### TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Renaissance of Religious Art and Architecture in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1946-1968

**INTRODUCTION by Jane Dillenberger**  
1

**INTERVIEW HISTORY**  
iii

**VOLUME I**

Father William J. Monihan: The Catholic Art Forum, St. Mary's Cathedral, and André Girard  
1

Elio Benvenuto: High Points, and Low Points, in Contemporary Catholic Church Art  
21

Emily Michels: Memories of Father Meehan  
39

Monsignor Robert Brennan: Memories of Effie Fortune  
49

Ethel Souza: The Junipero Serra Shop, Maiden Lane, San Francisco  
60

William Justema: Thoughts of a Concerned Artist and Critic  
70

Louisa Jenkins: Growth in Art and Spirit  
84

Sister Maria Luisa Wolfskill: Religious Art From the Point of View of an Art Teacher  
95

Mary Erckenbrack: An Artist's Religious Works on Tile and in Clay  
119

Antonio Sotomayor: "Art That Explains"  
129

Paul Ryan: Beaux Art Principles and Church Architecture  
144

Micaela DuCasse: The Education and Devoted Life Work of a Catholic Artist  
175

Mario Ciampi: Art in Architecture--The Newman Center, Berkeley  
227

Stephen DeStaebler: The Newman Center Sanctuary  
250

Charles Warren Callister: Creating Places of Worship and Contemplation  
288

Vivian Cummings and Harold W. Cummings: Cummings Stained Glass Studio  
320
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robert Olwell: The Greek Orthodox Church, Oakland, and &quot;A Feeling for the Renaissance&quot;</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucienne Bloch Dimitroff and Stephen Dimitroff: Art, Music, Family, Fresco, Belief</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Adams: Religious Art Work Commissions in the Bay Area</td>
<td>464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor Ries: Religious Artistic Expression in Metal Sculpture</td>
<td>499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth Levi Eis: The Jewish Artist and the Synagogue</td>
<td>547</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDICES 573

INDEX 681
INTRODUCTION

This oral history presents a picture of the artistic community which was responsible for creating a significant number of religious landmarks of the Bay Area, St. Mary's Cathedral and the Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco, the Newman Center in Berkeley, the Christian Science Church in Belvedere, and the Greek Orthodox Church of the Ascension in Oakland. Through conversations with artists, architects, lay leaders and enlightened clerics, the circumstances surrounding the building commissions or interior additions of these and a number of other churches and synagogues are described. The format of the transcribed interview allows for informality, immediacy and a vivid sense of personality. Since those interviewed include architects, artists and craftspersons, all of whom may have worked on the same project, there is an overlapping of reference which is often illuminating, as when the architect Mario Ciampi and the sculptor Stephen de Staebler both discuss their work for the Newman Center, Berkeley.

Central to all of the interviews are the basic perennial questions about religion and art, the artist and the commissioner: What does it mean to be a religious artist? How do artists get commissions from church and synagogue? What is the relationship of the artist's personal faith to the creative process? What about non-Jewish and non-Christian artists in the employ of synagogue and church? These questions are all considered in the context of particular concrete situations and are thus more valuable than the armchair speculations of those who look on but are not professionally involved.

Underlying the discussion is the question of the lasting significance of the Bay Area movement of art for the church and synagogue, 1946-1968. Seen in the total context of the times, one would have to candidly admit that it was, for the most part, of local significance only. Aside from Richard Lippold's glorious baldachino for St. Mary's Cathedral, which came at the very end of the period studied in the interviews, there were no commissions of national significance. Yet the artists, architects, clerics and laypersons whose work is the substance of this report did accomplish the purpose recorded in the manifesto of the Catholic Art Forum "to foster a greater interest in and appreciation of liturgical and religious art with particular emphasis on the contemporary insofar as it does not contradict tradition." As a result of their efforts, the Catholic Church has been more receptive to a modest form of modernism. Local artists have been commissioned for liturgical items in many cases rather than purchasing these from a religious supply house catalogue.

However, one can regret that the aims were so circumscribed. The dictum "contemporary insofar as it does not contradict tradition" bound the artists to a representational style at a time when the great American artists of our
century were creating a new and non-representational style—Abstract Expressionism. Three of the leaders of that movement, Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko, did "religious" works, although only Rothko had the benefit of a church commission in his chapel for an ecumenical center in Houston.

In Europe, during the same period, with the leadership of the courageous and persistent Père Couturier, Matisse designed the Chapel at Vence and Le Corbusier the church at Ronchamp and the Abbey Latourette, and the alpine church at Assy was decorated with religious art by Rouault, Lipchitz, Bonnard, Matisse, Chagall, Leger, Lurçat and Richier.

Yet the contribution of the people interviewed and those they discussed must not be undervalued. They introduced the tenets of modernism to a church and synagogue who were then using mass-produced items in a banal style, and they championed good craftsmanship and good materials. They revived an interest in ancient liturgical art forms—stained glass, ceramics, mosaic, tapestry, and direct carving in wood and stone. And they created a climate of acceptance of modern art and architecture which will ready the field for the next developments of art and architecture for the church. What lies ahead is an uncharted future, but one more open to the welling up of new forms and new forces than might have been possible without the pioneering efforts of this group.

Jane Dillenberger
Emeritus Professor of Theology and Visual Arts

December 1984
Graduate Theological Union
Berkeley, California
INTERVIEW HISTORY

Renaissance of Religious Art and Architecture in the San Francisco Bay Area

Planning for a religious art and architecture project began in 1979, with the awareness that in the geographically defined San Francisco Bay Area with its long-standing tradition of fine and original religious building, a group of artist-advocates, the Catholic Art Forum, was bringing liturgical arts strongly into the twentieth century. This quiet renaissance had been in the making since 1946.

Conversations began with William J. Monihan, S.J., for many years librarian of the Gleeson Library of the University of San Francisco, about a "liturgical arts oral history." As enthusiastic about a scheme of recording through oral history the conception and the results of the liturgical arts movement in the Bay Area as he was in 1952 about the organization of the Catholic Art Forum, he suggested interviewees and encouraged us to pursue possible sources of funding.

The oral history project design proposal stated: "The resurgence of church construction following World War II created a renaissance of related arts and crafts: architecture, painting, sculpture, weaving, and work in stained glass, wood and metal. North to Sonoma County and south to the city of San Jose, the Bay Area was the scene of intense creative activity in the liturgical arts...strengthened by the flourishing of the secular arts in the area in that same period."

Religious artwork in the Bay Area, from planning to execution, had gone largely unrecorded, and so had the association of church lay people and craftsmen with the artists and architects. Tangible evidence of the association would be visible for generations, but intangible factors, the inspiration for the renaissance, would disappear without thoughtful documentation.

"...It is important to find out from the people involved in the creation what the spirit and intention of the time and the work were, and how they were carried out." The assignment in 1982 of the proceeds of the Flora Lamson Hewlett fund to such a project made it possible to begin to create the record of the renaissance of religious art and architecture.

Over the next two years, as the project came into focus, a list of interviewees was worked out, mainly drawn from the founding membership of the Catholic Art Forum, whose constitutional mandate was "to foster interest and appreciation of liturgical and religious art of the Roman Catholic tradition, with particular emphasis on the contemporary in so far as it does not contradict tradition."
Micaela DuCasse, muralist, whose interview is in the first volume, was close to the project from the beginning. With sculptor Ruth Cravath, who had in a 1977 oral history memoir told of her own liturgical work in the 1950s, Micaela DuCasse did short interviews with artist and teacher Emily Michels, and Junipero Serra Bookshop founder Ethel Souza. In June 1982 a letter went out to sculptor Elio Benvenuto, ceramic artist Mary Erckenbrack, mosaicist Louisa Jenkins, architects Paul Ryan and Mario Ciampi, artist and critic William Justema. Father Monihan, and painters Antonio Sotomayor and Maria Luisa Wolfskill, inviting them to tell about their part in the movement.

As the interviewing developed, the denominational scope of the project expanded. We were looking now at Unitarian, Jewish, Christian Science, Episcopal, and other sources of commissions in the religious arts. A second round of invitations to be interviewed went to Mark Adams, an artist in tapestry and stained glass whose work is in Catholic churches as well as Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco; Charles Warren Callister, an architect who had worked with the congregations of San Francisco's Unitarian Church, Belvedere and Mill Valley's Christian Science churches, and who designed the chapel at Mills College; and Stephen DeStaebler, ceramic artist, creator of the powerful sanctuary pieces at Newman Center in Berkeley.

The subject was becoming more complex, and the resources richer. Out of those interviews yet another group was recommended, and the story of the commission for the Greek Orthodox Church of the Ascension in Oakland and its dramatic interior is told in the interviews with Bill Olwell and with Lucienne and Stephen Dimitroff. The Cummings Stained Glass Studio's innovations in stained glass and the studio's religious work were the subject of an interview with Vivian and Bill Cummings. Msgr. Robert Brennan, biographer of artist Charlton Fortune, whose liturgical work in Monterey in many ways inspired the Catholic Art Forum, recorded what he had learned about that earlier renaissance. Victor Ries, a metal art sculptor whose work is known in synagogues as well as churches, was one of the last interviewees, yet his connections with Father Monihan and Ninfa Valvo bring the story around to the beginnings. Former curator of paintings at the M. H. De Young Museum, Ninfa Valvo was not well enough to be interviewed, but Ruth Eis, a curator at the Judah L. Magnes Museum and a painter, adds a final thoughtful note on the question of whether a religious identity is important for an artist working in a religious setting.

The interviews built upon each other in an exciting and a productive way, and are presented largely chronologically. Each interview in the volumes has a brief introduction, by the primary interviewer, explaining the circumstances of the interview, and sketching the larger context of the work of the interviewee. Interviewees submitted biographical data. Each of oral histories goes a ways beyond the immediate scope of the project, and we have included visual material where possible, and extensive appendices.
As the project neared completion, the editor contacted Jane Dillenberger, Emeritus Professor of Theology and the Visual Arts at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, who became our perfect audience, reading through the massive final draft to get an understanding of the undertaking and to find a theme for her introduction to the work.

Jane and John Dillenberger, he Professor of Historical Theology at the Graduate Theological Union, had in 1977 done an exhibition, *Perceptions of the Spirit in Twentieth-Century American Art*. The catalog of that exhibition includes an essay by John Dillenberger which may help the reader of the volumes following to put the material into a larger context.

Choosing not to isolate and discuss "religious artists," the *spirit* of the Dillenbergers' title is from God or nature, from any religious tradition, or "unarticulated inner mystery."

In the twentieth century...artists no longer reflected religious traditions but created and expressed new spiritual perceptions which we are invited to share. The sources for such perceptions are many. In part, they represent individual transformations of residual religious traditions; they reflect a renewed interest in all that has been encompassed by the word nature; they express a continued and renewed interest in the art, and to a lesser degree, the religion of Eastern traditions.... Most of all, the sources seem to well up from within....

Although historic religious traditions do not figure significantly as either source or context for the visual arts, the new perceptions of the artists provide an interesting context for churches, should they be open to utilizing such resources. There are of course indications that they have, as in the cases of Rothko, Lippold, Nevelson, and DeStaebler....

We live in a time of new opportunity. The gamut has been run from the domination of faith, to its material and secular denial, to new forms of perception, diverse and open to new forming constellations. While all art is not religious and the museum is not its temple, the artist today represents, to use the words of the late Paul Tillich, a manifestation of one form of the latent church. But such a recognition means that we do not expect the artist to utilize the subject matter and forms of the past, but rather to represent the new forms and perceptions which can become the source of transfiguration and transformation. Indeed, to use the old subject matter is to repeat the past in a context in which its power has been lost; to remain true to the past, we must now transcend it, and be open to forms strange to the eye and ear. In order to see and to hear the new possibilities of faith, we must be as daring as was the past, which was also once new and strange, awaiting new transfigured meanings.
Thus, the Renaissance of Religious Arts and Architecture in the San Francisco Bay Area project is a record of twenty-three individuals' understanding of their own efforts to "represent the new forms and perceptions which can become the course of transfiguration and transformation."

It has been a pleasure to work with Micaela DuCasse as co-interviewer and as interviewee. The kind of a person she is shines through, and her enthusiasm for the endeavors of the Catholic Art Forum were heartfelt, as well as artistically informed. If the volumes become a well-worn text for students of theology and the visual arts we are indebted to the lively interest of Jane and John Dillenberger. We also thank the Graduate Theological Union reference librarians for help in checking names and facts. And quite beyond mere appreciation are the interviewees themselves, our essential point of reference.

The existence of the Flora Lamson Hewlett fund has made this undertaking possible. We believe that it appropriately honors the interests of a woman who was a generous supporter of activities of a religious, artistic, and educational nature.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons prominent in recent California history. The office is under the direction of Willa K. Baum, division head, and under the administrative supervision of James D. Hart, the director of The Bancroft Library.

Suzanne B. Riess
Senior Editor/Interviewer

1 February 1985
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley
Renaissance of Religious Art and Architecture in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1946-1968

Father William J. Monihan

THE CATHOLIC ART FORUM, ST. MARY'S CATHEDRAL, AND ANDRÉ GIRARD

An Interview Conducted by Micaela DuCasse in 1982

Copyright © 1985 by The Regents of the University of California
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

**Father William J. Monihan**

## INTERVIEW HISTORY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CATHOLIC ART FORUM FORMATION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninfa Valvo</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Directions of Religious Art</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effie Fortune</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## ARTISTS EXHIBITED BY THE CATHOLIC ART FORUM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS OF THE FORUM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## ST. MARY'S CATHEDRAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## ST. ANN'S CHAPEL, PALO ALTO, AND ANDRÉ GIRARD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first gathering of a selected group of key professionals in all the phases of the visual arts, at Gleeson Library, University of San Francisco, in 1953, was my first encounter with Father William J. Monihan. That group became the Catholic Art Forum. That meeting was for me the beginning of a most rewarding friendship, flourishing to this day.

I know others have said it of him, but it is so true that repetition will not dull the point: Father Monihan, as then librarian of Gleeson Library, in his intelligent and wide interests, elevated taste, and ability to communicate culturally, is indeed a "Renaissance Man." It was his foresight and courage for that time that inspired the founding of a group that would influence art for the Church in the greater Bay Area in a deeply significant way.

The Gleeson Library facilities were a perfect meeting place for the Catholic Art Forum. They provided not only a place for the board to meet and make its plans, but conference rooms for lectures and exhibitions that were to become a vital educational background for the fruitful meeting of the artist and the Church. The Gleeson Library and the Junipero Serra Shop complemented each other in providing the milieu in which the aims of the Catholic Art Forum could be projected and realized.

This interview with Father Monihan, currently director of library relations of the University of San Francisco, is indeed a most important one to start off the oral history project. It provides the setting, along with the interview with Ethel Souza of the Junipero Serra Shop, for the renaissance of the liturgical arts in the Bay Area from 1946 to 1968. Father Monihan continues to be a champion and patron of contemporary liturgical art in the greater Bay Area. The aims of the Catholic Art Forum remain alive through his continuing interest and encouragement.

Micaela DuCasse
Interviewer

September 1984
Piedmont, California
**BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION**

(Please print or write clearly)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your full name</td>
<td><strong>WILLIAM J. MONITIAN</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of birth</td>
<td>4 NOV 1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of birth</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father's full name</td>
<td><strong>WILLIAM J. MONITIAN</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birthplace</td>
<td>HOKESSEN, CHESTER COUNTY, PA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>PLUMBER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother's full name</td>
<td>HELEN MAY HUNTER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birthplace</td>
<td>SAN QUENTIN, CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>HOUSEWIFE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where did you grow up?</td>
<td>SAN FRANCISCO, CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present community</td>
<td>SAME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Entered Society of Jesus 1932; B.A. Univ. of Santa Clara 1936; M.A. (Phil) Gonzaga Univ., Spokane 1939; B.S. in Library Science, Univ. of California, Berkeley, 1962.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation(s)</td>
<td>Head Librarian, 1947-64; Director of Library Relations, 1964 to date;.... both at University of San Francisco</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Special interests or activities

I am deeply involved in "publicizing" the Library at USF through (1) friendships with book collectors (2) actively assisting in developing USF book collecting, (3) annual presentations of book/library-related SYMPOSIA on humanistic topics each August 3 days, since 1968.

NB My priestly ministry is exercised through these media.
THE CATHOLIC ART FORUM, ST. MARY'S CATHEDRAL, AND ANDRÉ GIRARD

[Interview date: September 14, 1982]

Catholic Art Forum Formation

DuCasse: This interview is with Father William J. Monihan, Director of the Library Relations at the University of San Francisco. Father Monihan was a founding member of the Catholic Art Forum because of his lifelong interest in contemporary religious and liturgical art.

Father, we were discussing when you first became aware of the liturgical art movement in general, the worldwide movement, and whether it was instrumental in what was happening here. Did you really know much about it before we became involved with it in San Francisco?

Monihan: Well, I would say during the period following World War II, I was a reader of Liturgical Arts [A Quarterly Devoted to the Arts of the Catholic Church], and I was very much interested in the liturgical movement. That was on the forefront of the Church at that time, and so that was in my mind, with only a reading experience in that regard.

But when it comes down to the immediate years preceding the formation of the Catholic Art Forum in 1953, I realized that after the Gleeson Library building was completed and dedicated in December 1950 that we needed some fine arts to decorate the exterior of the building. I'm sure the interior too, but primarily there were two spaces, 9¾ feet high by 6 feet wide, on both sides of the entrance. I was introduced by someone to Mark Adams, who had done several religious art pieces at the small chapel at Carmel [Daily Mass Chapel at Carmel Mission].

DuCasse: He did a series of stations for them.

Monihan: Yes. So I guess by the ordinary course of meeting people I got to know you, Micaela, and Ruth Cravath. And at that time you and the others were on the committee planning the religious art show at the de Young Museum which occurred between October and November of 1952.
Monihan: So, to go back, the immediate occasion of my interest in liturgical art or religious art was my desire to get something that would fit into the new Gleeson Library building exterior. You were about ready to take a trip in 1952, was it?

DuCasse: Right, in the summer of 1952.

Monihan: And you explored possibilities for me in Spain and elsewhere along the lines of Ignatius Loyola.

But as I watched all of you, getting to know more and more of you, going through the final preparations of the religious art show at the de Young, I guess I heard many of you say that, "This is such a marvelous experience, couldn't we do something about it?" I guess by nature I'm an organizer, so I said, "Well, why not come to USF, and let's work together?"

DuCasse: And artists usually need an organizer!

Monihan: That's, I guess, my closest answer to your question of how I became involved. I was a learner, very much of a learner. I did not know at all about the art movement, and the whole experience of being with you, the artists, was a great source of education for me, immense.

DuCasse: That exhibit was a very valuable education for most of us. Many of us didn't even know some of the other artists that participated; that brought us together.

You mentioned the Liturgical Arts magazine. You had met Maurice Lavanoux and he did come to San Francisco several times, didn't he?

Monihan: And he spoke to us, didn't he?

DuCasse: Right, he did. He was one of our lecturers.

Monihan: You see, at that time the first floor of Gleeson Library to the left was a conference room. It's now a reserve book room and special collections. So that was the room that we used for Catholic Art Forum. We called it a conference room.

I was surprised--you and I have discovered, by reading copy in front of us here, that we had quarterly meetings; that's quite a bit.

DuCasse: We were just charged with this message that we had, this educational idea to bring the laity into the contemporary art world.
Exhibition of CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS ART by California Artists

Architecture Painting Sculpture Metal Crafts Textiles Mosaics

EXHIBITION COMMITTEE:

Ruth Cravath, Chairman
Mrs. Edwin L. Jennings, Secretary
The Reverend George Benigsen
Norman K. Blanchard
The Right Reverend Karl Morgan Block
Mario J. Ciampi
The Right Reverend Monsignor Harold E. Collins
Michaela Martinez Ducasse
The Reverend E. C. Farnham
Rabbi Alvin I. Fine
Louisa Jenkins
Peter Macchiariini
The Reverend Leo T. Maher
Dr. Elisabeth Moses
Antonio Sotomayor
Ninfa Valvo

An exhibition of Contemporary Religious Art by California artists will be held at the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum for a period of about one month beginning October 16th. It will consist of Architecture, Painting, Sculpture, Mosaics, Metal Crafts, Textiles, etc., of original design and suitable for use in the services or for the visual enrichment of churches and synagogues.

You are one of a selected group being asked to submit works in this category (as many as three) to a jury of selection which will meet at the de Young Museum on September 20th. Your entries should arrive at the Museum not later than September 16th. Shipping instructions will be sent out at a later date.

Transportation and insurance costs are to be borne by the artist. Works accepted by the jury will be insured by the museum and returned to the artist prepaid.

If glossy prints of photographs (preferably 8 x 10) of your submissions are available, please send them to the Committee for possible publication in connection with publicity or catalog.

We trust that you will participate in our enterprise and we would appreciate hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours truly,

Mrs. Edwin L. Jennings,
Secretary - Exhibition Committee

EXECUTIVE OFFICE: 716 Montgomery Street, Studio 3, San Francisco, California YUkon 2-3689
Monihan: And especially the clergy.

DuCasse: Yes, the clergy too, of course, the religious. Very definitely.

Now we spoke about the Art Forum and I think we should give something of its aim. Don't we have that here in our brochure? [refers to papers in front of them]

Monihan: I'll read this aim and maybe you could read the other one. I guess this is one of our first brochures. The aim was as follows: "The aims of the Catholic Art Forum are to foster a greater interest in and appreciation of religious art of a living, Catholic tradition with particular emphasis on the contemporary form.

"The Forum is composed of artists, art educators, and others interested in the problems of church art and desirous of carrying on the work begun in our area by the large exhibit of religious art held at the de Young Museum in the Fall of 1952. Since its organization in 1953 the Forum has held quarterly meetings. Included in the list of speakers on these occasions are the following: Reverend Terrence R. O'Connor, S.J., Louisa Jenkins, and Alfred Frankenstein."

Ninfa Valvo

Monihan: Why don't you read that one, Kai?

DuCasse: Yes, I think this one gives a little bit more.

"The Catholic Art Forum is composed of artists and art educators interested in the problems of church art and desirous of carrying on the work begun in our area by the large exhibit of liturgical art held at the de Young Museum last October. Critics and gallery visitors alike acclaimed this manifestation of a vital religious art."

Ninfa Valvo, who was the curator of paintings, was also the designer of that exhibit, the person who was in charge of getting it together. And you made a very important point before we were talking on tape about her using local artists primarily. Would you like to comment a little more on that? Because you made a wonderful point about that.

Monihan: One of the many great achievements that Ninfa Valvo should be hailed for was the exhibit that she did of artists of this area. Never before had artists of this area received such public attention as her exhibition accomplished. Dr. Walter Heil, the director of the
Monihan: museum, was high in praise of it. Alfred Frankenstein, in reviews, was high in praise of it. And for the same reason, as recently as two years ago Miss Valvo received an honorary degree from the Art Institute of San Francisco. They gave her an honorary degree, and I was present for that, and the whole reason for the degree was what she did for the local artists.

I said to you, Kai, at lunchtime, before this interview, that it's interesting to me that what Ninfa did for the local artists we were also doing on a smaller circle on the religious side; we also wanted to emphasize local artists. Because many of the churchmen, Catholic and Protestant and maybe even Jewish, were using artists overseas to decorate their churches.

We wanted, following the leadership of Ninfa Valvo, to bring in artists of our area. This would be metal craftsmen for chalices, this would be stone sculpture, that would mean vestment makers, that would mean canvas painting, everything that would contribute to that.

You also mentioned that Archbishop McGucken, in an interview with the Catholic Art Forum, listened very positively to our plea that local artists be considered.

DuCasse: Yes, for the cathedral, which was then just in the planning stage, wasn't it?

Monihan: For the cathedral as well as just in general to approve what his own clergy would be doing in their parishes, to encourage the local artists.

DuCasse: Yes, this was a really high point of the Catholic Art Forum's life span, being able to bring the Archbishop to the Forum and allowing the Forum to meet him on a very friendly basis. As you said, a "non-threatening" basis, where we could have a meeting of minds and of taste and of ideas. That was one of the most important things I think that we did, really, when you think about it.

European Directions of Religious Art

Monihan: We who were in it didn't realize—we wanted to do so much—we didn't feel we were accomplishing anything, but in retrospect I think there was an impact. But the fascinating thing about this, Kai, is that what we were doing was almost an expression of the time. What was happening here was happening elsewhere in the world, in Europe, in France, in England, and other places, and other parts of the United States, as in Boston. There was the same response to the need, and so it was a very fascinating experience.
Monihan: We looked to "L'Art Sacre" and Father [Père] Couturier, O.P., for that great dialogue he encouraged with the non-Christian or, in this case, Communist or atheist, whether they could do religious art. All of which seems to show that Father Couturier's direction was correct when you read Vatican II's document on liturgy.

DuCasse: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. I had the honor of meeting Père Régamey, O.P., in Paris in 1952 when I was over there because Père Couturier was very ill and was not seeing anyone. Of course, Régamey wrote that book on the liturgy and liturgical art and so forth also. [Religious Art in the Twentieth Century, Herder and Herder, 1963] So that was a very inspiring person to meet, and just as you said, that powerful movement that was in France.

Monihan: And Germany too, following the growing sense of community during the early 1930s, was a leader in liturgical art. We witnessed what Father Joseph Jungmann did in Austria, being the leader in the research on the liturgical movement; then coming into this country through Collegeville, Minnesota, and Father Reinhold and other great names in this country.

And now we have the Vatican II doctrine on liturgy which showed where the Church ultimately wanted, and did go. So we were happily on the forefront of participants in the movement.

DuCasse: Europe gets the trends much quicker than we do; they already had been saturated with the contemporary form so they were able to adapt to it quicker than we were. It took us a lot longer, didn't it?

Monihan: There's another phenomenon--I'm sure, Kai, you have it on tape from other sources. The Junipero Serra Shop, the religious art shop in Maiden Lane, I think played a very important role because it gave us an exhibition place, it gave us a place to see contemporary art on sale, inexpensive to very expensive. So there was a lot of opportunity in those days, and they played a very important role.

DuCasse: Oh, they did indeed. And of course in the Art Forum also because Ethel Souza was one of the founding members of Art Forum. And then they also had lectures there. So I think we had a nice meshing of the Catholic cultural world and the religious art world also. I think their being here in San Francisco was a very, very important part of the renaissance of liturgical art in this area. Very definitely.
Effie Fortune

DuCasse: This is sort of skipping back, but one thing I didn't want to forget to ask you, did you ever know Father Meehan at all well?

Monihan: No. I think you did and several others because you were on the committee for the de Young show with him. I met him, and I remember liturgical vestments as one of his specialties, but I really had very little to do with him.

DuCasse: Really he, and Effie Fortune, of course, you knew—

Monihan: Effie Fortune! Yes! Effie was a very important person.

DuCasse: She and Father Meehan really were the instigators of liturgical art in this area way back in the thirties.

Monihan: 1930s?

DuCasse: Thirties, very definitely. At least the thirties. If not late twenties. And this is something which had been difficult because we cannot get them, they're gone. So anything that you may remember, especially about Charlton Fortune, would be very good to get into our record.

Monihan: All that I remember—I gave a retreat in Los Angeles at the Convent of the Sisters of Social Service, and in this chapel the altar was in a central position rather than along one wall; it was entirely designed by Effie Fortune. Because of being there, I inquired about it, I learned more about it. I met Effie Fortune in the very early years of the Forum. I believe she must have even spoken to us. Very dedicated, and to me the important thing is when any of these new movements are going on, there can be a big temptation to become impatient and to get angry or frustrated. But she was a great example of a person being patient.

She would be very explicit in what she thought of the opinions [laughter] of certain clergy or laity!

DuCasse: True.

Monihan: I remember one fellow Jesuit called her a misfortune! [laughter]

DuCasse: Well, she could be very sharp-tongued at times, but it was a very forthright kind of thing. It was not a malicious thing, it was just because she knew that she was right. And she wanted them to get the message, and it wasn't always easy to put it across.
Monihan: Well, being a librarian, I would encourage anyone who reads this record of our interview to pursue any archive of this Charlton Fortune, called Effie Fortune.

I remember a former Archbishop of Portland who collected Miss Fortune's work. His name escapes me now. [Mon. Brennan] He purchased a lot of her paintings and he may also have acquired her entire file. So this could be somewhere in the estate of this wonderful archbishop. Wherever those paintings are, wherever the archive is—I have a hunch that when she died he acquired her archive. But that is a very important chapter in this whole movement of which Catholic Art Forum was only a part.

DuCasse: True. And I think that maybe Effie was almost more important than Father Meehan because she went out from California, as you know. She was at Portsmouth Priory for awhile, she was in Kansas City, and she was up in the Northwest. Effie did not remain just in the Monterey Guild in Monterey or even in San Francisco. She took her message as far afield as anyone would give her the opportunity.

Monihan: Didn't she know your family?

DuCasse: Yes, because she was one of the early California artists before she became a liturgical artist. I did meet her, in the early thirties, when I was beginning my career in liturgical art. My mother took me to meet her because at that time she had the Monterey Guild. But she did not have many commissions for painters because she herself was a painter; the little that came in she usually did. So I never was a part of that, but I did know her and she knew about me and she was certainly a very important person to know.

Monihan: Well, this Social Service Sisters Chapel in Los Angeles was designed by her.

As we were saying, coming from lunch, language and design change according to the taste of each decade.

DuCasse: Very true. No one is immune from that! Even Leonardo and Michelangelo very often had something new put over what they had done.

Monihan: Has someone done an interview of you?

DuCasse: That's coming, yes.

Monihan: Because there are many people that are beginning to come into my mind right now in the Carmel/Monterey area that you knew as a child, as a young person, and your mother and father knew, and—was it your aunt?
DuCasse: Yes.

Monihan: Your aunt who lived with you. I'm thinking of Sullivan, Noel Sullivan. Now he was not a primary, but he was certainly an important patron of the arts.

DuCasse: Oh definitely, definitely he was. And, of course, the whole mission restoration with Harry Downie and so forth. Oh yes, that will all be covered eventually. Very definitely.

Artists Exhibited by the Catholic Art Forum

DuCasse: We might try to review some of the artists that you remember who were part of the movement, and of course were exhibited by the Catholic Art Forum, and about that program of traveling exhibits throughout the greater Bay Area, that is, as far as Santa Rosa and Stockton.

Monihan: Among the papers here [looking through papers] we had an insurance list which is a pretty good indication of—here it is. Now you probably know more of these names than I do. Do you know that first name, Franz Vanderbruck?

DuCasse: No, I don't.

Of course I knew Victor Ries, who was also—see this man is a silversmith. But we know Victor Ries and he is very well known in the area. We'll have to try to find out something about him. Margaret Bruton, we know her.

Monihan: I don't know her.

DuCasse: She is one of the Monterey artists. She and her two sisters often did work together. They were mosaicists and they've done many different kinds of mural work. So there we are; we're getting ecumenical right now because the Brutons were not Catholics. Irene Bryner [again referring to list in front of them], I'm not familiar with her.

Monihan: I'm not either.

DuCasse: Now the Hanna Center photographs must have been Ruth Cravath's work.

Monihan: Ah!

DuCasse: Remember she did the beautiful façade.
Monihan: We had a program to visit Hanna Center.

DuCasse: Right, we did. And then she did the stations of the cross and the crucifix over the altar. Of course Elio Benvenuto [referring again to list].

Monihan: Yes. He did a lot of things, and here we're looking at two things, to read a list of his: Lazarus, wood sculpture, St. John, a bronze figure.

DuCasse: Right. And he will be interviewed eventually too.

Monihan: And Ruth Armer.

DuCasse: Now there's another ecumenical person, you see.

Monihan: You knew her, didn't you?

DuCasse: Yes. Ruth was a very fine painter. Dirk Van Erp, again like Victor Ries. Dirk Van Erp was more, I would say, more of the traditionalist worker in silver.

Monihan: Yes.

DuCasse: And I believe that Father Meehan worked with Dirk Van Erp at one point, designed with him.

Monihan: And Mary Erckenbrack [still referring to list].

DuCasse: She is a—I think Mary is a Catholic. She's always been connected with the Church, so I think she must be.

Monihan: And Louisa Jenkins is mentioned.

DuCasse: Naturally, yes. There we have one of her madonnas. And Sargent Johnson, that's interesting, because he was a black artist, and not a Catholic, again ecumenical, but chosen. All these other artists were chosen because of the fine work they did, whether they were religious or not.


DuCasse: Luke Gibney. Now he was well known in the area, Luke was.

Monihan: I commissioned him shortly after this time to do a portrait of a Jesuit who died in 1916 at Santa Barbara, Fr. Maurice Joy. Jean Leslie, do you know her?
DuCasse: Yes, I did know her, and I believe she was an Anglican Catholic.

Monihan: Well, Mario Ciampi, we are very close friends, very active.

DuCasse: Oh, definitely. One of our founding members.

Monihan: Maybe actually a member of the board for awhile.

DuCasse: Oh yes, he was.

Monihan: And we had a visit to his Corpus Christi Church here in San Francisco. Remember that?

DuCasse: Oh, definitely, I do. And he conducted it himself. He will be interviewed, so we will get his information.

Monihan: Del Lederle.

DuCasse: Del Lederle, of course, was one of the best artists at the Junipero Serra Shop. He was a patron, and they had his work. His work was very beautiful because it was contemporary but it was reflective of the Byzantine period. Del, alack and alas, is no longer with us. Peter Macchiarini, he was a very good craftsman. He did also the tabernacle sets of wrought-iron candlesticks. Phil Pratt is another metalworker. It's interesting to see [still referring to list] the number of metal workers we had in this one exhibit. And then of course Victor Ries is so very well known.

Monihan: And Marie Strawn.

DuCasse: Marie Strawn. The name is familiar to me, but I cannot place her. Four stations of the cross, huh, that's interesting. [referring to list] But that does give us an idea of some of the artists that were participating with us, as well as our founding members.

Monihan: The artist-founders—it might be good to read this into the tape.

DuCasse: Very definitely.

Monihan: So, among the artist-founders, the California artists, were Elio Benvenuto, Mario Ciampi, Peggy Conahan, Ruth Cravath, and you, Michaela Martinez DuCasse, June Foster Hass, Louisa Jenkins, Del Lederle, and Antonio Sotomayor. Those were the artists and—founding members. It's very important that we have these.

And I might mention that at least a third of these are not Roman Catholic. And that was an important aspect of our work, because we were not interested in a strictly parochial presentation.
Educational Programs of the Forum

DuCasse: That reminded me, when you just brought forth that announcement, of some of the important people that we had on our programs, our Catholic Art Forum programs, to show how much of an educational thrust we had. We really got some amazing people to come and talk to us.

Monihan: Some of them were international and some of them were local. Father Hofinger, S.J., for instance, was an Austrian working in the Philippines who lectured here frequently during the 1950s. We presented Father Hofinger in April 1956 on "What Is Liturgical Renewal?"

DuCasse: He was one of the most distinguished at the time.

Monihan: He was. One of the first in the series of lectures was Father Terrence O'Connor's, entitled "The Visual Arts and the Teaching Church." That was in February of 1954. So that was within a year of the founding.

DuCasse: Truly. And this was eventually put into a monograph, wasn't it?

Monihan: Yes. It was published in Theological Studies in September of 1954.

DuCasse: Do you have an extra copy that could be kept with the record of these things at the library? At The Bancroft?

Monihan: Yes, you could have that.

But you remember who did this, don't you? [i.e. the illustration of Christ the Teacher by Mary Fabilli printed in the keepsake program for Fr. O'Connor's talk] Mary Fabilli.

DuCasse: Yes, Mary Fabilli. Yes, she was one of our artists. She was never on the board, but--

Monihan: We have remained friends for years, and I still hear from her.

DuCasse: Yes. These friendships we made at that time have been lifelong.

Oh, and we have this. [refers to paper in front of them] This is interesting, this that we were looking over before. This was a series, wasn't it?
Monihan: Yes, I would guess about 1954. Miss Ethel Souza in July, a discussion on "The Purpose of Religious Art." Del Lederle, "The Common Sources of Contemporary Religious Art." Yourself, Micaela, on "The Movement Abroad." And Miss Stephanie Alioto [Wilhelm] on "The Local Expression." And you said that was a walking commentary on the exhibition. And then a panel of Father Meehan, Sister Mary Antoinette, and Elio Benvenuto.

DuCasse: Oh, now that's good to see—that shows that Father Meehan was brought into this.

Monihan: Then on the 25th of July we had a field trip. My golly, we were busy, weren't we?

DuCasse: We certainly were.

Monihan: A field trip to Hanna Center to see Ruth Cravath's work there.

DuCasse: And then we organized the traveling exhibits which went to Santa Rosa and to different Catholic institutions in the greater Bay Area.

Monihan: Yes. [looks through papers] This seems to be something about Louisa's work. "Christian Art Exhibit at Newman [Hall]," 1955.

I think it might be worth it for me to read this. This is a notice from the Newman Club at UC Berkeley; the May issue of 1955, Volume 19, Number 2, pages 4 and 5, has a feature on the Catholic Art Forum. Its introductory words are these: "With the intention of creating a greater understanding of contemporary religious art, which is seeking to develop its own style and idiom, the Academic Committee and Publicity Committee has planned this semester"—this must be the committee of the Newman Club—"has planned this semester a religious art show to be held from May 27 through June 12 in the Lounge and Library of Newman Hall. It is with the greatest pleasure that the Committee announce at this time the securing of the Catholic Art Forum's traveling exhibition as the focal point of this religious art show."

DuCasse: Oh, that's good to know. Yes, it's bringing it all back now, seeing these notices. And it seems to me that we had some connection, some exhibition with the Lutherans over in San Leandro? Hayward?

Monihan: I don't remember.

Do you remember the name of Sister Jean Darcy?

DuCasse: Darcy, O.P., yes. She was well known for her beautiful black and white silhouettes. Yes, she was a good artist of that period.
Monihan: I have some other names here that we had insurance for.

DuCasse: Now there's one where June [Foster Hass] has something in it.

Elah Hale Hays, "My Peace I Give unto You," this was the piece that we discussed briefly before we went on tape. It was a magnificent contemporary work in stainless steel, and, remember, it was not allowed to be shown in the religious art exhibit because it was considered made from inferior material.

This is an indication of one of the reasons we felt there was a need for the education of the laity and the religious people because there was nothing wrong with a beautiful piece of steel, in fact, it's a very beautiful material. But that shows how little was known or realized of our contemporary materials, that some of them were perfectly beautiful and no reason why they couldn't have been used. So that's interesting. I'm glad we were able to show it in our traveling show.

Monihan: You are listed here as having three pieces, two stations of the cross, Descent of the Holy Spirit.

Emi Luptak is another woman.

DuCasse: She's up in Fairfield. And Dorothy Cravath, she was Ruth Cravath's sister-in-law, and she died some years ago. Frances Moyer did those magnificent stations in welded metal, and we always had hoped that we could find a church that would accept them and never did. She still has them. She's now a resident of Mendocino. Monica Hannash, she's an international person. She was one of the Junipero Serra Shop artists.

Monihan: Do you remember that name, Otto Spaeth?

DuCasse: Oh yes. Otto Spaeth, he and his wife were Catholic patrons of art in New York, did a great deal for the Catholic magazine Liturgical Arts, and they also established funds for art and were very helpful in the East.

Monihan: Well, do we have any other topics to go through, Kai?

St. Mary's Cathedral

DuCasse: Let's see what we have here now [going through papers]. We've covered the artists that you've known personally. You said something very interesting, I thought, about the significance of our cathedral, of the building of our cathedral here in San Francisco in its time.
Monihan: The Catholic Art Forum was interested in any new church building being planned in the Bay Area. Mario Ciampi, San Francisco architect, became active in the affairs of the Forum. He was a member of our forum in a very active way.

At the end of the fifties [1960], we had the St. Mary's Cathedral fire. The cathedral on Van Ness Avenue was destroyed. It took about three years of fundraising to get the money together to build a new cathedral.

Paul Ryan, the architect for the new cathedral, was well respected and had planned many churches. When his designs were presented they were considered to be exploring, you might say, with a thought that other participation should be brought in to open up the plans for the cathedral.

Archbishop McGucken was the archbishop at that time, and though it is not correct to say that the Catholic Art Forum had any direct intervention or contribution to make to the archbishop at that time, I can record, without exaggeration, that Father Terrence O'Connor, the Jesuit, had a lot of influence on the archbishop. He conversed with him about the plans, as developed by Paul Ryan, saying that, "Whatever you do, Your Excellency, this is going to be a lasting thing. And think of your other options; do not limit it to the first draft that you have in front of you."

Apparently Father O'Connor opened other points of view in the archbishop's mind, and that is when he brought in [Pier Luigi] Nervi from Italy, and another man who'd done work in the Northwest and East Coast with a Polish name. [Pietro Belluschi] So these two architects were brought in as consultants to Paul Ryan. So it changed the direction of the design into what we see now as the final form of St. Mary's Cathedral.

DuCasse: That was providential of Father O'Connor because he was so knowledgeable in art, contemporary as well as historic, and it needed someone like that probably to remind them that this was a great opportunity in the twentieth century.

Monihan: There was nothing about Father O'Connor that was not reasonable. He was so knowledgeable about the history of the Church, the history of architecture, that he said that this is going to be a visual presentation of the Church's statement or word in a visual sense. So it got through, and, as I say, I really believe that Father O'Connor is to be credited with that.
Monihan: I think that as someone goes into the history or planning of St. Mary’s Cathedral they may discover that Father O’Connor had a minor, insignificant role, but from where I was at the time I thought he had quite a significant role because of his diplomatic, very gentle way of explaining things without threatening the archbishop, just to say, "We just hope you will keep an open mind, that you’ll be successful in achieving what you want to achieve." And so it happened.

DuCasse: It certainly did. And we certainly can be proud of that building; we’re very lucky to have it.

Monihan: Yes.

DuCasse: Incidentally, before we leave Father O’Connor, he is an artist in his own right, is he not?

Monihan: Yes, yes.

DuCasse: I remember he exhibited. For one of our Art Forum shows we had a booth in the San Francisco Art Festival when it was held over in Washington Square in front of St. Peter & St. Paul’s Church. It was an outdoor thing, of course, and at night—what could you do, you couldn’t lock things up too well—unfortunately Father’s piece was stolen. He was wonderful about it, of course. He said, "Well, you know"—and we were insured, but that was just one of those strange things that happened. I’ll never forget that exhibit because of that!

Monihan: Father O’Connor’s talk to the Catholic Art Forum in 1954 was at "The first quarterly meeting of 1954."

DuCasse: Probably that was the first complete sequence of a year in the life of the Forum. Our meetings prior to that probably were board meetings of executive work, so that that probably was really the beginning of our public exposure.

Monihan: Victor Ries was an artist who played an important role. Correct me if I’m wrong. He was educated in Germany and went to Israel.

DuCasse: Very true.

Monihan: And then he came to the United States. But, as I remember, he had a very active role in the de Young Museum show.

DuCasse: He did. And what was also interesting, Father, was when you were speaking of the ecumenical side of that. He was a Jewish artist and he did some very beautiful things for Temple Emanu-El here in San Francisco. He did the menorah, and I had the privilege of
DuCasse: talking about that on one of the TV stations. I think it was to do with the religious art exhibit in 1952, where we showed examples of work from different religious ideas. We had the Catholic and the non-Catholic and then, of course, the Jewish. He did a very beautiful thing.

Monihan: Well, didn't Victor Ries have his own one-man show later on?

DuCasse: Oh yes, yes, he did, and I think he had a show with us and I believe he even talked to us at one point.

Monihan: Because it was at one of his one-man shows that he had a very delicate way of giving me a gift. We went into the exhibition and we stopped at one case and read the label, "On loan from Father Monihan." That was the way he gave it to me.

DuCasse: How delightful. What a beautiful way to put it.

Monihan: A holy water font for my office.

DuCasse: For your office. Isn't that lovely? He was a very interesting man. I remember him. I remember his character and so forth. He was a person you wouldn't forget.

Monihan: Yes.

DuCasse: We were lucky to have had so many interesting, vital people among the artists. Roger Bolomey I remember as a very interesting person. I think he was originally from Switzerland or from some part of that area. He did very unusual paintings, a curious combination of mixed media and they looked almost like they were enamels.

St. Ann's Chapel, Palo Alto and André Girard

Monihan: Kai, I would suggest that we move from here to the Rare Book Room, and it could be—I don't want to take too much of your time—that you might find something that would give us something to put on tape.

DuCasse: That would be splendid. Let's do that, by all means. So we will stop momentarily until we can set ourselves up in the Rare Book Room. [brief tape interruption]
DuCasse: We are now in the Rare Book Room at Gleeson Library, University of San Francisco, and we will continue a little further. I have asked Father to speak a little bit about André Girard, who did the windows and the stations at St. Ann's Chapel in Palo Alto.

Monihan: Yes, that was in the mid-1950s. I was showing you, Kai, some correspondence that the Gleeson Library now has in the Rare Book Room from André Girard to me showing various stages of his work. I met him at Palo Alto at St. Ann's Chapel with Will Ready from Stanford Library, and admired his work very much. As far as I know the Catholic Art Forum never involved him in any program I know of, although I think we probably had a visit to St. Ann's Chapel, because Louisa Jenkins's work was there, and André Girard's stations of the cross. We had a visit to St. Ann's Chapel and we had a talk there about the stations. Incidentally, sketches—that is, painting on glass but as sketches—for the final job were given to me for Gleeson Library. And we framed them on permanent exhibition on the fourth floor of this building.

DuCasse: Wonderful. Where they are against the window, is that not so, so we can see through?

Monihan: Against the window. But then the paint faded because the exposure to the sun was constant. I mentioned to André on visits to Nyack, New York, that they were fading. He said, "Well, I'll come out and repaint them again for you."

DuCasse: How marvelous! [laughter]

Monihan: But he never did. I feel that he did not anticipate that the medium was not permanent, because with the passage of time the colors faded and some of the pigments chipped off.

DuCasse: And some colors are more fugitive also. If I remember rightly, was that not a technique which he himself had invented, so to speak?

Monihan: Yes. And he thought the medium was going to last forever. Well, he was mistaken, but he went into other mediums such as painting on film. Have you heard of that?

DuCasse: The only thing I know is that they do it at Disney, so it must be a possibility, but maybe he explored it in a different way.

Monihan: Well, he used this medium in a series for CBS Television called "Lamp Unto My Feet." I was invited, in one visit to New York, to go to CBS studios and see that presentation. It had been a Sunday morning presentation. It was painting in color on film.
DuCasse: How fascinating. I know he was very—I don't know whether the word obsessed is a little bit too strong—he was so concerned with his media because he felt that it was so appropriate, such a direct way of using art in the Church. I think one thing that they very rarely remember, in California especially, is our light; not just our sunlight, but our light is so strong that it can fade many things that are not supposed to be faded. I've worked with acrylics, and even acrylics exposed to light and sun will fade in time. I don't think we have anything that permanent. I don't know whether he had ever used this in France before he used it in New York.

Monihan: I don't know.

DuCasse: Because there he might have had it in a situation that the light was just not as strong. Although the Mediterranean light is almost as strong as California light.

Monihan: Well, I just know that Paris, which was his home, is a further northern latitude than California.

DuCasse: Yes, that's right, and the sun is not as strong there. I think we have the violet rays more strongly in our western hemisphere or in our latitude somehow. This might account for it; I don't know, this is just talking off the top of our heads.

I was impressed with that technique at the time because it was so very different, and it seemed a wonderful shortcut to stained glass.

Monihan: I would like to say for the purpose of this interview that André Girard, who is a disciple of Bonnard, was truly an artist that should be classified very high in rank with the religious artists. I was just showing you, Kai, the volume of serigraphs which he did in sixty copies.

DuCasse: Sixty-five, I believe.

Monihan: He did sixty-five copies and I have copy number twenty-eight. This was published at Nyack, New York, September, 1956, and the title is "The Sayings of Jesus; Sermon on the Mount; and Instructions to the Disciples."

DuCasse: And each book was hand-done by the artist, by Girard.

Monihan: Yes. And by the way, Girard said, "When the artist uses the squeegee it's like the violinist using the bow." Each time it's done it's an original—even though there are many copies—it's still an original work of art.
DuCasse: That's fascinating. I've never heard that explained. A person like Sister Corita, in her early days, it would have been wonderful to have asked her did she feel this about it, because I've never heard that said before. It's a marvelous way to express it. I think many people don't understand that a serigraph is a personal work of art. It's not just a print, you know, anything but.

Monihan: Oh no. Don't you feel that Girard did a great piece?

DuCasse: Oh, extraordinary. A tour de force really, a most remarkable work, and beautifully typical of his style which has a delicacy which I think maybe he'd developed through the work on glass because the light gives it another dimension, fills in some of those open spaces so beautifully. But he carries it off very well in this series.

You were also saying something about his character, which I think is lovely to remember, maybe that also is reflected in his work.

Monihan: His character was that of a man of great gentleness and great kindness and sensitivity. Soft-spoken, very intelligent, exploring new ideas. Shall I go ahead and explain to you the visit we had?

DuCasse: Yes, please do.

Monihan: It was a memorable visit I had one Christmas in the middle-fifties. Will Ready of Stanford Library came with André Girard to USF and we had drinks in my office and went down to Sam's Grill, a very well-known San Francisco restaurant. In the course of our conversation—a good part of it was on the Holy Eucharist—André Girard said he was contemplating a series of some sort on the Eucharist.

The dinner was memorable for me because André spoke extensively, with great cordiality. It was completely in a Christmas spirit, and it was a lovely dinner, but the elevation of the subject matter made it absolutely glorious. That visit at dinner at Sam's Grill will always remain in my mind. It was his characteristic as an artist; in a lovely way he made use of his friends in talking out a subject that he wanted to explore as an artist.

DuCasse: True, and that was a beautiful correlation in a sense because, of course, the Eucharist is the meal that Christ had with his disciples, and so how very beautifully related it was.
Monihan: And the three of us look back on that particular dinner, Will Ready and André and I look back on that dinner as a very special evening.

André Girard ranks high--also he was a very handsome man, a man apparently of great personal discipline, but showed great joy in his life, and generous. This volume of serigraphs, "Sayings of Jesus," was given to me in the middle-fifties for the library.

DuCasse: It certainly is a treasure to have. I haven't seen anything quite like that; it's most remarkable. I think he is a beautiful example of a contemporary religious, or liturgical, artist (because of course he was both), of a believing artist. We have many great artists who aren't strictly, let's say, believers in the institutional Church sense, but certainly André Girard would be a very fine example of the best of Christian artists.

Monihan: Very best, very best.
Renaissance of Religious Art and Architecture
in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1946-1968

Elio Benvenuto

HIGH POINTS, AND LOW POINTS, IN CONTEMPORARY
CATHOLIC CHURCH ART

An Interview Conducted by
Micaela DuCasse
in 1983

Copyright © 1985 by The Regents of the University of California
## TABLE OF CONTENTS — Elio Benventuo

**INTERVIEW HISTORY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BACKGROUND: PIETRASANTA, ITALY</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITURGICAL WORK SINCE THE EARLY 1950s</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corpus Christi Church, San Francisco</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Liturgical Lexicon</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Vital Vodusek</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapel for the Ursuline Sisters</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Art Forum, and St. Mary's Cathedral</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Luke's Church, Stockton</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**THOUGHTS ON THE STATE OF CHURCH ART TODAY, AND RECOMMENDATIONS** | 33 |
INTERVIEW HISTORY

Elio Benvenuto came to San Francisco from Pietrasanta, Italy, soon after the end of World War II. He brought with him his very great talent as a sculptor and teacher, as well as the inexhaustible energy of his countrymen. He has been a most productive and distinguished member of San Francisco's art colony every since.

Almost from the beginning, he was involved in religious art, primarily for the Catholic Church. From his experience in Italy, and out of his belief that "part of the professional and elementary items with which the Italian, all the European artists work, is a background of Biblical education," he was an ideal founding member of the Catholic Art Forum. He shared the wisdom of his experience with members and helped to build upon it in developing the policy and aims of the Forum through the two decades of its existence.

Elio Benvenuto has pursued his talent as a sculptor and a painter, winning many honors and the just recognition of his peers. He lives and works in the studio which was originally built, lived and worked in, by the late Arthur Putnam, a great sculptor who was also honored for his work as a member of the San Francisco art community. This has surely been an added inspiration for Elio, and would be of great satisfaction to Arthur Putnam.

It was a special pleasure to return to old friends in that twice-famous studio to interview Elio, who still has pertinent ideas on the subject of liturgical art in the Bay Area, and to renew my association with him and his lovely and talented wife, Lydia Maccharini Benvenuto, who also was a member of the Catholic Art Forum.

Micaela DuCasse
Interviewer

September 1984
Piedmont, California
Your full name  **ELIO BENVENUTO**

Date of birth  **January 7, 1914**

Place of birth  **PIETRASANTA, ITALY**

Father's full name  **GIOVANNI BENVENUTO**

Father's place of birth  **GENOA - 1866**

Mother's full name  **MARIA ANTONIEATTI FERRALIS**

Mother's place of birth  **CUGLIERI - SARDINIA ITALY**

Where did you grow up?  **PIETRASANTA - GENOA, FLORENCE**.

Education  **ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS - GENOA, SAN MARCO LYCEUM, FLORENCE ITALY.**

Employment  **COMMUNITY COLLEGE, S.F. S.F. ART COMMISSION, SELF EMPLOYED**.
EXHIBITIONS

First Summer Exhibition, Viareggio, Italy, 1934
Montecasini Group Show, Montecasini, Italy, 1935
Kunstal, Regional Exhibition, Viareggio, Italy, 1937-40
Pietro San Gallo National, Florence, Italy, 1937
Bottger Dei Vaguri, Viareggio, Italy, 1941-42
Semiscale Exhibition, Lucoa, Italy, 1938
Gallery of the Soldiers at Arms, Two Man Exhibition, Verona, Italy, 1942
Lucoa Regional Exhibition, Lucoa, Italy, 1946-47
Black and White Drawing Exhibition, Pietrasanta, Italy, 1946-47
International Exhibition, Porte Dei Marmi, Invited: 1948
Sixty Ninth Annual Oil Tempera and Sculpture Exhibit of the San Francisco Art Association, 1950
De Young Memorial Museum, Religious Arts by California Artists 10-11-52.
75th Annual San Francisco Art Institute Catalog.
Catholic Art Forum Exhibition, 1956.
America Federation of the Arts-Traveling Exhibition 3-1958, 3-1959.
San Francisco Art Association Art Bank, 1958.
Eric Locke Gallery, 3rd Annual.
Pulson of the Legion of Honor-Purchase Award from the City Collection, 1960.
San Francisco Art Association Contemporary Art, 1960.
Grace Cathedral, Church Art Today-Trinity, 1960.
San Francisco Art Association Contemporary Sculplure, 1961.
Sacred Contemporary Art, Seattle, August 1962.
San Francisco Art Association Invention and Tradition, 1962.
Marin Museum Association Exhibition Marin County Civic Center, 1963.
San Francisco Art Association Art Bank Catalog from the Sixth Touring Exhibition, 1964, 1966.

AWARDS IN ITALY

Montecasini, Sculpture Exhibition 1935 "GINO" Terracotta
Garibaldi Prize, Viareggio 1942 "FRANCA" Wax
National Gallery of Modern Arts, Rome 1942 "CALF" animal Wax
Lucoa Art Association Prize, Lucoa 1946 "DONATELLA" Wax
Lucoa Art Association Prize, Lucoa 1947 "ANNA" Wood
5th Annual Art Festival, S.F. 1951 "THE TRIAL" Marble
Sacramento State Fair 1952 "MOTHER AND CHILD" Wood-Bronze
The American Institute of Architects, Award of Honor 1952 "SCULPTURES FOR CORPUS CHRISTI" Stone
San Francisco Annual Art Festival 1954 "SCULPTURE" Stone
San Francisco Annual Art Festival 1964 "SCULPTURE" Stone
San Francisco Annual Art Festival 1970 "SCULPTURE" Wood, Metal, Canvas
San Francisco Annual Art Festival 1978 "DRAWING" Pencil on Paper

Civic Awards: California State Resolution #18 September 21, 1976.
San Francisco City and County Certificate of Honor, September 21, 1981.
International prize, Arts, and Culture; "CITTA" di Terracina 1982.

