



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Ruth Cravath,
1965 September 23

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Interview

MM: MARY MCCHESENEY

RC: RUTH CRAVATH

MM: This is Mary McChesney interviewing Ruth Cravath who lives at 893 Wisconsin Street in San Francisco, California. The date is September 23, 1965. I would like to ask you first, Ruth, where were you born?

RC: I was born in Chicago.

MM: What year was that?

RC: I was born in Chicago in 1902.

MM: Where did you receive your art training?

RC: Well, the first part of my art training was in the Art Institute of Chicago. I attended summer school there one summer and then I went to the lower school. At that time, the school was divided into lower school and middle school and upper school. And during the next year my family moved to California and, after one year of college in Iowa, I came to the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco.

MM: What year was that?

RC: It must have been 1921, I guess.

MM: Was it called the California School of Fine Arts?

RC: It was the California School of Fine Arts and it was where the Mark Hopkins Hotel is now. As you know, it was at one time called the Mark Hopkins Institute, because it had been the Mark Hopkins family estate and the Art School was one story in the basement of the building there, until 1927. I believe it was in '27 when they sold it to the hotel.

MM: So you were here in San Francisco, then, during the time of the WPA Art Project.

RC: Oh, yes, yes indeed.

MM: Did you have contact with any of the government-sponsored art project?

RC: Well, not directly. I had many friends who were working on the Project and I knew the artists and Mr. [Joseph] Allen and I followed some of the Projects with quite a bit of interest.

MM: That's the Joseph Allen who was head of the Project here?

RC: Yes, yes.

MM: Was your sister, Dorothy, on the Coit Tower Project?

RC: Oh, she was one of the very first, before it was WPA -- when it was PWA, Public Works of Art. She and Helen Forbes did the murals at the Fleishaker Zoo, the tempera, you know, the Noah's Ark series in the Mother's House. Have you seen that?

MM: Yes.

RC: Well, that was just before the WPA. The first project was called the Public Works of Art and then they organized it into the others. Dorothy didn't make any of the murals in the Coit Tower. However she has, over the years, restored them. I think at least twice because she's such an expert fresco painter and technician that the City Park Department has always kept their finger on her when they needed her to have something restored.

MM: Mmhmm. Did you study fresco yourself in art school?

RC: No. No, I've never done fresco.

MM: But you were around here when that upsurge of interest in fresco was going on?

RC: Oh, yes. I was. I was. As a matter of fact, I was teaching at the Art School (California School of Fine Arts) when they started doing fresco. As you know, I'm a sculptor.

MM: How does that particular 'fresco' era strike you? How do you think it came about that there was a sort of sudden interest in this area, in mural painting?

RC: Well, I think a great deal of it was due to Diego Rivera because, as you know, he did the frescos at the California School of Fine Arts, which is now called the [San Francisco] Art Institute and he also did one during the [1939] Fair -- or am I jumping ahead to mention the fact?

MM: No, no!

RC: He did the great wall which is installed in the George Washington High School? One of the high schools in San Francisco?

MM: No, I think it's the City College or the Junior College [San Francisco State College], whatever it is called.

RC: Oh, San Francisco State College, yes. Well, he did this great wall and it was part of the Art in Action Program at the Fair, the second year, and many of the local artists studied in Mexico with him, people like Victor Arnautoff. I think that had a great deal to do with it, starting the frescos here, don't you?

MM: Oh, I think so. Umhmm. How did you happen that, as a sculptor in the Bay Area, you didn't get on any of the projects? Was it that you weren't interested or what?

RC: Well, I did make a feeble effort to get on. It happened at a time when I had young children and I guess they thought I didn't need it. [Laughs]

MM: You had other things to keep yourself occupied with. What were some of the major projects that were going on in San Francisco at that time that you remember especially?

RC: At the time of the WPA?

MM: Yes. I was thinking Since you are a sculptor, I was particularly interested in the kind of work that was being done in sculpture.

