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**Oral history interview with Eugenie Shonnard,  
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# Transcript

## Interview

(Corrected and edited by Sylvia Loomis, April 17, 1964)

**SL:** Sylvia Loomis, Interviewer

**ES:** Eugenie Shonnard

**SL:** This is an interview with Miss Eugenie Shonnard at her studio, 226 Hickox Street, Santa Fe, New Mexico. The interviewer is Mrs. Sylvia Loomis of the Santa Fe office of the Archives of American Art, and the particular phase of art to be emphasized is that of the Federal Art Projects during the 1930s and '40s. As you were one of the artists involved in the projects, Miss Shonnard, we would like to ask you some questions about it and also about yourself; where you were born, where you received your education and so forth.

**ES:** Well, I was born in Yonkers, New York, and I knew Yonkers as a village. Shall I tell you about it?

**SL:** All right.

**ES:** It went from the Hudson River to the Saw Mill. It was originally a grant of land from King George III of England to the Shonnard family. And I, as I say, I knew it just as a village and no streets.

**SL:** Do you want to tell us when you were born?

**ES:** I was born on April 29th, 1886. I'll soon be seventy-eight.

**SL:** And where did you receive your education?

**ES:** Well, I was a very delicate child and I went to the public schools and a private one at that time. I don't remember. I got interested in the arts and in designing and I went to the New York School of Applied Design for Women. It must have been about 1905, but I might have started in 1904. I'm not sure. I think '05. Then Mr. Alphonse Mucha, from Czechoslovakia, came to teach there and he was a very, very prominent painter of Czechoslovakia and I studied in his classes of design. I'd say, in 1905, '06, '07 and then my father died, and that changed things for my mother and myself. Well, I had won some prizes in a designing class - you have all that. (See biographical data.)

**SL:)**

**SL:** Yes.

**ES:** Then I found clay in an old hole and that fascinated me so that I made up my mind that I didn't want to do anymore designing. So I told my mother and my father, who was still alive, and they could understand. Finally I thought I'd better tell Mr. Mucha and his wife that I didn't want to go to designing class anymore. I wanted to do sculpture. And they were very upset. So was I. But I felt it so strongly because I didn't like the repetition in design. I like originating it, but I hated the repetition. Then I lost my father, so my mother and I had to go to New York and live. We had lost our own home. I'll tell you, that's quite a thing to tell you.

**SL:** Yes, it must have been very difficult.

**ES:** Well, New York was pretty expensive for us and the Muchas suggested that I go to Paris,

because there I could live to much better advantage and have a much better opportunity, and he could introduce me to...ah...

**SL:** Rodin?

**ES:** Rodin! To tell this Rodin about me, and Rodin told Mucha, "Well, send her to me, I'd like to see her." Well, so then Mucha, he had to leave Paris. I wasn't there when he was there, but I got a little studio and started working myself outside of Bourdelle's class. I studied with Bourdelle, too. Emile Bourdelle. Well, I saw a model that interested me. I saw the model outside of the Ecole de la Grand Chaumere, and I asked the model if he would pose for me, and I did a head of him. That was the first thing I took to Rodin for criticism. He said to me (he was very impressed with it) and he said to me, "Where did you find my model?" He recognized his model. He said, "That was my model for Saint John the Baptist," and he was so pleased. He said to me, "You come whenever you can, whenever you want, for criticism." He never charged me one cent.

**SL:** Is that right? How wonderful!

**ES:** And it was a wonderful experience working with him, and then with Bourdelle. Bourdelle was a pupil of Rodin, worked with him when they were young. Bourdelle was more inclined to the architectural sculpture and I did a lot of work with him in the school.

**SL:** How long did you study with Rodin and Bourdelle?

**ES:** Well, Rodin was then not young. Let's see, my mother and I sailed to Paris, November 11, 1911, and then we - oh, the tales I could tell you! - we got settled and I went right to study at Ecole de la Grand Chaumere and also with Rodin. Bourdelle was particularly wonderful on talking, actually giving criticism. They were very hectic - you couldn't make them out. He would tell you one thing and change the next time. He would get us so - you know, but what he would say, the sum total was marvelous. We would all listen to what he would say about everybody. So, that was that. Now what did you ask me?

**SL:** I asked how long you were there. Or how long you were with Rodin?

**ES:** I stayed in that class the winter of 1911 and 1912 and then I studied a great deal with Bourdelle. To Rodin I went for criticism. Oh, but then also I studied in New York at the Arts Students League.

**SL:** Was that afterward?

**ES:** That was afterward - when I came back. So we were there during the war in Paris, and Rodin, he became interested. My mother always went with me because she was terribly interested, too. And was very companionable. And Rodin wanted to show some of his drawings. He wanted to explain why he did them as he did them. And the reason was this; he would make a drawing, it had to be done in a minute, and he would not look at his paper. He would look at his subject. Now, if I am going to make a drawing of you I have what I need in the way of pencils or pen or brush and my paper. I do not look at it. I look at you, and I try to make my mind and my hand work together. The impression of my mind I try to express in an outline with my hand.

