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Oral history interview with Hebe Daum  
Stackpole and Jack Moxom, 1965 January 9

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Hebe Daum Stackpole and Jack Moxom on January 9, 1965. The interview took place in Oakland, CA, and was conducted by Mary Fuller McChesney for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Interview

MARY MCCHESENEY: I'd like to ask you first, Hebe, where were you born?

HEBE STACKPOLE: I was born in Holland.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What town?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Hilbersun.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And what year was that?

HEBE STACKPOLE: In 1912.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And where did you receive your art training?

HEBE STACKPOLE: At the California School of Fine Arts, as it was called then, in San Francisco. It's called The San Francisco Art Institute now.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What year did you come over here?

HEBE STACKPOLE: I came here in 1923.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And you went to the Art School in San Francisco for four years?

HEBE STACKPOLE: No, I was there only for two and a half years. I went on a half a scholarship and I earned the other half myself, during the height of the depression. I worked for my living and I worked for my lunches. I worked for everything which is unfortunate because I don't think that you get as much out of school if you spend all your time working too much. But, I had to.

MARY MCCHESENEY: How did you first make any connection with any of the government sponsored art projects?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Well, Susanne Scheuer asked me if I would like to be her assistant. She chose me as her assistant and that's how I got into it.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Was that when you were at the art school?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Yes, it was just about when I stopped the art school.

MARY MCCHESENEY: How had you met her?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Well, she was going to The Art School. I guess I met her in The Art School. She wasn't actually a student but I think she came there. I can't actually remember.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And what was she doing? What project was she working on at the time? Was that Coit Tower?

HEBE STACKPOLE: That was the Coit Tower. She was doing a mural on newspapers. I had to go and make drawings of teletype people working on the teletype.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Where did you go? To the newspaper offices in San Francisco?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Yes. I made the drawings. I made a lot of the drawings that she used. And then my job was to get prepared in the morning, very early and I lived on the Estuary in Oakland in a boat, my sister's boat at the time. I used to go across the Bay and get there at 7:00. And then I'd have to prepare the paints and get everything ready and then she'd come and I'd help her. I'd paint sections.

MARY MCCHESENEY: This was fresco technique, wasn't it?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Yes.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Had you done any fresco work before you began there?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Oh, yes. I did a mural in the cafeteria at the art school.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Who was your instructor in fresco at The Art School?

HEBE STACKPOLE: I had Mr. Ray Boynton.

MARY MCCHESNEY: And he had you actually do a mural of your own?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Yes, all these students got a chance to do murals, which they've taken down now, in the cafeteria. They each were given a wall and they could do what they wished with it.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: That's Ray Boynton?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Ray Boynton.

MARY MCCHESNEY: How large a space did you have for your school project?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Gee, I can't actually say. Maybe a hundred square feet.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Did you design the mural and execute it yourself?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Yes, over a door and both sides. It's kind of hard to say how large it was.

MARY MCCHESNEY: What was it? What was the subject matter?

HEBE STACKPOLE: It was the school. I used the students and then I had the background of San Francisco and the hills. I have a photograph of it somewhere.

MARY MCCHESNEY: And at Coit Tower when you were working with Suzanne, did you do any transferring of the drawings on to the wall too?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Oh, yes, and some of the painting.

MARY MCCHESNEY: How long were you working there?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Oh, I'd say about a year. That's guessing. I think so. And when that was finished, I got to do a mural of my own.

MARY MCCHESNEY: At the Coit Tower?

HEBE STACKPOLE: No, at the San Francisco State College. And that was two hundred and fifty square feet, approximately.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Was that fresco too?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Yes.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Do you remember what year that was?

HEBE STACKPOLE: There's the catch. I think it was '37, between '36 and '37.

MARY MCCHESNEY: That must have been WPA then?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Yes.

MARY MCCHESNEY: But when you were working for Suzanne, you must have been on the WPA?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Yes.

MARY MCCHESNEY: But there was a gap there between the time that you completed the mural for her? Or was there?

HEBE STACKPOLE: I don't think there was a great deal of time between them.

MARY MCCHESNEY: How did you happen to be assigned a mural at the San Francisco State College? Do you

remember how that came about?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Well, I don't remember.....Mr. Gaskin? Was that his name?

MARY MCCHESENEY: William Gaskin?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Yes, William Gaskin. I don't know. I tried for it, asked for it and got it.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And how large did you say it was?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Two hundred and fifty square feet.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And where was it located?

HEBE STACKPOLE: I had a mosaic on the lower part of it which somebody else did. (Done by Maxine Albro's group of workers) It was a passageway between the kindergarten and another building. They had a kindergarten there attached to the college.

MARY MCCHESENEY: All the way around the room?

HEBE STACKPOLE: All the way around. It was open, you see. It was open to the outside. There were arches. It was the connection between two buildings actually.

MARY MCCHESENEY: So the mural was done on four sides of the passageway. What was the subject matter?

HEBE STACKPOLE: The subject was children, small children.

MARY MCCHESENEY: We were talking about the mural that you did at San Francisco State College when the telephone rang and you were saying that it was of small children. Were they playing?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Yes, playing all different games. One part was London Bridges which I had over the top of one side. The other group was just children with a building in the background. Some jumping rope and on the sides were children playing with all sorts of things, building things.

MARY MCCHESENEY: How long were you working on that mural? A year? Longer?

HEBE STACKPOLE: I think it was longer than a year. It was very difficult because the plaster was put on early in the morning by an assistant and I had to wait, of course, for it to be just right and sometimes if he was late or if it was damp weather, it would take a long time so I wouldn't get started until quite late. And then sometimes I'd work until four o'clock in the morning getting it done.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Who were your assistants?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Well, I had just one, Neininger was his name.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Do you remember his first name?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Urban

MARY MCCHESENEY: Neininger was it?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Neininger.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And did he do the plastering?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Yes, he did the plastering. He didn't do anything else. I did my own tracing. I had no assistant in the painting.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: He was the project's technical man.

HEBE STACKPOLE: He was very, very good.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And this, you said, was in fresco too?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Yes.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Did you grind your own colors there?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Well, I had ground my own colors quite a long time before that time and used them. I did

those, I think, while I was working at the Coit Tower.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Interviewing one of the artists recently, he said he insisted on grinding all his colors, to get the very best and found he would work less and less and less and finally he just blew up, said no more. From then on he bought all commercial colors.

HEBE STACKPOLE: It is. It's a great deal of work.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: It's good experience, I guess, to know how the colors go together.

MARY MCCHESENEY: How large an area would you usually have plastered for a day's work?

HEBE STACKPOLE: I'd usually do a head at one time and perhaps the figure, then the rest of the figure other times and part of the background...

MARY MCCHESENEY: Was that ever a problem? I was wondering about that when I was talking to somebody else. If you got too much plaster on, what would you do the next day? Take it out and replace it?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Yes, well, you could always take it out right then. If you were dissatisfied, you could take it out immediately or you could take out what you couldn't finish and then continue from there on. But usually you have to choose just where it's a good place to cut.

MARY MCCHESENEY: You have to become quite skilled in estimating the amount of work that you could do in a day.

HEBE STACKPOLE: Yes, and then if you get a very late start, sometimes you get frantic. That's why I did stay late to finish it some days.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Who were the other people working at San Francisco State College?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Jack Moxon and Reuben Kadish. Well, I guess, they were the only two that I can think of. I think there was one other.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Do you remember who was doing the mosaic that was underneath your mural?

