



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Mary Dill
Henry, 1964 May 12

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560

www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions

www.aaa.si.edu/

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Mary Dill Henry on May 12, 1964. The interview took place in Mendocino, California, and was conducted by Mary Fuller McChesney for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Robert McChesney was also present at the interview. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's New Deal and the Arts project.

The original transcript was edited. In 2022 the Archives created a more verbatim transcript. Additional information from the original transcript that seemed relevant was added in brackets and given an -Ed. attribution. 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

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: This is Mary Fuller McChesney interviewing Mary Henry at her home in Mendocino, California. The date is May 12, 1964. Mary, first I'd like to ask you where were you born?

MARY DILL HENRY: Sonoma, California.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Sonoma, California?

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah, mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And what year was that?

MARY DILL HENRY: 1913.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Where did you get your art training?

MARY DILL HENRY: At Arts and Crafts in Oakland. And then, Institute of—oh, Institute of Design in Chicago, '45 and '46.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: That was after you were on the WPA Project?

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah, uh-huh [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Could you tell us about how you first got on the WPA Project?

MARY DILL HENRY: Oh, I heard about it from a friend of mine, Norval Gill. And—who was on the Oakland Project. And I had just graduated, really, from Arts and Crafts. And I had been working that summer in Yosemite. I'd saved up a few dollars. And he told me there was an opening, and if I hurried on down that I could get on the Project.

It was Clifford Pyle who was supervisor at that time. And he had an opening for me, so I left Camp Curry and came down to Oakland, and started through the process of trying to get on the Project, which was a very long tedious kind of thing. Actually, it took me about six months before they would believe I was impoverished enough to warrant getting on. One of the things that really irritated me was, I don't know if I should say this or not—

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Certainly. We want any criticism. [Cross talk.]

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah. Well, because I was interviewed, you know, by these people at—I think, it was in the courthouse, maybe on the first floor, where they put you through a kind of grilling to find out what you're qualified for. And the best thing they could come up for me was a housekeeping job. And this after getting a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Fine Arts, you know. And it didn't matter to them, evidently, that I'd had this training and that there was an opening waiting for me in the Art Project.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Before you were interviewed by people who were on the WPA?

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah, the—what were the social workers—

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Social workers?

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah. And I had to go through several of those. Offered jobs, you know, of cleaning houses and that sort of thing, which I always turned down. [Laughs.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Good for you.

MARY DILL HENRY: Naturally. [They laugh.] And—but always with this—the hope, you know, of getting on the Art Project. And by the time I had used up my \$57, which I had earned that summer, plus unemployment compensation which I had to use up, I finally was really honestly stony broke. And then, not only that, they call all of your friends to find out if they will help you if you're destitute. And I had friends who didn't know that this was a—you know, an old routine question. And some of them, unfortunately, said, Yes, if she's destitute we'll take her in, you know [laughs]?

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, not knowing that you—

MARY DILL HENRY: Not knowing that I—this was the last thing in the world that I wanted. But—

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: They called friends, not just relatives?

MARY DILL HENRY: They phoned—they phoned friends. And—because I had to give, you know, references. And I found this out later from my friends. And they said, Well, of course, we couldn't tell them what—that we would turn you out on the street. And I said, I'm sorry you said that. [They laugh.] But, anyhow, after about six months I got on and I—it was truly worth it.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: The person who told you about the possible opening on the WPA Project in Oakland was a man named Norval Gill.

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Was he a painter?

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah, he was a designer. And at the time I got on, he was designing a tapestry—had designed a tapestry which was being woven on the Project.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And when you first went on the WPA Project in Oakland what did you do at the beginning?

MARY DILL HENRY: The first thing I did was learn to set mosaics. And started right in with old stained-glass windows [laughs], cutting them up into squares and using those because we didn't have imported tiles. And they had mosaics going for schools in California, and I began there, learned the techniques.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Where was the building that you worked in located in Oakland?

MARY DILL HENRY: It was the—in the old courthouse down on—at Fifth and Broadway.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Who were the other artists that you worked with on the Mosaic Project?

[00:05:00]

MARY DILL HENRY: Oh, they were mostly people who didn't have a great deal of training. And—because most of the artists—the really competent ones, I would say, were either easel painters or designers. The rest of them were setting tiles. And I don't remember their names, really. A lot of old people, older people, I know were employed this way. And they began me this way because it—as an apprentice, really.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Well, you didn't know designing of the mosaics.

MARY DILL HENRY: No.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: You simply learned the technique.

MARY DILL HENRY: Just learned the technique, mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: How long were you doing this?

MARY DILL HENRY: I don't remember. [Laughs.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: A month or—

MARY DILL HENRY: It might have been a month.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: A month? Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY DILL HENRY: Or possibly a couple of months, not very long. Because they soon—they soon found other things that I could do. And I began pretty soon, as a matter of fact, designing mosaics and murals. And I became a mural designer, actually, for a rather short while.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: How were the mosaics done? You said they were done for schools all over—

MARY DILL HENRY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —California.

MARY DILL HENRY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did you take the mosaic and set it—it was stained glass, but it was set in cement and then transported to the—

MARY DILL HENRY: Well, I'll tell you it was set into a kind of mastic goo. I think Glenn Wessels invented it [laughs], as a matter of fact. It was very lightweight. And was made, I think, with—seemed to me it had sawdust in it, and glue, and things like that. So, it was set directly into this material and—some of it, at least. And then, just shipped and set into place that way. And then, sometimes we glued it down onto paper in reverse. And then, the sections were set into concrete later.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Glenn Wessels was a supervisor of the WPA Project in Oakland, who is now a professor of art at the University of California.

