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Oral history interview with Ernest Lenshaw,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Ernest Lenshaw on May 19, 1964. The interview took place in San Francisco, CA, and was conducted by Mary McChesney for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

ERNEST LENSCHAW: You ask the questions. I don't know what you want.

MARY MCCHESENEY: This is Mary Fuller McChesney interviewing Ernest Lenshaw at his home, 1244 19th Street in San Francisco. The date is May 19, 1964. Mr. Lenshaw, first could you give me some background information about yourself? Where were you born and what year?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: In Denmark.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What city in Denmark?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Espia.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Espia?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And what year?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: On the west coast of Denmark just across from England.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What year was that?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: 1892.

MARY MCCHESENEY: When did you come to the United States?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: 1921.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Could you tell me about your early art training? Did you go to art school?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Sort of, yes. I did.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Where was that?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Espia.

MARY MCCHESENEY: In Denmark?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: In Denmark.

MARY MCCHESENEY: When did you first get on the WPA art project?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: 1938.

MARY MCCHESENEY: How did that come about and where did you first begin working?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, I worked first down at the Acquatic Park with Hilaire Hiler.

MARY MCCHESENEY: He was doing the large mural.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes, in the Acquatic Park.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What kind of job did you have with him?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, I was . . . he had a lot of modern shapes of undersea waves. The theme of this particular mural was Atlantis

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: That was all sea forms.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: The Lost Atlantis, yeh, and whales and forms. So, I was going over all the waves which were all sort of modern in different colors of blues and greens, you know. We had about thirty different colors of waves which were sort of cutting across one another and shafts of light coming down through the whole mess . . . ha ha . . . So, that was one of the jobs I was doing.

MARY MCCHESENEY: You actually painted the waves?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes, I made up the colors and painted them. They were already painted but there were corrections being made constantly so that the whole thing would come out the same.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Wasn't that glazed over too, with transparent colors?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: That was another thing. He had all these shapes filled with fish and he had some what you call snails or some other kind of forms, sand, and I was glazing in all these different modern shapes that he drew up. That was another job I did. And . . . what else did I do?

MARY MCCHESENEY: What type of paint did you use?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: It was regular standard art colors . . . Winsor-Newton.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Regular artists oils.

MARY MCCHESENEY: This large mural was done on canvas and was placed on the wall?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes.

MARY MCCHESENEY: How was it mounted to the wall?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No, it was mounted already before we started, before we painted it. It was already on the wall.

MARY MCCHESENEY: How far along was the mural when you went to work there? You said part of it was already done.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, some of it was done. Well, I don't know just what to say. Whether it was half done or one third done, I don't know, but it was partly done when I went to work.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Who were the other people working with you?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, there was a Russian girl named Anna Medalie whom I know from . . . I worked with her before in a furniture shop

MARY MCCHESENEY: But not on a WPA project?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, at that time then I worked with her on this particular project.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: The furniture shop was before you got on the project?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, you know it was in between, a long time ago, you know, many years ago . . . but anyway she was a flower painter.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: I remember that name.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh. Anna Medalie. And when I went to Mexico, I was just about a month behind her. I went to Mexico in 1952 and wherever I went, we were talking about painters and what not and people said, "Do you know Ann Medalie?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, she'd just been here about a month ago or two months ago." I was in Guadalajara and Taxco, Acapulco and I don't know, Mexico City. I mean Sargent Johnson was also talking about her. He was acquainted with her at the same time.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: We were there in 1952.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: You were there in '52, so was I. My son was living in Mexico City. He was working in Mexico City.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: We stayed in Ajijic and San Miguel Allende.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Ajijic! I was out there.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Were you?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Sure, we stayed there. We spent . . . I bet we spent two or three months in Guadalahara. We had some friends there. We made a lot of friends. We stayed at the Navy Club, you know the Navy Club? It was a motel. It had a Navy ship in the middle and a swimming pool in the front of it. I used to go swimming every day, even Christmas Day.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Present also is Robert McChesney who was on the WPA project in San Francisco as well. Can you remember any other people who were on the Acquatic Park project with you?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, Saccaro was on the project.

MARY MCCHESENEY: John Saccaro?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Was this on the Hiler job?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Hun?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: He wasn't on the Hiler job?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No, I don't think so. I can't remember now. Jose Ramis was on the job and oh, I don't know. There was a whole flock of them. I just can't remember all.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Phyllis Zakheim was on the Hiler job.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Phyllis Zakheim, was she working on the Hilaire Hiler project?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes, yes, that's right.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And Sargent Johnson, the sculptor, worked on it too.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes, he was working on the tile that was put in front of the balcony out there, that tile out there, and he had some fella from Egypt or some darn place . . . an Arabian fella was helping him. And Peter Fredrickson was there. Another thing we were working on was that Colorama or whatever he called that thing in there, ya, I worked on that crazy thing. I just put all these crazy colors around there.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: It was sort of a color chart, wasn't it?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: That was a color chart and on the walls and all that sort of stuff. I worked there with Peter Fredrickson.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Wasn't that Hiler's own color theory.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes, that was his, his color scheme. Yes, sure.

