



Smithsonian
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**Oral history interview with Donal Hord, 1964
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Transcript

Interview

BH: BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG

DH: DONAL HORD

BH: Mr. Hord did the beautiful sculptures in San Diego, among them the *Aztec*, which is at San Diego State College, and the huge fountain in front of the Civic Center in San Diego. The creation of that Civic Center fountain was the subject of one of the documentary films done by the Project which is owned by . . . the rights to use it are owned by the University of Southern California. Mr. Hord is so well known that it seems pointless to go into telling about his life, since we have limited time today. He is going to tell us on the tape something about his work with the Project. Shall we begin?

DH: [Reading an old newspaper] I find here that I was Technical Advisor for the Project, as of September 18, 1937. Ha ha!

BH: Oh, you had already finished quite a lot of work by that time! Was the *Aztec* the first thing that you did on it?

DH: Yes, the . . . No, the first projects I did was the figure in front of the Los Angeles County Museum and some various minor pieces. The Museum statue, *A Man With a Wheel* monument and it sat in front of the old rotunda. Do you remember that?

BH: Oh, I don't remember that.

DH: I have a photograph of it. This was in Dawson's last book catalogue [Dawson's Book Shop on Figueroa St., downtown L.A.]. The only other things I have that show in the picture are little things sitting way in the background. But I did one in Los Angeles in 1934 and the last time I saw it the nose had been broken off, and it was, I think, discarded.

BH: Oh. This was the one at the Museum that had the nose broken off?

DH: Yes, yes.

BH: And you have not repaired it?

DH: I think they have just discarded it and I'm very happy about it.

BH: I'll have to go over and check. [I did. It sits on the side step of the Museum facing the rose garden.]

DH: I think all that is left, in fact, is . . . it was a large wheel. Did you ever happen to see it? The hands were over the wheel.

BH: No.

DH: Do you remember the rotunda in the old part of the Museum where it was all brick?

BH: I don't think I've been in Los Angeles that long. I don't remember it.

DH: Well, it probably isn't there anymore. I don't know. But the *Aztec* was our second one done on the second Project.

BH: On the second Project?

DH: Yes.

BH: And when you were on the first Project, were you living in Los Angeles?

DH: No. I was down here and went up to do the work on that particular job. It was modeled and cast rather than carved.

BH: Oh. Then in 1934 you were asked by . . . Well, would you mind talking about how this commission did come about in 1934?

DH: Well, it came through the Project. I've forgotten who the directors were in charge at that time, but the suggestion was that they wanted a figure for the steps, to sit on the steps of the Museum so this was designed for that. Then when that Project closed, we did a figure -- not on the Project -- for the House of Hospitality in San Diego and from that came the *Aztec*.

BH: What was the one at the "House of Hospitality?"

DH: It's a figure of an Indian woman with an olla.

BH: Oh.

DH: You have been in the Casa Del Rey right opposite the Fine Arts Gallery?

BH: No, I haven't but I've seen pictures of it. It was . . .

DH: That was our first picture . . .

BH: . . . in the garden, wasn't it?

DH: Oh, yes. And we were under the delusion that if we could carve that in ten weeks, which we did, that we could carve the *Aztec* in twenty in diorite -- just double the time. But it took fourteen months to do it.

BH: The *Aztec*, I believe, is the only piece of sculpture in the whole United States of that size carved of a piece of stone that hard, isn't it?

DH: No. Because the Civic Center fountain is carved of the same stone, only it's a grey diorite rather than black.

BH: Oh, it is very, very, very heavy, then?

DH: Yes. It was a 30-ton piece of granite, or rather diorite. The black diorite comes from Escondido. Later we did a small one of it and then some work for the Project in Mexican onyx, as well as some small marbles and some modelling and then some other pieces of limestone at Coronado.

BH: The *Aztec* . . . in fact all of these were done here at your home?

DH: They were done in the studio. At that time we had simply rabbits and quail running around on

the ground and we couldn't annoy neighbors, which was quite wonderful.

BH: We are going to get a photograph of that time for the Archives.

DH: Yes. We'll get that for you.

BH: How many people did you have working on the Project?

BH: When the Civic Center fountain started, we had to have two blacksmiths continually. And then we had two men, Dana worked on it and George Baker, two men who were working with pointers. And I stayed off of it and marked it for the disposal of the material until we got down to the airhammer and then I started in to work.

BH: Weren't there many more people here toward the end of it?

DH: Well, that was just for the figure. We had the mosaic under way down at the pier. Melissa Jewel was head of that. We drew up the cartoons and fixed the colors from here. They cut it. I think there were 200,000 pieces of tile in that.

BH: And you had designed the whole thing?

DH: Yes, the whole thing was my design at the time.

BH: A very wonderful symbol of water. Would you like to tell about that on the tape?

DH: Well, I think it is very well . . . better told in the motion picture than I could tell it. Because they ran that through very carefully with the ideas in mind. And it's explained carefully. Relative also, I think the mosaic is demonstrated against the evening orange groves, the patterns that we took it from out towards Escondido, and . . .