RC: Well, of course, the big sculpture projects were the ones that Benny Bufano was working on, you see. And they didn't have . . . he had a number of people helping him and also Sargent Johnson, who did the Washington High School, I think, the big frieze on the outside . . . ?

MM: Yes.

RC: Both of them were involved in it, and finally it ended by Sargent carrying out the project -- I mean designing it and carrying it out. But, in many of the local parks you see Bufano's animals and that employed a number of people -- Bufano and helpers, you see, during the project.

MM: Do you know any other sculptors who were on the Projects besides Bufano and Sargent?

RC: Well, I'm not sure, Mary -- it's so long ago -- whether the other people were on the Project or not, I don't know. I know more painters, I believe, were on. Yes, Portonova [Giovanni Portnova] was on the Project. He was an Italian who came out here to teach. When he first came out, he taught in the California School of Fine Arts. He was my first instructor there. And he couldn't speak a word of English at the time. This was the first year that [Ralph] Stackpole left the school and went to Europe. He was in Paris and Portonova had just come to San Francisco from Italy. He was a very competent sculptor, so they got him to teach. That was very, very interesting. He was very conscientious and he taught us by gestures mainly. And he later was on the Project. I remember seeing him at their . . . August Dakarts' where they were working on many of these things.

MM: That was a big plaster casting studio?

RC: Mmhmm. We all worked there on things for the Fair. Well, I mean those things are all mixed up in my mind. Because we were working in 1938-'39 for the Fair, you see, and it was directly after the Project but the Project was still going on, wasn't it, to a certain extent then?

MM: Yes.

RC: What were the dates of the Project? I forget.

MM: Oh, PWA began in 1933-34 here, and then the WPA Project finally closed up completely in '43. But there was very, very little left in the last year when they closed it down. Maybe we should go into the 1939 Fair, then. You began working then and this was for the Golden Gate International Exhibition?

RC: That's right, yes.

MM: Treasure Island?

RC: Mmhmm.

MM: And you began working on that project in 1938? Could you tell me how you first got involved, who approached you about it?

RC: Well, it was Timothy Pflueger, who was the architect of the "Court of the Pacifica," and there were nine sculptors who worked for that Project. You remember as you entered the Fair, there was this large fountain, and the tall statue of Pacifica which was 80 feet high -- Ralph Stackpole made that -- and at her feet was the fountain and around the fountain were sixteen -- no -- 20 sculptures, I believe, because there were four men sculptors and four women sculptors who did groups around it. The women had the groups that were closest to the fountain -- Cecelia Graham had South America and I had North America. Adeline Kent had Oceania and Helen Philips, who's in Paris, you know, who's the wife of Bill Hayter now, had the Orient. So we each had three figures to do which were around the fountain. And then outside of that there were four men who each did two figures representing South America, North America, the Orient and Oceania. They were Sargent Johnson, Carl George, Brents Carlton, and Jacques Schnier -- I think it was Jacques Schnier who was the fourth one, wasn't he?

MM: I'm not really sure. He's the man who has been head of the Sculpture Department at University of California for a long time.

RC: That's right. Mmhmm. I'm pretty sure that it was Jacques. Those are the four. So you see, with Stackpole, that's nine sculptors who worked on the Court of Pacifica and this was all Timothy Pflueger's plan. I mean the general design was his.

MM: Did he design the total Fair Grounds, or just this one section?

RC: I think he just designed the "Court of Pacifica" but I'm not sure.

MM: So you were approached directly by him?

RC: That's right. That's right.

MM: To go to work on it. When he did approach you with this idea, what was the next step in the process? Did he ask you to make drawings, or what?

RC: Well, he had a little three-dimensional model, you see. We all started to work. We all had a model of the model in our studios, to design from, and it so happened that Cecelia Graham first of all came up with something he liked very much, her three figures, which you might say, set the theme into motion, so that we all designed something that was consistent with her designs. That's why the figures were sort of semi-reclining, because she really started the idea. That is, for the three women. Then the men's figures were leading down to that. I don't know just how that came about but we all made little models, I think an inch to the foot, as far as I recall. We tried them in this and that is how it came about. It was lots of fun.

