



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

Oral history interview with Jerry  
Bywaters, 1965 June 9

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Jerry Bywaters on June 9, 1956. The interview took place in Dallas, Texas, and was conducted by Sylvia Glidden Loomis for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's New Deal and the Arts project.

The original transcript was edited. In 2021 the Archives created a more verbatim transcript. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

SYLVIA LOOMIS: This is an interview with Mr. Jerry Bywaters, head of the Museum School, Dallas Museum of Fine Arts in Dallas, Texas on June 9, 1965. The interviewer is Mrs. Sylvia Loomis of the Santa Fe office of the Archives of American Art. And the subject to be discussed is Mr. Bywaters participation in the Public Works of Art Projects in the 1930s and other information about it. But first, Mr. Bywaters, would you tell us something about yourself, where you were born and where you received your art education?

JERRY BYWATERS: I'm a native Parisian, I like to say. Paris, Texas that is unfortunately.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, I see.

JERRY BYWATERS: And I came to Dallas though, at the age of nine, and went through university here at Southern Methodist University and then went to the Arts Student's League. Then to Europe from some study just to the museums though, no formal study. And then I came back to Mexico, I did have the opportunity to go to Mexico at the time when Rivera and Orozco were just starting their murals—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JERRY BYWATERS: —in the secretary of education building. And it was very fascinating to watch them work. I think that helped us an awful lot really as we began to get into the mural situation later with the different projects.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Who did you study with at the League?

JERRY BYWATERS: Strangely enough two opposite people, Ivan Olinsky, in figure, and John Sloan. So, I date back rather far though. This would have been in 1927, I guess, after I got out of university.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Was that after John Sloan had been in the West and gone back or not?

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, I think he had been to the Santa Fe area some by that time, but he had not been making his regular summer trips, I think, by that time.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So then, so after, you well left France you came back what and then you went to Mexico, and that's when you—

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, came back and actually began to be a painter. And so, I was a painter and a teacher until 1936. I joined the faculty at SMU and then in 1941 came to the art museum as the director of exhibits, and then in 1942, they couldn't find anybody else to take the job, so I took the job of being director of the museum. And was director at the museum here for, oh, 1941 until last year, 1964.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And that's when you took over as head of the museum school?

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, this is principally a way I'm trying to get some research done in the field of arts in the Southwest, and some writing. And so, I think I have to give up most administrative work in order to do this.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see, mm-hmm [affirmative].

JERRY BYWATERS: May have to give it all up in order to do it. As you know, you have to have a good deal of time to do any of these things.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That's right, well I have so many responsibilities in an administrative job, and it can take all your time.

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, and there are really not enough people. I sure hope there are more and more people being trained in the field of administration for our institutions because they're sure needed.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Certainly, is needed. Well, how—do you remember how you were approached in participating in the Public Works of Art Project?

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, I think all of the artists in Dallas, beginning in the early '30s were barely able to stay alive. I remember literally one of the artists, I won't name him, but he was actually selling anything he could on the streets to stay alive, and he would do any kind of work. I think at the time the best work I could get was custom stencils, funny, humorous stencils for mimeographing people. So, I had a little family started about that time too, so we were all rather low on funds then. So, when the first project came up, I think it was routed through the then director of the Dallas Arts Association, Dr. John S. Ankeney. I believe he was the project director in Dallas, and so he called us and set up various projects in the area for us to do.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And that would have been 1934?

JERRY BYWATERS: I'm sorry, I don't remember the date. [Cross talk.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That was the date it was supposedly set up, I think. And how many other artists were there involved at that time, do you know?

JERRY BYWATERS: No, roughly 30 or 35 I would think.

Again, your list would probably show that specifically. But I really can't trust my memory on any of these facts.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No, of course not. [Cross talk, inaudible.]

[00:05:14]

JERRY BYWATERS: But I do remember how much it meant to all of us to have this work. And I think without exception, each artist just did all he possibly could to make each project very good. I remember specifically how at first, we felt like we were wanted for a change, instead of unwanted. Then second, the thing that thrilled us so much was that we were asked to do work which had to do with the history of our area, and which had to do with things that we knew and were familiar with. A good many of the painters were, at that time, doing some of their finest work, all though they were unknown.