BH: And photographed . . . ?

DH: Yes, they are photographed very beautifully, one right following the other. So I think there is a better explanation coming out of that in twelve minutes than I could give in twelve minutes telling about it.

BH: That was a film that LeRoy Robbins made for the Federal Art Project?

DH: Yes.

BH: Ah, we were speaking a while ago about the benefits of the Project to the different people who worked on it. Would you like to amplify that for the tape?

DH: Well, as far as I can see, it . . . in San Diego that was the biggest thing (and the first and last thing) that was done in San Diego. Of course, people working on it with me were more . . . perhaps were not as interested as I was, but it did bring out technical values that we could even pass on to the Los Angeles Project. Because I think from the *Aztec* and the diorite came the idea of doing the Hollywood Bowl thing . . .

BH: Oh, I see.

DH: . . . because we were asked up to Los Angeles several times to show them what we had done in the way of stone carving. There is so little of it done, and so little knowledge of how to handle

diorite and granite. That the knowledge was diffusible. I've forgotten the name of this one chap from Los Angeles I think he quit later.

BH: George Stanley?

DH: No, not George Stanley. George, I think he designed them rather than carved them. But there was a . . . I've forgotten the man's name who was working in diorite a little bit. And he came down here to San Diego two or three times to see how we worked it. Later on we heard it referred to up there as "his stone" because he worked it. But that makes no difference.

BH: Ha, ha. What about the mosaic? Did Al King come down to you to help?

DH: No, when there was a discussion of mosaics, it was Field who mentioned it first, and Field, when it started, was the supervisor. He made the suggestion that it would be very nice if a mosaic could be designed with this to keep a crew of people working. So, partially the designs at that time were arranged for the people who in a way did not have too much talent but who were very good craftsmen. So, the idea of using mosaic was born from Al King's handling up there of mosaics in Long Beach and the fact that it could be done. But he did not come down here or have much to do with ours. There was a reference to it, I think, in that letter of McDonald-Wright's. Later I had made some other designs for the Mosaicists on the Project and I don't know where they are. They were given away.

BH: The designs?

DH: Well, no, the designs were made up as flat mosaic panels but I don't know where they are. There was at least one of them. And then at the same time I was asked to do some designs for the weavers -- Field was very good about that. He wanted them to do tapestries also at that time. So, there was a very handsome handling in distributing work to keep craftsmen functioning who might otherwise lose their skills.

BH: One of the weavings done was by Marion Kendall who was of an Indian woman and a child. Was that done from your statue?

DH: No, I did that design for her.

[PAUSE]

BH: This is Betty Hoag and I would like to explain why my tape was interrupted at that point and to make the correction on the date. The interview was done on June 25, 1964, at Pacific Beach, San Diego, California. I had written ahead of time to Mr. Hord for an appointment and had had communication with him in Italy setting up the date for our meeting. I planned on having the whole day to talk to him. However, when I arrived that morning, he said that he had had unexpected houseguests come the night before (Paul Manship, a sculptor, and his wife), that they had gone out for a walk and that, as soon as they came in, we would have to stop. So when the tape is ending, you can hear the voices of Mr. & Mrs. Manship and Homer Dana who has been Mr. Hord's assistant for many years coming in the door. We had to let the tape go. I also wanted to explain that the strange noises in the background are due to an aviary which must have been in the adjoining room because the noise got quite screechy at times. I would like to make several additions to the tape about Donal Hord. One was in reference to the film which is owned by USC, and which was done by Le Roy Robbins. I imagine that our Archives could obtain a copy of this film through some kind of exchange. It shows the complete construction of the mosaic basin which holds Mr. Hord's very

