELSON: The County Council room, yes.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes, the County Supervisors. I don't know what happened to them.

BETTY HOAG: I asked the janitor what happened to them and he said they had been taken to the County Museum and I've been going to check with Dr. Brown and ask him if they have been put away there.

LORSER FEITELSON: Oh no, I doubt it.

BETTY HOAG: Really? It's a shame. I thought the janitor knew, you know.

LORSER FEITELSON: Maybe they consider this county property and this belonging to art and therefore they don't destroy it, they probably have some storage where they bury all these things.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I wouldn't be surprised.

BETTY HOAG: Well, I hope they do because these are perfectly beautiful. There's yours and Buckley Mac-Gurrin's, Mr. Davis's, and they're all - that's beautiful. Here's the other one. Oh yes, here's the other one. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. This shows you what it was all about, which I had forgotten completely.

BETTY HOAG: Oh really? This whole thing has been microfilmed so they have that for reference back there so we don't have to talk about this unless you remember anything particularly.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No, I don't remember anything especially interesting about it.

BETTY HOAG: By 1939 you had also done a proposed mural for the Los Angeles County Hospital and exhibited a case in tempera for that design. Was that ever completed?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No, it was never done.

BETTY HOAG: Was that on the project?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It was for the project but I don't remember what happened to that.

LORSER FEITELSON: Well, I think what happened - well, they were fooling around with the blooming thing, other jobs had to be done - we only had just so few designers, so maybe you were put to designing something else.

BETTY HOAG: And then about the same time was the Hooper Avenue School. Now that was the Lewis and Clark Expedition, you know we were missed up on the tape before, we couldn't remember -

LORSER FEITELSON: Hooper Avenue?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, I never saw a mural for Hooper Avenue School.

LORSER FEITELSON: I did these murals -

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Lorser did murals for Hooper Avenue.

LORSER FEITELSON: Two: Henry Hudson and I can't remember the other. What is the other?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I don't remember it. No, you did two, I'm sure.

LORSER FEITELSON: Henry Hudson, but I can't remember the other one.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I remember Henry Hudson but I don't remember the other one either. I once did a design for the Lewis and Clark Expedition - Sacajawea, the Indian girl guide, do you remember.

BETTY HOAG: Yes.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I did this design but I don't remember what it was for. It was never done as a mural; it was never carried out. That's one of the things that happened, you made designs for things and then you went to something else and it was never completed.

BETTY HOAG: Well, you did a petrochrome mural: there was a cartoon exhibited of fire engines, a panel of the animal memorial, now that's the only reference I have to that at all.

LORSER FEITELSON: That was never carried out.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: That's another one that was never carried out. I did a number of petrochrome mural designs which were carried out but not that one. That one fell by the wayside somehow.

BETTY HOAG: I saw the one at Inglewood and it's perfectly beautiful, a history of transportation.

LORSER FEITELSON: Is it still there? We have never seen it.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh, I saw it. My sister had a visitor, remember that Lundeberg from Connecticut? And poor man, her idea of entertaining him was to take him around to look at my murals. I saw the Centinel wall then, that was the last time, and that was - oh - ten, twelve years ago.

BETTY HOAG: Don Totten told me about it. He assisted you on that.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: He worked in the petrochrome department and I think he did the color mixing.

BETTY HOAG: Yes, that's what he told me on the tape, and he told me how to find it, so I went over that day and saw it and it's really just a beautiful thing.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I imagine it's very weathered, isn't it?

LORSER FEITELSON: They put a door through it, I understand.

BETTY HOAG: And it's been patched and then there's another place where it looks like they're going to have to do something pretty soon, the wall is kind of folding in, you know, it's curved at one end, do you remember? Well, the curve is not taking stress very well, but I thought the design was beautiful.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I think I sort of enjoyed designing that one, and the panels were polished after they were done, you know, before they were put up. I don't know if they've had any care since then.

BETTY HOAG: They have, and there are no mutilation marks, which is amazing because that part is being used all the time, and you know how people do, so they must take care of it. The thing that impressed me was that it carries the history of costume up as well as transportation. I had the feeling that I wish you would go back and put in a couple more panels and bring us up to date and take the clothes right up through the '30's when the skirts were long.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes, it's surprising how many things you have to research to do a mural project like that, because that part is always very interesting to me (getting around these things).

BETTY HOAG: The design for the Los Angeles County General Hospital that wasn't finished was called Health and just for the record do you remember what the subject was, I mean how you carried out the idea of health.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: The only thing I remember about that was that I think it was based on the Aesoulapian cult, remember the Greek god of medicine, or patron of medicine? And as I remember, the figures were in Grecian costumes. It was not a contemporary life sort of thing.

BETTY HOAG: No test tubes?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No, no, no, it was meant to cheer up the patients rather than to remind them of they were going to go through. No, I don't think there were any test tubes in it at all.

BETTY HOAG: And then another one that probably wasn't built wither, because I have no other record of it, was for the Riverside Drive and it was Friends of Man, and this was a scale model of whatever it was. It was exhibited in the Los Angeles Museum catalogue in 1939.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, that means - yes, a scale model had been done - but I must say I don't even remember that one - Friends of Man. Oh, I know, it had to do with dogs, I guess, something to do with animals and the humane Society and so one, but it never got done apparently.