But—because they were trying to interrupt their own relation to their own environment. So, this was not necessarily a regionalism, or what came to be called regionalism. But, it was just a matter of each artist finding himself more at ease with his own material. The material he knew most about. So, this theme for the projects was a great boon to each of the artists. They did a lot of research and they felt it had meaning, and that if they could put it into the works they would have more meaning also for the public.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, did the sketches that you did have to be approved by the Dr. Ankeney?

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, they had to be certainly approved by him. I've forgotten whether they had to be approved further or not.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: By the owners, or the administrators of the public buildings, do you know? You remember that?

JERRY BYWATERS: Well yes, I do remember that, because we did some work in the city hall. I say we because another one of the painters, Alexandre Hogue, and I got a joint project to do several panels in the city hall and of course we worked with the city hall officials, or the city officials. Yes, and I remember there were great discussions as we would work. We would have— the public opinions would be given to us directly as to whether we were doing the

things right or wrong. As to whether our historical research was correct, or whether somebody's memory was better than ours, or they thought it was.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see, I see. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JERRY BYWATERS: I remember we had early scenes in Dallas, and we used mule drawn street cars, and many people insisted that they should have been horse drawn, but we had looked up and they were actually mule drawn. So, here again it was the business of the artist trying to do both the thing that satisfied him artistically, and also the factual thing that would satisfy the historians, or the would-be historians.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Were these frescos?

JERRY BYWATERS: In very few instances, I think. I don't really know a single instance of fresco at the time. Buildings were—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: The ones that you did at city hall?

JERRY BYWATERS: No, unfortunately, these were painted directly on plaster. Not that that wouldn't have held. But I mean there was no way of disengaging them and their eventual fate, many years later, was to be painted over. Well, the walls actually had to be destroyed in the renovation of the building.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, I see. Well, so many of the mural artists worked with oil on canvas, and then that was applied—

JERRY BYWATERS: That's right. Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —you know, the frame applied directly on the wall. But this was on the plaster directly.

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, actually it was painted directly. The plaster was in good condition, we used special sizing, so it was all right. It was a safe procedure, but it was not a permanent procedure.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Tell about those panels that you did, the extra ones.

JERRY BYWATERS: Well, I forget what number we had been assigned to do, not many. I think we were to do four or five at the most. For our modest salary, I've forgotten what it was, but it was a great deal to us at that time. But we were so interested in the work and in completing it that when we realized there were actually 11 panels there in the lobby of the city hall, we felt it was a shame to just do five and stop. So, we decided to do all 11 for the price of five, and we did. And we were only able to work at night, quite late after all the offices had been closed and after actually the janitors had been through, I think.

[00:10:08]

So, we worked from about 11 p.m. through the night until dawn, each night. And I remember that was a little bit rough because I was also working some in the daytime. I was trying to do some—write some criticism for the Dallas news, some art coverage at that time. But through it all we were pretty thrilled through the whole prospect.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How long did it take you, do you remember?

JERRY BYWATERS: I think we were to be paid for 60 days, I've literally forgotten that. But we spent another 60 days beyond that time doing these panels. Without any pay, but again, feeling pretty good about the whole thing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. And how long were you on the Project?

JERRY BYWATERS: I forget how the projects developed. I know we later did murals. I did a mural in Quanah, Texas, and a mural in Farmersville, Texas, and a mural in Trinity, Texas. Which project these were on, I'm sorry I don't remember.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: You also did one in Paris, Texas.

JERRY BYWATERS: In Paris, in the library. That was perhaps the second one, yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, these might have been these later ones might have been under the Treasury Department.

JERRY BYWATERS: I expect they were, because we also did another one in Houston, and that, I remember, was under the Treasury.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: It was, so those—that probably continued then for the next several years.

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, I think probably the Paris Library one was still under the first project. I don't remember how it came about. But I was—being [ph] a native of Paris, I think the library had the opportunity to have something done so they requested that I do it since I was from Paris.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Do you remember how you got these commissions? Were they through open competitions?

JERRY BYWATERS: The first very ones were not. They were actually allocated by the committee headed by Dr. Ankeney. He was rather familiar with all the work of the artists and through exhibits and so forth, he knew the ones that he felt could do the best job. Then later there competitions came back.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: There were competitions from that point on I do remember. Talk about the post office murals down here.