ARTS JURY DUTY

Duty: Juror, California State Fair; 1953.
San Francisco Annual Art Festival; 1953.
American Phisician Art Association; 1958.
Association: Artist Equity Association; 1950-70.
San Francisco Art Association; 1950-70.
Academia Tiberina, Association Member, Rome, since 1967.
Elio Benvenuto: A survey of 50 years of work

We don't have to confuse our art with that of painters, which essentially has to turn to dynamic images that will be alive and project from the canvas; painting is fundamentally syn., and tends to produce musicality of the figurative themes. Sculpture lives in a three dimensional space; it does not need any device to support it as if it were a flat linearism.' 1943

Recalling this statement forty years later, Elio Benvenuto responds with a changed attitude toward painting, and redefines his position on sculpture.

Art history, and especially several artists such as Jacopo della Quercia, Tino Di Camaino, and I Pisanu, were important and influential to Elio as a young artist. At age eleven, he began as an apprentice to his father, and studied modelling, drawing, and marble carving. When he was eighteen, Elio had learned the technical aspects through traditional training. At the age of seventeen Elio moved to Genoa to work, and attended the Academy of Fine Arts for two years.

Elio left the Academy in 1933, disenchanted with what he considered to be an excessive emphasis on meticulous detail. Elio continued to work and became chief assistant to a local sculptor, Amadio Notis, who was creating monuments for the Staglieno Cemetery in Genoa. At this time Elio began to develop a realistic style exemplified by the first three works in this catalogue: the bronze of his father's head, "Tobias," and "Brigida." From 1933-35 he studied art and several artists, whom he sees as important influences: Donatello, Bantoni, and the 19th century Rodin.

Elio served in the Italian Army in 1935-36 and again in 1940-41; between enlistments, he passed a test and received the degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts from the San Matteo Lyceum in Florence. Throughout the same period, Elio had an exhibition of sculptures at the "Parterre San Gallo" which was an important vehicle of exposure for Italian artists.

In 1938, he completed "Tobias," the boy with a fish, which was cast in bronze in 1981, and is currently on display at the Museo Italo-Americano. Elio won a competition in 1941, and was awarded a contract to construct and carve a memorial for World War One. The competition was sponsored by the Engineer Corps of the Italian Army. Once back in his Pietrasanta studio, he began to work on the monument. For this he received national recognition, and he continued to work on projects for the Engineer Corps. In the same period, when in Pietrasanta, he frequented the revitalized "Bottega dei Vagati," meeting place and exhibition gallery for the region's artists, and those confined by the "Regime." His activity expanded and he participated in regional and national shows, receiving one national and four regional awards. "The Call" was acquired for the national gallery in Rome.

After the war, the Committee for National Liberation (formed during the war as an underground organization) appointed Elio to the city council. In 1945 they elected him as Mayor of Pietrasanta. His administration quickly created new jobs, facilitating post-war reconstruction. Elio revitalized the marble industry by using surplus army troop trucks to move materials and marble down from the Alpines. Soon after, the regular administration election in 1946, and with the stabilization of Italy, Elio devoted his time to his art work. The war had an impact on Elio's art. The poignancy of suffering and destruction was such that he could no longer express himself through purely formal and academic methods repudiated in such works as "Tobias." Therefore, in Elio's words "in that period of 1946 to 1954, I went through what I can call an expressionist period."

I developed a strong need to carve religious work, and a liquidurgical in content. This was a common thematic ground, its interpenetration became the subject master to reach for a personal idiom.

Expressionist works include: "Lazarus," 1946; "The Angel of the Annunciation," 1944; and "Swimmer," 1948. Lazarus, Jesus raised from the dead, is sculpted as a stiff, bandaged body, resembling someone just removed from the wreckage of a bombed building. The "Angel," although roughly chiselled from wood, emanates a gentle nature through the delicate gesture of her stance. At the same time he also executed several portraits of local personalities which included his father.

During the 1946-48 period, Elio further developed his expressionist work, and was invited to participate in the Foire de Marmi, International Exhibition with "Francis.

In 1948 Elio moved to San Francisco and carved the "Swimmer," which embodies fullness rendered in a streamlined form expressive of movement through water. "The Poet" (1952) and "Tightrope Walker" (1953) are additional examples of Elio's expressionism, pictured in this catalogue. Elio was interred in European artists like Moors, Lichizia, and Calder whom he found more creative than the American artists of the time who hadn't developed a personal idiom.

In 1950 Elio was commissioned by Father Zunino, pastor of the Corpus Christi Church, to create the (14) stations of the cross, the central crucifix, and the two figures for either side of the sanctuary. The architect Mario Gambi designed the church. When the project was completed, it became a unique liturgical environment. The work expresses the union of Christ's supernatural presence with the miracle of resurrection. In World Magazine, 20 October 1952, critic Alfred Frankenstein had this to say of the church:

Among other things, the lighting serves to dramatize Benvenuto's settings of the cross, carved in a strong simple style not unlike that of folk art. Benvenuto's hanging crucifix and his sculptures on the columns at either side of the sanctuary are both fluent and monumental at once.

During the 1950's, Elio's work became more abstract. He worked with the lines, form, and volume of the medium, exploring the nature of sculpture as a whole. As an example, "The Angel," 1969, is a marble sculpture of an angel standing on a rock, with the weight of the body on the right leg, and the left leg raised. The form is simple, yet the sculpture is complex, with the head turned to the right, and the hand holding a small object.

In 1967, along with architect Roger Ramusio, Elio was commissioned by the Pastor of St. Luke's Church in Stockton, California, to design and carve all the furnishings. Elio completed the altar, baptismal font, central crucifix, several candelabra, a large tapestry symbolizing the Ossue prophecy of rebirth, and the statue of Saint Luke. A controversy ensued over the finished statue of St. Luke, which differed in form from the original sketches that Elio had presented. Accusing him of "modemist decimation," the pastor removed the three-ton sculpture, causing it to be in the back of the church. The statue became the central focus of the controversy, modern versus traditional. The church and its furnishings were presented on national television, channel 5 in January 1965 by Walter Cronkite. Only Saint Luke was left, and it was rejected in August on display at the Richmond Art Center.

Elio has been an active member of the American Art Commission of the annual Art Festival, and the Visual Arts Program. In 1970, with the assistance of some artists, he restored a neglected old building, the Art Commission's gallery, "Cappuccini Assonato." This gallery became instrumental in promoting young and established artists alike. The California State Senate, and the city of San Francisco commended Elio for his work in developing the Festival and gallery as a vital expression of Bay Area artists. Elio Benvenuto is presently instructing life drawing at San Francisco Art Institute and he has helped establish with the local Community Church of El Cerrito the Dr. Albert Asavedo Center. The center now serves as a cultural rendezvous for the San Francisco community. To preserve the stone carving technique, he has established specialized courses in marble carving which are structured to continue the traditional and artistic use of this material. His activity was rewarded with seven regional prizes, one national award, The American Institute prize d'Arte and Culture. "Citta" di Terracina 1982. He is currently working on several graphic and sculptural projects.

Gregory Albright, 1982
Written under the direction of Ray Mondini, Chair
Humanities Department, San Francisco Art Institute

*Paris resident for many years.

Located in San Francisco on Santa Rosa Avenue at the 45th block of Mission Street.
ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Those years which appear to be less productive in art works were richer in human experiences, and I felt compelled to become more involved in the multi-form opportunity that this Society was offering.

The complexity of everyday contact with my fellow artists resulted in the necessity to seek, depending on the circumstances, alternative avenues with the goal in mind to assert or compensate for the vacuum which I felt was surrounding the public forum, in so far as the arts were concerned.

I joined the San Francisco Art Association with the belief that the common ground of unity of intent might slowly overcome the aloofness of the general public toward the arts through a systematic exposure of our artistic efforts. The museums, which at the beginning of the 50's appeared to be a strong ally, in time cancelled all the local exhibitions one by one in the quest for a better audience.

The Arts throughout the ages have functioned as a catalytic link that bound man and His Gods. Only in recent history the illuministic philosophers were among the many who took partial hold on the secular culture and concurred to break the binomial Man-God link. Man since that time is ever searching for his soul and art is the mirror.

Apart from the many reactions that this statement may raise, I deeply felt that the Arts were granted the reason to "Live" only as an afterthought, never recognized as an archetypal force of primeval necessity, which I feel it is. An occasion arose that seemed to be leading to a better understanding (as far as I was concerned) of the Public-mind reaction to an all comprehensive visual Art Program.

In this period I was offered the role of dihor of the ever peripatetic and always interesting Annual Art Festival (conceived in the 30's by a courageous handful of artists); this was always in favor with the Public, sometimes appreciated and other times denied by the critics. Between the 70's and 80's I became very much involved in the Art Commission's Arts programs. To the "Annual" I dedicated time and concern, promoting local and international visual Arts exchange programs that were beneficial to both parties involved. Vancouver (British Columbia) artists were invited to the Annual Festival where they presented a stimulating group of works, shown in a specially prepared pavilion. The following year San Francisco Artists, chosen by a panel of artists, were the main attraction at the 1973 Maximilian Planetarium Museum and at the Art-latch exhibition.

Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico became a common lexicon due to the artists' exchange between the two countries. Guadalajara artists were presented in the ever hospitable "Capricorn Aunder" Gallery and San Francisco painters were hosted in the beautiful State-sponsored Galeria De Artes Plásticas in downtown Guadalajara. The 70's were marked by the Osaka International Expo where a handful of highly qualified Bay Area Artists represented the United States Arts. In 1975-76 Japanese artists came here (over a hundred) with the most marvellous series of exhibitions, poetry recitals, and dance performances which electrified the Bay Area for almost a month.

My main concerns were with those programs that the Art Commission originated and was entrusted with. Several outstanding exhibitions were presented in the Art Commission "Capricorn Aunder" Gallery, conceptual or traditional, they received positive critical response.

Since the establishment of the Arts Center at Fort Mason, I saw the opportunity to expand the curricula with a special course for sculptors. Mechanical equipment and adequate facilities permitted the use of traditional media for artists working with marble, stone, granite and wood. This course was and is offered to all students willing to wrestle the hard stone.

With all these varied programs to take care of, I was left with a very limited time for my personal use. I took advantage of my life classes. Pencil drawing and clay became my principal expressive avenues within the dynamic of everyday life. Mainly figurative, this body of work delves into the study of the human forms from a variety of angles and compositional gesture. Several ceramic pieces came out of the kiln in the same period, again figurative, ISRAEL #1 and #2, shown years ago in a special exhibition. Furthermore, I pursued the playful and stimulating clay media, obtaining some interesting results such as: IT IS NOW (inverted letter S) or the more complex study of DIANE OF EPHESUS, maquette for a bronze statue. (See photo #5).

A period of travel took place: I revisited the ancient gigantic Apuan marble quarries, sun blinding in the noon hour, retracing the path of history of the Tuscan region. The rugged Mexican coastline, the sublime sites at Monte Alban and Mitla, became a pilgrimage for several years.

The fifty year survey was short of one piece of sculpture, a thought which haunted me for some time in the ever busy hours of the day. In 1982 following the cyclical tide of the seasons, this last piece for the show became ALABASTER MOON DESCENDING ON A DESERTED PLAZA, an homage to Giorgio De Chirico.

This journey is ever present and longing for a quality of life compatible with my social-aesthetic belief, and the share of a vast horizon within the depth and limit of my imagination.

Elio Benvenuto
HIGH POINTS, AND LOW POINTS, IN CONTEMPORARY CATHOLIC CHURCH ART

[Interview date: September 21, 1983]

Background: Pietrasanta, Italy

DuCasse: Today our interview is with Elio Benvenuto, and the interview is taking place in his studio in San Francisco which originally belonged to Arthur Putnam. Elio has just presented me with a curriculum vitae and we will just take a little bit from it. His birthdate was January 7, 1914, and his education was in Italy at the Academia Ligustica di Belle Arti, Genoa--

Elio, why don't you just tell us the most important things, and about your teaching experience now, and some of the awards.

Benvenuto: Very well, Miss DuCasse. (I'm formally addressing you now.)

DuCasse: Thank you! We can go back to our first names later.

Benvenuto: Okay. As you have read in this biography, I did go to the Academy of Fine Art in Genoa, which is "Ligustica"—from Liguria. And after a few years of works with Mr. Norris, a sculptor, a friend of my father, I went back to Florence.

I did follow the courses at the Lyceum of St. Mark. That was the classical college which prepared artists for the future artistic life. Then I came back to Pietrasanta and later I went in the army, which cut out plenty of the dreams!

When that period was over, I came back to Pietrasanta and I taught a private drawing, plastique (clay) art class, and mainly history of the arts. This was a rather professional approach to teaching art, at that time very much felt, but not very much practiced by many people. In Pietrasanta, in the years between 1935 and 1940, it was a time when I was teaching, working
Benvenuto:  in my studio, and at the same time preparing quite a few projects. In the same period, as you well know, about the end of the thirties, the big clouds of the war came over, and I, as many other young people, had to go, and I spent about four years in the army.

During this period though, I became very much involved in the art nevertheless. I won a national competition for a monument to the bridge engineers corp in March, 1941. The local commandant gave me ample time to execute and work out all these large components of the monument, which was about fifty long by thirty feet large, with a group of seven figures and architectual elements.

So, I have to say that my army time was spent carving, drawing, and modeling. I was very fortunate that the person in charge of the bridge engineer corps was General Paladino, a very Renaissance type of man, and he liked to have an artist in his troop, so I was treated like the prodigal son.

DuCasse: Terrific. It could only happen in Italy.

Benvenuto: Well, I don't know, but I heard that in the United States army some artists were serving in various branches, et cetera, performing tasks other than militaristic duties. I was, anyway, lucky to have this assignment.

So, until the collapse of the Italian army and the fascistic regime in September, 1943, I performed that particular duty. Then it became my time to get involved in the freedom fight, and I was involved in the underground, et cetera, et cetera. We don't want to go through that now.

In 1948, after the war, I followed my wife--Lydia Macchiarini, born in Santa Rosa, California--out of an idea of seeing what America was, more than anything else. In Pietra-santa I had my studio, I was very well settled there. I gave up political ambition. For a time after the war I was the mayor of the town. I was proposed to run for higher office, in congress. I gave up "the favour" for I didn't want to become another politician; I think it was too much for my temperament to sustain.

DuCasse: Well, you were more of an artist after all.

Benvenuto: Yes, and that was a fact. I always had the necessity to go in the studio and work, and as it was I couldn't do it anymore. So the trip of my wife in the United States gave me an opportunity to really break off clean with my Italian, lovely and great people, but in the same time very much politically involved; at that time I couldn't take the climate anymore or any longer.
Liturgical Work Since the Early 1950s

Corpus Christi Church, San Francisco

Benvenuto: So I came here. One of the first works which was offered to me was the Corpus Christi Church appurtenances, mainly the sculptures part of it. [Corpus Christi Church, Santa Rosa and Alemany Blvd.] These were the stations of the cross, the bronze corpus on top of the altar, and the two lateral figures, the Sacred Heart and the Madonna.

The architect of this particular church is Mr. Mario Ciampi, but the work was really assigned to me first by the pastor, Father Zunino, which saw my work in other places, but mainly those I had in the studio across the street, in front of the church. Every day he would come over to pass a few minutes, to chat; apparently he liked what I was doing.

Then, when Ciampi got the assignment to build the new church, he contacted me and asked me if I would prepare some example, maquettes, which I did. About the same time there was an exhibition, held in the Palace of Fine Art, and these examples went in the exhibition—that was the San Francisco Annual Art Festival—and were awarded a prize. Those circumstances helped favorably the project; my professional status became better established.

DuCasse: And what were the dates roughly of this period?

Benvenuto: It was 1949-1951. That's the period in which I developed all the artworks which became part of the Corpus Christi complex. The Salesian Fathers were in charge of the parish.

So that was the first large work I conceived and executed in wood. It was rather an interesting project which I did without a preconceived idea. In a sense, it was my passport to the art world. We didn't want it to become modern for the sake to be modern, but I felt the necessity to renew the character of these liturgical works which appeared to me, at least what I saw around, very dull and very commercial. So my main purpose was to give a rather strong impact, original interpretation, of what art could do for such an environment, and in a contemporary vein.

I believe that we were successful. We received many complaints by some of the parishioners; then, the appreciation of people which knew a little bit more. And in the end it was very well accepted by all. Surely it was a rather pleasant result, especially for the pastor which had taken a chance!
DuCasse: True. And he backed you all the way, didn't he?

Benvenuto: And backed me up all the way. Well, that was the first one.

The Liturgical Lexicon

Benvenuto: I believe we are now involved in making a brief history of my involvement in the liturgical arts in San Francisco and around the country.

DuCasse: Correct. That also answers my first question, which was when you were first using religious subjects in your sculpture.

Benvenuto: I believe that as part of the professional and elementary items with which the Italian, all the European artists work, it is with a background of Biblical education, even if they are not religious. And just for that reason I had carved quite a few works of a religious nature, not liturgical but of a religious nature. One became quite famous, the Resurrection of Lazarus, which was exhibited at the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1951, and before in Florence, et cetera, et cetera.

So, I did not have a strictly liturgical background, but I knew as much as any expert, for don't forget I come from a small but very cosmopolitan town which has served the world with all liturgical appurtenances since 1860, Pietrasanta. Ten thousand craftsmen and artists have, I believe, spread as much the gospel as any proselytizing saint!

DuCasse: I'm sure of that!

Benvenuto: And it's true. So, as I was saying, I did not have a liturgical preparation, but it was part of the general lexicon of life; it was not liturgical for me, but it was religious for many people.

DuCasse: What was your impression of the attitude of the Church authorities about the use of contemporary art, other than this one pastor who seems to have been very receptive? How did you feel at the time or after that about this situation of the acceptance of local artists rather than something which was bought out of a catalogue?

Benvenuto: I have firm convictions that at the time many of the curia and especially, as far as I'm concerned, the San Francisco archdiocese were not prepared to any art movement or to any realization that art was the best "visual" words to reach the people.
Benvenuto: They were so uneducated insofar as art was concerned. I was appalled, for even if the Italian priests were misled by the Renaissance and still insisted on some worn out canons, at least what they did choose was of technically a very chosen quality and was not out of a catalogue.

This certainly is not true for all even of the Italian priests, as much as it is not true for the American ones. I found some people in the archdiocese, like Father Hurley or Monsignor Maher, which were responding to my inquisitive mind insofar it was the use of a new contemporary language in the liturgical art. And they did ask me out quite a bit, it's true. I don't know where at this day Monsignor Maher is. I believe he's a bishop now.

DuCasse: I believe he is, in Santa Rosa, if I'm not mistaken.

Benvenuto: Is he? I don't know. But I do remember very well that at the time Archbishop Mitty was the archbishop in charge of the San Francisco dioceses, I did, through Monsignor Hurley, a portrait of Bishop O'Dowd, who was in a railway incident killed in Santa Rosa or Sonoma. It was Monsignor Hurley or Maher, one of these two persons, who asked me to make a portrait, which I did, as a goodwill gesture. And the same portrait was later placed at the Bishop O'Dowd High School in Oakland.

My point in reminding this was that Archbishop Mitty, when he was presented with the work, said, "What material is that?" I said, "It is plaster."

He said, "Why aren't you giving me marble?"

I said, "Monsignor, I don't have the money for it," and that was it. That was his kind of appreciation. If it was marble, it would be ok; if it was plaster, it was too light! [laughter]

That clarifies the mentality of some prelates at that period. Certainly, as I mentioned, these two persons, now Bishops, were very receptive. To Monsignor Maher I proposed a coram populi [open to the people] altar. I provided the architect and the artists, the contractors, to do it as a goodwill gesture. This was for an exhibition, to show and promote the idea of this coming-close-to-the-people action. He accepted. Two days later or three days later he called me back and said, "Elio, please change it, for I cannot support you in your idea." And that was the end of the project. That was between '53 and '55. It was very early, before the Vatican Council.
DuCasse: Right. This was after the exhibit that we had in San Francisco at the de Young Museum, and of course you participated in that exhibition.

Benvenuto: I was in that exhibition at the de Young Museum with you, Ruth Cravath, and other people from California.

After that we did quite a few small exhibitions. But I believe, since you mention the de Young Museum exhibition, it was in that year that a few people, like you, Ruth Cravath, Ciampi, and a few others, Sotomayor, and other artists that now escape my memory, got together and decided to organize a group of people which were interested in furthering the idea of contemporary art, producing artworks for the new contemporary churches that were being erected around the country.

DuCasse: Right, and that was the Catholic Art Forum.

Father Vital Vodusek

DuCasse: You were one of the founding members, as I remember.

Benvenuto: Yes, as you and other people.

DuCasse: And of course Father Monihan was the sort of spearhead for that.

Benvenuto: The monitor. And there was Father Vodusek, which not many people knew but he was a great poet in the Slavonic and Serbian languages. He was fantastic, he was a sensitive soul. Yes, I really missed him when he died.

DuCasse: I'm sure. You were especially a friend of his, were you not? You might tell us a little bit about him, because he hasn't come into the record yet, and it's nice to have a reminiscence.

Benvenuto: He was a very, very warm person, but I would say very shy to speak of his ability. His contribution was his great literary gift that he had. He did prefer to show his support for other artists, with great enthusiasm, painters or sculptors, poets or architects. He was a great supporter of my work to the point that he commissioned me the statue of the Good Shepherd, for he anticipated that sometimes we must pass away. And there were, at that time, a group of six people, six priests, which were strictly bound by the same roots of Slavonic origin, and they were part of the establishment of the Slavonic Church, and of the six, three I believe were passed away, deceased. So he wanted to make a memorial to them.
Benvenuto: So I did this large memorial, it was about eight feet high, carved in stone, the Good Shepherd, which is in the Slavonic section of the Holy Cross Cemetery. I have to add that last time I saw it, on account of atmospheric pollutants mixed with sulfuric acid, the stone is rapidly deteriorating at a very fast pace. But that is something that is very hard to overcome, you see. I do plan to contact the father and see if I can do something to help to maintain it.

DuCasse: Would there be something that you could cover it with?

Benvenuto: Well, you can give it a sealer, yes. The problem is that the maintenance of it should be regularly performed every year or so.

DuCasse: At least it hasn't been vandalized by human hands.

Benvenuto: Well, the cemetery is rather a secluded place and there is less chances, although I've seen artwork stolen from the Italian cemetery.

DuCasse: Oh yes, well, there's such tremendous artwork there! It's like a museum.

Benvenuto: True. But when you are talking about vandalizing or vandals, it is a sad state of affairs. There is no limit to the extent that damage can be perpetrated to an artwork by people, for greed or unknown psychotic reasons.

But in any event, that was my association with Father Vodusek, and throughout the years we were pretty close, even to the point that at a much later time, 1964 I believe, he was the one that mentioned to me that the saint from St. Luke Church was in a yard, they hung it up with chains to the telephone pole. He was the one. He didn't know how to tell me!

He came to my house. He was crying. Lydia was trying to find out, when I arrived later. Anyway, I saw Father Vital [Vodusek] all upset. I said, "What is going on?" Well, he didn't know how to tell me, but then he told the story. Well, I was surely surprised by the action, to say the least.

DuCasse: Oh, heavens yes. Had that been taken from his church?

Benvenuto: No, it was in St. Luke's Church in Stockton. But he had been visiting Stockton in that day, and the removal had just happened, or maybe it was a few days before. I had no idea of the action. To me it was the first account of the fact. So it was rather shocking. You are an artist, you know what happens, when you get beaten on the head.
DuCasse: Oh yes, this is the worst thing that can happen to you, is something happening to your own work.

Benvenuto: But, that was Father Vital Vodusek, and his full involvement in the arts.

DuCasse: And what was the name of his church?

Benvenuto: It was the Church of The Nativity, Nativity Church on Fell Street, San Francisco. Also, the front of the church was restored by Mario Ciampi.

DuCasse: Ah, that's good to know. Well, Father Vodusek was certainly one of our very enthusiastic prelate sponsors and members of our group.

Benvenuto: Yes. When we speak about clergy or religious people involved in the art or in the arts in general, it is rather difficult to appraise the number of these persons involved in it, for usually they are staying apart, they never partake in the general trend of the society. But in those years I did meet quite a few. Father [Terrence] O'Connor of Alma College, the Jesuit father. He has a fine brain, an intelligent and acute mind, and I believe was a fellow sculptor, even though very seldom he said so. He was very interested in the philosophical attitude and the philosophical meaning of sculpture within the religious concept, and that is where he was at his best.

DuCasse: Absolutely. He is at USF now.

Benvenuto: Maybe I will call him up some day and go out to lunch.

DuCasse: Why don't you? I know he'd love to see you.

Chapel for the Ursuline Sisters

Benvenuto: Is Daniel O'Connor still active in San Francisco?

DuCasse: Not in a pastoral sense, but he is doing a great deal of work with various groups.

Benvenuto: Very good. I'm glad, for he is a very enthusiastic man, very intelligent, and also I have to say he was one of my moral sponsors. Through his office (at the time I believe he was resident in Santa Rosa, California), he asked me to look at the plan of a small chapel which a local architect was building for the Ursuline Sisters. I looked at the plan, I said, "Father, this is a barn! It's not a church, it's not a chapel."
DuCasse:  [laughing] So many of them were, just barns.

Benvenuto: "It's a barn!"

He said, "Do something about it."

I said, "Can I? How can I? I don't want to insult the architect." I said, "Look, ask the architect if I can consult with him, but I don't want to change his plan."

Well, Father O'Connor was persistent and contacted the architect. The architect, out of impatience, didn't have time, or out of spite, said to the priest, "Go right ahead, do whatever you want," but he would not change one iota of what he had done, that was his contract.

At that point, Father O'Connor told me, "Well, would you help me now?"

I said, "Okay, I must have a talk with the architect." I went by the architect's office in Santa Rosa, and I asked him if it was true. I said, "I don't want to do anything against your desire unless there is your cooperation, for after all you have to direct the contractors."

The architect was very impressed by my presentation. He said, "Well, Mr. Benvenuto, you can go right ahead. I believe I will do as much as I can." So in the long run he became very cooperative, and I did make a few changes in the chapel, which I won't mention now.

DuCasse: Yes, but at least you were able to modify it.

Benvenuto: Yes, it became a liturgical space, and it was important. I did provide a few items, a tapestry wall hanging with the symbols of the wheat and the grapes, hung on the back wall of the chapel, to hide out the dullness of the apsidal wall. I did design the small altar and the tabernacles and a few other elements. I think it is a very nice chapel. I carved a Victorious Christ, with white robes and a blue mantle, and it is in a victorious attitude, with open arms to invite people.

But those are the main, I would say, episodes regarding my activity, not with the Catholic Art Forum but as an artist.

With the Catholic Art Forum, we did provide quite an important service, all of us, you included, Ruth Cravath, and others which escape my memory now. There were Emi Luptak, and Del Lederle, and other persons. We did provide small and very
Benvenuto: exquisite exhibitions to be seen and shown in public or semi-public spaces, like churches or convents or other places frequented by religious people. I believe it was working well for a few years; we did for five or six years.

Catholic Art Forum, and St. Mary's Cathedral

Benvenuto: At a certain time, by the board of directors, it was decided to let the Catholic Art Forum sleep, and I believe it is sleeping now.

DuCasse: It is sleeping now, right. Do you feel that it performed a good service in education?

Benvenuto: I think it was a great service. One of my reactions was, I didn't see enough clergy participation as projected. I felt we were imposing upon them this "new dawn," and not everyone, it seems to me, was happy about it. Apparently it seems, and this I'm speaking out of experience, that certain people, a certain group of people needs longer span of time to be able to appreciate certain values. And the only thing I can say is that I hope that somebody else will do the same as we have done in the future. I think it's needed.

Any time I go in a new church, I see a drab, commercial type of construction which is uninspiring, if not outright objectionable--that is the particular adjective for this.

DuCasse: True. That brings us to St. Mary's Cathedral, and I'm sure you have some ideas about what's happening to that in mind.

Benvenuto: Yes. I believe St. Mary's Cathedral was part of, I believe one of, the pet projects of the Catholic Art Forum. At the time we convened and we felt strongly that we should be heard, and we should say at least how we stood about the building of a new cathedral in San Francisco. And I remember very well we were in Ruth Cravath's house, and we decided to invite the bishop. What is his name?

DuCasse: Archbishop McGucken.

Benvenuto: Yes, we invited the archbishop at the meeting.

DuCasse: Wasn't it here in your studio?
Benvenuto: That's right. They did choose my house on account there is a little bit of floor space. I remember that that evening there were about 150 persons which were around the balconies. We had quite a crowd.

The archbishop was very gentle, and I remember very well when he arrived at the meeting, he said he had a visit from a Roman apostolic delegate and he had just one hour to stay. But after the machine-gun questions and the heavy bomb which landed on his lap, he just forgot about the apostolic delegate, and he stayed until over twelve o'clock, when kidding I suggested: "Look, I want to go to bed." He said, "You are right," and he left. [laughter] He was talking at that time with my mother-in-law in Italian (an old lady of ninety years old at that time).

DuCasse: Oh, marvelous.

He was very open, and he listened to the questions very fairly.

Benvenuto: What transpired at that time was that he didn't promise anything, but apparently we made a strong impression. We didn't accuse him to be a sort of a non-committed person, but we did point out that it was his role to become very important in the construction of the new cathedral.

So months later we heard that he had hired an Italian architect, a famous engineer, Mr. Nervi, and that in a certain sense appeased our conscience, for we felt even if the corporation of the cathedral's architect was not composed of the best minds available in California, at least Mr. Nervi was a creative mind which might do something good, and in fact I believe it came out very well, the dome, the interior. I believe that the character of the cathedral is a beautiful and dynamic space, even if the outside is static and conventional.

The dome, the baldachino by [Richard] Lippold is a shimmering jewel, and the concept of the baldachino, a spiritual protection upon the head of the officiator, is very interesting. I think it was a very good idea and it was beautifully solved.

DuCasse: If only that level of high art had been pursued throughout the church.

Benvenuto: It's true, but I don't know. It seems to me art, as anything else, goes in periods, not always the same. It goes by pushing, pulling, sometimes jumping, and sometime it stops. And now it seems hibernating.
DuCasse: I remember one of the points that we tried to put across to the archbishop that evening here was that live, local artists of the best caliber should be utilized. Now, that wasn't always done but at least they have used actual artists. Unfortunately they bought from different places, but they have not just bought art from a catalogue, thank God.

Benvenuto: Yes, you are completely right. The idea was probably an egoistic idea to use the local artists, although it was an interesting idea, I believe we had the right to pursue that concept. Nevertheless, they did use artists; that was at least a positive reaction to our meeting. I think it was great, in a sense.

St. Luke's Church, Stockton

Benvenuto: Unfortunately every diocese, I don't think they have and I think they should have, an expert on liturgical art. Every diocese should have an expert, not to dictate to the pastor what to do, but at least to open up his mind to what is possible, which now they don't have, and which at that time I suggested to quite a few of the people I was working with.

In my relationship with Monsignor Hurley it was this kind of a relationship! He is a very intelligent man, and when I told him what my idea was, he said, "Okay, very good, but bear in mind that you don't have all intellectuals there, you have peasants, you have people which have not gone over elementary school," which has nothing to do with intelligence, but has to do with preparation.

I said, "Very well, I think I will be as direct and as simple as possible." And the work in St. Luke was as simple, as direct as possible. And the only result I obtained is that they did take off the most "realistic" piece; they left all the abstract works, minus the crucifix.

DuCasse: That's very interesting.

Benvenuto: It is. So all the other elements are abstract, the baptismal font, all the elements of the station of the cross, all conceived in abstract, although they do pinpoint the liturgical needs. (That work was featured on the national network with Walter Cronkite. It was a discussion of the sculptures executed at St. Luke's Church in Stockton, January 1965.)

DuCasse: They were understandable works.
Benvenuto: Understandable, but they were abstract, and the statue was too powerful for them. I thought probably they didn't know who St. Luke was, for through the Biblical history—I didn't mean to say that I knew the man—but through the Biblical history I read enough to understand that he was a very strong person, was not always sweet when he was involved in his addressing and apostolate. He was right to the point.

That's what I tried to convey, that idea of this man talking as a reality, not as a concept but just as a reality. Well, be what it is, the work is not in the church, is now going some other place, for I never sold the work, never, never, I didn't want to sell it.

DuCasse: I see. Really it was on loan, so to speak?

Benvenuto: It was on the contract, and was not paid. And I still have it, and it probably will be placed in some other place sometime.

DuCasse: Oh, wonderful. I hope so. You know, St. Luke should be in a hospital because he was the great physician.

Benvenuto: That's right! The idea is to go to the University of California, on Parnassus. That's the idea.

DuCasse: That would be very appropriate. They would accept it not as much as a religious piece as a true symbol of the individual, of the great physician.

Benvenuto: Yes. That is the idea.

Thoughts on the State of Church Art Today, and Recommendations

Benvenuto: I mentioned all that in the conversation of our appraisal of the clergy's attitude of the time. There were some surely, the one I mentioned before, and I'm quite sure there are many others around the country, but I am talking of those which I have been in contact with, which we can talk about, those you have been in contact, and there are many, but in the overall I would like to repeat the previous concept, on account it's going on record; that the archdiocese should have an expert on liturgical art and seek his advice—advice, if nothing else.

DuCasse: True, true. I think at one time they did. I think Monsignor Maher was supposed to have served in that capacity, but I think he was a little too conservative, he didn't have the breadth of vision or of education in that to have performed that duty fully. I think they tried at one time and it's probably gone by the wayside.
Benvenuto: I do hope they will have, although strictly speaking I'm no
more interested in doing any liturgical work. As a matter of
fact, I've been asked for and I've refused. I felt so really
bad. I placed all my vision in those 1964 pieces that I felt
that they were not appreciated, there was no point for me to
pursue that same idea. I have worked with some other pastor in
other capacity, yes, I did reorganize the St. Peter and Paul
Church sanctuary several times, since 1950. I did some work for
them, but it was in a decorative design, not as artistic as it
could be, but as a decorative part of the liturgical aspect of
the appurtenances.

DuCasse: That's a tremendous service in itself.

Benvenuto: Yes, it is. Oh, sure it was. That's what they can appreciate
most!

DuCasse: And of course there wasn't anything you could add to the inside
of that church, was there?

Benvenuto: No, no. There is too much, as a matter of fact. And I think
I should be free to mention Father Costanzo. He was the soul
of that Italian church, a dynamic man, very open, although he
stopped at the Renaissance insofar as art is concerned.

DuCasse: So many have!

Benvenuto: He was trying to simplify the interior of the church, and many
times we tried. We did move saints, plaster of Paris statues
from altars, and we had to place those statues back.

DuCasse: The hue and cry must have been tremendous from the people.

Benvenuto: Once he called me back and said, "Better come down before they
will lynch you!" We did try a couple of times. But I have to
say that many people see the church as a continuation of the
gods of one time; there is no change at all. A good part is
paganism dressed up in Christian dress, that's all it is.

DuCasse: So true, so true. Yes, they have their devotions. And really
that's what the Council tried to do, was to bring us back to
our central devotion, which is the Eucharist, but it's awfully
hard going!

Benvenuto: Well, I believe there is another point to consider from a
philosophical point of view, that after all it is the people's
lives which are important, and if that is what makes them
happier or live better, well, I can't say anything against it,
can I?

DuCasse: No.
Benvenuto: In my last, as I mentioned, sabbatical leave which I went through the "Magna Grecia"—Sicily, Greece, Crete, Italy, Sardinia, and various parts of Italy—I did have a point in mind. My main idea was to find out the instrument by which the artist gave to humanity these famous and these great masterpieces, for there is not a technical museum, nor recorded history of the tools of them.

So I went through all these museum, and the question was, "Do you have marble-carving instruments from any era, any century?"

They said, "No, we have not a technical museum dealing on the subject." Directors of museum, and curators, have a limited notion and doubtful technical experience, any expertise, in depth. I gathered a wealth of information, which should be developed to its full potential.

We have to bear in mind that it's through the forging of the tools that many things became important to sculpture, and many things became important to the culture, for if they didn't know how to forge, they didn't know how to cast, they wouldn't even be able to implement the ideas they had. So my quest was to find out the particulars.

In the same time I did observe how paganism became woven with Christianity at every level. From the seventh century before Christ, the great classical basilica were developed, and in the second century after Christ these became Christian basilica. They had incorporated the columns, architectural elements, so the structure of the previous temple was not greatly changed. The idea was new, but the dress was old.

And it was interesting to see that this concept is not changed today. When last time I was in Mexico, and I saw the many and great architectural structures of Mexican Mayan periods transformed in Christian basilica, part Christian, part pagan temples, I was astounded. I never realized that this was done before in such a large scale. The Christian established the fashion after the Roman. They did it in the fifteenth century. They changed beautiful Romanesque churches into the Baroque style churches, and so forth. This is a continuous evolving drive of humanity, and probably that's why it is.

DuCasse: Why it keeps alive.

Benvenuto: You can certainly say that keeps that alive! It's true. Or keeps us alive. I think we have covered enough for your interview? You have special questions?
DuCasse: One thing I would like to ask you. Do you remember, other than Mario Ciampi, other architects who you felt were more receptive of a contemporary art form?

Benvenuto: Yes. One very interested architect, even if he did not at least follow the general idea of innovation, was Mr. [Vincent] Raney. Raney was very much interested in the renewal of the architectural space. His personal life—as I heard at the time, he was a pilot before, so he was the kind of man, a progressive man in that sense, he did that. I don’t know if he was forced during the war, or what he did on his own, but he was a man which liked the peace, liked the new concept, so he was receptive.

Another one which was also very receptive and did something about was Henry Chescoe. He was very interested in fusing traditional and contemporary, was a very open man insofar it was architecture and liturgical artworks. At one time I worked with him and with Monsignor Kennedy of St. Raymond’s, Menlo Park, on the church, and I believe I did a couple of liturgical elements, the one in front of the church.

DuCasse: How very good. I often pass it because I work down there.

Benvenuto: Yes, they are still up. And I was surprised, for the material is not a good material.

These are the two most involved persons insofar as architecture or liturgical works. Others were interested, but they didn’t have a chance. Mario Gaidano wanted to, but never had the chance; for one reason or another he didn’t pursue the idea; he had a few original ideas. And I could mention others.

DuCasse: Do you remember Paul Dachauer, who was in our group?

Benvenuto: Sure. Paul Dachauer did a few, with Tony Perrinello. They did St. Anthony’s.

DuCasse: Yes, they did the reconstruction of St. Anthony’s.

Benvenuto: They left only the old pulpit, which is very nice, and the gateway, which is nice. And then they did the complete St. Anthony’s Church—whose pastor is a good friend of mine by the way, Father [Effrem] Trettel. He’s a very interesting man, he’s a poet, he’s a writer. He has a program—radio Christian program.

DuCasse: Is that an Italian name?

Benvenuto: Yes. He is Italian, but the name might be Slavonic, for he was born in the border town of Trieste.
Benvenuto: He was a person very much involved in liturgical ideas and also founded a few programs for the people, insofar as the mass. For people who cannot get out of the house on the Sunday, he has a special mass. He's a very interesting person, but I know him as a person, as an artist, as a friend. I'm quite sure I'm not giving you what is due to him. I'm sure I'm forgetting some which are more important than us. But that is it, at this time, at this moment. Another time maybe somebody else will come up again.

DuCasse: Right. Well, how do you feel about the need for art in the Church today? You know, for a while, after the Council, it sort of was shelved, but do you feel that it's beginning to have more of a place in the Church?

Benvenuto: I believe the need for art is felt, and there are places and countries which this needs is felt stronger than others. I believe the problem now is this general economical situation has kind of stifled everyone's aspiration. I know of persons and pastors which would like to use art, but they cannot afford it. Other pastors buy commercially produced works, pseudo art from catalogues, which in the long run cost as much as an "original." If they find the right artist, they can have the work they wish.

But generally speaking it seems to me, and I do not know if I am aware of all the points, that now is a very, very sleeping situation. There are no sparks. There is no movement which indicates that the interest is growing. There might be sparks, but they are under the ashes, they are not producing flames, it seems to me. I do not hear of special exhibition in the country. Once in a while you have some exhibitions which indicate that these sparks are there, but they are very tenuous and it seems to me not very spread around. Maybe you can tell me where they are. Maybe you know more.

DuCasse: No, I have not discovered anything of that kind either, and certainly nothing like the exhibit which we had in 1952 at the de Young Museum, which was given the status of a fine exhibit with a great deal of attention, good critiques, the whole thing.

Benvenuto: Probably we are missing the point, but I for one feel that unless the clergy shows more interest it's very hard for the artists alone to carry this concept. They must show interest, and as I said before they must come forward and try to produce some kind of statement in order to attract the artists, and involve the arts in general.

DuCasse: Right, right.
Benvenuto: And I do know that if not in this country, then in other countries, they are involved in a social battle, which is as great or greater a call than the arts per se. But that, as far as I'm concerned, is not sufficient to not show their interest in contemporary art trends.

DuCasse: I think we have that same problem here in this country in the Church. I think they're struggling to hold onto their people, and that is such a struggle, that is something so important to them, that they are forgetting some of the other aspects, which could be very important too. But there are priorities in everything, alack and alas.

Well, I think you've given us some very interesting insights. You had a very personal part to play in all that.

Benvenuto: Well, I'm glad that you did these historical interview for the General Library, which might be useful to other people in the future, and might prove me wrong insofar as the clergy attitude. With this I end the interview!

DuCasse: [laughing] Very good! Thank you so very much, Elio.
Renaissance of Religious Art and Architecture
in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1946-1968

Emily Michels
MEMORIES OF FATHER MEEHAN

An Interview Conducted by
Micaela DuCasse
in 1981

Copyright © 1985 by The Regents of the University of California
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEW HISTORY</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEMORIES OF FATHER MEEHAN</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTERVIEW HISTORY

Emily Michels was one of the finest art teachers at high school level in San Francisco. She taught at Mission High School for thirty-nine years. Many future priests, several that would have an influence on liturgical art in one way or another, passed through her classroom and enjoyed her inspiring influence.

She had an unerring instinct for recognizing hidden or latent artistic talent in a student. She worked hard to develop and encourage such talent whenever possible. Those students who benefited by her excellent training and encouragement to go on with it as a life-work or an avocation were always grateful to her, and gave her the credit due her with gratitude and friendship. Among her students was Rev. Terrance O'Connor, S.J., sculptor and teacher and member of the Catholic Art Forum.

Emily was one of the first artists to join the Catholic Art Forum, and she was one of its most enthusiastic and loyal members to its end. Her contribution as a teacher of art was invaluable in that area of its aims which was education. This, combined with her knowledge of art in general and her faith and interest in contemporary art in the Church, was reason enough to interview her.

Ruth Cravath teamed up with me to do the interview in Emily's home out near San Francisco City College. Ruth and Emily had been life-long friends and Ruth had been the one to have invited Emily to join the Catholic Art Forum. Even though Emily was not able to get about because of a lengthy period of ill health, she was still happy to have us come to her, and to share tea and delicious goodies after we had taped our interview. It was an enjoyable reunion of old friends and fellow members of the Catholic Art Forum, and most important, Emily was able to give information about Father Meehan and others to round out the background for the rest of the project.

[Note: In filling out the biographical information form requested of interviewees by the Regional Oral History Office, Emily Michels offered some comments about her own work.] She was an architectural scale model maker in the office of Willis Polk, and other architects after his death. She did architectural ornamental sculpture, such as the façade of the Water Department Building on Mason St., San Francisco, figures over the Post Street entrance of the Crocker National Bank, Montgomery and Post Streets, figures for the forestry department panorama and models for heads of wax and papier-mâché mannequins. She taught arts and crafts at Mission High School for forty years, and at senior centers. She was interested in
modeling in clay, pottery, painting, plastic, crafts, screen printing, illustration. She prepared and coached students to win free scholarships to the California School of Fine Arts. She was also interested in decorating tables for teachers and church lunches, dinners, banquets, et cetera.

She says about liturgical arts, "I had intended to produce figures and reliefs in terra cotta for the church upon my retirement, but, when I saw the kind of monstrosities in scrap metal and the brutal faces of some statuary being installed in some churches, I quit. I believe that art should inspire beauty, peace. 'The tranquility of order is peace.' A lot of contemporary confusion and chaos is expressed in what we call contemporary art. I wonder if it has an inspiring place in the church?"

Micaela DuCasse
Interviewer

September 1984
Piedmont, California
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please print or write clearly)

Your full name: Emily Josephine von Michels

Date of birth: Nov. 15, 1901

Place of birth: New York City

Father's full name: Peter Paul Michels

Birthplace: Riga, Germany

Occupation: Painter

Mother's full name: Emilie

Birthplace: Baden, Germany

Occupation: Housewife

Where did you grow up?: New York City; Brookline, San Francisco

Present community: San Francisco, Cal.

Education: Grammar grades to 4th in Berlin, continued through Polytechnic High School, California School of Fine Arts, University of California

Occupation(s): Architectural scale model maker in office of William Page; Architectural and ornamental sculptor in facades of Water, Left Bank, Union St., Margrave, (figures) over Post St. entrance of C. L. reen National Bank - Montgomery & Post St.; figures for special interests or activities: forestry Department; Caricature and paper-mache mannequins.

Taught art and crafts (head of art dept) at Mission High School; 40 years also senior citizen. Was mainly interested in modeling in clay, pottery, painting, plastic, craft, screen printing, illustration, etc. Was mainly interested in preparing and teaching students to win free scholarships (especially free students to the Calif. School of Fine Arts). Was also interested in decorating tables for Teachers and
church lunches, dinners, Banquets etc., and, of course the Liturgical Arts.

I had intended to produce figures and reliefs in terra cotta for the Church upon my retirement — BUT — when I saw what kind of monstrosities in scrap metal and the brutal faces of some statuary being installed in some churches — I quit!

I believe that art should inspire BEAUTY! PEACE!

"The Tranquility of ORDER is PEACE," a lot of contemporary confusion and chaos is expressed in what we call Contemporary Art!

I wonder if it has an inspiring place in the church?
MEMORIES OF FATHER MEEHAN

[Interview date: May 27, 1981]

DuCasse: Emily, you knew Father John Meehan before our exhibit that was formed in 1952.

Michels: Oh, yes, sure.

DuCasse: What I would like to ask you is when you first knew Father Meehan and in what relationship did you know him?

Michels: He was in a church on Ellis Street [San Francisco]; I don't remember the name. Some friends introduced me as a teacher and artist.

DuCasse: Do you remember about what period that was, what year maybe?

Michels: Oh, I don't know. It must have been the late twenties.

Then, Father Meehan was doing some artwork, and of course he wanted to show it to me, and I was interested in seeing his work. He did carving too.

DuCasse: Oh, I didn't know that. You mentioned something about a chalice or a ciborium.

Michels: No, he carved a beautiful crucifix. And I was surprised; I thought, my goodness, he ought to be an artist. You know, he should be in the art business because the figure, the corpus, was beautifully done. I classified him more as an artist than a priest. [laughter] He showed me many of his things. He designed his own chalice that he used when he was ordained, and that was really a beautiful thing. If I'm not mistaken, he had that chalice made in Belgium.
DuCasse: Yes, that sounds reasonable because I know that Father Juan [Oronoz], who was sort of a protégé of his, had his made in Belgium too.

Michels: I'm almost sure it was done in Belgium. Then, he designed other chalices for other people. We had these students at our school [Mission High School] who became priests. There was Father Terrence O'Connor [later a member of the Catholic Art Forum].

DuCasse: Do you remember Father Meehan's discussion about his interest in the liturgical arts movement as a movement?

Michels: Not too much. He spoke of collecting things for a show, but I wasn't particularly interested. I was too busy at that time, you see. I was still teaching.

But anyway, he mentioned something about collecting things for an exhibit, and he mentioned Charlton Fortune, and the things she was doing: she was doing some embroidery and designing candelabras and things like that for the altar.

DuCasse: She founded the Monterey Guild down in Monterey, and that's where she was working. And I know that she and Father Meehan worked very closely together, and there was an exhibit, prior to ours, Ruth, at the de Young Museum.

Michels: Wasn't that something with that magazine they had?

DuCasse: Oh, the *Liturgical Arts Magazine*?

Michels: Yes, it was *Liturgical Arts*; that was what it was under, it wasn't the Catholic Art Forum.

DuCasse: No, that was later.

Michels: And it seems as though this Charlton Fortune was quite busy doing things. She did a number of things down in Carmel and Pacific Grove and she designed the things for the Dominican College chapel in San Rafael. She painted, too, she did the backdrop and, you know, the front of the altar. What do they call those?

DuCasse: It's an *antependium*; *antependium*, Latin.

Michels: But, see, he [Meehan] was getting his own things, he was getting things together from different people for collecting, and he designed a beautiful monstrance for down there at Vallombrosa. (I wonder where that is.) And then he installed stations. I don't think he made them, but he got the pictures for those little stations of the cross, and they were beautiful things. But, of course, now they've changed that.
DuCasse: Yes, that was the old chapel then. See, they have the new chapel and there're no stations and such.

Well, Emily, we'd like to hear anything you can remember about your participation in the Catholic Art Forum, unless you can think of anything more about Father Meehan that you want to add. Was there anything more you wanted to add about his work?

Cravath: Do you have any anecdotes about Father Meehan?

DuCasse: I bet you have plenty of those, because he and Charlton Fortune were a great pair, and they used to pull the legs of the other clergy.

Michels: Yes, the more conservative clergy didn't like what Charlton did.

Cravath: Father Meehan was her staunch defender.

Michels: He saw the art in her work, but, you see, some of those people thought it was kind of affected. Now it seems conservative. People have gotten used to it. At that time it was kind of bold not to have the other, kind of lacy things. She seems to have stopped that decoration of crocheting and knitting and lacy stuff. In fact they were using applique on felt. I know I sent some felt out to her cousin in Germany; they didn't have material around the time of the war, you know, or something like that, and so they were using felt on the altars, felt sheets.

DuCasse: That's unusual.

Michels: They probably put the white neck and some white cloths on top. I've noticed here in some of the churches they had felt.

I was going to say about what he was interested in, and I think he [Father Meehan] was influenced by Charlton Fortune with his vestments. He had the most wonderful collection of vestments, and they were beautiful. To watch him say Mass, he was just—. And you saw the way he manipulated the folds and everything, you thought he was a Mr. Reagan as an actor. [laughter] Really, you know, really. He knew just how to manipulate those things. He did a beautiful job.

He had some of the sisters down in Mission San Jose Convent—I can't remember the name of the sister down there, one of the older sisters helped to make some. Of course, he directed them, he designed and directed them. And then, later on, the last collection I saw, he had some copes and some of these—what do they call those, you know, the scarves?
DuCasse: The stole, which is the important thing, yes. They have to have that, whether they have a vestment or not.

Michels: Well, anyway, he had those, and oh, my goodness, those vestments, you never saw anything like them. They were all silk. And they were made in Japan.

DuCasse: Were they elaborate as far as design?

Michels: No, not elaborate, no, no. One of them was something with a design like a sword down the back and some kind of a heart. It was like a cross, and the vertical thing was really a sword. That's the one he's buried in. He was very fond of that one. Oh, but he had some beautiful things, beautiful.

DuCasse: Well, it would be interesting to know where those are.

Michels: Then Father Meehan was directed to design and build some kind of a new church in east Palo Alto. He couldn't get the money for a church, so he thought he'd get the hall and use that as a church first and then build the other church. Well, he had the hall and everything went fine—and then you ought to see the beautiful statues that he imported from France! They were beauties. Not exactly like the ones up there at San Rafael, you know, they're really nice. But they remind me of some of the things [Antoine] Bourdelle did.

These that he brought over really were beautiful in design, beautiful, no painting, you know, just wood carving. Beautiful things. And you can see a face; it's not one of these masks that look like they want to scare the little kids. [laughter] Oh really, some of these things are awful.

Well, anyway, he got that done. Then they directed him, or maybe it was him, I don't know, but he had to have a new rectory. So he designed and built the rectory and lived in different houses in the neighborhood, until that was ready. And the poor man, he was going to move in a certain week, and he died the week before. He never got into it.

When Father Meehan was doing these vestments I was interested, you know, and I got yards and yards of this silk that's just a plain weave?

DuCasse: Pongee?

Michels: Pongee, yes, but the real heavy kind. And I got yards and yards of that white stuff and then I got the most beautiful emerald green brocade down at Chinatown. You know, we used to get them
Michels: for a couple of dollars a yard. And I brought a couple of those things down, I don't remember how much or what, but that, particularly the green brocade stuck in my mind. I wanted to make a dress out of it! [laughter] I thought maybe he could use it as a lining or something. Well, anyway, I don't think he ever got it. As I say, he moved from house to house. And then when he was sick, I guess nobody knew where anything was. I hope whoever had it would give it to that sister and let her make use of it for somebody.

DuCasse: I could inquire of those sisters in San Jose, if they remember some of the work that they did for him. There was a nun who was an artist.

Michels: Oh, yes, that's right. That was the younger one.

DuCasse: Yes. She showed some of her work to the Art Forum.

Michels: But that was one that was a little younger, and I think the other one--maybe she wasn't doing things anymore.

DuCasse: She might not have been doing them anymore. But that's a good suggestion, because they also might be able to give us some information.

Michels: I imagine that some of those vestments may have been on exhibit too.

DuCasse: I'm sure they were. I'm sure they must have been on exhibit at that first exhibit because I don't think we had vestments in our show, did we, Ruth?

Cravath: I think, yes, we had a few.

DuCasse: Did we have some? I brought one of my catalogues. I'll bring that out when this half-hour of the tape stops, and we'll take a little breather.

Michels: Is this all going on [reference to the tape]?

DuCasse: It's all going on; it's gotten every word you said.

Michels: Heavens!

DuCasse: Well, Emily, many of the things you told us are wonderful because I have completely forgotten the extent of his talents and of the kind of work that Father Meehan did.

Michels: He did some painting, too, and was very good at it.
DuCasse: I remember going to a meeting in someone's home in San Francisco out in the Western Addition, a lecture by Father Meehan about liturgical art. Do you, by any chance, remember anything about that, because I was wondering if you might have been there too.

Michels: Well, no, I don't remember. But, you see, he gave so many lectures. He lectured on the radio every week; he gave a lecture that was broadcast from, I think, the San Jose-Palo Alto area. It was a talk, a sermon, I'd say, every Sunday, and I would compare him to Bishop [Fulton J.] Sheen. He was a wonderful speaker. Another one I compared him to was that Father Coughlin.

Father Meehan, he just hit things right on the nail. Some of them really could crawl if they would only hear what he said. Really. But, you know, it wasn't criticism in any way, it just kind of made them think a little bit, made them a little aware of some of the things that they're doing that are not quite what they should be.

DuCasse: He was very outspoken.

Michels: Oh, and these lectures surely were wingdings.

[tape interruption] The first thing I knew, I was invited to Ruth's [Cravath] studio, down there on Montgomery. It was [Ralph] Stackpole's studio, and so, I thought, that's kind of fun, it'll be a studio party or something. When I came in there and saw all the ladies around, I thought, it looks like a meeting. Who is the president? You were [to Cravath], weren't you?

Cravath: I was the last one.

DuCasse: I was the first president of the Catholic Art Forum, and then Stephanie Alioto [now Wilhelm] was president.

Michels: Yes, that's right. Well, anyway, I saw all these friends, and I thought, oh, boy, this is really nice to be among all these people. Then they were speaking of this art forum, and we had the meeting and then I think we selected or voted for a president.

DuCasse: Could be so. Maybe at that meeting.

Darrell Dally was one of the founders. In fact, Darrell Father Monihan had the incipient idea, and they got in touch with a group of us likely artists and people interested in the idea. They got us together, and that's how it was formed.
Michels: Did Father Meehan ever come to one of those gatherings or meetings? I don't remember.

DuCasse: I don't believe that he was able to do it. I think that's when he was so ill, because this was in the fifties, in 1953.

Michels: And then Father Vodusek was a member.

DuCasse: Yes, he was our priestly director. So was Father Monihan, the two of them, yes.

Michels: And then they worked with the Liturgical Arts Magazine quite a bit that time, didn't they?