**SL:** Yes.

**ES:** And some of these were marvelous. To train the spontaneous impression of your brain or your spirit with the working of your hand. And he showed us drawers full of those. Then later they were

exhibited, but not then. Then, I wanted to do some portraits in relief, bas relief. And he saw something I brought and there was, he made some criticisms and he wanted me to go to the Louvre and study Pisanello. Well, Pisanello, he was very early. I think 14th century sometime. So I went and I found the reliefs of Pisanello and studied those. They were magnificent. They showed how things must be more or less on the same level in a relief. If you do it naturalistically, it is all wrong. Now you see me, you're going to make a relief. Well, if I make this relatively correct, you won't see me, you'll see nothing but shoulder. It is a lie actually, right straight through.

**SL:** I know, it is very difficult technically, I understand.

**ES:** To give that impression and make it harmonious, but generally speaking your shoulder isn't much higher than your - right here. And it'll look, it'll project more than you want.

**SL:** Did you say you came back in 1915? Back to the States?

**ES:** No, we came back in 1914. We were in Paris, crossing the Luxembourg Gardens when we heard the first cry. A man came and it was very solemn and he jumped up on a table and he called out that he had something to say. And he said that the Germans had violated Luxembourg, the little country of Luxembourg, and there was complete silence. We knew that was war. And everyone went home their own way.

**SL:** I see.

**ES:** But it was terrific and the French were so thoughtful and so kind and gave us all kinds of advice, told us what to do and how... Everybody, there was no confusion.

**SL:** When you came back to New York, did you go to the Arts Students League?

**ES:** We came back in the end of August, if I remember. The war was declared August 4, 1914, and we came back on the last steamer leaving France. We tried to stay, but the government wouldn't allow it. All women and children had to leave, come home. Oh, what an experience! Lots of things I ought to tell you but...

**SL:** Well, maybe we can talk about it some other time, when we aren't just specifically on this subject. When was it that you did the study of the gorilla? That must have been about that time wasn't it?

**ES:** I'd have to look it up. But Dr. Hornaday, he was the head of the Bronx park and I ran into him, I think. I had gone to the Bronx Zoo and I had met him before and he said, "You know we have a pet gorilla and I wondered could you do a portrait head in bronze?" "Well," I said, "Dr. Hornaday, I'll try. I'll see." So he said, "Well, you do. I want you to do it." So he introduced me to the keeper and then a few days later I started. Well, I was put in a large room, as big as this room, maybe even larger, alone with Dinah, the gorilla. The keeper told me, "Do not give her any water." He said, "The water is up there on the shelf, and don't put it where she can get it, because she will throw it all over herself and get pneumonia and die." I discovered, I suppose that first day or second day I was a little nervous locked in the room with Dinah, the gorilla. I suppose I sang to her or hummed, or whistled a little bit. She liked it, and she demanded it. So everyday when I would go she would demand that I would sing to her before I could handle her. She would stand on her hind legs, stand up straight. She was about like this and thump, lick, umphhh...that means come on and sing. And we did, before we did any work. Then I discovered that everything was the opposite. To get her to sit on a chair where I could see her I had to forbid her getting on it. "Dinah, don't you go near that chair." Up she would

go and sit on the chair. Then, if I saw she was going to get off the chair, I'd tell her, "Get right off that chair!" She thought, "I'll stay here." Then she wanted to get at the clay, tear it up, she wanted to get the head I was working. That was my problem. I had cloths and I had some clay covered, and how to keep her from grabbing it when I wasn't watching. To tell her not to, she'd do it more. So she was terrifically observing. There is a photo I have to show you, she just looked like an angel sitting there peacefully like this, and what did she do...she punched me in the ribs, like this. She figured it out. She knew I'd look. With the other hand she grabbed the rag which was about like this and she swallowed it.

**SL:** Oh my!

**ES:** All but this one end, and there was a big table in the room, low, a little higher than this over there, and she went under there and there was no way I could get her out. And this thing hanging out of her mouth, a little bit. So I grabbed the water, the forbidden water, and put it on the floor because I knew she would go for the water. She went for the water, starting throwing it all over herself and I pulled the rag out of her mouth like this! I called the keeper and told him what had happened. I said I can't help it, I had to get the water to save the rag - to get the rag out of her. So, he came right over with alcohol and bathed her with alcohol and she didn't catch cold. But she was a very, very intelligent creature.

**SL:** I see. How long did it take you to do this?

**ES:** Well, I worked off and on...I don't remember. Oh, several months. You know, because I couldn't always see her. I mean by that she was very active. Then the keeper without realizing, he put an orangutan in there with me to play with her.