JERRY BYWATERS: Well, there was a new federal post office being built in Dallas and naturally by this time all of us had had a good experience doing murals through the earlier projects. So, we were on the lookout for new projects, new possibilities, because we thought we were getting better all the time too and didn't want to miss any opportunities to do murals. So, we watched this development of this project knowing that there would be a competition because it was a sizable federal project and didn't have spaces. But after correspondence with the—I presume this time the Treasury Department, I don't remember actually. We were trying to determine if the competition was to be held and they said at first there would be one. But then after some months and the building came along, we read in the paper one day that an artist from California had been assigned to do this project. Probably as a result of other competitions elsewhere. But we felt that we had the right to object because we'd been told that there would be a project for this one, and a competition. So, we did object, and—to the director of the project in Washington.

And after considerable hemming and hawing back and forth and quite frankly a little pressure, which we felt was justifiable from this end, why then they did have a project and a competition. Which was later won by Peter Hurd of New Mexico. This was all right with us because we were not complaining about who won it, we were really complaining about the fact that no project was held, no competition was held. So once the competition was held, then we were satisfied. We all submitted to it and several of us got other projects allocated to us as a result of this competition. And I think this was the procedure followed in many cases. Where a major competition would be held and we would be told in advance that in addition to the winner of that competition, other assignments would be made from it to smaller post offices and to other federal buildings being made.

[00:15:18]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Did you get one directly?

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, I think as a result of that one was the one for the Houston post off—yes, the Houston post office. Which I believe was at the railroad station there. So, again, Alexandre Hogue did one part of this project and I did another.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you remember the subjects of any of these murals that you did?

JERRY BYWATERS: In the Houston one, it was—it had to do with the ship channel and so I think I took a section of loading, ship loading at the turning basin. And Hogue as I remember took the subject which had to do with the digging of the channel, the making of the channel.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Are the rest of these murals still intact?

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, as far as I know.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Just the ones at the city hall.

JERRY BYWATERS: The city hall in Dallas I believe are the principle ones I remember of ours that are no longer in existence. I think the panels even in the Paris, Texas library are still up. [Cross talk.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Still there.

JERRY BYWATERS: —I noticed some years ago.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Do you remember the subjects at the city hall?

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, it had to do—really it was the kind of thing which all of us, I presume, were doing at that time. We felt like we had to cover all the history of the situation, and we did. From the early Indian days to the latest thing, to the dedication of whatever it was, I believe, the new airport that we had. So, this, in the 11 panels we did cover quite a period of time and activity.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well now, were all the artists that were involved at that time, were they all doing murals? Or were they doing some other types of work?

JERRY BYWATERS: Among the very early ones, as I remember, some were doing just paintings which would be then just placed in buildings. Some were even doing things like band shells. I remember one did a design for the shell for the symphony, for the Dallas symphony. And a curtain for the same area. So, the projects were quite diversified, as I remember. And this was not at the time of the Index of American Design, but earlier.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Was there any sculpture done?

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, yes, some sculpture was done.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Do you know where any of that was allocated? And of course, they were all public buildings, but any particular ones?

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, much of it would be low relief. That would be in an architectural setting, and I'm pretty sure that's where people like Allie Tennant and others. The kind of project they did would be one which had to do with the architecture, had an architectural setting, rather than being freestanding. I don't remember any freestanding things in this area, all though there undoubtedly were.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well now, do you—as I understand there was no Federal Art Project of the WPA in Texas.

JERRY BYWATERS: I don't remember that really. I think you can determine that better than I can from records.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, this is information that I got from Detroit, and—which was quite surprising to me, because as far as I can understand from other artists in Texas that I've interviewed that they needed, they needed to go on—[Cross talk.]

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, I think we could have done very well, and did, in many cases, do incredible work. I think too, that the best artists were at work on the projects. It's been proven, I believe, that the ones that went ahead and became good in their field were on the projects. Of course, many—there were many that fell by the wayside. But most of them were producing artists and did continue. Not just as teachers, but as—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Do you want to give me the names of some of these?

JERRY BYWATERS: Well yes, I would think Otis Dozier was one, a Dallas man, Everett Spruce another, William Lester another, Harry Carnahan, Dallas man and California, Don Brown, Texas man from Shreveport, later a teacher at Centenary College in Shreveport, now deceased. And many others like that, that I just can't think of right now.

[00:20:16]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, it seems to me that the continuity of the work was almost entirely in murals, though.