MM: How many separate sculptures did you make?

RC: Well, of course, the tiny little model, and then the scale model which was one fourth scale from which the big ones were made. Cecelia Graham and all of us, we all worked at August Dackarts' plaster shop, because August Dackart, who was a grand old man -- he was 70 years old at the time and we just loved him -- had the contract to cast these figures, all of these figures for the Pacific, and also to see if they could get some others for the Fair. And Cecelia Graham modeled hers in clay and then had it cast in plaster. Our contract was to deliver the figures to the Exposition company in plaster, you see, and so Addie Kent and Helen Philips and I decided that we'd save the money of casting and make ours directly in plaster. I was always glad we did, so we built ours up. So we saved this process of casting and making it in clay and, ever since then, I've preferred working directly in plaster, or hydrocal, or something. So we built them up on armatures in plaster. And then we thought the Exposition company was going to use these, but they worried because they were going to have the fountain close by, so they had them cast in exhibition plaster -- or in a cement rather, and they're still . . . some of them are still over there on Treasure Island.

MM: Oh, are they?

RC: Yes, eight of our figures are there, not mine, but the Mexican boy and the Alaskan boy and two of Cecelia Graham's and two of Helen Phillips'. You can see them today, around the fountain. Where the fountain part was is now a lawn and they've put the big ceramic fountain that, I think, Sotomayor designed, if I'm not mistaken, in the center; but some of our figures are still there, because they were cast in cement, instead of in the temporary exposition plaster.

MM: How tall were they?

RC: Just about twice life size. You see, it's hard to say how tall, because they were all seated, or semi-reclining figures. The center ones were seated and the ones around them, the eight smaller ones, were sort of semi-reclining and twice life-size. They were pretty large.

MM: I think I remember their having a rather warm color; they weren't in a cement color.

RC: They were a beige, a warm cement color is right. Yes, and the Navy has kept it up. It's very pleasant now. If you have a chance to go there, it's kind of a nostalgic experience.

MM: Can anybody go in?

RC: Yes, I think so. Well, you may have to get some kind of a pass. Of course, it's Navy territory now, but it's quite pleasant. I was over there last spring, after all these years.

MM: Did this Dackarts company do the final cement casting of the work?

RC: Well, you see, mine, I made it myself direct, and so did Addie Kent. I think they were the ones who cast them in Exposition plaster, but that wasn't my contract. I just delivered them in plaster, and they were cast from that, you see. They cast Cecelia Graham's I know. In fact, it was the first casting. But I'm not sure about mine. It may be that they were cast on the Island in Exposition plaster. At least . . . I don't remember because the last that I had to do with it was to finish the plaster -- the full-size plaster model. We made them full size. The men, I believe, made theirs half size. Then they were enlarged by the Exposition company, but I'm not sure.

MM: How long were you working on the project?

RC: Oh, the Fair opened in February, I think. I think it was about a year before, but we didn't work for a whole year. I was working on the big figures for three or four months, just every day for three or four months. All of us working there together, it was lots of fun.

MM: All eight, or all nine, of the sculptors?

RC: The men weren't working there. The four women were, and then Billy Huff, who did some other sculptures for the Fair, was working there. His was not in the Court of the Pacifica. His were in some other part of the Island and I don't remember just where they were.

MM: Was the large Pacifica figure of Stackpole's done there too?

RC: That was built in the Stackpole stoneyard. He made the plaster model of it, which was one quarter size, and then that was built up on the Island too. I think all the actual final casting in the material was done on the Island. I'm not sure.

MM: You didn't actually go over there to the Island?

RC: No. We didn't work over there. Some of the artists did, some of the mural painters, but our particular group didn't work there.

MM: At that time Ralph Stackpole had a stoneyard down on Montgomery St., didn't he?

RC: Well, the stoneyard itself was on Hotaling Place, but you entered his studio from Montgomery Street. Yes, he had that studio for many, many years. When I was a student of his in the 1920's, I used to like to go down there and visit him and I was fortunate enough when he went to Paris in 1949 to inherit that studio from him and I had it for ten years and the stoneyard. That's why it was a wonderful period.