beautiful statue of the *Guardian of Waters* in San Diego Civic Center. An interesting addition to this is that I had learned the night before at the Clarke's house; Jim and Helen Clarke told me that in 1959 a copy of the *Guardian of Waters* was given to Yokohama for the people of Japan, and that they in return had given our country a great ceremonial bronze gong. It happens that this gong was placed on an island or rather a spit which is just opposite the Clarks' home. Their house faces on the waterfront and opposite them, on Shelter Island, is a harbor services building with a Koniki club which is where there is the bronze bell. They said that the only time it is ever rung is when some "drunk" finds it and makes a racket until the police come along and quiet him. Before we had started our tape, Mr. Hord had shown me his working quarters in the back of the house. They consist of a very elaborate compound of courts and rooms where he does his sculpture. All of the grounds are magnificently landscaped and very, very beautiful. He also showed me a photograph which was taken of the same area at the time that workers on the Federal Arts Project were doing some of the sculptures with him, and he is going to have his assistant, Homer Dana, make copies of this photograph as a gift to the Archives. Mr. Dana is a very gifted person. Besides being a sculptor, he also takes care of all Mr. Hord's correspondence and is a capable typist. So, when Mr. Hord showed me his scrapbook of work from the Project period, he said that (although he would not let us borrow the books to have microfilm copies made, that he would have Mr. Dana type off copies of all of the records and duplicate the photographs in it. Since there are several books and obviously all of it need not be copied, he suggested that when I return the other material which I borrowed from other artists in the San Diego area, that I phone to come out and spend a morning going through the scrapbooks to decide what Mr. Dana will type to send to the Archives. He also invited me to come back and continue the interview with him at a later date, which I hope to do. Off the tape, Mr. Hord told me some rather interesting things about the Aztec Indian monumental piece of sculpture which was done for San Diego State College. It was a tremendous thing. It took over a year to complete as he told me. The block weighed 2 1/2 tons and when Holger Cahill and Stanton McDonald-Wright first viewed it at the unveiling in 1937, Mr. Cahill called it "the finest piece of stone-carving ever done in the United States." However, it seems there was some misunderstanding on the part of the people of San Diego about whether they wanted or needed the statue. At least, they don't seem to have done their part in paying for it and Mr. Hord himself spent hundreds of dollars making this statue, for which he was never reimbursed. He considers this his contribution to the Federal Arts Project. And the community itself seems to have been quite amazed about the fact that when it was shown in New York, I believe at the Worlds Fair, it was insured for \$10,000. They didn't realize what a wonderful gift they were being given by the Project. Mr. Hord said that a similar thing happened in the work of another sculptor in Los Angeles. A piece of work was done for a school under the Projects, and the children got an erroneous idea from someplace that if they had *not* been given the statue they would have gotten a swimming pool. As a result, ever since then, this myth has existed and the children have defaced the statue. It is continually being marked up and is not held in very high repute by children who go there. I will try to get him to tell this in his own words when I tape him again, but in case he doesn't, I thought it should be in our records.

I have a few miscellaneous items about works that Mr. Hord mentioned. For instance, the limestone panels on the Island of Coronado are in Union High School and they consist of seven *bas relief* panels. They were done when he was a sculptor superintendent for the Federal Arts Project in San Diego. Another item is that a 1939 Los Angeles County Museum catalogue lists an exhibit which included his trial piece of unglazed vitreous tile architectural decorative style for the San Diego tapestry, *Indian Mother and Child*, which was done by Marion Kendall, the weaver who he was talking about when we were interrupted. Also in that show there was a plaster replica of the Aztec and there was a lignus vitae wood Chumash Indian exhibited. In 1934 the same museum had had some of his things, including a *Man with Sheaf of Wheat*, which was a glazed terra cotta figure and a *bas relief* in plaster of *The CCC Workers*. In my notes I have a short biography of Mr. Hord. He was

born in Prentice, Wisconsin, Feb. 26, 1902. He studied at Santa Barbara School of Fine Arts, modeling and wax-casting under Archibald Dawson of Glasgow. He received the Gould Memorial traveling scholarship in 1927-28 and '29 to Mexico, in 1929 to Philadelphia and in 1930 to New York City. He received many different awards. For instance the "California Arts and Architecture" magazine for July of 1931 says that he won the General and Mrs. M.O. Terry \$500 purchase award for a wood carving, *Young Maize* which is a standing Oriental man. He went to San Diego in 1916 and has been an active sculptor ever since that date. Other awards are the American Academy of Arts and Letters award in 1942; a Guggenheim fellowship in 1945 and again in 1947; Gold Medal Award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1948; Fine Arts Gold medal of the AIA in 1953. He is a member of the National Academy, an Honorable Life Member of the San Diego Museum, and is one of the founders of the Western Arts and Letters Society. Water is a matter of prime importance to the people of San Diego and it's the subject of Mr. Hord's *Guardian of Waters* statue, a woman holding an olla in her left arm. The great lakeside silver-grey granite stands in the drum of mosaics which he described. Undoubtedly he was influenced by the forces of nature by his travels in the Sonora zone, which is geographically the area diagonally north through Nevada and east through and beyond Arizona and Mexico. An area studded with dry boulders, partly desert because of the lack of water. This symbolism in his statue he has carried out showing this transfer of water from the clouds to the sea, and water from the sea to the shore, and from the shore back again into the clouds. Just for the record, the statue itself of the woman is fourteen feet high and the drum is 8 feet wide, the basin seventeen feet six inches, with the dolphin and skipjack design 17' 6". Its outer circumference is 22' 3" high and 100 feet across and has sea snails portrayed on it. The day after I talked to Mr. Hord, I heard a rather interesting little story. Miss Belle Barancann had done a mural for the high school in La Jolla. In it she depicted several people whom she knew. The subject is the "Seven Lively Arts" and the one for the arts is represented as "Sculpture" by a picture of this same statue with Donal Hord on a ladder working away at it with his chisel. When he came to the opening celebration of the new mural, Ms. Barancann went up to him afterward and asked if he minded that she had taken some artistic liberty in her portrayal of the statue. Instead of separating all of the fingers holding the olla, she had made them aligned, parallel. She felt that architecturally it carried her painting better into position in relation to the beams of the auditorium. Mr. Hord laughed and said no, that as a matter of fact he was very happy to see that she had done the statue that way. It had been originally designed that way by him but, when he was carving it, one of his tools had slipped and he had had to carve the small finger on the hand at a right angle instead of parallel the way she had painted it in her mural.