HEBE STACKPOLE: That was done after I left, after I got married, and I don't know who finished it. I never saw it and I never did see the mural again. It has been torn down.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh, it has been torn down.

HEBE STACKPOLE: That's what I hear. In fact, I wanted to go back to see it after I came back from the East and I heard it had been taken away. They tore all of them out.

MARY MCCHESENEY: I thought Kadish's mural was still there.

HEBE STACKPOLE: No, I heard that that was taken out too. That's what Jack Moxom told me. Do you know Reuben Kadish?

MARY MCCHESENEY: Yes. We saw him in New York about two years ago. Did you have much contact on the job with these other people, other artists who were working at the same time, like Reuben and Jack Moxom.

HEBE STACKPOLE: Oh yes, we used to walk in and talk to each other.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Reuben is quite a businessman now.

HEBE STACKPOLE: Really?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: He owns part of the Cedar Bar, is it? In New York. That's one of the artists' hangouts. He has a big ranch and raises pure bred stock. And he's also doing some sculpting. He had a show just recently. And he's just about as rude as he ever was. Ha ha

MARY MCCHESENEY: Who was your supervisor on the job? Was this Bill Gaskin?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Well, no one, as I recall, ever came out to look at anything.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Nobody ever did? You never had anybody check on you for your time or that sort of thing?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Not that I remember.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Reuben became a supervisor afterwards, didn't he? He was, I know, when I was on the project. He was a supervisor.

HEBE STACKPOLE: That must have been after I left then.

MARY MCCHESENEY: When you originally were assigned to do this mural, did you have to have your drawings approved by anybody? Did you have to submit a drawing?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Yes, we did. We had to make a plan and then they had to approve it.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Who was it that approved yours?

HEBE STACKPOLE: I guess it was Gaskin.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Uhhuh. Bill Gaskin? And then after it was approved, you had no further contact with him?

HEBE STACKPOLE: I can't recall anybody checking up. I think you had to make out a card or something as to how much time you had put in but there was no interference.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Were you on relief? Didn't you have to go on relief to get on the WPA project?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Well, it is relief, isn't it?

MARY MCCHESENEY: It was but some people were allowed on without relief. There was a special term for them and they were allowed to be on the WPA project without going on relief. They were supervisors or special people, but no, you were on relief. Uhhuh. And after you completed this mural at San Francisco State College, did you go ahead and do any further mural work?

HEBE STACKPOLE: No, I moved to New York. I haven't done any fresco since. I did some egg tempera and things ...

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Small paintings?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Small, yes. I've always wanted to try to do it again sometime.

MARY MCCHESENEY: After this mural was completed then did you leave the project?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Yes, I was married and moved to southern California and then to New York.

MARY MCCHESENEY: How long a time were you actually on the government projects? Three or four years?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Well, if the one in the Coit Tower took a year and with the other, ... I'd say about two and a half or three years.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Somebody said that you had been the subject of a bas-relief that was done by David Slivka. Do you remember that at all? Where is that?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Yes. I don't know where it is. I was holding a violin, although I don't play the violin. I play a flute but, you know, the violin was nicer.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Fitted in with the design better.

HEBE STACKPOLE: He did a very fine head and that was cast in terra cotta but unfortunately the whole thing blew up when it was fired. I've always wanted to see the relief.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Was this of you?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Yes, and it was a very fine job he did. I'd love to know what happened to it. You know, he must have formed a cast.

MARY MCCHESENEY: A mold certainly.

HEBE STACKPOLE: The mold, I mean. But I didn't find out. I've always wanted to know.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: He has a lot of stuff.

HEBE STACKPOLE: Ralph Stackpole looked him up in New York last year or the end of the year before and I asked him what David Slivka was doing and he didn't say much. He said he was doing some small things. Have you

seen what he's been doing?

MARY MCCHESENEY: When we saw him in New York two years ago, he was doing quite large bronzes. Up to six feet.

HEBE STACKPOLE: Oh, really. That's the only answer I got from him.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: He was out here four years ago at the University.

MARY MCCHESENEY: He taught here.

HEBE STACKPOLE: He took Dick O'Hanlon's place, he taught Dick's class.

MARY MCCHESENEY: I think so, at the University of California.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: At that time, well, he taught the lost wax method and got involved in using big sheets of wax as sculptural forms himself and forming the sheets into large massive constructions and when we were there, that's what he was doing. He had a big show right after we left.

HEBE STACKPOLE: When was this?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: A couple of years ago.

MARY MCCHESENEY: '62. 1962. It was interesting because we went down to his studio which was in the basement and he had these great big sheets of wax that he was working on and he had a bathtub there which he had to keep full of cold water with ice in it. In the New York summer these wax things would start to melt, you know, and get out of shape and he had to plunk them in the bathtub and leave them in there to keep the form.

HEBE STACKPOLE: Where did you meet him?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Dave? I met him out here. It was after the projects. I was going to sea as a merchant seaman and Dave was - - the draft was blowing down his neck so he asked me how he could ship out so I sent him down to the Marine Corps Hall and he got a job out of there and then he transferred to the Marine Fireman. But anyway he went to sea then.

MARY MCCHESENEY: That was quite a common practice during the WPA days, to take a friend and put them in a mural or use them as a model in a sculpture of some kind as David had done with you.

HEBE STACKPOLE: And they did it in the Coit Tower so much. So many faces there that are familiar.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Lucian LaBaudt's mural has everybody in it.

HEBE STACKPOLE: The murals got very scratched up and ruined, didn't they, at the Coit Tower? Is it still open to the public now?

MARY MCCHESENEY: They were all repaired about, I guess, a year ago. Dorothy Puccinelli repaired them.

HEBE STACKPOLE: Puccinelli and ...

MARY MCCHESENEY: Puccinelli and somebody else who worked on them. I've forgotten who it was. They spent quite a long time repairing the murals and now they're open again, I believe, but they're roped off so that you can't get right up against the surface where they were vandalized.

HEBE STACKPOLE: I remember an incident in the Coit Tower. I forget whose mural it was but ...

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Zakhein?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Was it Bertrand who painted up the steps, where they were sort of winding ...

MARY MCCHESENEY: LaBaudt painted something on the steps, maybe Bertrand did too.

HEBE STACKPOLE: But anyway, there was a broom or something with a sharp edge on it that fell and it scraped all through this mural, some object that went down. Great tragedy. Can you imagine that happening? It made a great scratch all the way down it.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Terrible. Were they able to repair it?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Oh, yes.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: It's pretty hard to repair a thing like that though. Don't they have to fill that scratch with plaster and then repaint?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Yes, it is, because that hard surface, the fresco is like marble.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: You can't just paint over that without filling it. Just leaving it would make it absorb paint faster.

HEBE STACKPOLE: I don't know. Also, it wouldn't last as long because it hasn't got that surface. It is the paint that actually combines itself with the plaster that makes a permanent surface. John Howard was quite a character.

MARY MCCHESENEY: He was working there at the Coit Tower?

HEBE STACKPOLE: He was working there. He always had a lot of wine, you know. He had a habit of drinking wine out of a cup with thumbtacks in the bottom. I don't know why he never bothered to remove them but he didn't.

MARY MCCHESENEY: (Laughter)

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: That way he always found out when he reached the bottom.

