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Oral history interview with Suzanne Scheuer,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Suzanne Scheuer on July 29, 1964. The interview took place in Santa Cruz, California, and was conducted by Mary Fuller McChesney for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Mrs. McChesney's husband, Robert McChesney, was also present.

Suzanne Scheuer and Mary Fuller McChesney have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MARY McCHESNEY: This is Mary Fuller McChesney interviewing Suzanne Scheuer at her home in Santa Cruz, California. The date is July 29, 1964. Miss Scheuer, first I'd like to ask you, where did you get your art training?

SUZANNE SCHEUER: I got my art training first at the California school of Arts and Crafts when it was still in Berkeley and graduated with, first, a fine arts major, and then later I went back and got a teacher's credential. Ten years later I went to the California School of Fine Arts and studied mural painting with Ray Boynton. I was there two and a half or three years.

MRS. McCHESNEY: That's the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes. It now has another name.

MRS. McCHESNEY: San Francisco Art Institute, I believe it's called.

MS. SCHEUER: Umhum.

MRS. McCHESNEY: And you studied mural painting there with Ray Boynton. He was doing actual fresco painting, wasn't he?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes, we had strictly fresco painting mainly and painted all the walls of the building itself, first inside and then outside on the walls, and then we also did some tempera painting, studied old master's technique.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Had you done any fresco painting over at the California School of Arts and Crafts:

MS. SCHEUER: No. None.

MRS. McCHESNEY: So that studying with Ray Boynton...?

MS. SCHEUER: Oh, I had traveled in Europe after my first few years teaching and that made me interested in mural painting...

MRS. McCHESNEY: I see.

MS. SCHEUER: ...and on board ship there were some people who had studied mural painting in Europe and so, when I came back to San Francisco, I decided to give it another try, give the Art School another try. I didn't really like teaching too well, especially not in grade school or in high school.

MRS. McCHESNEY: And how did you make your first connection with the government-sponsored Art Projects?

MS. SCHEUER: Well, after, or while, I was going to the California School of Fine Arts, I did some small murals for individuals just for the experience and also for a settlement house in San Francisco. And so when this big art project of the Coit Tower was announced, the persons in charge of it were looking for people of experience and I was one of the few in San Francisco who had experience working on walls.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Who was it that contacted you? Was it Walter Heil? From the De Young Museum?

MS. SCHEUER: Well, officially it was Walter Heil but as an artist it was Ralph Stackpole, who was in charge, pretty much in charge of picking the artists, and then Dr. Heil had, oh, technical connections but not as artists; he didn't know much about the artists.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Were you assigned a wall somewhere in Coit Tower on which to paint a mural?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes, I was assigned one of the twelve-by-twelve walls downstairs.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Oh, you had one on the first floor then?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes.

MRS. McCHESNEY: On which side of the building as you enter, which one is yours?

MS. SCHEUER: As you enter, you go to your right. First, on the immediate right, you have a panel by John Howard of the oil industry. And then next to it, I've forgotten what that one is, actually. Then, as you walk past the window, then the other corner, I had the first wall. Mine is the newspaper printing industry.

MRS. McCHESNEY: That puts you near Bernard Zakheim.

MS. SCHEUER: Right next to Bernard Zakheim.

MRS. McCHESNEY: At the time you were given a panel at the Coit Tower to do a fresco, were you assigned a subject or were you given a choice?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes. The joke of it is I was first given a choice and I chose the oil industry. I was very enthusiastic to have done that. But I was also very shy and always kept in the background, and other artists who were better known got ahead. Then John Howard came along and asked for oil, evidently, so I was pushed to newspaper which was as far removed from my interest or knowledge as anything could possibly be. I was very shy. I went to the San Francisco chronicle newspaper building. They were very, very helpful. I was allowed to go into any department and make sketches there, and Hebe Daum, who is now Hebe Stackpole, assisted me.

MRS. McCHESNEY: In doing the sketches or in the final painting?

MS. SCHEUER: She did some of the final parts of the painting....

MRS. McCHESNEY: When you were assigned this newspaper project or to paint the newspaper industry, you said that you began by going to the Chronicle offices or to their plant...?

MS. SCHEUER: To the whole plant, yes. First, I went to the editor's office and made a drawing of the editor at his desk. Then I think to the linotype--no--well, it doesn't matter--all the different steps....

MRS. McCHESNEY: All the different steps?

MS. SCHEUER: All the different steps.

MRS. McCHESNEY: How long did it take you to do this kind of preliminary drawing and sketching?

MS. SCHEUER: Frankly, I've forgotten how long, maybe a few weeks and, at the end of this time, I tried to make a composition. I don't remember how long we worked there, about six months, I think, off and on.

MRS. McCHESNEY: After you had done the sketches, then you made a cartoon, of course?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes. We made a full-size cartoon on the wall in charcoal and later on, as it was gradually established, you make a tracing of it and then you keep that and, when the wall is plastered, you have your tracing, you see, and you put that on the wall with charcoal through the little holes in the drawing, and you don't necessarily keep to it exactly. That depends on the individual, on how they work. It was very interesting to work there. There were about forty artists and assistants and they got along amazingly well. And every day you would go and look at what the other person had done, you know. And you'd become so interested in the little sections; the whole thing probably doesn't look that good any more but, section-by-section, it's very interesting.
Robert McChesney: Who did the plaster work for you?