MM: Was he very influential as a sculptor on your own work?

RC: Yes, more than any other one person, I think he influenced me. I've always admired his work very much. And he still is working and exhibiting in Paris with young sculptors and he's very active. He's not working in Paris. He's living in Puy de Dome [phonetic spelling?], a little village of Choudarac [Phonetic spelling?], but he exhibits continually there. He was here a year ago February. I saw him then.

MM: His work has changed considerably. I saw a brochure.

RC: Yes, yes. It has.

MM: What was his background? What was his training as a sculpture?

RC: He was born in California and he worked for Arthur Putnam when he was a young man. He worked in Arthur Putnam's studio; I think he got most of his sculptural training from Putnam, and then he also studied in Paris, later. But I'm sure that his first work was done with Putnam.

MM: Let's see, Arthur Putnam was an early California sculptor; didn't he do some work . . .

RC: Yes, yes.

MM: . . . for the [Golden Gate] Park?

RC: Yes, he did and he did remarkable animal sculpture. There's a collection of his things at the Legion of Honor now and I'm not sure whether they still have the lamp posts on Market Street, with his pumas and tigers. Do they? Because he designed those.

MM: I remember those, but I haven't seen them for years.

RC: Well, he was the sculptor who did them. Yes, he was a great sculptor in San Francisco, in the earlier days.

MM: And Ralph Stackpole was his student?

RC: At the turn of the century, yes. That's right.

MM: What were some of the larger jobs that Ralph did? The Stock Exchange?

RC: The Stock Exchange, yes. Well, that was a project that . . . Well, he did all the exterior work and the big things but quite a few sculptors were involved in that. Did you know that, Mary?

MM: No, I didn't.

RC: And painters. Bob Howard did a mural inside. I have three carvings of reliefs. Addie Kent has some work inside. Let's see, I can't think of others but any number of us have work there. You can see them now.

MM: Oh, they won't let you in.

RC: On the tenth and eleventh floor. Oh, they will if you tell them you're coming. There are certain hours. You can't go during the lunch hour. But, I think, after 3:00 they'll be glad to let you in.

MM: I thought some years ago to go to see the Rivera murals, and they said, "No, you can't come in." Maybe I was there at the wrong time.

RC: Well, maybe it was at the wrong time. When Ana Maria Berlanga was Vice-Consul from Mexico here -- when Diego Rivera was still living -- one of her projects was to make a survey of the Rivera work, the Diego Rivera work around the Bay Area. So she got me to take her around, but she was a friend of mine and I was very fond of her. Of course, we had no difficulty then, see. I called them and they said to come in after 3:00. And so I took her down there and she saw those murals and we went up to the Art School, and peered behind the gauze. At that time they had that mural covered up. Now, fortunately, they have exposed it again, so you can see the Diego Rivera at the Art School.

MM: Now was the Stock Exchange commission arranged? Was that through Timothy Pflueger, the architect, too?

RC: Yes, he was the architect of that, wasn't he? That's right.

MM: I was wondering about whether there was some connection between the art work there . . .

RC: Yes, that was it. Yes, that was it. Yes, it was Timothy. Yes, Timothy Pflueger was the architect there. That's how it happened. He and Stackpole had worked together a great deal. Well, you know the big pylons outside are Stackpole's at the Stock Exchange and the sculpture over the entrance on Sansome Street, too.

MM: Oh, a relief carving?

RC: Yeah. Right over the door, the big door.

MM: You knew Timothy Pflueger then, personally?

RC: Yes. Yes, I did.

MM: He was a rather unusual architect for his period, wasn't he? He was so interested in employing artists to work in his buildings? Or was that a very common practice at that time? **RC:** It wasn't. There weren't very many architects [who did]. It wasn't exactly a common practice and I think it was partly due to a young man who was working in his office, Michael Goodman, who is an architect. Do you know him? It was Michael Goodman, who was quite a good painter too, and he is an architect and he was very much aware of what could happen with artists and architects working together. And I think he was an influence on Timothy Pflueger.