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, and I think that proved to be probably the most logical outlet for the work. That and sculpture too, I think, architectural sculpture.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: But in the other states they had extensive projects such as art centers, and they had craftsman, they had graphic arts.

JERRY BYWATERS: Yep.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: They had very extensive easel projects, of course, and then one thing that you mention, Index of American Design, but that was definitely under the WPA and so—  
[Cross talk.]

JERRY BYWATERS: I do remember that there were Index of Design projects done in Texas, and very good ones. They were done with headquarters in San Antonio, and here again, I'm sorry I don't remember the details of where the office was, or who was in charge, except I do remember that the principal art director of the project was Thomas M. Stell, Jr.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Stell?

JERRY BYWATERS: S—T—E— double L. A very able painter who had—a native of Cuero, Texas, who had gone East to study and had come back here and was a very fine teacher as well as a good painter. His particular interest was in Romanesque sculpture and early Italian paintings. So, when the opportunity came along for him to get together a group of workmen, literally rather unschooled people to do these Index projects with very careful workmanship, the paintings of objects. He was able to teach them then rather quickly how to secure almost fool-the-eye Trompe-l'œil effects for this kind of painting, and that was great. Exactly what the project wanted.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, I know that absorbed quite a bit—many of the very academic type of painters.

JERRY BYWATERS: One's who were craftsmen.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Wanted to do the photographic type painting rather than something that was a little freer. Well, that's very curious and I'll have to take it up with Detroit, [laughs] find out how that happened to sneak in when there weren't any other [cross talk, inaudible] projects—

JERRY BYWATERS: Of course, that may have been under one of the other types of projects. That may have been under the WPA or something like that, I just don't know.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: It was WPA. That's why if there was no WPA federal art project in Texas, how this one happened to get in and nothing else did. Because it was a statewide organization and administration, and so it might have been from some other state that just had a little branch here in Texas or something of the sort. Either that or its incorrect that there was no WPA in Texas, but this, well this is one of the types of things we're trying to run down to find out just how extensive the projects were.

JERRY BYWATERS: I do remember that specifically, because we borrowed those particular works on early Texas crafts at a later time from the Index of Design at that National Gallery. And that covered some furniture, early furniture that had been made by slaves in East Texas. It covered the blankets or the quilts which had been handmade. It covered a few utilitarian objects that were made by the French and Germans in the South Texas area because they had some very fine early crafts and to record those crafts was an important part of the Index. And Stell had been quite familiar with all that material and was a great admirer of the material.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I don't suppose you have any idea of about how many plates were made. I mean whether it was 50 or 500?

JERRY BYWATERS: No. I would say not more than 100. Perhaps a great deal less. Between 50 and 100 plates were made.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That certainly is curious. But I'll try to find out about it. [Clears throat.] I

know the WPA had other kinds of projects in San Antonio.

For instance, the open-air theater and the reconstruction of the Cos House, that was done by WPA. But that would be under an architectural or construction project.

[00:25:14]

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, I remember I think O'Neil Ford, the architect, helped with that and I remember him working on that.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, he was the person in charge of it and I didn't find this out until just a couple of hours before I was to leave San Antonio so I didn't have a chance to talk with him, but Mr. Leeper at the McNay Gallery said that he would try to get him to answer some of these questions.

JERRY BYWATERS: That would be a very good deed if you can get answers out of him. [Cross talk.] SYLVIA LOOMIS: —a problem, huh?

JERRY BYWATERS: Well, he's become really one of the fine architects in the country and stays extremely busy.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I would imagine so.

JERRY BYWATERS: I think he's the new consulting architect for the Hemisfair that they have in San Antonio, so he'll be busy with that.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: You said that you worked on *the Dallas News* as an art critic?

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, I think from 1933 to 1939. Six years.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And also, I saw that you were the editor of *the Contemporary Arts of the South and Southwest*.

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, that was a very short live [ph] magazine, though. But one that we felt there was a need for. The cost of production just exceeded income so we couldn't keep it going.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What period was that?

JERRY BYWATERS: The late '30s, I presume. I think there were only five editions really, five copies, and they're quite rare now. I haven't looked at it recently. I do remember, though, that on the cover of the first one was a very nice wood block by Vernon Hunter, the project director for New Mexico.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, this might have had some information then about the art project. [Cross talk.]