HEBE STACKPOLE: And, of course, Ray Boynton was working there. It was really a marvelous time and great lunches had together, you know, we'd buy big slabs of cheese and salami and bread, breaking off bread and sitting around talking. It was really a very wonderful time.

MARY MCCHESENEY: You would all have your lunch there at the Tower?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Oh, yes, we'd all get out and sit together you know.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Did you work as an assistant for anybody else on any of the other murals at Coit Tower?

HEBE STACKPOLE: No, I didn't and the curious thing is there were a number of them that did do that. They worked a little around for everyone but I worked for Suzanne only, for some reason. I did do quite a bit of drawing for her. I would go away and do drawings. I still have some of the old drawings.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Were you there at the Tower during the time of any of the demonstrations or protests that were held?

HEBE STACKPOLE: No.

MARY MCCHESENEY: There was one, I understand, that was involved with Rivers.

JACK MOXOM: Well, I hate to start bitching because it is one long biblical lament in which I think, woe is me, the sons of bitches screwed us up and that's that. Except I can't blame the villains. There is no villain. We were permitted to have our dreams and youthful hopes and we thought this wonderful thing will continue. We can live as artists and we began to grow as artists in that period.

MARY MCCHESENEY: (We've been joined now by Jack Moxom who has been speaking and was also on the art project in San Francisco.) You were first on the PWA, weren't you, Jack?

JACK MOXOM: Yes, I think so. Well, no. I started with the Art Project but they changed the initials part way through.

MARY MCCHESENEY: When did you first go on to any of the art projects?

JACK MOXOM: At the very beginning. The artists were anxious to line up so that the payroll got started in the beginning and I remember the interviews were in the DeYoung Museum and I remember Gottardo Piazzoni who we all thought was rich but poor Gottardo didn't think he was rich. And he would trundle in there and sit very patiently and lonely and his dignity diminished somewhat in my mind. I admired him. I loved him but I thought, "Oh, you shouldn't come down to our level," and he was hoping for a little job too and was eminently qualified but he owned his own house and he wasn't quite eligible. I think later they permitted supervisory artists and so he was employed. Yes, he was and did rather lovely things in their own context in the public library in San Francisco. You remember those side walls?

MARY MCCHESENEY: I've never seen them, no?

JACK MOXOM: Well, the entrance to the public library is on both sides of the staircase. Very enclosed and it's



poor architecture in a sense and he had the dignity to merely penetrate these walls and get a little air into it painting these vast panels but maintaining the continuity. If he had broken it up into various little busybody things the way a lot of people -- demonstrate how you do the tight walk, this is the way you nose dive -- you know, every painting different. It could be very bad but his absolute simplicity made a nice job of it. And that was done under WPA.

HEBE STACKPOLE: Well, that was a trend then to crowd many figures into the mural. I mean it was the influence of Rivera which certainly took over in this whole area.

JACK MOXOM: Rivera knocked us on our ears.

HEBE STACKPOLE: Everyone was afraid to get away from it.

JJ What was the first mural project that you did on the PWA?

JACK MOXOM: I didn't do murals on the project. I had a big block of sandstone and I was carving it for the Sarah Cooper fountain in Golden Gate Park and it was actually placed, which is a miracle of kindness of people because I was not a sculptor ... I did drawings in those days. That's all I could do, good drawings. But I didn't really know anything about sculpture. Stackpole was just kind of sweet to me and I did no painting at all. But it was actually put up and there were several mistakes in the conception. It was a little girl, my sister, standing naked with a cat by her ankles and it was to replace a ruined fountain called the Sarah Cooper fountain. And strangely enough it's still there.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: How large was it?

JACK MOXOM: Life size.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: About four feet?

JACK MOXOM: Yes, I would say so.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: And how did the water flow from it?

JACK MOXOM: Well, the water just filled the semi-circular, lunette shaped fountain. There was no flowing water at that time. But one of the errors, beside the kindness of hiring me, was that I bought a type of sandstone that darkened to a bloody red when the water hit it and while it was beautifully flesh colored in the studio or in the shed, it wasn't the moment the water hit it. I kind of pretend it wasn't that bad, you know, but this little girl of six looked kind of pregnant too. (laughter) And it had the typical square noses, remember in those days every nose was square. I thought there was a law about noses. Noses just came down with a good flat bridge on them. Now who did we get that from or was it my own ... ?

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Stackpole's always were that way.

JACK MOXOM: He was quite a square nose man, yes.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: Was he your supervisor when you did this fountain?

JACK MOXOM: Well, I was in the privilege position of being my own supervisor. It was my own project and I had mule kicking freedom to do anything I wanted and I didn't have the judgement to know what could be done. In fact, I couldn't have been happy in any other capacity. I was not capable of being happy as an assistant to somebody cutting granite. This was supposed to be creative and the fact that it didn't turn out to be very good was quite apart from the experience for me. Oh, I did paintings after. I'd forgotten. Yeah. How could I forget we worked together?

MARY MCCCHESNEY: That was the mural at San Francisco State College?

JACK MOXOM: Yeah, for almost two years wasn't it, solid painting.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: You did a mural of your own?

JACK MOXOM: Yeah, I did about fifteen of them, little ones over the doors. Let's see, there were three little door ones. No, not that many. There were some lunettes over some windows about ten feet wide and four feet high and some completely around doors and then in the library there were probably several hundred feet of murals. We'd paint about four feet because I was painting rather picyunish in those days. Painted one angel with five toes on her. It looked fine. I thought she had big feet and someone started counting them. She was floating over a doorway. Oh, and I guess we've done our classical bitch about how everything was destroyed there or covered over.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Was it covered over or destroyed or what?

JACK MOXOM: Oh, some fancy completely. It couldn't be removed. The real tragedy were Hebe's murals which were, apart from liking Hebe, just loves in a little tiny corridor where the athletes would tear down for the showers and this corridor was a classic with a beamed ceiling and all the walls around were covered by perfectly delightful drawings of children. I would say rather influenced by the Egyptian murals that you saw, not in the drawing but in the simplicity of the color. And there were children pulling little carts, digging, playing. From the drawing viewpoint, they were the most superb drawings I've ever remembered. And one of the big tragedies of the period was you dissipated your ability. I don't know whether you dissipated. Maybe you took it out in other ways so those were destroyed in two ways. For one thing no attempt was made to patch the roof and so the leaks began and they themselves apart from liking Hebe were the most perfect little gems of the period and most suited to the location and they were a real loss. I think somewhere there must be some photos.

HEBE STACKPOLE: John, who did the mosaic after I left?

JACK MOXOM: Well, Maxine Albro did the mosaic on Haight Street which was very adequate and good but not world shaking or close to fine art as yours. Some of her people put a very simple mosaic base underneath Hebe's paintings. She also had the sense to have the base of the frescos, which are vulnerable, about six feet high so that they could be seen nicely and also they didn't invite damage so the mosaics underneath were made quite high. A lot of labor went into them by people on Albro's project. And the other great tragedy at San Francisco State was Kadish's mural. Now I never like Kadish. My mind told me he's a fine person. He always trod on my little egotistic toes and, in fact, while I despised him personally, I had to keep admiring him all the time, I couldn't stand him and it was pretty mutual. We were all pretty big egotists, if you remember, and Kadish rivaled me and (laughter) I don't brook rivals. And his mural which I still think was very valuable should be preserved. If any effort could be made to preserve this thing. They had such contempt for that that they didn't even bother to paint it out. They built storerooms and nailed beams into the side of it. So it is still possible, the last I heard or saw of it. There's some chance of restoring it. It was well designed. It was fantastic. It was trompe L'oeil, fool the eye. It was, yeah, sort of surrealist school and highly original.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Big heavy faces in it, sort of like Siqueiros.