DuCasse: Maurice Lavanoux came out and gave a talk, I believe, and then the Junipero Serra Shop, of course, with Ethel Souza, very much supported it, and we had programs.

    I found this among my things. Here's a postcard [she reads from it]: "The Catholic Art Forum and the Junipero Serra Shop invite you to hear Image and Indifference, a joint lecture by Frank Kazmarcik and Robert Rambusch." They were from New York, the big church decorators. "June 30, 1957."

Michels: It was that late?

DuCasse: Yes.

    You know, Emily, we want to get everybody that we can while they're still in the area or with us, you know, so that we can get as much background. This is a study not only of the Catholic Art Forum or of the Junipero Serra Shop, but the whole picture of the liturgical art movement on the West Coast.

Michels: Well, the beginning was the hardest. You remember we had that show and we were trying to put a tabernacle—where was it we wanted to put that tabernacle?

Cravath: Which show are you talking about, Emily?

Michels: I don't remember what show that was.

DuCasse: Was this the show that Father Meehan organized at the de Young Museum?

Michels: I don't know. My memory's kind of funny there. Anyway, we wanted to put the tabernacle in the back someplace, I've forgotten, or off to the side, or have the altar the way it is now, or something that is acceptable right now and I've gotten so used to it now
Michels: that I don't think about it. You see, it was breaking the tradition of having the tabernacle in the altar against the wall. We wanted to get the tabernacle out of the altar and put it on a side or somewhere, to have it separate from the altar.

And we asked Father Maher. And Father Maher didn't say no, but he just didn't want to approve.

DuCasse: When we went to him about something to do with our exhibit, he was very difficult.

Cravath: We wanted to have Fran Moyer's stations and those marvelous things and Elah Hale Hays's crucifix and all that wonderful stuff. It was thumbs down.

DuCasse: Yes, but that was probably Father Meehan too, he didn't like that very much.

Do you remember Monsignor Collins? The one that wrote the book on liturgical procedures and everything.

Michels: Collins, yes! He was the one that designed and planned St. Cecilia's. Oh, yes, he was quite conservative.

DuCasse: He was the liturgy man, not art particularly, but the liturgy as such.

Michels: He was the pastor of St. Cecilia's for quite awhile.

DuCasse: Emily, you're bringing up the fact that Father Meehan did so many different things. I had forgotten that he had designed chalices and chasubles and all of that.

Michels: He designed that chalice that Mr. Tiesselinck made for Father Terrence O'Connor. Tiesselinck did the metal work, and Father Meehan supplied the design. It was very nice, a beautiful one. I asked him, "Now it's in the Jesuit Order, where's it going?" "Well, it stays there."

And I said, "Well, suppose you go someplace else?"

"It stays there." [laughter]

DuCasse: That's right, exactly. No, they never have any possessions.

Well, I'm glad to know that Father Terrance O'Connor was connected with Father Meehan. I will write to him and ask him if he won't give us some information.

Do you have anything to ask Emily, Ruth?
Cravath: No. Emily, I'm really impressed, you remember more than I even hoped.

DuCasse: I always think of Father Meehan as being the very beginning of it, here, he and Effie Fortune.

Cravath: And Emily.

DuCasse: And so Emily knowing him and remember that part of it is very helpful.

Michels: He must have been working there at that time. I knew he was getting things together and he was assembling things, but that's all kind of foggy it's so long ago.

Cravath: I remember Father Meehan so many times talking about Effie Fortune. He just adored her.

Michels: Oh, yes.

Cravath: She said to me as priests that all their taste was in their mouths. [laughter]

Michels: She had a wonderful sense of defying people, defying the old, traditional ways. She knew what she always wanted and she knew what she was going to do.

DuCasse: True. And she was a contemporary artist and she felt that contemporary art should be in the church. And, of course, that was Father Meehan's idea also. They were conservative about it in a way, but they were contemporary.

Michels: Well, he tried to do a little changing there, very slowly, like that one old church, St. Aloysius down there in Palo Alto on El Camino Real. When he first went down there, it was a simple country church. And by the time he was there a little while, we had new figures there, beautiful. The hangings, the altar is changed, the whole thing was changed.

Cravath: Is that the church in Woodside?

Michels: The Woodside was a charming little chapel.

Cravath: Well, Dorothy [Pucinelli Cravath] did the Madonna and the grotto, or whatever you call it. She called it the Madonna of the Wayside.

Michels: Well, he overhauled that church. Wherever he went, he tried to change it.
Michels: When I was in Italy I went to Alinari, in Florence, and I got from him a Madonna of the Wayside, a great big painting. I thought that whoever is down there could put that someplace in the church because Father Meehan liked that very much. I brought it down to that priest, and I gave it to whoever he was. I don't know what happened to it, now. You know, I haven't been going down there.

DuCasse: I'll have to go by there and see it sometime.

Michels: He may have it in his home, but I would have liked to have seen it in the church. The Madonna outside is not exactly the Madonna of the Wayside.

Of course, you know how the Italians did, they always put crowns on and hung jewelry around. Then when you come right down to it, the poor picture is all covered. But then they're happy with that kind of thing. One place I saw they had nothing but some kind of little hearts all over the wall, you couldn't see anything.

Well, are we finished here now?

DuCasse: I think that if there's nothing more that you want to tell us, I think maybe we can end.
Renaissance of Religious Art and Architecture in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1946-1968

Monsignor Robert Brennan

MEMORIES OF EFFIE FORTUNE

An Interview Conducted by Micaela DuCasse in 1983

Copyright © 1985 by The Regents of the University of California
# TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Monsignor Robert Brennan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEW HISTORY</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEMORIES OF EFFIE FORTUNE</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTERVIEW HISTORY

Though the period of time for our oral history record of the renaissance of liturgical arts in the Bay Area begins with 1946, there would not have been even that beginning were it not for the true pioneer of the movement, Euphemia Charlton Fortune, founder of the Monterey Guild of Liturgical Arts in the mid-twenties.

Unfortunately for us, Charlton Fortune departed this world a few years ago. What a loss this is for our project, because she was remarkably and spiritedly articulate about her cause: the best of art by live artists in the service of the Church.

Charlton Fortune's knowledge, experience, and enthusiasm to spread the word were enthralling to many. I was fortunate to have been one of the many in the early thirties when I met her and heard her lecture several times. I myself was beginning my career as a liturgical artist and she was the example par excellence.

Fortunately for posterity, one of her listeners was indeed a "convert" for life. Monsignor Robert Brennan first came in contact with Charlton Fortune and her dynamic message as a young seminarian. The friendship which began at that time continued on throughout "Effie's" lifetime. Monsignor Brennan made it his avocation to be the preserver and chronicler of Charlton Fortune's life and work. He is at work on completing—hopefully, for publication—a biography of this great woman's remarkable life and work as a liturgical artist and pioneer in the field.

While he was visiting in the Bay Area recently, Monsignor Brennan kindly consented to give us an interview, to fill in for our project the most important high points of Charlton Fortune's career as founder and director of the Monterey Guild of Liturgical Arts.

His thoughts are indeed most welcome and appropriate for our project, or any study of liturgical art in California, as well as other parts of the United States. We are most grateful for Monsignor Brennan's generous sharing of his knowledge of so important a true beginning of liturgical art in the Bay Area. His book will carry further an important story that should be told and received by so many who could not know of it in any other way.

Micaela DuCasse
Interviewer

September 1984
Piedmont, California
Your full name: Mary Robert E. Brennan

Date of birth: Sept 14, 1908

Place of birth: Lee Moine, La.

Father's full name: Robert Owen Brennan

Father's place of birth: Lee Moine, La.

Mother's full name: Rose Agnes Cochran

Mother's place of birth: Lee Moine, La.

Where did you grow up: Los Angeles, Ca.

Education: Loyola High School, Loyola College (1 year), St. Patrick's Seminary, Abbey of Soledad, Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music, Rome.

Employment: Priest of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.
MEMORIES OF EFFIE FORTUNE

[Interview date: September 22, 1983]

DuCasse: We are conducting this interview in the Residence Hall at College of the Holy Names in Oakland. Monsignor Robert Brennan was a very good friend of Charlton Fortune, has written a book about her and her work, and I know that he's going to be able to fill in a great deal of background for us for our project.

Monsignor, we were speaking a little bit before we started this about when you first got to know Effie Fortune, and so I'm going to let you take it from there, if you will please.

Brennan: I entered the seminary at Menlo Park in 1926, at a time when interest in liturgical art was just commencing on a general basis. There were magazines from France that were available at the time, especially the Artisan Liturgique that had just commenced to be published and later on, of course, the Liturgical Arts in the United States. At the time in San Francisco there were two priests who were very close to the seminary. Father John Meehan came to us largely because of his voice. He would give some concerts to us. And Father--[tries to remember name of second priest]. He was the director of music in the archdiocese. While he did not give us any lectures, yet the momentum of interest in liturgical art was carried on by interest in music more than by anything else.

One evening Father John Meehan announced that he would introduce a person who was commencing a new project in the country, a Miss Charlton Fortune of Monterey. She gave us this initial lecture on the general principles of sacred art, especially liturgical art, and from that moment on, it seemed like we became friends. I spoke to her after the lecture because of my own personal interest in the subject, but the initial conversation grew into a real friendship within a year or so, and I frequently visited her as a student during vacation at her studio in Monterey.
DuCasse: About what period would this have been, Monsignor? Would this have been in the twenties or the thirties?

Brennan: This would have been in the twenties. I was ordained in 1932. So it would have been between, say, 1927 and 1932. And it was at the time when she was just commencing her work with the Monterey Guild. Not that she entered very much into detail with us, because we were just youngsters you might say, and completely sophomoric about the whole structure of liturgical art, but nevertheless she greeted us very kindly and introduced us to some of the mysteries of the situation.

Then, after ordination, our friendship continued. It was extended of course to other members of my class, in particular the future bishop of Reno and archbishop of Portland, Robert Dwyer, as well as Monsignor Alvin Wagner of St. Joseph's in Alameda.

It was a very easy type of friendship, not that we were introduced to the art colony in any sense of the word or even to other members of the Monterey Guild. These people were kept at a, I presume, professional distance because her friendship with us was on a different level with that of other persons, and we recognized that and just took it for granted.

In after years, when she had transferred the Monterey Guild from Monterey to the East and then to the Middle West, and finally in her days of retirement, our friendship became so firm that I felt that I was in a position to give a definitive biography concerning her. I had occasion to meet her family in later years, not only here in this country but in England and in Scotland, and I met one particular friend of schoolyear days in Scotland, a woman who was living in Ireland at the time, and who gave me information concerning her years as a high school girl in Scotland that no one else could possibly have given.

DuCasse: That's wonderful. That was a great help, I'm sure.

Brennan: And then on this research work that I had continued before I started to write, I had occasion to visit the places where she painted in Europe, both in England and St. Ives and in France at St. Tropez. I had a very interesting experience there inasmuch as I visited the pension in St. Tropez where she stayed in the twenties with her mother, and there I found one of her pictures, which I was able to obtain from the person in charge of the pension at that time. That's one of my great treasures.
The liturgical arts movement is an effort to reform taste in designing and making everything used in the litany of the church. It deals with the making of objects used in divine worship, and is not to be confounded with ecclesiastical art; which is a subdivision of the fine arts relating to the subject matter of certain paintings and sculptures.

The liturgical movement is somewhat of a paradox because the standard set is the best of contemporary design and craftsmanship, yet the rules which must be followed explicitly were made centuries ago. These rules cover only the part of the church edifice and its furniture that is used in divine service. There is no such thing as a "liturgical" pew, although there are precise directions for the throne for the bishop or the sedilia for the clergy. The rules for the making of all objects used in the liturgy are meticulous and exacting, yet they permit, at the same time, the greatest freedom of style and design because they are based on sound principles of aesthetics.

During the latter half of the 19th century these rules were largely ignored or forgotten, and great quantities of factory-made ecclesiastical furniture of inferior taste flooded the churches both at home and abroad, following the general decadence of taste. Within the last two decades a change for the better has become increasingly evident. Encouraged by the hierarchy, and following the direct recommendations of the Pope, small groups of architects, artists and craftsmen in scattered localities have dedicated themselves to bring back to the church works based on standards such as those followed by the medieval guildsmen.

The liturgical arts movement, at first sporadic, has gathered tremendous momentum, sweeping rapidly over many European countries. The best of the new work may be seen in England, France, Holland, Belgium, and Sweden.

Charlton Fortune,
Director Monterey Guild.
Brennan: But the friendship continued, not on a strictly professional basis. Occasionally, Effie would enter into some technical conversation, but generally speaking it was more of an amiable, personal relationship.

It was only after my conversation with many of her relatives that I began to see Effie in a broader light, because my conversations with her had been naturally of a rather restricted nature, while their information would have gone back many years before I knew Effie, and their attitudes were entirely different.

She was a contradictory character in many ways, and this was one of the great obstacles I think people met in understanding her at the beginning. In the United States she was representing the ideals of the British Commonwealth. She would have a tendency—I'm sure it was quite unconscious—even to assume a rather English type of speaking. And anything that pertained to the British aristocracy was something to be maintained and, well, highly honored and venerated really.

On the other hand, in Scotland she was Miss America, and I think that some of her relatives might have become a little tired in hearing the United States set up as the example of all that is good and fair and honest and wonderful! It was part of her sense of humor, and she had an interminable strata of humor in her makeup, so that these irreconcilable elements of the British or the Scottish and the American were continually being interplayed. And once you began to understand that, you could get much closer to her than otherwise, because so many felt that they could never get near her. Possibly she made that a manner of her own on purpose. She didn't want too many people near her, and I believe from her point of view as an artist she wanted to be alone.

This was perhaps illustrated in the fact that she never wanted to lose herself in a large city. She had opportunities to live in San Francisco, but she chose Carmel. On the East Coast, though perhaps for other reasons too, she stayed at the Benedictine Monastery of St. Gregory near Newport, Rhode Island. While she traveled here and there she generally kept cosmopolitan centers at a distance.

It was only in Kansas City under the direction of her friend, and really the savior of the Monterey Guild, Bishop O'Hara, that she entered to any extent into the social life of a fairly large community, and that was only on special occasions and with a certain amount of hesitation. Her love was to be alone because, as she wrote very beautifully on one occasion, "a person has to hear nature speaking, and nature speaks very quietly."
Brennan: So she loved Monterey and she loved country places for that very reason. It wasn't to escape society, but she wanted to keep society at arm's length. She maneuvered with great facility. In conversation she had no hesitation maintaining high speed with anyone present, but she rarely engaged in personal relationships, even in conversation. People were always objects at a distance. So she could speak very humorously and sardonically and sometimes very acidly about them, but they seemed to be always persons on a stage. They were not friends or individuals in the sense of the ordinary relationships. So many of the expressions that made her humor sparkle might scandalize the average person who would hear her say something and translate it in the ordinary terms, but they were never intended to be ordinary terms.

DuCasse: And it was not vicious or anything of that kind.

Brennan: It was basically the rollicking humor of a Scot, and that's perhaps a rather mysterious expression, but you have to be a Scot to understand it! [laughter] My grandmother was a Scot, so I know that too.

But now coming down to perhaps the more immediate circumstances of the Monterey Guild, Effie had a great veneration for church authority. It was one of the most unrealistic things about her. She venerated the office and the person of the bishop, so much so that despite her realism in many ways, she was really convinced at the beginning at least, that if the bishop were to announce a project, all priests, all sisters, all brothers, all religious in the diocese would bow their heads in absolute obedience, conform to his will, put the project into action immediately and enjoy the obedience.

Actually, the Monterey Guild was founded on that concept, and one of the tragedies was that no one, not even her very close friends in the clergy, had the nerve or perhaps the realization to express the reality to her. She was encouraged by the Archbishop of San Francisco and by the Bishop of Fresno to establish the Monterey Guild, and given all sorts of blessings and commendations and best wishes for a brilliant future. But when it came down to the nitty-gritty of getting contracts, it was an entirely different matter.

DuCasse: Oh, that's when she learned about the ways things are done.

Brennan: And then she began to learn in a very serious way how many problems were involved. Of course it wasn't simply the relation between herself and the clergy. It was the more practical relationship of herself to the man who had contracted to design the church, the architect. What would be the relationship
Brennan: between him and Effie? What would be the relationship between the architect, the pastor, and Effie? Between the architect, the building commission of the diocese, the pastor, and Effie? And in all of this, Effie would, at the beginning, have a tendency to ride roughshod over it all and say that she was the artist and anything that had to do with art was in her province and she could dictate to these other irrespective of their particular positions or interests. This established difficulties from the very beginning.

It was rather singular that the ones who understood her best in the early days were women, not men. There was Mother Raymond at Dominican College who you might say was her savior. It was Mother Raymond who gave her her first major contract. The redesigning of the old chapel at the college gave her an opportunity to show her ability to plan a new sanctuary. She not only designed an altar, she not only did some painting, but she incorporated the use of sculptors, of metalworkers, of women who did the sewing of the reredos and the antependia. As Effie did all the designing for these craftspeople, she held herself as an artist on a level with the architect as far as the sanctuary was concerned.

And obviously these principles had never been worked out previously. No one ever thought of designing a church or a chapel with these principles in mind. She was a pioneer in this respect, a very hardy pioneer and a voluble one, and not every architect or priest or building commission was able to go along with her because they had their experiences of their own and could foresee difficulties that she either did not foresee or refused to foresee. So there were present these very natural elements that induced difficulties which always would be there, but possibly would not be quite so dominant.

Then there was another very practical problem at the beginning. I'm only speaking of these very early years.

DuCasse: Yes, well, that's wonderful because that's what we need, that's what we don't have.

Brennan: Actually, the first work that Effie did was the decoration of the Church of St. Angela in Pacific Grove. Father Kerfs was a very capable man, and he had sense enough to realize that to decorate a church you needed someone with knowledge that went a little more beyond painting, that is in the flat sense of the word.
Brennan: So he approached Effie probably thinking that she would simply choose a color and have the sanctuary painted. It was a small sanctuary. But of course the project ignited Effie's brain, and she started from this small sanctuary to design something that actually was the pioneer realization of liturgical artwork in the United States as far as the Roman Catholic Church is concerned.

DuCasse: There were good pictures taken, I hope, so that this is preserved.

Brennan: Yes, good pictures were taken, and I have them.

But one of the tragedies was that in this work Effie and the craftsmen and some of Effie's friends paid for most of the furnishings, for the altar, statues, baptistry, for the various things and I'm sure that the craftsmen were not given an excessive salary to begin with. Effie probably took nothing at all. The complete financial statement of the decoration is unbelievable, a few thousand dollars. This generosity had a reverse effect.

It soon became known, especially through the diocesan newspaper, that this wonderful work had cost very little. Consequently, when other priests became interested in having things done by the Monterey Guild, and she presented an estimate for the job, they thought it excessive. She was met immediately with the challenge: "Well, how did you do so much for St. Angela for so little, and you're charging so much for so little for me?"

[laughter]

So her reputation became extremely questionable and was generally put in a bad light. In many cases the impression was given that she was asking exorbitant prices, and of course the standard of comparison was the published catalogues of religious-goods houses. Little distinction was made between commercially produced objects and hand-crafted ones of real artistic merit. As long as one could get something cheaper in the catalogue it was generally preferred. And in this way, the Monterey Guild grew very slowly. Effie had lean days, and it was the Depression.

DuCasse: So there were many things that were conspiring against the whole expression of that wonderful idea.

Brennan: Yes.

DuCasse: Yes, I can see more and more why there was a reason for our eventual forming of this Catholic Art Forum which was necessary to educate not only the religious people, but the laity to know what it meant to have a real artist to do the work, which meant that he had to be paid, she had to be paid properly, and the value and so forth.
Brennan: But during those days of course Effie did carry on a one-person campaign of education. She would speak widely at different groups. And there was one—I think it was the National Council of Catholic Women—at whose annual meeting in San Francisco she not only spoke but held an exposition of some of her materials. There was a quasi-altar with the candelabra and some of the decorations of a chapel just to give an example of the standard that she was trying to set. That information can be found, I believe, in the back issues of The Monitor [San Francisco Catholic newspaper]. That was one of the first public demonstrations she made.

Then, skipping over the years a bit, after her initial work at Dominican College she engaged in the decoration of the novitiate chapel there. While this building is no longer used as a novitiate, the chapel and the altar remain. A painting behind the latter represents the Five Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary. The Dominican Congregation is the Congregation of the Holy Rosary, and it was because of that that the subject was chosen. It is a very, very beautiful altarpiece done in the sort of medieval motive of the triptych, but in an entirely modern technique. It is a glorious painting.

Then, some of the materials, the frontal and some of the candelabra, were later introduced at the San Francisco Exposition many years later when a certain section for liturgical art was set aside.

DuCasse: Was that the Treasure Island fair of 1939?

Brennan: Yes. The frontal, I believe, is still with the Dominicans, but the altar reredos, which was one of oak that Effie later presented to St. Angela, is now up in Oregon. The candelabra are dispersed also. She was, I think, the only liturgical artist in the United States to be asked by the committee to exhibit. There was someone from the Scandinavian countries to demonstrate tapestry work. There was a French jeweler who showed a chalice, and there might have been one or two other Americans with particular objects, but no one had the extensive display that Effie was asked to have at Treasure Island.

DuCasse: That's good to know that in 1939 and 1940 it was exposed to really a national and almost international exposure.

Brennan: Then she left Monterey, because she was given indication that her work might be more acceptable in the East. She had persons there who were interested in her work and gave her the assurance of support. One of them was a Benedictine monk at the priory of his order near Newport, Rhode Island, an old friend from the West Coast, Vincent Martin.
Brennan: She went back, and the monks established a studio for her on the grounds of the priory. She taught art to the students, took them up to Boston to the museum and gave them a peripatetic art course, then carried on with different diocesan art commissions in a rather modest character. One of the most original projects, though, was for a military institution on the East Coast in Massachusetts where she designed a small chapel for the men in a patriotic fashion that is extremely handsome.

DuCasse: She would be able to do that very well.

Brennan: Yes. Meanwhile, Bishop O'Hara of Kansas City had taken a very great interest in her, and induced her to come to Kansas City to establish a movement of liturgical art in his diocese. So she left the Benedictines and moved to the Middle West. There for a number of years she was busily engaged in various works.

One of the first things she accomplished was the editing of a small guide for the appreciation of art based on sculptures and paintings found in the Nelson Gallery of the city. Unfortunately, the booklet was entitled "Art for Catholics." How she came to choose that title must remain a mystery. From her correspondence to me at the time I knew that she spent some time on this detail. For one of her ecumenical tendencies, such a decision was all the more puzzling since the examples she chose to illustrate principles were not strictly liturgical but taken from the area of sacred art in general or even from the secular world.

She commences her work by clarifying the difference between a photograph and an artistic approach to the same subject. By way of illustration, she chose the picture of a lion photographed in the Kansas City zoo and a sculptured Assyrian lion of the museum. From that point she goes on through different steps of art appreciation, carrying on the historical approach but always with reference to works of art in the Nelson Gallery.

Bishop O'Hara underwrote the little edition, and I'm sure that not more than a thousand copies were ever available, perhaps only five hundred. On a subsequent trip to Kansas City, when I asked if there were any copies, they said, "No," and that they didn't know anything about it. But it still remains for me one of the clearest and most down-to-earth approaches to art appreciation that I've seen.

DuCasse: Well, I can believe that because I think that was Effie's approach anyway. She was in many ways a realistic person, though at times she was not.
Brennan: Then the bishop asked her to paint a picture for a retreat house in Kansas City, and she chose Christ waking the Apostles in the Garden of Gethsemane. For this she was able to use her favorite atmosphere, the night scene. She always loved night air and the effect of light at night. It remained at the retreat house for a number of years, even after the retreat house was turned into a school. But when I saw the early marks of deterioration on it, I was able to obtain the painting, and still have it. I consider it one of the outstanding paintings of religious art in the United States, apart from the decoration of any church. And I treasure that more than perhaps any of the other pictures that I have of hers.

Then she went into the Kansas City churches themselves. At St. Peter's she did a magnificent retablo as well as the entire sanctuary. Christ The King and other places in Kansas City came next, under the guidance of the bishop, but not by his commanding. The priests were never pressured, but a number of them took advantage of her being in the city and subsequently asked her to design. Then her influence went elsewhere, to Chicago, and to other places.

She also maintained connections with the West, designing the chapel at Providence Hospital in Oakland and doing a great deal of work for the Sisters of The Good Shepherd, for their convents from Seattle to Denver.

So she was kept relatively active, and then finally she knew that circumstances, both of age and other things, dictated that she should put a close to the Monterey Guild. So she resigned as its active head and the books were closed, it seems to me, in the middle fifties. I could get the exact date, but as I say my memory isn't acting too well.

DuCasse: Well, that's close enough.

Brennan: Then, through the years she had an overwhelming desire to return to Scotland. Well, her first attempt was almost fatal. She rented a cottage on an estate, tried to face a Scottish winter, contracted pneumonia, nearly died, and was directed by her doctor to leave Scotland as soon as possible! [laughing]

So she went to Italy and remained in Italy for some time with occasional trips back to the United States, either to the East Coast to look over some contracts that were still in the making or even to the West Coast. But eventually she returned to Monterey, and spent her last days in Carmel Valley where she passed away.
Brennan: Even there she continued her painting. A friend of hers living in England has a painting of her residence at Carmel Valley. And a friend in San Francisco has a small painting of Two Artists at Leisure, a very lovely scene which really represents these two friends of many, many years; their friendship goes back to the time when they were young women. Effie was the bridesmaid of the other, and they have remained friends all these years. That painting was also finished at Carmel.

One of the humorous incidents in Effie's later years was at Carmel Valley Manor when, shortly after her arrival, one of the residents came up and introduced herself as the chairman of a group that was interested in painting. She said, "Miss Fortune, we understand that you like painting, and we have a number of residents here who have gotten together and we have been in touch with an instructor from Monterey. He's coming over to give us lessons. We've already had one and are delighted with him. Would you like to join us?" [laughter] In a subsequent letter Effie wrote, "That afternoon I went out and bought a white petunia."

DuCasse: Oh! What a beautiful way to put it! Isn't she marvelous? Well, one thing I wanted to know, did she and Father Meehan do any work together? I know they were friends.

Brennan: I believe not.

DuCasse: They never did collaborate, did they?

Brennan: No. Father Meehan was a one-man liturgical movement. I don't know very much about him from a personal point of view, but Father Vincent Carroll at St. Thomas More Church in San Francisco would be the one to contact; he was very close to him.

DuCasse: Oh, I'll do that.

Brennan: But he was famous in our day for having had a chalice made by Holmans of Brussels. What happened to that chalice I don't know, but I'm quite sure that Father Carroll could tell you. Then subsequently he was responsible for the designing of other things by Holmans or by Gorham or some other silversmiths in this country for churches in and around the Bay Area.

DuCasse: I think he used Dirk Van Erp at one time.

Brennan: Yes.

DuCasse: Your generosity in giving us this information about Effie Fortune is so important. There would have been no movement I think in this area if it hadn't been for Effie.
Brennan: Oh, that's right.

DuCasse: And also Father Meehan, but I think she was the more solid.

Brennan: Well, she accomplished things, whereas Father Meehan was in parish work, and his interest in art could only be you might say secondary to his pastoral work. He was also responsible I think possibly for the introduction of what we used to call gothic vestments, the wide vestment. I'm not sure of the sisters that he contacted to make them.

DuCasse: I know the Sisters of the Mission of San Jose did some vestments, but whether they did his or not I'm not too sure.

Brennan: But these were the roots of the liturgical movement here.

DuCasse: Well, that's been a very great help to us, Monsignor. We do appreciate it so much.

Brennan: Well, it's not very logically presented.

DuCasse: Oh, I think it was more logical than you realize because you just went right through from the beginning, and it was very, very wonderful. Thank you so very much.
Renaissance of Religious Art and Architecture
in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1946-1968

Ethel Souza

THE JUNIPERO SERRA SHOP, MAIDEN LANE, SAN FRANCISCO

An Interview Conducted by
Micaela DuCasse
in 1982

Copyright © 1985 by The Regents of the University of California
TABLE OF CONTENTS — Ethel Souza

**INTERVIEW HISTORY** 1

**INSPIRED BEGINNINGS: CLYDE HEASLEY, AND PAUL DIEBELS** 60

**WIDER CONNECTIONS: DEL LEDERLE AND MAURICE LAVANOUX** 62

**SPONSORING FORUMS AND WORKSHOPS** 64

**FINDING A NEW PLACE, AND A NEW WORK** 65

**SHARED THOUGHTS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CATHOLIC ART FORUM** 66
Ethel Souza and the Junipero Serra Shop were not only a mighty force for Catholic art and culture in California and the Bay Area, but in the lives of all who were fortunate enough to have known her as a friend, and the shop as a gathering place for Catholic artists and others.

I am one of those people fortunate enough to have met and become one of Ethel's friends. For ten years, between 1952 and 1962, she lived in my home, bringing into it many of the leaders from Europe and the United States in the vanguard of that movement in the Church that led to Vatican II. It was an invaluable education of mind and spirit in contemporary Catholic culture.

Ethel and the Junipero Serra Shop, with Father Monihan, S.J., were the cradle for the Catholic Art Forum founded in 1953 which did so much to bring the contemporary artist together with the Church during the 1950s and 1960s in the Bay Area.

With the closing of the Junipero Serra Shop in 1967, Ethel went on to exercise additional talents in her directorships of Catholic retreat centers in Santa Barbara and the Los Angeles area, and eventually back in the greater San Francisco Bay Area, always with an emphasis on contemporary art in liturgy and life. Her sphere of influence was strongly felt wherever she was active in the field.

Suddenly her great career was abruptly stopped by a tragic occurrence in August 1980: an embolism in the brain, which kept her in a coma for months. Miraculously, she came out of it, but she is still struggling through a lengthy convalescence and rehabilitation.

It was during this time of convalescence that I did our interview. Our place of meeting was the mobile home she was living in in Marin County. Her memory was remarkable, considering what she had been through, but it is not as detailed as it surely would have been had we been able to talk earlier. It was a privilege to interview a person so responsible for the renaissance of the liturgical arts in the Bay Area.

Micaela DuCasse
Interviewer

September 1984
Piedmont, California
Your full name  Etel Gloria Souza

Date of birth  January 27, 1926

Place of birth  Merced, California

Father's full name  Frank Souza

Father's place of birth  Merced, Calif.

Mother's full name  Margaret Avila Souza

Mother's place of birth  Merced, Calif.

Where did you grow up?  Merced & other parts of San Joaquin Valley

Education  Public schools, University of California at Berkeley; two years at law at Hastings College of Law

Employment  Founder-Director of Jenifer Senior House

PR for Casa Maria, Santa Barbara; PR St. Andrew's Priory, Valyermo, CA; PR Assistant Director, Vallombrosa Retreat Center, Menlo Park until Brahmavihara invoked her into retirement. Now residing at Lytton Gardens Retirement Center, Menlo Park, CA.
Inspired Beginnings: Clyde Heasley, and Paul Diebels

DuCasse: When did you first get your idea for founding the Junipero Serra Shop?

Souza: When I was at the University of California I got involved in Catholic Action, and we started a YCS [Young Christian Students] group there. When I was through at Cal, I went on to law school, but I hated law school. I had a friend, Clyde Heasley, who was very much in love with my friend Mary Moore (I guess she was Mary Eggers then), and she liked him but she didn't want to marry him.

Well, Clyde disappeared one weekend, and we thought maybe he jumped off a bridge or something. I got a postcard from him telling me that he would meet me at the Gaylord Hotel, where we often went for lunch. And so I met him, and at the end of the meal he said to me, "Well, what are we going to do about it, Ethel?" I thought he meant Mary. I was prepared to say, "I don't know," because I didn't want to get in the middle of that anymore.

But he said to me, "When I was praying down at Los Gatos--down at the Jesuit retreat house at El Retiro--I stayed one extra day to clean the floors for the brother, and the next day I got the floor wet with my tears, and I realized that I was crying because I knew that God was there, but I didn't feel that He was there. So I promised Him that we would do something for Him. I told Him that day I would meet you and we would decide what to do."

I had a cup of coffee in my hand, and it was just as if he was inviting me to a movie or something. I knew that it was what we were going to do. So we went from there to the Cardinal Room
Souza: and drank beer all day and made a list of what we thought the Church needed. We went through that list and classified ourselves as to abilities and resources, and gave up on that because we couldn't do anything on them. So Clyde took another piece of paper and wrote down what we could do, and from that came the idea for the Junipero Serra Shop.

We made two promises to each other. One was that we would discuss it with a lot of people, but that we would finally take the responsibility ourselves, and the other was that we would not—we weren't going to do this for life, we would only do it as long as we thought the Lord needed us. We discussed it with many people, including you, I think.

DuCasse: No, I was not in on it quite that early.

Souza: But, with many people. And from that came the idea of the Junipero Serra Shop.

One of the people we discussed it with was Father O'Looney, who introduced us to Paul Diebels, who was just back from Panama, and he was selling books out of his home in Menlo Park and wanted to go on selling books. I met him once and said to Clyde, "Well, I like him; if you want to join with him, it's all right with me." Clyde took me to the airport, and I flew East and made lots of contacts back there, and when I came back we were partners.

They had developed into what they called "loft mice," [laughter] because they had decided it was better that we stay downtown, rather than go out in the neighborhoods; the only thing we could afford downtown was on the loft side.

In the meantime, we didn't have any money. And I had called my father and mother from New York telling them that I was going to leave law school and start the Junipero Serra Shop. My father told me he never wanted to see me again, he was so angry at me. When I got to St. Louis, I stopped at the Liturgical Conference, and I got a letter from my mother with a check and an apology (which was the only time she'd ever apologized to me in her life), telling me not to worry about my father, that he would be all right. He was, too, after we had several vicious arguments.

I lived with Barbara Juvenile's parents in Oakland during that time. We had no money, as I say.

Then Clyde met his old lieutenant commander, Heiner, at the transit terminal where the buses came in over from Oakland. Commander Heiner asked him if he would like to write a book on
Souza: missiles for the Navy. He said "Yes," and so Commander Heiner gave Clyde a check for $3,000, and that was the money we had to begin the shop.

Clyde then was working at Treasure Island, and we found--I've forgotten who found it--an ad for the shop on Maiden Lane. We went up there, and they wouldn't give us an answer. In the meantime, we found another shop over the Yankee Doodle Bar on Powell Street, which was more expensive but had a lot more space. We called Clyde and asked him which to take, and he said to us, "Well, let God make the decision. Go up to Mr. Van Horn and tell him that you've got to know now whether you've got it or not, and if he says yes, take it, and if he says no, go to the Yankee Doodle Bar and take that one." Paul went to Mr. Van Horn--I don't remember whether I was with him--and told him that, and Mr. Van Horn said yes, and so we moved in. We opened on the Feast of Christ The King in 1949 on October 31st. And that was how we began.

DuCasse: Now, there was just yourself and Clyde and Paul at the beginning, is that right?

Souza: Yes.

DuCasse: What were the aims or the purpose you had in mind for that?

Souza: We wanted to be a center of communication for the Catholic Church in the area. We became later much more ecumenical. We wanted to provide the best in books and art for the area that was possible.

DuCasse: So you really had a cultural aim as well, didn't you?

Souza: That's right.

Wider Connections: Del Lederle and Maurice Lavanoux

DuCasse: There was another question too that I thought might bring out some of your own ideas. Was the situation with the liturgical movement in Europe, as well as in America--did that have something to do with your aims in founding the Junipero Serra Shop? Did that come into it at all? Or, was perhaps that part of it a little later on when you branched out into the art as well as the books?
Souza: I think it was later on, because Mary Moore (she was Mary Eggers then) had gone to Europe, and I wrote her and told her that we were opening the shop and asked her if she could find art for me. I sent her a Junipero Serra Shop card which my old art teacher from high school, Elaine Dulivia [sp?] had designed for us.

Mary took the card and posted it at a religious art center in Paris, and Del Lederle came to it. He started to write me, and I wrote to him, we wrote back and forth. Then, I was going back East, and it just so happened that he was coming back home. We met in Sheed & Ward's in New York. The elevator opened, and this tall man with furs and a corduroy suit and a red beard walked in, and I knew it was Del.

We became fast friends. We went all over New York together, and I told him what I wanted. We went to the Liturgical Arts Center and met--what was his name?

DuCasse: Is that Maurice Lavanoux, the editor of *Liturgical Arts* magazine?

Souza: Yes. And we invited him to have lunch with us. He accepted, and when I went down to meet him Del wasn't there. I was furious because that meant I had to take him to lunch alone. [laughter] Those were the days when women couldn't--so he had to pay for it.

Then I got back to San Francisco, and we opened the shop on the Feast of Christ The King. It was blessed by a pastor of Old Saint Mary's, Father Collins I think it was.

DuCasse: Yes, it probably was Collins at that time, a Paulist father.

Souza: I don't know exactly when, but shortly after that Clyde told me he was leaving, that he wanted to go East. (He had gotten married in the meantime to Maria Keasing.) He told me he was leaving, that he wanted to go East to continue working on the missiles book. I said, "All right," so he left, and Paul and I went on together. I can't remember who came to take Clyde's place.

DuCasse: Was that Joe? Or did Joe Golden come in later?

Souza: He came later. He came when Paul left. Madeleine Baldwin came in there. She was Paul's godmother, and that's why she came. Then Paul left to become a priest, and then Joe and Janet Golden came. Then Philip and Monica Burnham came, and they lived with us, as you remember.

DuCasse: Yes, indeed I do remember.
Souza: Well, that was pretty much it. Then we moved across the street from 116 to 157 Maiden Lane. During that time I met a lot of artists, including you and Ruth [Cravath], those are the main ones, and Louisa Jenkins.

Sponsoring Forums and Workshops

DuCasse: The Catholic Art Forum was not begun until 1953, so, you see, you had thoroughly established the shop as a cultural center really, and a liturgical center for art and for liturgy and books and the whole life of the Church as well as the community life of the Church. So that helped the founders of the Art Forum also.

Did you have any other priests near the beginning who took an active part or at least gave you some support there at the beginning? Or were you pretty much a lay group that struggled along on your own?

Souza: Pretty much a lay group. There was Father O'Looney, of course, and Father Joe Diebels, who was Paul's brother.

DuCasse: You had a series of lectures, too, at the shop, given by prominent people in the field?

Souza: Yes, we had various topics. We discussed liturgical art. We had Bob Rambusch come once and discuss liturgical art. Later we sponsored forums with the College of Notre Dame of Belmont during the summer, one on peace and one on creativity.

DuCasse: And then they also had one on the wisdom of evolution.

Souza: And the religions of Abraham.

DuCasse: Yes, where you really showed the ecumenical spirit that you all had developed by that time.

You exhibited and sold the work of artists in the shop, Del Lederle primarily, and Louisa Jenkins, so many of those great people.

Souza: Then I started Barbara Zrnich making vestments for us.
Finding a New Place and a New Work

DuCasse: When did you close the shop in San Francisco and move to Monterey?

Souza: In 1967. I knew at the beginning of that year that I was going to leave, but I didn't know what I was going to do. But I knew that the changes in the Church had been such that the reasons that we had started the shop no longer were applicable, and I decided that I wanted to work with people instead.

I was speaking with the then-Sister Fleurette, who's now Elisabeth Bugental, and told her of my idea, and she said that she was going to do that in Santa Barbara, going to start a center in Santa Barbara. I said that's what I'd like to do in northern California, and she said, "Why don't you come to Santa Barbara and do it with me?" and I said, "All right." Those were the two worst years of my life because I got down there to find out--

Well, I went from the Junipero Serra Shop in 1967 to be at the B.V.M. [Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary] for two months while they decided what to do with their place. And during that time I flew to Chicago with Don de la Peña to meet with their council to ask for support for the year's program to find out what to do with the place. I flew from Chicago to Los Angeles, and Fleurette met me and told me she was leaving the community. She was the first of the important Immaculate Hearts to leave the community. So it was a big decision for her, and for the community. And she ended up marrying her psychiatrist whom she's still married to, Jim Bugental.

DuCasse: That must have been very hard for you.

Souza: Well, I've often said that it was as though the Immaculate Hearts invited me to help them build a house on the banks of a river, and the river began to flood and they had to spend all their time on the banks keeping the flood from coming on. They didn't have any time or any resources to help me. So I ended up holding down two jobs, and it was very difficult and it didn't work.

DuCasse: Would there have been a good response there if that had not been on such a shaky foundation, do you think?

Souza: I think so, yes.

DuCasse: Of course they have retained it [Immaculate Heart College], but they are using it in different ways.
DuCasse: And then after that was it that you went down to St. Andrews?

Souza: That's right. Then I went down to St. Andrews Priory. I didn't know what I was going to do, but Father Vincent Martin had just come back from Israel and he came in to visit me. I told him I had to leave La Casa [Casa Maria, run by Immaculate Heart Order], and he invited me to come to St. Andrews Priory. He invited V.J. [Victoria Jadez] to do it too.

DuCasse: So she had been working with you at Casa Maria.

Souza: That's right. I had met her when she was the secretary to Ludwine Van Kersbergen, when Van Kersbergen was the head of the Grail. I knew that V.J. was a very good secretary, so when I was in Chicago that time with the B.V.M.s, we had lunch and I invited her to come to La Casa to work with me and she did. She's been with me ever since.

DuCasse: How long were you then down at St. Andrews?


Shared Thoughts on the Importance of the Catholic Art Forum

DuCasse: I think we go through periods in our life where we have a beginning and we have an end, just like you did with the Junipero Serra Shop. And it's very much the same that happened with the Catholic Art Forum. We had come to the end of its need; there was no more need for the educational part of it, the expositional part of it, and I think it was very much the same with the shop. We had done all that we could, and the time had ended and a new era had begun.

Souza: Well, I would have preferred it if the shop had ended sooner. I would have preferred it if it had ended with a bang and not a whimper. Joe Golden took it to Monterey for two years, but they had to close it there too because they couldn't get enough patronage. They supported it pretty much; Janet Golden is very wealthy, you know.

DuCasse: You know, people still say, "It's just terrible that we don't have a Junipero Serra Shop in San Francisco anymore."
Souza: I know, but the reason that we don't is that they don't get supported.

DuCasse: All they really wanted it for were for good cards and good books, or something like that. Well, that's not enough.

I wish that we could remember some of the other artists. Of course, Barbara Zrnich and Del Lederle.

Souza: Vincent Stegman, Louise Masten.

DuCasse: You had Ade Bethune's work at one time, didn't you?

Souza: Yes.

DuCasse: I remember she came to the Pacific coast back in the thirties.

Souza: I met her in the East. I didn't meet her out here, I don't think.

DuCasse: There was an English artist, Joan Morris, and she did come, I think, after the shop was open.

Souza: Yes, that's right.

DuCasse: Do you remember if Maurice Lavanoux ever had an article about the Junipero Serra Shop in his magazine?

Souza: I think he did have.

DuCasse: He must have had something about you people in his magazine, because remember he took those trips around the country canvassing the areas where he felt that there was some real activity, some real Catholic art and culture.

Souza: And he visited us, I know.

DuCasse: Oh, yes, and I remember meeting him in the early forties, because it was after I had done the murals at Saint Monica's.

I still have several copies of this article that appeared in The Monitor [a San Francisco Catholic newspaper], on July 5, 1957. [The article is an interview with DuCasse about religious art and the Catholic Art Forum, of which she was then president.]

This was done in '57 and I must have had that at Lone Mountain College because, see, it said student membership in the Catholic Art Forum was one dollar. We had that article copied and used to give it out to people at the Art Forum meetings.
Souza: I remember that I left the Art Forum because it seemed to me that we were spending more time running the Art Forum than we were doing anything about Catholic art.

DuCasse: [laughter] There was a period when we were. At the very beginning, at the inception of it, it was full of vibrancy and life, and I think it was also around that time—probably about the middle of its life span that the need began to cease.

Souza: Probably.

DuCasse: Remember, we had done the educational part, we had architects and artists coming together and working together on new churches and so forth, so there really wasn't very much left for us to do, was there?

Souza: No.

DuCasse: And then when the Vatican Council came along, art was not quite so important anymore; it was the spirit, it was the community of Christians together that was important. So, of course, that left most of us out of a job! [laughter] It was a fascinating and exciting period.

Souza: It was indeed. And I met some of my best friends at the shop, including you.

DuCasse: That was a mecca for people from all over as well as from California, from the Bay Area. It was a wonderful, wonderful place, and it fulfilled a very great need that was certainly dominant at that time.

Did you get to meet at any time in the very, very beginning, or maybe even before you started the shop, Father John Meehan?

Souza: Yes.

DuCasse: He was crucial in the establishment of a liturgical movement in California, and of course worked with E. Charlton Fortune. Do you have any memories of either of them?

Souza: I remember Father Meehan as a very nice person, but he had frozen at about 1920, he wouldn't go beyond that. Charlton Fortune I liked very much.

DuCasse: Yes, she was a vibrant person. Father Meehan was gentle and rather quiet about things. Of course you would have known him because he worked with us on the religious art exhibit of 1953, and you were very much a part of that. Effie Fortune, I don't remember whether she was active in that or not.
Souza: I don't think she was.

DuCasse: I don't believe so either, but of course she was really more down in Monterey, with the Monterey Guild.

Souza: She was an Anglican too.

DuCasse: No, she was a Roman Catholic, but she was very Anglican in her whole attitude, and she loved to be able to tell off the clergy, that was her chief aim in life [laughter], and she did it very well. She was quite a character. She was a Scotswoman; I think you think of her as being an Anglican because she was just not the Roman kind of Roman Catholic, there's no doubt about it.

What I'm hoping is that I'll find more history in Liturgical Arts magazine.

Souza: Minna Berger was a great help to me.

DuCasse: Yes, oh I'm sure she was. I remember how much she really backed the Junipero Serra Shop. This was the kind of thing that she needed, that she wanted, having been the librarian of the Paulists.

Souza: That's where I met Father O'Looney, at Minna Berger's.

DuCasse: I think probably we've pretty much covered it.

Souza: I think so too. Would you like a glass of wine?
Renaissance of Religious Art and Architecture
in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1946–1968

William Justema

THOUGHTS OF A CONCERNED ARTIST AND CRITIC

An Interview Conducted by
Micaela DuCasse
in 1982

Copyright © 1985 by The Regents of the University of California
TABLE OF CONTENTS -- William Justema

INTERVIEW HISTORY  i

THE EUROPEAN BACKGROUND OF 20TH CENTURY LITURGICAL ART  70

CONVERSION, AND STUDY TOUR OF BENEDICTINE MONASTERIES  72

DECORATING THE CRYPT OF THE ABBEY CHURCH AT MOUNT ANGEL, OREGON; LOUISA JENKINS' COURSE AND SUBSEQUENT ART INTEREST  74

LITURGICAL ARTS ARTICLE ON SOURCES OF STYLE FOR CHRISTIAN ART  78

CHANGES IN THE CHURCH AND THE NEED FOR A NEW LITURGICAL ARTS MOVEMENT  80
William Justema has been a friend of mine since he studied with my father, Xavier Martinez, at the College of Arts and Crafts during several summers when he was in high school just prior to the 1920s.

His very great talent as a poet, painter and writer developed steadily, with wide acclaim. A new impetus and direction for his artistic life began with his conversion to the Catholic Church in 1949. After a short period in a Benedictine monastery, Mt. Angel Abbey, in Oregon, he moved outside the cloister and for a time was art editor for the abbey's publication, St. Joseph's Magazine. From then on he painted, wrote and taught alternately in New York and San Francisco.

Upon his retirement in the 1970s, he settled in San Francisco and has been working on a number of manuscripts for books, preparing them for publication.

Our renewed friendship brought forth much discussion of the state of the art of the Church in the present time, as well as in the period of its renaissance in the Bay Area, with which we were both involved in varying degrees. It was a special pleasure and enrichment to have interviewed so valued a friend, and to have reviewed his thought when we met for these interviews in his Sutter Street, San Francisco, studio-apartment.

Micaela DuCasse
Interviewer

September 1984
Piedmont, California
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>(Please print or write clearly)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your full name</th>
<th>William Guzman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date of birth</td>
<td>Dec 7, 1905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of birth</td>
<td>Chicago, Illinois</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father's full name</th>
<th>William Guzman (Sr)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birthplace</td>
<td>Grand Haven, Michigan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Private secretary, realtor, salesman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother's full name</th>
<th>Ethel Manager</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birthplace</td>
<td>A small town in Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where did you grow up?</th>
<th>Hollywood, Thousand Oaks, Los Angeles, San Francisco</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present community</td>
<td>Midtown San Francisco</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Grade school, high school, special teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation(s)</th>
<th>Actor, painter, writer, soldier, monk, teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special interests or activities</th>
<th>The arts and crafts, the theatre, instructing the handicapped, interior decoration, politics and the church</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
DuCasse: The interview today is with William Justema, who was born in Chicago in 1905, but has spent most of his career shuttling between the West Coast and New York. For forty years he designed wallpapers and fabrics for some of America's leading manufacturers of home furnishings. He has designed and executed large-scale mosaics for public places, and has taught design at craft centers across the country and in conjunction with the Textile Study Room at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. During World War II he was cited for his work as an instigator and instructor of camouflage techniques. His poetry has been widely published in the New Yorker, the Atlantic Monthly, Poetry, and elsewhere, and he is the author or co-author of The Pleasures of Pattern, Living Walls, and Color Course, as well as of many articles for craft and shelter magazines. Mr. Justema is now devoting much of his time to writing.

He will give us a brief introduction to the whole background of liturgical art in the European, twentieth-century tradition. All right, Billy, if you'd like to start?

Justema: Anthropologists seem to agree that art and architecture, properly so-called, had its beginnings, perhaps with fear and trembling, in some form of worship. It is easy to see the connection between Stonehenge, the Parthenon, and the columns of the façades of most of our government buildings; somewhat less easy to trace a religious impulse, following cave painting and rock drawing, through Bruegel, say, to Picasso. As long as we were dealing with buildings and symbols, works of art could be
called either religious or not with impunity. Doubts enter our minds, however, when pictorial subject matter is broached, for what may have looked reverent to one age may appear blasphemous to the next.

This was the major difficulty that faced churches and their decoration after the Second World War. The majority of people had been exposed to the abstract qualities of modern art, and whether they realized it or not, wanted edifices and statues that reflected it. "Just so it's not too extreme," they would say, and end up with a structure modified by Frank Lloyd Wright and cubism.

Curiously enough, what one might call the visual side of this new liturgical style was anticipated here in the United States. About 1928 a woman named Charlton Fortune started what she called the Monterey Guild in Monterey, California, for which she did all the designs that were then executed by herself and local craftsmen. Before long she attracted the attention of religious throughout the country, her most striking work being the mosaic in the sanctuary of the Immaculate Conception Cathedral at Kansas City, Missouri, for which she received a gold medal from Pope Pius XII in 1956. A more detailed account of her work will be in another part of this project. Though she worked, traveled, and lectured throughout her adult life, her headquarters from 1943 onwards were at Portsmouth Priory in Rhode Island.

But what we heard the most about were the innovations that originated in France. Once a largely Catholic country, and still proud of its great cathedrals, French Catholics as a whole became increasingly indifferent to their religion after two devastating and humiliating wars.

Spearheaded by a Dominican monk known as Père Couturier, the Church in France led Christendom in creating the first distinctive new style since the Gothic (which had also been crystallized in France by the Abbot Suger in his abbey church at St. Denis, just outside Paris). The word for Father Couturier is "indefatigable."

Apparently without questioning their own religious convictions, he persuaded the architect Le Corbusier to design what is still the most revolutionary of the new churches, Notre Dame de Haut, at Ronchamp, France, and perhaps the most original of the three greatest artists of the century, Henri Matisse, to design the Chapel of the Rosary at the Provençal town of Vence (though he was so crippled by arthritis that he worked at it for four years from a hospital bed).
Justema: At Assy and at D'Audincourt he called upon the talents of Léger, Braque, Bazaine, Rouault, and Germaine Ricter to design the stained glass, the mosaics, the stations, and the crucifixes that were needed.

In the late forties this was international news. And by the time I first visited Europe in the late fifties, every European country had a few ultra-modern churches all ready for the changes that were to be made in the rites following the first session of Pope John's Vatican II Council which convened in the autumn of 1962.

Meanwhile, here in the States, once again small groups of artists had begun to translate, as it were, old traditions into new settings, and your interviews, Kai, are to record the individual efforts in the liturgical art movement in the San Francisco Bay Area between the years 1946 and 1968.

Conversion, and Study Tour of Benedictine Monasteries

DuCasse: Well, Billy, you certainly show that your interest in this whole movement goes back quite a ways, and so I'd like to ask you when did your interest in religious art begin?

Justema: It must have begun with my conversion after reading Thomas Merton's The Seven Storey Mountain; I decided that I had to become a Catholic, and I was baptized at the Old Mission Church in Carmel, California, in 1949. Soon thereafter I wanted to spend my first Christmas as a Christian in what I thought was a Catholic country, namely Guatemala, and on my arrival there Christmas Eve was, instead, greeted with firecrackers!

DuCasse: Very Latin!

Justema: And indeed, very noisy, especially when they went off in the apse and would explode down the central aisle!

In Guatemala I was taken under the wing of a group of Franciscan missionaries from, of all places, Brooklyn, New York, and would go into the villages with them on jeeps and on donkeys. My convert zeal was, in fact, so tremendous that at the end of six months they thought that I was destined to be a monk.

So a Father Gabriel Sparacino wrote the abbot of Mt. Angel Abbey, a Benedictine house in Oregon, about me, and I was asked to visit them. I stayed in the guest wing for almost a week, and was accepted into the community as a candidate for the brotherhood.
Justema: After about six very happy months, however, I became restless. Wanting to know more about religious art, I asked permission for a leave of absence of six months in which to view what was going on and had gone on for thousands of years in Europe.

DuCasse: About what time was it that you visited Europe?

Justema: Actually, it was in '51. It was just after the Jubilee year, but the Golden Jubilee of 1950 had been so successful that they continued to celebrate it for another year!

DuCasse: Right, they did through '52, because I was there in '52, in time for the end of it! [laughter]

Justema: Well, I headed straight for Rome, of course, and had a letter from the abbot of Mt. Angel to present to Benedictine heads throughout Europe. All the religious accommodations in the city were crowded, but I finally persuaded the head—I don't know what his official title would be—of the Benedictine House of Studies on the Aventine Hill to let me sleep in the bell tower. Aside from the clamor of the bells, I had a fine view of the Tiber River, and stayed in Rome for two months, diligently making notes on over 200 of the 500 churches.

DuCasse: How marvelous! No wonder you got such a good background of the early Christian churches, and also down through time, for Rome, of course, has them all.

Justema: Yes. It undoubtedly provides us with a cross-section of Western civilization.

Then, after two months in Rome, I decided to do the grand tour, and by train went to Spain, then France, England, Holland, down through Germany and Switzerland, and back to my little bell tower.

I think the most interesting part of the trip consisted in comparing the life in the different Benedictine monastaries. For instance, in England I spent four weekends at four different religious houses, and at Prinash, on the Isle of Wight, they support themselves by manufacturing a beautiful kind of stoneware pottery, while at Buckfast, the largest of the abbeys in England, I noticed that the more mature and better-known artists each had their own studio, whether they worked in tapestry, stained glass, or whatever.

I was also struck in the Netherlands—in Amsterdam and Utrecht—with the extreme modernity of the churches, because just as at an earlier time northern Europe suddenly became
Justema: Protestant, in the early fifties they suddenly became ultramodern. The stay at Maria Laack was particularly fascinating because one of the monks there had worked in the Vatican Library photographing very ancient manuscripts in color so that when he would project a slide on the white walls of his cell it looked like an enormous fresco.

Then they insisted that I visit the famous jeweler Burch-Korrodi in Zurich, Switzerland. He was in the process of putting together again the monstrance belonging to the Pilgrimage Church of Einsideln, in Switzerland.

DuCasse: Oh, yes. Another Benedictine monastery, incidentally, wasn't it?

Justema: Yes, and pure Baroque, all white and gold with great flourishes of wrought iron, and cupids on pink or blue ceilings. Snow had begun to fall by that time, and the abbot of Einsideln said, "The people in town think that we're a lot of crazy old women when they see us skiing down the slopes in our black habits."