BETTY HOAG: It sounds like you'd been inspired by the horses and then went right on.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I took up the anatomy of horses quite seriously for a while, made drawings and charts, and so forth of proportions, you know, because if you don't know your horses you're really in trouble.

BETTY HOAG: Did you work with a lithography group on the project? Did you have your stone and work down there at the center?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes, I worked there at the project headquarters in the lithography department but the curious thing is that I didn't work on stone, I worked on a prepared paper.

BETTY HOAG: Oh really? And made lithographs?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: I don't know much about this craft. I didn't know you could do that.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I don't know who invented this, but they didn't have enough stones and apparently they felt that perhaps they didn't have enough zinc plates either. It was transferred to a zinc plate after the lithograph was done. You had to be just as careful about not dropping any grease in unwanted places, and so forth. I worked very precisely and very delicately on these things, the paper had a grain, you see, which looked rather like - I wish I had one. Do we have any of those old lithographs I did on the project, Lorser?

BETTY HOAG: I know the names of the two: Mystery and Ruin. They sound very interesting.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh yes, that's right. I did one of a sort of desert ruin. And I did versions of two of my Post-surrealist paintings.

LORSER FEITELSON: One was The Red Planet.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: The Red Planet, which I did in reverse.

LORSER FEITELSON: And The Mirror.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: And one called The Mirror, which was a painting done in 1934, which turned out quite well. But that paper was difficult to work with because in some places the brush that had put the grain on the paper left brush marks and you had to work and pick and fuss around, you know, to get rid of the unwanted texture.

BETTY HOAG: Did you see the article in the Sunday paper about the Tamarind Workshop?

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh yes.

BETTY HOAG: June Wayne. And it seems to me that - it says this is the initial birth of interest in lithography here - but it seems to me it goes straight back to the project.

LORSER FEITELSON: Oh, certainly, the project started it.

BETTY HOAG: They didn't say anything about it in the paper and I thought it was too bad.

LORSER FEITELSON: Well, we know June and she's a very ambitious person, she's excellent on organizing, and they have their own publicity department and I daresay they'll do a terrific, bang-up job. And she knows how to work it. She'd be a success no matter what she undertakes.

BETTY HOAG: It reminds me of a question I have to ask you in a rather circuitous way of describing how it came about. Miss Hrdy - Olinka Hrdy is a friend of Ruth St. Denis, the dancer, so after I interviewed her the first time -

LORSER FEITELSON: You don't mean to tell me she's still alive!

BETTY HOAG: She's still alive. And after I interviewed Miss Hrdy the first time this week she called me up and said she had been talking to Ruth St. Denis who had a fabulous idea for something that she would like to get a Ford Foundation grant for, and asked if I knew how to do it. I explained to her that I came by this second hand and had no way of helping her although I certainly would like to; and told her that June Wayne had got one for the Tamarind and that possibly if she knew her and could contact her, she could help. So lo and behold when I went there this morning she had called June Wayne and she had given her the addresses to write to and all this information, which certainly was nice of her. But in their conversation the fact came up that their source of - whatever the rock is they use for these lithographs - is in Belgium and they are running out of the rock. And they're desperate at the Workshop for more rock. And Olinka wanted me to ask you if you knew what happened to the ones used on the project because maybe Miss Wayne could be able to trace them back and buy them.

LORSER FEITELSON: None of those stones were large enough; they were small stones.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: There weren't very many of them when I - or they wouldn't have had us using paper and zinc plates and so on.

LORSER FEITELSON: We would make our print and then erase and then use the block. We didn't have a very large supply of this stone.

BETTY HOAG: Does that wear it down rather fast too?

LORSER FEITELSON: No, the stone usually is about this thick.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It's pretty thick and it would last quite a while.

LORSER FEITELSON: But June uses enorm... -- I've never seen such big slabs.

BETTY HOAG: Oh really? What's it made of - is it marble?

LORSER FEITELSON: No. Actually it's a peculiar thing, you know. Some of the things are - it's hard to explain - this man who invented this process was a German who had to do some kind of printing, you know, so he thought about this, and ink and water and the way they repelled on e another. So he thought he should be able to do it on a nice stone making a grain on it. So he went out into his yard or his area and picked up a stone and did it. And that's the only place in the world where that stone was, the best stone for that.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh, they apparently never discovered any other source.

BETTY HOAG: In Belgium.

LORSER FEITELSON: I don't know where it was but one of those places.

BETTY HOAG: I have a friend who owns a dude ranch in Montana and she came with me for the ride this morning to Miss Hrdy's and she was very excited about it because they're just at the entrance to Yellowstone Park and of course it's very mountainous country with all kinds of stones and she thought maybe on her ranch she would have some.

LORSER FEITELSON: Kistler does lithographing - but most of the printing that we did later on was simply on zinc - the zinc they prepared with a little grain - not quite as good as stone.

BETTY HOAG: Doesn't give as nice an effect.

LORSER FEITELSON: No.

BETTY HOAG: I interviewed Miss Jeakins who was very active on that.

LORSER FEITELSON: Oh yes. Where is she?

BETTY HOAG: Well, right now I think she's in Japan. She's a costume designer for the studios, and a very fine one. She won an Oscar last year.