JACK MOXOM: And he had a marvelous feeling for color. He loved to make things solid and round. Geometric solids and really vivid colors, something that I'm enjoying now. Then some paintings up in the main front hall were horrible to start with, done by un ... this is a personal opinion but I think a lot of people would agree. With rainbows to doll them up, weak drawings and they were painted out, I'm happy to say.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Who did those?

HEBE STACKPOLE: That's just what I couldn't answer.

MARY MCCHESENEY: You don't remember?

HEBE STACKPOLE: There was another person there.

JACK MOXOM: He had what would be called an established reputation . . . He lived in Berkeley . . .

MARY MCCHESENEY: Not Gerrity? John Gerrity?

JACK MOXOM: Familiar name. But they were pronounced in that they had little rainbows all over the place. Whenever he had a bit of drawing, he'd fade a rainbow through it. And they were also ill-advised in that he used oil paint that shone or got dull and that rather fouled up that whole front entrance. In Europe, on the whole, things survive when they're good and become painted out or destroyed when they're not. This applies to architecture as well as painting, so that there is a survival of the fittest there which process hasn't occurred here. Even the Turks painted out what they called or would consider idols in Santa Sophia with whitewash that could be removed. It was deeply against their religion to have those things in a holy place but they weren't torn out and now even though the state religion is Islam, they might permit these things to be restored. They have more respect for art, certainly, than we do. We have a sublime contempt for artists and we feel that they ought to starve and if they're starving and their stuffs cheap enough, then we might buy it for a real small sum.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Whatever happened to that mural that Bernard Zakheim did?

JACK MOXOM: That I believe is still in good shape. It's in Toland's amphitheater. He's an extremely talented man. (At the University of California Medical Center, San Francisco)

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Didn't they put wallpaper over that or something?

JACK MOXOM: Yes, and I believe it was removed. Personalities entered into that. One of the Dean's of Medicine

had it wall papered and another had the guts to come out and have the paper removed. This was subsequent to the WPA. He himself is living somewhere near Petabima and also near you.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: He just returned from Poland. He took a trip over there and decided to do a mural while he was there. This was the report.

JACK MOXOM: He was another man I admired but he was always urging me to join the loyalists and go die in Spain so . . . I got sort of mixed up on that deal. I thought I wanted to be with the Loyalists and live too.  
(laughter)

MARY MCCCHESNEY: The murals that you did at San Francisco State College, were fresco too?

JACK MOXOM: They were pure fresco and there's nothing worse. I mean there's really no regret at them being covered over at all on my part but it was the way they didn't even say "please do you want to take a last vote or a look," we for good reasons feel that they should be covered." They can't be cleaned up and restored. They were nothing memorable in any sense at all. I didn't learn to paint for another ten years and then it came not as any staggering learning but a very definite learning to paint verses not knowing how to paint.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: What was the subject matter of the fresco that you did?

JACK MOXOM: They were children. Basically the subject matter was Hebe's but a little different approach and I catlicked the hell out of them. I painted every little hair on all of the little wretches and made their eyes fat and sausagelike. It was a good training school for artists, a blessing of a training school.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: How long were you on the project?

JACK MOXOM: The full length of the project. I was in at the beginning and they had to push my hand off the edge of the lifeboat at the end.

HEBE STACKPOLE: How long was that? How many years?

JACK MOXOM: It was definitely more than two years. I don't think it was three.

HEBE STACKPOLE: Then I must be wrong.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: From the beginning to the end?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Then I must be wrong because I thought . . .

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: I went on in '37 and I left the project around '41.

JACK MOXOM: Was it that long?

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: And that was quite late.

JACK MOXOM: Oh, lord, it was longer because then I did some murals down at Hillsborough at the school there. I'd forgotten those. That was a big one. It was sixty feet wide, over the stage.

HEBE STACKPOLE: Good heavens. I didn't know that.

JACK MOXOM: They had big feet too but they had boots on. Ha ha ha

MARY MCCCHESNEY: Was this at a school in Hillsborough?

JACK MOXOM: Yes, the school is still there and I understand the murals are still there and I hope they've darkened considerably.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: Were these fresco too?

JACK MOXOM: No, they were oil and they were a proscenium arch for a roof of this type, gabled and with a sort of a flat arched stage and a slight drop down on both sides. Subject - - early Spanish explorers in California. Native arts, Indian women weaving.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: Did you do those down there at the school, on the location?

JACK MOXOM: They were done on the wall, yeah. I think most of us had pretty rigid articles of faith and one was that you didn't paint in the studio except for piazzoni. You had to work on the sacred wall, if possible, with the sacred material.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Did you have any assistants working with you on that project?

JACK MOXOM: Well, I did on the murals. I had one assistant who taught me the violin because he didn't like grinding colors and he was much more useful as a violinist. Ha ha. No one else could stand my violin but he had to. Ha ha ha

HEBE STACKPOLE: Did he grind your colors?

JACK MOXOM: Well, he ground for a little while 'til I found he was a damn good violinist.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Did he accompany you while you painted?

JACK MOXOM: No, nothing quite that neurotic. Ha ha ha ha

MARY MCCHESENEY: What was his name? Do you remember?

JACK MOXOM: Ya, gee, that was . . . Well, sometime when this is off, I'll tell you about that. His wife married a transvestite. Not his wife, his girlfriend. Rather a sad story. No, I can't remember . . . Lou, Lou, something or other. I'm sorry. There was an Irish no-good that came on as a carpenter and when I saw what carpentry he was doing, he was building baffles and .... oh, and there was that guy who always liked you so much, who stammered, had a cleft lip, tall and handsome. Neininger, yeah.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Did he work with you too as a plasterer?

JACK MOXOM: He worked as a plasterer, yes.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh both of your murals at San Francisco State College.

JACK MOXOM: He did both of them.

MARY MCCHESENEY: After your mural was finished at Hillsborough, then did you go on to some other mural project?

JACK MOXOM: Then I think that things were concentrating on an old nunnery or school for girls on Potrero, near the hospital and they established little work places for lithographers and weavers. There was one whole group of people who were a little less privileged who had to work in the project, remember? So we were considered just less privileged. Oh, boy, the freedom of just checking in for paychecks - - terrific!

HEBE STACKPOLE: Didn't we also turn in the time, the amount of time that we put in? Wasn't there something that we had to fill in? I recall we had to fill out some forms as to how much time we had put in.

JACK MOXOM: Some forms, forms. Oh, you had to . . . sure, but we never paid much attention to that. We were paid for so many hours a week.

HEBE STACKPOLE: We put in much more than that anyway.

JACK MOXOM: Yeah, well, it was a sheer pleasure.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Were you on the lithography project for a while?

JACK MOXOM: Not as such but I made lithographs on stone and on metal.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Quite a few of the artists did, in fact.

JACK MOXOM: A lot of people were encouraged to bring in transfer plates and Ray . . . hun. . .

HEBE STACKPOLE: Bertrand?