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: [Inaudible] identify him.

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY DILL HENRY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: So, you were on the mosaic cutting project for a couple of months probably, and then went on to designing?

MARY DILL HENRY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], yes, uh-huh [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: But what was your first design job? Can you remember?

MARY DILL HENRY: It's so long ago [laughs], and I did so many things [laughs]. I really don't remember. I can remember doing—designing of a mural for a high school in Alameda. I think it was probably Lincoln High. Or is there a George Washington High over there?

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: There's one in San Francisco. I don't know if there's—

MARY DILL HENRY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —one in Alameda too.

MARY DILL HENRY: I don't remember. It was a stillborn thing because it was never done. As so many of them.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, it was never actually executed?

MARY DILL HENRY: Never executed. But it was a mural for the school gym. And I think it was George Washington High because—or George Washington School, because I can remember using themes from the revolutionary period in it. And I did another—oh, I did a couple of school mural designs, but I don't know whether they ever were—ever executed or not. I know one of the small mosaics I designed was put into Colton Hall in Monterrey and that's still there.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Yeah, Colton Hall—

MARY DILL HENRY: Colton Hall first—I think it was one of the first capitals of California.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Do you know where it's located in Monterrey?

MARY DILL HENRY: In Monterrey? Where the old government buildings are. I don't know. It's sort of an historical monument there, in a huge garden somewhere in the middle of town.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. In the old part of Monterrey?

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah. And it was a mural—or mosaic, showing Colton with a sailing ship in the background.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Was he an early—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —explorer of the Monterrey area? How large was this mosaic?

MARY DILL HENRY: Very small. [They laugh.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Like just a foot, you know, or—

MARY DILL HENRY: It's about four feet, I think, high, and a couple of feet wide, something like that. It had an arched top to it. I didn't execute it, but I designed it.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: You designed it and opened—

MARY DILL HENRY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —and somebody else actually put it—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —in place.

MARY DILL HENRY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], yeah.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Can you remember the size of some of the murals that you did design, the first ones, that were not executed? And were they intended to be done in what technique?

MARY DILL HENRY: Painted, they were to be painted. And I can't—I can't remember at all, except there was one for the gym that would have gone all around the gym on the walls. So, it would have been a very long kind of panoramic mural showing sports and so on and so forth.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY DILL HENRY: Basketball, volleyball, whatnot.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Who was your supervisor during this period? Was it still Clifford Pyle?

[00:10:01]

MARY DILL HENRY: No, it was Beckford Young. Clifford Pyle left rather shortly after I came on, and Beckford Young took his place.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: I understand that he did some frescoes at the administration building on Government Island in the Oakland estuary.

MARY DILL HENRY: I saw those once. And I went over there and visited him when he was working on the job. Yes, they were—he was working in wet plaster.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: In the fresco technique?

MARY DILL HENRY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY DILL HENRY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], yes.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: Did you have any other murals that you designed during this period actually executed?

MARY DILL HENRY: I don't think so because not too after that, I went onto easel painting and became an easel painter. And that's where I spent most of my time.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: Before we go into that, perhaps you could remember, are there any others artists that—whose names you recall who were on the mural project in Oakland at the time that you were?

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah, there was Edgar Dorsey Taylor. And one of the things he was doing, too, were stained glass windows. And I can remember watching him working on those. And it was the first time I'd ever seen anybody, you know, doing stained glass windows. And—

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: He also did mosaics at Piedmont High School in Oakland. Did you see those, or did you—

MARY DILL HENRY: No, I haven't. No.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: And were there any other artists on the mural project at that time whose names you can remember?

MARY DILL HENRY: Well, there was Ernst Stolz. And he was also a graduate of Arts and Crafts, and we knew each other as students. And he was—he did a lot of mural designing. And I don't think he became an easel painter. I think he was always a muralist, as far as I can remember. And then, there was Ajax Jackson, who was a muralist, and also a sculptor. He did a lot of sculptor work. A lot of things in wood, I remember.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: Were any of his designs executed? Pardon me, were any of his designs [laughs] actually executed in the Oakland area? This man, Ajax Jackson?

MARY DILL HENRY: Um, I can't remember. It's—

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: I never heard of him before.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: And were there any other artists in that mural period that you remember?

MARY DILL HENRY: Oh, Mary Sibily [ph].

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: Mary Sibily [ph]?

MARY DILL HENRY: Mary Sibily [ph]—yes, she was a muralist. And if I could just remember that Japanese girl's name.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: You mentioned a man named Adolph Brun [ph].

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes. He was—he was not a muralist; he was a yarn dyer. And I believe he was from Italy. And he took raw wool and dyed it with vegetable dyes in the most wonderful colors. And then, the raw—this wool, this rather coarse wool, was woven into tapestries there, and made some stunning things. And I—I'm not sure that that's his last name. I mean it's—I know his first name is Adolph [ph].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: But you're not sure—

MARY DILL HENRY: But there's a question of—yes, in my mind about his last name.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Right, it doesn't sound very Italian, does it?