MS. SCHEUER: We had professional plasterers, supposedly the best ones that could be had. Oh, another interesting part of that job was that we had to choose shifts because we couldn't all work--the plasterers couldn't have plaster ready for everyone on the same day at the same time. So I chose the first shift and that was five o'clock in the morning. I lived on the opposite side of the hill. I lived on Russian Hill so I felt absolutely idiotic. In February I would walk in the rain early in the morning, down the Hill, up Telegraph Hill, and I would arrive and some boys would be sweeping the place and the plasterers would be working there then and that was really fun. And then gradually the other artists would arrive.

MR. McCHESNEY: Did you do the complete job by yourself or did you have an assistant?

MS. SCHEUER: I had Hebe Daum as an assistant.

MR. McCHESNEY: Oh, that's right.

MS. SCHEUER: Who was a better artist than I am.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Didn't she do a mural there too?

MS. SCHEUER: No. She did her own work later on the WPA; oh, she did some beautiful things which were also destroyed.

MRS. McCHESNEY: There was about a six months' period that you were working on Coit Tower...?

MS. SCHEUER: Well, I'm not reliable about time at all; frankly, I don't know. I think about six months.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Well, you must have been there at Coit Tower during some of the commotions, like the time that--wasn't his name Clifford Wight--got in trouble with the San Francisco Examiner newspaper. Do you remember anything about that?

MS. SCHEUER: I don't know too much about it but it was all a lot of unnecessary nonsense about Communism, you know. It was ridiculous.

MRS. McCHESNEY: The stories I've heard indicate that it was mainly the newspaper's idea, almost as though the Examiner newspaper sort of built up this fuss over practically nothing.

MS. SCHEUER: Well, something happened to do with my mural--I did all of my drawings at the Chronicle and so, when I ended up the mural, the boy was holding a paper in the mural, and on it was "Chronicle." It was sinful. Then came a big fuss, and Dr. Heil had something to do with that, and I had to change the name to a nondescript name, a meaningless name, which seemed absolutely silly to me. And in the meantime, Victor Arnautoff had a newsstand in his painting with all the names of real papers and magazines....

MR. McCHESNEY: Yes, and particularly The Peoples World.

MS. SCHEUER: Yes, and, oh, Zakheim had all kinds of Communist suggestions on his mural....

MR. McCHESNEY: Marxist literature....

MS. SCHEUER: Yes, yes. And so, this year, or a year or two ago, when we restored the murals, when we retouched them, you know, because they had been scratched on, I took the liberty to change the name back to "Chronicle"...

MRS. McCHESNEY: Good for you.

MS. SCHEUER: ...because it seemed so unnecessary, you know.

MR. McCHESNEY: What did you originally call it, I mean the newspaper?

MS. SCHEUER: I've forgotten, really.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Some paper that didn't exist...?

MS. SCHEUER: Nothing interesting.

MR. McCHESNEY: San Francisco Post....

MRS. McCHESNEY: You did work on the redoing of the murals with Dorothy...?

MS. SCHEUER: Dorothy Puccinelli. She did a beautiful job.

MRS. McCHESNEY: I've heard that it was marvelous. We were there when it was in process of being restored. That was last year--in 1963?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes, I think 1963.

MRS. McCHESNEY: How long did it take you to do that restoring job?

MS. SCHEUER: At least two weeks.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Two weeks? Is that all?

MS. SCHEUER: I think so. Mine wasn't damaged very much.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Oh, you worked just on your own? I see.

MS. SCHEUER: Oh, yes, I just worked on my own. Dorothy worked there a long time. I don't know how long, at least a year, I think.

MR. McCHESNEY: There was a lot of water damage in there, too, wasn't there?

MS. SCHEUER: I didn't see any.

MR. McCHESNEY: On the east side, the tops of them were quite damaged....

MS. SCHEUER: Oh, I didn't...I wasn't aware of that, whether they had already been retouched, I don't know, when I was there.

MRS. McCHESNEY: What was the damage on your mural? Had it been cut into...?

MS. SCHEUER: Oh, a few scratches, yes, very slight. But Dorothy demanded such a meticulous job that it did take some time to do.

MR. McCHESNEY: Did you fill in the scratches with plaster or something and paint over it?

MS. SCHEUER: No, you paint over with very fine brushstrokes. I remember when we went to buy the brushes and I went with Dorothy and I picked out the same kind of brushes I did the mural with, and she was buying brushes with three hairs in them. She said, "Oh, no, no, no," but I finally ended up with the same thing.

MR. McCHESNEY: Well, then the scratches weren't actually deep enough to show through after you painted over them?

MS. SCHEUER: No, They didn't show at all.

MR. McCHESNEY: In other words, just the surface painted and scratched out but nothing cut into the plaster...?

MS. SCHEUER: Well, in some cases maybe it was; in mine it wasn't. The worst things were naughty details added to figures; you can imagine what they were. And Dorothy had the pleasure of doing all of those great big figures.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Now they've made arrangements for the surface to be roped off so people can't get that close to it, can't vandalize it.

MS. SCHEUER: I don't know what they have decided to do. That I didn't find out.

MRS. McCHESNEY: I understand that while Coit Tower was in the process of being painted, there was another difficulty that you were engaged in. I saw a photograph of a demonstration that the artists had; they walked off the job at the time that Diego Rivera was having trouble in New York with his Rockefeller Plaza mural. Do you remember anything about that?

MS. SCHEUER: I don't remember, no.

MRS. McCHESNEY: George Harris's wife had a photograph and it was from a newspaper of the time of a group of people from Coit Tower all in their white overalls and everything and they had gathered outside to protest the destruction of the mural in Rockefeller Plaza.