MARY MCCHESENEY: It was on the ceiling of one of the rooms.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes, there was some on the ceiling and there was something on the wall. He had greys, he had the twelve steps or whatever it was, he had coming up the wall. You know, the values, twelve values going up the wall and on the ceiling he had the colors and he had a center piece there. I forget now exactly what . . . I think it is still there and it's, I think it's cracking rather badly. I forget now what it was.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: The last time I saw it, it didn't look bad.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Was that oil on canvas as well?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Same thing.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And did you mix the colors for this then?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No, Peter Fredrickson was in charge of that. But I made the color for the mural on the Federal building.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Yes. Well, let's finish up with the Acquatic Park.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Ok.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Mr. Hilaire Hiler was out there and was supervising the project when you worked for him. Can you tell us something about him? What kind of person he was and how he was to work with?

ERNEST LENSHAW: Well, he was very good to work with. I have no complaints as far as that goes. Well, you know, probably, as much as I do about him. He is quite a well known authority on color and such things. I think he has several books out on that stuff.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Yeh, he's quite famous for it, color theories.

ERNEST LENSHAW: Color theories, yes.

MARY MCCHESENEY: He has also designed a color chart.

ERNEST LENSHAW: Yes. I would think he has.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Well, he has written two or three volumes, I believe it is.

ERNEST LENSHAW: Yes.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: The book devotes itself entirely to color. He has all the tone values, and then he has along with that a little box, you know, with all these color chips. Every interior decorator uses them.

ERNEST LENSHAW: Luke Gibney worked on that project too.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Acquatic Park?

ERNEST LENSHAW: Yes.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What was he doing out there?

ERNEST LENSHAW: He was working some place up stairs where they were doing some of these modern things.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Modern things?

ERNEST LENSHAW: Well, they were sort of nautical things; everything was nautical. I don't mean naughty but nautical.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Nautical, right, ha ha.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Well, they were modern to the extent that they were designed in a rather classical way, no, not that. Oh, I'll think of the term later maybe.

ERNEST LENSHAW: Well, it was kind of in modern treatment, wouldn't you say?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Yeh, um hum.

MARY MCCHESENEY: So Luke Gibney was working as a painting assistant to Hilaire Hiler at that time.

ERNEST LENSHAW: Yeh, well, there was - oh, gosh - there must have been about twenty people working on that project, at least. But, I can't remember them . . . I know them when I see them but I can't remember their names.

MARY MCCHESENEY: It's been a long time.

ERNEST LENSHAW: Oh, yeh, and some of them are gone, you know, forever and Luk is gone and there was a tall fella with large set, Peter Fredrickson is gone, that fella is gone, Luke Gibney is gone.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Pete Fredrickson is dead?

ERNEST LENSHAW: Oh, yes.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Did he die in Los Angeles?

ERNEST LENSHAW: Yeh, somewheres down there.

MARY MCCHESENEY: How long did you work out there on the Acquatic Park Project?

ERNEST LENSHAW: I don't know. Can't remember.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Was it six months or a year?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No, not that long. No, because pretty soon we were doing other things. We went over to the Fair. What are you trying to do?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: I'm going to see if pops on the mike when you set the glass down.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh, I see.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Ha ha ha ha.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No, but then we had, then Volz came and he wanted me to come out o the Fair and make the colors. So I mean . . . well, from there I think I went up to the sate college and Karl Baumann! Do you remember Karl Baumann?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Yes.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, Karl Baumann was making a lot of lettering and I was putting gold leaf on it and I had some big arches on there to do.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Where was this?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: In the state college, which is now a university extension, but they have painted it all out, you know. Some guy was doing a lot of work on that entranceway, you know, there in the corner. It had our murals over it and over the doors they had big arches and it had, oh . . . scientists, names of scientists and poets and writers and their names were, you know, like a big band going all the way over, around and it had a date on it and my job was to put the gold leaf on it. Really, when I started out, I was a gold leaf man. That's what I was doing.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Didn't Hillaire use gold leaf too?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh yes, yes. A lot of these fishes, we used gold leaf down there but . . . I don't think I did anything. I think Ann Medalie did all of the fish with the gold leaf on them. Then they were, you know, painted in and glazed over.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: And there was some silver too.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh. Gold and silver and then glazed in various colors and all that sort of suff but I didn't work on that. Ann Medalie did that kind of work. Then I worked here and I worked there and then I think I did some smaller mural things. I think it was out in the Sunnyvale Housing Project. Then I went over to the Fair and made up all the colors for the mural in front.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: You didn't work down on First Street there in the studios?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: . . . Before you went over to the Fair?

MARY MCCHESENEY: Those small murals that you did, did you design them yourself or did somebody else?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No, they were somebody else's design.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Had you had any of your training in gold leaf work before you went to work at State College?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh, God, yes. I've done acres and acres of that stuff. In fact, I'll dig it up for you in case you're interested. They sent up from Los Angeles for me to help them. They didn't have anybody down there. I mean, so I wrote sort of a thesis on laying gold leaf.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh, for their information so they didn't have to do it from scratch.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: I have it, I'll give it to you.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Ok, fine.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: I have to go down and pick up my wife.