LORSER FEITELSON: How nice.

BETTY HOAG: And they're doing some picture that has Japanese background and just before Christmas she was leaving for six months. And isn't she a lovely person.

LORSER FEITELSON: Oh, she's a wonderful artist.

BETTY HOAG: She was certainly enthusiastic about the project – her memories of it.

LORSER FEITELSON: Oh yes, she’s a wonderful person.

BETTY HOAG: I think that probably we have covered – oh no, we haven’t got to Fullerton. Goodness sake!

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh, the Fullerton City Hall.

BETTY HOAG: Yes. In 1941 – seeing all the pictures of it, that must have been a big undertaking.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It was quite a large project, yes.

BETTY HOAG: This is Fullerton City Hall mural.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes, and I remember that project with some pleasure because we had to take this long ride every morning out to the Fullerton City Hall. This one was done on the walls, and I had a crew of assistants of course. Let’s see, about five other people working on that with me.

BETTY HOAG: I know Miriam Farrington was one who had credit in the article I read for helping you with it.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Miriam Farrington.

LORSER FEITELSON: Have you got in touch with her?

BETTY HOAG: No, I don’t know where she is. Do you? I have no idea.

LORSER FEITELSON: Well, she married some son of a General Allen, wasn’t it – or something like that?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I really don’t remember, Lorus. Miriam Farrington and Victor Bassinet.

BETTY HOAG: I haven’t found him either.

LORSER FEITELSON: Well, he’s dead.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, he died, I think. He was an interesting character. And a very disagreeable young man named Ellsworth, but I don’t know if that was his first or last name.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, I found D.J.L.B.J the other day.

LORSER FEITELSON: He called me the other day.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, did he? He went to visit the Salter exhibit on La Cienga and Mrs. Salter knew that I was hunting for him.

LORSER FEITELSON: Anything he tells you, you had better check over and over. He’s, as I say –

BETTY HOAG: Well, I won’t be doing him. He lives up in Monterey.

LORSER FEITELSON: It will be difficult to separate truth from the fantasy.

BETTY HOAG: Really? His name is Owen now.

LORSER FEITELSON: His name is Owen.

BETTY HOAG: It’s B.J.L. Owen, I guess.

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: And I sent his name up to our person in Northern California who will visit –

LORSER FEITELSON: He’s a strange –

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I must tell you something funny about this Fullerton job although it hasn’t really anything to do with the mural. The crew went out to the job every working morning in a five-ton truck, you know a regular, an old army truck with a cover, like a covered wagon. And for about a week we had no one to drive the truck. None of the men in the crew had a driver’s license so I drove the truck for a week. I enjoyed myself until someone noticed a woman was driving the truck and that was the end of that. They had to get someone to drive it.

BETTY HOAG: Had to get someone on the project with a license and give them some post -

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, that ended my interest in the whole business as far as the truck was concerned.

BETTY HOAG: This sounds like a very, very interesting mural because the reviews say it has the effect of tapestry. How did you achieve that?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, it was a style of painting a mural which we call vignette.

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes, but it's on account of the wall.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: The wall, which was coated with acoustic plaster, had a tone, as I remember it, it was a rather beige-pink color - the wall itself.

LORSER FEITELSON: You know it's that it has openings for the sound.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes. It had a nice texture, not slick, and we worked on it with line and tone but not solidly, so that everywhere it was like making a colored drawing on a colored paper, you know.

LORSER FEITELSON: In other words, it was a stain rather than a film of paint.

BETTY HOAG: Vignette means it's bled out on the edges?

LORSER FEITELSON: No, vignette usually means it's bled out, it's open, the figures made just color and nothing next to it, you know, that's vignette. There are many interpretations but it doesn't deal with solid space, or so on, or over modeling, gives you a linear thing with color supporting it, that's all - little tints.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It's a very pleasing way of decorating a large room with a great many figures and animals and buildings and what-have-you without making it heavy and overpowering.

BETTY HOAG: And there certainly were a lot of figures there, eleven different scenes and I want to say for the tape that Architect and Engineer, Volume 147 for December 1941, pages 24-25 had this completely written up.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh really?

BETTY HOAG: And has a list, I mean there are eleven, they can get it from that so I won't read them, but they're all historical scenes in California again. There were three panels altogether, is that right?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I don't remember because the murals went right around the walls - yes, I think it went around three sides of the room, which is probably what they meant by three panels.

BETTY HOAG: I asked because it was still not hung at this time. I thought maybe you had done more later. It said these were to be hung. I didn't know if they had put in more -

HELEN LUNDEBERG: To be hung?

BETTY HOAG: That it was going to take two months to install them.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Those murals were painted right on the wall.

LORSER FEITELSON: These were on the wall.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: They didn't have to be hung. They put up scaffolding and we worked right there. The designs were copied.

BETTY HOAG: Well, this is some reporter! I copied this from a magazine.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, that just shows you can't believe everything you read.

BETTY HOAG: They ought to correct these things.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: The full scale cartoons were made at the project headquarters.

LORSER FEITELSON: Do you suppose they confused the word "install" with "dedication?"

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Perhaps. Well, I don't know. It wouldn't take two weeks to dedicate it or two months, or whatever it was.