JACK MOXOM: Bertrand, who was an excellent technician besides being a good draftsman, a fine lithographer, put them on stone. But so far as my contributions in lithography, they were strictly learning and the WPA to me was a wonderful opportunity to go absolutely mad wild and to try for everything which, with a little bit of assistance and self-deception, you'd think might mean it was a success but it wasn't. All it was, from my viewpoint, was just a wonderful period that would have been very valuable if I had been able to continue as a painter. But, that didn't happen. Reality took over. The harsh reality that always had existed. It had changed a little in that just previous to our time a painter, a good painter, could live by the sale of his work and now that is not possible. Oh, there are a few who manage. I don't know. Maybe I'm sour grapes. I don't believe it. I mean Piazzoni would sell a painting for a thousand dollars which would buy him a new car. He didn't do it everyday, just whenever his car broke down.

MARY MCCHESENEY: That was a great deal of money, though, at that time.

JACK MOXOM: It was a great deal of money and it was probably much more than the painting actually was worth at the time but it was a period in which people bought paintings.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Moya del Pino sold paintings.

JACK MOXOM: Was that Moy who did those things at San Francisco State? No, it wasn't. I'm trying to remember . . .

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: He did portraits mostly.

JACK MOXOM: Very skillful ones, I guess, if you like them. Everyone on Russian Hill, every tenth person had a del Pino. I think your wasting your tape.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Hah hah. What were the sort of influences that were prominent in San Francisco art circles at that time? You mentioned Rivera a bit earlier. Did you ever know him or see his work in Mexico or how did he begin to influence art here?

JACK MOXOM: Well, we knew him here.

HEBE STACKPOLE: Well, I never did meet him.

JACK MOXOM: No? I was assigned to work for him as an assistant. Fred Olmsted worked with him very closely. And all I did was meet him and get to go up on the honored scaffold. Of course, some people got to meet him at the Art School when he did that very lovely thing at the end of the room.

HEBE STACKPOLE: That was before I was there.

JACK MOXOM: That was, really?

HEBE STACKPOLE: He did the mural at the stock exchange too, in San Francisco.

JACK MOXOM: Oh, it was before I went to art school for that matter but I think we visited him. Peter posed for the mural.

HEBE STACKPOLE: At the Stock Exchange.

JACK MOXOM: When you see the boy with the airplane, that's Peter Stackpole.

HEBE STACKPOLE: In the middle, the all-American boy.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh, that's your husband?

HEBE STACKPOLE: That's my husband. Posed for three hours and almost died.

JACK MOXOM: Oh, he was on those sculptures of Ralph Stackpole's outside and wasn't Mirielle Piazzoni supposed to be in that? Looks like Mirielle.

HEBE STACKPOLE: I don't' know. Some people say that boy looks like Tim, my son. Every time they drive by they think it's Tim.

JACK MOXOM: That was long before Tim was born. That was looking ahead.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What mural of Rivera's were you an assistant on?

JACK MOXOM: Well, it was supposed to be the one on Treasure Island but things got sort of mixed up there. They gave him a dinner of welcome and honor and everyone was there lined up at the art building at the fair, tables laden and no Rivera. Ha ha. He tried to rent my house at that time. He liked it because it had high walls and could be defended easily. He usually carried a pistol in his hip pocket and he liked my house because it was easily defended. Did you ever see that? You never saw the first one I built? It had very high walls and was easily defensible and that actually appealed to him very greatly because some people had shot at him. How they ever missed I just don't know.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Ha ha ha ha

JACK MOXOM: If you can imagine shooting at Rivera and missing. It's a crime to shoot but it's abominable to miss at any reasonable range. Oh, and remember this woman he had. She was almost died here at the time. You

know, she died in Mexico and quite a cult sprang up. His wife . . .

HEBE STACKPOLE: Frida.

JACK MOXOM: Frida Kahlo. She was very beautiful, I thought. She had these big gold earrings, lacy, and she was a much better painter basically than Rivera I think. A good argument could be made for that.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And she came up with him at the time of the Treasure Island Fair?

JACK MOXOM: Yes, she did because I think someone else was sort of taking care of him a little too much for her sheer pleasure and delight so she came up and took a little more care and gave a few lectures in French at the tiny little theatre at the Legion of Honor. I remember they were translated phrase by phrase, I believe.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Did you actually ever do any work for Rivera as an assistant?

JACK MOXOM: No, no, the honor of being named as his assistant was quite enough for me and then when no one pushed it, I thought well, ha ha ha ha.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Ha ha ha. Well, his influence had really begun in this area, though, before his arrival on the scene or had it?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Oh, yes. It had because I remember even in high school he was spoken about. He came over like a wave.

JACK MOXOM: That's incredible. Now I wonder why that influence when there were other good or better painters that were living and working at the same time? Now why isn't Siqueiros' influence more? Or not Siqueiros so much as this chap in Guahalahaura ... Orozco, a great painter.

HEBE STACKPOLE: Orozco. Very exciting.

JACK MOXOM: Have you ever seen his studio in Guadalahaura? It's a beauty.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Do you think it was because Rivera came up? Well, no, his influence had really begun before he arrived in San Francisco.

JACK MOXOM: The color, the publicity. I think painting always has been inevitably mixed up with various other problems that are personality problems rather than an interest in the rite of art. And Rivera or any painter who is notorious and colorful will attract attention and becoming an artist solves many social problems, even if you don't paint. So I think that the law of becoming an artist or not involves not having too much judgement in the people you admired and followed and imitated. I think in imitating Rivera, it may have been we wanted to substitute for Rivera in his colorful life too. We'd walk like Rivera and paint like Rivera. I mean .. that's a little trite but in some ways, true. I mean, you don't understand painting when you start painting. So many people don't particularly know that fewer disciplines are required. I mean, it's as if ballet suddenly said you don't even have to know what a pas de deux is, express you soul and be original, you know? Wonder what's coming next? But now that the bars seem to be let down or so thoroughly confused, the psychological motivation for being a painter operates on a vast amount of people and this operated at the time of Rivera. It started out with you asking, "Why his influence?" It was not because we understood painting. It was because of his prominent and rebellious character and we, wanting to be prominent and certainly being rebellious, picked him as a model and he was successful. Success was very important naturally. But the psychological reasons for becoming a painter -- this poor son of a gun who can't do a pas de deux joins the school. He becomes an artist and everyone says, "Oh, my God, I didn't understand he was an artist all the time," you know? And his social position improves a hell of a lot by becoming an artist and it usually stays improved as long as he can talk and he doesn't have to paint. And when he has to paint, when he's faced with the easel and faced with his vast lack of feeling, understanding, training it becomes a very soul searching and terrible struggle. There are a few solutions to that struggle but they aren't usually learning to paint. They are learning to become a gallery director or to work off into allied forms where they're not faced with the painting anymore. Then, inevitably, painting is tied up with sales and acceptance, with prestige so terribly. Well, I got off the question. That is an answer ... My opinion of why we followed Rivera. It wasn't because of an interest in art.

MARY MCCHESENEY: There was sort of a surrealist influence going on in San Francisco at the time. Did you have any contact with that? I think of that because of people like Shirley Staschen, do you know her work?

JACK MOXOM: Oh, my God, yes.

MARY MCCHESENEY: She was doing some surrealist work.

JACK MOXOM: Shirley, I knew when I was sixteen. I could tell you the whole family history. She's my sister-in-law.

MARY MCCHESENEY: She's your sister-in-law?

JACK MOXOM: Not quite now. I don't know, does divorce affect sister-in-laws or do they still remain? My brother married her sister. Well, I knew her in high school. She was a great admirer of mine at the time. Ha ha ha .