**SL:** Gracious!

**ES:** So, the orang was almost as big as she was. And he locked the door by mistake and I couldn't get out. And I had to stay there to save my work. And while those two were playing, the orang jumped on me, he ran over there to grab me, just like this! No, I wasn't in any danger of being bitten. None whatsoever. But just of having my work destroyed or be knocked over. That was that. It was all right, nothing happened. Then when the work was finished, of course Dinah missed me. And I missed Dinah. At that time I was living in Mt. Vernon with my Uncle Clifford. He is the one who started the book review for the New York Times, by the way. So, I was very happy there with Uncle Cliff and his family and it was easy to go down to the Bronx Park and I said, "Oh, the bronze has come, and I've got to take the bronze down and show it to Dr. Hornaday. See if I can meet him. I'm going to catch the train and go off, and I'll get home late this afternoon." So I did, and it was in the summer and they had Dinah out in the air and they wanted to arrange a nice big place for her where they hoped eventually to raise little gorillas, which was almost impossible, and they wanted big trees and everything. Well, she was out there in the garden in a big enclosure and I saw her. I didn't have time to do anything but to wave to her, "Hello Dinah," as I ran over to see Dr. Hornaday. Then I had to run to catch my train. So I merely waved to her. Well, that's that. So I said to Uncle Cliff when I got home, "Uncle Cliff and Beatrice," I said, "Now I'm going down to spend the whole afternoon with Dinah." It was about a month later. She never allowed me to see her face again. She was so hurt. She put her arms around her face. I never saw her again, and she died about two months after. She died of a sore throat.

**SL:** What a shame, but what a very interesting story!

**ES:** Terrifically. That animal was terrific.

**SL:** I would say so.

**ES:** Intelligent!

**SL:** Well, what other things did you do before you came to New Mexico?

**ES:** Oh...

**SL:** Is that too much to talk about?

**ES:** Yes. Oh, I did a big fountain for Mrs. Alfred Curtis James of New York for her gardens in Newport, The Blue Garden. Then she commissioned me - also I did a big bird cage in metal for her - to make the decorative thing that hangs, you know. I did some portraits and my Mucha - I did that while he was there in New York - I have a portrait of it. Heroic size. Oh, I can't remember what I did, but I did a whole lot of things.

**SL:** When did you come to New Mexico?

**ES:** In '27 to stay, but I first came in '25 on a visit. And I did a whole lot of Indians, and I was with my mother and we rented a house and I met Dr. Hewett and talked everything over and we didn't go back to New York - we merely went through New York - and I took my Indian things with me. Dr. Hewett gave me a studio in the Museum and I just worked without meeting a soul or even wanting to - I just went off with the Indians. My mother used to go with me. They used to take me across the Rio Grande in their truck - I have photos of it. And that's where we would meet them down there. I can't remember the name of it. You would know.

**SL:** Down at Santa Domingo? That's on the river.

**ES:** No, but it is not far from there - San Felipe! That town down there.

**SL:** Oh yes.

**ES:** And then the Indians would meet me and we'd come back a little bit and the Indians would cross the river. It was shallow there. We would meet there and they'd take us back and forth across the river before there was any bridge. And I got to know them very well, and then towards the end of the season I thought maybe I ought to show Dr. Hewett the work I had done. That's his criticism, that's his letter there. He was so pleased and that's how that was. And it was so cheap living in Paris at that time that we went back. Cost less than just staying in New York a month, including passage.

**SL:** Is that right?

**ES:** It was \$50 across the ocean, a lovely apartment, for \$10 off the Luxembourg Gardens, and my studio \$3.50.

**SL:** It is quite different now.

**ES:** Yes. And our French friends found us all those things.

**SL:** Well, what were you doing at the time you became involved in the Federal Art Project? Do you remember?

**ES:** Indians.

**SL:** You were still doing the Indians?

**ES:** Yes, oh yes. And then I did a chapel for Mrs. Frederick M. P. Taylor up in Colorado Springs. Twenty feet high, carved in wood, and the altar and everything.

**SL:** Do you remember how you...?

**ES:** Oh! Then I did a head of Miguel Chavez. It is outside the College there.

**SL:** Yes, St. Michael's College, yes.

**ES:** St. Michael's. I have a photo of that. And - Oh, Lord, I can't remember it all.

**SL:** Do you remember how you became involved in the Federal Art Project? I mean, your first commission?

**ES:** I...No, I think it was at the time when I knew Vernon Hunter, but he was on the WPA. This was...No. It speaks in one of those letters that Mr. Rowan knew my work. Well, I'd exhibited a lot in New York before I came out.

**SL:** Well, you said something about that mailcarrier, the snowshoe mail carrier, was that before you had done work on the project itself? Was that the way you got involved?