BETTY HOAG: "Two months to install" were the words in the magazine.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Perhaps it took us two months to paint it. I don't know. You know we got this system of doing this kind of mural down so that we could really do it very quickly. Everything was systematized: the cartoons were made at the project, they were traced onto the walls; from the color sketch we got the colors; the color scheme was all worked out, you see, so there was a number one blue, a number two blue, there was lining blue, there was toning blue, etcetera, so that on any given morning I could say to any given assistant, "You take this figure and use this number red and this number whatever it was." And I think it was Victor Bassinet who always mixed the colors. He'd mix up great batches and tube them so it was all very handy.

LORSER FEITELSON: I think I know - yes, I know exactly what that information was: After your sketch was approved and the public relations department was ready to send out publicity, they may have got the information from the sketches itself, colored sketches all carried out in detail, and then the word "install" would mean just to put it up, to make it.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: To actually paint it.

BETTY HOAG: Because they said it was thinly painted over acoustic plaster wall, so they must have known that that was going to be happening. Do you remember anything else about the project to tell the tape that I haven't asked?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, my last mural job for the project was not the Fullerton City Hall but three panels in Patriotic Hall.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, I haven't even come across that. I don't even know what Patriotic Hall is.

LORSER FEITELSON: You don't know what Patriotic hall is?

BETTY HOAG: No.

LORSER FEITELSON: It's on Figueroa near - where would you say?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It's Figueroa near Washington, I think.

LORSER FEITELSON: And I think it's a county building that looks like an Italian palace, it's a beautiful place.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It's like a Renaissance palace, it was very darkened as if by soot the last time I saw it, and it used to stand up there by itself, you know, you couldn't help seeing it as you came along, but I don't know what that street is like now.

BETTY HOAG: Is it owned by the city or the county?

LORSER FEITELSON: It must be a county building, or the state, I'm not sure - maybe state because these-

HELEN LUNDEBERG: All the patriotic societies had offices there and they used it for their various meetings and other doings.

LORSER FEITELSON: And the subject was the Preamble to the Constitution.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: The Preamble to the Constitution and the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution.

BETTY HOAG: How did you interpret this subject?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, there were to be, I think, nine panels but we finished three of them and then the projects ended, you know. We were at war already. The project ended in 1942 so we had only time to do three and it seems to me the central one was the Preamble to the Constitution itself, wasn't it?

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: And I think the other two were freedom of assembly and freedom of speech.

LORSER FEITELSON: Freedom of assembly?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Or freedom of assembly - it seemed to me the other one had to do with voting.

LORSER FEITELSON: Voting, yes, give them a ballot.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: And were these done fresco directly on the wall?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: They were done in oil but directly on the wall.

BETTY HOAG: I wonder if they're still there, have you heard?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, I daresay they're still there. I haven't been in the building in a long time.

LORSER FEITELSON: As you walk into the foyer.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes, there's a huge central hall there.

LORSER FEITELSON: Leading to the auditorium.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: And these are lunette-topped panels about twelve feet high I would say, and probably nine feet wide. That would be the logical proportion. I think we did each one of those in about eleven days.

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: Did you have helpers on that?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh yes, about four people.

BETTY HOAG: Do you remember who they were now?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Victor Bassinet was on that project and a Mexican boy, Freddie Rigaldo.

BETTY HOAG: Rigaldo?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No, I don't remember this boy's name now and I've never heard of him since.

LORSER FEITELSON: And a Hungarian - Emery - what's his name?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Emery was on that.

LORSER FEITELSON: That's right.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: And George Marshall.

LORSER FEITELSON: George Marshall. Leitner, wasn't it, also?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: He worked on one of the projects I worked on, but I don't think he was on that one.

BETTY HOAG: He's been in lithography too, hasn't he?

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes, probably. We all had to.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, we all went through the mill there. We did easel painting, lithographs, and then there were a few people who designed murals.

BETTY HOAG: You didn't have to have a truck to get to this place?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No, I don't remember how we did get there as a matter of fact, but it was right in town.

BETTY HOAG: Speaking of people on the project, there's someone else I want to tell you about - J. Fong. You know I asked you before if you knew where he was.

LORSER FEITELSON: Fong?

BETTY HOAG: J. Fond or Fong - Chinese person.

LORSER FEITELSON: J. Fong, yes.

BETTY HOAG: Tyrus Wong knows him and he said he's gone into entertaining and he's in a night club in San Francisco.

LORSER FEITELSON: My God!

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh really?

BETTY HOAG: Isn't that amazing! So again I sent his name up to that area.

LORSER FEITELSON: I almost forget his name but I remember the J.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I remember the name but I don't remember him.

BETTY HOAG: It sounds like some beautiful Chinese woman. I was utterly disappointed that it was a man.

LORSER FEITELSON: You think of some kind of exotic courtesan or something like that.

BETTY HOAG: Yes. And White Bead Quann I can't find and that's such a lovely -

LORSER FEITELSON: We ran into - wasn't it, oh, her sister? She did some beautiful things.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: She did some perfectly delightful -

LORSER FEITELSON: She was a Cherokee -

HELEN LUNDEBERG: - Indian legends - what was that?

LORSER FEITELSON: The fox stole the sea - allegory.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: How the fox stole the spring or something like that is one -

LORSER FEITELSON: They were allegories.