MARY DILL HENRY: No, I know. [They laugh.] And also, because there's a—there's a weaving place in San Francisco by—called Brun or Brune [ph]. And it may be that I've connect the two in my brain somehow.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh, mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Was there a very large tapestry project connected with the—

MARY DILL HENRY: No.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —Oakland Project?

MARY DILL HENRY: There was just one woman weaving. And she's a rather elderly woman. I don't remember her name. And she's, very likely not—not alive still.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did she do—weave designs of artists on the Project there?

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes, uh-huh [affirmative], yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did you ever design any tapestries?

MARY DILL HENRY: No, I didn't. I wish I had. [Laughs.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY DILL HENRY: I would like to have worked with that. And I'm sorry I didn't do anything with stained glass windows either.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: This was all taking place at the old courthouse in Oakland?

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah, mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: What other different projects did they have going? Did they have ceramics or different crafts?

MARY DILL HENRY: No, we didn't have crafts. We had another artist, a sculptor, who was working directly in stone, I remember. And he had great blocks of stone. And he used to chisel away, directly, into the stone. And made some rather monumental things, but I don't remember his name.

[00:15:10]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: You don't remember his name?

MARY DILL HENRY: No.

[Recorder stops, restarts.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: We were just discussing a sculptor who was also working at the Oakland courthouse when you were there, Mary.

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah, uh-huh [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Do you remember other people?

MARY DILL HENRY: Oh, well, we had quite a gathering there. One easel painter, I remember, by the name of Bill Jones who didn't have any hands. He had a couple of clamps strapped onto his forearms. And he used to use these to clamp onto his brushes. And he was an easel painter. But he was a very competent, realistic type of painter. And I used to—when I first began my easel painting, Bill and I worked side by side in a big studio.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: That was in the courthouse—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —also?

MARY DILL HENRY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], yeah.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Mary, did you ever work at home?

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes, that was a glorious later development [laughs], when I finally persuaded them that I could do even better in my own studio, you know, than trotting down to the courthouse every day. So, they gave me canvas, and paints, and brushes and I did all of my painting at home, the last—perhaps, the last nine months or so of my sojourn on the Art Project. And once a month I would trot my canvases down to the courthouse and show them, you know, so they'd know I'd been working [laughs], and leave them there and pick up a bunch of fresh canvasses and take them back. Always a rather chore on the streetcar but worth it. This is actually a very ideal set up because I had a good room to paint in. And I could paint all day long with no interruptions. And I got a lot of work done.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Didn't the supervisors ever come around—

MARY DILL HENRY: No.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: —to see you?

MARY DILL HENRY: No, never. Nobody bothered me.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: That's unusual.

MARY DILL HENRY: No, it's—

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: [Because the supervisors checked all the artists in San Francisco. - Ed.]

MARY DILL HENRY: It was marvelous.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: [Inaudible].

MARY DILL HENRY: Marvelous. Did they? Uh-huh [affirmative]. No, they knew I was working because I had my work to show. Of course, I didn't paint every minute, but I painted when—as hard, when I painted, as I could, you know? And I considered this a supremely happy state of affairs. I had \$90 a month, which bought T-bone steaks and—which I've never been able to afford since, you know? [They laugh.] And all of the canvas I could cover. And I was terribly happy. It was a marvelous situation.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Were you—

MARY DILL HENRY: Ideal for any artist.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Were you given a quota of paintings that you were supposed to complete in a certain—

MARY DILL HENRY: No.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —length of time?

MARY DILL HENRY: No, I worked at my own speed. Nobody ever complained that I wasn't putting out enough work. Everybody seemed quite satisfied. And I know that some of the paintings later went around on exhibition to—I don't know how far they went, but they were on a—in a traveling show. And some of them went to Treasure Island for the Fair and for—in 1940 and were shown there. I don't know what's happened to them since.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: During this time, your supervisor was still Beckford Young?

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes, mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did he ever criticize your work? Or was that completely left—

MARY DILL HENRY: No.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: —alone too?

MARY DILL HENRY: I'll tell you though. Beckford Young didn't work directly with me. The man that I was directly responsible to was George Harris. And George came in, really, as an assistant to Beckford. And he was there several months while I was there. And I—before I became an easel painter, and before I went to work in my own studio, George Harris used to give me little projects to work on, almost training projects. You know, he's an art teacher and has been for several years. And I think this showed up in very early [laughs] because he was—he was teaching me, really. Teaching me color and designs and I learned a great deal from him.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: What type of paintings were you doing then?

MARY DILL HENRY: Oh, that—well, mine were always abstract, nonobjective paintings.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: Do you remember the names of any of the other artists who were on the easel project in Oakland? You mentioned Claire Falkenstein.

MARY DILL HENRY: Well, Claire Falkenstein was not working in the courthouse. She was working, I imagine, in her own studio because I very rarely saw her. But she would come down occasionally, and I just took it for granted that she was working at home.

[00:20:06]

I don't know what she was doing, but—at least I didn't see her work, but she was around once in a while. Mary Sibily [ph] was an easel painter. And somebody else named Virginia, whose last name I can't remember, was also an easel painter. Um—

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: Was John Haley on the easel project in Oakland?