DuCasse: Oh, how marvelous!

Justema: Burch-Korrodi is perhaps the most famous ecclesiastical jeweler in Europe, and a chalice by him is to be treasured beyond metal. The monstrance that he was putting together must have been four feet high and it was entirely encrusted with precious stones, diamonds, rubies, and emeralds which had been hidden, the monstrance having been taken apart and hidden during the war. I never saw it used, but it must be overpowering. Incidentally, Einsideln is the home of one of the so-called Black Virgins.

DuCasse: Yes, that's a great tradition in Europe, there are many of them, in Spain and in the south of France.

Justema: Yes, and of course in the South American countries. In Guatemala, for instance, at Esquipulas.

Decorating the Crypt of the Abbey Church of Mount Angel, Oregon; Louisa Jenkins' Course and Subsequent Art Interest

Justema: Well, to return to the States. I was given the job of decorating the crypt in the new abbey church at Mt. Angel, Oregon. I had seen a show of religious art some years before at the de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco, and had been impressed by the mosaics of Louisa Jenkins and the statues of Frances Rich. So for a very minimal sum, Frances Rich made a
Justema: life-size terra-cotta statute of St. Joseph for my crypt, and Louisa Jenkins designed the fourteen stations of the cross, on whose composition we worked together, because the stations were hung in a long row against the rear wall of the crypt which the seminarians used for their devotions, so we connected them with a path that rose and fell as Christ made his way to Calvary.

When Louisa brought the fourteen stations, which I had commissioned to be placed along the rear wall of the crypt under the main basilica church at Mt. Angel Abbey (she brought the stations, appropriately enough, in a station wagon!), I prevailed upon her to remain for two weeks in order to instruct seven or eight of the more artistic-minded monks in her mosaic technique, which of course is unique in that it utilizes the material of magnesite which can be colored and thus give a lightness to a composition which would be missing if the whole surface was covered with tesserae or solid material.

I add this because it seems to me that in that fortnight we set a precedent which should be resumed and spread widely among religious houses and particularly in seminaries, where there may or may not be courses in art. For such techniques as stained glass and mosaic are not only fascinating but highly desirable for the decoration of churches.

Louisa's method of teaching was very direct, very modest, very thorough. The seven or eight monks that were selected to take the course came to a basement room for several hours every day, actually after the noon meal which was called dinner. She began, as a mosaicist must, with a firm surface to which mesh wire was attached. Then, such is the beauty of this particular technique, the colored magnesite can be put on in sections and does not harden to a lovely matte finish for several hours.

Perhaps the most brilliant piece was that produced by Louis La Barbara who was a Brother Candidate, as I had been, and, having taught art in a Los Angeles high school for many years, knew exactly what he wanted. First, on a piece of plywood, he sketched in a Madonna and Child with almost cubistic simplicity—it looked in fact like a drawing by Juan Gris made with a broad black felt-tip marker. Then, as prescribed, he tacked on the "hardware cloth," and, bit by bit, as needed, laid in inch-thick shapes of pastel-colored magnesite, outlining each area with small bits of the conventional Italian opaque glass called tesserae, before filling in parts of his composition more solidly. The final result was halfway between realism and abstraction, a quality that practically defines contemporary religious art.
Justema: Though I was very happy at Mt. Angel, and the abbot paid me the compliment of saying that I was an exemplary monk—I guess because I was scared half the time!—I decided to leave the cloister and became the art director of St. Joseph magazine, and lived in the workman's cottage which was also occupied by workmen who did the gardening and tended to the cattle and various odd jobs.

DuCasse: Now, was that magazine published by Mt. Angel Abbey?

Justema: Yes, they also published a German magazine called, I think, Der Blatt, which has only recently been suspended.

DuCasse: They were originally a German foundation, were they not?

Justema: Yes, their mother house is in Engelberg, Switzerland, which is on the lake of Lucerne, or at least it's above the lake. You reach it by a funicular that goes straight up the side of a mountain with waterfalls leaping at you from every side. Benedictines, as you know, always like to occupy high places, as at Monte Cassino.

What with my work on the magazine and living in the workmen's cottage—which was right next door to the cemetery and really almost a fairy-tale setting in the middle of a great grove of fir and pine trees—I became involved with the seminarians, of whom there must have been 200 at the time. They were always putting on shows, and one weekend I had asked a friend of mine, Archibald MacLeish, if we could produce his radio script The Son of Man, which they did very brilliantly, four of the boys telling the story of Christ as Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John tell it in the gospels, while the action was being performed in pantomime on a platform at one end of the gymnasium.

The seminarians also put on a religious art show which was another great weekend success, and one of the most sensational pieces in it was a crucifix by a metal-worker who welded the piece that is used in the Church of the Holy Cross, I believe, it's called, at Sedona, Arizona.


Justema: Yes, and it's described as pretty grim. [brief tape interruption].

DuCasse: And the name of the artist was?
Justema: Keith Monroe, who supplied us with a two-foot version for which he asked only $100, and it was sold immediately to a young priest from Portland, and he could have sold twelve of them. It was an almost skeleton figure like one of the anatomical drawings of Vasalio.\footnote{Vesulius? W.J.}

We showed an excellent cross section of all the work that was being done by sisters and often lay people throughout the country.

DuCasse: Did you do this exhibit \textit{after} the one that you saw in San Francisco in 1953?

Justema: Oh, yes, for I was still living at Mt. Angel.

DuCasse: Did you perhaps use some of those artists? Did you engage some of those artists from that exhibit?

Justema: Yes, though I can't, at the moment, identify many of them.

DuCasse: I think we have that little catalogue here. \footnotesize{[looking through papers]} Here we are. I thought you said to me once something about having used some of the artists there.

Justema: Well, Sister Mary Corita, who is now known simply as Corita---

DuCasse: Corita Kent.

Justema: ---showed us a serigraph or two. Antonio Sotomayor supplied us with a marvelous altar piece done in oil with a superimposed terra-cotta crucifixion on it. Helen Bruton sent us a mosaic. Frances Rich sent us a small piece. Micaela, you sent us a station, Station IX, Jesus nailed to the cross, which was in cast stone. Mary Erckenbrack sent a marvelous tile. Jose Moya Del Pino contributed a tempera of Franciscan monks. All in all must have been forty artists represented.

DuCasse: That's quite an extensive show.

Justema: And it was attended by people from all over the Willamette Valley, in fact from all over Oregon; I think we had about 10,000 people in three days. And many sales were made, and of course the seminarians were extremely pleased. Several times every day the boys in the seminary modeled church vestments beginning with some old fiddleback chasubles which were in the collection of the abbey and ending with chasubles of my own design, which are now at the Chicago Institute of Art, in their permanent collection.
DuCasse: Are those the ones that you showed me in the reproductions in that catalogue: "Raiments for the Lord's Service."

Justema: Yes.

DuCasse: Oh, it's good to know they're preserved.

Justema: During the time I was in Mt. Angel—about a year and a half after I left the cloister I married a Doris McMullen, who had been a widow for about six years, had two grown sons, and was a marvelous weaver. So I moved from the workmen's cottage by the cemetery down into the little town of Mt. Angel where we had a string of famous visitors such as Father Reinhold; the modern musician and member of The Six, Darius Milhaud; and the Jewish composer Ernest Bloch.

Liturgical Arts Magazine Article on Sources of Style for Christian Art

DuCasse: Of course Father Reinhold was one of the most literate and articulate men on the liturgical movement, isn't that correct?

Justema: Yes.

But perhaps the greatest friend I made at that time was Maurice Lavanoux who was the editor of Liturgical Arts magazine and president of the Liturgical Arts Society. The Liturgical Arts magazine was financed for many years by a Mr. and Mrs. Otto Spaeth of New York. It was a quarterly and had marvelous reproductions of the most advanced art, or at least art of the most advanced liturgical vision which was being produced all over the world.

Maurice traveled far and wide to collect material for his magazine. I wrote several articles for him, and enlisted the help of the mural painter Jean Charlot, who was then living in Honolulu and teaching there. He had been part of the Mexican renaissance, and whereas Rivera, Orozco, and the others were all communist-inclined, Charlot was a very staunch Catholic. He preferred to live out of the States. He supplied both St. Joseph magazine, when I was its art editor, and the Liturgical Arts magazine with marvelous caricatures and brush drawings which considerably lightened the pages.
DuCasse: I think for the record, we should mention the issues of Liturgical Arts which includes your article. I have it right here. It was November 1951, "Sources of Style for Christian Art." And you did have very delightful illustrations by Charlot throughout your text.

Justema: What I did in the article, "Sources of Style for Christian Art," was give a run-down of world-famous artists beginning with Arp, going through Balthus, Berman, de Chirico, Dalí, Campigli, Calder, Feininger, Giacometti, Dufy, Marini, Lipschitz, and the others, and, based on what I knew of their style, suggest what possible contribution they could make to religious art.

DuCasse: And this was exactly in the spirit of Père Couturier, who was very willing to use the non-Catholic, non-Christian artists because of their particular talents.

Justema: Yes.

DuCasse: Wasn't that what you had in mind also, Billy?

Justema: Yes. The decisions were all based on style. For instance, Mark Rothko I thought--and this was anticipated in a synagogue that he decorated later in great bands or areas of pure, vibrating color--was a likely candidate for church art. Then the attenuated sculpture of Giacometti appealed to me as being very spiritual in character.

But Dalí objected to my objection to the crucifixions he was doing at that time and using as a model for the Blessed Virgin his wife Gala. He was painting, of course, technically in a most marvelous manner, but so meticulously that I dared to say that at any time we could expect to see a Dali on the cover of the Saturday Evening Post, which offended him deeply [laughter] because he had just entered the Church and sort of taken over religious art as an extension of surrealism. I'm afraid at that age I was rather a prude, as I insisted on putting things in categories [laughter] which I have long since abandoned.

Of course in my commercial designing I couldn't incorporate any religious motives, but I would occasionally, when I could afford to paint an exhibition of pictures for myself, do a religious subject such as a crown of thorns, showing nothing but the thorny crown itself suspended in space but with a white rose where the face would be and a single petal falling as if it were a tear.
Justema: Though I use secular subject matter, and my books on art deal with pattern and design, I still consider myself, and always will, a religious artist.

DuCasse: Yes, I think that the true artist is a religious person, they can't help but be.

Justema: And the last poem that I wrote is also the shortest, and it goes like this. It's called "Task." [reading]

The day is ended, the slowing wheel been stopped,
My orders are filled, the potter said,
Now, but one thing remains.
How, with the time I have left in this failing light,
Do I give shape to praise?

DuCasse: Oh, that's very beautiful, truly beautiful.

[brief tape interruption] The following are some after-thoughts by my friend, Billy Justema.

Changes in the Church, and the Need for a New Liturgical Arts Movement

Justema: Micaela, in the thirty-three years I've been in the Church great changes have taken place, as everyone knows, but the most ironic of all is that Protestant churches have taken up religious art as a whole much more seriously than Catholics have continued to do, after making such an excellent start. I have a great friend, Father Shepherd, a Jesuit retreat master, with whom I sometimes travel, and he can't pass a church or what appears to be a church without wanting to inspect it. And we always think and hope that it will be a Catholic church (and if he hasn't said his mass that day we can rouse the rector so that he can say his mass with an audience of one, a congregation of one).

The curious thing is that the most striking of the modern churches, perhaps aside from St. Mary's Cathedral here in San Francisco, are Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopalian, or what have you. That's to say, many of them have adopted the semi-circular, theater-in-the-round effect, and this I think is psychologically a mistake because I'm told by priests that it's very hard to hold the attention of an audience that half-surrounds you. So that when we sacrificed the long, narrow nave and focused our attention on the high altar with the tabernacle behind it we dispersed attention quite dangerously, so that nowadays the priest almost always uses a microphone which distorts the voice and is very distracting to the congregation.
DuCasse: Yes, it is. But I suppose it's been very tempting for architects to explore this architectural novelty.

Justema: Yes, and many architects have come up with very daring exterior forms, though sometimes they don't sufficiently consult the priesthood regarding certain liturgical problems. For instance, they'll put the baptistry on a balcony.

DuCasse: Yes, which isn't at all plausible!

Justema: But there's apt to be excellent stained glass, very simple, and modern statues, if any, rather than the plaster saints of our youth.

DuCasse: You mentioned the cathedral in San Francisco, and I know that you and I have discussed some of the esthetic aspects of it. Would you like to say just a few words about that?

Justema: Well, I attend mass there every weekday morning at seven o'clock, and though I disliked the structure at first—it's been called a washing machine, the bishop's hat, and--

DuCasse: And various other epithets!

Justema: Yes. It is of course a marvel of engineering. The famous Italian architect Pier Luigi Nervi was consulted regarding the construction. But, though it is arresting, there are too many architectural elements, too many shapes involved. The church itself is, again, perfectly square with the congregation in a semi-circle. The altar is very imposing, but I think perhaps the greatest beauty of the church is the baldachino by Richard Lippold, the modern sculptor who came out from New York and has hung over the high altar a great pyramid consisting of perhaps ten or more thousand lengths of highly polished steel pipe, and if the doors are open they rustle in the wind and reflect the light so that the Holy Spirit really seems to be right at your ear as well as above you.

Unfortunately, economics being what they are, Father O'Shaugnessy, the rector of St. Mary's Cathedral, said they can't always light the baldachino because the spotlights high up in the tower—and it is an immensely tall structure, as anyone who has seen it knows—runs their monthly electric bill up to $8,000.

DuCasse: Good heavens!
Justema: But it's a glorious thing when it's lighted, and every ceremony in the cathedral, because of the spaciousness, has great solemnity and dignity. And some of the odd shapes which result from the high divided dome are soon forgotten in the majesty of the setting.

DuCasse: Yes, that's very true. I think you and I discussed this also before, namely the sad fact that there was not a harmonious plan for the decorative parts of the interior, and that they seem to have been done at random.

Justema: Yes. Well, churches today are not built by one man, or even two or three, but by a committee, so that they usually end up with a compromise, and everyone has to be pleased.

I think we need a new liturgical arts movement because we've learned a great deal in the last twenty-five years about simplicity and the requirements of the liturgy, which are sometimes ignored, as for instance with the theater-in-the-round effect for the congregation. I don't say that the long, narrow churches should come back, but some solution should be found, perhaps even balconies, so that the people would be closer, because as you know Catholics, for some reason, or a certain type of Catholic, though he loves his church, sits as far away as possible from the altar.

DuCasse: Yes, this I could never understand. I always sit as close as I can!

Justema: I do too.

DuCasse: Perhaps there's a fundamental individualism that was inculcated somewhere along the line.

Justema: Well, it's very perplexing to the priesthood. They wonder why do you come at all if you stay as far away as possible?

DuCasse: You're right. They're just inside the door, so to speak, as if they are going to be trapped! No, this is a very strange thing, and even with our new liturgy—well I say new in quotes—where they are trying to bring us together as a community, it's very difficult. You still find this reticence about participation.

Justema: What makes me really very annoyed sometimes is that the Episcopal and other churches have adopted so many of our more theatrical practices, and often done them better than we do. What we need is devout showmen. Because of course there is quite a lot that goes on besides the high point of the mass, which is the breaking of the bread and the consecration.
Justema: But I won't get started on the subject of sermons. [laughter] The main fault, I think, is that many priests try to talk about too many subjects, so that five minutes after you have heard a mass you don't know what the sermon was about. They begin with a homily, probably, from the Gospel or the Scripture, but then they think for comic relief they have to tell a funny story, and then they touch on politics. One very wise convert friend of mine said, "I wish they'd forget the sermons!"

DuCasse: Most of the time one could do without!

Were there any other things now that you wanted to add?

Justema: I think I've said it. I think that the Catholic Church in America is quite aware of its—what shall I say?—misdemeanors, its esthetic shortcomings, and that they'll be rectified as art education is instilled in the youth and we absorb and learn to evaluate all the tremendous changes that have taken place in modern art in this century. We really haven't assessed all of those.

For instance, Picasso and cubism had no significant contribution to make. Matisse, whose favorite subject was odalisques, proved that he had. And I think it was because of his sense of simple, pure color and curved lines always with some subtle reference to nature.

For me, one of the great joys of going to an early mass at the Cathedral—the seven o'clock is held before the Blessed Sacrament at one side of the high altar, and the rear of the church is entirely of glass—is that you can always look out over the city and sometimes see a glorious sunrise.

DuCasse: That's beautiful. A natural mural as it were.
Renaissance of Religious Art and Architecture in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1946-1968

Louisa Jenkins

GROWTH IN ART AND SPIRIT

An Interview Conducted by Micaela DuCasse in 1982

Copyright © 1985 by The Regents of the University of California
TABLE OF CONTENTS — Louisa Jenkins

INTERVIEW HISTORY

EARLY INFLUENCES, AND COMMISSIONS FOR CHURCHES

ST. ANN'S CHAPEL, PALO ALTO, AND THE BOOK ON MOSAICS

TRANSITIONS IN LITURGY, ART, AND IDEAS: TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

RETREAT ART WORKSHOPS
INTERVIEW HISTORY

Louisa Jenkins has been consistently motivated in her art by her deep faith in God, and the service of the liturgy of the Catholic Church since her conversion to the Church so many years ago. I have been fortunate to have known her from very nearly that beginning.

The source for her inspiration is deep and absorbing. It is her life. She has executed a great variety of commissions for the Church or related patrons, such as her mosaic mural on one of the buildings at Holy Names College in Oakland.

Louisa participated in the Catholic Art Forum from its inception, as a founding member. Our friendship was based upon our mutual concerns as Catholic artists for the acceptance of contemporary art in and for the Church. This made it a particularly happy privilege for me to have been her interviewer for this project.

The interview took place in her beautiful studio home in Carmel, with her scrolls upon the inner walls, and from balcony windows a breathtaking view of the Santa Lucia Mountains and Point Lobos. It was a journey back into a time that had been so stimulating and inspiring for us both as a shared experience.

Micaela DuCasse
Interviewer

September 1984
Piedmont, California
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION
(Please print or write clearly)

Your full name     LOUISA JENKINS
Date of birth      NOV. 30 1898 Place of birth  ANACONDA MONT
Father's full name AUGUST MEYER
Birthplace         DEUTER STADT GERMANY
Occupation         PIANIST COMPOSER
Mother's full name ANTONIA STROH
Birthplace         SAN FRANCISCO CALIF
Occupation         HOUSEWIFE SINGER
Where did you grow up? SEATTLE WASH
Present community
Education          2 YRS. COLLEGE
Occupation(s)      ARTIST LECTURER

CONDUCTED WORKSHOPS.

Special interests or activities TEILHARDIAN PHILOSOPHY
RAISING LEVEL CONSCIOUSNESS
SWIMMING SCROLL MAKING
STARTED WITH MOSAICS
The scrolls of Louisa Jenkins represent one human being's efforts to translate into visual form the unseen depths of cosmic experience, the spaces around which we weave the strands of ordinary life.

"The scroll is just to delight. Delight the deeps within, not take surface," says the 82 year old artist. "You can only see a scroll by sitting quietly, doing, asking nothing. Nothing gazing at nothing."

Louisa, the daughter of a German composer who immigrated to America, was born in 1898 in Montana. She spent her early youth in Washington State and served as a surgical nurse during the first World War. Later she lived in Paris and studied painting under the noted Russian artist Gonchorova. For the next 20 years, as a Californian, Louisa painted in oils and water colors in studios she maintained in San Francisco, Carmel, and on Partington Ridge in Big Sur.

She attained reknown as a mosaicalist following her first one man show at Gump's Gallery in San Francisco in 1950. Over the next 18 years she undertook numerous commissions including wall mosaics for Mount Angel Abbey near Portland, Oregon; Mt. LaSalle Novitiate Chapel in Napa, California; the College of Holy Names in Oakland; St. Ann's Chapel in Palo Alto; Vallombrosa Retreat House in Menlo Park and St. Teresa's Church in San Jose.

In recognition of her significant influence on liturgical art, St. Mary's College of Notre Dame in Indiana awarded her an honorary degree in 1957.

She began making scrolls after being introduced to deep sea diving. The floating, translucent, ethereal world which she discovered beneath the ocean had such a marked impression on her psyche that it transformed her life. And so she ventured in new spiritual and artistic directions, directions which led her in 1963 to a Zen study center in Japan. From this contemplative experience, Louisa developed a new style of artistic expression using collage with acrylics. These "Accretions," as she called them, were the first evolutionary step toward scroll making. They represented her fledgling efforts to bring to form a synthesis of Western and Eastern religion and philosophy. Louisa now works out of her Carmel studio home.

In 1973 a retrospective exhibit, including examples of her drawings, paintings, mosaics, boxes and scrolls was held at the Monterey Peninsula Museum of Art. Her scrolls were also shown with an exhibit on the history of parapsychology at Kennedy College in Orinda, under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institute, entitled Psi-Search.

Louisa is now writing a book on scrolls. In the introduction to the manuscript she addresses her motivation to scroll making:

"It is impossible to stop the flow of making. Even if no one else looks at them, it is part of my living. It is not only food for my psyche and my soul, but a means of cleansing and renewing the invisible part of me..."
DuCasse: This interview with Louisa Jenkins is being held in her home in Carmel, California. Louisa Jenkins is an artist of distinguished and varied accomplishments. After her conversion to the Catholic Church, she turned her talents to the religious and eventually liturgical arts for the Church. Louisa, the daughter of a German composer who emigrated to America, was born in 1898 in Montana. She spent her early youth in Washington state and served as a surgical nurse during the First World War. Later she lived in Paris and studied painting under the noted Russian artist Goncharova. For the next twenty years, as a Californian, Louisa painted in oils and watercolors in studios she maintained in San Francisco, Carmel, and on Partington Ridge in Big Sur.

She attained renown as a mosaicist following her first one-man show at Gump's Gallery in San Francisco in 1950. Over the next eighteen years she undertook numerous commissions, including wall mosaics for Mt. Angel Abbey near Portland, Oregon; Mt. LaSalle Novitiate Chapel in Napa, California; the College of Holy Names in Oakland; St. Ann's Chapel in Palo Alto; Vallombrosa Retreat House in Menlo Park; and St. Teresa's Church in San Jose. In recognition of her significant influence on liturgical art, St. Mary's College of Notre Dame in Indiana awarded her an honorary degree in 1957.

Early Influence, and Commissions for Churches

DuCasse: Louisa, do you remember when you might have first become aware of liturgical art and its worldwide movement? Did that have a specific beginning for you at any time?
Jenkins: I don't think that I thought too much about art as a career. I was very busy as a mother, with children, having marriages, divorces, and the whole art world had taken a very secondary place until about 1948, I guess, shortly before I was-- And then, I had gone down to Guatemala and had really been excited about the things that were happening down there in the churches, in their processions, in all of the things, and I felt that I really wanted to go on with that sort of work, become a part of that type of thing. So that was the beginning.

I think the first large work that I did I did for Mt. Angel Abbey.

DuCasse: The work that you did for Mt. Angel Abbey, you were commissioned to do that by William Justema, weren't you?

Jenkins: That's right. He came down and saw the things that I had been doing in the way of mosaics and suggested that I do this, make some sort of a preliminary drawing, and so forth and so on, and then take it up and present it to the monks. If they passed on it, fine; if they didn't, well then--

DuCasse: Start over again.

Jenkins: Start again. So they did pass on it, and that was the beginning of my career.

DuCasse: I know that that was very important to Bill Justema, because he had been given that commission, as you know, to do the crypt and he was trying to get the best people he could to do the various parts of it.

Jenkins: With the young men using that room in their very formative years as novices it meant a lot to me, when I was up there not long ago, to see that it was working out very well and the young men still enjoyed that room.

DuCasse: Once you mentioned to me that the young seminarians did some of the work with you? Did you have them working on those mosaics?

Jenkins: Well, after the mosaics were installed they became very much interested in it, so I stayed there three or four months instructing some of the young men. I've always felt that you don't really know something until you start teaching it, and so all along with my work I was also teaching or giving workshops or lecturing on these same subjects.

DuCasse: So they could also have a deeper understanding of the whole---not only the process but why the work was the way it was.
Mosaics by Big Sur Artist Are Installed in Benedictine Monastery
Fourteen exquisite glass mosaic representations of the Stations of the Cross, made by Louisa Jenkins, well known Peninsula artist, have been installed in the Benedictine monastery of Mount Angel, about 40 miles from Portland, Oregon.

The mosaics were designed and completed in the artist's studio home on Partington Ridge in the Big Sur, and transported to the monastery earlier this month to be mounted in the crypt chapel against a wall of soft gray tone. Both chapel and stations, two examples of which are shown here, to left and right, are freshly modern in design.

Mrs. Jenkins has made use of a rich variety of materials in creating her impressive series of stations. These materials include Italian mosaics, fragments of stained glass, crystals, marble chips, travertine and other stones, isinglass, and about 20 different materials in tones of gold.

Mounted about three inches apart, the 14 stations, each individual in its symbolism and emotional appeal, are bound together by a "path of life" which flows continuously through the 14 designs.

Mrs. Jenkins devoted the past five months to this monumental task, hailed by those who have seen the mosaics in all their beauty of sparkling color as her masterpiece to date. She and her son, Peter, accompanied the stations to Mount Angel in order to assist with their installation. Dedication ceremonies will be held at a date to be announced later.
Jenkins: Right, yes.

DuCasse: I think the artist is innately a teacher in a sense, don't you? At times? Without meaning to be!

Jenkins: Yes, I think sometimes it's just a means of communication, and I feel that maybe the visual communication, you know, is a little bit easier than words, and still we struggle always to keep ideas in words.

DuCasse: The work that you did at the Abbey was in, I believe, 1951. And after that commission, the Novitiate Chapel for the Christian Brothers in 1954 was the next commission that you did?

Jenkins: It might have been. I traveled back and forth too, you know, to St. Mary's College in Notre Dame, and lectured there and so forth.

DuCasse: And, of course, you were writing the book too. [The Art of Making Mosaics, Louisa Jenkins and Barbara Mills; D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc., 1957]

Jenkins: Yes. And then also I was going to Regina Laudes and teaching there somewhat. So these things all kind of interweave, and I'm not too certain of the exact dates.

DuCasse: I think that you were involved with the liturgical art exhibit at the de Young Museum in 1953 which Ruth Cravath and Ninfa Valvo and several others were directing.

Jenkins: Right.

DuCasse: Do you remember any of that particular involvement or did that seem to you at the time to be a worthwhile, important project?

Jenkins: Well, it was. At that time we formed this liturgical group.

DuCasse: Catholic Art Forum, it was?

Jenkins: Yes. And it seemed that this was a means of creating work in a larger sense, not just an individual sense, but also in more of a community. Art has to be as an individual, but if it stays just as an individual then it finally dies out, I think. So, either in the invisible world or in the visible world which was the art show, it was an important art forum.

DuCasse: And it was also a means of education, and I guess that was what the Art Forum was established for, to educate lay people in accepting, let's say, the contemporary terms and contemporary media and so forth.
The new mosaic STATIONS OF THE CROSS

for Mt. Angel Abbey by Louisa Jenkins

a souvenir of the Blessing
Sunday, July 19, by Father Gerald J. Ryan, O.F.M.

The Benedictine community of Mt. Angel Abbey, at St. Benedict, Oregon, is now the happy possessor of what many consider one of the major works of modern religious art anywhere in America. These fourteen Stations of the Cross by Louisa Jenkins of Big Sur, California, are unique in many ways. Their physical splendor should be evident to everyone. Less obvious, perhaps, is their complete mastery of an ancient and difficult craft. Mrs. Jenkins works in true mosaic, setting each bit of material by hand as they did at Ravenna, Constantinople, and Monreale—homes of the greatest examples of mosaic art. The slightly “crude” look which results from this method is quite intentional. A slick surface and a naturalistic appearance are not characteristic of true mosaic.

Moreover, as a distinguished modern artist, Mrs. Jenkins has her own highly personal style. This style, though it continues the Byzantine tradition, is much less naïve than it may seem at first. In order to get her subtle effects of texture she uses such unusual materials as lava rock, iridescent furnace slag, crystal, quartz, pyrite, mica and various metals (as well as the traditional Italian mosaic glass) setting them in areas of colored magnesite. But the greatest originality of these Stations lies in the thought, study and devotion that went into them. Many of her interpretations of the individual Stations, Mrs. Jenkins says, are the direct result of reading “Christ in His Mysteries,” by Abbot Marmion, the great Benedictine scholar who died in 1923. Louisa Jenkins’ own notes on her Mt. Angel Abbey Stations of the Cross are on the following pages.
INTERPRETATION OF STATIONS

The clearest rules for an artist are laid down by Jacques Maritain in "Art and Scholasticism." I would like to quote his concluding rules, for however unsuccessfully they may have been followed, the artist has tried to keep them in mind.

It must be intelligible. For it is there above all for the instruction of the people, it is a theology in graphic representation. The work must be finished. I do not mean finished in the academic sense, but in the most material and humble meaning of the word. It is in the highest degree fitting that nothing shall enter the house of God but work which is well done, accomplished, clean, permanent and honest. This must clearly be understood according to the peculiar style of the work and the means taken to achieve it.

Sacred art is in a state of absolute dependence upon theological wisdom.

Considering the essential inadequacy of the means of expression of human art in relation to the divine mysteries to which they are applied, the frightful difficulty of expressing in a sensitive medium truths which cleave the earth and sky and unite the most opposed realities, one would even be inclined to think that sacred art, however rich it ought to be in sensibility and humanity, ought undoubtedly, if it is to attain a certain spiritual fullness, to retain always some element of hieratic and so to speak ideographical symbolism, and, in any event, of the strong intellectuality of its primitive traditions.

A work of religious art ought to be religious. If it is not religious, it is not beautiful, for beauty presupposes essentially the integrity of all the requisite conditions.

In general the artist has endeavored to show not only the drama of the historical events of the Passion in themselves, but also as applied to our daily living. So some of the scenes are shown as close-ups and some are shown in the distance or with just the hands to suggest the living symbol of today.

The face and hands of Jesus and Mary are in gold, of the others in stone. The Way of the Cross is in marble chips to suggest a path; this path winds through the Passion. It is also our path, therefore it is represented as intersecting the figures of Christ Jesus and Mary. It starts at the bottom of Station 1 and finally descends through the tomb of Station 14. As the Crown of Thorns is also one of glory, jewels are shown in the thorns. The wooden cross in each Station is surrounded by gold, our most precious material.

Station 1  Jesus is condemned to death
The silence—acceptance.
Bowl and water symbol of Pilate washing his hands.
Mystical Vine suggested in robe.
Cross becomes barrier to earthly justice.
Virtue: Obedience to lawful authority.

Station 2  Jesus bears His Cross
The Cross is placed at the back of the Head. The intersection is left empty to indicate the eternal which can never be reached in this life. "Take up your Cross and follow me." Obedience in Station 1 imposes the Cross of Station 2.
Station 3  Jesus falls the first time
Crosses of humanity piercing His Cross. Our falls are caused by imperfect Faith, hesitation, fear of the outcome. Virtue: Faith.

Station 4  Jesus meets His Mother
Cross becomes sword of Truth between them. In the look between them Mary realizes that He must go before her; it is the renunciation of Mary. Sacrifice on Mary's part of her Son now realized to full extent. "Thy own soul a sword shall pierce."
Virtue: Abnegation.

Station 5  Simon helps Jesus carry the Cross
The Cross becomes the monstrance carried before him. Virtues: Cooperation. Fortitude.

Station 6  Veronica's Veil
The image of Christ on the veil is hung like a banner on the Cross. Vera Icon—image. It comes from pictures on unprepared linen cloth that were brought to Rome in the period antecedent to the 3rd century. Virtue: Compunction.

Station 7  Jesus falls a second time
The façade of Mt. Angel Abbey carries the shadow of the Cross. It is the Church, (the Benedictines and others) who have always helped us in our falls. The Church, the visible manifestation of Christ in the world. Virtues: Repentance for our failures. Penance.

Station 8  Jesus meets the Women of Jerusalem
The women mean humanity in general, all mothers who have had to give up their sons. The hand of Jesus is lifted in warning to indicate that the sorrow and pain is turned back to us. "Weep for yourselves and for your children... for if in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?" Virtue: Fear of the Lord.

Station 9  Jesus falls the third time
Jesus is prostrate, crushed beneath Divine Justice. No other being has ever borne it in its fullness. Virtue: Humility.

Station 10  Jesus is Stripped of His Garments
The world's rude hands leave Jesus with nothing, naked and beholden to all. Again the path begins to climb. Virtues: Chastity and Poverty.

Station 11  Jesus is nailed to the Cross
The drama reaches a climax. Sacrifice. Each human being is firmly fastened by God to an individual and personal way of sacrifice. The red of martyrdom surrounds Jesus' hand. Virtue: Resignation.

Station 12  Jesus dies on the Cross
The Climax. Christ gives His soul back to His Father. Complete abandonment to God's Will even to death. (Dark night of the Soul.) The opened side gives forth Blood and Water. Virtue: Abandonment to God's Will.

Station 13  Jesus is taken down from the Cross
After descent from the Cross, Mary holds the body of her Son. Face of Jesus is at peace. Grieving of Mother, end of sacrifice. Mary now transcend her grief, becomes Mother not only of her Son but of all mankind. Cross indicated as ladder. Virtue: Charity. Pity.

Station 14  Jesus is laid in the tomb
The path descends through the tomb. The preparation for rebirth. The winding sheet, spices, are signs indicating preparation for rebirth. "By baptism we die to sin, descend into the tomb, to come forth resplendent in Grace."—Abbot Marmion, O.S.B. Somber, dark colors. Virtues: Hope. Patience.

It is hoped that the beholders, the ones making the stations, will discover their own hidden symbols. A quotation from Heinrich Zimmer has application here: "For
true symbols have something illimitable about them. They are inexhaustible in their suggestive and instructive power. The meanings have to be constantly reread, understood afresh. We must never forfeit our proper humility and open-mindedness before the unknown, and refuse to be instructed—refuse to be shown what has never yet quite been told either to us or to anybody else.”

If this is true of the mystery of symbols portrayed inadequately in art, how much truer of the grand mystery of the Passion of our Lord! In this inexhaustible inspiration on which we meditate, the beholder transcends both the artist and the material representation and lifts his heart to the Lord.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

*History of the Origin and Introduction of the Pious Practice of the Path of the Cross.* By Leonard of Port Maurice.


*Christ in His Mysteries.* By Abbot Columba Marmion, O.S.B.

*Lost Language of Symbolism.* By Harold Bayley.

*Symbols and Emblems of Early and Mediaeval Christian Art.* By Louisa Twining.

*Symbolism in Christian Art.* By F. Edward Hulme.
Jenkins: Right.

DuCasse: Your work was very influential in that because you used an ancient technique, but you were able to use it in a completely contemporary manner.

Jenkins: Yes. I didn't go to Italy and find out how they did their mosaics until after I had experimented, thrown away, oh, a year's work, more or less, and established somewhat what I wanted to say. And then I went and saw what they were doing and how they were making mosaics. I also was able then to establish a base for supplies and bring home the materials and continue to get the materials from them. Along with the traditional materials I would use different things that I felt were incorporated in the technique. I suppose part of that came from my visit to Guatemala.

DuCasse: Another part of that period, in the fifties, what was important was the Junipero Serra Shop. Were you involved with them?

Jenkins: Well, they were my friends. I didn't--I don't know--I bought books there. [laughter] And they were my friends and they still are my friends, but I didn't make any particular things for them, none that I can remember, I don't think so.

DuCasse: Among your earlier works was the Sophia mural for Holy Names College in Oakland which was dedicated in 1957.

Jenkins: The college had moved from their old place on the shores of Lake Merritt, and they had a new college and new buildings. I had a personal friend there. At the time she was called Sister Luke; she since has changed her name. [now Sister Maria Luisa Wolfskill] We were very anxious to have something of a contemporary art form. She was in charge of the art education, their whole art department. We were very close together, and she would come down to Big Sur, and we worked on this project and submitted it and they said, "Yes, go ahead."

DuCasse: Was that not a combination of media?

Jenkins: Yes, it was part iron. David Tolerton also, who lived in Big Sur, on certain of my things would collaborate with me and do the iron part. So this Sophia, which was dealing with Sophia as Wisdom with the symbols and so forth and so on, this was large and it entailed using men because there was no way that I could possibly do this myself.

DuCasse: No, of course not. On such a large scale and with such variety of material. Didn't David Tolerton work with you on several other of your works?
Jenkins: Yes. Wasn't it David who did the ironwork on the Mustard Seed Fireplace?

DuCasse: Yes, that's at Vallombrosa also.

St. Ann's Chapel, Palo Alto, and the Book on Mosaics

DuCasse: I would think that you may have worked on St. Ann's Chapel before you worked on the ones for Vallombrosa, but we'll check those dates and I'll get them into the record later on. It's been a long time since I've been at St. Ann's and I'm a little hazy about just what I remember.

Jenkins: Well, I did the baldachino up above the altar, and then there was a madonna which I did in connection with David Tolerton in which the mosaic and the candlesticks which were of iron were done as one piece. So that is very much in use right now. I had somebody telling me about it just the other day.

DuCasse: Was the St. Ann's baldachino in mosaic?

Jenkins: Mosaic and iron. Yes, that was very important to me because that was when I first met Clare Boothe Luce, you see. She heard about my work and she was very much interested in St. Ann's Chapel; it was in memory of her daughter. She had asked that I come and see her there, so we met at the chapel and discussed what to do. She asked that I do this, and this became a very important friendship, a very close friendship through the years.

DuCasse: In some of the material that you've showed me, the mosaic that you did for Vallombrosa was in an exhibit in San Francisco during 1961.

Jenkins: Yes.

DuCasse: Something else that I want to go into is your book that you did on mosaic, one of the first really scholarly and yet practical books on the making of mosaic after mosaic began to be recognized as a twentieth century medium again.

Jenkins: Yes, it was the first one because we hadn't been doing mosaics in this country. It was purely Italy, and things that had been installed had been brought over from Italy.
Jenkins: I wouldn't have been able to do that along with all the other work I did except that Barbara Mills, my daughter, really took over the writing and the whole thing. I wrote it out, but, you see, writing things out means that it must be really edited by somebody, otherwise it is of no use at all. So I think the person who does the editing should have the credit for the book! [laughter] It was really a happy collaboration because I am much better in the visual arts and she is really very good in verbalizing things. And very few people can excel at both. If you're really going to be a visual artist it's very hard to talk about your work.

DuCasse: It's true, very true.

Jenkins: Although you can give workshops and you can lecture with slides and so forth and so on, that in a way is teaching, but when it gets into trying to define your own works and what your own invisible ideas are and how you then make that invisible art into a concrete form, then you just kind of shrug your shoulders and say, "Well, you know, it's all a mystery anyway," and let it go at that.

DuCasse: One of the reasons that you received your doctorate from Notre Dame was because of the accomplishment of having produced that very fine book that was a real need at the time.

Transitions in Liturgy, Art, and Ideas: Teilhard de Chardin

DuCasse: I wondered if you have any personal observations about art as part of the liturgy when you first came to know about it, when you were first working with it.

Jenkins: Well, it was a time of transition. You remember this was a time when the Church was opening up and losing its crust, as it were, that it had had for centuries. I don't remember the exact date when they changed over; there was no more Latin and the liturgy was radically changed much to the disturbance of many people, but it was wonderful for me because I love change, I love to be in the beginnings of things, I love to try something new. It's really a chore to go back and try and do something the same way again, but it's very easy to move onto something new. So it was a time in which most anything would go.

[At this point the telephone rings and the tape recorder is turned off. The remainder of this side of tape was not recording properly, and so DuCasse has made a note regarding what was said during this time.]
Jenkins: The discussion regards Jenkins's friendship with Clare Boothe Luce after their meeting about the work for St. Ann's Chapel. This friendship, notes DuCasse, "brought about a complete change in Jenkins's technique." DuCasse then inserts in her notes the following biographical excerpt from another source and states that this covers what Jenkins talked about while the tape was not recording:

"She began making scrolls after being introduced to deep-sea diving with Clare in Hawaii. The floating translucent, ethereal world which she discovered beneath the ocean had such a marked impression on her psyche that it transformed her life. And so she ventured in spiritual and artistic directions, directions which led her in 1963 to a Zen study center in Japan. From this contemplative experience, Louisa developed a new style of artistic expression using collage and acrylics. These 'Accretions,' as she called them, were the first evolutionary step toward scroll making. They represented her fledgling efforts to bring to form a synthesis of Western and Eastern religion and philosophy. Louisa now works exclusively in this medium."

Jenkins: The whole philosophy and— it's more than philosophy, my whole religion took a change then because there's no way that you can be a follower of Teilhard de Chardin and deal primarily in the past, in the tradition. He says that he's a pilgrim of the future, and so this is why even talking about the past is really difficult because your mind is in a different place. You're dealing in ideas and in the things that are happening and that you see projected. So it's really difficult to follow Teilhard and still remain in the Church as an institution. And that requires a certain stress, and I think that stress is very good inasmuch as it forces you into new things, new creations, new ideas, because without the stress you just go on in the same old way of thinking.

DuCasse: True, true. And of course this was probably the reason that Teilhard's work was suppressed in his lifetime, and once it was allowed to come out and scholars began studying it they realized that there was nothing that should have been suppressed in it, but it was definitely something for the future.

Jenkins: Well, they don't use it still. They don't teach Teilhard in the seminaries, they don't teach it, you don't find courses in it. The theology is a thing of the past.

DuCasse: And his whole theology was really of the future, wasn't it?

Jenkins: Right.
DuCasse: But of course it has received acceptance.

Jenkins: Very much acceptance in the new consciousness movement. If you find people like Marilyn Ferguson and Capra, Rupert Sheldrake, all the people who are moving now, they acknowledge that Teilhard is the beginning of this whole thing, and he's very much in the forefront in science and religion. So you find him there but you don't find him, say, down at the mission. And that is the Catholic Church as an institution, that's not where he is.

DuCasse: But he has gained a tremendous following among thinking Catholics!

Jenkins: We just had his centennial, and I had spent three years in doing scrolls on the Teilhardian themes which I called the stations of life, equating them with the stations of the cross that I'd done at Mt. Angel Abbey. And these circulated the United States. It's interesting, you see, that these things are very, very much in the consciousness of the people.

DuCasse: Your development of scrolls and your own spiritual development sort of went together, didn't they?

Jenkins: Right.

DuCasse: And this is something you're still pursuing, isn't that true?

Jenkins: Naturally. I mean, as long as you are creating things, you go on creating them until physically the body gives out, which will happen eventually. I think that most people are saying now, and now I'm judging, if you continue on working your work gets better, at least that's what you think! And it seems very reasonable to me because what comes out as a concrete thing on paper or something is just what is going on within your own consciousness, and if you are moving forward all the time then naturally the work gets better.

DuCasse: Your technique itself has developed. There's been very definite evolution there. It's interesting to me that you began with such a very tangible kind of material and now the materials that you're using are, in a sense, intangible; they give the impression of being that. It's extraordinary that beautiful lightness that they have.

Jenkins: I think with these very thin Japanese papers that you could express that watery world which had such an effect on me. I go back to that over and over. It was as though I'd made a right about-face from the heaviest into the most fragile. And I think that this euphoric state that you get into when you are painting these papers and working in this expresses very well what Teilhard is saying. So I find myself comfortable with it.
Retreat Art Workshops

Jenkins: Did we touch on the retreat art workshops? Why don't we talk about that?

DuCasse: Yes, I would like to have you do that.

Jenkins: This is an article, by my daughter Barbara Mills, that was the cover article in St. Joseph's Magazine, which was published by the Mt. Angel Abbey. (This magazine is discontinued now.) This, in 1962, showed the art retreat workshops that we did in connection with Father Thaddeus Yang, O.S.B. These were at St. Andrew's, near Palmdale.

I, with the monks and my son, put up two geodesic domes. We had to have a place to work. This was right in the beginning of the geodesic domes, the portable kind, and a lot of my ideas in space and time were influenced by Bucky Fuller. He used to come and stay with me at Big Sur. I felt very happy going on a space continuum of his, you see.

DuCasse: Definitely.

Jenkins: Father Thaddeus had just recently died. Also we had Jean Varda here who I got to come down and do some. It was really very exciting to watch these people create things when they didn't even know they had the possibility.

DuCasse: You were the one really who instigated the art workshops at St. Andrew's Priory?

Jenkins: Right. I had this idea that we should use other things besides words in our retreats, and there was no reason why we couldn't use visual things or make things. But this was a very new idea, and I traveled all over. These monks who came from China had already had enough of a shakeup so they were willing to accept a new idea! But they were the only ones, so this was right at the beginning of that.

DuCasse: That was in 1962, and we are still presenting such retreat workshops in 1982.

Jenkins: We also used body work, we did massaging of feet on each other, we did all sorts of exercises of yoga and so forth. It was trying to get the whole person involved in it. And some of those I did up at Santa Barbara at the Immaculate Heart place, Casa Maria.
Jenkins: I did the tabernacle doors for Marguerite Staude's chapel in Sedona, Arizona. That was really a beautiful building; if there ever was a church that I liked that was it. I was very happy to be a part of that. I think it took the prize for architecture that year.

DuCasse: You really had some wonderful places to do your own work and to express your own feelings about things.

Jenkins: Right. And wonderful friends to help. I think it's impossible, there's no way that an artist can be a hermit. I think you have to have silence, you have to have areas in which you're absolutely alone and in solitude, but you have to keep in touch with your fellow artist, with your friends; there's no way that you can just be a hermit. You have to live your life, and that in itself keeps you in a way on balance! [laughter]

DuCasse: Yes, true! Probably one reason why your idea for these workshops at St. Andrew's was so beautifully received and implemented was because that is the spirit of the Benedictine rule of work and prayer. And so this was a perfect way of conducting retreat exercises, bringing in the total involvement of the individual person. Let's hope they won't falter too much because sometimes it's difficult.

Jenkins: Well, everything changes; everything either grows or it disappears and something new will come up. There's no way it's going to stay the same. I think that right now up at Redwoods Monastery is where I find they understand more and really appreciate more of the contemporary scroll than any liturgical church that we have in the United States.

DuCasse: Is that Whitethorn?

Jenkins: That's Whitethorn.

DuCasse: And they are the Cistercian nuns, aren't they?

Jenkins: Yes. They are enclosed, but, as I say, they are grounded but not stuck! [laughter] And that's exactly the way it should be, you see. Of all the places, as of now, they come closest to my work and the expression of the work and my relationship with them.

DuCasse: I'm sure they have some of your scrolls, don't they?

Jenkins: Yes, and I think it was my greatest compliment that I've ever had in my whole liturgical life because they do not put things on the walls. They have a plain block for an altar. They keep
Jenkins: the place extremely austere, and that's the way it is. But they bought two large scrolls. One is at the entrance to the chapel and the other, I don't know where it is.

That is the monastery that Thomas Merton visited just before he left. He was very close to them, said that he was coming back to them.

DuCasse: Well, I think that probably we have gotten as much as we can for today, don't you think?

Jenkins: I think so; I think we've finished everything.
Renaissance of Religious Art and Architecture in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1946-1968

Sister Maria Luisa Wolfskill

RELIGIOUS ART FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF AN ART TEACHER

An Interview Conducted by Micaela DuCasse in 1983

Copyright © 1985 by The Regents of the University of California
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Sister Maria Luisa Wolfskill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEW HISTORY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EARLY AWARENESS OF THE LITURGICAL ARTS MOVEMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOUISA JENKINS' WORK AT THE COLLEGE OF THE HOLY NAMES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEACHERS, CRITICS, EXHIBITIONS, AND THE MISSION SERIES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BENNY BUFANO, AND JEAN VARDÁ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FABRIC WORKS: SUBJECTS AND INSPIRATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RITE OF INITIATION FOR CHRISTIAN ADULTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETHEL SOUZA, AND THE SERRA SHOP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A SENSE OF ACHIEVEMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sister Maria Luisa Wolfskill is a person of many talents. The greater part of her life has been spent in the exercise of her considerable gifts as a painter, along with her vocation to the religious life and its expression in teaching in the schools of her order of Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary.

I met Sister Maria Luisa during the early days of the Catholic Art Forum. We found we had much in common as artists and as art teachers at college level, as well as our common desire to see contemporary art forms accepted in American Catholic churches.

Our friendship continued these many years, into our retirements—she following me by a couple of years or so. Again in common, we have each chosen new directions in our retirement. We have welcomed the changes, internal and external, which have allowed us to pursue other facets of our talents. But such changes did not prevent us from enjoying a nostalgic return to a most stimulating and inspiring period of our lives, our participation in the renaissance of liturgical art in the Bay Area.

Sister Maria Luisa applies the energy and enthusiasm of old to her new vocation, ministering to the elderly and infirm shut-ins within the radius of her Hayward convent, astride her winged Moped! Her sphere of influence has changed and widened, rewarding her as well as those who look forward to her coming to them. She has the soul of the artist and the religious, who sees Christ in those to whom she ministers.

The interview with Sister Maria Luisa took place in her living-work room at St. Bede’s Convent in Hayward. The walls were decorated with several of her own colorful works, watercolors, stitcheries, photographs, sketches, and one wall was almost completely lined with books. All is in a relaxed order, reflecting her own warm, artistic but disciplined nature.

Micaela DuCasse
Interviewer

September 1984
Piedmont, California
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please print or write clearly)

Your full name  Sister Maria Luisa Wolfskill (Norma Luisa)

Date of birth 3-11-15  Place of birth  Los Angeles

Father's full name  William Luis Wolfskill

Birthplace  Los Angeles

Occupation  photographer, horticulturist, building contractor etc.

Mother's full name  Orma Anna Stolp

Birthplace

Occupation  Housewife - died at 29 yrs.

Where did you grow up?  Los Angeles area / Ramona Convent

Present community  St. Bede, Hayward

Education  1-3 public school; 3-12 Ramona Convent;

B.A. Holy Names College; M.F.A. Calif College of Arts & Crafts

Occupation(s)  Teacher: Grades 2-5/8yrs; high school/11yrs;

Holy Names College 21yrs (7yrs chairperson); Missionary

in Aragua, Peru/3yrs; 1yr service; 1980-St Bede; min-

ister to sick/elderly

Special interests or activities  Painter wk, embroiderer, calligrapher; reading,

playing the flute, walking/hiking
DuCasse: Sr. Maria, would you give us just a few details of your background?

Wolfskill: Well, I was born Norma Luisa Wolfskill, and I'm a seventh generation Californian. I was educated by the sisters to whose congregation I belong, and subsequently got my master's degree in arts from the California College of Arts and Crafts, and I began at that time to teach in college, specifically our College of the Holy Names in Oakland. I was there for twenty-one years, most of the time in the capacity of chairman, and it was there that I participated in the Catholic Art Forum and hopefully made some impression on parochial school art through the teaching of teachers.

DuCasse: When were you first aware of or interested in the liturgical art movement?

Wolfskill: I can't remember when I began to read the Liturgical Arts magazine by Maurice Lavanoux, but I did read that consistently all through the time of my college career when it was being published, because I remember toward the end there it no longer was published.

DuCasse: True. I think it was the fifties, but it began in the early thirties. So that of course gave you--

Wolfskill: An introduction to it. Then I began to look into all the examples I could find, Charlton Fortune's work in the immediate area, and then when I went to Europe I was very interested in what was going on, particularly in Germany.
DuCasse: I'm so glad to hear that, because I've never really discussed these things with you before in this way, and I didn't realize that you had traveled in Europe and this had been one of your interests at the time. Maybe you could tell us a little about that.

Wolfskill: Well, to go back a little bit, a very dear and close friend of mine was Yanko [Jean] Varda, and he had been in the institute in Paris, I forget its name, with Dom Couturier. Varda himself had felt called to the priesthood at that time in his life, but I always thought it was very interesting that somebody I knew knew the man who was instrumental in bringing the great artists of our time to work for the Church. Dom Couturier said it was a very rare thing to have the combination of a holy person and an artist. And it was much more important to have a great artist—who after all had a spiritual dimension—working for the Church than to have very inept, pious artists, which had been the problem in the nineteenth century. And so we had some very virile, wonderful, exciting art going on prior to World War II when everything seemed to be terminated.

DuCasse: That is most interesting that Varda knew Père Couturier. So of course you must have seen many of the churches, or at least some of the things which Père Couturier inspired.

Wolfskill: Yes, I did. But I didn't see as much as I intended because I played everything by ear, and I remember one day I was going to stop all along the Blue Coast of France on my way to Genoa and I found myself in Genoa that night without having made a single stop because I had such a wonderful seat companion! But I didn't care!

DuCasse: So you didn't get to Vence?

Wolfskill: No, I didn't. I went right past it, talking my head off.

DuCasse: Ah, too bad! Did you by any chance see the Church of Notre Dame de Raincy?

Wolfskill: I can't remember. My ten volumes of diary are right over there, but I don't remember all that I saw.

DuCasse: Oh, well, don't worry about that. I'm sure you must have seen many of them.

Wolfskill: I remember wanting to see the Opera House, but it was closed for restorations. The famous Jewish artist [Marc] Chagall's beautiful murals are there, but I was denied that. I saw what I could. Mostly in Germany.
DuCasse: Well, you must have seen some fascinating churches in Germany, because of course they were in advance of France in the movement. When did you first participate in the Bay Area in the liturgical art movement?

Wolfskill: I would say that when Fr. Monihan established the Catholic Art Forum I began to go to those meetings, and it was there I met the participating artists in the area.

DuCasse: I'm glad to know that. I wasn't sure whether maybe you had become a part of it before that, but we felt that the Catholic Art Forum had been a pivotal movement.

Wolfskill: Very, very important in stimulating the artists of the area.

DuCasse: And to bring artists together so that they got to know each other and so forth. That answers one of the questions I was going to ask you. Do you remember when you joined the Art Forum? Did you join near the beginning?

Wolfskill: Oh, I'm pretty sure it was close to the beginning.

DuCasse: It was 1953 when it began.

Wolfskill: Well, it wouldn't have been that early because I didn't get to college till '55, and so I don't think I started to participate till I was on that level of instruction.

DuCasse: Were your subjects, from the beginning when you were painting or doing your own work, were they primarily religious?

Wolfskill: No, when I got into fabrics I began to do wall hangings that were religious in subject matter. Previous to that and by and large I'm a watercolorist, and although I don't have a green thumb with plants, the minute I pick up a brush things start to "grow"! And I remember one time when I had an exhibit at the Jewish Art Center, or their Recreational Center—I forget the name of their place down there by Altenheim—but anyway one of the persons who was viewing it said, "I don't know who did this, but whoever it is, every one of these paintings is full of joy." And it used to worry me that I wasn't a religious painter in the sense of subject matter, but that really gave me a great uplift because I remember reading that Newman said, "The infallible sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit is joy." So, that sent me on my way, and I didn't care whether I was trying to butcher the Madonna's face or not!
DuCasse: Well, you were just going along with what Père Couturier had begun, which was to get the essence rather than just the surface, which had been so sorry in the century before.

Wolfskill: I did only one painting of Our Lady, the rest were reliefs and embroideries. And the most beautiful one was stolen from our chapel.

DuCasse: No. The chapel up in Oakland?

Wolfskill: Yes.

DuCasse: How terrible.

Wolfskill: C'est la vie.

DuCasse: C'est la vie. Such is the attraction of art sometimes.

Louisa Jenkins' Work at the College of Holy Names

DuCasse: I was interested in when you became a friend of Louisa Jenkins because I know that this was a wonderful association for her as well as for you. Naturally your friendship probably came before she did the mosaic mural at the college.

Wolfskill: Actually it didn't, Kai. Don't you remember? We had a blank wall at the new college campus, and I think that was '57. The question was posed to me by the sister in charge of all the operations, "What shall we do with this wall?"

DuCasse: This was when you were chairman of the art department?

Wolfskill: Yes. And we had just arrived at the new campus, and she said, "We have a blank wall there. What do you think we should do with it?"

I said, "Are you kidding? Do you really mean what you ask?"

And she said, "I mean it."

I said, "You should put a mural on it."

"What kind?"

"Mosaic."
Wolfskill: "Well, who would do it?"

"Louisa Jenkins."

And she said, "Do you know her?"

I said, "No, but I know somebody who does."