MARY MCCHESENEY: We were just talking about the project over at Acquatic Park where you worked with Hilaire Hiler and then you said that after some time you went over to Treasure Island to work on murals there at the

Golden Gate Exhibition.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And who was your supervisor there?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Herman Volz.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And what kind of work did you do for him?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, I had a little shack in front of the mural and it was all filled up with colors and my job was to mix the colors from the sketch and transform it into five gallon lots, three gallon lots, two gallon lots and whatever was needed.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: And one gallon lots?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: One gallon lots . . . Ha ha ha whatever it was. So, that was my job. I was in this shack and I mixed up the colors in batches, you know, in various amounts.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: If I remember correctly, we never left the shack without at least a gallon bucket. It wasn't quite full because we didn't want to splash it, climbing up that eighty feet.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No, sixty. The mural was sixty feet high.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Eighty.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No, sixty I think. I beg your pardon.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Eighty feet, I've been telling everybody it was eighty feet.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No. Sixty feet high and three-hundred and eighty feet long, the two combined, the two sides combined.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Didn't you raise the buckets up on ropes or anything?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes, we pulled them up by ropes.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: We'd lower a bucket and yell down there to fill it up.

MARY MCCHESENEY: You want to paint his nose now?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: I don't know if this is of any interest to you. The various parts of the mural were marked by . . . ? Did you mark it? Or Tom Hayes?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Well, I think . . .

ERNEST LENSCHAW: It was already marked with a number and a color. See, we had four reds, four blues, and four of everything so the various areas had a letter like "R" for red and "Y" for yellow or "B" for blue and a number.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Yellow 1 and yellow 2 and . . .

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh, that's right. So, when the fellas got up on the scaffold, it was already marked for them what color they had to put on and the colors were marked too, you see, with a tag.

MARY MCCHESENEY: This was done in regular oil paints?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh, it was done with . . . no, it wasn't regular oil paint. It was a special paint made by Sherman and Williams.

MARY MCCHESENEY: But, you didn't grind the color there? You just mixed them.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No, they were already ground. I just made them up to match the colors in the sketch. We had a thirty foot sketch, thirty by something, I forget the height. But, anyway the sketch was 30 feet long.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And this mural was done on plywood panel?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: I was done on plywood panels and its height was sixty feet and the length of the two sides combined was 380 feet. What would that make half of it? 180? Two times?

MARY MCCHESENEY: 190, I think.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Alright. Well, that was the length of it and we had a scaffold.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Well, there was a passage way in between there.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh, yes. Sure, there was. As I say, there were two parts but combined it was 380 feet.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: It covered the building, the whole building.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: I mean the two sides combined and we had it all covered with scaffolds, you know. We had these steel scaffolds.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Those were portable steel scaffolds.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: That was afterwards. In the beginning we had the whole thing covered with scaffolds.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: The whole thing was covered with scaffolds?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh, I'll give you a picture of it.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Well, this has only one scaffold.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh, yeh. Oh, that's from there? Oh. Could we move that thing all the time?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Sure. Every time we wanted to, all the time I worked there. Every time we finished a section . . .

ERNEST LENSCHAW: You'd move it.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Well, it was easy to move.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh, oh, yeh.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Five of us would get on it and it was rather easy.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, I can't remember it now.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Who designed the mural? Herman Volz?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh, Herman Volz designed the mural. It was his project.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: I would like to correct this. He got the credit for it but it was the whole group.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Tom Hayes?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: No, the whole group over there worked on it. Alden Clark and all these cats worked on it.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh, get in your two bits worth, I didn't know anything about who signed it.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Herman got the credit but you remember down at the bottom underneath that great big Herman Volz signature there were a few little names added?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: How many?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Oh, maybe ten.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: They worked on it? . . . well, why don't you put that in.

MRS.LENSCHAW: Where does Herman Volz live now?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: He lives in Sausalito. He comes up to see us.

MRS.LENSCHAW: There is a Herman Volz who is a bar tender at a Cliff House.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: That's not the same one.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: That's no him! Ha ha ha ha ha.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What was the subject matter of this mural?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, one side was the conquest of the West by land and the other side was the conquest of the West by sea. These were the two sides.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Do you remember any of the other people who worked on this project?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well . . .

MARY MCCHESENEY: You mentioned a few when we were looking at the photograph.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Ramis, Jose Ramis, John Saccaro, Tom Hayes and . . .

MARY MCCHESENEY: Carlton Williams.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Carlton Williams.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: What are you doing?

MARY MCCHESENEY: We were just talking about some of the people who were also on the Treasure Island mural project. I think you named Carlton Williams, John Saccaro.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Peter Lowe.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Percy Freer, Robert McChesney . . .

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: You take the people you knew. Ha ha . . .

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, so I did.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Were there other people in the photograph that you recognize?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No. I think you already mentioned . . . we mentioned all these people, didn't we?