JERRY BYWATERS: It might have, I'll be glad to look those up and see.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That would be the proper period. See the WPA—the Federal Art Project lasted from 1935 to 1941, just before the war, so if it were—if—

JERRY BYWATERS: I'll look also in my own articles and see also what was touched on there because theoretically I was covering art and should have kept up with some of this, so there may be some facts there.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That would be interesting to know. Well, what do you think was the effect of the Federal Art Projects, the ones that you had here, on the general public in this area?

JERRY BYWATERS: Oh, I remember a lot of objections to things. To begin with there was a—I believe a general objection to the use of funds this way. Many people felt that the money could have been used better, because these were rather hard times as I remember. But I think that scene was overcome by both the results and by the fact that most of the artists were working with the people also to determine the kind of history there was to be covered, what was important in the community to be reflected. So as the thing got underway, I believe, it more than earned its way in good will as well as in actual—well a financial equivalence for the building it was decorating or that it was being used in. I remember I did



one—when I did the one in Quanah, Texas, probably this was the only painting that the citizens of Quanah had ever seen in life. So, it was a pretty great day for the city of Quanah when this mural was installed in their post office. And since of course I covered the great Quanah Parker who's—who had given the town its name and used him and some of the other local industries and activities they were very proud of it, and so was the postmaster. And it's still there and talking with the editor of the paper not too long ago, she said it still looks pretty good, she thought. I did a good job and they still thought of it as a work of art that the town had acquired. Which it couldn't have done at all any other way.

[00:30:05]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yeah, of course. What about some of these other towns where you put murals?

JERRY BYWATERS: Well, I guess it was pretty much the same way, although, I guess, too, at that time art was thought to be rather a frivolous activity and a luxury item, and so forth and so on. Not at all, I believe, as it is now. So, it took a bit courage, I think, on part of the government to start this business. It took courage also for the artists to go ahead and do what some of both the architects and some of the local people thought of as spoiling their nice buildings with these pictures.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, oh.

JERRY BYWATERS: Yeah, and in many cases the artists would come up with the painting of local characters and there would be a great discussion as to whether the artist had done right by that local character. And this would range from such legendary characters as Judge Roy Bean, I remember so many of the historians criticizing the artist because of the clothes he put on Roy Bean, or the signs that he put in the background, so forth so on. But usually, most artists were able to substantiate their things with documented photographs.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What about your style of painting? Were you allowed to use any style you wanted, to experiment in techniques?

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, I don't think there was any difficulty there. As I remember it, many of the first efforts on our part, they were kind of combinations between the Prix de Rome things that had been held by architectural competitions or they would be almost primitive things. So, here was this great difference between things. One had an attempt at sophisticated mural painting, or what was thought to be sophisticated at the time, because that type of thing had been winning prizes, Prix de Rome prizes through the architectural agency, and this other extreme of the local artist who had never been anywhere and didn't know really what a mural was supposed to be so he would just paint what he wanted to. Often, of course, that turned out quite good. But I don't remember any particular instance of style ever being a difficulty. Subject sometimes was. There were always many opinions as to what should be covered in these things. Most of the time artist was able to put his points over.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, being more or less representational, or that there wasn't the problem that there might be today for instance.

JERRY BYWATERS: Yeah, that's right. I don't remember any complete abstractions. All though I remember Dozier doing one of his things, it was a—he decided to take a subject which had to do with the formation of coal, I guess. Why that should be chosen I don't know. I don't know of coal or any use of it around here. But he was interested in pre-history, so he depicted the early days when there were tropical forests, I guess, in this area and did a very stylized and simplified thing, which I thought was very much ahead of its time.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Where was this placed?

JERRY BYWATERS: In one of the local high schools, and I'm ashamed to say I don't know whether it's still in existence or not.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: As far as the easel painters were concerned, they were allowed the same kind of freedom?

JERRY BYWATERS: I think they just went ahead. We always felt they had the easy time of it. They just painted some more pictures and got paid for it. We were out trying to determine how to make a wall stay flat and how to please the public who was coming by and still please

us, how to please officials of the cities and so on.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That was a much more complicated problem than it was to paint an easel painting.

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, and even the physical problem was very difficult as we found working in the middle of the night.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, what do you think was the effect on the public as far as art appreciation was concerned?