MARY MCCHESENEY: Well, in Reuben Kadish's work too there was sort of the same kind of feeling...

JACK MOXOM: Was Reuben Kadish surrealist in a sense?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Yes, I was going to say that. In a sense, he was.

JACK MOXOM: I think he was. It was a vigorous influence, a much more honest influence.

HEBE STACKPOLE: But he certainly stood apart from the average. I mean when you take average painter.

JACK MOXOM: He's probably stood out now in perspective. I would rate him higher than almost anyone of that group. Or would you?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Well, that extends pretty much. You mean, the whole group?

JACK MOXOM: That's a hard question. Well, see, I don't think of David. David's real peak was just before the project. In my mind, three sculptures by David Slivka stand out as the most superb sculpture I've ever seen and these three things were done just before the project started. So David and Kadish and your work, Hebe ... and David Park, huh? Wasn't he rather good? He was a little, little clever but he was a good painter and he did some good designs on the project for tapestry.

HEBE STACKPOLE: Yes, he did.

JACK MOXOM: There were quite a few tapestries executed at that time.

HEBE STACKPOLE: Do you remember that large figure? Didn't David Slivka do a huge standing figure of a young girl? Wasn't that on WPA or was that before?

JACK MOXOM: I think it was before because David got interested in carving low relief on sandstone on WPA and they were impeccable but they weren't monumental. Oh, the three things that David did that were monumental, one was slightly larger than life size, a standing figure in clay. It was cast of a not too pretty girl either, just absolute simplicity, just standing something like that. Remember that thing? It wouldn't be in existence now because the art school has gone through some pretty low hands and they scrapped everything that was idolatrous. They went through an Islamic period where anything that looked like anything, unless it looked like a kidney bean, was pretty well covered over. You know, they revolted against subject matter. They CLAIM they revolted against subject matter. You know, the group that followed people who did recognizable work. But actually all they did was substitute a new acceptable vocabulary of subject matters -- kidney beans and prisms and rather interesting things you'd call abstract -- which became as rigid a matter in painting as September Morn had been and meant as little as the periods of Bodegon and September Morn when the subject was pretty girls bathing and sweet people by pools. That made the established thing. And when people have revolted against subject matter, sometimes they have only substituted a completely new vocabulary of subject matter and it becomes as rigid a thing as before. Real painting, which is a personal discovery in every work, doesn't work that way. It's always hard to say.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What were the reasons, do you think, for the surrealist influence? What there was of it? I was also thinking of Clay Spohn. Do you know his work?

JACK MOXOM: I knew Clay.

MARY MCCHESENEY: He did murals that had sort of an Artschy Bachev (sp. - Time mag Cover Man) look to parts of them as a matter of fact. Not really like European surrealism.

JACK MOXOM: Can you be catty on tape?

MARY MCCHESENEY: What?

JACK MOXOM: Frank? I didn't think much of Clay Spohn. Or that chap who did those vast things on Treasure Island. Do you remember those big brutal murals? Who was he?

MARY MCCHESENEY: Herman Volz?

JACK MOXOM: Volz. Yeah. And he was sort of a Carl Hofer modern. And he personally and his paintings both were

a shock to a sensitive boy like me.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Ha ha ha They were a shock to many people.

HEBE STACKPOLE: What happened to Volz? Where is he?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: He's still around. He lives in Mill Valley.

JACK MOXOM: But Clay was a very nice person but he never seemed to do anything, did he?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Not that I know of.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: He had a very hard time finishing anything. He put a rather nice mural down in the Los Gatos high school. Sort of a chronology of Indians.

JACK MOXOM: Oh, now I begin to remember. Yes, he did. He knew more about painting than I did. I'd forgotten. He did finish his work, which is more than a lot of people did. And as I remember, it probably would have been more acceptable to the people who had to live with it. We were all of us terrible shocks. That was a social relations problem, putting our dreams of the broad life onto someone else's wall. I remember running up against Dr. Geiger once. Do you remember? I took you in to see an operation once at the San Francisco hospital? I was working on a drawing and they gave you the bum's rush. They wouldn't let you in the operating room because they said they had enough trouble without picking up pretty young artists. You were so young they wouldn't serve you beer in a pub then. Ha ha ha. And at that time I would sort of finagle myself in to doing these drawings of operations and was even invited to do one once. The nurse had thought I was an intern and they had no one to lance an abscess. It was a real temptation because I've always been inclined to that direction. Ha ha ha. Well, it was easy to do; it was just under the pectoral muscle and if you were clean and let it out, it was fine. I've done worse in the Army. Gee, I had a lot of fun in the Army. I got in the medical corps in between times when the bloody people were coming back from Anzio and it was a lot of fun there until someone said, "Where did you get your medical training?" And my surgery came to an end. Ha ha ha.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Well, getting back to this surrealism, I think it's rather interesting. You might call it post-surrealism. But I think Feitelson, Lorser out of Los Angeles was the one that influenced the most people.

JACK MOXOM: Who were the Adam and Eve, who were the people you're rooting back to? Miro? Or the Dutch?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Well, that's just what I said ...

JACK MOXOM: Or that chap with the long mustachios? Dali.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Well, you can't take it back that far.

JACK MOXOM: I hate to admit but I'm a little foggy on what a surrealist is. I remember there was a literary school of surrealism that indulged in some fascinating mumble jumble stuff.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Well, now that you ask, I forget the names but it was quite a school.

HEBE STACKPOLE: Philip Guston was a friend of Reuben Kadish wasn't he?

MARY MCCHESENEY: Yes. He wasn't out here though, Philip Guston. Was he at that time?

HEBE STACKPOLE: No. I was just thinking of him. I think he's a very fine artist.

JACK MOXOM: Funny, a lot of people, such as I found out today as this chap from Shell Oil, have happy memories over WPA. He never picked up a pencil to do a thing. He just lived to sharpen tools and probably it was wonderful combination because Schnier, Jacques really wanted to be a psychiatrist. I think he is now, isn't he?

HEBE STACKPOLE: He was a very exacting person. Wasn't he a perfectionist in what he did?

JACK MOXOM: Yeah, well, like a lot of them. Well, I hate to say this about David Slivka, but he was also hamstrung. I went through delightful painting, painting period just now like that. They desired to do things so perfectly they slowed down everything to a standstill by this delight to get it absolutely perfect. Well, Schnier gave up sculpture -- which in a way I think was rather proper -- and took up psychiatry. He was very good at that. As I remember, he had me hypnotized once. He sat me where that north light came in. I came to see him about something. He was on some committee, you know, and I wanted to get my little sculpture into place in the park because I thought that was what it was intended for and maybe if I put it there, it would be a success. And he was helpful, I guess, but he was also amused by putting me in a strong north light and talking in a very hypnotic voice until I damn near fell off the stool. Ha ha ha ha. Say Ted Polos, who was in the art project, is one



of the few people who is producing good work now. And how he's doing it for a kind of sick person and he's doing heavy physical work as a house painter. It's a goddamned tragedy. If society had a collective ass that I could kick, I'd kick it on Ted Polos' behalf.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: The Flax brothers were supporting him for a while.

JACK MOXOM: Who were they?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Flax, you Flax.

JACK MOXOM: Flax, old man Flax. He's dead.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: The younger. There were, I don't know how many boys, but there was one who split off and opened another art school and he was the one that was supporting Ted for a while. I don't know when he stopped.