MS. SCHEUER: Probably...I wasn't in on it. But I have never been much of a joiner or known what was going on, frankly. There are always a few artists who, you know, are all for forming unions. Zakheim for instance--I don't know whether he wanted to start a union--but anyhow, prior to that time--oh no, was it after that time.... Oh, it was after that time that they were planning to have a Fair, you know, the San Francisco Exposition in 1939. Then, just a year or two prior to that, the artists formed all kinds of unions. Oh, we were going to get big mural jobs for all of us, but then there were different factions in the group, you see. There were the ones who were mainly political and there were the ones who didn't really care too much.

MR. McCHESNEY: Well, I remember the artists' union headquarters where they had a big art supply store....

MS. SCHEUER: In San Francisco?

MR. McCHESNEY: Yes. I joined the artists union in '38 I think it was.

MS. SCHEUER: Well, I was a member of the artists union at that time, I think. I even took the notes one evening. No, I....

MR. McCHESNEY: Ray Strong, I think, ran the union. Of course, they had what they called a sort of artists' cooperative store and they had all kinds of things, of which I never bought any. I don't know how long that lasted.

MS. SCHEUER: Well, I don't remember really.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Who were some of the other people who were doing murals at Coit Tower while you were there? Maxine Albro, do you remember her?

MS. SCHEUER: Maxine Albro, first of all, and Ray Boynton.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Where is the Boynton mural?

MS. SCHEUER: Facing you, right as you enter the front door, right over the entrance to the little office and the elevator. Ralph Stackpole did a beautiful mural there; I think his is by far the best....

MRS. McCHESNEY: I haven't seen it for years....

MS. SCHEUER: A very long panel in the center. The tower was cone-shaped, in the center of the Tower you have this....

MRS. McCHESNEY: Core sort of thing. What's inside that? What is that?

MS. SCHEUER: Well, the elevator mainly and stairs. You can walk all the way up, and there are a few little rooms, I believe, upstairs. The caretaker of the Tower lived there for a while. While we were working there, he was living there with his wife, but I don't think they do that any more. Perhaps they do, I don't know.

MRS. McCHESNEY: There were murals painted on the stairway by Lucien Labaudt?

MS. SCHEUER: Oh, Yes.

MRS. McCHESNEY: And up on the second floor there were--we weren't able to get up there, at least I wasn't....

MS. SCHEUER: Yes, on the second floor there was Edith Hamlin, a small one, and the Japanese boy, I've forgotten his name, and also the wife of Robert [actually Henry] Howard.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Oh, Adeline Kent?

MS. SCHEUER: No, the one who lived in England, a very good painter.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Oh, Jane Berlandina.

MS. SCHEUER: Jane Berlandina did one there.

MR. McCHESNEY: That's right. In fact, her mural is almost completely different from all the rest of them.

MS. SCHEUER: Oh, it didn't fit in there at all.

MR. McCHESNEY: All the rest of them were social realism.

MS. SCHEUER: I don't think that the technique--well, I think, actually, artistically, the murals are not good, but they are interesting as a start. Just imagine, most of the artists had never done murals and I had never really....In my mural class we weren't really taught anything about design. I should have been because my design is my weak point in my mural; I'm much too realistic. But...and so some of them are very bad, by artists who in easel work do pretty good work, but I won't say which I think are bad, naturally.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Well, it must have been a pretty difficult--well, a challenging, proposition--to just get out of art school and have some very limited fresco technique and then suddenly be provided with an opportunity to do a twelve-by-twelve wall which is something else again and unlike small school work.

MS. SCHEUER: But at art school we did large things, too.

MRS. McCHESNEY: You did?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Were any of those permanent?

MS. SCHEUER: They covered them over; they could be washed and shown again, I think.

MRS. McCHESNEY: They were done in the building?

MS. SCHEUER: In the building and they're all whitewashed. I did a terrible one there that I'm glad they whitewashed.

MR. McCHESNEY: Where was this?

MS. SCHEUER: In the School of Fine Arts Building.

MR. McCHESNEY: Oh, yes.

MS. SCHEUER: Anne Rice O'Hanlon was talking about that. She must have been the same mural class.

MRS. McCHESNEY: No, she wasn't. Her husband was.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Dick O'Hanlon?

MS. SCHEUER: Dick O'Hanlon, yes.

MRS. McCHESNEY: She apparently studied with Ray Boynton, though, or maybe it was someone else....

MS. SCHEUER: Yes. I don't know whether she had or not; I think probably she was in another class. I don't think Ann was in my class. We had very small classes.

MRS. McCHESNEY: They were very small?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes. A very wonderful group we had there for a short while.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Boynton studied in Europe. Hadn't he studied fresco technique in Europe?

MS. SCHEUER: I don't know. He didn't talk very much about Europe that I recall. Funny, I don't remember.

MRS. McCHESNEY: After you finished the Colt Tower mural, did you stay on the PWA or did you go to some other project?

MS. SCHEUER: That was the end of that project. I went back to school where I was painting this mural in the halls of the California School of Fine Arts. While I was there, I think the WPA got a start and, in order to go to school, I used to work for my board and room. So I was poor but not hungry or anything. So one day one of the students walked by and he said, "Suzanne! Why don't you get on WPA?" I said, "WPA?" Well, I said, "I'm not starving; I'm not penniless." "Oh well, you can declare yourself. You're eligible." So I looked into it and this is a thing that still today, oh, bothers me a little. Any woman that's in moderate health can get a job today doing housework. So you cannot honestly say that you cannot get a job. But people don't want to do housework. But I did it while I was going to school. And so I did as others do, I declared poverty and got on the WPA. And that was the time it was very poorly organized, very amateurish, you know, and I was allowed to do I think most anything I wanted. What did I do?