[PAUSE]

BH: Mr. Hord, we talked about so many things last time I was here but there are other questions that I wanted to ask you. They aren't very well coordinated but I'll ask you one at a time. One thing, we didn't talk about your life, because we had decided there were many biographies available about you. But I wanted to ask you about some of the things which have influenced you. For instance, so many of your subjects are Indian, and I know that you had grants in 1929 and '30 to study in Mexico and New Mexico. Was that when you first became interested in Indians, or was it an earlier time you were in Montana which you briefly mentioned to me before?

DH: No. I think that what affected me as far as the background of our country is concerned is based a little less on the Indian as an Indian than on the idea that in deriving ideas from our own country, it is a little hard to put a white man's face on the Southwest. So many of the ideas that I have had were derived from our desert. Again, I'm forced to cloak it with an Indian face, but not a literal Indian's face. I think in all the time that I have worked I have only had one Indian model and that was probably about 1922; he was the last one of the Lagunas, who lived in our Laguna

Mountains.

BH: Yes.

DH: When we'd one such things as desert whirlwinds, subjects of that sort, it would be a little hard to get it to look like a white prospector. then some years later when I was in Santa Barbara, Fernon Lundgren, who was at that time one of the best-known painters in Southern California (I think he was quite a friend of Stewart Edward White's, the writer) and Lundgren was the first man, I think, to paint at Santa Fe and one of the first to paint Death Valley. His paintings, "The Rose Dawn" and the "Grey Dawn" were taken as titles for Stewart's books. At that time when I was about 24 he was in his seventies, and I thought he was older than God. He took me aside one day and said, "I don't know to tell you, but try to interpret your *own* country. There is no guide that I can give you, but that is the thing that you should do."

BH: Isn't that wonderful!

DH: So, what I have tried to do has been more or less simply to express this area up as far possibly as the Death Valley and that country, which is the same area Lundgren was also interested in. But the strange thing is that a painter has much more latitude than a sculptor has because the symbols that the sculptor has to literally use in a piece of sculpture . . . well they literally *are* symbols; whereas a painter can build an atmosphere around what he is doing. We cannot. So, in handling a form of symbol to pin our own area down, I have been forced into rather a high-cheekboned type with waving hair. I was expressing something that I was impressed by in the desert and tried to interpret in sculpture. And the experience I had in Mexico I don't think was as much of an influence as some might think, because I was down there when Diego Rivera was painting the frescoes in the Palazzo d'Education Public.

BH: Oh really?

DH: And the Mexicans at that time were much more interested in social reform than they were in anything else. While I wandered around Mexico and saw a great deal of it, and I have slept and copied in front of a lot of Palazzo Municipalities in Lock and such places, yet I saw it as almost an extension of our Southwest. That was particularly brought home to me when I went to New York City and saw that it was a much stranger town than Mexico City was. In fact I felt much more foreign there than I did here. But I think the other thing that has blended very well -- and I think this is why McDonald-Wright and I got along so well -- we both like Chinese and Japanese art. Somehow most of the people who have bought my things have collected Asiatic art. It's been a very strange factor, because they suddenly realize that I had been more influenced by Asia than I had been by middle America.

BH: Along that line, I wonder whether you agree with the idea of Covarubias' film -- the Mexicans worked with jade long before history and so did the Chinese, and I believe that is one of the parallels he uses as a basis for his belief in an early transmigration of people from China to Mexico.

DH: I think one thing that Covarubias did not run upon and that was -- this, of course is a little diversion -- that the Emperor Schawange de Chu Wong Dye about 250 BC sent an Imperial Fleet out to find the elixir of life and it came out, scouted, and went back home, picked up a few more young people and took off again. The strange thing is that there are some artifacts from Middle America that are so close in style to those of China in that period that they couldn't possibly have appeared unless there had been a connection.

BH: Do we know how far that fleet went?

DH: Well, it was easier for an Imperial Fleet to sail from China than it was for the Manila Galleon once a year to come to Acapulco because it was thoroughly equipped. It had everything to do with . . . money was no object. And if they had returned home they all would have been executed because they would not have had the elixir. So, a smart Chinese, a scholar of that period would have stayed away [i.e., in Mexico]. If you like I'll show you a couple of things that I think are quite convincing.

BH: You think Covarrumbias didn't have this information?

DH: That particular little bit. He was very interested in the comparative morphology effect. He compared designs and his designing sense was wonderful. The only subtle key clue that he didn't happen to run upon was the fleet. Another influence I think has happened that people don't comprehend was Mandarin art (there must have been an effect of Roman art on India), which also affected China, but there isn't. That there was a Greek influence one that came from the other way just as well as one coming from Europe. So we had a Greek influence translated then to Asia, as well as one that was filtered through Europe. So if one By putting the stamp on what Because I have been interested in our own country and that's the only reason I stay here. The town doesn't interest me; the country does.