Now, actually I had heard her lecture and seen her work up at Mt. Angel on slides at the Catholic Art Forum presentation. So I phoned my friend, Micaela DuCasse, and I said, "Kai, how can I get in touch with Louisa?" And she said, "She's going to be spending the night with me, that's how!"

DuCasse: How terrible that I should have forgotten that!

Wolfskill: And I just thought, "Well, this is divinely ordained."

DuCasse: It was.

Wolfskill: So I phoned her, and she came over for an interview. She did about six months of research on it, and then of course it was installed and unveiled with solemn high ceremony. And it became the pivotal point of the campus, but also it was an experience for the art department, including the instructors and the chairman, to have that association with her during that time.

The installation was made actually by some Venetian craftsmen during the Mass for the Feast of the Holy Name of Mary. And of course the iron work on it had the JM, the vocables for our congregation, and so I just thought it was thrilling. It wasn't planned, but that's what happened.

DuCasse: Isn't that magnificent? On a tape I have done of Louisa she spoke very highly of that and how much she had loved working on it.

Wolfskill: The inaugural exhibit of the new gallery, which was the fifth time I had moved the art department, of course I thought belonged to Louisa. So she came. That was during the time that Clare Boothe Luce was in town campaigning for Goldwater, and so she came to see the mosaic. And their association—one had taught the other deep-sea diving and mosaics respectively.

DuCasse: Yes, Louisa spoke about that. The deep-sea diving opened up a whole new spiritual world to her which was so fascinating.
Beauty Produced on Blank Wall

The Monitor, September 20, 1957

Louisa Jenkins' Mosaic Adorns CHN Campus

High on an Oakland hillside, a woman's talent is shaping a blank wall into a thing of beauty.

Out of her own dreams, out of the pages of Scripture, out of plain enthusiasm for her job emerges imagery both ancient and new.

The ancient is the art itself: Mosaic, a design expressed in thousands of embedded bits of rock, glass, quartz, and shimmering tile.

The new is the vivid originality of the artist: Louisa Jenkins of Big Sur, whose "Sophia Mural" is nearing completion this week on the new campus of College of the Holy Names.

Visitors have seen the work in progress, have watched as workmen mounted the massive mosaic segments on the concourse side of East hall; perhaps have wondered at a design that combines rock and steel, brilliant color and stark black, new forms and old.

"Sophia" is a mosaic in relief, its dominant feature a woman's head connected by delicate ironwork with three panels. Mrs. Jenkins explained the symbolism:

The head is that of Sophia, archetype of the source of true wisdom to whom Solomon dedicated his Book of Wisdom in the Old Testament—"For it is she that teacheth the knowledge of God, and is the choicer of His works."

Fluidly formed steel rods, leading from the head into the three panels, suggest wavelengths of power and light communicated to the three academic areas:

—Philosophy and Religion, a panel divided into three bands of color representing the three divisions of the universe as we know it: Earth, sky, water. An iron J stands for the Holy Name of Jesus — "In the Name of Jesus let every knee bow of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth" (Introit, Feast of the Holy Name).

—Arts and Letters, one half the panel presenting a staff of Gregorian chant, one of the ear-

Artist and Aide

Monitor photo by Ray De Aragon

Mosaicist Louisa Jenkins has enthusiastic helper in Sister Luke as "Sophia Mural" takes shape on wall of East hall, new College of Holy Names campus in Oakland. Sister heads college art department.
liest forms of music; the other showing a scroll representing letters and learning. Ironwork here terminates in the letter M for Mary.

Natural Sciences, whose panel contains orbits of revolving atoms, symbolic of science's explorations today.

Commissioned last year, Mrs. Jenkins began her work in Advent at her Big Sur studio. She literally started with "nothing but the image of a bare wall" after Sister Emilie, CHN, director of development, and Sister Luke, head of the art department, promised to allow her a free hand in the design.

From the architects she had the dimensions of the wall, then not even built.

"I went home," she said, "and just began to think. What is a college? It's a place to seek wisdom. Wisdom? There's a whole book by that name in the Old Testament. Why not look there?"

"By feeling, by experience —and by stepping back occasionally for a look," she chuckled. "My studio is 70 feet long."

As the mosaic went up, piece by piece, Mrs. Jenkins had other helpers besides the workmen. With her on the scaffolding have been girls from Sister Luke's art classes—and Sister Luke herself, a white apron covering her habit.

"It's good for the students to be a part of the work that's to be a part of their life," said the artist.

Ten years a mosaicist, after long training in other forms of art, Mrs. Jenkins has won nationwide renown for her designs, many of them liturgical. Other Catholic institutions that have used her work are Mount Angel Abbey in Oregon (stations of the cross) and Mont La Salle Novitiate, Napa (altar triptych).
Wolfskill: She had subsequent exhibits of her "concretions," as she first called them, but they were too diaphanous for such a horrible word! And then another exhibit of her boxes, another phase of her development, when she came back from Mexico and was very much inspired by all kinds of images and also bits of old missals and icons and so forth that she saw down there.

DuCasse: That is wonderful to know. My memory is foggy on certain aspects, and I couldn't remember whether you and Louisa had known each other prior to that, but that's great, I'm glad I had a hand in it. The Lord was pushing me around nicely!

Well, that's one of the questions I had here, that you should tell us something about your side of that mosaic mural.

**Teachers, Critics, Exhibitions, and the Mission Series**

DuCasse: I see you have something there for us?

Wolfskill: Well, just in case I need to refresh my memory, this is all my curriculum vitae on cards, because I'm asked questions all the time.

DuCasse: Oh, of course you are. Was it after that then that you started that series of the beautiful watercolors of the missions?

Wolfskill: No, actually that was prior. It was in fulfillment of my work for my master's of fine arts, and I wanted to do something that inspired me, and instead of painting a lot of disparate paintings I wanted to do something that had a corpus to it. And naturally with my roots in California history, my father having brought me up on the folklore of California, it was second nature.

Previously in college when I got a chance to write a paper in an English class, I chose Moorish architecture. Of course the Moorish influence was extremely strong in the Spanish California architecture. So I had been fed mind, heart, and soul on the missions from the beginning. In fact, my father used to take us to all kinds of public monuments and museums and so forth and we were frequently at the missions. He would head for the wine cellar and I would head for the church! [laughing]
Wolfskill: One time when I was giving one of a series of lectures later I was telling about all this and he was present at the lecture. Some people came up and congratulated him instead of me at the end of it! And then he sent me an empty wine bottle. I'd never received a package from him in my life, and then I got this empty wine bottle. I was so delighted!

DuCasse: What a witty gentleman your father was.

Wolfskill: So the next lecture was at the Athen's Club in Oakland, and I was telling this present audience and they were just roaring they thought it was so funny.

So anyway, I toured the mission with my best friend who was a driver, Sister Mary Dolora, and for two weeks we photographed and sketched the missions and had all kinds of wonderful adventures. When I came home I was supercharged, and in eighteen days I did eighty watercolors. That averaged six a day. And I threw out forty of them and kept forty to present for my master's.

I didn't know it at the time, but my professor, who was Louis Miljarak was also the professor of photography, so he made a double set of slides. One he gave to me and the other he showed to his classes to inspire them. I had had a very hard time getting going since I had to go to summer sessions for my work because I taught full classes. So I used to have to start and stop and start and stop, and I got so discouraged that one day I went to him and I said, "Mr. Miljarak, why don't you call 'the dogs,' just write to my provincial or phone her and tell her that I can't paint." And he said something to me, I don't know what, but the next day he said, "Whose work is that on the wall? I don't recognize it."

I timidly raised my hand, and he said, "I can't believe it." And then he told the class what had happened. He said, "I have no idea what I said to her! But whatever it was, she has started to paint."

I used to tell my own students that, you know, if you stop just five minutes too soon it could be crucial to your life. It's hard, and you have to take all kinds of criticism and discouragement to get on with it. I was thrilled later on when I heard that he was doing this to his classes to inject them with a little courage.

DuCasse: That is wonderful. Well, he had a good example there.
Wolfskill: Well, then, it was Louisa actually who made me famous because she was a good friend of Ninfa Valvo, who was the curator of painting at the de Young Museum, and she interested Ninfa in my work, and she arranged for an exhibit that occupied the center of the museum!

DuCasse: I remember that.

Wolfskill: And it was next to-- Who is that wonderful woman? I can't remember her name.

DuCasse: Dorr Bothwell?

Wolfskill: Yes, Dorr Bothwell hung in the gallery beside me. Well, Ninfa got on the tail of [Alfred] Frankenstein to give me a review, and when she phoned him, he said, "I've already written it, because I'm going to Germany tomorrow." So I had this marvelous critique, it was just really thrilling.

DuCasse: That's great, because he was a very touchy person, and he only just picked certain people to really review.

Wolfskill: He hardly mentioned Dorr Bothwell, and I already knew her and knew what a genius she was, and admired her work.

DuCasse: Well, he probably thought he had already given Dorr plenty in the past, and here was somebody new that he really got excited about. That's a great tribute from Mr. Frankenstein.

Wolfskill: I have the correspondence between Louisa and Ninfa, passing the letters and the critique back and forth, and both seemed thrilled because I was their baby! Well, they kept it there for three months. I had to ask to have my work back so I could take it to Phoenix, so that also was another feather in my cap. And actually the reason I was interested in my personal aggrandizement was I was sent to the college to put the art department on the map there, so naturally to get started I had to get myself on the road.

DuCasse: And this was while it was still by Lake Merritt in Oakland, isn't that right? The beautiful, old buildings.

Wolfskill: Yes. So my first exhibit was one I gave myself. And then-- Oh, who was my professor? Eugen Neuhaus had been my professor of philosophy down at Arts and Crafts, and of course I invited him to come and see my work, and he gave me a rave criticism. Then he got Paul Mills to come up and see it. Paul was the director of the gallery at the Oakland Museum. So he gave me an exhibit. Then later on, when they also used Kaiser, he gave
Wolfskill: me another one there. Some woman phoned me while it was at Kaiser, and she said, "Sister, my husband and I are moving east, and before we go we want to see your California missions. Is there any opportunity to do so?" And I said, "Yes, they're at Kaiser, just go down and see them." I thought that was a tribute too that my missions epitomized California for her.

DuCasse: Well, it should have been. Because you use so much imagination and such an unusual viewpoint, you brought out the special qualities of each one, but not in the usual way.

Wolfskill: Not the usual "saccharine way," as Frankenstein said. They weren't representational, they were impressionistic in the sense that I painted them the way they impressed me.

I got lots of support from my Arts and Crafts teachers; even those who hadn't taught me but who had known me then on the campus were very encouraging, and of course a beginner needs plenty of that. And so that's what I tried to transmit to my students was a sense of encouragement along with hard work.

DuCasse: Oh, I agree. I try to do that with mine. I think you can do much more with a positive attitude; then the criticism you give them they accept.

Wolfskill: Louis [Miljarak] taught us that. He said, "The first thing you do when you give a criticism is to say all of the good things, because then that gives you the permission to suggest some corrections on the negative side." He was a marvelous man and a great teacher.

DuCasse: Yes, he was indeed. Well, that is very interesting. I never had placed your series of the missions in its proper time slot.

Wolfskill: Then I had thirteen one-woman shows, up and down the coast. And at that time I was known as Sister Mary Luke, and I didn't want anybody to have prejudice against my work as a religious or as a woman. Because in those far-off days of the fifties women were still nobodies.

DuCasse: Yes, indeed, right.

Wolfskill: So I signed "S.M. Luke." And one of our sisters was viewing them in the Pasadena Public Library, and there was a couple there, and the woman said to the man, "Who is this fellow Luke?" [laughter] So I had accomplished what I wanted.
DuCasse: Well, certainly your work would never have been recognizable as "woman's work." There was a period when one could distinguish very definitely.

Wolfskill: Dainty, boudoirish. The mother of one of our sisters bought my first painting that I sold, and the superior lowered the price that I put on it. I think she made me sell it for twenty dollars. The woman took it to have it framed, and the framer raved about it and he charged thirty dollars for the frame for my twenty-dollar painting.

So she said, "Well, if you like sister's work so well, why don't you give her an exhibit here in the shop?"

And he said, "Oh, no, I couldn't do that, she's never had one."

Well, that just got my craw, so when I had the bottega for my art department, I set apart a section of it for a gallery, and the first thing I did was to phone the art colleges in the area and to ask for an introduction to young women who had just graduated and gotten their MFAs so that I might give them their first show, so that nobody could say that they had never had a show. And they were very grateful and excited, and I made some wonderful friends.

DuCasse: It's true. Someone has to do that, has to give you your first chance.

Wolfskill: Another thing that I did that was fun—it wasn't exactly liturgical in one sense, but it had a bearing on it—I was teaching Scripture at that time, at one part of my career at the college, and so the first thing I did was to go down to the Jewish educational center and meet Seymour Fromer, who was the director of the museum [Magnes Museum]. And I made friends with him. So later on I wanted to have an exhibit of a Jewish artist, and I had thought of a local artist, but Seymour and his wife Rebecca had just come back from Israel where they had met an artist in Tel Aviv. (I'm ashamed to say I can't even remember his name at the moment.) At any rate, they had some of his work, and with the help of Murray Lehr [?], who subsidized it, we had an exhibit of Jewish art at the college, and I made many wonderful friends in the Jewish colony. In
Wolfskill: fact, I just got a letter yesterday in response to the moped article from somebody who had met me through Seymour.* So, it's a wonderful world. She lives right here in Hayward.

DuCasse: Oh, how great. And, you know, there's such a tie-in now since Vatican II when we began to recognize the Jewish heritage of our Christian faith. I mean why shouldn't there be a really very beautiful exchange between us?

Wolfskill: Exactly. Well, this was an ecumenical gesture because I was teaching Scripture, but it was way before anybody was thinking of ecumenism, at least in our area.

DuCasse: Well, fortunately some of us had that spirit prior to being recognized by it!

When we were speaking about Ninfa Valvo and so forth, you must have had work in the 1953 exhibit that we had at the de Young Museum. Do you remember that?

Wolfskill: I saw it but I didn't do anything on a professional level because I was still getting my master's at that time. It took me four summers, and I didn't go to the college till '55, and it was after that that I began to be a public character.

DuCasse: But did you see the exhibit?

Wolfskill: That was a wonderful exhibit.

DuCasse: And then of course it was from that that the Catholic Art Forum started, and I don't know whether you knew part of that story and would be interested that Father Meehan was on the committee.

Wolfskill: Yes, I knew him too.

DuCasse: I'm sure you did, and we'll have to talk about him in a few minutes, but he objected to a wonderful piece of work that we had invited. We invited some key artists without jurying them, and one of them was Elah Hale Hays, and I don't know if you remember her?

*Hayward Daily Record, Weds., Mar. 30, 1983, Headline: "Elderly get a spiritual lift from moped-riding nun." "Sister Maria Luisa spends more than 20 hours a week zipping along on her moped, comforting 300 sick and elderly people confined to homes and convalescent hospitals." [appended]
Wolfskill: No, I don't.

DuCasse: Her work was a very beautiful thing, "My Peace I Give unto You," which was made of the most beautiful structural steel. It was an exquisite thing, a cruciform Christ. He would not allow that to be shown in the exhibit because he thought it was inferior material. It just shows how antiquated some of us were at that time. So we had to reject that after we had invited it, so this was what made us realize that education was needed. And one of the reasons the Art Forum was founded was to begin to educate the clergy, the religious, and the laity that such things were superficial and not right at all.

That's interesting that this came up because I wanted to ask if you had known Father Meehan and if you remember anything much about him and his activities.

Wolfskill: I just remember that he was quite a dandy.

DuCasse: Very much so!

Wolfskill: And he had a chalice that was so ornate and so loaded with jewels that he couldn't get any insurance on it.

DuCasse: Oh no! Well, you know he did a monstrance for Vallombrosa and I'm sure it's the one they've been using because I'm sure it's the only one they have. It came out the other day for one of our activities, and it was so simple I couldn't believe it was designed by him; it was really beautiful. Because I know he had a tendency for ornateness.

Wolfskill: Well, I think because he had Thomas Meehan, his movie-actor brother, who subsidized him in his artistic ventures—.

Benny Bufano, and Jean Varda

Wolfskill: It just occurred to me while we were talking that the first year I was at the college, which was the old campus, I had the nerve to invite Benny Bufano for lunch and a lecture. He was a great rabble-rouser, and I always admired his work, I just loved it, particularly his animals and St. Francis.

DuCasse: And he had the courage of his convictions, he had character and he was a good person.
Wolfskill: Yes, yes. I think one of his most impressive works is the beautiful crucifixion in which Christ's trigger finger is missing, as was his.

DuCasse: Yes, as was his.

Wolfskill: Then, of course, I already have mentioned Varda; he used to call me his favorite nun. And one time one of our sisters' brother was out on the Bay on a yacht and saw this habit standing on the Vallejo, his boat which he shared with Alan Watts, and he said, "I've got to see who that is, it can only be Sister Luke." And sure enough, they drew alongside and there I was with Varda. I would take my classes over there periodically, but I also had him come and visit with and talk to my department because although he had this bohemian exterior he had a marvelously deep spiritual interior, which goes back to that call to the priesthood.

DuCasse: Of course. And his Greek soul.

Wolfskill: And his Greek soul. His mother was a visionary. She got her instructions from Our Lady, he said; he didn't tell that to many people. I have a correspondence of I think thirty letters in my portfolio here, and recently Virginia, his first wife, got in touch with me and she borrowed them because she wants to do a life of him.

DuCasse: Oh, splendid. There should be one, because he was a fascinating man and a very fine artist.

Wolfskill: Yes, a wonderful person. I know God only looks below the shirt, which was always in this case very flamboyant and colorful! [laughing]

DuCasse: Definitely. I hope the Lord appreciates that. [laughter]

Wolfskill: Oh, I'm sure He did. And you know on this boat that I have a print of. He particularly loved to sail past a place where some sisters had a summer place on the Bay, and they'd all sit on the shore and wave to him if he went by, and that was quite a feather in his cap!

DuCasse: How delightful! Oh, he was an amazing man. I knew him briefly in Carmel the last few months of my father's life. And we got them both together, and they each tried to outdo the other in flamboyance. We had quite a session with those two! [laughing]
Fabric Works: Subjects and Inspirations

DuCasse: We'd like to discuss then some of your embroideries. Many of those you did for chapels and for the church.

Wolfskill: Well, they arrived in one case in a chapel. However, I was just thinking about what inspired me. I think there were two things. In the summer of '57 or '58, I forget which, I went to the University of British Columbia for a summer session because I was very weak in figure, and I drew the figure in the morning and sculptured it in the afternoon. I had the same professor, so I made quite a bit of progress, and got some confidence. Among the clay things that I did in relief toward the end of the course, I got into some madonnas that were Byzantine in inspiration. I always loved that form of art anyway because I think that it's very incarnational, and that of course interested me. Then probably Varda had a lot of influence as far as using fabric was concerned; although I used it very differently there's still that derivation and inspiration.

So I think my first one was of Our Lady in very cool colors on natural linen. I raffled that and one of my students won it; I called off the raffle when I got to a hundred dollars. Then I did a red one using telephone wire for the delineation of the face and the hands. All the rest was embroidery. It was on red burlap, and I called it, "Love Is Stronger than Hate," and I worked it in pink and red because in Heywood Broun's autobiography I remember him saying that "the pope's encyclicals make the Communist Manifesto look pink." So I was juxtaposing in my mind pink and red, and it had the tree of life and Satan underfoot. A woman bought it in Sacramento because she saw it in a show I had up there—a religious show, I can't remember the name of it—but the Lutherans sponsored it, and it hangs in her bedroom. She sent me some very lovely pictures of it.

Then there was one of St. Michael that my favorite student, Carol Larkin, has hanging in her vestibule. And it's about one-by-two feet, done on natural linen. The inspiration for that was a little, tiny picture I saw in Life magazine of a wood carving on a church door in Coptic Africa. So I blew that up. I understood when I was teaching the history of art that the miniatures in the Bible and the Books of Hours were the inspiration of the frescoes and murals, so I didn't think there was anything wrong with lifting this! But changing into a new medium makes a great deal of difference.
Wolfskill: And, let's see, then there was a Stella Matutina which was, I think, another one that was on red. It was a beautiful one with a lot of gold thread in it. And my student Carol Larkin used my cartoon for it and did one for my sister in colors that went with her home. It's entirely different actually. I think Carol's more creative than I am! I taught her embroidery, but she did things that were very, very free which I admired immensely.

There was one I called "The Christian Vocation." It was done at the time I was teaching Scripture, both Old and New Testament, for two semesters. And so I wanted to do something to show how inextricably united the two Testaments are, and I chose the embrace of Elizabeth and Mary in the mystery of the Visitation. Elizabeth was dressed in the colors of evening and night, and Mary in the colors of dawn and spring. And their figures are interlocked as one figure. The Sun of Justice in Mary's womb is the golden effulgence that dissipates the darkness that surrounds the figures. And that's the one I loved. In fact, one of my students bought it, but she never came to get it, as she moved to Southern California, so it was hanging in the college chapel from the choir loft, and from there it was stolen. I've always prayed that it would be an instrument of conversion for the thief! Or for the buyer!

Then I have done some others that were not strictly religious. When I came back from Europe I did a blue seascape from found fabric and I called that "The Blue Coast," but it was dedicated to Mary, Star Of The Sea. And this one which you see [gesturing] is "Costa del Sol," which is dedicated to Our Lord, the "Sun of Justice."

DuCasse: Oh, that is a beauty.

Wolfskill: So everything I ever did had religious connotations, even though it may not have had the title.

DuCasse: So-called religious subjects, as such.

Wolfskill: Yes. Because if you love the Lord it spills out in what you do.

DuCasse: It certainly does. Oh, indeed. Well, I'm always so impressed with your beautiful embroideries. Because I think it is a technique which is suitable; it's a wonderful way of expressing your ideas.

Wolfskill: Well, when we were speaking at our interval there, we remembered that we were both on the Catholic Art Commission [Oakland Diocese]. After Vatican II the bishop [Bishop Floyd Begin] came
Wolfskill: home with his pockets full of ideas that he should have a committee for this, that, and the other. So the priest--whose name I have forgotten, who was in charge of the liturgical art of the area--called me and asked me who I would recommend for the committee. I gave him the names of all of my artist friends, of course, who were intelligent and wonderful people, yourself among them, and the first thing I knew I was asked to be on it myself. I didn't think that was going to happen.

So we functioned ineffectually, as you remember, since we were told by the Bishop that we could be heard but that his opinion would prevail. [laughing]

DuCasse: Yes, we tried hard enough while we were doing it, but it died a natural death.

Wolfskill: Rambusch [church designers, decorators, and craftsmen, New York City] did it [renovation of Oakland Cathedral, St. Francis de Sales], and I really liked it.

DuCasse: Oh yes, I think he did a very good job.

Wolfskill: He's doing St. Leander's, and they have the plans there, really marvelous. He, too, has learned a great deal through the years.

DuCasse: I'm sure he has, because he had imagination and his heart was in the right place, and I think he has tried to live up to the new concepts in liturgical arts. It's good to know that that's happening because we put the Catholic Art Forum to sleep in the sixties, after we felt that it had fulfilled its mission, which was really education in a sense. And because the emphasis of the Vatican II took us a little bit away from art as being a necessary part of liturgical functions. You remember how--

Wolfskill: Oh, I do! Anybody could do it. And we had the most gosh-awful banners--

DuCasse: That's it, it became a free-for-all.

Wolfskill: --an opportunity for the hoi polloi, whether they had any education or not, and I think that education in art is an extremely powerful factor for the development of the human being.
Wolfskill: That takes me a step further. I didn't think to talk about this, but in February I went to my first week-long session with the RICA, which is the Rite of Initiation for Christian Adults. This is going back to our roots in the catechumenate. It's transforming parishes that are using it. It's absolutely fabulous the way the whole Easter liturgy came alive for people in a way it had never done before.

DuCasse: We have that at our parish too.

Wolfskill: At the week-long session there were experts there and there was an environmentalist, in fact a group that functioned with her. Their environments for the rites were absolutely gorgeous, and I think this is going to be a transforming factor. Our parish church looks like Breuner's, I say, because there's no relationship between one thing and the other and there's no focal point.

DuCasse: Like the cathedral in San Francisco, I might add, St. Mary's, everything is hodgepodge.

Wolfskill: True, but I think the baldachino calls your attention to the altar. That's beautiful.

DuCasse: That's the one redeeming feature.

Wolfskill: But a priest I was talking to said, "Well, why don't you be the environmentalist?" And I said, "Well, just get me in that job and I'll take over."

Oh, you can't worship in a place where there are nothing but dead flowers and banners that are all over the place and ten times too much furniture. It's sickening, and there I saw how beautifully it was done--they went out into the woods and got whole branches of trees as well as ferns and rocks. For the living water somebody contrived a way to make the water flow into the little garden that they had there.

A number of people were in it on a committee basis, and so a committee--if it's small enough and intelligent enough--is a wonderful way to work because instead of having 100 percent of one person's brain you have 50, 60, 90, 80, 100 percent from a number of people and you get some really rich results. Besides, it activates people in the Church and makes everybody develop his/her gifts.
DuCasse: True. Because even though it was very essential that we come back to the source, which is the altar and the mass and so forth, there still has to be that environment. That is a wonderful way to put it. I'd never thought that. How very inspiring.

Wolfskill: So that may be the next step forward to get the artists back into the act. Because I remember reading in *Liturgical Arts* that artists considered it the epitome—or the apogee is perhaps a better word—of their careers to do something for the church, even though they were not ecclesial [sic] people. Because just to work for God—to work for the church was to work for God—and to make an offering of themselves through their art to God, was the ultimate for them. Remember the wonderful vestments that used to be done?

**Ethel Souza, and the Serra Shop**

DuCasse: Oh, extraordinary.

That brings up one of the artists that you may have known, Barbara Zrnich?

Wolfskill: I remember her name.

DuCasse: She was also a good friend of Ethel Souza's. That's what we wanted to bring out, Ethel and her Junipero Serra Shop. She worked with Ethel a great deal and she did a number of very beautiful vestments, and she also has done fantastic embroidery banners. We have one at Vallombrosa that is exquisite. It's an angel, a blue angel, in the dining room. And she has that same ability you have, really, though she's not doing it in such abstract terms, but her use of fabrics and line is very wonderful.

And another person— I don't know that Emi did much of that type of thing, but don't you know Emi Luptak?

Wolfskill: Oh, yes, of course. She was my colleague.

DuCasse: Emi has done some very wonderful things, and I know she's probably trying to do in her parish up in Fairfield what you are doing here.

Wolfskill: Yes, she was a very Catholic activist!
DuCasse: Oh, very much so. And she was a minister when they first allowed women to be ministers. I haven't seen her for a long time.

Wolfskill: Well, then we could talk about Valyermo and all of the Benedictines down there and of the oblates who were also in many cases members of the Catholic Art Forum.

DuCasse: Oh, definitely.

Wolfskill: They cross-pollinated and fertilized Catholic Art at both ends of the line.

DuCasse: Oh, yes, and Louisa brought that into her interview, because she's so close to them. Well, all of these elements have been important. Now, let's get back to the Junipero Serra Shop, and what you remember of their activities and how you felt about what they were doing.

Wolfskill: Well, I think I hardly ever go to a Catholic bookshop anymore that I don't think of that place because there's nothing like it. It was sort of a physical hub for the Catholic Art Forum because whereas Father [Wm.] Monihan, S.J., who was our guiding light, often gave the space at USF, he couldn't do it perpetually. Whereas, if you went to the Serra Shop, you would meet other artists and you would see books, hear records, buy cards. All inspirational.

DuCasse: Yes, and see other people's art.

Wolfskill: And be generally stimulated. There was nothing inferior. So often bookshops, especially the Catholic breed, have a great deal of junk mixed in with the real, so that the uneducated when they come in they won't know the difference! But here they would have to know the difference, because if they did have anything it was hidden under the counter. And Ethel was such a wonderful person.

DuCasse: Oh, yes. She had that fire, the Holy Spirit motivated in her extraordinary way. I was able to get a tape of her, and she remembered quite a bit. There was more that I would have liked to have drawn from her, but she seems to have given as much as she wanted to.

Wolfskill: I had an exhibit there too, so I'm happy about that.

DuCasse: I think I remember seeing it. Weren't they the watercolors?

Wolfskill: They were the missions, one of the thirteen shows.
By Karen Holzmeister
Staff writer

HAYWARD — Most people pray to get to heaven, but Sister Maria Luisa is paving her way on a shiny red moped.

Sister Maria Luisa spends more than 20 hours a week zipping along on her moped, comforting 300 sick and elderly people confined to homes and convalescent hospitals.

"Our Lord was not reclusive and my life is beyond the classroom, too," said the retired teacher, who puts around on her Puch Maxi at 30 miles an hour.

Policemen have pulled her over for running red lights. Passersby have shouted "Hi Ho, Silver" and "The Flying Nun." She's gouged her boots and scarred her shins in tumbles to the pavement.

But the plucky nun, at 68, is not fazed.

"I'm far from finished unless someone mows me down," she explained.

While some people her age may look forward to a rocking chair, Sister Maria Luisa is thinking ahead to her next tuneup.

Preparing to go for a ride, she resembles a sporty Yuletide elf, with her green quilted jacket and knee-high, lace-up boots. Before slipping on thick gloves, she tucks her gray curls inside a candy-red helmet.

The helmet came, Sister Maria Luisa said, after a friend warned: "You've only got one set of brains, so get with it."

A mischievous smile curved her lips when she said she is a pacesetter in the Holy Names teaching order. Sister Maria Luisa was one of the first nuns in the order to exchange the thick folds of a long religious dress and veil for street clothes in 1967. She thinks she is the first member of her order to use a moped.
This nun has a different habit

Continued from page 1

The moped comes in handy for her ministry to the sick and elderly of St. Bede's Catholic Church on Patrick Avenue.

When she arrived at the parish three years ago, Sister Maria Luisa said its sheer size ruled out making her rounds on foot.

The parish, one of the largest in the Catholic Diocese of Oakland, is bounded by Jackson Street on the north, Industrial Boulevard on the west, Industrial Parkway on the south and Huntwood Avenue on the east.

A car was also out, Sister Maria Luisa said, "since I never ran anything more mechanical than a sewing machine."

She started out on a large tricycle built by a parishioner. Teased about riding it, she progressed to a two-wheeler. "I rode at quite a good clip, just tearing along," she said.

Then knee problems flared up, so last October she finally took Monsignor George Francis, St. Bede's pastor, up on a promise to provide a motor vehicle, gas and insurance.

The 100-pound moped, just 30 pounds lighter than Sister Maria Luisa, was the answer.

Despite failing the cycle licensing exam the first time, Sister Maria Luisa wasn't discouraged.

"I didn't feel so badly," she confessed. "I was talking to a guy with a pigtail, jacket and boots — a real biker — at the license bureau. He said he failed, too."

Her longest trip has been down Mission Boulevard to Warm Springs in Fremont for a tuneup.

Sister Maria Luisa has some unorthodox maintenance methods. On cold mornings, when the engine won't start, she aims the warm air nozzle of her hair dryer at the motor.

"Then I give the moped a kick and off she goes."

Her tool box — a cigar box — also contains a book of religious readings.

When the weather was at its worst this winter, she left the moped in the convent garage and several parishioners chauffeured her to appointments.

Sister Maria Luisa's ministry to the elderly is her latest calling. She has taught at three grade levels and was a missionary before coming to St. Bede's.

"I'm a retread, not retired," she said.

At the peak of her teaching career, she headed the art department of Holy Names College in Oakland. She started her retirement in 1977 with a three-year stint of missionary work in Arequipa, Peru.

Sister Maria Luisa said she is doing her present work because she has always loved the elderly.

Born Norma Luisa Wolfskill in Los Angeles, she grew up in a Holy Names convent school after her mother died.

"I loved everything about the sisters, most of all their wonderful love of life and ability to laugh. My father placed me in the convent because he knew they would take care of me for love, not money," she said.

After graduating from high school in 1933, Sister Maria Luisa applied to the teaching order, but the nuns suggested she take a year to experience the outside world.

Thus, she joined the order in 1934. She moved to the Bay Area more than 30 years ago to teach.

She accepts the discipline of religious life, and said it has not stifled her individual freedom or forced her to submerge her personality.

For years, her religious name was Sister Mary Luke in honor of St. Luke. She later changed it to Maria Luisa.

Laughing, Sister Maria Luisa said she never regretted giving up her baptismal name of Norma. Norma, the title character of an Italian opera, was a pagan priestess not faithful to her vows, she said.

A one-time landscape artist, Sister Maria Luisa said she has virtually given up art, with the exception of calligraphy and some work with fabric.

Meanwhile, she is having a good time performing daily acts of kindness and, as she jumps on her moped, she is having a little fun along the way.
DuCasse: Yes, yes, because I was sure I had seen it there, very definitely.

Wolfskill: When I moved from the college, I threw out a great deal, but there are certain things I kept. Like my correspondence with Louisa, and my correspondence with Varda. I kept those. But also with [Konrad] Adenauer's son Paul, a priest. Because he came to the college, and the president nudged me to give a painting to him, so it hangs in his father's place, Rondorf on the Rhine!

A Sense of Achievement

DuCasse: I've been shown a wonderful album of information and articles, pictures and so forth all to do with the series on the missions, the watercolors on the missions, and where they were exhibited, all the correspondence and all kinds of fascinating details. [looking through album]

Wolfskill: In the days when I was Luke, I chose the name Luke because of St. Luke, the patron of art, and I subsequently learned that he's the patron of butchers and brewers.

DuCasse: Oh really? Not of doctors? I thought he was supposed to be a doctor.

Wolfskill: Yes, of doctors and butchers, and they never mention that in front of the surgeons. And he was patron of brewers, because he had his feast at the midst of Octoberfest.

DuCasse: [still looking through album] Oh, your beautiful, beautiful calligraphy, oh, I envy you.

Wolfskill: That's the exhibit, I mean the critique. [Frankenstein's review]

DuCasse: Oh, isn't that wonderful [reading], "The missions had fire but no orange peels!" [laughing]

Wolfskill: And these letters are so beautiful and so appreciative that they really carry me on.

This is the correspondence between Ninfa and Louisa—

That's a darling letter from one of my Dominican artist friends over at St. Albert's. I associated with them too. I think Louisa got me into everything I ever got into! [laughing] She'd prod and scold and encourage alternately as the need arose!
Wolfskill: [referring to album] That's the one that was stolen, the Visitation.

This set of missions I did another year, and they don't have quite the zip and the inspiration of the others, but they're joyful.

DuCasse: Well, that is splendid, it's a good record of all your achievements in that particular line.

Well, let's see what else we can get from you. Any other ideas that you just want to talk about?

Wolfskill: Oh, nothing comes-. Talk is what generates these things.

DuCasse: I know, one has to do that. And I have to be careful that I don't allow too much of myself on the tape. I have a tendency to, you know.

Wolfskill: You know, now that I am not producing anymore, except a bit of calligraphy now and again, joining my sisters who have this grant I was telling you about, it started at the college here in Oakland, and then it went to Washington to Fort Wright, and now it's going to be at Marylhurst this year. And I felt like I was a retiree as far as art was concerned, not as far as other aspects of my life are concerned, but I found—and it was acknowledged by those present—that I had an enormous contribution to make. A year ago January I took the Meyers-Briggs Test for the first time, and I learned something about myself that I always thought was a deficit, but it's just a certain kind of character; that I need people to generate thought in me.

For example, they send me something with blanks to fill in. Well, they remain blanks because I don't fill anything in. The minute I get with a group of people I get charged! And I have a thousand ideas. In fact, I feel like I have to keep my clamps on so I won't talk too much. Just like you, I think of things I haven't thought of for years because it just turns me on to be with people.

DuCasse: Well, I feel the same way. I think maybe the artist needs this because even though he has to work really by himself and quietly, he needs this other generative force.

Wolfskill: Feedback.

DuCasse: Feedback, true. And people. People are very important to you because you deal with tangibles, with the world.
Wolfskill: That's why I think the friendships we have made in the Catholic Art Forum are invaluable because they were deeply spiritual friendships on a level of development of our own personalities that just drew each of us out in a different way. So although if you ask me the names of some of these people, if I remember their work, I might not be able to give you anything except the aroma of the stew. Everybody contributed something that was rich and delicious.

DuCasse: Which was received by everyone in turn.

Wolfskill: That's right. And only God knows how much of it touched us and made us what we are and has transformed our own art.

DuCasse: That's true. You mentioned right near the beginning about Effie Fortune. Did you know Effie at all?

Wolfskill: No, I didn't know her, and the first thing I saw that she did was the chapel of Providence Hospital. But I know Monsignor Brennan very well and of course his whole thrust has been to document and publish her life. And I don't know whether he's done it yet.

The next one she did I think was down at Pacific Grove, a very beautiful little church.

DuCasse: That she did first actually. She founded her Monterey Guild in Pacific Grove.

Wolfskill: In fact Ethel started in Monterey. Well, she moved to Monterey.

DuCasse: They moved to Monterey. Actually Ethel was out of it by that time, and the Goldens moved it to Monterey, but it was past its time. It was just like the Forum; at a certain period of time it was the end. And the same with the Junipero Serra Shop.

Wolfskill: Yes, and I don't think we should hang onto things and try to resuscitate them when they're dead. I always think of the Book of Exodus where the Lord commands them to take just enough manna for their needs. And those who took more and hoarded it because they didn't trust the providence of God turned to worms. And I think that's true of inspiration, which is one of the great gifts of the Holy Spirit, that they're always fresh and if you don't share them and pass them along then they not only won't nourish you, but they stagnate and do nothing for anybody else.
DuCasse: I'm so encouraged by what you've told me of this new movement in the parishes.

Wolfskill: It's throughout the Church, it comes from Rome, and it's a document that's been worked on very carefully. And it's so thrilling. A great deal is being written on it.

DuCasse: Is there some central writing about this?

Wolfskill: Oh, yes. The rite itself is central and then everybody works it out to fit the local situation.

DuCasse: I'll have to check at my parish for that because I know that at one point they mentioned this to us and I may have received something in the mail.

Wolfskill: You would love to go to one of the workshops. The one I went to was at Presentation College, and you can join the environmentalist group because you sign up to serve as you wish. You may also sign up to act as a sponsor or as a catechumen or as a neophyte or an inquirer and go through the experience because, you know, just hearing about things you could read a book at home, but it's doing it that makes the difference.

You know, you're sitting in front of something that I did for fun, but I really like it. It was one of the doors at Mission San Miguel and it had the reja, and behind that was a piece of plate glass and beyond that a patio. Well, this intercepting piece of plate glass gave me a reflection of the fountain in the garden out in front of the mission and then it compenetrated [sic] with the dark passageway that led to the patio beyond. To me it meant what I put on there by calligraphy from Solomon's Song.

DuCasse: [reading] "She is a garden enclosed, my sister, my promised bride; Song of Songs 4:12" and "He looks in at the window, He peers through the lattice. Song of Songs 9:2"

Oh, that is just beautiful.

Wolfskill: And in this intervening painting there's a woman's figure, which I never intended, but I see her as plain as day.

Can you see the eye, the mouth, the nose?

DuCasse: Yes.

Wolfskill: This is unintentional.
DuCasse: Yes, and she's really a part of that composition.

Wolfskill: Colorwise, she flows into it.

DuCasse: Flows into it. It's amazing how those things happen.

Wolfskill: Yes, it is.

DuCasse: I was looking at it briefly when I was across the room, but then we changed our seating so I didn't get to look at it. That's a beautiful concept. This is what is so marvelous about the imagination being able to conjure these things up.

Wolfskill: Well, I think we can wind this up by praising God who gave us His gifts so richly.

DuCasse: And for the rich treasure of our friendship; even though we don't see each other too often, there's always something that is there.

Wolfskill: It's like Fray Luis when he was jugged by the Inquisition. Remember, he was lecturing and five years later he said, "As I was saying--"! And he carried on from where he left off. And that's what friends can do, especially friends that have Christ as their center.

DuCasse: Definitely. Well, it's been a pleasure to do this with you.

Wolfskill: And we say, Amen, Hallelujah!

DuCasse: Amen, Hallelujah!

Transcriber: Joyce Minick
Final Typist: Catherine Winter
Renaissance of Religious Art and Architecture in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1946-1968

Mary Erckenbrack

AN ARTIST'S RELIGIOUS WORKS ON TILE AND IN CLAY

An Interview Conducted by
Micaela DuCasse
in 1984
A memorial celebration will be held for Mary Erckenbrack, a prominent craft artist with a national reputation who was a longtime figure in the North Beach community. She died of a stroke Thursday at 81.

Ms. Erckenbrack was distinguished in the areas of ceramic and tile art and sculpture.

She was born in Seattle but grew up in Brazil and in Europe, as her father, a U.S. shipping commissioner, moved from port to port. She came to San Francisco in 1935, after a brief marriage, and chose to live in North Beach. Her works were commissioned by the Shriners’ Hospital for Crippled Children in the Sunset District, the Hamilton Recreation Center in the Fillmore, the Ping Yuen housing project in Chinatown and other institutions.

She also sold her work at department stores in San Francisco and nationally, and operated craft shops around the city, including Mary E’s Mud Shop on Clay Street.

She is survived by her brother, Eugene, of Seattle and by several nephews and nieces.

A memorial will be held next Thursday from 4 to 6 p.m. at Caesar’s Restaurant at Powell and Bay streets in San Francisco.
AN ARTIST'S RELIGIOUS WORKS ON TILE AND IN CLAY
It was a special pleasure to renew acquaintance with Mary Erckenbrack after a lapse of several years. We met in her apartment in San Francisco, not far from Fisherman's Wharf. From her window ships could be seen plying their way in and out of the Bay, against a backdrop of East Bay hills. Within, the walls were covered with drawings, paintings, prints, and ceramic reliefs. Standing here and there were some of her sculptures from past periods. Truly an artist's studio-home.

We partook of a delicious lunch, reminiscent of many we had shared in the past in Ruth Cravath's stoneyard on Potrero Hill during the weekly meetings of the sculpture class we both attended. The setting was a nostalgic remembrance of the recent past as introduction to our interview about Mary's life as an artist and specifically her participation in the liturgical art renaissance in the San Francisco Bay Area.

I remembered vividly the tour we had made years ago, probably in the late sixties, to Hanna Center, with Ruth and Mary and a group from the sculpture class, to view the work each had done for that splendid project in Sonoma County. Mary's stations of the cross and a holy water font were, in scale and simplicity and directness of design, perfect for the modest proportions of the sisters' chapel. Her style in ceramic material was harmonious in spirit with that of Ruth Cravath's rugged stone façade sculpture and the large marble relief stations in the main chapel. It was a happy team work between two fine sculptors and friends.

Mary Erckenbrack has always been imbued with a religious spirit, whether it was conscious or unconscious. It was quite natural for her to turn to religious subjects at various times in her career. As we hear in her interview, the innate taste of the artist did not always mesh with that of the patron, when it was a member of the clergy or religious order, reminding us of one of the primary reasons for the existence of the Catholic Art Forum.

Micaela DuCasse
Interviewer

September 1984
Piedmont, California
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please print or write clearly)

Your full name: Mary Elizabeth Eckhardt
Date of birth: 11-30-1910 Place of birth: Seattle, Washington
Father's full name: Eugene Philip Eckhardt
Birthplace: Kenlock, Washington
Occupation: Business, Shipping Industry
Mother's full name: Grace Mary Costello
Birthplace: Fargo, N. Dakota
Occupation: Housewife

Present community: San Francisco, California

Education: School in Le Havre, France, University of Washington in Seattle, Fine Arts

Occupation(s): Artist, sculptor, painter - architectural assignments - maintained own business since 1939 - ceramic workshop - Catalina Giffenkein Study Grant, Leiden Post

Special interests or activities: Languages, travel - all arts, music
MARY E. ERCKENBRACK

BIOGRAPHY-RESUME

Native of Seattle, Washington, Early school years spent in Brazil, France and England.


Murals and color plans for architects...Seattle, Washington.

1937: 1st prize in sculpture...Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, Washington.

1938-1939: Return to Brazil and to Argentina...study of Architectural details and the related arts.

1940: Established residence and operating studio in San Francisco, California.

National and international market for ceramics and sculpture: V.C. Morris, Gumps in San Francisco, Gumps, Honolulu, Marshall Fields of Chicago, Lord and Taylor, Macys of New York, Neiman-Marcus, Dallas, Texas, etc.

1948-1949: Established Ceramic Department and taught one year...

1949: Napa Junior College, Napa, California; adult teaching credential retained.

1948 on: Specialized in Architectural assignments...Landscape Architecture, gardens and play grounds, interiors, sculpture, wall decoration and color planning.

Constant exhibitor in local and national museums and galleries. Recipient of prizes, purchase prizes and mentions in San Francisco Art shows and Art Festivals.

1964: A study grant with the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon, Portugal... for the study of "Azulegaria" tiles. A one man show in Estorial of tile panels and sculpture made while in Portugal. A medal from the British Petroleum of Portugal, Lisbon, for an exhibit related to the sea.
1965: Continued design and commissions in San Francisco and Bay Area, California.

Speak the languages of countries visited.

LIST OF WORKS


Tile Mural, black and white, sea motif, 400 sq.ft. for Reuben Hills. Architect: Thomas Church.


High Relief Mural; terra cotta glazed, "Symbols of Healing" Medical Building, 2320 Sutter St., San Francisco. Architects: W. Hertzka and W. Knowles.

Stations of the Cross; tiles, for the Hanna Center for Boys, private chapel. Sonoma, California. Architects: J. John Bolles, Mario Ciampi.


Fountain; glazed terra cotta, "Lotus Flower". IBM Project, San Jose, California. Architect: John Bolles.

Prehistoric Animals for childrens playground, Raynor Park, Sunnyvale, California. Park and Recreation Department of Sunnyvale. Architects: Royston, Hanamoto, Mayes and Beck.

One Man Show of tiles, panels and sculptures in Estoril, Portugal. Work made while in Portugal on a study grant with the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon, Portugal.
Incised line mural. Laborers' Fund Building, Sutter St., San Francisco. Architects: C. Runge, Alfred Johnson.


Christ in Benediction, glazed figure, in the round, 6 ft. on the cross. Lutheran Sanctuary for the Good Shepherd. Concord, California. Architect: Alfred W. Johnson.

Glazed and decorated pipe forms. Fountains, garden seats, containers, tables, plaques and play forms in the Bay Area and nationally.


Planning in Color and Materials for architects and private clients.

GRANTS, SHOWS AND EXHIBITS, PRIZES AND AWARDS


Shows and Exhibits: One man show, 1964, of tile, Estoril, Portugal. Panels and sculpture made during study in Portugal from work done in the factory of Viuva Lamego.

Prizes and Awards: Medal from the British Petroleum of Portugal for a design related to the sea.


Continuous Participation: Art shows, festivals and recipient of numerous prizes, purchase prizes, honorable mentions since 1940. San Francisco and Bay Area.
DuCasse: Mary, where were you born and where were you educated?

Erckenbrack: Well, I was born in Seattle, and lived in Brazil and Europe. While living in Brazil I attended school and learned the language. In Europe during my teens I spent several years in a Dominican convent school, Pensionnat Jeanne d'Arc, in LeHavre, France.

I came back to Seattle to go to the University of Washington. And I took the arts, everything I could find in the arts. It was during the Depression, and I thought I'd better do something to earn a living, so I took anatomy. They didn't have anything like that in the art school, so I took the premedic's dissection in the anatomy department so I could be a medical illustrator, which I practiced. I took everything I could there and I learned to do everything that had to be done, and I had many little jobs to do and they kept on growing as I was still in school.

In 1934 I married an architect, A.E. Hennessy, and then my work became more architectural rather than anatomical.

DuCasse: Did you do any church work that far back?

Erckenbrack: I was doing a drawing for a mural that I wanted to do with Paul Thiry, who was a very fine architect in Seattle, but it never came through. By that time, I went down to Brazil again, and then when I came back I lived here in San Francisco, and I've been here ever since.

DuCasse: When did you first come to San Francisco, then?
Erckenbrack: In 1939, and I was in the fair over there. [Golden Gate International Exposition, Treasure Island]

DuCasse: And that's where you got to know Ruth Cravath and so many of the other artists?

Erckenbrack: Yes. I was in the Art in Action. Also Bea [Beatrice] Ryan wanted to know what I'd like to do, and I said, "Well, why not do a torso of Johnny Weissmuller? In between performances, he could pose for me." So that's what I did in the Art in Action. And Ruth was doing a horse's head, and Dudley Carter was chopping a tree, et cetera.

Cecelia Graham was my first artist neighbor on Telegraph Hill. She introduced me to Beatrice Judd Ryan and to other artists who became my friends.

DuCasse: Then, did you stay in San Francisco?

Erckenbrack: Yes, I decided to live here and start a business. My idea was to do good shape, good design, good color, and good sculpture, and all of a sudden I'm involved in ceramics. People thought that was rather limiting, but I managed to build it up. That was my business.

But little by little my work became architectural. I'm a painter, to begin with, and I like to paint on tile; I feel there's a security on tile I don't find on paper.

DuCasse: I can see exactly what you mean by that.

Erckenbrack: I like drawing, the loveliness of the line, it's always been my favorite occupation and medium.

DuCasse: Well, Mary, when you were doing your ceramic work, did you work always in two-dimensional or did you do some three-dimensional work at that time?

Erckenbrack: Oh, I did lots of three-dimensional. I did a lot of figures, smaller, for the market. Little by little they became bigger, and for better individual places, and that became my work.

From then on I began working for landscape architects and architects: murals and fountains and garden seats, everything that happens with the architecture, landscape, and the home.

DuCasse: How did you come into the field of liturgical art, or church art?
Erckenbrack: Well, I've always been interested. It's been a lot in my background.

I was admiring Ruth Cravath for the work she was doing, and before I knew it I was doing stations of the cross for the sisters' private chapel. The stations were on twelve-inch-square terra cotta quarry tile, done in sgraffito, very small, very small. I told the story with the head alone, except for the eleventh. I used the hand there. I also made the Holy Water fonts for the main chapel, modelled and glazed.

DuCasse: This was for Hanna Center, was it not?

Erckenbrack: For Hanna Center.

DuCasse: I know we have those dates down somewhere. Do you remember just briefly what in general they were? Was that in the early sixties or was it in the fifties?

Erckenbrack: It had to be fifties.

DuCasse: Probably in the fifties, right. You did your work for them I imagine in your own studio?

Erckenbrack: Yes.

DuCasse: But did you do any work up there in place, like she did?

Erckenbrack: No, no. I wish I had. I'd like to have helped her.

DuCasse: Did you know the priest in charge, the one that she was so fond of?

Erckenbrack: I met him once. I know he was well liked and admired by everyone. I liked him too, but I didn't know him that well.

DuCasse: I know he evidently was very sympathetic and interested in that project, was very supportive.

And you did other work after that, did you not, for the church?

Erckenbrack: I've done smaller things, and even vignettes on tile. I've done quite a few things of that nature. I came across one the other day that I'd forgotten I'd made. I made a sculpture of Walking Madonna and Son in terra cotta. It was exhibited here and in Valyermo. Also I did a sand casting of a madonna with local stones and materials, for Portugal. In 1983 I was on a religious pilgrimage through Italy and Sicily and put my many drawing from the trip on tile in color and sgraffito.
DuCasse: Did you exhibit in that exhibition that we had in 1952?

Erckenbrack: I hope I was there.

DuCasse: We'll check that catalogue. You showed me this brochure of your work. It was 1 Genoa Place, your studio?

Erckenbrack: Yes.

DuCasse: Your place of business. The brochure shows much of the work that you were doing at the time, and among the pictures is a Christ in Benediction for a crucifix. Now, was that in ceramic?

Erckenbrack: In ceramic, and it was six feet high. And it was beautifully done in very mild colors, and the head and the hands and the feet were in unglazed terra cotta. And it was a very simple design and it was supposed to hang freely, except something architecturally happened to the building and they had to take it down from a hanging position. It is hanging, well placed, now.

DuCasse: And this was the Church of the Good Shepherd, a Lutheran church in Concord, California.

Erckenbrack: Yes.

DuCasse: And I think you told me that you did this probably sometime in the sixties, wasn't that right?

Erckenbrack: Yes, it would be mid-sixties, late sixties, because I came home from Portugal, where I'd had a study grant. The Gulbenkian Foundation sent me over there to know everything about tile. I actually did many, many things, religious and otherwise.

DuCasse: What a marvelous opportunity for you to expand your technique and knowledge.

When you were in Portugal, then, you must have noticed and seen a lot of beautiful churches.

Erckenbrack: Oh yes. The director of my studies, Dr. Santos Simões, was the head of all this work, you know, and he would take me everywhere, all over Portugal, north and south. I saw the most extraordinary tiles and subjects that you would never see otherwise.

DuCasse: Oh, I'm sure, because they were supposed to be wonderful tile makers.
Erckenbrack: Yes. Well, it's what they put on the tile.

DuCasse: Ah, yes, the decoration.

Erckenbrack: I had the run of the factory for six months, and then I had a one-man show in Estoril after the work of six months was over.

DuCasse: Did you bring these things back with you?

Erckenbrack: They were supposed to come back by ship and they never arrived. And I call that "the Portuguese promise": they say it will be done and it never gets off the dock. [laughing]

DuCasse: How sad that you couldn't have had these.

Erckenbrack: Yes, it's one of the saddest things that ever happened to me. I just hate to mention it now.

DuCasse: When you came back from that trip to Portugal what were you doing?

Erckenbrack: I came back to the architectural work, and I did things of many varieties. This is the one of the Crucifixion, the Christ in Benediction, that I did after that. There are many small things. People want a saint here and a something there, but I will forget that I've done them, and then I catch up with them.

DuCasse: You have always been very at home in the church, no matter which church it was.

Erckenbrack: I travel with them all the time too. On this pilgrimage in 1983 with three priests, we saw every shrine and every grotto there was to be found in Italy and in Sicily.

DuCasse: Did you go to Monreale?

Erckenbrack: Oh, yes. It had the most beautiful things.

DuCasse: Those wonderful mosaics.

Erckenbrack: Absolutely. The most beautiful things. I didn't believe they existed they were so lovely.

DuCasse: Have you ever worked in mosaic itself?
Erckenbrack: Not in mosaic as such, but in small ways; sand casting, for instance, I've done that. I use that as mosaic, and pebbles, et cetera, but I haven't done any recently.

DuCasse: The way you have used your tiles very often is almost as a mosaic; you know, gathering them together and using them in groups.

Erckenbrack: Well, I like to use them as a wall, as a painting, as space, and, as I say, I'm secure on tile, the colors there, rather than on paper.

DuCasse: When you were working with the clergy in these two different church things that you did—the one in Concord for the Lutherans and the one for Hanna Center—do you remember your association with the churchmen then, or was it primarily through the architect that you had any association?

Erckenbrack: It was through the sisters and the architect.

DuCasse: At Hanna Center, for instance?

Erckenbrack: Yes. These are very small compared to the work that Ruth did, but I have them on one wall, the fourteen stations. The only problem was that the fourth station, they couldn't stand the agonized face of Mother Mary, so I had to do it over. I tried to soften it, to make a beautiful, pretty face. Those stations, with the red of the clay and the matte white glaze, still look sharp now.

DuCasse: But this demand that things look pretty, blue and white and gold, et cetera, this was one of the reasons that we had to form the Catholic Art Forum, because of this real lack of knowledge of what the spirit can express in other ways. The artist knows this already, but it's very difficult, isn't it?

Erckenbrack: I've never quite understood why they want, you know, just such a form that they're accustomed to, and the colors, and a pretty face; there's so much more to it.

DuCasse: Well, I suppose it's our twentieth-century concept of beauty, but a very mundane one, not high art; this is in the realm of the catalogue art, which so many churches depended upon.

Erckenbrack: Well, there again you come into the artist who becomes greater than the reason for doing his piece of work. The Bernini sculpture, the Santa Lucia in Syracusa, became
Erckenbrack: greater than just an image of their beloved saint, St. Lucia, the healer of all eye ailments. Maybe people love to read into it what they want to read into it, and they probably couldn't stand it otherwise. After all, this was not from a drawing made of the saint 2000 years ago. [laughter]

DuCasse: Well, you see, that is the period [17th century] which inspired the kind of art that most churchmen look for today. It is that very mundane kind of beauty, I'm afraid.