MARY DILL HENRY: He was. And yet, I know he was also teaching school, I think at Cal. And so, his position wasn't the same as ours, really. Because I'm not sure that he was on the Project, but he was connected with it some way.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: Do you have any idea about how many painters there were on the easel project in Oakland when you were there? Were there hundreds or—

MARY DILL HENRY: Oh heavens, no [laughs]. There must not have been more than—I wouldn't think more than a dozen at the most. There—we were really, I think, a very small project, probably. It's hard to remember now. I can't think that there were more than 20 or maybe two dozen of us all told.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: On the total Project—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: —in Oakland?

MARY DILL HENRY: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: Oh, I see. It was very small.

MARY DILL HENRY: It was very small, yes.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How long did you stay on the easel project? [Mary Dill Henry laughs.] Was it a nine-month period of working—

MARY DILL HENRY: I was—I was on the Project entirely for 18 months. And then, I would think, half of that time I was on the easel project, perhaps longer. I don't remember.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: Did they ever have exhibitions of the WPA artist's work in the courthouse? Did they have a gallery—

MARY DILL HENRY: No.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: —set up?

MARY DILL HENRY: No, we didn't. We—they—it was a very crude, old building, you know, and terribly run down. Sort of falling apart. And [laughs] crumbling plaster and all that sort of thing. And no space, no decent wall space. We didn't have, as I—during the time I was there, never had a show there.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: But exhibitions were arranged of your work.

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes, they were, uh-huh [affirmative]. Things were taken out of storage and shown about.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Do you know who was in charge of that? Was it somebody from Oakland, or—

MARY DILL HENRY: It probably was Beckford Young, I would think. But I'm not sure.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did you know Beckford Young's wife, Janet Todd Young?

MARY DILL HENRY: No. I met her. I think she came down at the Project and I met her. And I know her work. She was in a fabulous show at the Museum of Art, which terribly impressed me at the time. And I—Florence Swift had something there, and Janet Young. They—it was a—the first nonobjective show that I had ever seen, with many constructions, and light mobiles, and things of that sort. And this greatly influenced me. I would think that was in 1939 when I saw that. It was a fabulous show. I don't know if you remember it or not.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: No, I don't.

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah. It was quite unique, because there was—there was a great collection of people who were working in the nonobjective way [inaudible] early.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What work of yours was shown at the Treasure Island?

MARY DILL HENRY: I had some oil paintings that were shown, and some lithographs. I began learning the technique of lithography when I was on the Art Project. And that was a terrific experience and led to other things later. Ray Bertrand was my teacher. And he was on the Art Project in San Francisco, head of the lithography project over there. And he came over to Oakland and asked if anybody was interested in learning lithography. And I certainly was, so I was one of those who was taught the process. And Ray gave us stones to work on and showed us how [laughs]. And I did this at the same time I was easel painting. And I used to—I don't know how, but I had stones in my apartment in Berkeley [laughs]. I don't—I can't remember how they got there, probably hauled in a truck or something, and they were enormously heavy. And then, Ray would take them over to San Francisco and print them.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: How large were the stones as a rule?

MARY DILL HENRY: Oh, they must have been maybe 12 or 14 inches wide by 16 or 20 inches long, rather huge things.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: [Inaudible.]

MARY DILL HENRY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, I did several at that time.

[00:25:02]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: These were abstract—

MARY DILL HENRY: No—

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —lithographs [inaudible]?

MARY DILL HENRY: No, they were not as abstract as my paintings. I was more realistic when I came to print making.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: What subject matter did you employ?

MARY DILL HENRY: Oh, landscapes, but stylized. California scenes, you know?

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY DILL HENRY: Farms, and trees, and hills, and things like that.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Which other artists were engaged in lithography in Oakland too?

MARY DILL HENRY: I think probably Ernst Stolz did some, though I can't remember. I seem to have been completely wrapped up [laughs] in myself. I don't know what anybody [laughs] else was doing, really. But he probably—I think there were about three of us who were really interested. I can't think that there were very many of us were.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: How often would Bertrand come over to Oakland to teach you?

MARY DILL HENRY: I don't remember. And, actually, I didn't learn printmaking at all at that time. Though later I went on and took a summer session at the old San Francisco School of Fine Arts, and Ray was my teacher then. Then I learned the whole process. But that was after—that was in 1941, which was the year after I had left the project.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: You left the project in 1940?

MARY DILL HENRY: In 1940, in the summer. Oh, after that period of 18 months it was a requirement to go through the whole red tape process again of getting on relief and proving that you were eligible for the Art Project. And, at this time, I just felt I couldn't go through that whole bit again. So, I—and since I was offered a teaching job, I took the job instead of staying on the Project.

And I mean it was the most glorious experience, really, as far as learning and earning at the same time, and fabulous life. But the business of [laughs] going through the mill to get on was so torturous that I couldn't face it again. I mean, it was too terrible [laughs].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: But actually, if it had been easier and more humane you probably would have stayed on the Project rather than taking—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes, because I didn't—I wasn't cut out to be a teacher. I didn't want to teach. It meant going to Iowa, for heavens sakes, you know? And, of course, I would have stayed, because I think it was the ideal situation for an artist.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Was the main—was your main objection to the way the process of getting back on the Project was handled the way the social workers treated you?

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes. Yes, I think they were—they set themselves up as judges and as little gods determining your fate, you know? And with absolutely no feeling of sympathy for your situation, and for your training, you know?

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: This was done independently of the supervisors and of the artists who were actually heads of the Project.