BH: Speaking of the painter being able to use more symbols than you do in a certain sense, it seems to me you have it way over the painters, I believe, because actually the stone you use is almost symbolic of the country too.

DH: Not unless you It would apply in certain things that we have that actually stamp us. Because, after all, the Aztec did use pyrite for the sacrificial stone as well as the Egyptians, who used it for their royal portraits, yet neither of them look alike. One is definitely Egyptian and the other one is definitely Anghor Wat. So, in

BH: Perhaps it's just in the way you use the stone then, because it certainly comes . . . it certainly feels practically Indian.

DH: Well, it looks Well, in the *Spring Stirring* sculpture, I had used conventionalized bean sprouts, actually growing at the bottom.

BH: Oh, realistic ones?

DH: Yes. Yet the whole base was composed of a repetition of bean roots, which is very important to the Mexican and the Indian as a staple, and so it is also a symbol.

BH: I am interested that you were speaking of doing the last Laguna Indian. Do you know where that piece is?

DH: No, I think that it was left in clay and was destroyed up in the mountains.

BH: Oh, what a shame! Was this a man like Ishi (the last member of a certain Indian tribe which lived in northern California, Kruber book)?

DH: No, oh no. He is still alive; he lives about a block from us.

BH: Oh, really!

DH: We were taking the Park Service over the old Yuma trail, just about two weeks ago, and the ranger referred to this *old* Indian who lived in Laguna. We'd known the old Indian since he was 19, so we felt a little older than the old Indian!

BH: Is he actually the last individual of a tribe?

DH: He is the last one of that particular group they call Equal Mali. He was raised by his mother and his grandmother. The grandmother died in the flu epidemic of 1917-18 and his mother died about 1922.

BH: I hope the anthropologists have studied him and made photographs.

DH: The Indians don't like to be studied. He says, "The lore . . . let it die. It's gone, let it die. Let's forget it."

BH: Does he remember any of the tribal history?

DH: Yes, he does but they don't like to tell about it.

BH: Even the legends?

DH: He showed us s shrine once on this trail, so we knew about it. We pointed it out to Dr. Brands, who is the new Director over at the Historical Museum and

BH: So they have that information you know about him?

DH: Oh yes. We tried to put down what information we knew, but after all, again it is a reflection, as someone once said about art, "Provincial art is apt to be the most individual art." It tends to grow out of its own area the minute it gets into a big affair. As we have it now. Everybody sees the latest art magazine so you find the same tradition is in San Diego that you find in Maine or in Seattle or in Florida. It's pretty much a repetition then.

BH: Great art some from a minority who come up with the creative few?

DH: They tend to be a little aloof. If they are working it would be as if Van Gogh was working by himself. Many people who do work by themselves come out with a little more individual . I don't know whether I have or not. I do like art, the desert above all other places. There is a feeling that if you like your own area, really if you're in love with it (and I do like art in the desert above all other places) I think it can have a terrific effect. *If* you are moved by it. Otherwise you are moved by other people whom you know and that makes less of a thing.

BH: We were speaking earlier today about teaching, and I had not found in the records that you had done any teaching and I'd like to get this on the tape that you have because I think it is so important when there is a great creative artist in an area who is able to transmit it to other people.

DH: Yes, but all an artist should do for any other artist or anyone studying is to teach them the techniques. I don't think that they should try to change . . . or to pass on a mode of doing things. A craft, yes; an outlook not enough so much.

BH: Homer and I were speaking about this a little while before you came in. He was telling me about the time that George Baker wanted another position and he said that if he did something creative that he could warrant it and he had such a hard time doing anything creative.

BH: Ha, ha.

BH: I was telling Homer that I was surprised that it was true because he'd worked with you and you think he would learn this technique. And Homer said that it was an individual thing whether you have it *in* you or not. And that reminded me of another question I wanted to ask you about today. I read someplace about you that you liked to be able to express what is in the block itself, as it comes out. And that reminds me of a book about the Eskimo where the Eskimo asks the chuk before him, "Who are you, spint? Tell me!." Is this actually the same thing you too feel about it?

[Edmond Carpenter & Rob Flaherty "Eskimo, V. J. Tarist, 1959."]