BETTY HOAG: Well, they were published in book form, weren't they?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: And I have been through the Los Angeles Public Library trying to spell that name and looked for it under every possible way of spelling every one of the parts of her name.

LORSER FEITELSON: I wonder if the Library ever did get this - I don't know - it was a small edition.

BETTY HOAG: They probably didn't because they have no record of it, or it's been stolen, like Mr. King's mosaic books. You know they had four of them and they now only have one left, and they had that available. And I talked to them about it and told them it should be put on special reserve and not allowed out of the library at all.

LORSER FEITELSON: Isn't that a shame! Isn't that a shame.

BETTY HOAG: I had to borrow it for microfilming and I had to sign my life away to get it out for one afternoon to have it filmed. It's a beautiful book.

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes, we know him very well. You have interviewed him, haven't you?

BETTY HOAG: Oh yes, I've been down there two or three times. In fact I have a whole box of his material which he said I could use, and I keep finding things that are helpful.

LORSER FEITELSON: He's one of the top authorities on color, you know.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh, he's going to lecture on color at the Art Association a week from this coming Friday night, the 26th I think it is.

BETTY HOAG: Can anyone come to that?

LORSER FEITELSON: Well, it's for members.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It's for members and then they ask a donation from anyone who is not a member.

BETTY HOAG: Well, if you donate they'll let you in?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: I would love to hear him talk about it. He's a consultant to Kodak Camera Company.

LORSER FEITELSON: And he was in Washington doing something in color for them ___ Bureau of Standards and so on. He really knows his color.

BETTY HOAG: I wrote a term paper at U.S.C. this last semester on the federal government and art, and it's very interesting trying to figure out what I've learned from talking to all these different people, and the last question I've been asking everyone is whether they feel the federal art project was beneficial to American art in general, or not. I haven't found anyone who didn't think so.

LORSER FEITELSON: American art? We were talking about it only today – that Paris, and I won't say London, but the continent itself has no influence at all on American art. It all began with these projects. Then they believed in themselves and exhibited their own kind of thing, and so on. There's no doubt in the world about it.

BETTY HOAG: And seeing what other artists were doing in different parts of the country.

LORSER FEITELSON: The projects – there's no doubt in the world.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It certainly kept many artists working in their medium during those bad times.

LORSER FEITELSON: Those were ambitious projects I think.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes.

LORSER FEITELSON: And also the publicity that the project itself gave to the artists and to the public and came back to the artists.

BETTY HOAG: In knowing that their work was needed and wanted. It must have been a wonderful thing for them.

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I certainly had a wonderful experience. I mean it gave me a chance to do things I would never – I would have been afraid to think of doing. I had never even looked at a mural before as well as having an opportunity to do such a thing.

LORSER FEITELSON: Also it's the Pericles –

BETTY HOAG: Oh, it is the Pericles of American art, that's a nice way to put it.

LORSER FEITELSON: There's no doubt.

BETTY HOAG: Well, of course, the whole thing is going to be reviewed I think, or thought about, certainly by the country if Johnson really comes out with this idea of doing something – so far he hasn't since mentioning it.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No, he's been pretty busy taking care of all these other –

BETTY HOAG: I can't wait to see what happens. And I noticed the other day that Mrs. Kennedy was looking for something to do. Johnson has not asked Heckscher for his advice or help. And he hasn't asked – unless it's just been very recently – hasn't asked Mrs. Kennedy, and it would such a wonderful thing is she would give her time to helping with something like that, you know.

LORSER FEITELSON: But I think politically he doesn't want that. He wants to make his own.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: He wants to disassociate himself, I think, from the –

LORSER FEITELSON: There's no doubt in the world about it.

BETTY HOAG: That's too bad.

LORSER FEITELSON: No, no, I think it's good. I'll tell you why: he's an ambitious man, therefore he's got to make a program that he thinks will be even better than the Kennedys would have done. That's the heart of it.

BETTY HOAG: If he really is I just hate to see it die out. In this paper I wrote we had to specialize in the Truman administration, which I knew nothing about. And I think the government and the arts as particularly applied to that administration – I learned an awful lot of things including the fact that nothing happens if the people in power are not interested – which he certainly wasn't, and he had miserable taste, poor man. He just didn't know what it was all about.

LORSER FEITELSON: Well, it's not so much his taste. If he's getting out a program of this kind he must get the backing, the support not only of the public but also of the people who are going to be in it, involved in it, so he has to get together people who know a great deal about the needs and the methods and the administration.

BETTY HOAG: But he had them available. He could have got the people left over from the Roosevelt

administration. They were there.

LORSER FEITELSON: But do you realize it's 25 years?

BETTY HOAG: Oh, you mean Johnson!

LORSER FEITELSON: I'm talking about Johnson.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, excuse me, I'm talking about Truman.

LORSER FEITELSON: Oh, Truman. Truman didn't care anything about art.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I'm sure he couldn't care less.

LORSER FEITELSON: He made some stupid remarks about art anyway.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, didn't he? And then of course this was the McCarthy era and there was enough of this stigma left over of any of the trouble they had with the film people.