MRS. McCHESNEY: Was it in Berkeley or Oakland that you first got on?

MS. SCHEUER: Oh, in San Francisco.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Oh, In San Francisco.

MS. SCHEUER: Always San Francisco.

MRS. McCHESNEY: The reason I asked that was because I interviewed a woman named Mary Henry, who was on the Oakland project, and she had just graduated from Arts and Crafts. And one of her main problems of staying on the project was that the social worker kept trying to get her to go to do housework.

MS. SCHEUER: Oh!

MRS. McCHESNEY: But you were in San Francisco at that time?

MS. SCHEUER: I was living in San Francisco but I have forgotten what I first did on WPA. I think, perhaps, I first was given a panel to do for what might be any grammar school and I chose as a subject the merry-go-round and

the playground, and I did not finish that because the project was changed and the location was changed for some reason. The next thing I did was lithography. It took quite a while to develop a style, and also I have always had a sort of conscience. I felt that, if you were working for the government and getting paid, you should deliver the goods, something that they could use. I mean, I have the feeling that it should be practical, so I chose to do a series of animals, of native California animals. I think that's the last thing I did on WPA. And they were going very well. I liked them, and they were liked fairly well by the artists in charge, not too well, perhaps, but anyhow I think I was getting better. I have them right here; I'll show you some of them. And then I think the Fair came along about that time and I demonstrated lithography in the Fine Arts Building at the Fair for a short time....

MR. McCHESNEY: Was that for the Project?

MS. SCHEUER: Well, yes, I guess so. Artists from the Project worked there and demonstrated. I think it was known as WPA work.

MR. McCHESNEY: I know I worked in the same building. I know there was a tremendous lot of artists working there; whether they were working for the WPA or not.... How many of them were on the Project and demonstrating, I don't know. I was on the Herman Volz mosaic there, you know.

MS. SCHEUER: Oh, umhum. Well, then, at one time...now, I don't know just exactly when that was but, while we were on WPA, different artists were taken off the WPA and were promoted and given Post Office murals to do....

MRS. McCHESNEY: Through the Treasury Department, wasn't that?

MS. SCHEUER: Well, now--I was on that, too, later. I think this was the Treasury Department, I believe, but, out of a clear sky, we were handed these Post Office jobs and I got the prize Post office, it was really a scream, many artists would like to have had that job that was the Berkeley Post Office....

MR. McCHESNEY: Well, did you do a mural over there?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes, but I couldn't get an idea for that mural. Should these be taped, should negative ideas be taped?

MR. McCHESNEY: Sure!

MS. SCHEUER: Oh, lots of trouble on that. [Subject: History of Berkeley-oil on canvas]. Couldn't get an idea. And it was a very awkward shape [over the door to the Postmaster's office] and the Postmaster did not want to move the clock. Oh, I can't blame it on the Postmaster, really. I just didn't have any inspiration ever, so that job dragged on. We were paid by the month for that and better than the WPA paid.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Oh, that must have been the Treasury, TRAP? [She did do this mural on TRAP. Note: mural has "WPA" on it.]

MS. SCHEUER: No. See, the first project the Treasury did, they just gave you a job off the WPA. The next thing that came along were these competitive jobs where you made a design for a large post office.

MR. McCHESNEY: What year was this? Do you remember? I'm asking because I'm confused; I can't remember the dates....

MS. SCHEUER: 19--, I just saw a date upstairs on something, it was 1938--whether it was these-- these were 1938, so that must have been about 1934....

MRS. McCHESNEY: '34? That early? It couldn't have been, could it? Because the Coit Tower was '33, wasn't it? '33 and '34?

MS. SCHEUER: Oh! Oh! It might have been about '36 then.... [Note: Mural dated 1937.]

MRS. McCHESNEY: I think it must have been a bit later.

MS. SCHEUER: '36, because these came afterwards; these [the lithographs] were in '38. Yes, it was '37, yes.

MRS. McCHESNEY: How large is this Berkeley panel, the panel at Berkeley?

MS. SCHEUER: Twelve feet high and about eight feet wide, I think.

MR. McCHESNEY: I think you solved your problem of the clock very well.

MS. SCHEUER: Oh, that thing; it looks better in reality, because the color is nice but it's a slick. I don't like it really.

MRS. McCHESNEY: It's still there; it's still in place? [Yes, LF]

MS. SCHEUER: I think so. I haven't been there; I haven't looked recently.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Who else worked on the Berkeley Post Office?

MS. SCHEUER: That's all.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Didn't David Slivka, the sculptor...?

MS. SCHEUER: He did a sculpture, yes. [In front of the P.O. building.]

MRS. McCHESNEY: Then there were just the two of you?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes, but he didn't work there so I didn't see him there at all. He did the sculpture in his own studio and it was installed there later.

MR. McCHESNEY: Oh! I see.

MS. SCHEUER: And I didn't do this on the wall, either.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Oh, Was this done on Canvas? It wasn't a fresco?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes. Canvas.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Oh! So you did this in your own studio?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes. Well, I had to rent a hall. My landlord had a hall in San Francisco that was not used and I worked there.

MRS. McCHESNEY: This is done in oil paint on canvas?