**ES:** Yes. That's the one.

**SL:** Well, tell about that.

**ES:** Well, the Alaska Snowshoe Carrier - I was asked by the government, Mr. Rowan I guess it was - to do a little model for Alaska Snowshoe Carrier. It was at the time that different projects for mail-carriers were being given throughout the whole country. And I was chosen for the Alaska Snowshoe Carrier with two other sculptures whose names I've forgotten, and some of the specifications were that they wanted it to fit in the niche very carefully and composed properly and so forth. And it was eventually, if I remember, to be three feet, in aluminum, I think. I mean, from metal. So I submitted my sketch of the proper size and the subject I looked into. I consulted an archeologist who had worked up in Alaska for twenty-five years, who knew the Eskimos and knew the customs; and he told me that they do not use the snowshoe to carry mail. It's the dog sled and the dogs that carri

**ES:** the mail. He explained and explained. He said, "They don't use the snowshoe anymore than we would use a shovel in the back of our car except for an emergency." And a snowshoe was for an emergency. So I used a dog with my figure of the man, the letter carrier. And I submitted it. And I didn't win. There was an exhibition of the thing in Washington and my husband and I, just about that time we had to go East - to New York - so, we came home by way of Washington and we meet Mr. Rowan and some other gentlemen. They were pleased to see us, and they said, "Why weren't you on your subject?" And I said, "Mr. Rowan, I was advised by a man who had lived there for twenty-five years, that the dog and the sled carried the mail. And that the snowshoe was not used but in an emergency." And right there he told me that if I had used the snowshoe and been on my subject, I would have won. And they were distressed because they liked what I did very much, composed very well, but they couldn't understand the dog. And they didn't realize that it was the dog sled that carried the mailman.

**SL:** So, you were on the subject, but they weren't?

**ES:** So I was really on the subject, yes, they admitted that they had not known, that they'd made an error. So they were distressed at what happened, and they gave me, without competition, a project to do in Waco, Texas. That's how that came about, without competition. Because they liked my work and that's it.

**SL:** And that was on the Federal Art Project?

**ES:** Yes. They gave it to me.

**SL:** Now tell about what that subject was, and how you did that. The Waco, Texas, one.

**ES:** That was the longhorns. The cattle. The longhorns and then the Indians.

**SL:** And that was in wood?

**ES:** Those were carved in wood, a bas relief that went on the wall. That I did, and they were very pleased with it.

**SL:** Well, I know from the letters that you received from the Postmaster and from Washington both, they were very much pleased with what you did.

**ES:** Yes. They were very much pleased. And Mr. Rowan was, too.

**SL:** You also did a fountain for The Carrie Tingley Hospital.

**ES:** The Carrie Tingley Hospital, yes.

**SL:** Do you remember anything more about the details of that?

**ES:** Well, that I had to do in terra cotta, and I made the models and the plaster molds and then I had it put in terra cotta. At that time they had a very big kiln in Denver where the pieces could be fired. And that's the way that was done.

**SL:** Did you have someone help you with that, any assistance?

**ES:** No, no, no, no. I did that only in the studio and it was pretty big size.

**SL:** Yes. It was so large the I thought perhaps you might have had somebody to help you.

**ES:** I did it in sections.

**SL:** I see.

**ES:** Since then I've done a big job down in Las Cruces, and decorations for the outside of the Episcopal Church, Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church.

**SL:** That was after the WPA?

**ES:** Oh, yes. That was recent. About '59, I'd say.

**SL:** Oh. How long were you on the Federal Art Project? Do you remember?

**ES:** I don't remember. But then - I don't know how many small pieces I've done and garden pieces



I've done, but this one down in Las Cruces they were very, very pleased with. I had to do all the architectural decorations on the outside of the building that went around the doorways and the windows. I made my own material and carved it and did it in sections and shipped it in a truck with sawdust all on the bottom of the truck and put the pieces in. It was set up and plenty of worry about it. Would it fit? And such things, and I had very nice letters about it, very pleased. They told me it weighed about three tons.

**SL:** Oh! When you say you make your own materials, what do you mean by that?

**ES:** Well, I mean, there is cement in it and now my recent material has some plastic in it with - you can put a lightweight material in with it instead of the heavy sand. You can use vermiculite. You can also use pumice and make it much lighter weight. Then recently I did the reredos and altar for Rosario Chapel here in Santa Fe.

**SL:** Yes, I heard about that.

**ES:** That's 17 feet high. I did the whole altar, the whole reredos which is the decoration in back of the altar, and the candlesticks, the vases for the flowers. I also did a figure of La Conquistadora in relief to put in her place when the original figure is not there.

**SL:** Oh, how nice!

**ES:** I can't remember all the things I've done, but I've done portraits of Witter Bynner, the poet, which has been very successful. Then garden pieces.