[00:34:59]

JERRY BYWATERS: I think it undoubtedly helped arouse the public, whether they liked these things or not they were made aware of the art in a way that they had not ever thought about it. Previously it had—art interest had been limited pretty much to what they could get in school or the art appreciation kind of club group business. Which would be rather limited in its scope and really have nothing to do with contemporary things. So, this was a real good taste at letting the public become aware of the fact that art was really a contemporary activity and had a place in everyday life. Just as it, I think, it had to do in Mexico.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, do you think that this sort of got the artists together to form a base of art appreciation in the community? I know a good many cases the artists said this was the first time they got together with fellow artists. Before they'd had been rather isolated and as a result of this it started an art organization in a community.

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, I think that's probably true here with us. Because I know all of us that worked on this then would later get together as a group and we submitted some things when the Texas centennial came along in 1936. We submitted as a group, a project for one of the large new buildings here at the centennial grounds. The building which is now the Hall of State. And although we didn't win the competition, we did at least work together and continue the activity of working toward the painting of murals, using art in public buildings. And many of the artists have continued to do that.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Is there much of an artist group now in Dallas per say?

JERRY BYWATERS: Not as an organized group. We did have that time and soon thereafter a group called the Dallas Artist Guild, I believe. But as artists would move away, or go away to teaching jobs things like that, well then, that particular group ceased to exist as a strong group. And that kind of thing has been replaced, more or less, by specialist groups, like a print-and-drawing society or a craft guild, things like that.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Approximately how many working artists are there now in Dallas, as compared to those days?

JERRY BYWATERS: Each year we send out mailings for competitions to about 400 people in Dallas who are on an artist list, and obviously that's a much larger number than there are professional artists. So, you'd have to say that there are perhaps 60 qualified professional artists, I presume, in Dallas. Others are advocational, some quite good, but it does then show that there's tremendous interest now. And it shows a great growth in actual participation in the arts, of painting, and sculpture, and so forth.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, would you venture to guess how much of that might have started with the Federal Art Projects?

JERRY BYWATERS: I don't—I'm a little prejudiced because I think the projects did do some good, and even though the works themselves might not stand up right now as top-quality works of art, the fact that they were done at the time, I think, helped the artists tremendously. It enabled him to continue to paint, but also to continue to think and to experiment. To search himself and to search a little bit more in depth on the business of the relation to himself and his environment. Come up with something that we like to think of fondly as being universal even though it has a local evolution.

[00:40:19]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Would you say that this had much to do with the shift of the art center from

Paris, France to Paris, Texas? [They laugh.][Cross talk.] To this country, I mean.

JERRY BYWATERS: Well, undoubtedly it surely did help—not only help the arts to survive through a difficult period, but it helped in many directions to project the artists into the future. So, yes, I think undoubtedly it helped a great deal on that. And I—oh, I can remember a few examples of where the artists would freeload on the situation, but that was rather the exception.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What was the attitude of the artists generally, one of appreciation—

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —for this opportunity?

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, a great appreciation and a realization that it was up to him to deliver or to—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Prove.

JERRY BYWATERS: --justify this occasion. And in most cases, I would say 95 percent of the cases the artist did deliver and deliver more than was expected of him.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I'm very glad of one of the projects you're doing now, which was your attempt to find, to locate all of the work that was done on the WPA or the Public Works of Arts projects in Texas.

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, I think that would be important to do. And one of the real regrets I have as a kind of an art historian or at least someone interested in trying to keep up with the arts. One of the great regrets I have is that we do not know really what has happened to this material. I know we turned in some awfully good drawings and studies to these competitions and our museum, I think, exhibited on at least two occasions the results of competitions. And they made an excellent show, excellent exhibitions of these preliminary inch-to-the-foot studies with details, I believe we were required to make details full-sized. Actual sized details of about three—or four—foot square sections.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: In color too, weren't they?

JERRY BYWATERS: Full color, the whole thing, yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, that's one of the things the Archives is trying to do, is to locate where these things went.

JERRY BYWATERS: I hope they were not destroyed, but it may well be that they were returned to Washington to some building and then as that building had to be made use of some other way when the projects were closed.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: But do you have anything in this museum? Now—

JERRY BYWATERS: Dating from those?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: From that period?

JERRY BYWATERS: No, because we had no right to them.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, quite often these were allocated to art museums.