MS. SCHEUER: No, it was done in egg tempera, egg-oil emulsion, a drawing, a shaded drawing, and then transferred with charcoal with color washes over it.

MRS. McCHESNEY: About how long did you work on this project?

MS. SCHEUER: I had the project for about a year and a half but I didn't do it, and I wrote these letters to Washington saying I simply had no ideas, and they were so very, very, very encouraging. They would say, well, now, that's all right, Miss Scheuer, if you would like to do something else while you're waiting.... So I did watercolors at Rockaway Beach while they were building the highway along the Coast....

MRS. McCHESNEY: Down south of San Francisco.

MS. SCHEUER: Umhum. Stayed there and sent them watercolors of that project.

MRS. McCHESNEY: How long were you doing that?

MS. SCHEUER: A month. That was interesting, very interesting, to see them work on the steepest part of that road right along the Coast, you know, the one that keeps sliding...

MR. McCHESNEY: Yes.

MS. SCHEUER:...and so I did endless watercolors of bulldozers, cliff sides. They gave artists these without even asking if you wanted them, you know. And later on they had the post office mural competitions, which had nothing to do with PA any more, or anything else of that sort. Anyone could try out for those. And I liked that very much. I was very satisfied with that arrangement. They would offer a competition for a large post office in San Francisco, Dallas, anything. And then, if you wished, you could submit designs and naturally only one person would get that big post office job. But they would just simply give you a small post office then.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Oh! So that, even though you didn't win, you got a job?

MS. SCHEUER: They didn't give them to everyone by any means; out of fifty or seventy-five artists that tried out, about seven were given small jobs. I was given two separate small jobs in Texas, in towns about which I knew nothing. So I chose an Indian theme for them...

MR. McCHESNEY: They're very nice.

MS. SCHEUER: ...and I think they turned out rather well; I rather like them.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Do you know what towns they're in?

MS. SCHEUER: Oh yes. I had to go over there and see that they were installed. These were done on canvas....

MR. McCHESNEY: Did you do these in San Francisco:

MS. SCHEUER: Yes.

MRS. McCHESNEY: How large are they?

MS. SCHEUER: Well, I think about twelve-by-five or something--twelve feet long anyway....

MRS. McCHESNEY: Oh, this was done by the Section of Fine Arts of the Treasury Dept., it says right here, in 1938.

MS. SCHEUER: Oh, good!

MRS. McCHESNEY: And what town was this?

MS. SCHEUER: One was Eastland, Texas and the other is....

MR. McCHESNEY: That's four-by-twelve....

MRS. McCHESNEY: So you actually took the train to Texas after you painted these?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes, and it was wonderful because I had to go to install this roll of painting. You had to go to Texas and I had never been there. And so the next time I took a friend with me. We had to go on the bus; I didn't have a car. And we felt we were so near Mexico that we'd just take a peek, you know, at the border. And then we thought, well, maybe we could afford to Monterey. Then we decided we could afford to go to Mexico City. We were there a whole month and we had a very good trip.

MR. McCHESNEY: Did the government pay your way back to San Francisco?

MS. SCHEUER: They didn't pay our way, no.

MR. McCHESNEY: No?

MS. SCHEUER: No, as I recall they didn't.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Well, for this kind of commission of the Treasury, the Section of Fine Arts of the Treasury Department, if you won a competition, weren't you given a flat fee?

MS. SCHEUER: A flat fee--\$750 I think it was....

MRS. McCHESNEY: And that was to cover your time and your materials?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes. Just everything. Everything. But if they were doing it today, they would pay more, of course....

MR. McCHESNEY: I hope!

MS. SCHEUER: In those days that wasn't so bad. In fact, for me it was wonderful. I....

MR. McCHESNEY: Really?

MS. SCHEUER: But there were always artists who were always complaining, you know, and they felt they should have money for their design. I didn't think so; I was quite happy to make designs free of charge.

MRS. McCHESNEY: You mean for the designs that weren't accepted?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes. For submitting a design you'd get paid. Now if I got paid for submitting a design, I would be nervous about it and self-conscious about it and this way nobody knew you were submitting a design and you could take your time and you had a long time for it....

MRS. McCHESNEY: How did you find out about these projects?

MS. SCHEUER: Oh, they were well advertised. We were all sent these forms. Since I was already on their list, it meant I was sent forms. And they are talking about doing it again today, I think.

MR. McCHESNEY: Well, it's the same thing; I think about the last one since the War was the job that Anton Refregier did on Rincon Annex Post Office in San Francisco, finished in 1946.

MS. SCHEUER: Yes. I liked that.

MR. McCHESNEY: I worked with him on that.

MS. SCHEUER: Oh, you did!

MR. McCHESNEY: I prepared his grounds and did a little painting now and then.

MS. SCHEUER: They didn't destroy any of those, did they?

MR. McCHESNEY: Well, the only thing they actually changed was the portrait of Roosevelt.

MS. SCHEUER: Was he not on there?

MR. McCHESNEY: They removed that. Well, actually Refregier didn't get the portrait in; they decided to take it out before...the Republicans were making a big row about it so....

MRS. McCHESNEY: Oh, how...?

MR. McCHESNEY: Actually the Post Office is dedicated to Roosevelt too, you know.

MS. SCHEUER: Oh, I think that is sickening, really.

MR. McCHESNEY: Isn't that strange?

MS. SCHEUER: It's so strange from thirty years looking back at it. So petty, you know. I think we owe all these projects to the Roosevelt family to begin with, don't you, indirectly?