LORSER FEITELSON: Well, I still think there'll be some kind of art commission and an art activity and Johnson being an ambitious man wants to create a permanent image of himself. Therefore, art is the best way to do this so this will be a very constructive thing. He can't be too ambitious as far as I'm concerned when it comes to art.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I think in that department he's probably smarter than Mr. Truman. I mean he'll find somebody to do it and keep his mouth shut.

BETTY HOAG: Kitty, are you going to be on the tape? (Cat purring)

LORSER FEITELSON: This is his birthday, St. Patrick's Day. He's eleven years old.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, it is! Then he should wear a green ribbon. Or did he rip it off? A beautiful cat.

LORSER FEITELSON: Oh, he's wonderful. How about a little coffee?

BETTY HOAG: I would love some coffee. It would be a very good idea.

LORSER FEITELSON: A good idea.

BETTY HOAG: Thank you so much for our interview. Unless we think of something else, and we probably will, I'll turn it off. We had a little break during which we were talking about a lot of things, one of them, Mr. Feitelson, you brought up, you wanted me to tell the tape about because we didn't have it on before, and that was about what happened during the project when funds ran out. Would you mind telling about it?

LORSER FEITELSON: It wasn't so much that the funds ran out as the funds were limited and there were more unemployed, say, artists and professional people than the projects could take care of. So in order to take care of as many as possible they limited the relief to, say, eighteen months, which meant that after eighteen months they had to get off the project to give another a chance, and sometimes it worked terrible hardships.

BETTY HOAG: Yes, they would have no place to go.

LORSER FEITELSON: That's right, yes, but this was also true in industry, I think. They had what was called the continuation of the NRA. In order to employ more people the law was that they could not work more than six hours a day, so they had more shifts; they didn't permit people to work overtime to give others a chance.

BETTY HOAG: But then at least they were still working. On the project when the artists were laid off it was completely.

LORSER FEITELSON: But many of these artists were living practically in panic during their last few months wondering what they would be doing.

BETTY HOAG: What did they do usually?

LORSER FEITELSON: Well, there was nothing they could do, there wasn't any work.

BETTY HOAG: Well, was there a length of time after which they could re-apply?

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes. I can't remember just what the time span was. Do you remember what the time span was? Wasn't that eighteen months?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No, I don't. I don't know if there was any set span between being laid off on the eighteen months deal and being reemployed again.

LORSER FEITELSON: They had to be re-processed, this I know. A new application.

BETTY HOAG: Then someone else mentioned the fact that there was an age limit for people who get on the project.

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes, sixty-five.

BETTY HOAG: Some of the people –

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes, we paid very little attention to that.

BETTY HOAG: The person that told me was telling about – was it Gordon Eckstrom?

LORSER FEITELSON: Eckstrom?

BETTY HOAG: Eckstrom, a very fine Swedish sculptor.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Wasn't it David Eckstrom?

LORSER FEITELSON: David Eckstrom, yes. Oh, we had many – also Dana Bartlett.

BETTY HOAG: Oh yes. Was he old then?

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: I haven't been able to find him. I suppose probably he's not around.

LORSER FEITELSON: I think he passed on, didn't he?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes, I think so.

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes, I think Dana Bartlett passed on.

BETTY HOAG: But Jean Swiggert would be around. They were together a lot on the thing so often.

LORSER FEITELSON: You're thinking of a different Bartlett. You're thinking of Ivan Bartlett.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, Ivan Bartlett. Oh dear, these names! I think I sent his name to New York. Someone said he was there.

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes, I think Ivan Bartlett is teaching, isn't he?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I don't know what Ivan is doing.

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I think Jean Swiggert is still down near San Diego somewhere.

LORSER FEITELSON: Jean Swiggert is teaching, yes. But Dana Bartlett was an old-timer who had a very fine reputation and did very well before the depression. In fact he even had an art gallery but then bad times came and hit him. He was a very fine, conservative painter. But he certainly must have been past the age limit. So there were certain things we simply examine, as we say, and never got to.

BETTY HOAG: I'm going to see Arthur Miller in a couple of weeks and I think probably he will be interesting because he wrote so many reviews of the artists who were on the project.

LORSER FEITELSON: But he was never on the project himself.

BETTY HOAG: I think he contributed some right at the beginning, you know.

LORSER FEITELSON: Maybe, yes, at the very beginning.

BETTY HOAG: Some of the people gave their paintings just to get it going.

LORSER FEITELSON: I think he was on the committee – they first set up a committee, an advisory board, and got all kinds of citizens.

BETTY HOAG: Yes, under Merle Armitage.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: He was on that first screening board that hired the artists on that first project.

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes. But actually the real project – he was never connected with the real setup when it went into high gear – it became something quite different from the very beginning, because in the beginning –

BETTY HOAG: It's my tape squeaking.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: That Peter out there has been playing with his little stuffed stocking.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, was that a birthday present?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No, it was a Christmas present but it's still around.

LORSER FEITELSON: It's the tape that's squeaking.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Does that register on the –?

BETTY HOAG: It registers but you can hear through it, and I don't know what makes it do it.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I noticed that before.