MARY DILL HENRY: Oh, yes, because they had nothing to do with it. I mean, they were—they were quite incensed by some of the trials that we went through. I know because when I talked to them about it, they intervened in my behalf. And so, some of the social workers were taken to task, I think, for trying to cram an artist into a housekeeping job.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: That was what they wanted you to do?

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Was to leave the Art Project, even though you had a bachelor's degree in art, and go—

MARY DILL HENRY: Well, in the first place, they didn't—they didn't even want me to belong in the first place. And then [laughs], in the second place I knew that I was going to have to run the gauntlet again. And I just—really, I couldn't face it. It was a horrifying experience for anybody who's at all sensitive. And I think most artists are. I mean, they absolutely were relentless in their grilling, you know, and seemed to be shocked that I wasn't grateful that I could get a job mopping floors.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: This would be a non-relief job, mopping floors? Or was that—

MARY DILL HENRY: No. Well, it seems they had women who wanted housekeepers. And so, they would apply to the relief roles to get them.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: But then, if you took this job you would be removed from the relief role? Is that the way it worked?

MARY DILL HENRY: I imagine. And that you would be given some pittance of some sort, you know, to work for these—as a domestic, in private homes.

[00:30:07]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And the social worker's ambition, probably, was to make you ashamed of the fact that you were on relief.

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Yes, mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY DILL HENRY: And why wasn't I grateful that I could have this job, you know? How much would you earn? I haven't any idea. Probably a dollar a day, I suppose, room and board [laughs].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Yeah. [They laugh.]

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: We mentioned earlier Jacques Schnier, S-C-H-N-I-E-R—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —who was an instructor at the University of California, in Berkeley. Did you know him when he was on the WPA Project in Oakland?

MARY DILL HENRY: He wasn't on the Project when I was there. He happened to have been a teacher of mine in sculpture when I was at Arts and Crafts. So, I knew him as a teacher. And I think that he was working on Treasure Island doing some rather huge bas reliefs when I was on the Art Project—

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: [Inaudible.]

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes, I remember some outdoor walls. Pacifica themed things.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: This was on—

MARY DILL HENRY: Balinese dancers, I think, they were. Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: This was at Treasure Island?

MARY DILL HENRY: Treasure Island, mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: For the Golden Gate—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —Exposition.

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you, aside from having a painting in the art exhibition at Treasure Island, have anything else to do with the Fair?

MARY DILL HENRY: We went over as a group. The muralists went over to paint on some murals in the Federal Building, I remember. We—I don't know how many times we went, not too often, because we worked very rapidly. There were a great—there were several of us working, maybe half a dozen—six or eight of us—working on one mural. And that was my one contribution [laughs] to the fair.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Was this the Federal Building?

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: [Inaudible.]

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes, in the—in the Federal Building, mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: Which mural was it?

MARY DILL HENRY: I can't remember. It was a very sketchy kind of thing I remember. With lots of wall space showing. It was a rather frivolous type of thing. Just a—you know, a little decorative thing, nothing serious.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: You don't remember who designed it?

MARY DILL HENRY: No [laughs], I don't [laughs]. I didn't.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Well, you know, as you walked into the colonnade of states—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: —between the big Volz murals—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: —and you went back, there was an open patio back there. And one side was the North American Indian Exhibit, or Alaskan Indians on one side. It was a beautiful exhibit. And I don't recall—

MARY DILL HENRY: Oh—

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: —what was on the other side.

MARY DILL HENRY: [Inaudible.]

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Where was this mural [inaudible]?

MARY DILL HENRY: It was on the right-hand side as you went in. And I don't know it—I think it was a—probably could have been [laughs] a background for the Indian or Eskimo exhibition. It could have been something of that sort just to add a little bit of something on a bare wall.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Would it be on the opposite side of the Indian Exhibition?

MARY DILL HENRY: It was on the right.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: It was sitting on the left as you went in.

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes. Well, ours was on the right as we went in. It's all terribly vague in my mind. I can remember the color of the background. It was sort of a rosy tan [laughs] wall.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: Do you remember the subject matter that you—

MARY DILL HENRY: No, I don't.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: Oh.

MARY DILL HENRY: Isn't that awful [laughs]?

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: No, [laughs] not really.

MARY DILL HENRY: But it was a very inconsequential thing—

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY DILL HENRY: —I remember. None of us took it terribly seriously because it was—it was strictly decorative. And, as a background, probably for something—for some other exhibition.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: There was a Music Project band playing in there, patio

MARY DILL HENRY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: —back there [inaudible]—

MARY DILL HENRY: This was—

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: They had a lot of—

MARY DILL HENRY: This was an interior thing. It wasn't—

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: It was inside?

MARY DILL HENRY: It wasn't outside, yeah. So, could it have been another building, even I wonder?

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: I doubt it because—

MARY DILL HENRY: I really think it was the Federal Building. But—

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: The Federal Building was two units.

MARY DILL HENRY: —it was an interior room of some sort, mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: As a painter on the easel project in Oakland, did you have much contact with WPA painters who were working on the Project in San Francisco?

MARY DILL HENRY: No, absolutely none at all. We—I didn't know any of them. Never saw them. We had no interchange of any sort, no visits [laughs], except for Ray Bertrand who came over. I think he was the only one.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: And aside from the mural that you designed that was executed in Monterrey, you didn't do any other work that was done outside of Oakland.