MARY MCCHESENEY: I think so.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh, those are the ones that I knew.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Well, this picture you've got here, if you read it from left to right, there is yourself and the next character I don't know. Carlton Williams - ?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: John Saccaro?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Tom Hayes.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: That's right.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Tatum. What's Tatum's name?

MARY MCCHESENEY: Clayborn.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Peer Lowe and I recall the name of Fred whatever his name was and Percy Freer.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: It's sort of odd how Percy go on the painters project or the murals project. He used to be an actor. Was he on the theatrical project for awhile?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, he . . . I think so.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: You know, during the war he was in Europe, you know, in the European area. I think he went over there when the government was sponsoring these things and put on shows for the GI's.

MARY MCCHESENEY: How long were you working on the Treasure Island project?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Two years.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: For two whole years?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Except . . . ? Yeh, I think so. The first year, we started in '38 and we worked all that year until about in the middle . . . about in the middle of the summer. Then we moved into the government project on the inside court and that's where you and I were. That's where I worked with Moe.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: The Fine Arts Building. That's where Diego Rivera was working on one side and the Volz mural was on the other side.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No, no, we were working inside the court. There was a court behind the face of the mural where they had the . . . What was in there?

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Shops back there.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No, no. That was the . . .

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Designing studio?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: That was where we painted murals of the proposed housing project, wasn't that it? President Roosevelt's conception of the modern housing projects or something like that where we painted these houses on the hillside?

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Oh, I'd forgotten all about that. Where did we do that?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Inside the court there. You know, remember that court? It was in behind there . . .

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: That's the Federal Building.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes, yes, yes, and you and I worked that whole thing all the way around, three sides like . . . on the inside of the panels.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: That's right you and I, we spent six months or something like that, you and I together. You and I were the only ones working there.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: We didn't spend six months.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: We didn't

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Nooo . . .

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, how much time?

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Well, there was nothing but rectangles, you know. Didn't Herman design that thing?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No, we did. You and I did.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Oh, I think Herman did that. I don't know whether I'd claim it.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Ha ha ha. Well, I don't know.

Mrs. Lenschaw: You told me it had Indian stuff in it. Wasn't it with the Indians and that . . . ?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No, no.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Well, this is amazing. I've forgotten all about this and we did it . . . No, Herman . . .

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Designed it?

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Herman designed that thing and it was nothing but rectangles . . . representing buildings and it covered one whole, supposedly, hillside. For some reason they wanted this bare wall covered up and Volz could think of nothing else to do but this and he put you and I on it.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes, I remember doing it. You and I were doing this thing together.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: Was it also done on plywood panels?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes, it was also plywood panels but I forgot the subject.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: The subject was housing. It was a housing . . . sort of . . . it must have been one of these projects out there.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes, it looks just like one of those things. We did other things too which I can't remember. I mean, my memory is going.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: We probably want to forget it. Ha ha ha . . .

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, it wasn't too much really to . . .

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: It wasn't a work of art.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No, no.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: It wasn't a design. We just wanted to cover up this wall.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: I agree with you.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: I came along late in that. Remember our headquarters was in the old river boat. Were you there when we were working off the river boat?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh, I'm sure I must have been.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: We had paint lockers and everything.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: I don't know.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: It was the old . . .

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh, you mean the ferry boats that were going across the Bay?

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: The River Queen that ran up and down the River.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: We had to paint all lockers up forward in the focsle head.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: That's something I don't remember.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: Was this boat tied up at the Island, over at Treasure Island?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh, when we first started out we went across to the Island on boats, on the ferry boats the first year, and then the second year they got me an old Pierce Arrow and I was taking all the things across the bridge to the project in this old Pierce Arrow. It was one of those free wheeling deals and the thing would freewheel like crazy. In about a week's time I burned out the brakes in it and had to have the darn thing realigned, the brakes realigned.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: On \$84 per month it was kind of expensive too.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Ninety four wasn't it that you got? \$94.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: It was \$86 back when I was working over on the Island and then when I got over to the Pickle factory, the top I ever got was \$94.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh, \$94 that was my pay.

MRS. LENSCHAW: You probably being a family man made all the difference.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, I had two children at that time.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: I took a bus over to the Ferry building, I believe. I'd take the bus and ride with Herman Volz.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh, yeh.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Afer the bridge was completed. I don't know why we quit riding across on the ferries. I always go down . . .

ERNEST LENSCHAW: They discontinued the ferries the second year. The first year we all rode the ferries.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: That's the reason.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Then the second year they gave me this old Pierce Arrow and we'd meet the fellas at a certain place and I'd take them all across.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Who gave you a Pierce Arrow?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: The Project.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: The Project did?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh. They had it once down there by Sixth and Brannen or Harrison or someplace or was it Fourth and Harrison? They had a garage there with a bunch of cars in it and I rode in a streetcar down to pick up this old Pierce Arrow and we'd meet the fellas there, you see, and I'd take them across the bridge.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: I didn't know that.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh yes, I remember that crazy thing.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: I remember Herman Volz must have picked us up because we all lived close by anyway.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: You know, these early cars they had this freewheeling deal you know, and as soon as you put it in freewheeling, the darn thing wouldn't have any gear. All you had to hold the darn thing back was the brakes. I had to ride on the darn brakes every time I was going downhill, you see. Ha ha ha ha. That was . . .