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, I remember that too, but—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: But not to this one?

JERRY BYWATERS: No, I don't remember. I remember we never were—it seemed that we never had the opportunity to get at any of the mural designs, which to me were the most interesting things produced.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well in almost—I think in all the other three states that I've visited, there have been some Federal Art Works of art—

JERRY BYWATERS: Would that have been an easel painting or something like that?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, of course with the murals they would be a little bit more difficult.

JERRY BYWATERS: Yeah, because they're not suitable for general exhibition purposes, but they would be great for records. [Cross talk.] I hope some of them can be found.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, in the Houston museum for instance, there are quite a good many prints that have been allocated there from other sections.

JERRY BYWATERS: Well, now we were given and through—this, again, is through the good interest of Vernon Hunter of New Mexico, we were allocated some paintings done by the Indians, a few done by New Mexicans, and the thing that we were principally pleased to get, and are still proud of now, are the Barela examples [ph].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, you have some?

JERRY BYWATERS: We have, I think, four Barelas.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Is that right?

JERRY BYWATERS: Very good ones.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I would love to see those before I go.

JERRY BYWATERS: And I don't think Lopez was on the project. He was younger, I think.

[00:45:05]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I know Barela died just—

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —last year, I interviewed him just a short time before his death. And then when I was in Tucson at the museum, or the University Art Gallery, Mr. Voris told me about 13 Barelas that were there that weren't even cataloged.

JERRY BYWATERS: Oh, really?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So, I spoke to Mr. Steadman [ph] about them and said he would get them cataloged, but he wasn't even aware of their existence at that point.

JERRY BYWATERS: And they had been allocated from the Project?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: By Vernon Hunter. He had sent them down there and then they had a great many prints from WPA projects throughout the country that had been allocated to them.

JERRY BYWATERS: Well, I have great respect for Vernon and the work he did on the Project and certainly, I think, the work done in New Mexico was some of the most important work done.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, there was so many artists there, it was an art colony to begin with.

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, and so much of the material was and still is glamorous, I think. And unusual in the American scene.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I would like to get a list of what you have here, if it's easy enough to get it.

JERRY BYWATERS: Sure.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And I'm also very much interested in these paintings by Indians. Because there again, my understanding was that as Indians were then wards of the government that they were not eligible for these Federal Art Projects, but apparently some of them did some paintings, because I've seen a few.

JERRY BYWATERS: I think I'm right in that, and we can double check that. I know we have a few down there and I think they came from the Project. I've gotten a few myself, over the years, and as I get older, I'm not sure of the source of much of what I do in the earlier days.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, are there some other comments that you would like to make about that period in your life?

JERRY BYWATERS: Well, I'm not trying to overstate the situation when I say that the various projects meant a great deal, really, to me. As I think they did to some of the other artists. Often times it was the difference between staying in art as a career and not staying in. And as to whether many of us should not have gotten out of the trade that's another question, but at least we did give it a try, and have given it a try over the years. And I think we learned a good deal of respect for both art as a profession during that time and we learned several kinds of responsibilities about our work both to ourselves and to the community. I think it was invaluable, really it was to me.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I think it was, too. Well, if the government should attempt a similar subsidy of the arts, you think the form of it should be changed in any way?

JERRY BYWATERS: I hope something is done and as to its modus-operandi, I don't really know of any different way all of those were a kind of combination of competition, and commission too, and I presume that's about the same thing that can be done now.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, do you think it was easier then to control the standards, than it is now?

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, but I think it would be a mistake to try to control the standards now. That is to the extent of saying they must have a certain style, or so forth and so on. I think they had just as much trouble there at that time with subject matter and running in to indignant citizens from time to time as they would have now. It would just be on a different scale. What was thought to be extremely wild then would be held to be very tame now. And so, perhaps the same sort of thing would take place.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Do you think it would get much wilder than it is now?

JERRY BYWATERS: I don't see how it can. [They laugh.] Well, that is, it can surely in principle or in idea. I think you and I both realize the word wild is really not what we mean. What we mean is exploratory and it's a kind of creative search everybody's going through with. Some of it will hold up and some of it won't.

[00:50:03]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, do you think—

JERRY BYWATERS: But it's all very exciting.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: It's exciting all right, but personally I just wish they'd get back to something a little more logical.