JACK MOXOM: Well, those Flax people have a well-deserved success in making money because the old man, the old Jew was one of the nicest old guys. He never handed money out to anyone but he'd give people paint and so if they paid, fine, and if not, fine.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: He bought a painting now and then too. In fact, he bought one from me.

JACK MOXOM: Say, the only person that bought in those days that stands out in my mind is the insurance man who's now dead, also Jewish. Do you remember? Not Gerstle. He was sort of an art patron.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Gerstle, William bought some paintings.

JACK MOXOM: Well, there's a memorial collection in the San Francisco Art Museum in his name.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Albert Bender?

JACK MOXOM: Bender.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Yes, he collected quite a bit of work from that time.

JACK MOXOM: I think you're off the end of your tape.

MARY MCCHESENEY: No. It's something, I think, more serious than that. Just have to ignore it. It's got a bird in it. I would like to ask you, though, looking back on the WPA period from a vantage point of about thirty years, what kind of an effect do you think the government sponsorship of the arts had on your career as a painter?

JACK MOXOM: Well, it confirmed me in my obsession that I was a painter and it convinced me that I was absolutely right about the whole thing and I'd shake the world before the age of forty-five. It actually confirmed me. It was very useful because later I was able to study painting with de Chirico and learn somewhat, learn how to paint in a simple way and in a communicative way and that wouldn't have been possible without all of these vast growing pains. I wish to god someone would start that again. Rather than cut-throat competition for artists. Put the poor miserable painters under some umbrella, some shelter can be erected by society that would permit a school of artists to grow up. They can be useful, like in teaching. Useful in teaching older people, retired people, no longer bringing up children and who are sitting around in these miserable retirement villages, playing golf, who need some meaning. They're wondering what meaning life can have and they are segregated the way I segregate my old in-laws, even though I'm joining the ranks rapidly. So they are segregated. They aren't in the main stream. And any subsidy that would permit people to be useful socially in that sense is good. I tried to get the Ford Foundation interested in some sort of project, in that direction, rather than buying paintings because I think buying paintings or commissioning is disastrous. For one thing you shouldn't commission when the results are going to be most horrid. All ass and no forehead. I mean, who is capable of decorating a public building. In San Diego there is the beginning of something that happened by sheer accident. On the previous exposition site there are a group of old shanties that are offered or allowed to the artists to use as studios and that removes the terrible taxes. You know, they pay a nominal sum and they're allowed work there. It gives them a place to work and then they can make sort of modest little sales without all the complexities of carrying stuff to galleries and the vexations of being judged. So that, in that sense, with all of our government land, for god's sakes, can't we make a neutral ground, an umbrella over the terrible demands of competitive life to make money? The tax situation would be one way of doing it. Because right now we have tariffs against wines if we want them or suppose we want to encourage Japanese, we lower the tariff. In other words, the use of taxes could be extremely valuable in permitting the development. The inception, not development. It doesn't exist. All that remains of our artists are corpses. We are scattered and disintegrated as any troop that had been under battle. So the actual formation could be maintained by a tax program in which some place for a studio, some facilities to make a beginning, some nucleus would permit the painter to live on a restricted budget. I don't mean subsidy. I don't

even mean that his home should be built on Fort Miley but, by god, our soldiers, our peace time Army have their commissaries where they get their food and if you're a pretty good soldier, you have a little house on the post, you know? That sort of thing might be a beginning, rather than competition. It's deadly, competition. Partly because most of us would always lose and those who win might not be the best ones. I mean, God himself couldn't tell what the results are going to be before we've begun. So a combination, some utilization of public lands, some shelter from the world. Well, for instance, I have to earn so much money or I couldn't pay my taxes. I couldn't paint. In Mexico I built up a certain amount of an income which would allow me to live in comparative luxury in Mexico but I couldn't here. The tax system and the demands of society make it impossible for me to paint. And otherwise it would be possible. And I've made it possible by making enough money so that I, if things were just a little bit more modest, could do it.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Have you ever seen any of the WPA sponsored art work in New York City? I was wondering if you had any thoughts about comparing the way the project developed on the East Coast and the way it developed on the West Coast?

JACK MOXOM: No. I knew nothing about New York City.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Did you, Hebe, have any contact with New York?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Not at all.

MARY MCCHESENEY: At that time apparently the artists didn't travel back and forth the way they do now.

JACK MOXOM: Say, Bill Hestle is another man. He was one of the best of the easel painters of the thirties, remember? His father owned a hock shop on Montgomery Street. Very, very high class hock shop. And Bill ... Did you admire him as much as I did?

HEBE STACKPOLE: I liked his work, yes.

JACK MOXOM: Yeah, it was honest painting. That's a rarity, isn't it.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What kind of painting was it?

JACK MOXOM: Well, there were landscapes and figures and everything he was interested in and it was plain painting. In other words, the subject didn't matter. He liked to paint, so he painted the things he liked, and he was interested in painting itself but there was no trickery involved in it, no attempt to trick. And, say, how about our old friend Luke Gibney who found a marvelous formula for paintings? He glazed the hell out of a dark night and put in a moon and a lonely drunk under a telephone pole. Kind of cute.

MARY MCCHESENEY: That's Mathew Barnes.

JACK MOXOM: Well, Luke Gibney followed very closely on the footsteps of Matt Barnes who had to make a living as a refrigerator engineer, didn't he?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Plasterer was it?

JACK MOXOM: Plasterer, right. Who was the refrigeration engineer?

MARY MCCHESENEY: Matt Barnes was a plasterer for Rivera at Treasure Island and at Coit Tower too? Maybe not.

JACK MOXOM: He probably, actually, did do plastering and in fact I, you're right. He did plaster the whole of the Rivera thing. And that is in existence, somewhere in storage.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Supposed to have gone up to San Francisco State College wasn't it?

MARY MCCHESENEY: That's City College. I think it is in the library or theatre, rather, at San Francisco City College. After a great deal of controversy, it was finally put into place. And I think it can be seen by the public.

HEBE STACKPOLE: What about Bufano's things? They've sort of been kicked around, haven't they?

MARY MCCHESENEY: I guess they have; some of them, of course, are in San Francisco.

JACK MOXOM: The question is who owns them.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Yes. What happened to the lithographs that you did on the WPA? Do you have any idea?

JACK MOXOM: Oh, first they started out with editions of forty or fifty, remember? And then as paper was expensive and the quality of the lithographs wasn't so much, they cut down the editions to twenty-five. These

were given to almost anyone, any little public school or public agency that wanted them. I don't know. Who was the outstanding artist? You did, I think some beauties but not many, two or three?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Two or three.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Barbara Olmsted did some.

JACK MOXOM: Barbara did some, Ray Bertrand, of course, and some other people.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: George Harris did some.

JACK MOXOM: Oh lord yes. How many of us are all dead? I mean maybe forty per cent of the lot. Isn't George dead?

MARY MCCCHESNEY: No, he's teaching at Stanford University.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: He just went back to school.

JACK MOXOM: Oh, Victor Arnauteff was another man on the project. He's teaching at Stanford.

HEBE STACKPOLE: Not any more, I don't think.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: No, he's retired and now he's living in Russia.

JACK MOXOM: His wife was the worst cook. She was the daughter of the chief of police of Moscow. And one night I ... might as well turn that thing off. I can't add anything fruitful to your tape. But, anyhow I was babysitting for Victor, whom I admired very much, and I was invited to have a meal there and no wonder he had ulcers. Oh, god, it was awful. Raw spaghetti with black pepper on it and that was about it. Heh ha ha ha. Well, he rode across the whole of Russia on a horse, you know. He was a young lieutenant in the revolution.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Yes, with the White Guard.