DH: Well, it reminds me of another philosophy I feel. To go back in time, there was a person who had a great effect on me. When I went to San Diego for the first time . . . I had not been away from San Diego before, but they had brought over Archibald Dawson who was then head of the Royal Academy at Glasgow and he was teaching bronze casting in Santa Barbara. He was a remarkable person. Everyone in the class was absolutely devoted to him. He was a young man then of about 32, although again I was so much younger that I didn't see it that way. This thing happened which made a little stronger impression on my mind than the feeling of the block itself on a way. When I first went into his class in Santa Barbara, I brought out a great deal of clay one day and started working it. He watched me bring it and stack it on my modeling stand and he looked and finally he said, "Mon, you're treating your material like a navrere with a bucket of swash. Now take it away." And I was a little incensed and just boiling, but I took it back and put it in the clay bucket. And then I came back with the "What now?" sort of attitude and he said, "Now, go and get a little and bring it in. You know, if you learn to treat your material with respect, as if it were precious, you'll get a precious result." I think that is the thing that accounts for the stone. You look at a piece of stone and you try to make . . . not to destroy any more than you can possibly use or to take away for what you want to do, which is badly expressed because I hadn't thought it out. But, fundamentally, you try to fill that block of stone completely. Otherwise, you take away a great deal of potential material. So, it is that approach to the block which is important, rather than the approach of here is a block, I want to absolutely split it.

BH: It's a wonderful . . .

DH: I think it is a very fine thing because the Renaissance . . . I can remember Cennino Cennini saying that in teaching people to draw; after one learns to draw on a brick he might finally learn to draw well enough to use up a piece of paper. This is Michelangelo's idea. All of them, the great Renaissance artists, believed that. Materials *were* precious and today, now, in a kindergarten, a child goes through many sheets of paper in no time. Imagine how the Renaissance would have been affected by this waste, an absolute waste! I think that this has something to do with the background of it.

BH: It's a wonderful thought and it's quite thrilling to me. My husband would agree because he does this with architecture. When he begins to design a house for a particular location, he has the same kind of feeling for the property, to make full use, not only of the view, but actually the rocks and the trees. He has often been teased by his clients because when he begins designing, he will sometimes go to the property and sit awhile in the trees, just sitting there to get the feel of what the trees mean in relation to the view before he's ready to design a house to put on it.

DH: Sure.

BH: So, it must be the same thing you are talking about.

DH: Yeah. You are using what you have expeditiously. There was another thing of Cennino Cennini in which there was a mention of the fact that the patron furnished the lapis lazuli for the background. Not lapis, what is it . . . the sky. The value of a painting depended entirely upon an azure color. As long as the patron had to furnish it, he sent a servant, very often, to watch that the artist didn't steal it. We began to study, watch, many Renaissance paintings, looking through those in other galleries in Florence for the amount of blue that was used, to see how valuable the painting was. Which is a rather strange way of looking at it.

BH: Oh, it certainly

DH: But Cennino Cennini mentioned also that one artist got around the servant by continually dipping his brush full of the color into the glass. When the servant had gone, he washed the color out . . .

BH: Oh!

DH: . . . letting the gold settle. So, there was such a thing as color and grinding colors and I think that enters. I think this is a diversion . . .

BH: Excuse me, I'm

[PAUSE]

BH: We were talking about the Indians when our tape ran out on the other reel. Was there anything else you wanted to add to that?

DH: Nothing that comes to mind.

BH: Speaking of people of different nationalities, I wondered if you would mind telling the tape the story about the Japanese figure on the Coronado limestone facade?

DH: Well, the time we began that was, I think, something like almost a year before Pearl Harbor and . . . one We had drawn a Japanese carrying brocade, I think, into the *bas-relief* and an admiral decided the Japanese were *not* to be included in *bas-reliefs*, although we had a Chinese, we had Basques, we had the Indian, we had the Negro. We had practically every type that had an influence on California, and the Japanese certainly had it. We decided to forget about the admiral's reluctance about including our Japanese, so we continued and finished it with the idea that if he objected too much, why maybe he could furnish the two blocks that were necessary to recarve it.

BH: Ha, ha, ha.

DH: And fortunately, just as we were finishing them, the admiral was transferred and so nothing ever came of it. And so now the Japanese are our friends again, so all is well.

BH: Well, it is indicative of how people's feelings change because it was shortly after the war that a replica of your lovely *Guardian of Waters* was sent to the people of Yokohama and they responded lovingly with the bell.

DH: Well, that was about only three years ago, and I think the other thing was finished about '39.

BH: Oh, I didn't realize it was

DH: Yes. So we made a cement copy which we didn't think was too well cast and sent it over. Because the Japanese are such fine craftsmen, we had our reservations about concrete, but no one else seemed to object so we'd just go along as temperamental artists.

BH: Getting back to the Coronada murals, that wasn't your only problem. You were telling me a while ago about the technical problem involved with the stone, and I wish you would tell it to the tape. I'm afraid I wouldn't be able to repeat it very well.