**SL:** When you were on the Federal Art Project, was Vernon Hunter your supervisor? Do you remember anyone besides Vernon Hunter that you conferred with?

**ES:** No, I don't. I think Vernon was on the WPA. He wasn't on the PWA.

**SL:** On, well, it must have been Gus Baumann. Was he ever involved when you were?

**ES:** I don't know.

**SL:** Or Jesse Nusbaum? Kenneth Chapman? Those were the people who were involved in that in the administrative end.

**ES:** Well, Jess Nusbaum might know. I know Jess pretty well, and I'll ask him. But this came right from Washington, to tell you the truth.

**SL:** I see. Maybe they worked directly with you. It didn't go through anyone here. I would think some of the competitions certainly were direct from Washington, but ...

**ES:** Direct from Washington and then they gave me the Waco job direct from Washington, but I wasn't on the WPA, that was a relief project.

**SL:** Yes. And you were just one of these key non-relief people that were hired to do these special jobs.

**ES:** Then I think that the whole project did help because we sculptors and painters and craftsmen, I feel, should have an opportunity to work with architects. And I wrote that way back then. And I'm still at it and I'm going to write another letter and I'm not sure to whom. Because I feel that - I do not

believe in taking advantage of the architect in the sense of; see a big space and think, "Oh, that's right," and do a big piece of sculpture. I feel that the artists, the sculptor or the painter should understand why the architect works as he does. Get the feeling of the building that he wants to put up, and that the sculptor or painter should try to help explain the sentiment of the building. You know what I mean. In the sense of working with the architect and not exploit himself. In that sense you can make the sculpture and the painting like the flower of architecture.

**SL:** Why isn't that done now?

**ES:** Why, that's what I ask. Why isn't it done? But what I feel is the great error is that a government project in architecture does not provide a certain percentage for the arts. Because, instead of that, I'm told no money is provided. Therefore ours is about the only nation, as far as I know, that does less architectural sculpture than all the rest. And we're really like that. The most primitive people have used the arts from the very beginning - before they had even carved the mountains, carved the rocks and dug right into the mountains to make their home there - they have it all decorated. I have books to show you what they've done. And we - no money provided. Yet we provide money for all the physical comforts but I believe one of the biggest assets are the spiritual values of whatever it is, that is what - in the final analysis - I believe, if we want to come down to commercial thinking, beauty earns more money than anything. By that I mean, take the Venus De Milo or De Melo, I don't know which, I ask, since she was created, how much money has she earned for wherever she has been put? She is now in the Louvre. But she has been traded back and forth during the war, during the century, through nations, one this and one that. She has been one of the great ones, besides many other things, and the world goes to see her. Well, you do not go, if you could avoid it, where there is no beauty. Whether you realize it or not, you seek beauty and if you go to see it you have to live somewhere, you have to spend some money in a hotel, you have to eat. And maybe you go shopping. You need to buy some clothes. You meet somebody and make a deal and if that goes on century after century how much money is earned? And I ask how much have the great cathedrals earned that have been built in Europe? The world goes to them. Now, who is going to go where there is nothing?

**SL:** Yes, it is very true.

**ES:** Just something to quickly set up. To quickly make some money, and I'm afraid that's where we have descended.

**SL:** I'm afraid so.

**ES:** You will not go where there is absolutely no beauty if you can avoid it. And the beauty calms you down and gives you inspiration and lofty thoughts, while all your tin cans and trash, sensational buildings and sensational colors, anything to attract attention, are destructive. In the final analysis, no one will go where they are.

**SL:** That's really very true.

**ES:** And I feel that the government should - we artists, sculptors and craftsmen, we will make mistakes, but architects make mistakes, we all make mistakes, but there should be money provided so at least we have an opportunity. All the scientists have made mistakes. All these rockets and what not. They do not always work and billions are spent and so forth. Why can't a few dollars be spent on us? So we have an opportunity to do what we are capable of doing.

**SL:** Well, then you would feel that this subsidy on the arts during the 1930s was very valuable?

**ES:** Very valuable. Whether they were all successful or not. At least it was a start. If we could have kept on we would have improved the same as one improves in whatever one keeps at.

**SL:** Do you feel that your work on the Project helped you in your work?

**ES:** Decidedly! Decidedly! Yes. And I think that every effort one makes enlightens you in some way and it helps.

**SL:** Were there very many other sculptors in New Mexico at the time that you were doing this?

**ES:** No.

**SL:** Well, how about the woodcarvers, you know the Spanish-American woodcarvers?

**ES:** Yes. And see what they have done.

**SL:** Yes, they did some beautiful work, but that of course was a different type of thing.

**ES:** They tried. It is in the Latin blood. They did what they could do with the little money they had, and the Indians, they did marvelous work, their pueblos are in beautiful harmony with their environment, with their way of life, and their plaza is a sacred place, their Kivas, they live right around them, and we haven't touched it.