MM: Were there other architects in the area at the same time who were employing artists to work in their buildings?

RC: Oh, I'm sure there were.

MM: Did you know this man Arthur Brown, was that his name? The architect who designed Coit Tower?

RC: Arthur Brown also designed the Art School. Bakewell [phonetic spelling] and Brown was the firm. John Bakewell lived right across the street from the Art Association which is now the San Francisco Art Institute on Chestnut Street -- and they were the architects who designed the Art School. Bakewell and Brown.

MM: Ohhh.

RC: Yes, Arthur Brown was a very active architect. He did a great deal of architecture in the city.

MM: When you were involved with the Fair, did you know Diego Rivera?

RC: Oh, yes.

MM: How did you happen to meet him?

RC: Well, I don't know. I think I met him first at Stackpole's place, and then, you see, I worked in the Art in Action for a little while at the Fair. It was the second year of the Fair. First it opened in 1939 and then it was closed for a number of months, and reopened and called the "Fair in '40" and at that time they had the Art in Action Section which was quite enlarged. The Bruton Sisters and Beatrice Ryan were there and they had the sculpture pit and I worked there for three weeks on a horse's head and Fred Olmsted worked there and Diego Rivera was working on his large mural at the time, so we would always eat lunch together and it was very jolly.

MM: What sort of person was he?

RC: In what way?

MM: Well, talking about his art or his murals or did he talk about it or his painting, like that?

RC: Well he seemed just sort of like a He wasn't terribly talkative as I knew him, but I didn't know him well.

MM: Did he speak English?

RC: He spoke English, yes. And his wife Freida was there some of the time and she was very pretty, a picturesque person and she also was a very good painter. He was a very, very large man. There's an absolute perfect spitting likeness of him at the Art School -- that he painted himself -- on the fresco there. You know how those things I remember going in while he was working on that on a scaffold and often you couldn't tell the people working from the painting [Laughter]. It was very amusing.

MM: You said you were working in the Art in Action on a horse's head. What material were you working in?

RC: Well, this was stone I'd picked up on a mountainside in Montana. It was almost as hard as granite -- Feltsite. It's a grey stone, it looked very much like granite. This was a life-size horse's head that I was working on just before the Art in Action affair at Ralph Stackpole's stoneyard, which was later my stoneyard, and Helen Bruton came down then and tried to persuade me to move over to the Fair to work on it there and I thought I never could work with the public watching, see. But finally they wore me down and I finished it over there. The last three weeks And I've always been glad I did, because it was lots of fun. It was a great experience. I'd go over before the Fair opened to make my decisions and do the thinking [Laughter], and then peck away in front of the public during the day.

MM: Were there many other artists working in the Art in Action, doing their sculptures?

RC: Yes, yes. There was a sculpture pit. One of the most picturesque was Dudley Carter. Do you remember him? Did you see the things there?

MM: Yes. I've heard a great deal about him.

RC: Dudley Carter with his axe, his double-headed axe. He was from around Seattle someplace, and he carved these large totem poles. There are one or two of them in the [Golden Gate] park now. And he was a very picturesque figure and he painted on one of the murals, the frescos. He had his plaid shirt and his double-headed axe and then Fred Olmsted made a huge head of Leonardo da Vinci, which I believe is in Washington High, at one of the high schools here in the city.

MM: Was it a stone carving?

RC: It was a stone carving. And he cut that out of granite. After my three weeks there, I moved out of my corner. Ida Degan took over and she worked on a piece there and Cecelia Graham was working in the sculpture pit, so there was Cecelia Graham, Fred Olmsted, Dudley Carter, Ida Degan, myself, and maybe some others during the ten months' period or whatever it was.

MM: Were you paid to work out there?