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: There was something else I wanted to add.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Do you remember any incidents that occurred during your days with the project at Treasure Island?

MRS.LENSCHAW: The stealing episode.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh, yes! There is a good one for you. That's a dilly. Bufano had made a statue of Saint Francis and it was placed in the California hall and it was made of . . . I think it was a stainless steel job - I can't remember now anymore, but anyway it had the front end of a pair of feet at the bottom which were made out of plaster. It was my job to put gold leaf on the feet. Well, I prepared the feet to put gold leaf on it one day and I sized them with the gold size and I was going to put gold leaf on them the next day. Well, when I came back the next day, the feet were gone. Somebody had swiped the feet.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Ha ha . . . How large were they?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, they were only about natural size, natural size feet.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Probably bigger than life. You mean that the costume of the statue came down to the feet.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Right straight down to the feet.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Feet.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh, the feet were protruding, from the robe or whatever you call that thing. He was standing right on a pedestal like.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Were the feet cast or made separately?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: They were made separately and they had a little indentation, you know, and the feet were protruding just so much, about half of the foot and I was supposed to put gold leaf on the feet and that was it.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What did Bufano say?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: I don't know what he said. I had no connection with Bufano at all. I guess he blew his top over there. Anyway, they cast a new pair of feet and I put gold leaf on the feet and that was it.

MARY MCCHESENEY: You never recovered the original feet?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No, sir. Somebody has that someplace. I don't know where but he got a new pair of feet and I put gold leaf on it and I guess, as far as I know, they stayed the rest of the . . .

MARY MCCHESENEY: They probably cemented them on.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: . . . durations of the fair.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Was that in the California building?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh, ah . . .

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: It burnt down? Did it burn up with the California building?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: That I could no tell you.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: You know that whole building burned down . . .

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes, yes, it was burned. This particular statue was standing in an inside courtyard and there was this statue by Bufano of St. Francis and I don't know whether it was destroyed or not.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Well, another thing ah . . . remember Neininger?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh, yes, yes. That I do. What was his job there?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Capacity?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: He was a technical advisory of something, wasn't he?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh, something but I don't know exactly what . . .

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Did he work in he shack with you? . . . the paint shack? Or was that before you got over there? I think he must have been mixing the paints before you got there.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Must have. Of course, I was the boss in the shack. That's all I can remember.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: I guess it was before you got there.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Maybe he worked on the cartoon for the job. I don't know. He did something but I don't know exactly what his capacity was.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Didn't someone say he was a technical advisor? I don't know whether he was actually . . . He was one of those people who didn't go through relief for some reason.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh, yes.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: He was on strictly as an advisor. You know, it's been pointed out that a lot of these people - not a lot of them but quite a few - got on the project because they couldn't find experts.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, I suppose he was a supervisor. What's his name? Allen and what was that other fella's name? You know that was when the project was out on Potrero Avenue at that time when I got on to it.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Gaskin?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Gaskin! You know Gaskin is teaching over at the Scaeffler School?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Now?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: I don't know, if he is now but last year he was, I think.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: I think he is.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: I don't know if he is now but you know Schaeffer bought that building there up on top of the hill. I used to live right in that same block. When I got on the project, we were living there, the same block.

MRS.LENSCHAW: Near the park?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No, no, no, on Kansas Street,

MRS.LENSCHAW: Oh, oh, oh yes.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: You know that was a boys' school there, that big building on the corner that goes way up on the top of the hill?

MARY MCCHESENEY: Yes.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, Schaeffer bought that and Gaskin was a teacher there one year. I don't know whether he is now or not. I haven't seen the schedule or the curriculum or whatever you call it. But, anyway at one time he was. Another time I saw him he was working in an oil station. That's a fact.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: He also had a gallery down in Monterey.

MARY MCCHESENEY: I think you are thinking of Danysh.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Oh, Joe Danysh . . . no, I'm not either. Joe Danysh is in New York, isn't he?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Joe Danysh is where?

MARY MCCHESENEY: In Monterey.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: He is?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Oh yes, that's right. It was Joe Danysh.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: He's still there?

MARY MCCHESENEY: I think so.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: He was that big fella, wasn't he? Kind of a good looking guy? Joe Danysh? No? Who was he?

MARY MCCHESENEY: He was a supervisor for the 11 Western States, the regional director.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes.

MARY MCCHESENEY: So, he was above Gaskin. Probably didn't have too much to do with the actual people on the project. I imagine.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: You know a lot about these things, don't you?

MARY MCCHESENEY: I've been working on it. Ha ha.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: You do, you do. You know all the higher-ups, I think.

MARY MCCHESENEY: I haven't met any of them.

MRS.LENSCHAW: Tell her about the book on the WPA in this vicinity. Wasn't there a book that was put out?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh yes. A very good one. The writers project wrote that up.