**SL:** No.

**ES:** An Indian woman came to see me here a few years ago and I happened to have some beautiful flowers out on the back porch - the night-blooming and day-blooming cererus were in bloom - and she said to me, "It is another way God shows his presence." That shows how beauty lifted her into a spiritual thought.

**SL:** Yes. Well, they are very sensitive to any beauty in nature...

**ES:** Very. Oh, I think the Indians are marvelous and they are going right ahead. Determined, and they are going to show us something.

**SL:** Well, we can learn a great deal from them.

**ES:** It is not mere commercialism.

**SL:** True.

**ES:** Just commercialism is short sighted as far as I'm concerned.

**SL:** I think so, too. Well, what would you say the projects accomplished, generally?

**ES:** Well, I think at least they made people think in terms of sculpture and painting, and brought it to their minds that there is such a thing and it is valuable. Even if there are mistakes. Everyone makes mistakes in whatever they do.

**SL:** Do you think it helped to make the public more art conscious?

**ES:** More art conscious. And furthermore, out here we are at a very great advantage, the sculptors are at a great advantage, because we have new materials. I have worked in stone, sandstone, and

if you can find a good piece, it is very beautiful. But it is very precarious, because there may be what you call a clay pit in it. You run into a hole filled with clay right in the midst of the stone. There are no quarries, but I believe they are finding something in the Southwest that may answer the question a little bit. But in bronze, the bronze foundries back in the big cities. We have no plaster casting men and we have nobody. We experiment. I've experimented, experimented. You have no idea how much experimenting. I don't count hours or anything else, but no one helps. The government provides no money to help the sculptors experiment, or the painters to find materials suitable to their own environment. So the word sculptor is so little used, particularly out here. A painting is more easy for the average person to understand because they have thought in color from childhood. They have thought in color. Even a little girl will say, "Oh mother, I'd like a little blue bow, or a little pink bow, or little red bow." They are thinking in color. But who thinks in form? Nobody. It's a new language for them out here. And it shouldn't be. The early primitive people, they felt their stone, they saw their stone, and they carved their stone. Now we have all kinds of machines that could help, but they've not the will to do it.

**SL:** Well, it may be because they can't get materials.

**ES:** Form is not understood.

**SL:** Do you think it is because it is difficult to get the materials here? That that's one reason why there are so few sculptors?

**ES:** Well, for instance, say that I had to do something in Indiana limestone. This was years ago. I did the Immaculate Heart of Mary for the Archbishop. Well, I forget what that cost - I had to send back to the Midwest somewhere and all that shipping of that piece, it was six feet high - a little more - and that shipping and everything adds to the expenses.

**SL:** Of course. Well...

**ES:** And our clays - we have beautiful clays, but again they need experimenting. You need to test them because they are spotty. They are too much lime here and there. But I personally have persisted in trying to create a material where I didn't have to do any plaster molds or plaster casts because that again, as far as one's client is concerned, counts for nothing. It is useless, except to show what it will be like.

**SL:** Yes. What about...

**ES:** And the wood. The wood is very good, but we can't use it outdoors.

**SL:** What material do you use for the ceramics that you are doing now?

**ES:** You use clay.

**SL:** Yes. Is that local clay?

**ES:** No. I had an experience with clay some years ago. I did some Indians in clay, and it fired. It was beautiful, really beautiful color, beautiful texture. I was very happy about it. And it was firing for about a month and then literally they started popping.

**SL:** Oh, dear.

**ES:** And pieces would shoot right out. Not just drop, but you'd find it over here and over there -

you'd find it just all full of holes. You couldn't imagine what was taking place in the studio. And friends who knew about the lime told me, "Oh, that's lime." Well, it takes a lot of experimenting to know where lime is and how to find it and so forth. I learned that the same time that it came from the same place where I got some clay. They call it clay pit. It is up on Cerro Gordo, here in Santa Fe. That it was used to make bricks. They had made a lot of bricks of it and they set up a wall for the Sanco Motors, if I remember, and all those bricks popped same as mine did. That all had to be done over again. So, just to solve our materials would be something. I mean everything for destruction money is provided for.

**SL:** Yes, it should be for a constructive purpose of this sort.

**ES:** Yes. But for the creative arts...I just don't know.

**SL:** Well, this was the only time that the Federal Government has subsidized the arts.

**ES:** Yes, and if they would subsidize it, a certain percentage of the cost of a building should be provided for the arts.

**SL:** Yes. Well, you might write to Governor Campbell about some of these new capitol buildings that they are putting up now - maybe that would help to improve the quality of the design.

**ES:** Yes. And I was thinking of Senator Anderson.

**SL:** Well, I think he would be better. Because he was the one who stopped that horrible design of the capitol building which they tried to put up. He was the one who was really responsible.