DH: Well, our technique was involved with the fact that every block had to have an absolutely perfect facing because any undulation in a *bas-relief* catches the light; and these were intended to be incised reliefs. Because of this, everything had to have a precision. That might not have been necessary had we had a raised one. When the blocks were delivered, they arrived in different thicknesses. Some of them were four inches thick, some of them were 4 1/2 inches thick and some of them were 6 inches thick. And they had absolutely rough edges. About that time I indulged in some recriminations with Los Angeles over the fact that I couldn't possibly do it, and they said I *had* to. The correspondence went into our files -- I think you have the letters on that. The architect finally came forth and backed me up at about the time I felt very much like going and jumping in the bay. It wasn't that we had We very seldom had any problems with Los Angeles. They had always been most cooperative, but in this case we had our first real round. It finally ended by their sending down one of the men on the Project who was sort of a roust-a-bout. He had a truck and he hauled them, block by block, up to Alhambra; and they were planed there and finished perfectly and brought back down here. The thing went on quite nicely. After the initial block we had no trouble. So the references to that in the letters that you have carefully registered for the Archives are references to "an artist going to pieces when he can't make a mechanical product!"

BH: Ha, ha, ha. What do you call the kind of relief when it is inverted in that way?

BH: Incised. Incised relief. It's a cheaper way of doing a relief. It's just as effective. It was used quite freely by the Egyptians on big surfaces. So many of the pylons were done that way. We decided after we had gotten into it or at least working on that technique that it was a cheaper way of doing it because the background didn't have to be reduced; and it also added a little more strength to the structure. When we were in Egypt at Queen Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el Bahri, we decided that sometimes the treasury must have been full because they pulled the backgrounds and had a raised relief; and sometimes the treasury must have been empty, for they had them incised.

BH: Oh.

DH: I truly think that is what happened.

BH: Isn't that interesting?

DH: Because it took so much more time to remove that extra surface. In our case, in handling this as we did, we had to have an absolutely true surface. It created a lot of complications.

BH: Mr. Dana was telling me that the school building itself is getting quite old and he wondered what will happen to them. Could they be removed now? Or are they applied in such a way that they never could be?

DH: Well, I don't know whether they could be or not. They are set in place. On the other hand, I understand they saved the building because of the *bas-relief*.

BH: I should think they would have! They are beautiful.

DH: This may be complimentary to ourselves, I don't know. But a few years ago there was some talk of tearing it down and then someone later told me that they liked the reliefs so much they kept the building.

BH: It seems to me it would be nice if they'd bring them to the inland because there aren't too many people to see them on the Coronado Island.

DH: Well, there are quite a few. It's a little off the beaten path, but it has been a place that they seem to like.

BH: Are the panels on a side that catches the sunlight?

DH: Yes. We constructed them in the same light that they were to be shown. We actually set up the easel so that we would have the sunlight falling exactly as it would fall on them later.

BH: To create the same shadows?

DH: Yes. It's a south-west light and so the sun plays across it most of the day. Incidentally, we advocated that they plant Natal-plumb below them to keep molesters away. Those are quite thorny.

BH: They did it?

DH: At first they wouldn't take our advice. Later they did and so the crayon marks that had been put on it were carefully erased. Nothing has been mutilated since.

BH: Limestone is probably "mutilate-able," isn't it?

DH: Oh, yes. It is very soft. Of course, *anything* is, if anyone works at it.

BH: One of the surprising things I have found is that in all of the schools where murals were done, there is very little mutilation. Children are usually so proud of having murals. It isn't like the federal post offices. I just wondered if maybe the juveniles are much more careful than adults?

DH: Maybe the juveniles are. I remember Diego Rivera was very upset about mutilation of his murals in Mexico City. But of course they were highly political and there is nothing political about these.

BH: No.

DH: Except the Japanese, and now they are back in popularity.

BH: You did a piece of sculpture for another school, the Hoover School, which is the young girl. We won't go into the part about her face falling off again, because Mr. Dana just told us about that. But, I wondered if you would like to tell more about the mosaics that you designed for the base?

DH: Well, at the suggestion of some of the Project people, we designed a mosaic to fit on the base of it. Incidentally, the fountain was there already and it was *not* decorated. This I had nothing to do with. There was simply a pedestal in the center and then these opened spaces that could be adapted to mosaic. So I made the mosaic, but the Supervisor of Art [for the San Diego City Schools], Lotta Perry, objected strongly to mosaics. So, they were never done. But the piece is set up in the center. Did Dana mention the handkerchief?

BH: No.

DH: It made such a nice design, that was the only thing I enjoyed doing. Some of the girls at that time were tying a handkerchief around their heads (a little bit like European peasants) and knotting it under the chin. So I utilized that and, the day that it was set up, I was informed by a young friend of mine that the Dean of Girls -- is there such a thing? No

BH: Principal?

DH: Well, whoever it was who was counselor for the girls, had *just* given them a lecture about not wearing handkerchiefs on their heads. And then along came this one statue and was set up in the middle of their fountain!

BH: Incidentally, just for the historical record, I think I know where that influence came from. Marlene Dietrich wore one at about that time, and I can remember buying one. It was made in Czechoslovakia and it was called a "Marlene Dietrich Kerchief." And I still have mine! It was a beautiful thing and they were very popular. So that was probably what you were putting on the statue.