MRS.LENSCHAW: The writers project, yeh, that was it.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh, they wrote that up very good. That's what you should get a hold of.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Yes, I've seen it.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: You've seen it? But you should have it! Because that tells you about all these things that we did. That was a very good job.

MARY MCCHESENEY: It was very good job.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: You can't get a hold of it.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: You can't?

MRS.LENSCHAW: No, I imagine it's rare.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: What few copies that there are . . . do the libraries have them?

MARY MCCHESENEY: Our library in Petaluma has two copies but it's out of print. It's been out of print for a long time.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh, I imagine so.

MARY MCCHESENEY: It's hard to get a hold of a copy to own?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: To own?

MARY MCCHESENEY: Yeh.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, do you need to own it?

MARY MCCHESENEY: No, I got it from the library and read it.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, you have it. I see. Well, what else would you like to know about the project?

MARY MCCHESENEY: After Treasure Island was completed, then did you stay on the project?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh yes. I was four years on the project.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Four years altogether?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What did you do after Treasure Island?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: I think I did a mural on my own which . . .

MARY MCCHESENEY: Is this the one here?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: This one here . . .

MARY MCCHESENEY: This was done with Peter Fredrickson and yourself, Ernest Lenschaw. Where is it located?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: A San Francisco General Hospital, children's tubercular ward, third floor on the south end.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And it goes around the whole room?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, it's forty feet long. Let's see now? No, it's more than that. Forty and two times eighteen, what's that?

MARY MCCHESENEY: That would be 36 . . .

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Eighty feet.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And it goes around all four walls?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No, three walls. Twenty and twenty is forty and another forty, that's eighty feet, right? That's the size of it. Of course, the windows come up . . . but I didn't start this thing. Somebody else started it.

MARY MCCHESENEY: You didn't design it then?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: I didn't do the designing part. I just, it was partly done when I got here. This was designed by a girl. Her name was Tomys Mead and when I got there, it was in the state of cartoon.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: This whole mural?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Did you do this on the walls? The canvas was already up?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No, no.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Where did you work on it? Pickle Factory?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Oh, I remember that thing.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: The mural was in the stage of cartoon and it wasn't complete.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: I see.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: I completed the mural, I mean the cartoon. I made the color scheme for it. I put it on canvas and Peter Fredrickson helped me paint it. We had to move it. We had it in three sections. One forty foot section and two eighteen foot sections for the end walls.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: I remember this now.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Then we had to get it out of the Pickle Factory. So, they moved me up to Washington Street to a school and then the room was not long enough so I had to put the mural like this. Here is the room and my mural was so long see. So, I had to put I like this.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: Oh, curve it around.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Build a curve there and make it like that. That's how I finished it.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: Well, has this mural been done on one piece of canvas?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh yes.

MRS.LENSHAW: You know I've never seen this mural.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: Is it still out there at he hospital?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh yes, sure it is. You can go down and see it.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: The whole mural on one canvas?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, I mean the forty foot is one canvas.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: It was spliced in the corners, wasn't it?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh sure, oh yes. But the forty foot is one piece and Peter Fredrickson and I put it up and we had it in a great big roll and it was put on with white lead and we had a stand and we had the roll on the stand. We started on one end and we kept rolling it and putting it up and putting it up.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: That's what you were doing at the Pickle Factory too.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: What?

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: You were doing that same thing at the Pickle Factory, weren't you?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, how do you mean?

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Well . . .

ERNEST LENSCHAW: We had it all stretched at the Pickle Factory, yeh. But when we moved over to this school, we had it on angle like I showed Mary here, you see going around he corner and . . .

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Tell me, Ernie, did both of your cats use those big fat palettes?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh no, that's just for the picture.

[EVERYONE LAUGHS]

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No, we had a little cart, you know . . .

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Where did you find these great big palettes?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: I still got them. They are made out of cardboard. You wan one?

[EVERYONE LAUGHS]

ERNEST LENSCHAW: There's one on top there.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: They were made up for the photograph.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Just for the photograph. But what we had, you see, was a square thing on wheels and it had a cabinet underneath and it had all the colors in it and we had trays and we put water on them. We had little tins. Each color had little muffin tin, you know what I mean, muffin tins?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Right.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: We'd just put water on it, you know, and we'd pour the water off and the next day we were ready to go again. I used to paint about four figures a day. There were 235 trees and figures and whatnots in this.

MARY MCCHESENEY: 235?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: 235 different objects.

MRS.LENSCHAW: We just gave away the original sketches for them. Don't you have one of the sketches left?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, there might be a little of it left downstairs.

MRS.LENSCHAW: They are done on brown paper, packing paper.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh, heavy paper, well, you know they were erased and what not.

MARY MCCHESENEY: It is very attractive. Were they bright colors? What kind of colors did you use?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: They are nice. The sky is pink, not bright though.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Not bright though if I remember correctly.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well . . .

MRS.LENSCHAW: They are kind of modern colors. Aren't the trees sort of blue or something like that?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, there are a couple of blue trees in there.