RC: I think we got a little tiny bit of something. Then, of course, we had privileges to see the Fair. I don't remember for sure if we were paid a little bit or something, but it was lots of fun. I decided I needed a model, so I went over to the Cowpoke Cavalcade of America and picked out this beautiful gray mare -- just the color of the stone -- and she had a little colt -- so it was arranged that she would come over a pose for me. Of course, the baby had to come too, and this was a big show in the Fine Arts Building. [Laughter]. They had to saw off a railing in the sculpture pit and they led the mare in and the colt and it was really awfully, very, very gay. After I finished my three weeks, I went back to Montana for the rest of the summer and when I came back the guard met me at the door and said, "You know we haven't had a horse in here since you left." [Laughter]

MM: Bet the public loved that! It sounds wonderful!

RC: They did. They came over once and posed for me and then Life photographers were going to photograph the project, so they made a special arrangement to have the mare and foal come back so they'd be in the picture. And then it appeared in a Life Magazine article on the Fair and the picture of the horses. It was very interesting.

MM: Do you remember the Herman Volz mural that was being done there?

RC: Oh, yes, indeed. That was opposite the Diego Rivera one.

MM: So you worked in between the two, then?

RC: Yes.

MM: What did you think of that as a piece of art work?

RC: As I remember it, wasn't it a sort of mosaic mural?

MM: No. That one, I think, was a very large one that was painted in house paints -- outside on plywood. Oh, we must be confused then. He did a later one that's now in place out at San Francisco State College, I think College, too. It was a mosaic.

RC: Mmhmm. Mmhmm.

MM: But at that time on the Federal Building, they were doing the big one.

RC: That's right. Yes. The one, the mosaic one, he did in the Art in Action Section, opposite Diego Rivera. The one on the outside of the Federal Building was -- I remember describing it at the time -- these funny paper colors -- very bright primary colors. Is that the one you mean?

MM: Yes.

RC: I remember both of them. Yes.

MM: That big Federal Building mural . . . I've talked with many people who worked on it and I was wondering if you could tell me anything about -- because I've never seen color photographs -- what it looked like. It sounds sort of Pop arty! [Laughter]

RC: I think that's true. It does sound Pop arty. As I said, to me, I always called them "funny papers" colors, because they're those very primitive, primary colors -- not anything subtle about the colors, just very bright colors. That's my main memory of it. It was at the Federal Building. His mosaic mural that he did in the Fine Arts building is the one, I believe, that is now at San Francisco State College or where Diego's is.

MM: Yeah, the same place as Diego Rivera's mural.

RC: It was done in marble mosaic and that was quite a different thing. A number of people worked on that too. I don't know what's happened to Herman Volz, do you? I haven't heard of him in years.

MM: Yes, I interviewed him.

RC: Oh, is he around here now? Oh, he is.

MM: Living in Mill Valley.

RC: Is he still painting?

MM: Oh, he hadn't done any work for years. He worked as a housepainter for years.

RC: Oh.

MM: I guess he hadn't done any of his own painting for 20 years maybe.

RC: Oh, is that so?

MM: Now he's gone back to painting.

RC: Good. I'm glad to hear that.

MM: But he's not working now. Just painting. Looking back on the WPA period and the work that was done through the different art projects sponsored here in this area, in the Bay area, how do you think it stands up as art?

RC: Well, that's quite a poser, that question. I think it stands up really quite well as art when you think back over the years. I really do.

MM: Are there any particular projects that you would single out, personally, that you think are very successful work?

RC: Well, I may be personally prejudiced, but I think the tempera paintings at the Zoo, at the Mother House, that Dorothy Puccinelli, now Dorothy Puccinelli Cravath, and Helen Forbes did are very beautiful and very successful. The animals they did and I think they are quite outstanding.

MM: Do you think it was a good idea for the government to sponsor the arts, like they did at that time?

RC: Yes, I do.

MM: What kind of effect do you think it had on the artists of this area? I mean not particularly in this sense, but maybe that too. But I was thinking in terms of how it might have affected their lives, or their career as artists, or changed them in any way, or influenced them in any direction? Or do you think that it did?