MARY DILL HENRY: I don't know. You see we had no way of ever knowing what happened to some of our designs. It may be that they were—I mean, we did designing for schools in the interior of California, for instance. And after we had done our designing, there was no way of our knowing whether they were executed or not. Because some of the designs, I think, went to that area and perhaps local people painted them. And I don't know. I have no recollection, no way of knowing. I know that the one that I did for Alameda wasn't—nothing ever happened to that.

[00:35:15]

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY DILL HENRY: That was one of the things that we often regretted. We had no assurance that some of the things we did would ever be executed. And it was a little heartbreaking sometimes, you know, to put a lot of yourself into something and then feel that it would—nothing would come of it. But that wasn't our problem, you know? It was money I expect.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: During the time you were on the Project, can you give us an estimate of the number of paintings you produced and submitted?

MARY DILL HENRY: I have no way of—no way of remembering. I must have done at least one a week, probably not more than that. But I would think I did, perhaps, three or four, possibly five each month. And—

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: Over a nine month period, so that would be—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah, mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: —in the 40s or 50s.

MARY DILL HENRY: I suppose, yes, because once I took them down to the courthouse, I never saw them again, you know? They were put in storage and that was it.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: You never knew what happened to any—

MARY DILL HENRY: No.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: —of the paintings that—

MARY DILL HENRY: No.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: —you did on the [inaudible].

MARY DILL HENRY: Except the one—the ones that went to the Fair.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: What happened to those?

MARY DILL HENRY: Well, they were—of course, after the Fair was over they were returned to the Project. As far as exhibition goes, I mean, those are the only ones that I could—that I knew were exhibited. I don't know what happened to the others. And I don't know what happened to them after the Fair.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: They were just returned to Oakland—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes, to the Project.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: —as part—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: And on into limbo, you know?

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: Did you ever feel resentment about this?

MARY DILL HENRY: Uh, not resentment, but I felt that somehow not for myself alone, but for an awful lot of artists, there was a lot of good work produced. And it always seemed a shame that something wasn't done with it, that it wasn't put into schools, you know, maybe permanently. Or rotating exhibitions that could have been carted around the country. I would like to have seen work that the Projects back East had done. But we—I don't remember ever having seen a traveling show. I think that there was a lot of work that was lost in this period, perhaps forever, that should have been saved. Not all of it, I know. [Laughs.] An awful lot was terrible. But there was an awful lot of good work, too, that went down the drain. And—

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: Do you know if there was any photographic record made of the paintings that were—

MARY DILL HENRY: Not that I know of. And this was a shame too. I don't even have a record of my work. I took some pictures, but—and I've lost the photographs [laughs].

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: Oh [laughs].

MARY DILL HENRY: But I remember some of them. [Laughs.]

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: Were there any mural projects of any large scale done in Oakland at the time you were on the WPA?

MARY DILL HENRY: I wasn't involved with any. I remember though that we were doing at the —not I, but at the time I was there there was a huge mural being done for the governor's office in our Project. It was a world map, as I remember. And it was rather a stillborn project in a way. I do think it was finished, but it was finished after I left the Project, so I didn't see the end of it. But it had two or three artists working on it. And I think that, for some reason or other, the first artist's work wasn't accepted, and it was rejected. And then, another artist took over and repainted it. But it was a rather large canvas.

MARY FULLER MCCCHESNEY: It was done for the—

MARY DILL HENRY: Mural.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —governor's office in—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —Sacramento?

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes, mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Do you remember the size of it?

MARY DILL HENRY: It wasn't terribly big. I think of murals now as being rather huge. It was the—it was not a terribly big thing. It might have been 15 or 20 feet square. Not too huge.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Were there any other murals done in public buildings, in Oakland itself, that you recall?

MARY DILL HENRY: No, I don't. That's a shocking thing, isn't it, to say? But I don't know. It's so—it seems so long ago, and so hard to remember. I know we were doing—we did a lot of mosaics. And I know those were placed in schools, but they were always schools outside of the area. And I know there was one, I think, that went into Stockton, or Fresno, or places like that.

[00:40:05]

And I never saw them because I wasn't traveling, you know? No one had any money for traveling. No point in going. But I know we did things that were—that were put into schools. I know Glenn Wessels had something to do with one. He was in charge of one that went into a school.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: How would you evaluate the WPA Project, first, on your career as an artist yourself?

MARY DILL HENRY: Well, I—I've always felt that it was the most fabulous experience as far as I'm concerned. In fact, I considered it, at the time, a graduate course in art, because where else could you learn how to make mosaics and watch stained glass windows being made? I mean, there wasn't anything else like it in the country. There weren't any schools teaching these things. And I was absolutely—I knew that I was in heaven as an artist at this time, and I appreciated every minute of it. I mean, learning all of these techniques and having a chance to paint freely without criticism and to be paid for it, to have enough to live on, it was perfect. A perfect situation.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Courses like this, then, were not taught at that time in the California School of Arts and Crafts?

MARY DILL HENRY: No. No. And to tell you the truth, I've done a lot of mosaics since, in the last 10 years. And I had to thank heaven I had—I had this early training to fall back on because you still couldn't go anywhere and learn how to construct a mosaic. There were no textbooks on the methods, nothing. And I consider myself to have been terribly fortunate and lucky to have been one of the people who was able to do mosaics, and to—on my own in these later years.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: You've done several large mosaic murals—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes, mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —since that time. Where are some of them located, Mary?