MRS.LENSCHAW: Moglie was berry brown.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh, the boys, Peter painted the stones and all this stuff around there and I painted the figures. I think he painted, maybe, the trees or something. I forget. We divided up the work. He tried to do the figures but he said, "No." He wouldn't like that so I said, "Okay, I'll do the figures and animals and you do all the leaves and all this, the rocks and what we have down below here." So that's how it worked out.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What is the address of this hospital?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, it's on Potrero and 23rd between 22nd . . .

MARY MCCHESENEY: The county hospital.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: The county hospital. Yes . . .

MRS.LENSCHAW: You can't get in there any day. You have to make an appointment.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes, you can. During visiting hours, you can get in.

MRS.LENSCHAW: Isn't there any restriction on the children's TB ward?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No, you can get in any place, any time in the visiting hours. You can go down to the office, they'll let you in.

MARY MCCHESENEY: How long did you and Peter work on this mural?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh, just about a year.

MARY MCCHESENEY: A year to do that.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, eighty feet long . . .

MARY MCCHESENEY: Quite long, it's a big job.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: About seven feet high and of course, the windows take up a lot space you know so. We started down at the Pickle Factory and then we moved over to that school, you know, I told you about where we had to bend the damn thing.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: I think, if I remember correctly, I had to go over there with you . . . was it the same time

we had to paint that whole place? Didn't we have to paint the interior with you working . . .

ERNEST LENSCHAW: You mean at the hospital?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: No, no, at the school, the second place you worked on the mural.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Over there?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: On Washington Street there. It was an old school, wasn't it?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh, it was an old school, that's right.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: And all brick.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh, all brick. I had to bend the damn thing.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: If I remember correctly a bunch of us were sent over there to paint that thing white on the inside.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh, is that so? The whole school?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: No, not the whole school, just some parts. Particular areas, maybe it was the area you worked in?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh, I don't think so.

MRS.LENSCHAW: They had offices or something upstairs because I remember going there myself once.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Well, the weaving project was there.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Could be. Yeh, we moved a lot of stuff. I don't know why we had to get out of the Pickle Factory. For some reason we had to get out of the Pickle Factory. I don't know just what the score was.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Well, I think the government had leased it and the lease was up or something like that.

MRS.LENSCHAW: What happened to the girl that designed it?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: She went to Hawaii.

MARY MCCHESENEY: That's Tommys Mead?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Tommy.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Tommy Mead. Does this illustrate a story of Kipling's?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: It's the story of Moglie.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Hum?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Moglie, one of Kipling's stories.

MRS.LENSCHAW: From The Jungle Book.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh, that's the story of it. Of course, it had snakes in it . . . I kept out the snakes because you know it might have had a bad influence on the children. I tried to make it pleasing for the children. There is an elephant, too, in the story but I don't have the elephant.

MRS.LENSCHAW: Can't get an elephant through the doors, I guess.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: There wasn't enough room for elephants.

MARY MCCHESENEY: After you did this project, then what did you do on the WPA?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh, after I finished this project, that was the end of it.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh, that was the end.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Then the war came up. Then this was finished in 1942.

MRS.LENSHAW: What the two paintings out at Sunnyvale?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Sunnyvale, well I told about that already.

MRS.LENSHAW: Fisherman's wharf?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh, well, that's out in the Sunnyvale housing project. But this was the last job I did. The war broke ou and the project folded up. And I went into the shipyard. I was painting in the shipyard.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Ernie, something I've been trying to find out very definitely and I haven't been able to do it. Remember the Artists Union? Do you remember when we had that demonstration?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes. I got . . a couple paintings in the Artists Union, Local 88, still have the damn things.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: You mean one of the picket signs? We went out in demonstration.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh yeh, down there, yeh yeh yeh! And somebody called the police and by the time the police came, we had all disappeared. I remember that one very well.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Why were we out demonstrating? What was the issue?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, the issue was that Congress . . . see, we had a certain schedule. We were working I think about so many hours (I think about 20 hours). We had a certain schedule and then after we had completed this schedule, we had the rest of the times to ourselves to do our own things hat we liked to do.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Easel painting and that sort of thing.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Anything that we wanted to do that we were doing, we'd do. Then Congress got the bright idea that we should work all the time because we were getting paid such a fabulous sum of \$94 or whatever it was per month. They made a law that we had to work every day and that was the reason we went on strike. Remember that?

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Was it a strike or just a demonstration?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Demonstration.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: We went out for one day, didn't we?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: We went out for some time or another. I forget now.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Do you remember where the parade was we had?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, the one I was in was around the Acquatic Park. There might have been others but the one I was on was there.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Weren't the musicians and the theater group and the rest of them out at that time?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Could have been, could have been. I don't know. I can't remember that but I remember that demonstration and we were walking around and everybody was sitting inside there looking at us. There was a restaurant there, do you remember. When we first started out, there was a restaurant, a high class restaurant. We marched around with our signs.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: Why were you demonstrating at the restaurant? Do you remember?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: We weren't demonstrating against them, we were demonstrating against the projects.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: Oh, I see.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Just like I told you, Congress passed a law that we had to work every day for the \$95, see, instead of working just so many hours. I think it came to about a dollar an hour or something like that . . .