JERRY BYWATERS: Well, I think these things move around in cycles and circles, and so forth and so on.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see you were the director of the museum up to last year, is that correct?

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes. 22 years, I believe, it works out, and that's a long time.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, what were some of your—the problems you faced in trying to get the public to accept some of this exploratory art?

JERRY BYWATERS: Well, it's always been, I think, what every other museum has encountered, and that is some people think you're showing things that are too modern, and other groups think that you're spending entirely too much of museum space on conservative things.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see, so you can't win.

JERRY BYWATERS: So, you can't win, but you keep on trying and I always felt it was the museum's responsibility to try to present what was being done without attempting to give any kind of evaluation of it. Other than trying to interpret what the artist said he was about. Rather than a museum being an institution which was supposed to be having the final word, I just don't think there are any museum people that smart. They're a lot smarter than I am,

but I don't think they're that smart. Nor can an institution do that.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No, that's true.

JERRY BYWATERS: I don't think it should, as some institutions attempt to do.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, it's this process of education, which, of course, is the importance of the museum.

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes, I think the greatest thing that goes on in the museum now is the activity among the children. Who do not think art is anything except the natural behavior that they have every right to enjoy and to participate in and to exercise. And they do it, and I think they're going to make terrific grown-up citizens. I really do. They're going to like art, they're not going to think it's extreme to like it and they're going to like all kinds of art, and they're going to think that's all right too.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Fine. How many classes do you have here?

JERRY BYWATERS: As much as we have space for. I don't know—we have I guess we have about 10 adult classes in painting, and in sculpture, and in ceramics and then about eight children's classes a week. That's about as much time as children have to give to it. But then we have an awful lot of informal things, especially in the summer. For instance, if you'd been here yesterday, if we have 20 galleries in the museum, every gallery would have been filled with children sitting on the floor making drawings, or talking about the works of art. There were about 600 children in the museum at one time. Each with someone who's not attempting to be a teacher in the sense of class work was done, but at least there to help direct their interest or their questions or their drawing activities.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Is this through the public schools?

JERRY BYWATERS: No, it's our own program. We do have though—we work closely with the public schools and our own art museum along with the other museums in this civic center. We helped start, with the Junior League, a thing called the Museum Program of Youth Activity. And we got the Junior League to put up enough money for us to try for three years and then we proved that it was a workable thing, by working with the school, having our activities tied in with the curriculum. Setting it up where the schools would consider it part of the curriculum. Then after the school adopted it, and underwrote the expenses and appointed an art coordinator and this is continuing now. So, we have both a formal and an informal program with the school, the public schools.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. How long has this been going on?

JERRY BYWATERS: Well, I think we started about six years ago.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, that's a wonderful thing, start educating children at that age.

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So that they accept it.

JERRY BYWATERS: That's right, and then, of course, indirectly once you have the child involved you have the parents involved too. And often if you couldn't even get to the parents, couldn't get them to the museum, this way they are coming to the museum, and then they get to enjoy it too.

[00:55:01]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, this of course is what has been done in many states, where they have the art centers, under the Federal Art Project.

JERRY BYWATERS: Yes. I think those centers were great, and again, were probably the first opportunity any of the citizens had to even thing about art, to participate in it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. Well, I was in New York City at the time, so I know that they had a good many art centers both for adults and children, so that a great many people were exposed to art for the first time as a result of that and, well, I think Roswell museum was one of the best in New Mexico.

JERRY BYWATERS: That's right.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: They actually constructed the building under WPA funds and had a very active art center there.

JERRY BYWATERS: Well, I remember Vernon, too, talking about making these various trips, kind of like an early day pastor who had to ride around, circuit rider—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Circuit driver, yes.

JERRY BYWATERS: He'd go to Clovis, then he'd go down to Roswell.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Large territory that he covered.

JERRY BYWATERS: Yeah, it sure was.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I'm very grateful to you Mr. Bywaters for this very interesting interview, and also for all of your help in other matters.

JERRY BYWATERS: Fine. I only wish my memory were better.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, there's unusually good, and I'm so glad to have that folder of clippings and materials that you saved from that period.

JERRY BYWATERS: I hope it will be useful and we'll help any other way we can, because I think this is a very important thing to be done and I would like to help in any way possible.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, you've been a big help and I'm very grateful to you.

JERRY BYWATERS: Fine, you come back.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I will, thank you.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]