MARY DILL HENRY: Well, I've—I have the last one I did was in Palo Alto in the Hewlett Packard Building. I did two outside walls—rather large walls, and using Italian mosaics. The small true Byzantine type mosaics. The size? I think they were about 12—I think 13 feet high and about 25 feet long, two of them, fairly good size

MARY DILL HENRY: —walls, yeah.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Were these abstract designs?

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes. Well, they were—had a—they—abstract to a degree. They—since

this is an electronics plant, I used a lot of electronic symbols, and mathematical symbols, and devices. And so the engineers there and the designers can appreciate them [laughs], but to the public they're pretty abstract looking.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Have you done others—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —recently?

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes. Well, I'm—I—right now, you know, I'm painting on my—for myself at last. And I've given up working on commissions. But I have done a great many murals.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And the fact that you went on to become a mosaic designer and to execute mosaics in this area, do you think the fact that you had this training on—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —the WPA—

MARY DILL HENRY: I mean, otherwise I—it—I wouldn't have concerned myself with it. I wouldn't have known about it. I would have felt that it was absolutely beyond me. And because of that, I feel that it was directly responsible. And also, fresco painting, which is something that one rarely does today, really, but—

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did you learn that on the Oakland Project?

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes. Yes, I had some training, not much, but did a small amount.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Who was your instructor in the fresco?

MARY DILL HENRY: It was Glenn Wessels.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Oh.

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: And where did you work on frescoes? Did you learn there at the courthouse?

MARY DILL HENRY: Oh, well what I did, really, were just small pieces to learn the technique. And nothing happened because I didn't do any fresco painting. But I did learn how to work—how to mix the dried pigments with lime water, whatever it was we used [laughs], and did some sample pieces, I would say—

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY DILL HENRY: —really.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did you ever go on to execute any frescoes?

MARY DILL HENRY: No. No. I've always wanted to. [Laughs.]

[00:45:01]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY DILL HENRY: But I never have. Now, I think we use acrylics, much simpler.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Over the plaster?

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: How would you evaluate the WPA Project in Oakland, in general, for the other artists as well? And for the work that was done on the Project then?

MARY DILL HENRY: Well, I think it was a very—a very serious undertaking. I think it was—there were people there, I think, that were very appreciative and grateful for the chance

they had to do this kind of thing. And, I mean, we all worked in—I don't like to call it an ivory tower situation, but it was a sort of sanctuary of artists who could work freely and under marvelous conditions. And I think we all did our best, I'm—I really do. And we worked very hard. And you sort of—we inspired one another, you know, we enjoyed each others' work and [laughs], it was a lot of fun. I mean, there was a lot of horsing around [laughs] too. I mean, you know, we had some practical jokers there.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Naturally [laughs].

MARY DILL HENRY: Funny situations arose once in a while [laughs], but that gives you a good happy memory of the thing. And I would live for the time when this will happen again. I really think that anybody who's ever worked on a project feels that it was a very practical solution to the artist problem, the financial thing, you know?

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Do you think American artists of this period would be satisfied with such a minimal payment to do their work?

MARY DILL HENRY: Well, it wasn't so minimum then. Because, I mean, \$90 a month in those days was a lot—I felt, was a darn good living wage.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: That's true—

[Cross talk.]

MARY DILL HENRY: And if you have—yeah, I mean if you had that much today you could certainly live on it. You could live adequately on it. After all, I was only paying \$12 a month for my little room—you know, studio set up and a T-bone steak cost 28¢.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: That's right, you said—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —that other thing—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah.

[Cross talk.]

MARY DILL HENRY: It's the only time I—[they laugh]—I've ever been able to afford one. [They laugh.] I certainly can't now.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Do you think, then, that it might be a good idea for the United States to re-establish some project—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —similar to this—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes, I do. I really think—I had hopes when Kennedy was president that a man who was interested in the culture of our country would somehow inaugurate a scheme for artists. Not only artists, but writers, musicians, anybody who is giving his life and all of his time to an art, you know, is a man who's not going to make any money [laughs] as it is now. And I think that if the government could somehow see fit to subsidize artists so that—and creators of all sorts, who could use the—their artwork for the good of the people.

And use the art, the murals, in public buildings, and use them—the music for public symphonies, and concerts, and theater, playwrights to use their work for public performances in the theater, be of terribly rich renaissance in American art. And I hope that, somehow, we could salvage this and go on, but didn't—it didn't happen this way. But we all felt at that time that this was—would create a great blossoming of art all over the country. And bring out a great surge of cultural benefits.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Why do you think it didn't? Do you think it was because of the war?

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes, I think so. I mean, a cut back in probably in allocations of money. I know that after I left, very shortly thereafter the whole thing folded. And [laughs] lucky me

that I took a teaching job, really, because I don't know what I would have done in that case. This is a very sad situation. I don't know where the artists turned to. Oh, as a matter of fact, I do know. They all went into defense projects.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: A great many of them went—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —to the shipyards.

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes, in the shipyards and piping. That's—I know this happened to some of the people that I worked with. In fact, they're still there, poor fellows.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: You mean still working—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —as a—

MARY DILL HENRY: Still working for Bechtel [ph] and still working for the shipyards. Artists who should be creating and they're working on piping designs, tool designing, yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: If a new Federal Art Project of some sort were set up in the United States do you have any suggestions that might be improvements on the way it was handled?