LORSER FEITELSON: So that break often was detrimental to the projects that were going on because we needed skilled people, for instance, like on Helen's jobs, or any of the mural jobs. What I had inaugurated was a period of training for each job. Now, for instance, if the artist is going to make a very large panel and one artist is going to work here, and another artist is going to work there, well even to the copying their own way of doing it will make the picture consistent. So each of the helpers that were assigned to paint was given a procedure which was made by the designer himself or herself; which colors come first, which come second, and so on; so they'll carry on the same procedure and there'll be a conformity.

BETTY HOAG: Well, it makes a tremendous job for the original designer then in addition to designing the mural.

LORSER FEITELSON: Oh yes.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: The designer had very little chance to paint actually on the mural.

BETTY HOAG: You were just a director general.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes. Well, you had to keep your eye on everything or something would go wrong. One assistant of mine carried a color clear down the wall that was only meant to go so far. He sort of absentmindedly was just embroidering. That meant that all that had to be taken out, you know, and done over. If you didn't watch, things like that would happen. Or you'd have to watch to see that they weren't running out of certain colors that were to be used, you know, and then the paint mixing man had to mix a new batch. And there was always something.

BETTY HOAG: I wanted to ask you, you said this he put in tubes. How in the world did he do that?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, he mixed up a great batch of color to match the desired tint on a palette and then with a palette knife spooned it into a tube.

LORSER FEITELSON: The back of it.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: You know the paint tubes are open at the back until they're clipped across, that's how the paint goes in, not through the screw top end but through the other end, and we had all these metal tubes used for this purposely. It was a great improvement on mixing color in batches on the palette for each job. It was economical and very efficient.

BETTY HOAG: I think I've kept you both way too late. I should be getting home. I certainly appreciate this taping. I enjoyed it.

LORSER FEITELSON: Of course you know in these projects we had to work with certain laws and regulations that were made by the state or the city, like, for instance, the scaffolds. You couldn't use any scaffolds until the state people okayed it, and there were certain regulations how wide they've got to be, and what kind of stuff, and they had to have some kind of little balustrade around it to the artists from falling.

BETTY HOAG: They would have been sued if anyone fell.

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes. In the meantime the workers learned the business procedures: the cost of a scaffold, how much time it would take, the cost of the paints and the details of the physical side. They learned a great deal about this and how to figure out time, and this is one of the great trainings that they received. There's no school in the world that taught that. This is something you've got to do.

BETTY HOAG: It's sort of a shame that because of the architecture that came to our country immediately after the war the artist's murals sort of went out with the international style.

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: And that training in a sense was lost because -

HELEN LUNDEBERG: There were a lot of people at that time who were just raring to go.

LORSER FEITELSON: The art of the mural did not go out. Actually it changed its technical methods. Instead of paint they use now all kinds of plastics and glass, and judging by some things I've seen in the European magazines -

[END OF TAPE]

[SESSION THREE]

BETTY HOAG: This is Betty Lochrie Hoag on March 17, 1965, Tape 3, interviewing Mr. and Mrs. Lorser Feitelson. And we cut you off right in the middle of what you were saying. Do you remember the middle of the sentence?

LORSER FEITELSON: What were we talking about?

BETTY HOAG: We'd been talking about scaffolding.

LORSER FEITELSON: Oh yes.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh.

LORSER FEITELSON: We were talking about the differences in the kind of architecture which now practically eliminates the old concepts of the mural, but on the other hand noticing these European magazines on architecture, arts and architecture, and I am thinking particularly of the magazine that used to be called Art d' Aujourdhui, and now it's called - I think it still has the same name - but originally it was just only on painting. Then it became sort of like Architectural Forum and painting, and I think Andre Belloc is the editor. And they were doing hard edge paintings before we were, applying them to these great big walls; according to the measurements some of those were about thirty-two feet by, say, twelve feet high, and say about five or six on these great big public buildings.

BETTY HOAG: This is in France?

LORSER FEITELSON: This is in France. And many of these were done in plastics or concrete painting, or probably some kind of ceramic relief for outdoors; and also just walls were made which were made in tile or brick, colored brick - that was safest with ceramic. And that's a new material for a new purpose which went very well with the immense perpendicular lines, something that would complement and yet was made of the same substance, sort of geometric shapes that are dynamic and have little dents in the color, and so on. Well, had the project continued and had we had this kind of architecture we would have done better.

BETTY HOAG: Oh yes.

LORSER FEITELSON: We were investigating all the known possibilities just like Helen's murals were made in the kind of paint - stains because we didn't wish to destroy the acoustic properties of this new kind of plaster. And also something new was taking place in some of the large buildings, I think particularly the building down in San Diego. This great big city hall, which had tremendously thick walls of reinforced concrete. Then, of course, I don't know what the footage was - there would be a separation in case of earthquake so there was enough movement. But the wall itself - what we would call the wall - was not the original wall. This was a steel mesh separated from the wall upon which the acoustic plaster was smeared and the space between that and the original wall was used for the piping, so you didn't have to break the walls, you could just walk in from the side where the door would be -

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh, was there that much space?

LORSER FEITELSON: There was that much space - about eighteen inches.

BETTY HOAG: It presented a completely new problem, then?

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes. So now you're working with acoustic plaster and anything we place on it is going to lessen its efficiency. So the stain, and not even to cover the total, you can just magnify the surface. The plaster was made up like little globules and little separations, so we touched only the very top, just the very top, sort of brushing it, just staining it and leaving many areas untouched. That's why we used the vignette. The vignette was not the caprice of the artist; this dictated procedure. Now, if we'd come into some new kinds of materials, as they're doing now, we'd find some kind of design that would go with very austere, large areas.