DH: Yes, that is what I put on her. So maybe it is more historical than I realized, but it ended up by being hysterical. This woman was dreadfully upset that this kerchief should appear, and I should imagine that the girls were all quite happy. I wouldn't know. I didn't go to the dedication because I didn't care too much for the figure. It was a little bit sweeter than I usually do.

BH: This is one where the tile design is of little girls playing jacks, isn't it?

DH: No, it isn't. That happened in another case in which we had designed a *bas-relief*, but it was not on the Project.

BH: Oh, another school?

DH: It was another, the Kit Carson School, and they wanted it to be of activities of children that age. So, among the things, I had some little girls seated playing jacks. This was also to be in incised relief. And I was informed by one of the school authorities that that was not permissible because it was a gambling game. Even though his own little girl played it, he didn't think it was a wise thing. So we eliminated the jacks and the little girls are just sitting there.

BH: I think that is just horrible.

BH: Well, this can happen.

BH: Getting completely off that subject, when I was here last time, you told me about the remark that Paul Manship had once made to you.

DH: About the Civic Center fountain?

BH: Yes, about the Civic Center fountain.

DH: Well, we took him by I think he was here in '42 during the War, and he wanted to see some of the things that had been done. So we took him by the fountain and I think he made a remarkable observation about it. He looked at it and he said, "Well, Donal, you were lucky to do a thing like that . . . on this scale when you are so young. Because mostly they come along . . . when they decide an artist is *fit* to do one, he is too old to have any interest in it." In many ways, I think the Project was quite a wonderful thing artistically all round. Although there were many people who picked on things

that were inept. Some of them were very bad. I think some things I did, I didn't care for too much, like the girl. But when you study the Renaissance remains in Florence, you find lots of things that are not "top-drawer." You can find Roman things that are pretty bad. I've seen Egyptian things that were horrible. And I've had quite a stint in Mexico, and there are a lot of Aztec, pre-Columbian, bits that The only thing that saved them is their age; I don't think they were any good artistically. So I think that the Project did things in accordance with other times and places. There were good things, very fine things; and then there were just "things." Artists have their off-days. And some artists are not as good as others. Things like this have happened all through history. But during the Project times, the minute that anything bad came up, the critics seemingly just multiplied like mad.

BH: Probably a lot of that was just political, don't you think?

DH: I think some of it was political, definitely. But, at the same time, San Diego had had *nothing* artistic before that except the Park buildings [left over from Pan Pacific Exposition of 1915, I think. BH]. And they were done by one of the great architects. Until the Federal Arts Project came along, we had no civic material. On the current scene, with the new Civic Center coming up, there is none whatsoever. So I can look back and think of that particular period of the Federal Arts Project as being, you might almost say, something which historically some day, and even as you are working at it, will be analyzed more favorably. And probably some of the things that happened (and the lack of things) after it may even be called a decline.

BH: Well, I think one nice thing for San Diego is that they have recently gotten one of your large sculptures. They certainly

DH: That wasn't San Diego! That was the University of California at San Diego, and it was. . . .

BH: The city had nothing to do with it?

DH: The city had nothing to do with it. It was given by a Mr. Cecil Green of Dallas, Texas. So it was a private gift given to the University because some of the people up there were very interested in it and thought it would be a good adornment. Of course I was pleased, too.

BH: When was it made?

DH: That was '47, I think, between '47 and '49. It was exhibited at the International Fair in Philadelphia in that competition and it was reproduced many times. It was reproduced on the front of the "New York Times." I don't think I showed you that.

BH: No, you didn't.

DH: If I didn't, you can find it there in the folder [his scrapbook or album].

BH: Was it reproduced in a recent "New York Times?"

DH: No, this was reproduced at the time. Of all the American pieces in the show, it was the only one reproduced with the European ones. I was very happy about that, with the European ones.

BH: Of course!

DH: Those things make anyone working in the arts a little more happy.

BH: Even though they didn't give it to themselves, I hope the people of San Diego go over and

enjoy it in La Jolla at the University . . .

DH: Oh, they are very happy at the University.

BH: . . . after someone else tells them it is there.

DH: Well, these things happen, after all. I mentioned it to Manship one time. We were talking about things going on here and he said, "Why aren't you doing more work?" I said, "Well, probably because I grew up here." Ha, ha, ha.

BH: Ha, ha, ha.

DH: I said, "If you had stayed in St. Paul, you might have had more trouble." Ha, ah.

BH: ?

DH: No, it isn't necessarily true, because I've been very well treated. Not that I've done so many things here, but I can't complain.

BH: I certainly have enjoyed looking at your scrapbook and we appreciate so much your giving us the photographs of things.

DH: Well, thank you so much. I think it has been a great pleasure to have you come by.

BH: It has for me and I thank you so much on behalf of the Archives.

DH: Thank you.

BH: I have particularly appreciated your explanations of your work.

DH: Well, I'm still of the opinion that an artist is more vocal in his work than he is in his explanations about it.

BH: I think that you are articulate in both ways, Mr. Hord.

DH: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]