**ES:** And they have only one architect who gets it.

**SL:** I know. Who gets all the jobs. I think that perhaps that this idea of including architectural sculpture would help.

**ES:** It should be, and they did at the time of the PWA or the WPA. There was - I can't remember - I don't know if it was 5 percent of the cost of the building or even less, but at least there had to be some sculpture, and the architect could not tell you that there was no money provided. He had to provide a space for sculpture.

**SL:** Well, maybe sculpture would help to improve the appearance of some of the buildings that are going up now that are so unimaginative.

**ES:** Terrible! And no one will come here, eventually.

**SL:** No, if we destroy what we have in Santa Fe and there will be nothing for people to come to. So I'm glad at least that one building was stopped. And they are going to have a different design for that.

**ES:** I know, but now there is to be a - well, the Post Office where it is, is giving lots of trouble to so many people.

**SL:** People are very dissatisfied with that.

**ES:** Very.

**SL:** Well, are there any other comments that you would like to make about that phase of your life

when you worked on the Federal Arts Project - just a sort of a summation?

**ES:** Well, it was very encouraging to feel that the government was interested and realized that there should be opportunities for sculpture. I don't think the government could do anything about private buildings, but government buildings where government money is provided, they should have something in the contract by which part of that money is provided for the fine arts. Beauty is a terrific power. It is the real money-maker through the ages.

**SL:** Of course.

**ES:** Your stocks and bonds may be fine today or say for a hundred years, I don't know, but what goes on through the ages and ages and ages but beauty. Proved it. And sculpture has played a terrific part. Look at what the Aztecs and other primitive peoples have done.

**SL:** Well, it is all through the history of civilization.

**ES:** And we ignore it. We have no way to work, very little, I mean except with great effort and perseverance.

**SL:** Well, we need a great deal more education in America. We're still a young country.

**ES:** We need to solve it. Not this sensationalism but to do something that really represents your environment and is in harmony with your environment.

**SL:** I agree with you, 100 percent on that.

**ES:** Well, I feel some extra, extra moderns will say it's - and I've had a few battles with some of them - it's universal art. All right, I say, fine, I won't try to do any universal art until I've seen every country in this world. Then I could feel that I could honestly try to do something - so-called universal - but I think if one does one's own environment truly and honestly, you've done about all you can do.

**SL:** That is certainly the job of the artist.

**ES:** You get universal art from photographs and magazines. You get what they are doing in different countries of the world. However, you've got to get your own spiritual impressions. You have to live there, and see there, and feel there.

**SL:** That's true.

**ES:** Otherwise you're just cheating.

**SL:** Well, thank you very much, Miss Shonnard, for this very interesting interview. It has been fascinating to hear...

**ES:** But, don't you think that's true?

**SL:** I do think that's true.

**ES:** But this, this, this, this, this is what they tell me, some of them they tell me that that sort of work, that's the rage today. That didn't come from this part of the country. It may come from the cities. It will go in the cities. It's money making in the cities. And the conscientious work is laughed at today.

**SL:** Well, I think this is a phase.

**ES:** ...but that's life today. I say, well, that's fine, it is. I go out in my car in the traffic, and it is hectic like this. But we're human beings. We, to my brain, we not only have a physical body and we have a so-called intellect, but we also have a spiritual body, a spiritual outlook. And I think for us to endure this hectic business, we must have a pretty strong spiritual will to do, to keep going. And it would be better to show our spiritual energy than just the hectic thing that we see so much of today that we don't want to even think of it any more. The confusion of today. Man has the power to lift out of his confusion and the arts should help him.

**SL:** I think so. Well, I agree with you there. Because I don't think that this confusion...

**ES:** Beauty is the thing that can help you.

**SL:** Confusion should not be perpetuated, but we should look beyond that to the beauty and the design that does exist...

**ES:** Beyond that.

**SL:** ...in nature if not in our own minds.

**ES:** It mixes you up to try to improve and make life worth seeing. But not for instance, say you go to a little town that you don't know, say you need to go into some shop where you need to buy something, say whatever you will, say you need a coat, or whatever. You instinctively will look the town over a little bit and you will instinctively go to a little shop that has some sense of beauty on the outside, or some sense of harmony. You go in there to see if you can find something. But you are not apt to go into a shop if it's windows are higgly-piggly, and tin cans, and all the rest of it. You'll avoid it. Therefore, beauty has helped earn some money. I mean put down in commercial terms. It's the only way to get to the people.

**SL:** That's why I think it has been so foolish of the people in Santa Fe who are apparently intent on destroying the unique beauty that we have here.