MR. McCHESNEY: Apparently they had a great deal to do with it.

MS. SCHEUER: Oh, I think everything; I think everything. I think he had vision, you know, and I think Kennedy would have done the same thing in time but I don't imagine now.... Why did they have such opposition to the WPA in general? All the fun they made of it, all the jokes, all the impractical...and was talked about, the wheelbarrow brigades and whatnot. I happen to know three or four men that were completely rehabilitated through the WPA, one a lawyer and one an office worker. It really put them back on their feet.

MRS. McCHESNEY: At a time when it was desperately needed....

MS. SCHEUER: I think it was a wonderful thing and then, of course, the Art Project and all the Art Projects, the Writers and the Theatre; it's too bad that they stopped so many of the projects on account of supposedly Communists....

MR. McCHESNEY: Well, I think that was just a Congressional rationalization, so to speak, to eliminate the projects.

MS. SCHEUER: It was just doing good things; they were just beginning to do some real good things, in the theatre and combining the dance with the theatre. Just the thing that should be done--and then they stop it off. It's maddening. I think that's what this country needs today, especially, is greater development of the arts; otherwise it's going to be nothing but engineers and mathematicians and the emphasis entirely on one side. And it's very dangerous.

MR. McCHESNEY: On these jobs...of course, when you got these jobs, then you were off WPA?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes. You're off.

MR. McCHESNEY: Then, when you finished this, you went back on?

MS. SCHEUER: No.

MR. McCHESNEY: This was the last job you did for the government?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes, and I think perhaps, after all, that job at the Fine Arts Building came after that. That was a

separate job. I think the Berkeley mural took me off the WPA and then came these [TRAP]. Because, when I was working at the San Francisco Fair in 1931, an old classmate of mine from the Berkeley days came in and she said, "Oh, Suzanne, and what are you going to do after this?" I said, "I don't know." She said, "Are you interested in teaching?" I said, "No, no, unless it were a part time job in a college or something." She said, "Well, perhaps I could arrange it." And pretty soon I heard and she had arranged it.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Another mural?

MS. SCHEUER: No, this was teaching, a part time teaching job,...

MR. McCHESNEY: This is at Arts and Crafts? [The College of Arts & Crafts-Oakland, California]

MS. SCHEUER: No. At the College of the Pacific.

MR. McCHESNEY: OH, Stockton?

MRS. McCHESNEY: At Stockton, California, at the College of the Pacific there?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes.

MRS. McCHESNEY: I was going to ask you about after you had completed the Coit Tower frescoes, that was the wet plaster technique, and you went to doing these oil panels....

MS. SCHEUER: They were tempera; they were not oils. The technique is more like fresco because you use your transparent glazes, you see, no paint colors at all.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Did you ever go back to doing any frescos on wet plaster? I had a notion that you had done a fresco in a church in San Francisco somewhere near the Presidio.

MS. SCHEUER: Oh, I did a panel in glass which was installed on the wall of a church because they liked it so well. That's all. It was not on the project.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Oh, this was done while you were a student at the ...?

MS. SCHEUER: While I was a student at the California School of Fine Arts, yes...one of the better things I had done.

MRS. McCHESNEY: We are just looking at some of the lithographs of California animals that Suzanne Scheuer did on the Lithography Project in San Francisco.

MS. SCHEUER: Yes.

MRS. McCHESNEY: How large a series was this? How many did you do?

MS. SCHEUER: Well, I think I did about eight, and then I was taken off the Project. But I would like to have continued these because it takes all so long to catch on, you know how it is these days. And I would have worked more freely, gradually. But it was fun doing the preliminary drawings and I did them. I worked. I made endless drawings at the Golden Gate Park of the buffalo and, at first, I used to think that buffalo were such ugly animals and I gradually began to think they were beautiful. And I made drawings of the coyote at the Zoo, the little ones, and I must confess I looked at the other drawings, and at the stuffed animals when I couldn't find any little ones.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Little coyotes....

MS. SCHEUER: ...little coyotes. Oh, I had a rather nice one of...and the mountain lions I adored doing, and also the raccoon was fun. And then I did drawings of the elk at the Zoo; I arrived five minutes after the baby was born; the mother was just licking the baby and he was standing on his wobbly feet, you know.

MR. McCHESNEY: Did you do these under Ray Bertrand?

MS. SCHEUER: No. I did them myself. He was working there, yes.

MR. McCHESNEY: He didn't do the printing?

MS. SCHEUER: No. This was done by a professional German printer.

MR. McCHESNEY: Oh, I see.

MS. SCHEUER: No, I worked with Ray Bertrand when I first got on the project and I did some drawings for children in black and white and he was the printer then. And in this other project we had a German printer of the old school whose ambition was to make a perfect copy of your drawings. One time he made a misprint which made the drawings so much better. Oh, it looked so rich and dark and really looked beautiful, much better than my drawing, and I was thrilled to death. But this man was a sort of fanatic and he took a hard crayon and he wiped it cross those prints. He had about ten of them and I wasn't allowed to have them. He destroyed them right in front of my nose.

MR. McCHESNEY: Oh, that's a shame.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Because they weren't perfect?