Erckenbrack: Well, I've just come back from the pilgrimage in this holy year. I've seen from Lourdes right down through Torino and Padua and Florence and Rome and St. Michel, and all through Naples and Sicily. Oh, the beauty outweighs any question whatsoever, like the mosaics in Monreale.

It was rather an extraordinary pleasure to go into these various grottoes, like St. Rosalie up in the Pellegrino Mountain in Palermo, above the hills, and down into Syracuse.

DuCasse: In the art community in general in San Francisco, do you remember if they were at all aware of the liturgical art movement, the so-called "renaissance" of that, in which we tried to bring good contemporary art form to the churches? Do you remember ever having any discussions with your fellow artists?

Erckenbrack: I know they tried, and anything they tried did bring up a few good things, but that's such a personal thing and a broad question. It's hard to do that, unless you're with the clergy or with the artist, and the patron. And I don't separate a successful religious concept from other non-religious concepts of work.

DuCasse: True, and of course the patron has something to do with that also. I thought you just might have remembered if there had been any discussions among your fellow artists who were not religious at all. I mean would they have even recognized such a thing was happening, do you think?

Erckenbrack: Well, I can't remember in my school years anybody being at all interested, except that certain architects I knew in Seattle were working with churches. And here, my friends are personally involved or not personally interested, you know. I don't know, I have to go around and see for myself.

DuCasse: Are you still now working on your tiles and your ceramic work?

Erckenbrack: Yes.
DuCasse: Do you have commissions still?

Erckenbrack: No, I don't have any yet, at this moment, but I'm hoping to get one, a good one; I'm ready for a nice commission. Otherwise I'll make the things that make a commission. Generally, that's how the jobs come; they see something they like.

DuCasse: Were you ever in contact with Mario Ciampi?

Erckenbrack: He was one of the architects with John Bolles on the Hanna Center. I haven't done a commission for him since.

DuCasse: It seems to me that there's a man who might possibly have more work again, for the church. Another one is Paul Ryan. Did you ever know Paul Ryan?

Erckenbrack: I have, but I haven't seen him for a long time. I don't know if he's still operating.

DuCasse: Yes, he is, but he's semiretired. He hasn't done any churches for a long time, but one never knows. What I'm leading up to is that I think it's good if you just remind these people that you're still working.

Erckenbrack: I've been wanting to make some new things, to make big things, to do new work to show them something new. So that's what my intent is this year, to get busy with new works.

DuCasse: This is what I think reanimates the artist, when you can come up with something which will be a challenge for you again, you see.

Erckenbrack: I did that [gesturing at a wood carving] when I first came to San Francisco.

DuCasse: That's a handsome piece.

And then of course when I got to know you better was when you were working in Ruth's stone yard.

Erckenbrack: Well, that's what I'm saying, most of my work has been in marble in the past few years. Only one of them out there has not sold. The others are in somebody's home or garden.

DuCasse: I always loved that one with the bodies twisted. Where is that located?
S.F. Artist's Fountain
For San Jose Plant

A charming Telegraph Hill artist, who well might be termed a living symbol of San Francisco, was busy yesterday putting the finishing touches to a fountain that will bring beauty to one of the Peninsula's major industrial establishments.

The artist, Mary E. Erckenbrack, not only created the design which she sketched on paper, but she molded the finished work in clay, fired it in the kiln after painting it with glaze, and will supervise its installation.

The fountain, which she calls "a play on a single jet stream of water," will be placed at the Education Building of the huge International Business Machines plant at San Jose. Miss Erckenbrack expects to have it on the scene within a week.

LATEST CREATION.

Her latest creation is merely one of a string of sculptured art objects that cover 17 years as an artist on Telegraph Hill. She formerly lived at 2310's Montgomery St., with shops at various San Francisco locations. However, about six months ago she moved her shop and home to No. 1 Genoa Place, still within the confines of Telegraph Hill and still an area of delight to anyone with artistic bent.

Of late years she has been much in demand by landscape architects and her work can be found everywhere from the tile designs on the walls of the lalani of Reuben Hills III of Hillsborough to the Stations of the Cross in the Sisters Chapel of the Hanna Center For Boys in Sonoma.

Among the latest is a mural on the entrance of the Medical Building at 2320 Sutter St., which was done in high relief and color, using the triangle of healing (the laying on of hands, treatment, and time) as a motif.

Miss Erckenbrack also has a number of works on display at the current exhibition of landscape architecture at the San Francisco Museum of Art. These include a whale in gold, black and green and a model of the fountain to be installed at the IBM plant at San Jose.

The fountain, which will be in a pool surrounded by black granite, is constructed of free-flowing segments that can be likened to the segments of an orange, although Miss Erckenbrack said she did not model it on anything in particular.

PERFECT EXAMPLE.

Its construction is a perfect example of the complex and precise operation which Miss Erckenbrack goes through to reach a finished creation.

The idea back of the fountain was for the "sun to catch the gold on the segments and leaves as the water bounced off them."

To obtain the commission, Miss Erckenbrack made a model of the fountain which was submitted to John Bolles of San Francisco, architect for the plant. When it was accepted she made another model of the project so she could study how to put together the complete fountain. This model is on display at the San Francisco Museum of Art.

Finally, the real fountain had to be molded in clay with each leaf prefired in the kiln, painted with glaze and then fired again for the finished job.
Erckenbrack: That's in Marshall Douglas's garden. And I want to do that in clay now. I decided to just embellish it more, build it up, spend more time on it. There are certain things you can do with clay you can't do with stone and vice versa. In stone one starts with the volume.

I really became attached to marble because, having turned work out in clay for so many years, it's a tremendous pleasure to do just one thing, and do a good job, and do a good thing, and let that be your one finished effort. But, of course, you always do tons of things in between.

DuCasse: Ruth loved having you there because you worked as a true artist works, and what you did was a stimulation for the rest of us to watch.

Erckenbrack: She said that, and I felt better about that. I was between studios and moving, and I was pretty unhappy about it, and I was thrilled to be there. Ruth let me come in, and I was just delighted.

DuCasse: You mentioned several things that you've done for a person's garden, or something like that. What were some specific things you did with architects and landscape architects?

Erckenbrack: Well, I've done quite a few murals in lanais and in pools, group figures. The Shriner's Hospital, that was a long time ago. And the little Chinese dogs at Ping Yuen gateway, which are probably all torn apart now. And many are in fireplaces, and walls in the house with a fireplace backing it. All sorts of things—garden seats, mats, portraits, etc. And a mural at the Almaden Vineyards tasting room. And color planning for the city. Also a tile carved mural on the face of Hamilton Recreation Center at Post and Steiner.

I've even done drinking fountains, for instance, at Portsmouth Square, and tile tables. I used to glaze a lot of sewer pipe for play tunnels for children to climb through, and the tile pipe for drinking fountains, and the big animals for a play park, Raynor Park, in Sunnyvale. Did you see those?

DuCasse: They are in your little brochure in here, yes.

Erckenbrack: A twenty-five-foot dinosaur, and a nine-foot pterodactyl. They were done in cement.

So I'm always working with gardens and architecture.
DuCasse: That's a lovely one you did for Shriner's Hospital, glazed terra cotta.

Erckenbrack: But that has been torn apart now. I added new figures and details for the pool fountain, but I think they took the original figures eventually into the director's setup.

DuCasse: Well, much as I'd like to extend this, do you feel that you've given us all that you can?

Erckenbrack: I'm sure there's always more, but I'm glad we had this much.
Renaissance of Religious Art and Architecture
in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1946-1968

Antonio Sotomayor
[1902-1985]
"ART THAT EXPLAINS"

An Interview Conducted by
Micaela DuCasse
in 1983

Copyright © 1985 by The Regents of the University of California
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**INTERVIEW HISTORY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REREDOS COMMISSIONED FOR ST. AUGUSTINE'S CHURCH, PLEASANTON</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;LA MADRE DE LOS POBRES&quot;</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRACE CATHEDRAL MURAL PANELS</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;STAND-INS FOR HUMANITY&quot;</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARICATURES—PIED PIPER ROOM, PALACE HOTEL—AND POLITICAL CARTOONING</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Antonio Sotomayor, the popular "artist laureate" of San Francisco whose festive murals and decorations have come to symbolize the city, died Sunday of cancer at the Community Hospice. He was 82.

The versatile Mr. Sotomayor was recognized as a fine painter, caricaturist, illustrator, designer and ceramicist. He is perhaps best known for murals and paintings that have graced San Francisco buildings for the past 50 years.

Mr. Sotomayor's joyous, colorful work prompted one critic to describe him as the artist who "helped put the smile on San Francisco."

His set decorations and mural backdrops were de rigueur for the city's splashiest galas, including opera and symphony parties, the debutante cotillions and the Bachelors' and Spinsters' balls.

"Why paint if you don't want people to see it?" the artist once told an interviewer.

A native of Chulumani, Bolivia, Mr. Sotomayor came to San Francisco in 1923.

Unable to find an architectural job, he toiled as a dishwasher at the old Palace Hotel, drawing caricatures of chefs and co-workers. His employers noticed his work and made him the hotel's artist-in-residence.

Over the past half-century, Mr. Sotomayor's work has been shown at the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco, 20 other American cities and France, Spain, Italy, Mexico and South America.

The artist's last piece was a huge 30-panel mural for Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, which he finished while recovering from an operation for cancer in 1981.

Educated at the Escuela de Bellas Artes in Bolivia and the old Mark Hopkins Institute of Art in San Francisco, Mr. Sotomayor taught at Mills College and the California School of Fine Arts.

He is survived by his wife, Grace. They had been married for 58 years.

A memorial Mass will be held on Thursday, 5:30 p.m., at the Old St. Mary's Church at California Street and Grant Avenue.

Contributions may be made to the In-Patient Unit of the San Francisco Community Hospice, 1020 Haight Street, San Francisco 94117.
INTERVIEW HISTORY

Antonio Sotomayor, in the interview which follows, made a most important comment on the essence of the association we all experienced as members of the Catholic Art Forum in its first years: ours was a fellowship among colleagues in all branches of the arts, and it deepened into a friendship that has mellowed with time and survived the demise of that great organization when its work was finally concluded. That fellowship was a fringe benefit that has been treasured by each of us who were participants in those exciting and fruitful beginnings in the 1950s. No matter how much time elapses between encounters, we always pick up where we left off, a warm and steady undercurrent of friendship and association welling up around us as we meet.

It was so when I spent the afternoon with Soto and Grace. Their charming apartment on Nob Hill serves primarily as Soto's studio, and one wall is lined with panels he is presently working on, in the continuing project for Grace Cathedral. This was indeed a most congenial and inspiring environment for a journey back into time and the beginnings of the Catholic Art Forum and Sotomayor's place in its formation and development.

In the 1950s Antonio Sotomayor was one of the most illustrious and sought-after artists in San Francisco. He had empathy for the cause of contemporary art in the Church, and was an enthusiastic collaborator whenever possible as an active member of the Forum. His wife Grace shared this interest, and added a great deal by her sagacious comments at board meetings and other occasions during the Forum's years of activity. For me the interview opened up so many memories of a very stimulating association begun in 1953 with Antonio and Grace Sotomayor.

Micaela DuCasse
Interviewer

September 1984
Piedmont, California
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please print or write clearly)

Your full name  

Antonio Sotomayor

Date of birth  

May 13, 1902

Place of birth  

Chulumani, Bolivia (South America)

Father's full name  

Juan Sotomayor

Birthplace  

La Paz, Bolivia, South America

Occupation  

Business Man

Mother's full name  

Celina Meza

Birthplace  

Chulumani, Bolivia

Occupation  

Housewife

Where did you grow up?  

Chulumani and La Paz, Bolivia

Present community  

San Francisco, California, U.S.A.

Education  

Escuela de Bellas Artes, La Paz, Bolivia.

Hopkins Institute of Art, San Francisco, CA

Occupation  

Artist

Special interests or activities  

Painting and Sculpture

Reading, Music, Ballet, Travel
"ART THAT EXPLAINS"

[Interview date: April 20, 1983]

Reredos Commissioned for St. Augustine's Church, Pleasanton

DuCasse: This tape is being made in Antonio Sotomayor's studio, and I will begin right away with a short biographical sketch.

Antonio Sotomayor writes: "I was born in a little town in a valley of the Bolivian highlands where the richness of the tropical plant and animal life and the colorful, bizarre costumes and grotesque festival masks of the Indians excited my imagination so that as a child I was always sketching. When I was about eleven years old, some of my Indian neighbors who had seen my drawings asked me to help them with a miracle. They had found a stone in the river which reminded them of a saint, and they wanted me to touch it up to make it easier to recognize.

"I went to school in La Paz, the capital city, up on the Andean Plateau, surrounded by gigantic snow-capped mountains. Here, at the age of fifteen, I began to contribute drawings and caricatures to newspapers and magazines.

"When I came to the United States, I intended to study architecture at the University of California, but I found myself painting and exhibiting here, throughout the country, and in Europe and South America. Ever since I touched up that first river stone in Chulimani, I have been interested in sculpture too, especially terra-cotta, and I like complicated problems. Of these, the huge, very difficult terra-cotta "Map--Foundation of the Pacific," which I did for the San Francisco World's Fair of 1939, was one of the most challenging. I have also made what is perhaps the largest drawing ever done on paper, sixty-four by ninety feet, as a backdrop for the "Festival of Faith," held at the San Francisco Cow Palace for the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the United Nations."
DuCasse: Well, Soto, that is really a beautiful introduction to your life and to your art, and from here on we will get your own personal observations about many of these things. One of the things I was going to ask you you've almost answered in that very lovely biography, but I'd like to get a more generalized idea of when you first became aware of a liturgical art movement? Maybe you knew of it in Europe? Or was it in the United States? Do you remember when you became conscious of that movement?

Sotomayor: Well, it seems to me that I have always thought of religious art as one of the most wonderful creations of man. And not only that, but I always admired the temples and churches—that the human imagination could do these things as homage from the heart to the belief in God.

DuCasse: So this has always been a very real thing to you.

Sotomayor: It was always in back of my mind, it was always with me, the idea of contributing something to the church or religion.

DuCasse: Did you know much about what was going on in Europe in the thirties and the forties and fifties when that movement began to accelerate?

Sotomayor: Yes, since my life was connected with art, I was aware of all the changes in the movements in art and the application of modern art and in the church. I joined a group in San Francisco. Do you remember, Micaela, the group that originally was to get together the works of art to be exhibited at the de Young Museum?

DuCasse: Ah, yes. The religious art show in 1953.

Sotomayor: Yes. And I saw it as a very interesting idea, and I would like this idea again to be repeated because this is many years.

DuCasse: True. It has been thirty years, exactly, this year!

Sotomayor: Would you like to hear some of the works I did for churches?

DuCasse: Definitely, yes, we want to have you tell us about that, but first, because you spoke of it, in that exhibit at the de Young Museum you had a very beautiful reredos for an altar piece with painted backgrounds and a terra-cotta corpus. You were telling me what eventually happened to that, and I think that should go on tape.

Sotomayor: Well, originally that concept came in Pleasanton. There was a church that had been renovated. Sometimes work comes in such a curious and many times in a very humble way. I knew a house
Sotomayor: painter—they painted houses, buildings—and he phoned me one day. At the time I had my studio at the Palace Hotel. I met him actually while he was engaged in painting one of the large rooms at the Palace and in conversation I said, "What do you want me to do?"

And he said, "I am doing this in Pleasanton, and it is a church, and would you be interested in doing some work for that?"

I said I would be delighted because it would be a tremendous possibility for me to do something that I always like to do. Curiously enough, we were to meet the following day.

But then at lunchtime I was alone, and I began to speculate what problem I would have to face there. And then on a piece of paper I thought, if it's a very large, blank space behind the altar I would like to do a large cross, very much as the paintings that they did in the thirteenth and twelfth centuries but instead of to be a small one it should be large. And then it should be filled, as they did then.

The next day he came and took me to Pleasanton, and I met the priest who was in charge of the whole project, and he took me to the church, and it was exactly the way I had figured out, and I said, since I'd already done a sketch and had it in my pocket, "What do you think? Could we do something like that?"

He said, "That's wonderful! Go ahead and do it!" And this was my first experience in Pleasanton. The church was dedicated to St. Augustine. And I had some information about the life of St. Augustine, I had already read some of his ideas.

And this was when they asked me to bring that altar to San Francisco for that exhibition at the de Young Museum, but it was too large, so I had to borrow the same idea, only using the life of St. Francis, and it was exhibited there. Eventually, after the exhibition—a club that I belong to, started in a place in Guatemala called Nuevo Progresso, wanted members of the Family Club, of which I am a member, to contribute. They went there with the idea of to retire, but then they suddenly found that a number of people needed expertise—they need doctors—and then they began and eventually the club was able to get enough funds in order to build a hospital, and they called it El Hospital de la Familia. So the large cross has now found a home in Nuevo Progresso, in Guatemala, in the chapel of the hospital.

DuCasse: Isn't that wonderful that it should have ended up in that place!
DuCasse: We might talk now about the formation of the Catholic Art Forum after that exhibit. You were one of the founding members of that.

Sotomayor: Yes, and the idea was very active, there were a number of artists, there were architects, and still today we do have more or less shall I say not almost a friendship but almost a brotherhood! [laughing]

DuCasse: Yes, most of us still retain our comradeship from those times even though the Catholic Art Forum was put to sleep, so to speak, at one point.

Sotomayor: But at that same time, you know, you always are a part of it. I think you never actually get away from this idea.

DuCasse: The Vatican Council II changed the whole emphasis of the liturgy, and for awhile art didn't seem to be a necessary part of it, and I think maybe that was a time when something like the Catholic Art Forum had no more function.

Sotomayor: It seems to me that at that period that they began to—architects especially—to try to find another form to express the culture of the church, and now we do have here in San Francisco St. Mary's Cathedral.

DuCasse: Yes, I wanted to ask you what you thought of St. Mary's Cathedral?

Sotomayor: Oh, it's a very impressive building. Especially I like the inside, when you are inside these beautiful contributions of some artists to decorate or to inspire.

DuCasse: What particular part of that interior were you impressed with?

Sotomayor: Well, especially the altar.

DuCasse: Yes, and that beautiful baldachino by Richard Lippold.

"La Madre de los Pobres"

Sotomayor: We visited many other modern churches. In Brasilia there was one, and then there was another one in Rio de Janeiro.

DuCasse: They've done a great deal in Latin America, have they not?
Sotomayor: Oh, yes. Especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and during a large part of the eighteenth, they constructed at that time most of the churches in the Baroque style. And they were very beautiful, especially two or three I remember by Mexican architects. And they are beautiful churches. I loved these churches in Mexico, the Baroque style in artifacts, very strong expressions of the architectural.

DuCasse: Yes, they really are extraordinary. Sometimes almost too much! You were mentioning another church here in our area, Grace?

Grace: The Methodist Church at Hillsdale.

Sotomayor: I did the façade in glass mosaic. There were two hands pleading or praying with a large cross.

[shows picture of a mural] I have one in Tijuana, in Mexico. It seems that the sister of one of the ex-presidents of Mexico had approached Father [Alfred] Boeddeker who has started here and been most successful in help to the poor.

DuCasse: Oh, yes. St. Anthony's Dining Room.

Sotomayor: St. Anthony's Dining Room. And he saw that they have a chapel there and the chapel would need some art, and he had the idea that it should be "La Madre de los Pobres," the Mother of the Poor. So he decided that this should be the theme and then he suggested perhaps the Virgen de Guadalupe, who is the Patroness of Mexico. I made a sketch with the Virgin but it had to have praying. And only as herself I added the one hand giving bread to the poor, and a number of Mexican characters around her, and then I also included the child Jesus helping his mother distribute bread.

DuCasse: Oh, it's lovely.

Sotomayor: It was very touching. When the painting was installed at the chapel there were about two or three thousand people that came. They came with musicians to play for the Virgin. And some of these people expressed such feeling when they saw this painting, they came and they kissed my hand, and I felt so touched and humbled with the emotional feelings of these people. Father Boeddeker told me it's always open and many people they constantly go in to see it and pray.

DuCasse: It's a very beautiful adaptation of Our Lady of Guadalupe. You have her exactly as she is except for the one beautiful gesture of offering bread to the poor.
Sotomayor: I haven't made very many changes from the original.

DuCasse: No, no, there are no changes except that one hand! Which is lovely.

Sotomayor: I wished especially to follow the suggestion of Father Boeddeker that this should be the mother of the pobres and for the pobres the most important thing first is to eat! Bread, you know.

DuCasse: Were there any commissions besides this one that you remember that you might like to talk about that you did?

Sotomayor: Religious commissions? Well yes. You know how the trees in a redwood grove frequently tend to grow in circles? These circles, I found out, are called "cathedrals." Well, my friends Ann and Richard Miller have a place in the country called "The Island." It's beautiful, like the setting for a fairytale, with a small lake surrounded by wild azalea and towering redwoods. The Millers had an idea, and invited me to see their redwood "cathedral"—fourteen trees growing in a circle. They wanted to have the fourteen stations of the cross there, and asked me to do them. I executed them in bas-relief in terra cotta. Each one is about eighteen inches square, and attached to one of the trees.

The style is realistic modern. I have reduced the visual image of each event of the drama of the crucifixion to its essential elements. And since the original creators of the devotion of the stations of the cross were the Franciscans, a priest of the Franciscan order, Father Boedekker, gave them his blessing.

DuCasse: Do you think that there's any change now in the need for art in the church with the change in the liturgical functions and the simplification of a lot of this?

Sotomayor: You know, art it is a part of humanity. Perhaps, you know, for awhile it's not much used or thought of, but art always returns, and many times even they try to revive a movement. For instance during the Renaissance they brought back Greek and Roman art, but they expressed it in a different way.

Even in the work of Michelangelo, who took his models from there, but at the same time they expressed their time. Because the Greek gods were devoid of the idea of hell. They were much more interested in what they were doing.

DuCasse: In the life of this world!
Sotomayor: But in Michelangelo's sculptures there is a terrible feeling of condemnation! [laughing] They are not tranquil or peaceful images. There is a tremendous warring.

DuCasse: A turmoil.

Sotomayor: Turmoil.

DuCasse: Of course, we're going through turmoils in our time, and maybe the art will have to express that.

Sotomayor: Well, the church is really trying to bring a little more sense! [laughing] Telling the world what is going on! I wouldn't be surprised if art will find a way of complementing it.

DuCasse: True. Well, there will always be that struggle, no doubt, to express things in our own time.

Sotomayor: Yes. You know, the other day we were talking about progress and I don't think there is progress, it's just change.

DuCasse: True. Yes, art really changes. It does not necessarily get better or worse from one age to the next!

Sotomayor: No.

**Grace Cathedral Mural Panels**

DuCasse: One of the very interesting things to me is how active you still are in your work. It was so impressive to see the murals that you've done for Grace Cathedral and that you are doing still more.

Sotomayor: Yes, there will be thirty panels.

DuCasse: And how many were dedicated recently?

Sotomayor: Fifteen, half, those on the north wall. It's much more the history of the Episcopal church in California. I feel that most religions are brought from outside, from far. It's like a plant that it has to be brought and then it has to be nourished; they have to develop, to grow.

The subjects are the first Grace Church in San Francisco in 1849, and the other one it's in the group of the first church of the Grace Cathedral here. And the other group it's about the school that the cathedral organized. Now I have the five panels-- [tape interruption]
THE
GRACE
CHURCH
AND
GRACE
CATHEDRAL
MURALS
GRACE
CATHEDRAL,
SAN
FRANCISCO
written in March 1983

PRELIMINARY PLANS AND MEMORIAL GIFT

For eighteen years, since the completion of Grace Cathedral, the blind arcades in the eastern bays of the nave aisles stood unadorned. The completion of the aisle murals has been a silent challenge to latter-day cathedral deans and prospective donors. Dean David M. Gillespie, sixth dean of the cathedral, took up the challenge when, in 1981, a memorial gift made the project possible. The tragic death on Marin Island of former cathedral trustee Henry Miller Bowles (1918-1981) led to the idea of a cathedral mural series in his memory. The three north aisle murals are his memorial. The Murphy, Powell, and Bowles families gave the south aisle murals.

THE ARTIST

The search for an artist equal to the task led Dean Gillespie to the artist Antonio Sotomayor. Born in Chulumaní, Bolivia in 1902, Sotomayor studied in La Paz under the Belgian master Adolf Lambert. By the age of fifteen he was contributing illustrations to Bolivian magazines and newspapers. In 1923 Sotomayor came to the Bay Area. After several years of work and study he became a teacher at Mills College and the California School of Fine Arts. Famed for his caricatures, paintings, and book illustrations, he created the Peruvian Pavilion murals and the Pacific Area Fountain (under restoration) for the 1939 Treasure Island Fair. For many years he designed sets and costumes for the San Francisco Ballet as well as backdrops for many civic and social events. A member of the San Francisco Art Commission for over a decade, Sotomayor received their Award of Honor in 1978.

Antonio Sotomayor has had over eighty one-man shows, in the United States and abroad. His work is represented
in several museums, notably the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Mills College, the Pasadena Museum of Modern Art, the San Diego Fine Arts Museum, the Newark Museum, IBM, and the Museo de La Plata (Argentina) as well as many private collections. Major religious works by Sotomayor include the glass mosaic facade of Hillsdale Methodist Church (1956) and the oil-on-canvas reredos of Saint Augustine's Roman Catholic Church, Pleasanton (1948). A lifelong interest in mural painting has led him from the prehistoric paintings of Lascaux and Altamira to murals in the great cathedrals of France, Spain and Italy.

A forty-year resident of Nob Hill, Sotomayor and his wife Grace live and work in their charming LeRoy Place home, half a block from the cathedral close. An intellectual and cultivated man, 'Soto' retains much of the genteel quality of Latin American culture and a still-strong Latin accent.

**MURAL CREATION AND INSTALLATION**

The need for a durable, yet portable, support for the new murals (Sotomayor did most of the work at home) led to a departure from the method and medium of the earlier De-Rosen murals. Treated plywood (rather than in-place plaster) panels were used as the support for a high-quality linen mounted on the surface. Two coats of gesso were then applied to the linen (canvas). Acrylic (rather than earlier wax tempera) paint was used, acrylic being a plastic resin miscible with water, which dries to an inert and durable form. Painted features were built up from thin preliminary washes. As with the earlier murals, gold leaf was used in several areas, being applied in small sheets onto a special varnish. Each completed mural panel was glued to five horizontal wooden supports which were, in turn, nailed to three vertical wooden supports. The whole assembly was bolted to the wall with nine steel bolts set into.
holes drilled in the concrete. The inscribed bases were installed below each panel.

Working in his living room, temporarily converted into a studio, Sotomayor began work on each mural with a small preliminary color sketch, based on the theme submitted to him by Dean Gillespie in consultation with the Fabric Committee. After revisions and approval by the dean and committee, full-scale drawings (cartoons) were prepared (charcoal on tissue paper). Upon approval, the drawings were transferred by hand from paper to panel.

Early in March, 1982, work on the first (Grace Chapel) mural was begun. Historical information, photographs, etc. supplied by the cathedral archivist guided Sotomayor in mural details but artistic considerations (composition, color, etc.) took precedence when necessary. Symbolism and evocative mood were of equal, and not infrequently greater, importance than historical detail. Sotomayor also tried to maintain a dignified and spiritual tone in the murals, with occasional lighter touches (animals, etc.).

When largely completed, each set of panels was taken to the cathedral and examined under the (darker) lighting conditions of their installation site. Corrections and adjustments followed in the artist's studio. Installation of the first three murals (north aisle) took place in late October and early November, 1982. These murals were dedicated following Evensong on February 3, 1983. Bishop Swing officiated, assisted by Dean Gillespie and the cathedral choir. Work began on the last three (south aisle) murals in mid-January 1983, and continued until the end of September. Unlike the first mural set, each of the south aisle murals was installed upon completion (in the order—Grace Church, United Nations, Oikoumene). These murals were dedicated by Dean Gillespie following Evensong on October 6, 1983.
Sotomayor: The old Grace Church was on California and Stockton, and during the earthquake and fire in 1906 it was destroyed. Grace Cathedral is much more spectacular I think.

I'm preparing two other groups.

DuCasse: These are definitely of the construction of the Grace Church, the ones that you're working on now.

Sotomayor: Yes, and they are this time of the bishops at the time in charge.

DuCasse: It's wonderful that this kind of thing can be done now. The history of all of our churches is important.

Sotomayor: I think it's wonderful, you know, to make people conscious of the history of churches in San Francisco.

DuCasse: Grace Cathedral has the ideal situation for it. Those areas below the windows are a perfect space for it to be built.

Sotomayor: And they have beautiful windows, and very handsome.

DuCasse: Magnificent, those very modern windows. Do you know anything about those windows?

Sotomayor: I know very little, but the only thing is that I enjoy them!

DuCasse: After you complete these panels, will the history continue on down past 1906?

Sotomayor: There is 1906, then there will be a group of five panels about modern history, the United Nations in San Francisco in 1945. I think that's a very interesting project because at the time the church had a number of standards or flags of the countries that came to San Francisco.

Then the other one will be ecumenical--the archbishop of London shaking hands with the archbishop of San Francisco's Roman Catholic Church! [laughing]

DuCasse: That will be a very good one to add.

Sotomayor: Art, especially this type of art, it's to be seen, to try to explain what you can say about the theme. Art, especially painting or music, it has a different way of expressing itself.
DuCasse: It does have, but what is wonderful is that this was done in past ages in the church. Certainly during the Gothic period there were many historical paintings and murals that were done in the churches for the period.

Sotomayor: Yes, with characters of people or kings of the time, and there is a precedent for that, because years pass, and the only thing that remains is whatever is recorded.

DuCasse: I think that we should bring in a few more details about the commissioning of these murals for Grace Cathedral, and maybe you can tell us something about the person who actually asked you to do them.

Sotomayor: I was invited by Dean Gillespie for the cathedral. He asked me if I would be interested in completing the murals at the cathedral, since half of the murals had been painted by a muralist from Holland. He did thirty panels, and there were another thirty panels to complete.

DuCasse: That was some years back, wasn't it?

Sotomayor: Many, many years back. The muralist was DeRosen, and he died not long ago, maybe two or three months ago, at the age of ninety-three or ninety-two. And the murals he had they were more or less on the process of--

DuCasse: Tempera?

Sotomayor: I think it's tempera, but they are more like frescoes, and each panel is 9'6" by 3'6" wide.

Dean Gillespie is an architect. He studied architecture, and it was very nice I could talk with him the problems.

DuCasse: You yourself studied it at one time, did you not?

Sotomayor: I wanted to be an architect, but this was much more my father trying to protect me from—With art, living is very uncertain. My father was a businessman, and he thought perhaps that I could apply this talent to something much more remunerative.

What we have there I painted on plywood covered with linen and painted with acrylics, and the effect is very much like the fresco. And then there is another advantage, especially we live in a city where the possibility of earthquakes is always with us, and they will be salvaged much more readily than if they were painted directly on the wall.
DuCasse: Acrylics are also so very much more lasting. Fresco is a very fragile medium really, and oil also can be affected by climatic changes.

Sotomayor: Acrylics technique is very much like fresco actually.

DuCasse: It is, because you can do it in a matte form, can't you?

Sotomayor: It's like a watercolor.

DuCasse: And you can build it up and do whatever you wish with it.

"Stand-ins for Humanity"

DuCasse: This brings me back to asking you more about the reredos you did for St. Augustine's Church [Pleasanton, CA], and also the one you then did like it for the exhibit at the de Young in 1953. Would you tell us a little bit about the technique you used for that?

Sotomayor: I discovered that to have in sections plywood covered with canvas and those were painted with oils. It was a large cross, about twenty-eight feet high. My inspiration came from some 13th century crosses I had seen in Italy, where the sculptured body of Christ was surrounded by painted scenes of his life. The church in Pleasanton already had a corpus, sculptured in plaster, and I used it in the center of the cross, surrounding it with scenes of the life of St. Augustine—including his mother, Santa Monica. I asked my wife to pose for her.

DuCasse: How lovely! Santa Monica. You lucky lady. That's beautiful. Well, I think artists always have used the faces of the people close to them, especially mural painters.

Sotomayor: Well, what else would you do? Either that you have to have someone to stand in.

DuCasse: Well, of course, the artist has to be able to imagine faces also. You could imagine a certain number, but then they become a repetition of type.

Sotomayor: It would be simpler to do a familiar face. After all, they are stand-ins for humanity. Each one of us represents humanity!
DuCasse: Very true. Have you done that with these murals that you're doing for Grace Cathedral?

Sotomayor: Well, especially in one. There was a young man who was my student, but I reduced his age, and painted him in the family of the priest Ver Mehr. [laughter]

DuCasse: In one of those panels, which was about the present-day school, you were saying something about a Chinese boy.

Sotomayor: What I try to do is represent the population of San Francisco, which is very rich in variety, so at the school I have representatives of all these racial groups. One boy, for instance, is today probably twenty years old and he is more or less a protégé of a friend of ours who gave me some photographs of him. He asked me that he should be there; it was a very simple thing to do.

DuCasse: Very good. So he could always go and see himself!

Sotomayor: Oh yes, and he brought his whole family!

Caricatures--Pied Piper Room, Palace Hotel--and Political Cartooning

DuCasse: Soto, there are many facets to your talent. Among them I think one of the most interesting were your caricatures that you did when you were a very young artist. By way of introduction, I would like to read a paragraph from a very fine article that was written about you as a caricaturist: "A caricaturist is above all else a sophisticate, has to be. His craft must be chic and finished, his point of view that of a man of the world. If he takes pot shots at celebrities, he must approach them as his peers. If he makes a lunge at a stuffed shirt, it must be done gracefully, in the spirit of fun. A good caricaturist is always laughing up his sleeve, and that sleeve must not be soiled by cynicism or bitterness or anger."

Now this was a quotation from Joseph Danish, and I think that is a beautiful way of expressing what a true caricaturist should be.

Sotomayor: Well, in South America I used to contribute--when I was very young--to the publications, the magazines and the newspapers. Then here I had an exhibition first at the Courvoisier Galleries, and they asked me to do people who were prominent
An appreciation of 55 years of art by Sotomayor

By Mildred Hamilton

San Francisco Sunday Examiner & Chronicle, October 15, 1978

The portrait of the person who has only a mono-personality will get bored with himself," said Antonio Sotomayor, who for 55 years has delighted San Francisco with his caricatures, his oils, his sculpture, his sets and costumes for ballet, his light-hearted mural backdrops for alas, his illustrations for both his and other books, and his religious tributes in art form.

Sotomayor was indulging in introspection as he strolled through the San Francisco Art Commission's Apricron Asunder Gallery (105 Grove St.) where the walls were lined "with pieces of my life." The commission selected him for this year's Award of Honor art exhibition, which will continue in the gallery through Oct. 20.

The 78-year-old, who has an ageless elfin quality both in appearance and personality, is no more likely to become bored with himself than he is to lose his sense of the whimsical. His appreciation of the absurd contradictions of life and his joy in its color and beauty shine in his creations.

Sotomayor came to San Francisco from his native Bolivia at age 21. "My father expected me to study architecture at the University of California," he said in his still slightly accented voice. However, Sotomayor's teen- age experiences as a caricaturist for newspapers and magazines in La Paz caused him to decide on enrollment in a local art school.

His need to work his way and to learn English took him to the old Palace Hotel where, for five days, he was a kitchen helper. "The most menial of jobs," he said. Then, his artist background was discovered and he started to design menus." Soon he was the hotel artist, with his caricatures and murals brightening its public rooms.

The Old California mural he painted in 1935 for the Happy Valley lounge is still an attraction. "It was dismantled but the parts are in storage and there is talk of reassembling it," he said.

There are also photographs of his latest grand creation in terra cotta, the 14 Stations of the Cross designed in 1977 for an open air chapel formed by a natural circle of redwoods near San Gregorio. Sotomayor painted the oil mural altar-piece for St. Augustine's Church in Pleasanton, did a mosaic facade for a Methodist Church Hillsdale and the Mother of the Poor painting for a chapel in Mexico.

"Lately I seem more drawn to religious art," he said. "Part of that influence may be the fact that people are looking more for religion today. And part of it may involve where I go next." He folded his hands in supplication and grinned.

The young at work on his Old California mural in 1935.

A bronze sculpture of a horse occupies the center of his studio today. "When I was in Florence recently I saw a little horse of a
Sotomayor’s art

‘I used balloons as symbols of all desires and hopes’

A Greek artist that moved me greatly. When I see beautiful things I want to create, but ugly things deaden me.”

A patron of the opera, he has painted dozens of decorations for the elaborate pre-opening parties of the Museum of Modern Art. “Grace and I are going to ‘Don Giovanni’ tonight,” he said.

A long-time symphony fan, he was almost adopted by members of the orchestra in appreciation for his huge caricature “Waiting for the Maestro” in 1951. In 1959 he won the $1,500 Arts Festival first prize for his Civic Auditorium stage backdrop for the “Pops” concerts — a merry, summery look at The City.

His ballet design period extended over a decade and he is still an ardent supporter. He painted murals for the first Cotillion and has been part of every one since then. “I am working on the designs for this year’s now.”

Sotomayer, who served on the Art Commission with appointments by Mayors Elmer Robinson, John Shelley and Joseph Alioto, has made a long civic as well as a personal contribution to a beautiful San Francisco. Starting in 1971 he and another former commission member, artist Ruth Asawa, criticized the still unfinished United Nations Plaza fountain on Market Street near Fulton. In one vote against it, he called it a “trough for horses.”

“Today some designers are tied to a big formula of what they call modern, but art is not like machinery,” he said. “The form can change but the feeling must always be there. Today too many things are deprived of feeling. In the beautiful city of San Francisco I don’t know how long that fountain will keep the public interest.”

He paused in an example of his own brand of piquant humor. “But again I might be wrong.”
Tony Sotomayor's San Francisco palette

By Caroline Drewes
Examiner staff writer

In the heart of the city, in a quiet mews on Nob Hill, in a building he bought for $3,000 some 40 years ago, lives Antonio Sotomayor, the versatile, whimsical, eminently civilized artist who came here from Bolivia when he was 21 and became an important part of the San Francisco scene. Which, indeed, he has delineated in so many art forms — in murals, some of them lighthearted backdrops for fetes such as the debutante Cotillion and parties at the Museum of Modern Art; in sculpture, caricature, oil painting, in ballet sets and costumes, illustrations for his own and other people's books, mosaics, religious tributes.

Tony is among the company of men and woman who give The City its flavor; in turn he gives the lie to the old saying that a prophet is without honor in his own land, in his case, a land adopted at first sight in 1923.

The first Sotomayor came to Bolivia from Spain in 1560. When this latest Sotomayor came to San Francisco from Bolivia in 1923, his father expected him to study architecture at UC. But Tony had other ideas. Earlier in his life, growing up in the little town of Chulumani, he was once approached by some Indians who brought him a broken rock they thought looked like St. Anthony. They asked him to complete the image, which he did. He was 12. In La Paz he studied art under the Belgian master Adolf Lambert, and by the age of 15 he was contributing illustrations to Bolivian magazines and newspapers. So, arriving in San Francisco, Tony determined to attend art school. He was eventually to teach at Mills College and the California School of Fine Arts.

But as a student, in order to earn his way as well as to learn English, he went to work scraping dishes in the Palace Hotel kitchen. That lasted five days, and then the young newcomer was designing menus and his way to becoming the official hotel artist.

Yes, Tony Sotomayor acknowledges now, in the gentle, whispery, sibilant voice that still bears the accent of South America, he has done well enough, he has achieved a generous measure of fame doing what he loves in the city he loves. "San Francisco has supported me and made me famous; I am even in Who's Who in England...." He offers this last with an impish little smile, his characteristic expression of expectant delight — or is it delighted expectancy?

Art is everything, but it is also necessary to make a living, and he has been able to do that. "You have to accommodate yourself to the economic life. We have always had enough, not always a great deal, but enough." Tony is philosophizing as he slowly makes his way the short distance from home to Grace Cathedral, where in October his series of murals was completed and the final ones installed in the eastern bays of the nave aisles.

It took two years to paint these murals; doctors had advised him to cancel his contract with the Cathedral three years ago when he was desperately ill with cancer, and they thought he had only two years to live. "They were trying to protect him," his wife Grace says, adding that she herself lost 35 pounds during that time of his grave illness, when Tony was so weak he could barely walk. One day his own personal physician came to call and told Tony, "If you think you can't take one step, take two." Well, perhaps Tony's mind was already made up. In any case he regained his health and he went ahead and finished the murals for Grace Cathedral.

In January he was ill again, but he is better now and in the last few weeks he is painting once more. The nearly completed oil portrait of a pretty blond woman, commissioned by her husband, sits on an easel by the fireplace in the Sotomayors' upper flat, whose entrance is announced by scarlet geraniums. "Now I am beginning to get my energy back," Tony says. "In order to paint, you have to have physical and mental energy."

He and Grace have adopted a custom new to them; these afternoons they sit down to tea, sometimes laced with rum,
and cookies. At teatime today before the walk to the Cathedral, they are talking about their life together, reminiscing a bit.

When they bought these flats for a song all those years ago, they did extensive remodeling. Unable to find the appropriate mantel for the fireplace, Tony simply painted one on the wall, a trompe l'oeil mantel that so deceived one guest that he leaned on it while engaged in a political argument as his host was cooking shish kebob in the fireplace.

The flat bears the mark of Tony's whimsy, his droll humor, his sense of fun: in the kitchen, a mosaic table with a mosaic egg frying in a mosaic pan, and a light globe that is a bubble blown by a gnomish sun painted on the ceiling. In the bedroom, a marvelous painted tree starts on a bedside cabinet and grows up and along the wall behind the bed, an occasional bird perched on a limb and the reading lights "suspended" from its branches, as well as Grace's collection of thimbles, contained in a shadow box.

His wife says Soto has the disposition of an angel. "He never gets cross. But the crabby one, he's calmed me down a lot." Soto smiles and observes, "If someone is angry, it is wise not to respond; on the contrary, it is wise to speak quietly. Otherwise you put logs to the fire."

They met when she was a pre-med student at UC and doing brilliantly; she taught chemistry for four years after graduating. They had known each other for about a year when one day at lunch he announced that this was his birthday. "What do you want for a present?" she asked, and he says he answered "You." No blood tests were necessary in those days; they were married at City Hall that afternoon. Then they stopped at the nearest jewelry shop and bought a little silver ring, the only one that would fit the bride.

In 1940, the Sotomayors' Telegraph Hill apartment was destroyed by fire and with it went everything, including most of his early work and his Inca textiles. A small silver bull from Bolivia survived; today it stands next to a Buddha's hand in bronze, among other artifacts on a long table under their living room box. They had no insurance. Always the philosophic rationalizer, Tony says now, "Sometimes bad things that happen bring you to reality. We had been talking about going away to live. If we had not had the fire, today we probably would be living in a rented house, in New York maybe. The fire brought back to us that we love San Francisco and this is where we would stay." They took the money Tony had made at the 1939 Exposition for doing the Peruvian Pavilion murals and the "Fountain of the Pacific Basin," a \(36 \times 46\)-foot relief map in terra cotta, and they bought the building they live in now.

The Sotomayors have indulged their love of travel. Once they went around the world. At their 50th wedding anniversary approached, "Soto asked me how we should celebrate," Grace remembers, "and I said, 'Let's go to Italy again.' But Tony had a further plan up his sleeve. Through the years he had heard his wife voice her regrets that being "two people from religious families," they had not had a church wedding. On the night of the anniversary proper, arriving at the home of friends for a festive dinner, Grace found Father Alfred Boedebeker there to bestow the blessing of the church upon her marriage. Also a photographer and an engraved gold wedding band. She wears the second ring on her right hand, European style.

"I planned all this," Tony remarks with a little chuckle, "but I couldn't keep my knees from knocking." A week later, properly revved, they departed for six weeks in Italy. On the subject of a compatible marriage, Tony remarks, "Two persons... you create a company." The Sotomayors regard the future with no fears. "We've had an exceptionally good life," the forthright Grace declares. "And after all, we're old... People tell me I wait on him hand and foot, and my answer to that is I love to, I love him."

The Grace Cathedral murals — 30 panels, five to each of six historical themes, from the Gold Rush to the United Nations, acrylic on linen on treated plywood — are a satisfaction to Tony Sotomayor. "At my age I would like to put something permanent in The City." Reared in the Roman Catholic faith, he adds, "I am moved by religion." Of recent years he has produced many religious works of art, including the 14 stations of the cross in terra cotta for an open-air chapel formed by a natural circle of redwoods near San Gregorio.

When the subject of faith is broached, "I always like to quote Pascal, who said to believe costs you nothing, but how costly for the unbeliever if he is wrong."

And now he is standing in front of his murals, which are peopled by real men and women of present times and the past. He chuckles; it is his way sometimes of punctuating his remarks. "See?" and he points to the panel depicting the Fire and Earthquake. He has put a fire hydrant in the scene, a little girl fleeing with her parents clutching her cat in her arms as The City burns in the background. The hydrant is useless because the water mains were broken; but a few drops of water cling to the sides. "See?" says Tony again. "Tears."
Sotomayor: San Franciscans. A caricature by itself you do not appreciate unless you know the people who will be in the caricatures. Then it becomes a much more shall I say enjoyable experience!

After that exhibition, which was very well received, a few months later I was asked by the decorator of the Palace Hotel if I would make caricatures of prominent local people or internationally and nationally-known political figures or actors or people in the news. At that time Prohibition came to an end, and the large hotels began to think in terms of opening bars. There was a very famous—and it's still very famous—room at the Palace and it was called the Pied Piper, and with a large painting by Maxfield Parrish. And the walls around they were naked, so they asked me to do these caricatures.

When the thing was proposed to the board of directors of the hotel, they rejected the whole idea. But curiously enough during Christmas the management invited sort of "on the house" guests in San Francisco for a special annual Christmas luncheon. So we thought, why not try out the caricatures on the public itself? So the board of directors or the manager knew nothing of the plan, and we just hung all these caricatures on the walls—I had already enough to fill the room—and the reception was much more than the board of directors of the hotel had expected.

Suddenly they began to get telephone complaints from people, not because their caricatures were there, but because they were not considered important enough to have their caricatures put there! And very curiously there was a man, a very prominent and very wealthy man by the name of Mark Requa, and he came to complain to the manager. They called me and he told me, "Do you know my caricature should be there? Do you know who I am? I am the man who actually put Herbert Hoover in the presidency."

And not only that, but days after the management had cards on the table inviting people to see the caricatures. And then this is a very interesting thing. In 1940 at the World's Fair there was a section, you know—in the art building they had organized something that it was called the "Meet the Artist." [Art in Action]

DuCasse: Yes, I remember that, "Meet the Artist."

Sotomayor: It was a very novel ideal, to show actually all these different branches of art being practiced or being represented by sculptors, painters, ceramicists, and so on. So I was asked by Timothy Pflueger, who was then in charge. He said, "Why don't you do that?" To go and make caricatures.
Sotomayor: At the beginning I was not very sold on the idea because I hated to have somebody just looking at what I was doing. But Diego Rivera was doing these large murals in back, and so I started to do. But I thought to not make the whole process take very long, so in about ten or twelve minutes I would produce a caricature. I thought that the people that I would caricature would not be everybody because they would try to pay or buy them. So I said I would do only of the other artists, so there was a parade of the artists.

I was the only artist that immediately after he finished his work he would get applause from the public. And once I had the caricature, I would hang it in the frame. There was a radio man who came. And even Diego was a little bit annoyed about I was getting more applause than he did!

DuCasse: You were stealing his thunder!

Sotomayor: Those caricatures were later exhibited at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. It was quite an experience. And I always enjoyed especially to amuse people and I amused myself.

I did it one night when we were invited to a party, and after awhile the party began to sag, and so somebody brought in a pad of paper and asked me to make caricatures. And I did. There was one person, and she was the wife of a very prominent artist, and she was very conscious of a large nose. She was a very attractive woman, very alive, but she was apparently very conscious of this. So I made the caricature. When she saw it, it had no nose, but the expression was hers. Everybody laughed, and she was relieved.

Generally the formula is to exaggerate some problem, and it was already, God made it!

DuCasse: So you just eliminated it!

I was interested in some of the political cartoons that you had done during that period before World War II broke out.

Sotomayor: Oh, it was before, when Hitler was beginning to mesmerize the Germans.

DuCasse: Yes, and you did those amazing cartoons foreshadowing what was going to happen before it happened.

Sotomayor: But at the same time you could feel it, the catastrophe that we were facing.
DuCasse: Don't you think that the true cartoonist has that sense?

Sotomayor: Yes, because you have the sensitiveness to what is going on. A good political caricaturist has to have this sense of a sort of premonition of things to happen.

DuCasse: You also did the covers for This World for the San Francisco Chronicle back in the thirties and forties.

Sotomayor: For many years, for many, many covers.

And then I remember I did drawings for a magazine called the San Franciscan. Because after the success of the New Yorker, there were a number of cities that began to try to have their own magazines. I went to the office of Joseph Dyer, the editor and publisher of the San Franciscan. He looked at my drawings, and told me that he needed an illustration for a theatrical article, but that he had already suggested the idea to another artist. However, he said that if he and the staff liked mine better, they would use it—and they did. So from then on, I began to do drawings for the magazine.

Among the things I did was a series of cartoons on the clubs of San Francisco by one who had never been a member. I did this series in the late twenties, and by 1935, I was a member of one of them!
Renaissance of Religious Art and Architecture in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1946-1968

Paul Ryan

BEAUX ART PRINCIPLES AND CHURCH ARCHITECTURE

An Interview Conducted by Micaela DuCasse and Suzanne B. Riess in 1983

Copyright © 1985 by The Regents of the University of California
TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Paul Ryan

INTERVIEW HISTORY

BEAUX-ARTS EDUCATION AND PRACTICE 144
Grace Cathedral, 1933-1935 144
Other Church Work: Simplification, with Exceptions 148
The Architect in Control 150
The Client: Diocese and Parish 152
Artists and Craftsmen, and "The Quarter-Inch Rule" 154

THE CATHOLIC ART FORUM; TRANSITIONS IN THE CHURCH 156

ST. MARY'S CATHEDRAL, SAN FRANCISCO 160
The Archbishop, the Architecture, and the Architects 160
Significant Decisions on the Interior of the Cathedral 168
INTerview HISToriY

Paul Ryan, a distinguished gentleman and architect, possesses the rich heritage of Spanish California in his family background. Added to this, his European training in the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris in the School of Architecture has given him the authority to design and build for our California-Western environment with a special flair and elegance, whether it be a private dwelling or public building. In his designs for churches, this training and heritage have been of the greatest influence and appropriateness for the handsomest results.

I have known Paul since our mutual involvement and membership in the Catholic Art Forum, which began in 1953. I have followed his career with admiration. He brought to it a deep understanding of Church teachings in regard to building for its houses of worship in addition to the great knowledge he acquired in his study of architecture. The credo of the Beaux-Arts in Architecture was the underlying philosophy of the important relation of balance and proportion in simplicity and directness of means. This has been an outstanding quality in his work, especially churches such as St. Jarlath's in Oakland and the Spanish Carmelite Convent Chapel in San Francisco. He was able in these two churches to mesh historical styles with modern materials in a harmoniously contemporary manner that is gratifying indeed.

Suzanne Riess and I met Paul Ryan for this interview in the Rare Book Room of the Gleeson Library at University of San Francisco, where the Catholic Art Forum had originated some thirty years ago. It was a happy reunion for Paul and myself, whose paths had diverged after the ending of the Art Forum in the late sixties. It was also a pleasure to have him recount to us in a most lively manner the history of his education in architecture, and the philosophy that has evolved during the many years of his most successful practice in the Bay Area. It was born out vividly in the pictured examples he showed us as well as those with which we are familiar from our own experience.

I had the added pleasure of a second visit with Paul when he, accompanied by his charming wife, came to my home in Piedmont to bring an album of his architecture and pictures of himself for us to choose from for our interview completion. He had never seen the studio, my father's studio, before. As it is an example of the Berkeley Craftsman Style, he was interested to see it, and I was pleased at his praise of it in its present form.
Paul Ryan is still creating beautiful and appropriate buildings, albeit not under the pressure of a full-time schedule any longer. He has the leisure to enjoy the fruits of his labors and look back upon a brilliant career with justifiable satisfaction.

Micaela DuCasse
Interviewer

September 1984
Piedmont, California
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please print or write clearly)

Your full name  Paul Anthony Ryan
Date of birth 6-11-07  Place of birth Alameda, Ca.
Father's full name  Thomas Francis Ryan
Birthplace  San Francisco
Occupation  Secretary & chief statistician
Mother's full name  Eugenia Cabrera Ryan
Birthplace  Mexico
Occupation

Where did you grow up? San Francisco

Present community

Education  St. Brigid's Grammar - Sacred Heart High School - École des Beaux-Arts
Occupation(s)  Architect

Special interests or activities


BEAUX ART PRINCIPLES AND CHURCH ARCHITECTURE

[Interview date: December 1, 1983]

Beaux-Arts Education and Practice

Grace Cathedral, 1933-1935

DuCasse: Paul, what we want to hear from you is about your participation in the Catholic Art Forum and also, of course, very specially, what you did with church architecture in the Bay Area. So wherever you want to begin.

Ryan: Well, if you like, we'll start with the forum, or possibly start with the period of the times in which we lived at that time.

DuCasse: Very good.

Ryan: I was graduated from the École des Beaux-Arts in 1933, and came back to San Francisco, and I worked for two years for Lewis Hobart, who was the architect of Grace Cathedral. During those two years I was with him, the two bays east of the transept were built. The cathedral originally had stopped at the transept. So we built the two bays, the north tower, the so-called Coulson Tower, and the little diocesan house on the corner of Sacramento and Taylor.

In effect, looking back on it now, I have worked for both the Episcopal and Catholic cathedrals.

Riess: Why had they picked up and gotten started again on the cathedral in 1933?

Ryan: I think this started about '34, actually. It was a question of money.
Ryan: Well, probably the Crocker family came up with some money at that time.

Riess: I know labor was cheap during the Depression, and so that often spurred building.

Ryan: Yes, oh yes. Well, that had a great deal to do with it. If the money was available, for instance, it would be a sensible thing to do. For instance, on that score, the Bohemian Club tore down a perfectly good building in 1933 and built the present building during the Depression, thereby putting a great deal of money into circulation, and they got a very fine building rather cheaply. That may very well have happened in connection with Grace Cathedral, but they only put on the two bay.

The Coulson Tower, the north tower, was given by Dr. Nathaniel Coulson. He had, I believe, some form of an annuity, and he was either a bachelor or a widower, so he turned over all that money, as long as he lived, to the cathedral, providing that they'd build a tower—and he wanted real bells, no electronics in the carillon. So that was from the Coulson money, but the rest of it I think was Crocker.

But anyhow, I graduated at a time when there were great changes in architecture, and it hadn't really begun to affect religious architecture too much as yet, but the beginnings were already there, the changes that were taking place. My education was very, very much along classical lines. By training and even by inclination, I was essentially a conservative and a classicist.

Riess: Where had you done your work in this country?

Ryan: I didn't. I went straight out of high school to Paris.

Riess: Really?

Ryan: Yes. My father thought every American boy should go to an American college, and my father wanted me to go to MIT, then do postgraduate work in France. And Arthur Brown, because he thought the two systems were counterproductive, persuaded my parents and he strongly urged that I go directly to the Beaux-Arts, which I did. I remained there seven years, from age nineteen to twenty-six, the most formative years of my life.

Riess: Well, working backwards, where did you go to high school?

Ryan: I went to Sacred Heart High School here in San Francisco. Normally I probably would have been a Jesuit boy; my two brothers went to St. Ignatius, but I went to Sacred Heart because it was the only
Ryan: Catholic high school in San Francisco that taught mechanical drawing, so-called. [laughing] I had wanted to be an architect; my parents said, "Well, look, you ought to go to a place where you can get some training in mechanical drawing." It really didn't do that much good, frankly.

Riess: So you had a very classical training, and came right back to Hobart. You didn't go back to Arthur Brown?