BETTY HOAG: Well, I would think that all the people who worked on the petrochromes with you, Mrs. Feitelson, would be able to apply it in the mosaic tile work that's being done today because there is certainly a lot of mosaic tile -

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: - and there are just really corny designs.

LORSER FEITELSON: Oh, most of them, yes.

BETTY HOAG: It's a shame - some of these people who worked with it, you know, like you, for instance, except you wouldn't be interested anymore probably.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, of course, I only designed the petrochromes. I made scale color designs for them and then made the cartoons. And then it was p to the petrochrome department who worked with aggregates and so on.

BETTY HOAG: Could you do the same thing with tile?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh, petrochrome is an entirely - of course I could design for tile, yes. But I know nothing personally about the techniques of actually using the materials because I didn't have anything to do with that. That's another department.

BETTY HOAG: I see.

LORSER FEITELSON: I think today when I look back at all these things today with the new plastics, and even glass - you've seen some of the new stained glass, great big chunks of glass poured into other glass, and so on - and I think with some of our new plastic materials you can make these designs at one-tenth the cost and with better effect, much better effect. The petrochrome was really now that I think of it, it was not a practical thing so far as cost is concerned. There had to be made little reservoirs for each color and turned upside down and reinforced with steel and some more concrete, and then turned and then ground because it's terrazzo - cut the same - and some of the colors you could not get -

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It's the same thing as the terrazzo that's used for floors.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, I see.

LORSER FEITELSON: - because we use actually colored stones.

BETTY HOAG: And you had to grind those too, didn't you?

LORSER FEITELSON: And then of course the colors themselves are limited.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: The top stone, as it were, came already -

BETTY HOAG: Pulverized perhaps?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It wasn't pulverized.

LORSER FEITELSON: Just broken in aggregates.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Just little - broken in large and small - small, if I remember, what they call aggregates. And that was imbedded in cement which was also colored, and the problem in trying to duplicate a painted, a colored surface was to find the right color stone and then the right pigment to mix with it so that the total effect was like a sort of pointillism. The total effect was the color you wanted as nearly as possible.

BETTY HOAG: It must have been very tedious.

LORSER FEITELSON: Well, supposing - now see there is no stone this red; and alos, see, pigment in cement this red will not last because -

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No. You had to design for the colors you could achieve with it.

LORSER FEITELSON: - the lime in the cement burns organic colors. So it has to be a metal or a stone, and the stones are very limited. Some of the blues - well, those stones would be very costly, so much so that people would hunt up certain areas and get the purples - well, there weren't many purple compared to most of the...So you played with this limited color scheme, which may be quite fine under ordinary circumstances, but supposing -

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, I think _____ is an attractive color for wall decoration.

BETTY HOAG: I think the effect, because they're so muted, makes them beautiful. They're very restful.

LORSER FEITELSON: - but supposing the building calls for more color, then these things would look faded, you see.

BETTY HOAG: Yes.

LORSER FEITELSON: What I'm trying to say is that you're absolutely confined so far as color is concerned. And the labor was - went to such long procedure, and setting, and so on. And there are always little openings - air pockets that have to be fixed, and so on. But today I think with plastics they could do some terrific things, or even heating glass with a torch and melting it right into these things.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, if you had a similar art project today that was engaged in putting up murals around the country, you'd certainly have a different look.

BETTY HOAG: Yes, wouldn't you!

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Different kinds of designs and different materials.

BETTY HOAG: I think the architects are feeling the need for more warmth in their buildings - on every side the materials they're using -

LORSER FEITELSON: They have to, yes. Because man can't live by efficiency alone. There's such a thing as the need not only to go from here to there and we build a room to make it easier, but also there's a psychological side. We say we can't live in this room, or it's depressing, and that's why the housewife says this color just gets me down; we have to have a different color. Or we bring a tree into the house and call it a plant to break up these -

BETTY HOAG: Sterility

LORSER FEITELSON: - this sterility. Some of these lines are just forbidding and I think very few people can possibly live constantly just perpendicular in some great big geometric form living like inside of a box, so to speak.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I would rather live inside a box than in Mr. - what's his name - Kiesler - isn't he the man who designed the endless house that just goes?

BETTY HOAG: Oh yes.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh, that was really -

LORSER FEITELSON: I can't imagine...because most people suffer from claustrophobia anyhow you see, so -

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Of course we've just seen pictures of it. I never saw the -

LORSER FEITELSON: But we don't know. He may be the prophet that is probably giving us the design for the people of the future when -

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Do you know he's sort of going back to the cave?

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes. When -

BETTY HOAG: Like these bomb shelter houses?

LORSER FEITELSON: Yes.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: Well, I hope it isn't the answer. I'd rather go with Mr. Kuthstow undersea.

LORSER FEITELSON: Undersea?

BETTY HOAG: Yes.

LORSER FEITELSON: Well, they may find perhaps up on the moon that people are living under the surface.

BETTY HOAG: What a grisly thought! I think we should end with that. Is that original?

LORSER FEITELSON: No -

END OF INTERVIEW

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