[00:50:03]

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes [laughs], I do [laughs]. The social workers immediately—[laughs] no more of that. [They laugh.] Absolutely. I mean, there would have to be some screening, of course, because we'd have to cull out the fringe element, I suppose, those who weren't really serious. But I don't think that's too difficult. And let the painters paint, and the musicians make music, the writers write.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Do you think it would be a good idea, then, to establish—to re-establish something like the easel project in which the painters that worked in their own studios and were paid by the government to do this.

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes, I think that would be a terribly valuable thing to do because I think too many artists right now, terribly good ones, are wasting themselves on teaching jobs. And well, heaven only knows, you know, what else, for heaven's sakes. Janitors maybe, I mean, they should be painting.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Would you have any suggestions for methods of handling the mural projects that might be an improvement on the way they were handled during the time that you worked on them? You seem to have felt—

MARY DILL HENRY: Well—

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —unhappy that the design—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah—

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —weren't executed—

MARY DILL HENRY: I mean, you felt that a lot of your work was going down the drain. Well, there are a lot of public buildings today that certainly need murals. And I think that they ought to allocate maybe one percent, or two percent of the total cost of the building. They do this for private artists. I mean, you know, artists once in a while who get—who are lucky enough to get commissions they will do this.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Yeah, an architect will do that.

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes, an architect will set aside a small percentage for artwork in the building. And I do—it seemed to me that there was something before Congress—and it may even have passed, where they would allow a small percentage of the total cost of the building to be used—to be allocated for artwork in the building.

I don't know if this is happening or not, but I think it ought to. I think every post office had—ought to have some form of artwork, or any of our state buildings. And why not some of the public—I mean, the private buildings too? Some of the big corporations, perhaps, could commission artworks.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: On the mural project, in which you worked, people like you did designs which were then turned in to your supervisors. And, as I understand it, many of the—many times, they were never executed because they had to meet the requirements of principals of high schools where these murals would be placed. And they had to suit these people, otherwise they wouldn't have been executed.

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes, probably. I mean that's—

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: But during the—yes. But the Treasury Department, at the end of this government sponsorship of art period established a sort of contest. And the Rincon Annex post office was done that—

MARY DILL HENRY: Oh, yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Do you think that would be a good idea to have contests for artists to submit designs that then would be approved by a jury? Or do you think some other method might be—

MARY DILL HENRY: I don't know. I could never work under those conditions myself. I mean, the minute—the minute one of my prospective clients tells me that I'm going to have to submit a design and compete with somebody else, this throws me off terribly. I feel that if he knows my work, I mean, that's the basis I would like to go on, personally.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY DILL HENRY: Because I don't think all artists can compete happily [laughs]. I mean, you're under kind of mental pressure, you know? And you keep thinking well, now what's the other fellow going to do? And how—how's my work going to stack up with his? And I don't like to be in competition with other people. But I do think that if—that if your work is submitted—photographs of other designs that you've done, and if he can trot around and see things you've done and then decide. I mean, why not this way?

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], you have an established body of work—

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes, you have.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —that you've done.

MARY DILL HENRY: And most artists do. I mean, you—they—there are places where he can go and see the work and sit too, you know, so that he doesn't—I mean, you know, you're not working under a kind of—it's a hurdle to get over somehow that I could never manage—

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —myself.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Did you have any other suggestions about changes or improvements that could possibly be made if a new project were ever set up?

MARY DILL HENRY: Well, [laughs] you're asking me this on the spur of the moment's kind of hard to—I mean, your leading questions have brought out thoughts. I don't know. I—there's a certain way that we proceed when we have a private commission, which has always seemed very good to me.

[00:55:08]

Where you have a client and you submit a work, and you have limitations of a sort on any job, and you try to fulfill these limit—work within the boundaries given—set up, and if he doesn't like the design you do it over again. I mean, I would—was always perfectly willing to redo a design if the client couldn't see it my way. But only with—to a certain degree too, because you have a personal integrity in your own design. And I think unless the client sees it your way, to a—quite a large degree, well, I don't—I just don't think you can work for him.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY DILL HENRY: So, I think the artist really—his own viewpoint, to me, is primary.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: In the Oakland Project, working together the way you did at the old courthouse with so many different things going on there, you actually had a kind of art center established.

MARY DILL HENRY: Yes—

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Do you think—

MARY DILL HENRY: —we did.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —a re-establishment of that sort of situation would be a good idea?

MARY DILL HENRY: Yeah, if it's—if you like working with other people. I think some artists don't. I think that they would prefer to work alone. It might be that you could have a compound of separate studios where you wouldn't have to see anybody else unless you wanted to. But I do think it's kind of fun to see what other people are doing, and to hash over designs, you know, and inspire one another—

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY DILL HENRY: —so to speak. I can't work with other people myself. I mean, I—I'm too distracted by other people. I love being there. I mean, sort of it's fun, but I don't do—I don't do my best work that way. I have to work alone.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: So, you did your best work on WPA when you were on the easel project?

MARY DILL HENRY: Oh, absolutely.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Working in your own—

MARY DILL HENRY: Oh, yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: —studio.

MARY DILL HENRY: Oh, yes. I can't—now, today, I can't work if anybody's in the house with me. But, I mean, it's gotten even worse. [They laugh.] More alone all the time [laughs].

[Recorder stops, restarts.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESENEY: Thank you very much, Mary Henry, for giving us the time to interview this afternoon.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]