Ryan: No, I didn't. Bear in mind, 1933 was the lowest point of the Depression, and you couldn't get a job, particularly in an architect's office, for love, money, or family influence. I had letters to different people. One was a letter to George Kelham. George Kelham is the man who had built the Russ Building, the Standard Oil Building, and Shell Building; he was one of the top architects in the city.

And so I presented my letter, and his secretary took it in to him, and I heard a booming voice coming out of the drafting room saying, "Tell Mr. Ryan to come in." So I walked in this vast drafting room, which was on the top floor of the old Cal Commercial Building at 315 Montgomery, and in this vast drafting room there were three men: Kelham, his chief man, and one other.

He said, "Mr. Ryan, I want you to see the only project we have in this office at the moment," and it was the remodeling of a little Victorian house on Webster Street near Pacific. [laughing] So obviously there was no job to be had.

Riess: Then how did Hobart find room for you?

Ryan: Well, at that time the city of San Francisco, with WPA help, started building lots of schools, and they assigned each school to maybe two or three architects. Al Cleary—who was a friend of my father's; that's how I got the job, by the way—who was chief administrative officer of the city [1932-1941], told me, "We have created this job arrangement, so we're keeping some very fine gentlemen out of the breadline." So the architects, they broke it up among them, they spread it very thin, so everybody had a little work to do, and that's how I got into Hobart's office. And I stayed there for two years, and then I started my own office.

DuCasse: That was brave, at that time.

Ryan: My generation, by the way, lots of architects—a lot of them became famous later on—started at a very young age, when normally they wouldn't have started their own offices, because the jobs ran thin. I'm thinking of Hertzka and Knowles, for instance, who are very
Ryan: successful architects here, and they started around the same time as I, and if you were going to starve, you might as well starve in your own office, and not be absorbed in another architect's office.

I started rather young—I think I was twenty-eight when I started my own office—and I was very fortunate in that I did get some breaks from the archdiocese of San Francisco. It's a question of luck, really, how things come into play. My maternal grandparents lived diagonally across from St. Mary's Cathedral, at the corner of Van Ness Avenue at O'Farrell, and they were good friends of Monsignor Ramm, who was the pastor of the cathedral church. He liked my grandparents, and so he gave me a break and gave me a letter of introduction to a young priest over in Novato. Well, that was my first job in the archdiocese. And it grew from that.

Incidentally, it also helped quite a bit that the Vicar General at that time was Monsignor Ryan, who also knew my family, and I guess with the name of Ryan, for some reason or other he liked me. [laughter] So I had some very nice breaks.

Riess: When was the first part of the cathedral built?

Ryan: The first part must have been built in probably 1924 or '25, in there somewhere. [work began in 1928] There was only a hiatus of six or seven years.

Actually Hobart had designed the cathedral. Contrary to the Junior League's book, which has somebody else involved in it, that was not so. I think somebody made an error in there somewhere along the line. There had been an old crypt. Maybe you may even remember the old crypt, one-story high, made out of white granite, on the California Street side. [speaking to DuCasse]

DuCasse: I think I remember, yes.

Ryan: Yes. Well, he may have been involved in that, but this man, whoever he was, was not involved in the design of the present Grace Cathedral, which is strictly Hobart, with Ralph Adams Cram as the consulting architect. So, in effect, he carried on his own design.

Then, later on, after his death, when the cathedral was finally completed, it was carried on by Weihe, Frick, and Kruse, who were really successors to Arthur Brown and John Bakewell, and they carried out Hobart's design very, very carefully, with very few changes. The changes were mostly in that Hobart had a large porch coming out in front, somewhat typical of the sort of thing you see at Autun Cathedral in Burgundy, with a big porch out in front.
Riess: You were very much in sympathy with everything that he was doing?

Ryan: Very much so, very, very much so. You see, that was my training.

Riess: You didn't want to do any little innovative touches while you were there?

Ryan: Not really, not really. It wasn't until really I got out on my own that I realized that in certain factors that times were changing. Even the Beaux-Arts was changing in my time.

During the years I was at the Beaux-Arts, we had what we used to call mostly plan problems given to us. The programs are written in such a way that the elevations and sections didn't count very much. The beauty of the plan itself was the important thing. And the reason for that was that within the Beaux-Arts itself there was conflict. There were those who wanted to take on more contemporary ideas, and those who wanted to keep on the old traditional idea of the grandeur and magnificent planning and so forth. So the problems given to us were all plan, very seldom any elevations. The training really was to create a sense of magnificence and of grandeur; do everything superbly, you know, and never think of anything as small or tight.

Riess: Well, it was certainly hard to translate that into Depression-era architecture.

Ryan: You bet your life it was. Also difficult, starting for myself, was facing the realities of money; to do things in the grand manner does require more money than most people could afford. So it was a question of adapting myself to these changes, but I don't think I ever really did totally adapt. [laughing]

Other Church Work: Simplification, with Exceptions

Ryan: As you may remember, most of the work I did in those early days was by simplification; not a question of compromising ornaments, but to a great extent eliminating ornaments entirely almost, and designing almost by proportion, keeping rather elegant, handsome, and understated proportions, and making the building rather simple so you could afford to build it.

One of the first churches I ever built was St. Basil's in Vallejo, which is very simple. It vaguely suggests a Spanish California feeling to it, but it's very simplified, and that has been pretty characteristic of most of my work, with very few exceptions; possibly across the street here, Cristo Rey.
DuCasse: I was going to say, that's one where you were allowed to put all that Baroque flower in.

Ryan: Yes, that's the only time I ever did that.

And then I occasionally did some period pieces. I did St. Jarlath's Church in Oakland, which is a rather restrained form of Tudor-Gothic—you could call it that. There's a very handsome school there, and I wanted to have a church that would sort of harmonize with it. So I used a little bit of Hobart's idea in Grace Cathedral which is done in concrete with all the form marks showing, you know, on the inside, sandblasted, but form marks which in effect gave somewhat the scale of stone. There were no attempts to imitate stone, but by deliberately making the form marks quite visible you create a sense of scale in that.

Riess: Would the Beaux-Arts have approved of that, or was that a California solution?

Ryan: No, I think that they were changing at that time too.

Riess: When you simplify, you don't modernize, you simply strip away.

Ryan: You rely entirely on proportion, the certain ability of proportion. I did the Carmelite Monastery up in the Napa Valley, not far from St. Helena, at Oakville. There the building has absolutely no ornament in it at all, but it does have very elegant proportions and it's a handsome building.

In the case of Cristo Rey, which is the building across the street here, on Parker Avenue, the Carmelite nuns were willed $1.5 million for the purpose of building a monastery. (Mind you, this was in 1953 or '54.) So I was called in.

First of all, I'm half Spanish, so I fit into the Carmelites, the Mexican nuns over here; I fit in very well because I could chat in Spanish, and I was more or less a natural for this. And they told me they wanted something that would be reminiscent of the monasteries that they'd occupied in Mexico or some of the ones they knew in Spain. So I took off and started out and had the time of my life designing for them a building that is, oh, rather sixteenth, seventeenth century, very Baroque.

DuCasse: But it fits those sisters, those nuns; that's their milieu.

Ryan: It fits those nuns perfectly.
Ryan: There again, the proportion is very handsome proportion, but I used a wealth of ornament in this one. We have stone columns in the chapel and we have carved ones very reminiscent of the ones in the sacristy in Seville, somewhat that same feeling. And it has a magnificent cloister on the inside.

But I can't tell you what type of architecture it is. It's an architecture that is both Spanish and French with a good strong dash of the Beaux-Arts in it, plus the fact that it was built in the mid-twentieth century. All of these things had to combine into making this building. And, as I say, I had the time of my life doing it.

I made full size drawings of every inch of that building. It was something I couldn't turn over to a draftsman because no one was trained to do that sort of thing anymore, you know. Besides, I loved doing it. I used reams of paper. I was full-sizing all these things, with a 6-B pencil, going down here, detailing every quarter-inch of that building. I drew the profiles of all the moldings on long sheets of tracing paper that I could roll into a metal circular container at the lower edge of my drafting table so I could show on one long sheet the profiles from the uppermost cornice to the very base.

The Architect in Control

Riess: When you left something simplified, then, did that mean there was the danger of another hand coming along and applying ornament—when there was money—that was inappropriate?

Ryan: No, I don't think so. I think usually in designing a building, I've had it have a certain elegance through its own proportion that doesn't actually call for ornament. If it's properly handled, you don't have to have the ornament in it.

Riess: Somehow we ought to be able to bring this question around, Kai, to why in fact you needed the Catholic Art Forum in 1950. What kind of inappropriate and mediocre art was being placed in beautiful, simple, handsomely designed churches?

DuCasse: Well, I think probably in Paul's churches and perhaps Mario Ciampi's and several architects who I know are careful about what goes in their churches, then maybe that wouldn't have happened. But there were many little small churches and older churches which were filled with very mediocre plaster casts straight from a catalogue.
Ryan: Right.

DuCasse: Don't you think that was the reason for the Art Forum?

Ryan: Yes. Well, usually I try to design as much as possible myself.

DuCasse: That's it, you see, and that made good architects try to do that, and if they can really control their building, then that is fine.

Ryan: Yes. Well, basically I design my own altars, I design my own tabernacles. Rather than going out and buying one out of a catalogue, I design the tabernacles myself, always, and the altars, and the candlesticks, whenever I could, and that sort of thing.

Riess: Do you think that's unusual, that you have that kind of control?

Ryan: I don't think so, I don't think so. I don't know. From my own experience, I was always very much in control of my own projects. I was terribly lucky that way, actually, really, having clients who trusted me, which is a tremendous advantage, really, in that I could pretty well control the project.

DuCasse: I think it was more the older churches which were not really always very well designed and that were filled with inconsequential kinds of art. I think that's where we were trying to educate the clergy because, I mean, even you know, the clergy were very difficult to work with.

Ryan: Extremely difficult.

DuCasse: To convince the clergy that the architect knew his business, that's what was hard.

Ryan: Extremely difficult. One of the great difficulties—I suppose architects have had this problem since the dawn of history—is trying to mold the client into understanding what is good and what is not good. Too many clients, and not only priests, say, "I want this, that, and the other."

"Fine, I'll give you exactly what you want," you say, but you bring it around to a way that's totally acceptable to you, and eventually he agrees with your plan.

They tell the story that Mansard had these same problems too; the second, younger Mansard, Jules Hardouin Mansard. Louis XIV had a great love of architecture and he also liked to show his knowledge, so Mansard almost invariably would leave a little error in his plans so that the king could pick it up. [laughter] So even in those days they had problems with their clients.
The Client: Diocese and Parish

Riess: Is the client always the diocese? Or is the client sometimes the congregation?

Ryan: In the Catholic Church it's always the diocese. It's always the diocese, and the diocese in my time—I guess it still does—had what they called an approved list of architects, and a priest might choose any architect he likes from that approved list. They were usually architects who had worked for the Church before and whom they felt confident would do a good job.

But it was through the archdiocese. Your preliminary plans were approved by the archdiocese, and before you brought your working drawings, the working drawings again had to be taken to the building committee and go through all that for their approval—the one exception being St. Mary's Cathedral. We never once showed it to the building committee. But anyhow, that's another story.

Riess: That is a story, and I think that's going to be half of this interview. But I still want to set the scene more for all of this. You did the church in Novato in 1938 or so?

Ryan: About 1938. It was a parish house actually, a little rectory for the Church of Our Lady of Loretto, I think it's called. From there I went on. I did a parish house up in Calistoga.

I learned from that one, by the way, never to go back and look at your jobs years later. This parish house went up next to a charming little old stone church, you know, one of the native stones of Napa County. So I wanted to have something there to have sort of the feeling of the stone and of Napa County. They couldn't afford stone on the bottom, but I did stucco; no attempt of looking like stone, but the lower part was stucco, the upper part was redwood, sort of to suggest the wineries and so forth up there. And it's very carefully chosen redwood; all heart redwood, you know, and it's just beautifully done.

Years later I went back. I was driving up in there, so I thought, "Hey, I think I'll go take a look at my little parish house," and to my horror the stucco had been painted sort of a pistache green and the redwood had been painted pink. A terrible desecration, you know! [laughing] Oh, Lord.

DuCasse: Well, that's happened to Ruth Cravath, you know. Some of her things have been painted; one of her statues of hand-carved stone.
Ryan: A statue that I gave, by the way, to that one, the Little Flower at Vallejo, I commissioned Ruth to design that statue and it stood in the little courtyard as you enter the church there, and it was a lovely stone statue, just a beautiful quality to it, and somebody painted it.

DuCasse: An icky tan.

Ryan: Terrible.

Riess: So those decisions, then, are parish decisions?

Ryan: Oh, those are parish decisions.

DuCasse: Oh, absolutely, and you never can keep your finger on it long enough to get away from that.

Riess: Have you been doing exclusively church architecture?

Ryan: No. I started practicing in 1936, so that's coming up forty-eight years this next summer, and I did several parish houses, and I did the church and school and convent center at St. Basil's, and the rectory up there. Then the war came along.

You asked if I did exclusively churches. No, my practice right across the board throughout these years has been 60 percent religious work: schools, convents, rectories, libraries, etcetera. The other 40 percent has been mostly industrial and commercial. Very rarely did I do residences. I doubt that I built more than twenty-four residences throughout my entire life, excluding rectories.

The residences I did build were rather fabulous, pretty fabulous residences, all of them; I was very fortunate in having very rich clients who didn't care what they spent. And residences, I enjoy doing them, I love doing them, but the thing is they are terribly time-consuming, and actually there's not much money in them because they consume so much time and the fees are relatively smaller than they are with your larger works, regardless of how expensive the house is. But you can't very well design a factory for a man and say, "No, I won't do your house." [laughter] But anyhow, I did love designing houses. To answer your question of a bit ago, 60 percent religious, 40 percent industrial.

And going back to the church; the war came along, and I'd just finished doing the Western Pipe and Steel along Bayshore Highway. It's still standing down there. It's a great, corrugated iron building right along the highway. I tried to put a little architecture into that, you know.
Ryan: But then I did go off, I ended up in India, where I spent a year and a half. Then I came home, and when an architect closes his office, it's closed; there's no continuity at all. But when I came back I was commissioned in 1946 to design Riordan High School, which was an enormous undertaking. It cost $3.5 million back in the late forties, and that was an enormous amount of money.

My commission from Bishop O'Dowd, who was head of the department of education, was, "Design me the finest Catholic high school in America," a rather nice order, I thought. And O'Dowd and I traveled throughout most of the eastern part of the United States and Midwest visiting schools—public, private, and religious—picking out the good parts of what we wanted and so forth. So it ended up with Riordan High School. It's a fabulous way to open your office, on an enormous commission.

Bishop O'Dowd did not live to see it. He was killed in a train–automobile accident, even before the building was completed. He had officiated at Clare's and my marriage, which was a great exception. He was a wonderful man. In those days, Archbishop Mitty would not allow bishops to perform marriages; he thought that it put too much of a demand on the hierarchy. But he made an exception since we were such good friends. [laughter]

Riess: I thought maybe because you designed the church you were married in, or some reason like that.

Ryan: No. I was married in Old St. Mary's Church; there was a family tie there.

DuCasse: That was a dear old church.

Ryan: I liked it very much. I liked it better then than now. But anyhow.

Artists and Craftsmen, and "The Quarter-Inch Rule"

Riess: Did you continue designing all the furnishings of these churches? Would you, for instance, have done the stations?

Ryan: Many times I commissioned them, and then I could control the design to some extent.

Riess: Who were you using in the forties, let's say?
Let's see. In the forties I commissioned wood carvings frequently from Sam Berger, and Lyn Genung. Sam Berger did the wood carvings for me for St. Lucy's Church in Campbell, and he also did them for me in St. Basil's in Vallejo. There was no question of buying stations. No, they'd be definitely commissioned. Also, nearly all the interior furnishings and statues would be commissioned. Some of those were bought, but mostly when I couldn't have a carver of my own. You'd get some wood carvings from Europe, of fairly good quality, as a matter of fact. But you avoided plaster like the plague.

Riess: How about windows?

Ryan: Windows? Yes. I used a man here in San Francisco named Carl Huneke, who did windows. And, there again, you're working directly with an artist. You give him a theme and you could tell him pretty much the sort of thing you wanted. Then he'd bring these down to my office, and I'd sit way back here and look at it way on the opposite end there and say, "I'd like this a little changed here. I have a feeling that we lost something in that," but leave him at liberty to go ahead and do what he wanted. But he'd react to my reaction to his original sketches.

The same thing was true of electric fixtures. I can still remember, when we were doing St. Jarlath's, I have some great torchères in wrought iron running down the nave of the church, and I had sketched those in on the working drawing. These were being done by a firm by the name of Phoenix Day, and the designer there was Roller, who was the brother of the architect Albert F. Roller. He also did these famous chandeliers in the Palm Court of the Palace Hotel; they'd gone back that far.

But anyhow, he came over and he brought over a full-size drawing of what I had sketched. By golly, these things were eight feet tall, and standing in my office they looked absolutely gigantic. And I think for the first time in my life I really began to doubt myself, you know. I've always had an absolute theory that you never, never under any circumstances change what you've done at quarter-inch. If it looks good at quarter-inch, it's going to be absolutely right.

But I looked at that, I said, "My God, they are absolutely enormous. We're going to have to make a mockup of this and put it in the church, and we'll see."

They made the mockup and I went over and it looked right, exactly right. Exactly right. "Go ahead and do it."
DuCasse: So you never doubted again!

Ryan: Never doubted again. If it's right at quarter-inch, it's going to be absolutely right.

Riess: I wish I could think of a rule in my life that would work that well. [laughter]

You didn't have to pass this stuff in front of the diocese though?

Ryan: Not the details, no. These were the details.

Riess: The windows, or anything like that?

Ryan: No, no.

Riess: There were no committees?

Ryan: No, no. No committees on that. The overall architectural design had to be though.

Riess: There wasn't an approved list of artists?

Ryan: No.

Riess: Was there a disapproved list?

Ryan: I don't recall one. [laughter]

DuCasse: I hope not!

The Catholic Art Forum; Transitions in the Church

Ryan: But going back to the Catholic Art Forum. The Catholic Art Forum I think did a great deal in those years of transition; really, they were years of transition, and particularly so in the Catholic Church, which was very, very slow in accepting any changes in design and so forth. The Catholic Art Forum did a great deal to open the eyes of priests and young seminarians, to what is beautiful, what can be done, in different forms.

The Catholic Art Forum did have that show down at St. Patrick's Seminary for all these young seminarians. I lectured there, and you lectured, and I think maybe Del Lederle may have gone down there. And it did expose the young fellows to what
their duties might be when they became priests, the non-ecclesiastic and the other things. They in effect would be exposed to being patrons of the arts, and therefore they had a responsibility to have some understanding: this is the thesis we gave them.

Right.

And at that time the Catholic Art Forum did produce some designs that were really quite excellent and were most certainly acceptable to a recalcitrant church that was resistant to change. A lot of things we had at that time had their origins in medieval art, curiously enough.

Yes, and even Byzantine.

Yes. The Byzantine and medieval art, you'd trace it, and reproduce it in a very simplified sort of way. They were very beautiful things, and exposed them to something totally different from the really awful things that happened during the nineteenth century.

What were the awful things?

Well, the overly ornate things that were done in cheap materials.

Plaster or--.

Plaster. Even gilded bronze and things of that sort that were done. I can still think of candelabras with electric lights coming out of them, you know, that were pretty terrible really.

Victorian.

In a way, but also inspired by some of the German things too. They went in for a great deal of kitsch, as we called it.

Yes, you're absolutely right. A lot of it was sort of nineteenth-century Bavarian kitsch.

It was just overblown.

Yes.

The Baroque was overblown, but in such a palatable way.

In a magnificent way, yes.
DuCasse: But this, you see, was watered-down, uninspired.

Ryan: And done cheaply.

Riess: Things that would be purchased from catalogues?

Ryan: To a great extent.

DuCasse: Yes.

Riess: And made in this country?

DuCasse: Well, probably some of them were copied in this country.

Ryan: Yes, right.

DuCasse: Or that may have been their inspiration.

Riess: It is interesting to think about these priests. Where do they get taught a little taste?

DuCasse: If they're not born with it.

Riess: I suppose depending on where they studied for the priesthood, they would have been in more or less contact with quality stuff.

Ryan: Well, even there where they studied for the priesthood--. We'll come to this later on in the question of St. Mary's Cathedral.

Many of the people in the hierarchy are mostly educated in Rome, at the American College in Rome, at the Gregorian College, and so forth. So they were exposed to really high-quality art, but to many of them, nothing ever equaled the High Renaissance. So the whole idea of their sense of beauty was the High Renaissance.

DuCasse: I know that's what Archbishop McGucken told us when he came to our Art Forum to talk about the cathedral before the cathedral was even really planned. He said, "I have to tell you right off that my greatest enthusiasm, what I respond to, is High Renaissance art." Well, of course, all of our hearts dropped several feet. But his church certainly was not a High Renaissance church.

Riess: You said that the Catholic Art Forum came at a time of transition. You two apparently know what the transition is; I just want to know specifically what you're transitioning from and to. Does this have to do with changes in the liturgy?
Ryan: Partially, partially. There also were changes in general thinking and changes within the Catholic Church itself and the adapting to changing norms of beauty.

Certainly, in the design of the cathedral, you couldn't have picked a team for designing a contemporary building more ill-suited than Archbishop McGucken and myself. [laughter] As I say, Archbishop McGucken, his greatest sense of beauty was the High Renaissance, which he loved. He lived in Rome for all of his formative years, as a young man. And I was trained at the Beaux-Arts with the sense of doing things in the grand manner and sense of really sort of simplified traditional architecture. But by simplifying things I mean it had to be, as I said before, in form, as opposed to the simplification of detail.

A classic example of that is the National Shrine in Washington, which is the Catholic National Shrine, of Immaculate Conception, I think, which was designed around the turn of the century, and it was very well designed, a very handsome classical building with a slightly Byzantine feeling to it, and it was very handsomely done.

It wasn't executed until the late 1920s, and there was a compromise in the detailing of that building which has totally ruined the building. The building, I think, is most unsuccessful. Its detailing is a compromise towards what in those days they called "modernism." The moldings were done in a fashion that didn't fit the building, and destroyed the building.

You've seen it, haven't you. [to DuCasse]

DuCasse: No, I've just seen pictures of it. Unfortunately, I've never seen it.

Ryan: I have, just once, and it's unsuccessful. It's too bad.

If you compared these two buildings, the National Shrine and the National Cathedral, I think it's infinitely superior to do a superb job in a traditional style than it is to water down what is essentially a traditional building. The National Cathedral in Washington, the Episcopal Cathedral, is absolutely superb. It's a magnificent, magnificent building, and it is done as a Gothic building, done with great taste and beauty, and it's infinitely superior to the Catholic shrine. No comparison. You see, one of them is honestly following a style. The other one is attempting to be modern, at the same time not.
Ryan: And it's exactly one of the criticisms that I put against Coventry, by the way. Coventry is very good, it has a certain sense of drama, but I feel there that it's a traditional building with modern clothing.

DuCasse: So it's neither fish nor fowl.

Ryan: No. It has its good points though.

St. Mary's Cathedral, San Francisco

The Archbishop, the Architecture, and the Architects

Ryan: Well, to go on to the cathedral, the archbishop, as I say, his training was one of the High Renaissance. Mine was of the Beaux-Arts tradition of doing everything in the grand manner, but I had learned by this time to do the grand manner in something that was greatly simplified.

And also bear in mind, at this particular time, Vatican II was just about to take place. St. Mary's burned in September of 1962, and the Vatican Council convened just about a year later, but everybody knew what was in the wind.

We were retained in March of 1963. I say "we": it was Angus McSweeney, Jack Lee, and myself. We were retained to be architects of the cathedral.

Riess: You were already in partnership?

Ryan: No, curiously enough. Jack Lee and I had been partners for thirteen years, the firm of Ryan and Lee, which we had dissolved on December 31, 1959. I started out the decade of the sixties on my own, and Jack went in with Angus McSweeney.

As I say, we were retained in March. I had a call from Monsignor Harold Collins, who was chairman of the selections committee for the architect for the cathedral. He called me and said, "Paul, what in the world is wrong with you? Practically every architect in the country, not to mention all around the world, have sent in brochures, trying to see if they can't get this commission, and you have sent in nothing."
I said, "Well, I've never done that." That's true. I never really went out after a job. I was very lucky that way, again. Every one of my commissions was just handed to me. There again, I was badly trained in Hobart's office; Hobart is the same type, the old school that a gentleman does not go out and seek a commission, you know. So I said, "No."

He said, "Well, look, you right this day send me photographs of all your work," which I naturally did, after being asked.

A few weeks later he called me and let me know that I had the inside track, that in all probability I would be chosen as architect of the cathedral. But they were very worried in that it was such an important commission, and inasmuch as my firm consisted of just one principal, they were worried that if I should die, if I should get killed or in any way incapacitated, it would leave this vast project with no continuity, and would I consider an association?

"Well," I said, "I most certainly would." So I proposed an association with my former partner and his present partner. And that's the way it came about that the three of us were chosen.

Were you surprised at this procedure of courting you?

Well, frankly, no. [laughter] Frankly, no.

Had they announced a competition?

No, there was no competition. There was no competition at all, ever.

So the other brochures were coming in just because people got wind that--.

And they wanted to get the commission and so forth.

They reviewed all of these things and they made their selection. And, I don't know, I just had a feeling that I'd get it.

And so you did.

And so I did.

Now, Vatican II was just beginning, and it was very evident that this cathedral had to be something that would be strictly of our own times, that it could not be something that would be reflecting the past. Within the Church itself, there were
Ryan: changes in the liturgy. Being a Catholic, I emphasize there were no changes in the Church's dogma, but there were very serious changes within the liturgical form, the outward form of worship, which influenced the entire design of the church.

Archbishop McGucken wrote a superb program of what he wanted in the way of the cathedral; it's absolutely poetry, it's beautiful. But he in no way committed himself to a, shall we say, style or a feeling. I recall in that program he did say certain things, looking back now, that he did achieve. He wanted to have a cathedral in which there were no obstacles between the altar--himself, in other words--and the people around him.

To use his expression, "I want to have the people of God around me." He said, "I don't want a church in the round, but I do want them around me."

"Then," he said, "I'd like to have, before you come into the cathedral, a place where there's a transition between the busy world and the cathedral, a peaceful sort of place." And, in effect, the great plaza in front of the cathedral is that.

It was a beautiful program, but he did not in any way commit himself to any suggestion of a style. And as we went along making these changes and making studies for the cathedral, I realized that it would be very, very important to us to bring in some consultants who were men who would be better informed on contemporary design than I. And it was at my suggestion that we brought in [Pietro] Belluschi and [Pier Luigi] Nervi as consultants on the job.

Nervi's contribution to the cathedral is absolutely phenomenal. For instance, everything above the ring beam is essentially his. The type of construction up there, you know, that's all strictly Nervi.

DuCasse: I think that's so beautiful inside, to see that and feel that construction.

Ryan: Oh, yes. Well, he was a great genius. As a matter of fact, I consider Nervi sort of a Michelangelo of the twentieth century. He was a marvelous man, an absolutely marvelous, marvelous man. A great man. The type of man who did not in any way hesitate to say, "I don't know." I've met so many pompous people who give lots of double-talk and so forth and say nothing, but Nervi never; he'd say, "I don't know, but we'll have to find out."
Riess: Why did you ask Belluschi and Nervi particularly? Had you worked with them?

Ryan: No, but I was certainly familiar with Nervi's work. His Sports Palace in Italy was, I think, an absolute masterpiece; as a dome, I think it's a twentieth-century answer to Michelangelo's dome or Brunelleschi's in Florence.

Riess: So you were thinking that you had to make a dramatic dome; that first of all was a requirement?

Ryan: Yes.

DuCasse: And also to have that unimpeded space; in other words, no pillars, no supporting pillars.

Ryan: No pillars anywhere. And, of course, in that we all had a definite conscious feeling we were, in effect, trying to capture in the vernacular of the twentieth century some of the aspirations of the thirteenth century, which was sort of the idea of lifting up the mind and heart to God, without having it in Gothic forms. And I think in that respect you have that.

Then, of course, we were terribly, terribly fortunate in having Richard Lippold's baldachino, because the structure is the lifting up of one's mind and heart to God, everything lifts up; and Lippold's is the converse, it's the sense of God's grace descending back on men. It's really a magnificent piece.

Riess: Who found Lippold for this?

Ryan: Belluschi had worked with Lippold in the Portsmouth Priory, the Benedictine Priory in Portsmouth, and he knew his work, and Lippold is a very magnificent sculptor.

Riess: How much time did Nervi spend out here?

Ryan: Nervi made several trips out.

Nervi, as I say, is a great, great man and I loved him dearly. He didn't speak any English, by the way, but he did speak superb French, and we had a marvelous time. We'd have dinner at the archbishop's house out on Broadway, with my two partners and myself, and my two co-partners didn't know what was going on because the archbishop was educated in Italy and would always speak to Nervi in Italian. And I understand Italian quite well; being half Spanish, and being in Italy so often, I used to get by fine with Italian, and so I understood perfectly
Ryan: and I'd answer in French; he'd turn to talk to me, and he'd answer me in French. So there was a combination of Italian and French going around the table.

DuCasse: Those poor fellows!

Ryan: But he was lovely though. I think I'll tell you one anecdote that's not architectural. You asked me how many times he came. He came several times, and we made several trips over to see him. On one of those trips, he took my wife and myself out to see the Sports Palace and he showed us the beginning of the new papal audience chambers, which was just then beginning to be under construction.

And during the course of the day I had some progress photographs on St. Mary's that I wanted to show him, so I took him back to my hotel and he remained down in the lobby with my wife while I was upstairs. Mind you, my wife doesn't speak a word of either French or Italian, so I was highly amused when I came downstairs and here was Clare with one of the great men of the century, and the two of them were communicating in the only way they knew possible: they were both holding hands and smiling at each other. [laughter]

DuCasse: Isn't that lovely? Oh, that's wonderful.

Riess: Well, it sounds like a lot of decisions, then, got made between you and Nervi and the archbishop.

Ryan: Everything went along beautifully. And Belluschi, of course, also.

Riess: You had said earlier that in the case of the cathedral you never submitted anything to the building committee.

Ryan: Not once. It was a very strange thing. The archdiocese has a superb building committee, and not once did the archbishop ever show those drawings to the building committee until it was ready to go under construction, purely as a courtesy. That is one of the great successes of that building.

As a matter of fact, I gave a talk at the Bohemian Grove about building the cathedral, and afterwards I had a lot of fellows come over and talk to me and say, "The reason the building is so successful, as you pointed out very well in the talk, is this: that there were only thirteen people who had an involvement in that building."
Ryan: There were no committees to throw in this and that and different ideas. There were actually thirteen people. At the client level, there was the archbishop and Monsignor Bowe. Monsignor Thomas J. Bowe was pastor of the cathedral church [May 1962 to June 1981]. So there were two at the client level. In effect, you might say there was one, really, since the archbishop had the ultimate say in anything he wanted.

DuCasse: It was to be his seat, after all.

Ryan: At the architectural level, there was McSweeney, myself, Jack Lee, and Bill Schuppel, who was our project architect. Then we had Leonard Robinson, our local engineer. We had Nervi and Belluschi. And the contractor, Cahill Brothers; Dick Cahill put up an office on the cathedral site, and he and three men from his office were involved in the project. And that's all.

And decisions always occurred between those thirteen men. So it was pretty easy to work with thirteen people rather than a big, big unwieldy committee. And, even among us, you don't win all your battles.

Riess: You mean you didn't win all your battles?

Ryan: I didn't win all my battles. [laughter]

Incidentally, a very interesting thing is that in the design of the cathedral, as I say, we became very aware early that it had to be contemporary, and to do something contemporary without being gimmicky was the most difficult thing of all. I kept preaching all the time, in and out of the office—. We had an office down on Van Ness Avenue here, and we, by the way, at no time had more than a dozen draftsmen on that job, which meant the principals were involved in this thing daily. And— I've lost my train of thought.

Riess: Well, you said that it couldn't be gimmicky, it couldn't be gimmicky modern.

Ryan: Oh, that's it. Exactly, exactly. I kept preaching at the office all the time to bear in mind that this building may last for centuries. It so happened that year that Notre Dame in Paris was celebrating its 800th anniversary.

I said, "It may, like Notre Dame, very well be standing hundreds and hundreds of years from now. We have to have something that is enduring in its appearance and in its style, and we have to avoid like the plague anything that is the cliche of the moment, and keep it simple and permanent." So there again it was going back to what I originally said, a question of elegant simplicity and of proportions.
Riess: In the beginning, when you and McSweeney and Lee started out, you had thought that you could conceive the whole thing?

Ryan: Not really, not really. No, no. I felt the need very early that we should have somebody in there. Belluschi's role was a very good one in that it essentially was the role of the critic, the fresh eye. He'd come into San Francisco maybe once a month, and he'd come and look at what we were doing, and he'd say, "Uh-oh, I think you're getting a little fuzzy in here. Maybe that needs restudying a little bit there." And it's a very, very helpful thing. He was far enough away from the program and close enough to it where his eye was really quite fresh at all times.

Riess: The dome as it now exists, or the roof as it now exists, do you think of the building as having been designed from that point down?

Ryan: To a great extent, yes. We usually call it a cupola or a dome, for lack of a better word. It's neither. It's eight hyperbolic paraboloids.

And it was really from there on down. From there on up it was really Nervi's concept. From there on down is the culmination of all of our thinking together. It's almost impossible to pinpoint it and say so-and-so did exactly this and that.

Riess: How long were you working on it in fact?

Ryan: Let's see, I gave twelve years of my life to it. [laughing]

I'll never forget when it first appeared in the paper. It was sort of unfortunate, the picture of the archbishop and myself holding the little model, and it wasn't a good picture. But various friends of mine had seen this thing, and at parties—many of them, by the way, were the largest contributors to this thing—they would say to me, "Paul, you know, I like your cathedral, it looks very interesting, but why couldn't it have been Gothic?" So I'd have to go into a long song and dance: "I like Gothic very, very much, it was most apropos to the people of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but it no longer speaks to men of our times in our terms. Therefore, we have to have something that is right."

Riess: How about the archbishop? He was your Renaissance man. When did he come around?
Ryan: He realized this rather early too, because very, very early we were totally free of any classical design. That is, in the architectural form. On the other hand, if you take a look at the plan, it's strictly Beaux-Arts. Have you seen it in plan?

Riess: No.

Ryan: Well, someday take a look at one of the plans. It has all the formality and the sense of space and approach that a Beaux-Arts plan would have.

But anyhow, these same people, by the way, who I met years later--actually those same people--with incredulity in their voice would say to me, "Why, Paul, I'm actually beginning to like your cathedral." [laughter] It's grown on people now and people have accepted it.

Riess: When you say twelve years, really what do you mean by twelve years?

Ryan: We were retained in March of '63. The building was completed in '71. I've been associated with it--like the doors, I had to go to Milan to see the doors--I've been tied into it a good twelve years. In fact I still am every now and then called in for different things.

Significant Decisions on the Interior of the Cathedral

Riess: You indicated earlier that there are still things you would like to add to it?

Ryan: Oh, yes. I'd like very, very much to do something about the lighting over the main sanctuary, which I think is unsuccessful.

Riess: In the case of the cathedral, did you have the kind of control of the interior that you managed in your earlier work?

Ryan: To a great extent, to a great extent. As I say, some battles you win, some you don't. And one of the battles I did win, by the way, was the fact that we don't have bronze doors. The archbishop had wanted bronze doors there, and I begged, "Let's have bronze grilles." I said, "To me, a bronze door means Fort Knox; it says, stay out. You want to invite people into this thing. At least with bronze grilles they can see into the cathedral." So he agreed to that.
Ryan: And also, to bring the city into the cathedral and take the cathedral out to the city, that's why the four corners are glass. By the way, incidentally, the original concept was that the entire periphery of the building was to have been glass; it was to have been totally glass all the way around because he wanted the cathedral to be part of the city, you know.

Riess: Was the cathedral the first really modern building that you were involved with? Is that one of the ways you might look at it?

Ryan: No, not really.

Riess: Had there been any precedent in your practice for this building?

Ryan: No, not for this building. No, no. No religious building. I have done contemporary buildings in a number of other things, but not a church of this calibre or in this general feeling of design.

Riess: How much time was spent actually in the designing?

Ryan: Designing? Let me see. We were retained in March. The preliminary drawings were accepted in December. It was really quite fast. That was December of '63, and we broke ground I think in July of '65. So the drawings were done I think rather rapidly too.

Riess: You were retained in March; when did Nervi first become involved?

Ryan: Probably around July or August, maybe even September.

Riess: Did your designs progress from less modern to more modern? I mean can you remember your original design, the feeling there?

Ryan: Well, I remember the original presentation with the archbishop, trying to sound him out how it was going to be. We decided to present three different schemes to him, just to get his general feeling how he wanted to go. One of them was archconservative. One of them was moderately conservative-contemporary, the kind I don't like. [laughter] The third one was really rather far-out, almost unbuildable, and he leaned towards that.

DuCasse: How interesting.

Ryan: So that gave us our keynote, and we knew then the direction we should take. And from that point on, it was pretty much easy sailing.

Riess: It was unbuildable because of engineering problems?
Ryan: Well, it was one of those things, it just wouldn't have worked.

Riess: Was it in a way what your dream church would have been, that unbuildable one?

Ryan: No, no.

Riess: It was not something you were deeply attached to.

Ryan: In this cathedral, incidentally, the thing that's interesting in this is that in so many churches the pews dictate the form of the building. Almost invariably in churches you'll see they follow the alignment of the pews. If it's an octagonal church, the pews follow the octagon, and so forth. But somewhere along the line we had the very happy thought of realizing that a pew is nothing more nor less than furniture. And the pews, in effect, are laid out in the cathedral as you would a Greek theater, and it answered the archbishop's idea of having the people around him, not all the way around, but around him, gathered together. And the building itself has absolutely no relation to the form of the furniture.

Among other things that happened—as I say, the doors, I won that battle, and I won another one. You see, tradition dies very slowly: we came up with this more or less square plan here, and in the archbishop's mind he wanted to have the traditional idea of the great processional aisle. Every cathedral always has a great, long aisle and the archbishop comes in in all this magnificent regalia and blesses the people as he walks down this great processional aisle.

Well, obviously we don't have that in St. Mary's today. But it didn't happen easily. We had so many schemes where we had what I used to call "the frying-pan plan," because we had the square or the round and so forth with this long aisle coming in, which made no sense. So, eventually, that went.

Another thing that died slowly was—again in the archbishop's mind—he wanted to have a marble floor throughout the cathedral, which is perfectly logical because most of the cathedrals of the great Renaissance period were all done in marble floors. I had strongly wanted to have the floor in brick, which it ended up being.

DuCasse: It's so much better with the building.

Ryan: Well, not only that, it gives a warmth to the cathedral. The bare concrete and the wood and the brick give a certain warmth to it; to me, I'm still amazed that a building that size has a certain warmth. You know, it's a vast building, and I don't feel dwarfed in it in that way.
Ryan: But anyhow, we gradually talked a way to having some brick in there, some brick and some marble. And then finally we got rid of the marble and have only the marble in the sanctuary on the argument that that created a sort of more precious place, that being in marble, and that the cathedral itself is more earthy and has more warmth to it. That's one of the few battles I won.

Riess: I'd like to read from this letter that I received about three years ago from John T. Collins, "for Father James O'Shaughnessy, administrator of the cathedral."

Ryan: Oh, yes. He is the rector now.

Riess: He's describing the cathedral. [reading] "Doors were executed by another famous contemporary Italian, Enrico Manfrini."

Ryan: Manfrini, yes. He just created a madonna for the cathedral, by the way, Manfrini did. It's installed, and it's very beautiful. Go and see that, it's very handsome, very handsome.

Riess: [still reading] "The tile mosaic of Our Lady of Guadalupe was executed by an unknown Mexican artist."

Ryan: [pausing] It was not my choice.

DuCasse: That was one of the things he didn't have a choice over.

Ryan: Well, I'll tell you this. First of all, the cathedral is dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption, and the new madonna is Our Lady of the Assumption. It so happened that Monsignor Bowe had a very personal devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe, and he rationalized that Our Lady of Guadalupe, in effect, you might call Our Lady of the Americas. And so he specifically wanted that.

Riess: "Unknown" Mexican artist?

Ryan: I think Monsignor Bowe bought the mosaic down in Mexico and brought it up here and said, "Here. Hang it." [laughter]

Riess: [reading] "The doors of that mosaic are the work of a local Marin artist, Peter Traphagen. He also designed the bronze doors for the altar where the Sacred Presence is reserved."

Ryan: That's correct, yes. That's another battle I didn't win. [laughter]

The thing is—I say "the battles I won"—we never really did have any battles. You reach a certain point where you say, "Okay, I lose; go ahead and do it your way."
DuCasse: I wish you hadn't lost.

Ryan: The tabernacle?

DuCasse: No, no. I mean I wish that you had had more control over what went into the church.

Ryan: A few things went in there that I was not very happy about, yes.

DuCasse: And it isn't that maybe they aren't good in themselves, but there's where you need the one person to guide the selection.

Ryan: Well, I think I know what you're talking about. I think you're talking about the statue of the patrons, that one inside there. See, what happened there is that Monsignor Bowe retained a woman who had done quite a bit of work in the National Shrine.

DuCasse: Ah! So, of course, she had a good reputation.

Ryan: Yes. So that's it. And she was supposed to coordinate all the things that went in the cathedral, and that's been stopped since, by the way.

As I say, the new madonna is excellent; it's a beautiful madonna, very, very handsome, and it's free from the wall, quite free from the wall. In fact, I just came back from a trip to England and France. About a day or two before I left they had a mockup made, again making a mockup so you can see, and see exactly where you'd put it, because flat on the wall it would have gotten lost. This thing is out five-and-a-half feet now from the wall. It has a wonderful sense of levitation to it.

DuCasse: And it should have.

Ryan: It's the Assumption, you know. So often you see representations of Our Lady or Christ standing on a cloud. This artist had the good sense not to have them standing on a cloud; they're definitely levitating, their feet are twisted sort of this way [gesturing] so they're obviously standing on nothing at all.

Riess: I don't know the stations there. There are stations there?

Ryan: Yes, the stations there were commissioned from a sculptor on the East Coast, whose name, again, escapes me. There again, our main thought was to not see them.

Riess: Not see them?

Ryan: Exactly.
DuCasse: Yes, they were not to be too obvious.

Ryan: Sort of to lose them.

Riess: Why is that? Was that part of the new Catholic Church?

Ryan: Well, now, but the thing is this, that if you have stations, after all there are fourteen of them, and they can take over an entire building, and I don't think it's that important a devotion within the liturgy of the Church to warrant having such an important place in the church.

Like over here at Cristo Rey, by the way, the stations are little medallions about that size. [gesturing] They're little silver medallions. Little symbols. They're tiny and they're at eye level so that people who say this devotion can see them, but they don't take over the church; you're hardly aware they exist.

And we did that in St. Mary's. The stations are mounted on one wall only, with a wooden background, where you have sound-deadening behind the wall, like slats, you know. They're bronze color, almost exactly the same as the wood. If you look for them, they are there; if you don't really search for them, you don't see them.

You can never tell the awful things that might happen. I'll never forget, one day I was summoned to take a look at some drawings that were made for the cathedral for the stations, and the archbishop was to meet there with us and a few others, and I was there and looked at these things with horror. They were about that high. [gesturing] They were paintings, and I swear they looked exactly like an ad for the Plaza de Toros, you know. Absolutely appalling, you know, appalling. The artist was there, and the archbishop came over to me, and I could see the anger on his face, and he spoke to me in French. He said, "Get those things out of this building and never let me see them again!" [laughter]

But you see the sort of things you risk getting. Fortunately, the archbishop did have good taste. And he was strong that way, really. There were no uncertain terms.

DuCasse: Well, he had very good taste.

Ryan: He did.

DuCasse: Based on the Renaissance idea, but that's a classic attitude.
Ryan: It's a fantastic, fantastic tribute to that man, that he was able to produce a building such as this. It's a fantastic tribute to him.

Riess: It certainly is. Do you have a copy of his program for the church?

Ryan: Oh, yes.

Riess: Do you suppose you could find it somewhere, or do you have it, Kai?

DuCasse: No.

Ryan: I have it. If it's important to you, I could find it. It's in the, shall we say, the dead files, and they're in storage. I could find it if you're really terribly, terribly interested in it.

Riess: I am terribly, terribly interested. You said it's a poetic thing.

Ryan: Perfectly beautiful, yes.

Riess: And you're talking about a man who did, largely through your efforts, go through a change of mind.

Ryan: Mine and others. Don't forget, I was just one cog among the others, among the thirteen.

Riess: How important is the Catholic Art Forum in the ultimate look of the cathedral would you say?

Ryan: That's a tough one, really. Well, I'll put it this way, its importance was it may have had— [The tape ended here, but at the request of the editor, Paul Ryan added the following remarks.]

Had I been called upon to have chosen a patron saint for the Catholic Art Forum, without hesitation I would have chosen St. John the Baptist, the "voice crying in the wilderness." It took many years for the results of the efforts of the Forum to manifest themselves, but today, forty years later, they are very evident in all forms of religious art.

Transcriber: Joyce Minick
Final Typist: Catherine Winter
Renaissance of Religious Art and Architecture in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1946-1968

Micaela DuCasse

THE EDUCATION AND DEVOTED LIFE WORK OF A CATHOLIC ARTIST

An Interview Conducted by Suzanne B. Riess in 1984

Copyright © 1985 by The Regents of the University of California
DU CASSE, Michaela Martinez, daughter of Xavier Martinez and Eisle Whittaker Martinez, died May 5, 1989, at Kaiser Hospital in Oakland after a brief illness. She was 75. Born August 26, 1913 in San Francisco she lived in the home her parents built in the Piedmont Hills in 1908. She received her Certificate of Fine Arts at the College of Arts & Crafts and did post-graduate studies in Fresco painting and Sculpture at the S.F. Art Institute. She was a member of the Carmel Art Association, and from 1934 had many liturgical art commissions for sculpture and murals including: St. Mary's Church in Chino; St. Boniface Church in S.F.; the naval station chapel on Treasure Island; and for numerous missions, libraries, prisons, churches and chapels throughout the state. She exhibited in the religious art show at the De Young Museum and the Traveling Show of the Catholic Art Forum. She joined the faculty of the art department of S.F. College for women in 1954 and was Chairman of that department until 1972. She specialized in art and artists of California and gave lectures at many Bay Area colleges and for other related groups. In her retirement, she gave much time to the Oakland Museum and The University of California Bancroft Library. She continued her sculptures with Ruth Crowe of S.F. and her research and teaching.

Survivors include two daughters Jeanne Du Casse of Pebble Beach and Monique Tomasovich of Sonora and three grandchildren.

Friends are invited to a Mass at St. Leo's in Oakland where she was Eucharistic Minister on Monday May 22 at 7:00 P.M. A Memorial Mass will be held at the Carmelite Monastery in Carmel on Saturday August 26, 100 P.M. She will be buried at St. Andrew's Priory at Vallejo, California, where she was a Benedictine Oblate of the Third Order. The Neptune Society is in charge of the arrangements. The family suggests contributions to Kaiser Oakland Hospice Program or charity of your choice.
INTERVIEW HISTORY

GROWING UP WITH ART AND RELIGION, AND WITH ELSIE WHITAKER AND XAVIER MARTINEZ, AND HARRIET DEAN

THE RELIGIOUS ARTIST; COMMISSION FOR THE FRANCISCANS

CARMEL: PLANS FOR A CATHOLIC ART CENTER, AND MUSIC IN THE MISSION

ADVOCATES FOR LITURGICAL ARTS; LITURGICAL ARTS MAGAZINE

THE CATHOLIC ART FORUM
"Contemporary Religious Art by California Artists," 1952
The Catholic Artists Organize--Aims and Achievements


OTHER DUCASSE WORK

RELIGIOUS ART OUTSIDE THE BAY AREA
INTERVIEW HISTORY

Micaela DuCasse, the co-interviewer in this liturgical arts oral history project, introduces some of her interviewees as artists with a true vocation. By the same token, we can say that Kai's vocation and determination were planted early and deeply rooted. With her background of flamboyant artist father (albeit anti-clerical), and searching Catholic convert mother, and her convent school education, she was at home from the start with art and faith. From an early childish taste for the saccharine style of figure to be found on holy cards, she graduated quickly to a European travels-influenced appreciation for real excellence in religious art. In Micaela DuCasse's great murals for the Franciscans done in 1939 she contributed an original California stamp of her own.

With the devotion of a born teacher and eagerness of a student of the Church and of art, Micaela DuCasse happily embraced, in 1953, the idea of bringing together a group of artists whose efforts would be put to raising the consciousness of practitioners and users of liturgical and religious art works. That group was the Catholic Art Forum. As related in the preceding group of interviews dealing with the history of the Forum, it was in part the lack of understanding by the church public and the prelates that made such an organized effort necessary: congregations were no more likely to want something modern in their churches than on their living room walls; priests were seldom sophisticated enough to venture out to meet the artists; artists needed group support and exhibitions.

The extensive interview with Micaela DuCasse that follows takes her from her very early years to the here and now of her activities with St. Andrews Priory in Valyermo. Readers of earlier interviews in this volume will meet here the interviewer who so enthusiastically went back to greet old friends, reviewing the formation, successes, and the demise of the Catholic Art Forum.

The interview took place in Piedmont, California, high up on Scenic Avenue where Kai and her friend Marian live in the house in which Kai grew up, in an atmosphere that is still a sort of shrine to a once-was Bohemian life. The reader will find that Micaela DuCasse was as thoughtful and enthusiastic and generous with her self as she has been in her approach to her interviewees.

Suzanne B. Riess
Interviewer-Editor

October 1984
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please print or write clearly)

Your full name  Miscela Marie Martinez DeCastro

Date of birth  Aug 26, 1913  Place of birth  San Francisco, Ca.

Father's full name  Xavier Timotes Martinez y Ortego

Birthplace  Guadalajara, Mexico  
Occupation  Painter, Teacher of Drawing, Painting  1909-1947

Mother's full name  Elsie Whitaker Martinez

Birthplace  Winnipeg, Canada (Winnipeg)  
Occupation  Housewife, Writer

Where did you grow up?  Piedmont, California

Present community  Piedmont, California

Education  Notre Dame Convent Grammar School, 8th Grade,  
California College of Art, Certificate of Painting  1928-1931  
Postgraduate study in Floral Design, San Francisco Art Institute 1935-39

Occupation(s)  Mural Painter  1939-1950's; Teaching Art  
San Francisco College for Women, later known as San Francisco State  
1955-1978; served as Chairman Art Dept. about 10 years.

Special interests or activities  Travel: Mexico, Central America 1976  
Europe 1952, Egypt, England, 1979; Japan 1984  
Sculpture, Crafts, lecturing in History of California Art  
Workshops in fiber crafts; Reading for study, pleasure.
MICALLA MARTINEZ DUCASSE, born San Francisco, California, 1913

Certificate of Fine Arts, California College of Arts and Crafts, 1932
1938, one year postgraduate study at San Francisco Art Institute:
- Fresco Painting under Victor Arnautoff

COMMISSIONS:

1939-40 - two murals for the Franciscan Library, St. Boniface Church, S.F. (Now known as The Marian Center Library)
1941-42 - Four of a set of seven (proposed, the last three never completed) for the library of San Luis Rey Mission, Oceanside, CA.
1943 - Mural of The Ascension of Christ over the High Altar, St. Francis de Sales Convent, San Francisco, CA.
1943-44 - Mural for the temporary chapel, Monterey Naval Air Station
1949 - Nativity Group, high relief, cast stone, for the Main portal, Old St. Mary's Church, Christmas decoration.
1949 - Mural of Our Lady of Guadalupe, for the shrine in her honor, St. Boniface Church, San Francisco.
1949 - Set of Stations of the Cross for the chapel of the Dominican Sisters Convent, St. Leo's School, Oakland.
1950 - Set of Stations of the Cross for the restored Mission, San Antonio de Padua, Jolon, California.
1950 - Set of Stations of the Cross, Poor Clare's Convent, Santa Cruz, CA.
1950 - Set of Stations of the Cross for the Catholic chapel, Soledad State Prison, Soledad, CA.
1953 - Set of Stations of the Cross for St. David's Church, Richmond, CA.
1954 - Set of Stations of the Cross for the Church of The Annunciation, Monterey, California.
1961 - Mosaic Mural, 4'X5', in collaboration with June Foster Hess, Berkeley
1962 - Mosaic Mural, 7'X4', " " " "
1964 - Historical Map 4'X8' of ground plan for San Antonio Mission, for St. Boniface Church, San Francisco, CA.
1965 - Mural 4'X6' for Madonna Residence, San Francisco, CA.
1951 - Summer Sculpture Workshop under Archipenko, Carmel Art Institute
1952 - Exhibited with The Religious Art Show, De Young Museum, Golden Gate Park
1953-55, " " " " The Catholic Art Forum of San Francisco Travelling Show

Joined the Faculty of the Art Department, San Francisco College for Women, Summer of 1954; Summer of 1955; Full-time Instructor in Art 1955 -
1960-67, served as Chairman, Art Dept., S.F.C.W., 1971-72, Acting Chairman.
1969-70, Fall Semesters, Guest Lecturer in California Art History, College of The Holy Names, Oakland, California. First time such a course has been offered in any California College. Course originated with me.
1979 - Lecturer in California Art History, UC Berkeley Extension
1960 and continuing: Sculpture Workshop under direction of Ruth Cravath, Clay, Wax, Hydrocal; Stone Carving and cutting. Works so far completed:
MY CAELA MARTINEZ DUCASSE

My formal education in art began at the California College Of Arts And Crafts under my father's direction, in 1928. I graduated with a Certificate In Fine Arts in 1932. In 1938 I did a year's postgraduate study at the San Francisco Art Institute in Fresco Painting with Victor Arnautoff; and in sculpture in clay from the model with Ralph Stackpole. Many years later I did extended studio work with Ruth Cravath in stone carving, 1965-1975.

During the years between 1939 and 1965, I was commissioned to do many murals on religious subjects for: St. Boniface Church, S.F.; San Luis Rey Mission; San Antonio Mission; Treasure Island Naval Chapel; Monterey Naval Air Station Chapel. Several sets of Stations Of The Cross were painted for churches in the greater Bay Area. A set of stations in cast stone were made for the Poor Clares Convent in Aptos. A mural was painted for the Madonna Residence on Mc Allister Street, which has since been relocated at The Residence on Pine Street, S.F. Two Mosaic Murals of secular subjects were made in collaboration with June Foster Hass (now deceased), for two apartment houses in Berkeley.

During the 1950's I was involved with the organizing of The Religious Art Show at The De Young Museum in 1952; From which was organized the Catholic Art Forum in 1953, and in which I played an active part until its end in 1968.

In 1954 I was hired to teach a summer class in drawing and painting at San Francisco College For Women. In 1955 I was hired as full-time Instructor in Art and eventually served as Chairman of the Department, 1960-70. During my tenure as Art Instructor I taught Drawing, Painting in both oil and water color, Design & Composition, Analysis Of Painting, History Of Art. In the Crafts I introduced courses in Mosaic, Stained Glass, Weaving and related Fabric and Fiber Arts. I retired in 1978.

I organized and taught the first survey course in History Of California Art at Holy Names College, Oakland, in 1968, as a preview for the opening of the Oakland Museum, The Museum of California, in 1969. Eventually I taught this course at Lone Mountain College and at U.C. Extension, Berkeley.
THE EDUCATION AND DEVOTED LIFE WORK OF A CATHOLIC ARTIST

[Interview date: March 27, 1984]

Growing Up with Art and Religion, and with Elsie Whitaker and Xavier Martinez, and Harriet Dean

DuCasse: I was born six years after my parents [Elsie Whitaker and Xavier Martinez] were married, so a great deal of their activities, the more exciting time of their activity, was before I was born. Not that it didn't continue afterwards, but I think the greater amount of it was between the earthquake in 1906, and 1913 when I was born. That's when they were going to Monterey for the Del Monte shows, and things were still happening in San Francisco. The Bohemian group were still trying to regroup and not terribly successful at it, you know; it was never the same after the earthquake.

Riess: Had they always planned to have a child?