MS. SCHEUER: Because they were not the same as the drawing. Oh, he was a real difficult one to work with, very difficult.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Was he on WPA?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes. He was the printer. You see, they had two who were really old printers who were used to working with these stones. They are very rare; they aren't used at all any more now. Except by artists, but not commercially.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Were these lithographs of the wild animals of California distributed to the schools?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes, all of the lithographs. They had them in a portfolio and any school could look them over and pick out what they wanted. Now, I don't know whether they ever took mine. Some of them, I imagine, were in schools, I don't know. I just thought I sort of liked the idea of a definite series of something....

MR. McCHESNEY: I think they did some terrific things on the lithography project.

MS. SCHEUER: Oh, yes, they did some beautiful work.

MR. McCHESNEY: I think some of the best stuff that came out of there was on the Lithograph Project.

MS. SCHEUER: Umhum.

MR. McCHESNEY: Of course, I got to see more of the lithographs around because all the artists were allowed to keep one copy or something like that, weren't you?

MS. SCHEUER: We were allowed four copies for a while and later on we were allowed three and then we also managed to get few more--misprints and so on, you know.

MR. McCHESNEY: Well, that's why I got to see so many of them, more informally than you had the opportunity of seeing paintings and things like that that were done in the studios on the Easel Project.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Did they ever have exhibitions in San Francisco of the work done on the Lithography Project?

MS. SCHEUER: I don't think so. Do you remember? I don't think so. In the building itself, but not many people would know about that but in the office of WPA, in the headquarters, I think they did hang a few things.

MR. McCHESNEY: There were watercolors and lithos around, I remember seeing those; I seem to remember that. I may be completely wrong in this but at the Art Center, which was also a WPA project, they had an art school and taught a life class and had several classes, etching, no lithography; but I do believe they had shows there. Now, whether these shows were WPA art work or not, I don't know. It might have been just of the students who were going to school. But you probably don't remember the Art Center at all?

MS. SCHEUER: I don't think I was ever there.

MR. McCHESNEY: It was on Kearny and Washington Streets.

MS. SCHEUER: I went once a month somewhere, I think, for our paycheck, something like that, but I don't know whether that was the Art Center or not. Yes, I think a friend of mine was either teaching or posing or doing something there--Helen Dunham, do you remember? MARY McCHESNEY; Oh, I think Julian Williams mentioned her name that she was on the Project.

MS. SCHEUER: Yes, she was working entirely away from me. She lived in the same house, but I don't remember what she did on the Art Project but she was on for a while any how, I know.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Most of your artist friends were on the Project, is that true?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Who were some of those people? What were they doing?

MS. SCHEUER: Well, Hebe Daum was doing fresco murals at the State College, the old building, San Francisco State. And John Moxom was working there and he was doing murals. And David Slivka was doing his own studio sculpture. I can't think of any others. I don't think Ann Rice was ever on WPA. I don't recall that she was; maybe she was.

MRS. McCHESNEY: In Kentucky, but not in San Francisco. [Ann Rice O'Hanlon was on WPA in San Francisco.]

MS. SCHEUER: Oh!

MRS. McCHESNEY: She has a mural in a post office in Lexington [And at the U. of Kentucky]. It was either PWP or WPA; I guess it was TRAP. It was after she had left San Francisco.

MS. SCHEUER: Oh! She did it the same way that I did.

MRS. McCHESNEY: After she had left San Francisco.

MS. SCHEUER: Umhum.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Did you do any smaller murals for any small post offices in California?

MS. SCHEUER: No, these are the only two I did. And they were in Texas.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Two in Texas.

MS. SCHEUER: I submitted designs for the Long Beach post office and I heard afterwards that I almost got it, but I missed.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Who made the final decision on that sort of thing? Did they set up a jury of artists?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes. They had a jury for each one and I don't know if the jury was in Washington or whether it was a local jury. No, it was in Washington....

MR. McCHESNEY: It was in Washington.

MS. SCHEUER: In Washington.

MR. McCHESNEY: The one Refregier...?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes, it was in Washington I'm sure.

MR. McCHESNEY: There were quite a few entered. Victor Arnautoff entered that competition and Reuben Kadish, I believe....

MS. SCHEUER: Reuben Kadish did good work. He did some very nice things at San Francisco State, small things, but good. Whatever happened to him?

MR. McCHESNEY: He's in New York now. We saw him when we were there a couple of years ago. Also saw Dave Slivka back there.

MS. SCHEUER: Oh! Is he doing...?

MR. McCHESNEY: He's still doing sculpture. He was out; he was invited to teach at the University in Berkeley about three summers ago...three or four....

MS. SCHEUER: Oh, he was! I'd be interested to see what he would be doing in sculpture now. Are they all changing to wires and wrought iron? Bronze?

MR. McCHESNEY: Dave sort of introduced a lost wax process out here at the University and it took hold, and everybody is doing lost wax.

MS. SCHEUER: Oh, yes.

MR. McCHESNEY: He's doing big things; he's using big wax slabs, bent slabs, very abstract, non-objective.

MS. SCHEUER: That's all Dick O'Hanlon was doing in his studio a couple of years ago, and I was so surprised that he was doing such things. I hadn't kept track of him at all since school days, you see, and the last time I had seen his little rocks and I expected to see little rocks and here was this mammoth thing in bronze, you know.

MRS. McCHESNEY: He did a wood panel for the Salinas post office over here which I guess is still there.... We didn't get a chance to go over and see it--but this was on WPA.

MS. SCHEUER: Umhum. He did some rather nice things.

MRS. McCHESNEY: They look very good in the photographs. What sort of an influence do you think the WPA project, or all the government art projects, had on your career as an artist? You must have been on for quite some time?