MARY MCCCHESNEY: The restaurant was at the end of the building.

MRS.LENSHAW: Where did you do the color chart on the walls?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: It has the Senior Citizens now.

MRS.LENSHAW: When did you do the color chart on the wall?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh, that, that room has no color chart that just . . .

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Oh . . .

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Are you talking about Acquatic Park? Now this room is used by Senior Citizens.

MRS.LENSCHAW: Oh, that room yes. Yes, that's right . . . it had a restaurant.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes, a restaurant.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: You were demonstrating at the Acquatic Park then?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes. Because they wanted to put in more hours for the same pay.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: I think for the same demonstration I was in downtown.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh, you weren't at Acquatic Park. I see.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: They probably had them all over the city.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, different areas. I can't remember just what it was.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: Do you remember what year it was? How far along in the project? Was it fairly early in the project?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No, no no no no, it wasn't.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: Was it toward the end?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well . . .

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: You were still at Acquatic Park.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: I think we were sill working at Acquatic Park but I . . .

MARY MCCCHESNEY: That must have been '37.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No, no. I didn't work then. I know it was later than that. '39, '40, '41, '42, I don't know.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Well, I went over to the Fair and started on Volz's job late in '38. I was on First Street working on cartoons. And it was much later after that, that we had this demonstration.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh, yes.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: So it probably . . . well, it wasn't before you got off the Acquatic Park job.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: I imagine. But you know, it's a long time. I can't remember. I can't say just what I did.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Probably the later part of '39.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: During the time that you worked at Treasure Island on the Herman Volz mural, did you meet Diego Rivera? Were you acquainted with him?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No. I didn't meet him. I met the Bruton Sisters and I danced the Hambo with one of the sisters. I don't know which one. How many were there?

MARY MCCCHESNEY: Three, I believe.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Oh yes, I met Cocorubius Covarrubias though.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: The Mexican painter?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh. I met his wife and she was a dancer and I got acquainted with Covarrubias. Ann Medalie worked with Covarrubias and painted that mural with Covarrubias . . .

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: The map of the . . .

ERNEST LENSCHAW: The map of the . . . what was it . . . this . . .

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: The Pacific.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: The countries of the Pacific. The Pacific Basin they called that thing and what was his name that was doing that?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Sotomayer.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Sotomayer was doing that job and of course, I met him and know him.

MARY MCCHESENEY: He was working with Covarrubias?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No, he had his own project. He made a big sort of geographical map of the Pacific Basin. Wasn't that what he called that?

MRS.LENSCHAW: No, it was something else. I saw a picture of it. It was called something in Spanish, it's name was something else.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: No.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Well, anyway it was all the different countries.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh, the countries that bordered on the Pacific like . . .

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: The continents.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: More or less like North America, Chili and South America and all these countries down around there and the Philippines and . . .

MRS.LENSCHAW: Ann Medalie, you said, Ann Medalie. Her name was Medale [incorrect]

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, she worked with Covarrubias when Covarrubias was doing that map and he was doing it in some kind of lacquer. I forget now but I think he was sorry he ever started doing it with that stuff because it didn't work out too well in regards to its workability.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Fascinating in its detail.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh, he was very good, very fine.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: For a total of time you were on he WPA projects for about four years.

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yes.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What did you think of that period of American Art History? Do you have any general comments on it?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Yeh, I sure have. I think it was a great period. I think it was one of the greatest periods of American Art. It was one of the finest projects that has ever been . . . what should I say? . . . achieved in the history of American Art. That's my opinion.

MARY MCCHESENEY: How do you think it affected you yourself as an artist?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, I think it was one of the very happy times, one of my very happy times in . . . what shall I say . . . in my endeavors in the arts.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Why was it so happy? Because you were working with other artists?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: Well, you had a certain income and you didn't have to worry about that and there were many great projects that were on a large scope. Well, it was just stimulating! Just yes . . . other artists too, I'd say working with other artists was a great thing and the whole thing was on such a big scale and the conditions were very favorable toward art in general.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Do you think it would be a good idea for the United States to set up another project like the WPA?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: I certainly do.

MARY MCCHESENEY: If they did do something like this, would you have any suggestions that might improve the situation for the artist? Did you have any objections to the way the WPA project was run during the time that you

were on it? Any things that were difficult for you as a painter or that you think might be improved in one way or another?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: In such a short time that we have together, it would be very hard for me to tell you just what I think should be done. I mean, it's something that I think should be really thought over very carefully. I don't like to make a statement that that's what they should do. If I had more time to kind of think it over, I probably could say something but right at the moment, I just can't say what could be done or what should be done.

MARY MCCHESENEY: But, in general you think it was a very fruitful period?

ERNEST LENSCHAW: I certainly do, most certainly do. It was a very good thing. It was . . . a lot of those things that were done during that period were never done before. And never after have I seen anything like it. And I don't think anybody else has. It was a unique thing in American History of art, tremendous!

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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