RC: Well, I think that probably it enabled some of them to keep on being artists, really, at the time. So that, I mean, they worked I mean they didn't make a lot of money because if you may remember it was so much a week or something like that. I mean, there were many independent painters who weren't working on Post Offices or Public Projects or anything who worked in their studios and the government owned their paintings. Well, this enabled them to feel that what they were doing was important enough so that the government would buy it and they kept on working and I think it kept quite a bit of art alive. That's what I think the Project did. For that I think it was very worthwhile, because they all had to eat, and they would have Many of them would have done something else to earn a living which is a little bit hazardous for an artist, sometimes, because it is hard to get back to it or keep on doing it. So I think it was very worthwhile. I've often wondered what has happened to some of the things, but I guess they were used in schools and libraries.

MM: Do you think it might be a good idea for the government in the United States to sponsor the arts again?

RC: [Laughter] It might be a good idea, yes. [Laughter] It all depends on Well, art goes through so many periods I think that it . . . in a way I think that art is being sponsored today. I think there's more public

sponsorship, don't you?

MM: How do you mean public sponsorship?

RC: Well, I don't mean public, I mean private. I think that in the galleries more art is being bought.

MM: Oh, I see what you mean.

RC: Yea, I mean

MM: Not the government, but the buying public.

RC: Yeah, the public is.

MM: Certainly more than there was in the 30's.

RC: Yes, much more.

MM: Do you think that, if the government did sponsor this type of sponsorship of art like the WPA Program, that the way they went about it then was successful? Or do you think there would be ways it could be improved upon? I was wondering particularly if people that you knew who were on the Project ever complained to you, talked to you about the difficulties they had with the way the Project was run? Or about objections they had to policies? This sort of thing.

RC: Now, this I don't really remember, Mary, because it was quite a while ago and, as you know, I didn't have the personal experience of working on the Project, so I don't remember any particular complaints about it really. I'm sure there were many which you probably have heard when you talked to the artists who did work on the Project. I'm sure they can remember some, but on the whole I think it was administered fairly well, I'm sure there were some people who were sponsored by the government who didn't need the sponsorship, but maybe it was very important for them and kept them going as artists, I mean the encouragement, you see. I don't know.

MM: Do you think, looking back on that time through the late 30's and early 40's, that it was a very productive period in San Francisco art?

RC: Well, it seemed so to me. It seemed so to me, because, of course, that was when I was younger and it seemed to me, for the number of artists in the community, there was a great deal of work being turned out. A great deal of serious fresco work, and serious sculpture on buildings, and things like that. I think it was a very good period.

MM: You mentioned a name I hadn't heard before, Carl George. He was one of the men who did sculpture at the Fair?

RC: He was a sculptor there, yes.

MM: What ever happened to him?

RC: I guess I don't know. He did two of the figures around the Court of the Pacifica.

MM: All the other names I've heard, but I never heard that name before.

RC: He may have moved away from the area; I really don't know.

MM: Who were the most important sculptors, do you think, in San Francisco at that time? You mentioned Stackpole.

RC: Stackpole was tops as far as I'm concerned. Bufano, of course, and Sargent Johnson.

MM: Did you know a man named Michael Chepourkoff who was working in metal?

RC: Yes, I do, and I'm glad you remembered him. He had some most attractive things in the Federal Building. They were outside the Federal Building. Yes, he was very good.

MM: He was one of the first sculptors in this area to be working in metal, wasn't he?

RC: I think so.

MM: Or were other people doing it too? Most of the sculptors of that time were doing direct carving, weren't they?

RC: They were working in . . . They were what we called masonry sculptors. [Laughter] They worked in stone, or sometimes in ceramic or in cast cement. They worked in that kind of material rather than metal. Most of them were and now it is the reverse. Most of the sculptors work in metal and the masonry sculptures are few and far between -- old-fashioned. (Ha ha)

MM: What about wood carving? Was that a big thing at the time? You mentioned Dudley Carter and Zygmund Sazevich were also carving then.

RC: Yes, yes. I meant to mention Sazevich as a sculptor, because I think he's one of San Francisco's finest sculptors.

MM: Did you work in wood yourself?