**ES:** It is the most short-sighted thing we can do. And we'll make it like any other town. And who will come here? I surely wouldn't want to. I've had the good fortune to spend a Christmas in Chartres. That marvelous cathedral. The beauty is beyond description. It took centuries to build, as I understand. And all the sculpture, all the frescos, all the stained glass, all done by hand. The beauty itself. My mother and I spent the entire Christmas - we didn't even have luncheon - we couldn't leave with the calm, the spiritual beauty and the - while we are not Catholic, at the same time the whole ceremony in the sense of beauty, it was beyond belief.

**SL:** Would you tell us a little bit more about what New Mexico was like when you first came here?

**ES:** Ah, New Mexico. Many, many Indians and horses, and the little dirt roads, it was very simple. We used to ride our horses up town to do our chores before so many cars came. And we'd jump on - I had a horse, my Peggy. I could show you where she would bang on my studio door and want me to come out and play. And I would. I'd just jump on her back and you can't believe it, we would go right out through this country on the prairie. And we used to chase jack rabbits for the fun of the chase, and they got to know us and like it. Just the chase. It would give your horse the reins. It's safer because prairie dogs, in those little prairie dog's holes, the horse would sense where they were better than a human being would, if there is not path. It was just priceless. And there were prairie dogs, and there were jack rabbits, and there were the burros, and...oh, and the Indians and colorful

costumes that everyone wore. They were not the commercial costumes and things. You'd wear what was suitable and comfortable for you for your own particular way of life and we tried to keep it simple that way.

**SL:** Well, I wish I could have been here in those days.

**ES:** The Indian life, the Indians. The Indians said to me, he said, "Before you Anglos came, the white man," he said, "we never spoke of our God. To speak (amongst ourselves) of the Great Spirit is to belittle him. The Great Spirit is in everything you touch here." I don't think you could say it more beautifully.

**SL:** No, I couldn't.

**ES:** And the Indian life was so beautiful, so friendly, and they are the real lovers of the arts.

**SL:** Did you actually live in the Pueblos, or did you go back and forth?

**ES:** I went back and forth, but I worked with Maximillina, the sister of Maria at San Ildefonso. And I did some pottery with her to learn how they do it. It is all by hand and the coil system. Oh, it was a very wonderful experience. Then what I never can understand, while I did it with them, the pots were fired in an open fire.

**SL:** Yes.

**ES:** Why they do not crack, I do not know and never will know.

**SL:** Don't they do them in the hornos?

**ES:** No, never. That was meant for bread.

**SL:** Well, I knew they baked their bread in it, but I thought they used those for kilns, too.

**ES:** No, they are out in the open fire. And they'll get red hot. They choose a day where there is the least wind possible, but even so there is always just a little bit, and how those pots can get red hot and not crack out in the open fire is beyond me.

**SL:** I didn't know that.

**ES:** And the fire is made first with a little bit of wood and then dried horse manure.

**SL:** I knew they put that in to make it black. Isn't that right?

**ES:** No, no. I don't mean horse manure, cow manure. Then to make the black they put in the horse manure. That's the way Maria makes her black pottery. It's with the final horse manure.

**SL:** Well, I wish we had time to talk more, but maybe I can come over...

**ES:** You come and see me.

**SL:** I will.

**ES:** Can't you come over and have a little pick up supper with me?



**SL:** Oh, I'd love to, yes.

**ES:** I'd just love it. There are lots of things I'd like to show you.

**SL:** Well, they're just fascinating, all of these stories and ...

**ES:** And I'll - my memory will come back to me.

**SL:** ...it has been wonderful...

**ES:** I've done a whole lot of work and I can't even remember where.

**SL:** Well, we'll have another session.

**ES:** And I've done oh, a fountain for the Cyrus McCormicks. I did the fountains up there. Oh yes. And what's his name? You know who lives there now. He was ambassador to...

**SL:** Oh, McKinney? Bob McKinney.

**ES:** McKinney. Did some there. And then I've done...oh, I did a portrait of ex-ambassador, John Bigelow.

**SL:** He was ambassador to France during the Civil War. And I knew him at 91.

**SL:** Oh, my!

**ES:** And I did a portrait relief of him. I can show it to you. And then ex-ambassador Myron T. Herrick. He, with Mr. Paul Leon - he was the head of the French Institute of the Arts, they opened my exhibition to the public in Paris.

**SL:** Well, I'm going to come back and talk to you some more because we are right at the end of our tape now.

**ES:** Oh yes. And then I've done lots for Miss Amelia White. Things are coming back...oh! And Mrs. Simms of Albuquerque, the original Mrs. Simms. She was Ruth Hanna McCormick Simms.

**SL:** Yes.

**ES:** I did - Oh yes - I did a big fountain, a big garden piece for her.

**SL:** Well, I'm going to come back and talk to you about it. In the meantime I'll just think you for now until next time.

**ES:** Well, I'll bet it'll be a dummy. Ha!

**SL:** Not at all! We've had a wonderful time and thank you so much.

**ES:** I've had a wonderful time.... END OF TAPE