JACK MOXOM: The White Guard with Keireinsky or Kolchek, the butcher, or something and then he got over into Denikin's quarters and got captured and so he said, "Yes, I'll fight on your side," which is the logical sort of thing to do so he fought with the Reds after a while until he saw a chance to escape. Eventually, he made it to Harbin (China) where he met his wife. That meeting was an unmitigated culinary tragedy.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Well, they had quite a tragedy, you know. She was killed.

JACK MOXOM: Oh, no.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: Well, they sort of let him go, eased him out of Stanford.

JACK MOXOM: Did they? Why? But, he's the most conforming, respectable, aristocratical. Why should anyone ease him out?

MARY MCCCHESNEY: Didn't he retire?

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: He was retired but, also, he was forced into retirement.

JACK MOXOM: Oh, what a pity.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: But, anyway, it was right after this when they were walking down the street there on Potrero Hill one evening near their home and a drunk driver jumped the sidewalk and ran into them and killed her.

JACK MOXOM: Oh, no.

ROBERT MCCCHESNEY: It was very tragic for Victor.

JACK MOXOM: Well, I imagine it was kind of tragic for her too. She was a nice person. I shouldn't be impressed by that meal after almost forty years, thirty-five years, anyhow. That's a long time. (Turn that thing off.)

MARY MCCCHESNEY: I want to ask Hebe one thing. What kind of an influence do you think the government projects had on your career as an artist?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Well, that's hard to answer. It was just a wonderful time. I mean, it was. It was the answer to being able to work during that time. It couldn't have happened at all otherwise. But my career as far as art is

concerned, I haven't followed through. I still think that I will but I suppose I'm kidding myself. I have worked, but not really seriously. Then I went into photography for quite a while and photography was a way of expressing myself and that I could earn money with and that's what I needed at the time so I went into photography for quite a while. It took up all my time, besides raising kids.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Do you think it would be a good idea for the government in America to sponsor the arts again?

HEBE STACKPOLE: I do, very definitely. I think it's been very important ...

JACK MOXOM: In what way? In what way do you differ from my idea or in any way? Have you ever thought about it?

HEBE STACKPOLE: Oh, I have thought about it. I think that not only painting but I think music, too, should be helped.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Of course, they did have a music project on the WPA.

JACK MOXOM: Yes, they did.

MARY MCCHESENEY: It was more extensive in San Francisco.

JACK MOXOM: They had a writing project. Kenneth Rexroth was busy working from within in those days.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: There was a theatre project.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Were either of you ever involved in any of the artist's or writer's union activities?

JACK MOXOM: Yes, I remember that vividly. You went once or twice and you always adhered to the proper thing to do. If the people were on strike you'd say, "I won't take my bread this week, I'll risk my whole career, I will not cross the picket line." We were pretty noble about it. We went out and bought an ice cream and hot dog special. (Laughter) And we were told by the director who liked us or probably pitied us, at least me. (You Hebe, were much more grown-up) But he said, "Now you don't have to get involved in this. The strike could turn out anyway. Probably if you wanted to strike, you'd be alright and you'll get your money but if you don't want to, you don't have to even come in. You're on your own. No one is holding up your time, you'll get your check, everything's okay. Now I'm not telling you what to do ..." Hebe says, "All these good people are on strike, I'm on strike. I will not take my bread this week." (Laughter)

MARY MCCHESENEY: What were the issues of the strike? Do you remember?

JACK MOXOM: Damned if I know.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Was it a money thing or conditions?

JACK MOXOM: It was not an art strike as such. It was part of a general WPA strike in which probably the artists got involved. Is that right, yeh, and the artists who were all happy as larks, my god, things didn't change for us, before or after. We were all in seventh heaven. We didn't want to strike against mother WPA and all our good friends. But, at that time there was a period of great solidarity with the hard workin' slaves and we tried to muscle up to become one of the workin' class. And we thought, "If the lettuce workers or something have a grievance, we will not be aristocrats. We will back them up." And the Artists and Writers Union was much in the spirit of the time and was permeated by our most loyal communists of the period and I was right with them, frankly. My name's John Moxom and I thought I was a good communist. I wasn't a member of the party but it seemed a good idea.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Ha ha ha ha

JACK MOXOM: ... It seemed the most satisfying thing to do and they ran things beautifully. You don't remember that but the Artists and Writers Union was pretty -- I'm not going to name anyone other than myself -- but the people who were turning it did things so efficiently and everyone else was such a crackpot that they got shouted down and "help the lettuce workers" or "help the worn out." It was always for a good cause so the artists and writers became involved. Well, it had no basis or foundation anyhow, I mean, where was the bread coming in that you had to bargain between the producer and worker? I mean, there was no need for art so the Artists and Writers Union was just a political, fine, outspoken, altruistic thing that made a lot of noise about help the loyalists or help the lettuce workers. The lettuce workers, Rexroth's wife and I worked very hard at the local office. I remember we were doing a big campaign for stuff for the lettuce workers on butcher paper which was a yard wide and twenty yards long and we sketched it in pencil, "Workers Arise, Decency for Everyone, Don't Starve the Children." Everything that was good, you know, because I was on the side of things that were good

and Rexroth's wife was too. What was her name?

MARY MCCHESENEY: Andrea?

JACK MOXOM: Andrea. She had glasses so thick, they were incredible. Looking at her would make you blush because you didn't know just what to look at. Remember those pitiful glasses? She died too. So we discussed it and we started late at night in this big bare hall. Do you remember the old bare hall with just a bulb in the center and good feelings or proper spirit, you know? We started painting at opposite ends and it was quiet and we were working toward the center, trying to cut the mustard and help the lettuce workers, you know. And at two o'clock in the morning, after rapid painting, we arrived and scanned the whole thing and gee, it almost broke up the friendship because the styles, ha ha ha ha, the styles were different. It's hard to think of any two more different styles on one poster. Our spirits had one common thought though. I wonder how those lettuce workers got along? Ha ha ha ha ha.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: I did a backdrop for one of those meetings.

JACK MOXOM: A what, Bob?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: A backdrop for a stage program for Browder for president. And I worked ...

JACK MOXOM: Yea, on Haight Street where they had a little place.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: ... a couple weeks on this thing. And the night of the meeting the backdrop was up there. It looked beautiful and everything was going fine and Los Angeles sent up a huge blown-up portrait of Browder, a black and white photograph, and low and behold, they dropped this right in front of my backdrop. Two weeks work just shot to hell.

JACK MOXOM: Well, we had to play ... (laughter) We had a little library there and I remember, once when the American Legionaries raided the place and someone that we knew who worked for the Examiner not too long ago and was quite well known, a Library of Congress man now, met them at the top of the stairs with a draw sabre and beat them down. (laughter) It was a very fine and simple battle in those days. On one side you had the American Legion and on the other side, you had the fine loyal workers, you know, workers and thinkers. It was very simplified.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Because Jack Moxom entered the conversation later I didn't have the time to introduce him. His name is spelled Moxom and he was born in 1913 in Alberta, Canada and attended the California School of Fine arts in San Francisco. He now lives at 6668 Colton Avenue in Oakland, California...

[END OF TAPE]

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