RC: No, I have not worked in wood. I've collaborated with my sister-in-law in one project of wood, but I'm not a wood carver. It's much more difficult than cutting stone, for me.

MM: What were the theories of sculptors at that time? Or were there any in particular? I was wondering if this idea of direct carving was important then?

RC: That was the big thing.

MM: Of being true to the material. How did that all start?

RC: That's right. It was sort of a reaction, I guess, against the end of the 19th century when sculptors modelled. I mean, the sculptor himself didn't work in stone. He worked in clay and then it was cast in plaster. Then that was turned over to a technician for carving so that it didn't have the feeling of stone because it was modelled in clay first. The great thing in the 20's, the early 20's, was this return to direct carving and the contact with the material, and a lot of the materials . . . The sculptor worked right with the material, with sculpting himself; his art was in his stone. This was a very healthy thing and that was what they called the cut-direct school, which I think was very valid aesthetically. What shall we say, it was a revival, maybe, of the earlier periods.

MM: And Ralph Stackpole was very active in that school?

RC: That's right; he was. He was the leader and his stoneyard in Hotaling Place was a place where many of the young sculptors worked and where he did his large cut-direct work.

MM: But this idea didn't come from Arthur Putnam, as I understand it.

RC: Arthur Putnam was mainly bronze. I suppose Arthur Putnam did some work in stone but he was a very good sculptor of bronze and his things were made in clay and cast in bronze as they should be, not transferred to another material by a technician, so they have the living quality of the touch of the sculptor, from the clay.

MM: I was wondering . . . I was curious about where Stackpole could have picked up this idea. Had he been in Europe?

RC: Yes, yes. Oh, yes. He came back from Europe with that idea. He had been in Europe. He had made several trips to Europe. I think, as a very young sculptor, he studied in Paris and then he went to Paris just before I studied with him. And then he returned to Paris in 1949 and he's been there ever since, in France, and that's why I had his studio. The day he left I took his studio. I was there until 1958 when the whole neighborhood was undergoing great change, you know. The Jackson Square development.

MM: You mean when they tore out the Montgomery Building?

RC: Well, they tore that out just the next year, yes. When I first had a studio at 802 Montgomery Street, when I was working on the horse's head and stone carving, we used to get a little horse-drawn ice cream wagon that went through the whole of Hotaling Place every afternoon at 3:00 and he rang a bell and people stopped and went out and got ice cream. It was very charming, but it isn't that way now-a-days when you go down Jackson Square, there's no horse-drawn ice-cream wagon. [Laughter] I know I used to go out and study that horse's ears when I was carving the ears on my horse. I'd listen for that tinkle of his bell.

MM: You had your . . . [Laughter] model for 10 minutes a day.

RC: That's right.

MM: The idea of working directly into the materials -- stone or wood. Is it out of favor now with American sculptors?

RC: Working in stone is, perhaps, not exactly out of favor, but not so many do it. I think they still have the idea of working directly, but there's so many more of them working in metal and assemblages. Don't you think, Mary? As a sculptor, isn't that your feeling?

MM: Mmhmm. I was curious about when this change took place. I suppose that with some people have never had this idea, I mean. Then, too, it's certainly true that many metal sculptors do work directly in the material, the metal, of course. They weld it.

RC: Yes. Yes.

MM: Then some work with wax first and work very differently. Have you ever worked in metal?

RC: Never have I worked in metal, no.

MM: So you've really been a stone sculptor all the time?

RC: Yes, yes, yes. I have had some things cast in bronze which was the clay transferred to the bronze, you see, but I have never worked directly in the metal.

MM: Looking back on the period in San Francisco art of the late 30's and early 40's, do you have any general conclusions to make? Any general thoughts about it?

RC: Oh, you should have asked me this before today so that I could have thought of something very profound. [Laughter] Well, I don't know. It was a very happy period to me in the art of San Francisco. I mean, for the artists, there was quite a nice spirit. There weren't so many of them so that they knew each other and I think in history it will shine out as a good period.

MM: Thank you very much for giving us the time for the interview.

RC: It was a pleasure.

[END OF TAPE]