MS. SCHEUER: Oh, I was on for a long time, yes, and on a variety of things. Well, I think it made one more apt to choose art as a career. If you were given, for instance, an opportunity to work consecutively for a while in any one medium, you see; if it hadn't been for WPA, you might sooner, say, have changed to something else. Of course, it depends on your own character entirely, too. But I have heard that from so many artists, and read it too. When you read, you often come across the name of a prominent artist who will say that it was through WPA that he really was put on his feet or got a real good start...

MR. McCHESNEY: Right.

MS. SCHEUER: ...and many of the well-known artists today, who are now in their fifties, most of them were on the projects.

MR. McCHESNEY: Particularly back in New York...nearly all of those big artists back there, Kline, and deKooning....

MS. SCHEUER: Umhum.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Gorky, of course, was on WPA in New York, too. Do you think the projects in San Francisco were generally successful?

MS. SCHEUER: I think so. I think so, generally successful. Well...I think toward the end they were getting better and better, don't you? Were you here then in San Francisco? Yes, you were, you said.

MR. McCHESNEY: Umhum.

MS. SCHEUER: I think the projects as a whole were a very valuable and successful thing, yes. Of course, bad work is bound to be produced; you can't avoid it. But more good is done than harm. I think it's really a very fine thing, not because I was on it at all. And I think the competitive art projects would be very good to have again because I don't think an artist should have to declare poverty in order to get government jobs. But I think artists should be happy to have regular work at not necessarily very high pay, that's what I feel. If you can get regular work and the opportunity to do worthwhile things, not just trite stuff, you know, for temporary use, but work on projects that have more permanence, this should be worth something to you, I think.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Did you ever do any frescos after the government projects were completed?

MS. SCHEUER: No, I didn't. You see, I started teaching then; I taught for ten years so....

MRS. McCHESNEY: This was at the College of the Pacific?

MS. SCHEUER: Yes. And so that threw me off.

MR. McCHESNEY: I think it's very important....

MRS. McCHESNEY: We were just talking about the fact that, after your experiences on the government project, you had gone to teaching. I wonder now if you would like to sum up what your feelings about government sponsorship of the arts were, and how you would feel about new programs if the government might see fit to initiate them?

MS. SCHEUER: I think it's very important for the government to sponsor the arts, all of the arts, because otherwise they are going to be neglected in this country, and we cannot be entirely practical, for we really are not being practical when we put so much emphasis on sciences and efficiency alone, because a person has to be a whole person and creative arts do something for people that is an absolute necessity. And now, when

corporations, say, employ the artists, such as in the theatre and in moving picture business and in....

MRS. McCHESNEY: Architecture?

MS. SCHEUER: No, architecture also, but I was thinking of the popular programs we all have at home....

MRS. McCHESNEY: Television?

MS. SCHEUER: Television...the only things that are produced are things that make profit for the sponsors.

MRS. McCHESNEY: For the business, for the corporation.

MS. SCHEUER: For the business. So profit is the end and aim. And I think if we're going to have that rule our arts, we're going to be deprived in the arts as we have. And the arts should not be sponsored only by or through the profit idea. And I think in all countries in Europe the government sponsors the arts and those are not the Communist countries by any means....

MRS. McCHESNEY: In most of Western Europe....

MS. SCHEUER: It has nothing to do with Communism. And the minute it is suggested here that the government sponsor such and such an art, immediately the cries go out "Oh, Communism!" It has nothing to do with Communism. I think we can have a Democratic system and at the same time certain things have to be supported by the Federal Government. And all people will gain by it.

MRS. McCHESNEY: If the government did institute a new program of sponsorship of the arts in the United States, do you have any suggestions about how they might go about this? You were on the Project for a long time and you were probably aware of the difficulties that developed. Could you think of ways that they might avoid some of the tensions and frictions that did develop on the Projects? You mentioned earlier that you liked the idea of competitive projects.

MS. SCHEUER: Yes. Well, that's what I'm thinking of now. I think the competitive system is a very practical one because only those people who wish to compete do so. And I think very established, say, great, great artists are very, very scarce and would probably get commissions anyway. And I think any artist should be willing to submit designs for a competition and either get paid for it or not. But I don't think he should require great pay for a design submitted in competition. Then, as the government did before, the government would give smaller jobs to those who were not fortunate enough to win the big competition. I think that's a very practical thing to do because, in your own time then, you can work on designs. I think it's very, very good.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Well, what about setting up projects like the Lithography Project you worked on? That wasn't in any way competitive, was it?

MS. SCHEUER: No, not at all. That was a project which would have to be a continuous project in any community. That would have to be, say, more like the WPA then, a permanent art project. I don't think that would be difficult. I think that would be very feasible if we have a great deal of unemployment in the future, which I think we probably will have, don't you?

MRS. McCHESNEY: We seem to be moving in that direction.

MS. SCHEUER: Yes. I think so. And I think it is better to employ people and develop their potentiality than to just hand out dole, you know, without any work. At the same time, there's so much that can be done for the country. Look at, for instance, the recreation areas that were worked on by the WPA. If you go to any outdoor recreation area today near a city, chances are the fine stone work was all done, has been done, by the WPA. These are permanent assets; I think they are very important. It's much better for a person to be working than to just go collect a check every month without doing anything for it.

MRS. McCHESNEY: Most people would prefer, I think, to be working, too.

MS. SCHEUER: Yes, I think so. Of course, it takes a long time to find out what people can do; we can't always rely on their own word right away. But in time I think that can be worked out.

[END OF INTERVIEW]