DuCasse: Well, my mother tells me that she planned to have twelve. Now, where she got that idea I don't know, because she had had to raise her siblings—her five brothers and one sister—when she was twelve and thirteen, and that's a rough kind of a life. Oh, I know why she said it; now I remember. She said she wanted to have a child by each great cultural race. That was her idea. She started out with a Mexican, but she didn't get any further. [laughing] She was a little bit too conservative for what that would entail!

Riess: I thought it was interesting that she referred to you, later on in your life, as "one of those casual Mexicans with a touch of the indolent Indian in her too."
DuCasse: [laughing] That's what I was when I was a youngster, yes, and when I was a teenager. I was extremely timid. I was a day student at the convent, but the convent life was very protective. Strangely enough, my mother was exceedingly protective too of me, and I felt this. I had a lot of insecurity problems, so I think that's why she said that.

I was put into art school at the age of fourteen, among students several years older. I was really afraid of my own shadow, but fortunately, being the professor's daughter, nobody came near me, so I was very safe. I didn't have too many friends at first because they were all, you know, just a little bit in awe of Marty and they weren't about to come too close to his daughter. But finally, of course, that broke down; I became more at home.

And this was strange because I had been used to adults all my life and fascinating people, but I was quite shy. And Harriet Dean—or Pal, as I called her; I was the one who named her Pal—she was the one that was almost more a mother to me than my own mother, in the physical sense. My mother was very restrained, was very undemonstrative. I can remember the first time that she embraced and kissed me, and it was when I was very much grown. That was just something that never was done, in the English tradition, you know. I didn't miss it consciously, but when Pal came into our life, she was a very affectionate and outgoing person, and I took to her immediately.

When she first came to the studio—I'd never gone near anybody, I was very shy, I was three years old—I immediately went and climbed up in her lap. And, of course, she was delighted because she loved children. We were friends from the very start. She was the one I always went to when I had my problems or troubles or anything, if I ever talked about them at all, which was rare. So that brought a different whole element into my life.

And that's why I think my mother never thought about me at all, except in a very detached way, you see. There was a great detachment between us. Not until I was married—she had begun to mellow, and she was a very different kind of woman then, and we had a very good relationship—it was a very different thing entirely.

Riess: Were there other children around here when you were growing up?

DuCasse: Very few, very few, until I went to school. There were two girls in the neighborhood, but I didn't have much to do with them. They didn't live too close. And then finally more
DuCasse: families with several children moved nearby, gradually, and this was I think after I came back from the trip to Europe with Mother in 1923. Then more people began building here and moving up and then there were more children. But really my friends were my school friends, and one of them I had as a close friend until she died just a few years ago. So, you know, it was a very different kind of upbringing.

Riess: That trip to Europe, did Marty go too?

DuCasse: No, he didn't. That was when the break came, when my mother was able to make the break with my father. See, I didn't know all this; I was too young to know. Well, I sensed it. I mean I knew there was something wrong, but, you know, a child of nine is not conscious of all the implications.

But they were not having an easy time of it at all. And this trip to Europe gave my mother the chance to make that break, and when she came back she didn't come back to this house, she came back to Pal's and Virginia's house that was down the road, and that's where we lived for the next seventeen years, before we moved to Carmel in 1940. Between 1923 and 1940 we lived just a block down the road. In her reminiscence she speaks about that, and how we still took care of Marty and all. And I saw him every day.

Actually, it was a perfect arrangement, as it turned out, because he was something of a loner, and just the physical fact of our not being in the house at night was no problem for him at all. He had us when he needed us, always. He never felt that there was any rift; there was no problem at all, because it was sort of agreeable to both.

Riess: But your mother doesn't sound like she would be that easy with the whole thing.

DuCasse: No, because, of course, lots was going on inside of her that I was never aware of and I couldn't understand at that time. I never understood it until I grew up myself and began having my own problems. Then I understood a lot more about her and, of course, was then much more understanding of her too.

Riess: When she talks about you as having a little of the Mexican, a little of the Indian, is that a second-hand way of saying, "You're just like your father?"

DuCasse: Probably. I don't think she meant it, though, in a malicious sense at all. I think it was a statement of fact. And this was in a sense what she wanted; she married a Mexican and she assumed
DuCasse: that that child would be Mexican. She forgot that it was going to be half British. [laughter] So I was never completely that, but I favored more the Mexican.

I'm very much like my father, and the older I get the more I think back and think, "Oh, watch yourself, now. That's just like Marty." Marty was a wonderful person but he was a very difficult person, so I'm trying to curb some of those things that are a little bit too much like the less admirable side of my father. But I am very much like him.

Other people say I'm like my mother too. And I feel at times I understand what they mean by that. I have ways, gestures, even some speech at times that's amazingly like her, and I never was conscious of it before, until I was much older.

Riess: How much encouragement did you get from Marty for your art?

DuCasse: Well, of course, during my student years, the encouragement was there, but he was extremely firm with me and strict with me because he felt that I had a lot of talent and so he wasn't giving me any quarter at all. He was wonderful to the students that tried so hard but didn't have an awful lot of talent; he would fall all over himself to help them. But the good students, he was stern with us, you know, we really had to work.

He treated me very impersonally in the classroom, very impersonally, and he never said too much to me about liking what I did, but I would hear it from other people. He would boast about his daughter and her talents and so forth. He didn't say it to much to me, but I knew it was there.

Riess: In your mother's interview, there is a photograph of you in a dark outfit. And did you have a long black braid?

DuCasse: In my teens, at the convent, I'd say I was twelve, we got that notion that everybody had to grow their hair. I was the only one that persevered and went through all that horrible stage where I had a little paint brush in back, and finally it became long. Then I left my hair long until I was married. But I very often put it up in two braids; a coronet over the head was the easiest way to get it out of the way. Finally I cut the hair, and once I cut it I never went back to the long hair. [laughing] I was too lazy. That was my Mexican laziness! It was too easy.

Riess: I wondered if you had been dressed to be Mexican.
DuCasse: Well, no. Strangely enough, I remember when I met Frida and Diego [Rivera] in San Francisco at a big exhibition. They were both there, and, of course, they were friends of my father's. Frida was dressed in a gorgeous costume, I think it was as a Tehuana from Tehuantapec. And I said to her, "Oh, I love that. I wish that I could wear something like that," and she said, "But you should be wearing it." You know, for her that was just a foregone conclusion. And I didn't get around to that until much later.

Riess: Your mother converted to Catholicism in 1937?

DuCasse: Right.

Riess: But you were in the convent earlier.

DuCasse: I became a Catholic at eight. That was in 1920.

Riess: How did that all happen? Why were you put in the convent school?

DuCasse: My mother felt that the convent education was the only education for a woman, for a girl. She hated public school. She was not well as a child and went to school intermittently, had a brain, and her father, of course, I'm sure educated her. And her idea of absolute horror was a public school.

So over my father's objections, who was anticlerical, having been a Catholic once and left it, you know--the Latin men are more anticlerical than anyone--she said, "She is going to Holy Names College, that's all there is to it." So he had to give in. That was in second grade.

I, of course, accepted everything that they gave me. We did our catechism lessons and learned all the prayers. I had never known anything about religion at all prior to that time, unless it came through the cultural end of it, religious art and so forth, but I was learning the catechism. Then one day Sister asked me about my baptism, and I said, "But I've never been baptized." They checked the records. When my mother had gone down to put me in the school, of course, she had to fill in all these things. "Oh!" They were in an absolute tizzy. Oh, they couldn't have that, you know; this poor child is not baptized, no, no, no.

So they called my mother, and she said, "Well, if she wants to be baptized, that's fine with me, I don't mind, but what should I do about it?" And they said, "Well, do you have any Catholic friend who could be her godmother," and she said, "Oh, I have a very dear Catholic friend, Josephine Ryan," who was the
DuCasse: wife of Dan Ryan who was a well-known attorney in San Francisco at the time, and they were good friends of Marty's and Mother's. So she called Josephine, explained the situation, and she said, "Fine, I'll take care of it."

She found out what was the closest church, which was St. Leo's down on Piedmont Avenue. It had just been founded maybe three or four years before, it was a very new parish. She got in touch with a priest, they set the date, and I was baptized on the eighth of December in 1920. So that was how it came about.

It was a natural thing for me because Catholics believe that if you come from a Catholic family or you have a parent who is a Catholic, it's like a birthmark; that mark of baptism on the parent will be an inclination in the child. So it was a natural thing for me, and being a Mexican too, half Mexican, I responded to all of that, I loved it. My mother had no objection. She was nothing, she'd never been baptized.

Riess: And yet in her oral history, when she talks about the difference between her Catholic self and her non-Catholic self, she talks of her Catholic self as a humane and loving kind of self and her non-Catholic self as skeptical, and intellectually independent. So how did she feel about having you in her midst? Because she was still her skeptical self then.

DuCasse: It was not evidently something which she felt was a threat to her; the fact that I wanted to become a Catholic was just fine. It's amazing. Her intellectuality was very interesting. I used to have arguments with her about that. I would say, you know, "You're such an intelligent person, how can you have this premise?" or something. We had many arguments. [laughing] But I think she felt that it was part of my heritage, that Mexicans were Catholics, so, you know, what was wrong with my being one? My father didn't like the idea at all, but he didn't put any objections in the way.

The strange part was that I became, naturally, as a small child like that, a very pious little Catholic. Oh gracious! And I'm sure this must have been a thorn in their sides at times. [laughing] So I would retreat to a corner when they were having some wild bohemian jag, and I would go over my lessons and my catechism while all this was going on. [laughing]

You know, it was amazing. Talk about stubborn! (That's what she said, you know, that I was a stubborn Mexican.) And I certainly survived all kinds of temptations, there's no doubt about that, which probably I never even noticed.
DuCasse: But that was I think what started that total change of my mother's attitude. The fact that she became a warmer and a more affectionate, a more loving person I think was certainly that Christianity that she got. She also was being influenced by Pal. Remember when I said that I don't remember her ever having been affectionate to me until many, many years later in our lives? When you brought that up I suddenly realized that probably when that started was after she became a Catholic and she began to have a totally different relationship with people because of that.

Riess: Well, I should think that it was like having a new authority, and her father and Marty had been the authority in her life.

DuCasse: Right, right. And many times she had disagreed with that authority, but the Church authority she never disagreed with. I will say for her that it took her a long time to become a Catholic, but when she and Pal were ready, they accepted it completely without any question because they'd already gone through such intellectual hurdles, numbers of hurdles, that they had really dissipated any real problems that they might have had with it. When they were ready to accept it, they were totally ready to accept it. And they never went back upon that.

And strangely enough, when they got to Spengler, they had a whole new world of thought opened up for them. Of course, that was before they became Catholics, but they claim that Spengler led them to the Church, Oswald Spengler. Which was very interesting because he was considered such a pessimist, and yet he showed them the greatness of Catholicism and how it was the only religious culture for the western world; that was the western world's religion. I guess that must have helped them a tremendous amount.

Riess: Was there a kind of vogue of becoming Catholic at that time?

DuCasse: I believe so. I think it was because of [Jacques] Maritain. Many of the great French and German and Dutch thinkers, both Protestant and Catholic, were really stirring up the intellectual world, the thinking world.

Riess: You know, it was also a period when a lot of people were becoming communists.

DuCasse: Right, right. Well, evidently it was a need to espouse something, you know, whatever.
DuCasse: And then I think the person—and I'm sure Mother had that in her book too—that really helped them tremendously was Minna Berger, who was the librarian at the Paulist Library in San Francisco. They met, and instantly there was rapport there. And Minna was just thrilled when she found these two extraordinary women with their great enthusiasm and their mentality. She said, "They've got to be Catholics." [laughing] So she says, "Kai, we're going to work on them."

Well, she began pulling out all the big minds that she knew in the Church, past and present, and she was connected with a lot of them, many of the great Paulists in the East, and that had a great deal to do with their being able to come into the Church, because then she also threw a lot of books at them and the best books and the finest things that she could get a hold of. And, of course, they ate them up, they loved it.

Many of the great minds of the past that she gave them to read were mentioned in Spengler anyway because they were the men that had really worked out Catholic philosophy and thought. So they were then able to accept the whole thing because their background was so perfect; their non-Catholic background was just a perfect lead-in for it.

The interesting part of it was that at that time, when they came into the Church, though I had never left the Church, I felt that I was converted all over again because then I understood it; as an intelligent, thinking adult I accepted it. Not just as a pious child who took it all by rote.

Riess: You once explained to me the difference between the gift of faith and not. And so would you say that as a pious child it was through faith that you entered?

DuCasse: Yes, it was. The baptism naturally does a great deal to strengthen that and to give you that faith. But now we realize that every Catholic, every born Catholic—when you're born and you're baptized as a baby or as a small child—you still, when you become a thinking, rational adult, you've got to accept it intellectually as well as just from the faith that was always there. You have to make an absolute acceptance of it.

Riess: So you had that chance.

DuCasse: That's when I did that; when Pal and Elsie came into the Church, that made the big difference. And even though I had thought I wanted to be a religious artist from the time I was a child, I think then I realized what it would mean to be a religious artist. I became much more serious about it.
Riess: Were you living with them in Carmel?

DuCasse: Oh yes, yes. I didn't get married until 1944, so I was with them, yes, very much so, at that time.

Riess: It sounds like a very intense kind of upbringing that you had.

DuCasse: It was. When my mother became so ill and I knew that probably she wasn't going to be with us much longer, I was thinking a lot about it, and I thought, you know, she really gave birth to me three times. She gave birth to me physically. She gave birth to me mentally, because she was always stimulating my thinking—she directed my reading, I listened to her and Pal and their friends discussing things and so forth, and it was a constant mental receptivity which they inspired in me. And then I felt that she also gave me the birth of my true Catholicism, my real faith. She did a tremendous amount for me in my life. Just amazing.

And she did that for anyone who was a part of my life. The friend that's living with me now, she and I were in art school together. We both had very much the same kind of background in that she was from an English background too. So there was not a great deal of affection displayed in the family, as in my case. In her family she was the artist, and though they appreciated it in a sense, they weren't too encouraging. But she wanted to go to art school, and they said, "Fine."

We were both kind of shy, and dedicated to being artists, and we became good friends. She's a very talented person, and she was beautifully blonde, you know, typical English type, and my father just loved that. She was one of his favorite students, so he was delighted at our friendship. She told me not too long ago that one time he said, "Now, you just take care of Kai." [laughing] I guess he thought I needed somebody to look after me.

Now, what got me started on that?

Riess: You were saying that your mother gave so much to everyone.

DuCasse: Oh, yes, to Marian. Marian said that she learned so much, just by listening to Pal and Pellie.

Also, at that time, our household included Armando Valdespeza, who was a talented young Mexican who came to this country after the 1927 revolution. His family were aristocrats, and they were completely put down and their money and everything was taken away from them. But the family scraped enough
DuCasse: Together to send him up here for his education. He arrived in the Bay Area and someone sent him to Piedmont High School because there was a very fine art teacher, Mrs. Sonnenschein, there at the time. She found that this poor boy, very sensitive with very little English, was so talented, and she got in touch with my father and said, "Here's somebody that you can help. He really needs your help."

He came up to the studio, and I'll never forget the day he came. He was a few years older than me, perhaps three or four, but still a youngster. And, oh, so proper. He was so thrilled when he met Marty and Marty spoke to him in Spanish, and then they just had a wonderful time. He began coming to see us, and then finally—he didn't really need the high school training, he needed art school—Marty got him a scholarship at Arts and Crafts, and he lived with us for two years. So he was like a brother to me. It was wonderful. And he said that that experience of living in our home and being educated, mentally, by my mother and Pal, was the greatest thing that had ever happened in his life.

He was an extraordinary artist. He went back to Mexico eventually, and got lost in the world of the faded aristocrat—many of them had come from Spain, and they lived this crazy kind of life. [brief tape interruption after phone rings] He loved, of course, that world, couldn't help himself, and he loved luxury, and instead of being willing to have starved to become the great painter that he could have been, he took the easier path and he became very well known as a dress designer. He had a very up-to-date column in one of the best of the Mexican papers which kept track of all the fancy people and their activities.

He had a wonderful life, but there was always, I think, a dichotomy within him; he knew that he had sacrificed something, a great capacity he had which he had never fulfilled. So this was very hard for him. He came to see us several times, and there was always this tragic kind of turmoil within him. Of course, you could do nothing for him because he had chosen and there was nothing to be done.

Riess: Did you have the sense, as you were growing up, both Catholic and an artist, that there had to be a kind of painful struggle?

DuCasse: Actually, I didn't. That's interesting. Because even though we didn't have money in the accepted sense, we had a very rich life, and we got along on very little. Our material needs were not the most important needs. They were always taken care of, they were taken care of very modestly, but the richness of our
DuCasse: life was a mental thing. I look back, and everybody says, "Oh, the Depression was so terrible," I say, "Yes, we went through the Depression, but it was never sad."

Well, of course, we had a wonderful home, in a beautiful part of the country. We were not down in some poverty-stricken area. It was a strange and unusual thing that these poor artists happened to settle themselves in Carmel and Piedmont, two of the most plush kinds of places in the whole country. And here they had all of this with very little outlay. It was extraordinary.

I didn't have that feeling of the need for that struggle, strangely enough. And things came to me. My first commission— which we can talk about latter—I was asked, I didn't have to go and ask. So it was a strange kind of thing. I don't know how to account for that.

The Religious Artist; Commission for the Franciscans

Riess: You decided that you wanted to become a religious painter at a tender age.

DuCasse: Yes, and then the religious artist that I wanted to become when I was a child and went to Europe at nine and ten, was loving all the great pictures of the past that I saw, and, of course, of the present too. Unfortunately, I had very bad taste as a small child; gradually I got out of it, fortunately. I mean I took to all those terrible things that the Catholic Art Forum stood against [laughing] when I was little because that was what I was given. But fortunately it was counteracted by pictures of Giotto and El Greco on the walls of our home, which were the antithesis of the "holy picture" given us by the nuns.

In school we were given little holy cards for good behavior or if we got a lesson and so forth. They were typical, late nineteenth-century Christian art, which was very saccharine, and even not as good as some of the better artists of that period who were doing this kind of work; they were very shadowy copies of them. Of course, I loved them, I loved them. I would bring them home and my mother would be horrified, but she couldn't do anything about it.

But there was this counter-irritant, that I was constantly exposed to great art, great religious art, because the artists were great, not because it was religious, you see. It was a
DuCasse: curious thing. That was always there. When we went to Europe, that was foremost, seeing those works of art, seeing the originals, going to museums and churches, and the Palais de Pape in Avignon, and so forth. It was an extraordinary experience for me. I was imbued with the right kind of taste, but I had that strange, dual appreciation; I still didn't give up my pious side of art, but fortunately I didn't try to express it too much that way.

Riess: But what did you yourself paint?

DuCasse: Well, I did a lot of drawings as a child, and they were, I can see, copies of things. Not literal copies, but, you know, I would do crucifixions or I would do the Blessed Virgin Mary and there would be angels around, and the usual childish style a child would do. They were neither based upon the pious ones completely, nor were they based upon, say, El Greco completely. The theme, the subject was uppermost.

Riess: You're almost saying that you became an artist because becoming a Catholic opened up such a rich kind of pictorial world?

DuCasse: Yes, iconography. True. I think that's quite possible, quite possible, because I don't think I was doing those pictures until after I'd started convent school. So that's probably definitely where I got the idea that I would like to be a painter, and then if I was a painter, I would like to be a religious painter.

But when I grew up and had my training and started seriously thinking of that, I wanted to be a mural painter, because the great religious art, really, of the past had been quite often murals, and the great painters of the present, even though I was terribly against their philosophy--. Oh heavens! Diego Rivera being a communist, you know, I just didn't like that at all, but I couldn't help but admire him as a great artist, and I wanted to be a mural painter, to do real frescos. So that's when I went to the art school in San Francisco and took a summer course with Victor Arnautoff, who had been, of course, Diego Rivera's student.

Riess: When did you do that?

DuCasse: That was in 1938.

Then, I had always wanted to do sculpture, but the sculpture class at the art school, Marty didn't approve of the teacher--I've forgotten who it was--he just didn't think he
DuCasse: was any good, so he wouldn't let me take sculpture. But he was a great friend of Ralph Stackpole's, who was then the head of the sculpture department at the San Francisco Art Institute.

When I was over there that summer with Victor Arnautoff, I got to know Ralph Stackpole. Well, we knew him as a family friend, but I mean I hadn't seen him for some time. And I said, "Oh Ralph, I'd love to take your course." So that fall I enrolled in his course and loved it, and realized actually that that was probably the kind of thing I should have done from the beginning; I should have done something with my hands. I loved it, and I did very well, and he was very pleased. He said, "This is ridiculous for you to be a painter; you should be a sculptor." But it took me a long time to learn that.

Let's see, that was the fall of '38, and the spring of '39 the Franciscans wanted some decorations in their library next to St. Boniface Church. And somehow, I can't remember now how, they got my name, and they got in touch with me. And that was the beginning; that was my first formal mural. But it couldn't be done as a fresco because the room was a library and it was already established; the best that they could do was to put a strip of canvas on the two walls that I was to do. So I had to do it in the traditional way and just paint it, you know, with oil.

But I insisted, for my own learning, to do all the preparation as I would for a fresco. I did the cartoons in sections. I pounced the cartoons on to the canvas. I wanted to learn to do this as I had learned that summer just in one panel. I wanted to learn how to do it, thinking, always hoping, that I would get a job to do that would be a real fresco. I never did. But that was a marvelous learning situation.

And this is something we should get in the record. So often we have asked others how was the church's attitude toward them as artists. It was interesting; I was going back through some of this material and a couple of articles that had been written about the job that I had done, and in both places they mentioned the fact that I had evidently told them that the Franciscans only gave me the basic idea. They said, "You can do it the way you want it. Here is what we would like to have you incorporate into your idea." I would go to them for specific information, so that I was getting the facts correctly and so forth, but they never once told me how to do it. This was remarkable.
THE FRANCISCAN FAMILY

Left: The Poor Clare Nuns—the Second Order (left to right) Two nieces of St. Clare—St. Agnes of Assisi—St. Clare, foundress of the Poor Clares—Her mother Ortolana—Her aunt Pacifica—Her sister Beatrice—San Damiano, the first convent of Order in the background.


Right: The Third Order. (Left to right) Blessed Pica, mother of St. Francis—Blessed Luchesius and his wife Bonadonna—Bartholomew the lawyer—Pope Gregory IX who canonized St. Francis—Blessed Franceschina of Gubbio—St. Elizabeth of Hungary, patroness of Third Order.

FRANCISCANISM THROUGH THE CENTURIES

The Holy Spirit (the Dove) overshadow the Franciscan Order (the Shield) which has vivified the world, influencing men in every walk of life.


Central group: Mystics and Theologians—St. Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus—Thomas a Kempis, who gave us the "Imitation of Christ"—Blessed John Duns Scotus, champion of the Immaculate Conception—St. Bonaventure, the Seraphic Doctor with his Cardinal's hat—His teacher, Alexander of Hales.

MICAELA MARTINEZ

By IRENE ALEXANDER

Another Micaela Martinez mural will shortly be fitted into its permanent place on the library wall of the Philosophical Seminary of the Western Province of the Franciscan Order at Mission San Luis Rey.

It is interesting that its completion, and the opportunity afforded Carmel to view the work of this young artist should coincide with a nationwide celebration of Pan-American Week, for Micaela Martinez, both in herself and in her art, is uniquely expressive of the union between the two Americas. Through her veins runs the mingled blood of the South American Indian, the colonial Spaniard and the North American pioneer.

Born in San Francisco, daughter of the late Xavier Martinez and Mrs. Elsie Whittaker Martinez, Micaela's education in the arts began literally in the cradle. Her bed was a little swing that hung in the corner of her father's studio, and he signalized her three months' birthday by the purchase of a phonograph and three albums of records. Her lullabies were the three B's—Bach, Beethoven and Brahms.

In an atmosphere of art and in daily contact with the distinguished circle that Xavier Martinez drew to his studio, a group not only engaged in creating but in discussing the principles of painting, music, drama and literature, it is not surprising that Micaela began drawing at the age of two. So eager was "Marty" to have his daughter's talents develop naturally that he interfered in no way with her earliest expression. It was not until she completed the eighth grade, at 14, that her formal art study began.

To be sure, there was in the meanwhile a year spent abroad, when she was nine years old, during which her visits to galleries and museums (where she saw originals of paintings already familiar to her), and especially to the old-world cathedrals, left an indelible impression. In Paris Virginia Hale permitted her to enter the Croquis-Collarosi classes, and since Micaela was the only child admitted, let her follow her own devices and refused to accept pay for her lessons. In London, she was entranced with her introduction to the stylization of ancient Egyptian art.

Xavier Martinez was Professor of Fine Arts at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland then, and under his guidance Micaela began at 14 the study of life drawing, still life and portrait painting; with Hamilton Wolf she studied perspective and anatomy—devoting four years to an intensive groundwork in art. Later she added theatrical design to her curriculum, under Joseph Paget-Fredericks, only pupil of Leon Bakst.

By the time she graduated from art school at 18, she had determined to devote her talent to religious subjects and complete her preparation for mural work. She studied fresco for a term at the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco, under Victor Arnautoff and spent a year at sculpture with Ralph Stackpole, winning a scholarship for the second term as one of the two awards in the Press Club—S. F. News contest growing out of the famous Benjamin Bufano-Westbrook Pegler dispute over the former's stainless steel statue of St. Francis. In spite of the fact that she was strongly urged to make sculpture her medium, she clung tenaciously to her aim—that of using her skill in this field to give greater depth and form to her painting, and in setting her free from models.

Unlike many young artists, Micaela is both conscious and clearly articulate about her ideals as a painter. She has contributed articles to the Liturgical Arts Magazine expressive of what she feels on the subject. "Art for art's sake" finds
no place in her concept. Art, she maintains, must be functional to endure. And she considers the liturgical arts the most functional of all, since they combine the reproduction of material beauty with a deep philosophical concept and a spiritual meaning. She believes that culture is far more than the expression of a single individual's talent—that it must rather express the attainments and refinements of a people or a social order.

So-called "Modern art" she finds too often merely a narrow individual expression, saying nothing except to the artist himself, and through its dependence upon the moment's approval, betraying the painter into current fads and fashions. Quite simply and frankly, she accepts the Catholic liturgy as her major theme—a theme which she views as neither austere nor detached, but warm and rich and living.

In dedicating her talent to religious expression, Micaela Martinez has also dedicated herself to a profound study of the history of art in all its epochs and to a study of the liturgy, both subjectively and philosophically, particularly in its artistic forms. It is part of her theory of the function of an artist that she should take an active part in all she hopes to express. She is a member of the Liturgical Arts Guild and has taken a prominent part in the productions of the Catholic Theatre Guild of San Francisco, designing and helping to paint sets for "Pie in the Sky" and "Brother Perroc's Return."

Her first public commission was the painting of two large murals for the Franciscan Library adjoining the Church of St. Boniface on Golden Gate Avenue in San Francisco. Here the canvasses, 25 x 4 and 30 x 4 feet, were attached to the walls, a movable scaffold was built, and the young artist plied her brush for six months while an interested public came and went. The library was dedicated by Archbishop Mitty on February 11, 1940 and souvenirs of the occasion were folders containing reproductions of the Martinez murals. Reproductions also appeared in the Liturgical Arts Magazine, and called forth enthusiastic notice from such critics as Frederick Mortimer Clapp, director of the Frick Collection in New York and Walter Pach, translator of Elie Faure's "History of Art."

The restoration of Mission San Luis Rey was in progress, and when the head of the library there viewed Micaela Martinez' work in San Francisco, she was at once commissioned to paint seven panels for the Philosophical Seminary at San Luis Rey.

She began work on them here in Carmel in October, 1940, and the newly completed panel is the fourth in the series. The first, depicting the three orders of the Franciscans, measures 16 x 6, and was installed at San Luis Rey in October, 1941. The canvas is mounted on masonite building board, which comes in four-feet sections. These are unbolted and the canvas cut with a razor for transportation, then carefully fitted together on the wall.

Since women are not permitted to enter the cloister, Micaela's only opportunity to judge the effect of the mounted panel was by invading a part of the garden open to the public and peering through a window, somewhat disconcerting the student seminarians who were engaged in hoisting it into place. Murals are destined for all four of the walls, but there will be a good third of the wall space quite out of her line of vision.

Two smaller panels, each 4 x 7 feet, were completed in February of 1942 and installed the following April. These were two monumental figures of saints, portraying differing approaches to the same philosophy. As representative of the intellectual, cold, clear light of reason, St. Thomas Aquinas, the mediæval Dominican is contrasted with his contemporary
Franciscan, St. Bonaventure, exponent of the mystical, emotional approach to religion. As Micaela expresses it, one depicts the love of philosophy, the other the philosophy of love. In her treatment of the two figures, Micaela has adapted both line and color to the inner meaning of her subjects. St. Thomas Aquinas appears in an austere, symmetrical composition against a background of pale yellows, greens, blacks and whites, while there is swirling movement in the other and rich, warm colors — the burnt sienna of the Franciscan habit surrounded by flame tones.

The panel just completed is one of four, each measuring 12 x 6, which will be mounted on the two side walls of the library. It represents Dun Scotus disputing with the opposing Dominicans the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Its background is the University of Paris in the 13th Century, and required a month of intensive research to ensure the accuracy of its details. Micaela is indefatigable in her research, and inspires those around her to engage in checking up on her authenticity.

It was Bruno Adriani who discovered among his rare collection of books a review of the 13th Century Paris skyline which is glimpsed through a window of the mural's background. Models she takes where she finds them — and many a friend is recognizable among the multitude listening to the learned dispute.

Three more large panels remain to be painted — about nine months' study and actual work, all of which will be done in the white house on Carmel Point. Father Junipero Serra comes next, and his great mission system — a subject which Micaela plans to treat abstractly. The third panel will depict Roger Bacon, father of experimental science. The fourth has for its theme Father Luke Wadding, eminent Franciscan scholar and philosopher of the 17th Century, head of the Franciscan House of Studies in Rome. Although the heads of the Philosophical Seminary at San Luis Rey suggested the general subject they desired for all of these murals, Micaela has been allowed free rein in both conception and composition. They have advised in such matters as ecclesiastical usage, but everything pertaining to art has been left completely in her hands.

How capable those young hands have proved themselves is well demonstrated by this new mural, a reproduction of which may be found on page 1 of the Pine Cone Cymbal of this issue.
DuCasse: Maybe it was because Franciscans are that way. Franciscans are really humble people; they've never lost that quality from their founder. And they hired a professional to do their job, and they gave me the credit for knowing how to do it, which was marvelous, so that I had a free hand.

Of course, I consulted and I made my detailed sketches and everything, so they knew exactly what they were going to have, but they never told me how to do it.

Riess: Who did you actually work with there?

DuCasse: It was Father Paul Meinicke. He is no longer a Franciscan; he left the order not long after the mural was completed. He had some physical problems and so forth and finally left. He's a priest over in Nevada, if he's still with us. The other priest was his good friend Father Brendan Mitchell, who later became, and I think he still is, editor of The Way, a little magazine that the Franciscans publish here on the coast.

And they were very interesting. We used to call them David and Jonathan because Father Brendan was a huge, big man, heavy, and Father Paul was little and slender, and they were just wonderful, good friends. They were the ones that encouraged me, and we talked over the idea for the two total subjects, and we just had a wonderful time together, and they backed me up.

What was interesting was that I worked on those murals while the library was open. I had a little movable stand that I used to get up on and do the work. And, of course, there were just crowds of people in and out of the library every once in a while, on Saturdays and Sundays. They would all come and have to see what I was doing, and ask me questions and so forth, which was fun, which was interesting.

One delightful thing happened. A man came in and sat down and watched me for a while, and I was putting the basic drawing in of the church at Assisi, it just happened I was working on that. And it was way up in the background, and, of course, it was in perspective, and this man kept looking at me, and he said, "Your perspective's wrong."

I said, "Well, do you know about perspective?"

He said, "Yes, I do."

I said, "Okay, will you work it out for me? I'd be delighted. If I'm wrong, I want to be corrected."
DuCasse: So he worked out this very detailed drawing, we took it up and put it right up with mine, and it was exactly the same. [laughing] What he had not accounted for, you see, was the fact that when he was sitting down and looking up, evidently, it looked distorted to him.

So these are some of the funny little things that happened to me in the library. But it was a wonderful learning process because even though I couldn't use true fresco, I learned a great deal about keeping the wall intact, not going into it too deeply with perspective, there were only certain things you had to think about in perspective, but keeping it really a decorative work, composition-wise.

Riess: Is that work still there?

DuCasse: Yes. It is now known as the Marian Library.

That was done in 1939-1940. It was dedicated by Archbishop Mitty. It was dedicated on February eleventh, the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, interestingly enough. I didn't realize that, and I guess that was in '41 probably. It took a year and a half to do that whole thing.

Then the Franciscans were very intrigued, and one of their members came up from San Luis Rey. Father Oliver Lynch, O.F.M., was the head of San Luis Rey Mission, and he saw the library. They had the theological seminary at San Luis Rey and they wanted murals on their walls above their library books. So that was my second commission, and I started working on that, and that was when we had moved to Carmel, in 1940.

I set up my wall. I did them in separate panels. The larger one was three panels of four-by-six masonite, which were reinforced in the back, and then where the two met were screws that went through, so they could be locked together, but they could be unlocked and delivered, you know, in a more concise package. I worked on those in Carmel during those prewar years, in 1941-43.

Riess: I want to stop and quiz you for a minute. Could you have been an artist and a nun?

DuCasse: At one point, I think, as a child, I thought I wanted to be a nun; most impressionable girls in a convent go through that stage where that's kind of an accepted thing. Once I got my training in art school and began to work actually, you know, on these plans, I realized that that would be very difficult. Illuminating manuscripts and things of that kind, you could do
DuCasse: that in the peace and quiet of a cloister. But to do murals, you have to be free to go. And at that time, very few nuns were able to go out and do things; you see, this was pre-Council.

Carmel: Plans for a Catholic Art Center, and Music in the Mission

Riess: Why did your mother and Pal decide to move to Carmel?

DuCasse: Well, they wanted to go back to Carmel because they loved the Mission; that was their birthplace as Christians, as Catholics. [brief tape interruption after phone rings]

In the meantime, they had been in Indianapolis visiting Pal's mother there--this was probably in '39--and they wanted to found a Catholic cultural center. (They would like to have had it in Carmel, but they hadn't really gotten down there for a long time enough to explore the possibilities.)

So Pal got to know about the chancellor. He evidently was from an Indianapolis family that were known to her family. There was some reason why, and I can't remember the little connection, but she went to him. Charming gentleman. He had the three of us in his office, we had quite a long talk, and he said, "If you will settle here, I can get you all the funding in the world. This is the kind of thing that we would love to back in this community."

Riess: The chancellor?

DuCasse: Of the archdiocese of Indianapolis, the Catholic archdiocese. Excuse me, I should have made that more clear.

Well, Pal had an abhorrence of Indianapolis from a very unhappy childhood there and so forth, so she said, "No, no." She didn't say that right to him, but when we got out, she said, "Never, never. I'm never going to do anything here. It's got to be the Mission."

But this chancellor said to us, "There is a very famous artist, monk, down at St. Meinrad's Abbey"--which was in southern Indiana--"Dom Gregory DeWit. You should go and see him because he has just completed a huge mural in the apse of the church, and he is looking for something else to do."
DuCasse: Well, we got down there as fast as we could. We made an appointment to see him through the chancellor, who did that all for us, and we drove down. It was beautiful country. Ah! that was the most wonderful visit. Of course, I had always loved the Benedictines, and so this was when I first began to realize what the Benedictines could perhaps do for an artist, though this was a farming community; they were not an artistic community, they were a farming community.

But Dom Gregory was delightful, a real character, and, of course, Pal and Pellie and he just got along beautifully. He took us all over, showed us the whole place. It was so funny because he'd have to try to remember when it was cloisters so we wouldn't get in there. A delightful man, Dutch, you know, and full of humor.

We were royally entertained, they gave us a beautiful meal, and my mother fell in love with the bread, which the monks made. Oh! The bread cook came in to meet her. He said, "I will send back bread with you," so he came as we were leaving, and we had these two loaves that were at least three feet long, the monastery loaves of bread. My mother went out with one under each arm. [laughter]

And we got Father Gregory to consent to come out to California. Of course, he was just delighted. He thought he was going to get some big jobs out there. That didn't materialize. But that solidified their idea that this cultural center had to be in Carmel, and they thought that maybe Dom Gregory could be part of it.

Riess: Is that work at St. Meinrad's considered to be modern?

DuCasse: Yes, it is modern, but it's Byzantine. And that was the same form that Del Lederle—who was a later artist here, who we'll talk about—used. I don't know why the artists of that period harked back to the Byzantine. I think it's because they were trying to get away from the realism of the late nineteenth-century religious art, which was extremely saccharine. So they went back to that which was semi-abstract; it was as abstract as they could get at that point.

Not only that, but I think Dom Gregory had trained at Beuron, in Germany. They were one of the foremost painting abbeys in Europe at the time. And they had a very rigid style, their own style. In fact the name of the abbey, Beuron, became the name for that style. He had trained with them, but he had kind of broken away from it because he was not set in any of his ways. Even as a monk, he was a wandering monk, he never
DuCasse: stayed in any one place. So he was able to break himself away from that, but that's where he had trained. It was more leaning toward the Byzantine than any other form. That's why he painted the way he did.

Riess: Now, tell me what happened when he came out to California.

DuCasse: Okay, he came out to California after we had moved to Carmel in 1940, and he stayed with us. You see, we had that little back studio, a separate building. So we fixed that up for him so that he could live as a monk there. And it was so delightful.

Maybe Mother said that in her reminiscences. He pretended that this was sort of like a monastery. We said that he was the abbot, and Pal was the prior, and Mother—What was Mother? She had a very special job there. But anyway, I was the novice. [laughing] So he ran our establishment as a monastery while he was with us, or tried to. [laughing] It was a little difficult because Pal and Pellie were not to be trapped in quite so much of that. But it was a fun thing.

Riess: And what was the Catholic community that you were joining in Carmel?

DuCasse: That was the Carmel Mission parish.

Riess: There were a lot of converts, weren't there?

DuCasse: Quite a few converts.

Riess: The same kind of intellectual orarty people?

DuCasse: Well, many of them came down in the summers. Not all of them were living there all year round. But several of them would come in the summers, like James Haggerty from St. Mary's College, a philosopher and theologian, an extraordinary man, who became a very great friend. And others, of course, came through Carmel, you see. So there was a tremendous amount of intellectual ferment. Of course, Noel Sullivan and his group, naturally, and he brought so many people into it.

That's why I think Pal and Pellie felt that this was a perfect place for this kind of thing to happen. They could draw upon people from all over the world that came through. They could draw upon the people that were there as well.

So they talked it up, and the pastor, Father O'Connell—who was a good friend of theirs by this time—well, he was all for it, of course, but money, this was the problem, how to get the money. And this was the one thing that was very difficult to do.
Riess: Was Harry Downie on the scene then?

DuCasse: Oh yes, yes, definitely. You see, he was Pal and Pellie's godfather. So he was very much in favor of what they wanted to do, but I think he was a little tongue in cheek, he was so concerned with the Mission restoration, which was a long, long job, as you know, it took him many, many years. That was foremost. And, oh sure, you know, he was encouraging. He said, "Oh, if you can do it, fine."

But there were other elements involved. They thought Dom Gregory could be the spearhead or the director or whatever, but he was not really capable of being that; he was an artist, strictly an artist, and he didn't really want to be tied down to that. Finally he left—he wasn't there for more than maybe six months or so—and went back to an abbey in Louisiana that wanted an artist to do some work for them.

They hated to give up the idea, but what it eventually turned into, my mother became president of the National Council of Catholic Women, of which also a part was the altar society of Carmel Mission, and she and Pal did a lot for them in getting all these little pious ladies to begin to think about Catholic culture. They talked about Catholic art, they talked about the need for good Catholic art in other churches. Here they had the best example, the Carmel Mission, which was filled with beautiful traditional and fine art, but so many other churches were just, you know, bland and had only the pious, late-nineteenth-century kind of art.

They started, you see, this idea, and they began a series of exhibits of shrines. Harry made some, I made some, and other people did. We tried to show how they could bring good Catholic art into their homes. Here they had the great example of the Mission period of Spanish Baroque art, in good taste.

Riess: And the shrine was for the home?

DuCasse: Yes.

And we had exhibits which we took all over the deanery—they called it a deanery, the dioceses of Monterey-Fresno at that time. We would go to the different groups of altar societies, and Pal or Pellie would lecture on all of this, and we would take our exhibit of shrines and put them up and show them.

So this was really an incipient education in good Catholic art, a sort of beginning of the liturgical idea, where art—not only in the home, but in the church—should really be something which is part of the Catholic's outlook on life.
Riess: Would you, if you were to go back and look at that now, think that it was good Catholic art?

DuCasse: Yes, I would. Because we used only the best materials, unusual and interesting materials. We used good art. Some of it was actually made. I made several shrines. Harry would make the wooden environment for the shrine. And everything was done with the best taste possible. And even though we used some contemporary things, they were good contemporary art—because there was some good contemporary art starting to come, from Europe, from New York.

Riess: But it seems to me that when you start working in that scale that you really are running a great danger of getting into kitsch.

DuCasse: Absolutely. But, see, Pal and Pellie would never have allowed that, nor would Harry. Harry had very high taste in art, even though it was the traditional art of the Mission Period and of the Spanish legacy; still, you know, he wanted good contemporary art, and he did have it. He had me do a set of stations, and he had Mark Adams do a set of stations, and things of that kind. He was willing to work with contemporary artists.

The only thing, when we did things for the Mission, or missions, they had to be in the spirit of the Mission Period. Mark Adams's series were amazing because they were contemporary in one sense, but they had that naivete of the mission Indian who would do the work in the early Mission Period. It was amazing; he was able to evoke that spirit.

I couldn't do that, I was already too highly trained with my tools as an artist and with my mental approach. I could not really break down and do something primitive. I could do it in the semiprimitive Spanish way that I did for that series of stations for San Antonio Mission, which are done very much like the Spanish.

Riess: When did Joan Morris arrive in your life?

DuCasse: I'm trying to think if that was before I was married or after. I'm sure it was in the early forties that she must have come. [refers to materials]

Riess: Here's a letter of hers from 1950.

DuCasse: It must have been late forties and early fifties, probably.
Riess: [referring to materials] Here is Joan writing and asking about whether Pal and Pellie have given up the idea of forming a Catholic Art Center in Carmel. She, of course, had her own particular thing, which was the International Society of Sacred Art, and the Damascene Studios, the animated art studio. Did any of it materialize?

DuCasse: No, not in Carmel. They had to give up that all-over plan of a real center. What they did was to bring, to encourage people like Joan Morris--. Now, I don't know whether she ever gave any lecture while she was in Carmel, that I can't remember. Because, you see, that was in the late forties, early fifties, and I was already not living in Carmel. I had married in '44, and in '46, when Ralph mustered out of the army, we took over the place here in Piedmont and I lived up here. We went to Carmel from time to time, but I was not involved as much with what they were doing then. That's why that part's a little bit hazy for me.

But along with the shrine thing, the other thing that Pal and Pellie had always wanted was to have Baroque period music in the Mission. To tell you the truth, they were not terribly happy with Noel Sullivan's music. It was good, but they felt that he used a lot of contemporary works.

Riess: He was in charge of music for the Mission?

DuCasse: For the Mission. He directed the choir and played the organ.

What they had was that idea of what they had experienced in Paris when they were there in 1922. Even though they were not Catholics, they loved great church music; that was part of the culture of Europe. Every Sunday we went to mass, and we would go to whatever church was having either a great choral concert or organ concert. Bonnet was the organist at St. Sulpice, and we would go and hear him play. I think it was St. Gervais that was over near Les Halles, and that was where they had great choral music as well as other kinds of religious music. So Pal and Pellie loved great church music, the Gregorian chants, they loved Palestrina, the whole thing.

Through Minna Berger and the Paulists, of course, they knew about Father Finn, the great Paulist choir director of their big church in New York, St. Paul's in New York. He was well known throughout the country, and I think his group had given concerts at different places. And one of his star performers, when he was a boy, was Milton Cross, who was the well known Metropolitan Opera commentator on the Saturday radio broadcasts.
DuCasse: Well, it seems that Father Finn was not very well, and the doctor said he had to get away from his work, get out, do something else, just go someplace. So he was invited to come to Carmel. And when he was feeling better, they said, "You know, Father, our greatest dream has been to have a great concert of Palestrina and Vivaldi, all of those men of that period, in the Carmel Mission, because that would be the proper music for the Mission.

You can imagine how Noel Sullivan liked that; oh, his nose was out of joint. Well, Father just loved the idea. He got a group of local people, people who were working in the Bach Festival and who were singing in the Mission. He got this group together and whipped them up, and they gave this magnificent Renaissance music concert in the Mission, and it was, of course, a tremendous success. Oh! you can imagine—that music in that Mission! And what he did with those local people, how he was able to bring that music out of them! I've forgotten how long it took him to do it.

In the meantime he was staying with us again, out in the little back cottage, and he did a great deal for Pal and Pellie because he encouraged them so much in what they were doing. They knew they were not going to be able to do this permanently, but they were going to try to do things from time to time that would bring some of this greatness back to the Mission which they loved so dearly.

Riess: Was Noel Sullivan in general estranged from Pal and Pellie?

DuCasse: No, strangely enough he finally rallied at the end, and came to the concert and enjoyed it, but I think he felt it was an affront to him. It really wasn't, they didn't mean it personally but it was just a touchy situation.

They were adamant because they felt that this is what should be in that Mission. And, of course, they knew that he couldn't keep up this kind of thing all the time—you couldn't possibly do that. Finally I think Noel understood that it was not a criticism of him particularly. Everyone should find out what Renaissance music could be inside the Mission. And the Bach Festival—of course, the Bach B Minor Mass was always given in the Mission, which was so marvelous a setting for it.

Riess: And what about their connection with Effie Fortune?

DuCasse: Well, my mother and father, of course, both had known Effie. She was not only in Carmel, but she was an active artist during the Panama-Pacific Exposition. So, of course, they knew her, you see, from that time. And my mother had heard that Effie was a liturgical artist.
DuCasse: Now, here is where we get the real liturgical art, because she was doing things for the actual Church, the mass and so forth. And also we had come to know Father John Meehan, who was active in San Francisco. He was a great friend of Effie's. They were both doing a parallel job at the time, he in San Francisco and she down in Monterey, of trying to raise the taste of art for the Church. They were really the pioneers, the spearhead.

Riess: But this was actually liturgical?

DuCasse: Primarily liturgical art, because Father Meehan, you see, designed vestments and chalices and so forth primarily, and also I think probably decorated churches. But it was geared to the liturgical function. The art that would encompass that would either be for actual use—the vessels, altar, what have you—but also decoratively, what would be as a decorative art.

Riess: Liturgical means it's in the service of the mass.

DuCasse: In service of the liturgy.

Riess: And so the home shrine, then, is only religious art?

DuCasse: That's religious art, right. But it was a sort of a bridge to try to get the Catholic to improve his tastes so that he would notice the discrepancy between what was great and what was not.

When Pellie and Pal and I were going to Carmel in the thirties and she found out that Effie was doing this, had the Monterey Guild, and here I was preparing myself to be a liturgical artist, she thought, well, this would be the person to go to. So we made an appointment and went to see her, and Effie was nice, but she was Effie. And we soon found out that she didn't want any other painter in the Monterey Guild; she was the painter, and she had, for other areas, these other craftsmen. She was nice but noncommittal and gave me the polite brush-off. My mother was very irate at that afterwards.

Riess: Well, maybe if you had gone by yourself and didn't have your mother and so on with you?

DuCasse: Maybe, but I don't think so, no. I think Effie was being honest in a way. She did not want anybody else. She did all the painting that was necessary, and what little painting was done was enough for one artist, you know, she didn't need anybody else to do it. She did need sculptors, and I wasn't doing any sculpture at that time. And metalsmiths, woodworkers and fabric constructions, you see. So that never came to anything.
DuCasse: I never held it against her. I understood that. To me she was doing a great work, there just was no place for me in it. So that was that. I just went on my own and did what came my way.

Riess: About Joan Morris, is she significant?

DuCasse: She was significant in that she was well known in England. I don't know how much actual liturgical art she did, but she was one of the people from Europe who came to this country trying to get interest in contemporary art for the church, which is, of course, what Pal and Pellie were trying to do too in Carmel.

Riess: In 1950, when you were just about to start the Catholic Art Forum, her idea was, and I'd like your comments on it [reading]:

I want to build an animated cartoon studio, even though we may do church building as well. An animated art studio gives an outlet to the work of many artists at once, and so gives a reason for artists gathering together without there being too much competition between them that leads to professional jealousy and would upset any art group. There must be normal outlet to artists' work, and church work will never give that, and so a Catholic studio for animated films is the one thing that would gather artists peacefully, or more or less peacefully, together.

DuCasse: I think that she is influenced there, very definitely, by Eric Gill. Eric Gill was the great English stonecutter and sculptor. He was still living at that time I'm pretty sure. I have his autobiography, published in 1941. He tried to establish communes for artists. It never worked, but I think that's where she got this idea, where they would all live in the perfect ambience for creativity, not only as Christians but as artists. I'm pretty sure that's where she got the idea. Eric Gill was the one par excellence at that time.

I never had much to do with Joan because she flitted in and out, and she was here and there, and she traveled all over the country.

Another person from the East who had effects all over the country in various ways was Ada Bethune. She was from the East Coast. I always sort of associated her in my mind with Joan;
DuCasse: I'm sure they knew each other. She was—-I shouldn't say "was," she may still be, I think we're probably about the same age—she was trying to produce good Christian art and liturgical art on the East Coast, before we got the message here. You know, everything takes time. There's that lag between Europe and the East Coast, then between the East Coast and the West Coast; you know.

So she came out. You see her in the Liturgical Arts Magazine a great deal. She was a good friend of Maurice Lavanoux. We haven't talked about Maurice, but he came out and saw my work and published one of these in here. [showing materials] It's in this one.

Riess: Yes, he founded that magazine?

DuCasse: Yes. It was very interesting. I found the copy of the letter I wrote to him. I thought that the Liturgical Arts, the association and the magazine, were a very busy kind of thing. I thought that the Liturgical Arts Guild was very active. It turned out that it was just Maurice Lavanoux and a few backers that backed him. So he was it, that was it, you see.

That's an extra copy which you can take with you. That material is all material that might be of interest to you.

Riess: Good. All right.

DuCasse: Of course, Minna, there again, introduced us to this. She knew Maurice Lavanoux. I subscribed to the magazine, and I see some of the earlier copies are 1932, 1933. So, you see, I got it fairly early.

Riess: Yes, I see Volume 8 is 1940, so I guess it started in 1932.

DuCasse: I wrote to him and told him about the work that I was doing. He used to travel around the country, and I said, "When you're on the West Coast, would you let us know? I would like to have you come and see my work." He wrote back and said, "I'd be delighted." So he did. He came to see my work and he was very complimentary, and that's why he had that published in the magazine. [Mural by Micaela Martinez in the Franciscan Library, San Francisco, in Vol. 8, Number 3, April 1940.] So that's how I got to know him.

I saw him once more in New York in 1952 when I was back there, but that was getting toward the end. It was very difficult for him to carry on that job because he did it all himself,
DuCasse: and he had a little tiny office that was like a cubbyhole, and it was literally stacked. He had a little tiny place for his desk, and everything was stacked around him, you know. The poor guy—I think some of his backers gradually petered out.

Riess: Who were his subscribers, do you think?

DuCasse: They were from all over the country. I think they were Catholic colleges, even some of the more well-educated Catholic priests, architects who were interested in church building. Because he always had articles on some nice church, churches that would be for a small community, that were not too expensive, that were designed to be simple but beautiful. Like Paul Ryan told us, you know, that simplicity of fine proportion and a good design.

Riess: Do you think it was an effective voice?

DuCasse: Definitely. I think this was—how shall we say?—the backbone of the liturgical art movement in this country, because no matter what else happened, what came out of this magazine was very reflective of what was happening and was very influential.

Riess: Reflective of the good?

DuCasse: Of the good, of the good. Of course, once in a while I think he would put something there that was no good as an example, but most was always positive. And you would find these little churches springing up in all parts of the country, it was wonderful.

Riess: Well, then, are you saying that what was good in Catholic church art began back in 1932?

DuCasse: I think probably it did. Now, maybe some of it had already begun, you know what I mean, the seeds of it; there might have been single souls who had this idea and were struggling to produce it. Like Effie, hers was back in the thirties. And Father Meehan. They were struggling against a current, and then gradually that current changed, and I think that the Liturgical Arts did a great deal for that.

Riess: You've lent me books that are academic discussions of liturgical arts, and I think that most of the examples, all the examples, are from Europe.

DuCasse: True. That was because most of those people were Europeans that wrote those books. That's the sad part of it.
Riess: At first I had thought that the great movement in modern liturgical art was postwar, but then I began to think, well, no, it really goes back to Matisse and Corbusier and people like that.

DuCasse: True. And Père Couturier and Père Régamey, yes.

In Europe, you see, there again, Europe still is the leader, still the spearhead of a movement. Well, the French always have been very different. I mean even their Catholicism is different, in a sense. And they were very courageous in their thesis that great art is produced by great artists, and their personal philosophy has nothing to do with it.

Riess: That message didn't get across the water though, did it?

DuCasse: Well, not at the beginning. But, I mean, look at Père Couturier in Assy. He deliberately took communists and atheists and whatever because they were great artists, and he said, "Any great artist can take a subject and do a great work of art; he doesn't have to be a believer in the subject."

And it's true. Now, if you can get a believer who is also a great artist, then you've got something which is, well, an El Greco or a Giotto. But it isn't always necessary; there can be an intellectual work there, someone who says, "Now, this is a subject that I will do, and I will make it as compelling as I can." And it worked.

The Catholic Art Forum

Riess: Now let's zero in on the Catholic Art Forum. You have referred to working for "our cause."

DuCasse: We needed primarily to bring contemporary artists into the service of the church. Whether they were Catholics or non-Catholics or nothing at all was not primarily our concern. If they were Catholic artists, fine. Or if they were Episcopalians or whatever. But what we were trying to do was to let the church community and the priests and the people understand that they should try to hire real artists to do their work, not to depend upon the catalogue.

That was not spelled out in the aims, but that was within the idea of bringing the contemporary artist and the church together, so that that would be done. I ran across that
DuCasse: manifesto in here somewhere. [referring to materials] Here it is. [reading] "The aims of the Catholic Art Forum shall be to foster a greater interest in and appreciation of liturgical and religious art of the Roman Catholic tradition with particular emphasis on the contemporary insofar as it does not contradict tradition."

That's very interesting, that wording, because if you allow the contemporary artist to go too far out into total abstraction, that would contradict tradition because we don't feel that Christ is abstract; Christ is actually living today, and therefore there has to be some concrete, specifically concrete ideas there.

In other words, we have the limitation on one side of bad-taste art which was just copied and recopied so many times it had lost all its form and meaning, or the other extreme art which was so far removed from life that it wouldn't have meaning for the average person. So in a way, we made those two extremes a stop; we would stop at those points.

Riess: Did you write these bylaws together with Father Monihan?

DuCasse: The board did. We had sessions in which we worked this out, and the wording of everything was done by the board. I think we were actually about fifteen members in all. They may not all have been listed there.

Riess: The artist-founders, and then there's Father Monihan.

DuCasse: And there was Darrell Dally who was a layman. His name is not there, but he and Father Monihan were the ones who got us all together the first time. He and Father were the ones who called us together to do something about these problems that had arisen from the experience we had in producing the contemporary religious art show at the de Young Museum.

Contemporary Religious Art by California Artists, 1952

Riess: So the show at the de Young was the first issue, then.

DuCasse: That's it. That was really what was at the back of the cause for the forming of the Art Forum. And now I'll tell you one of the main reasons. Father Meehan, of course, was on the committee, and he was on the jury, and we had selected certain key artists
DuCasse: whose work we had great confidence in, and we invited them, 
not to be juried, but they were invited to show. Then we juried 
a whole group of other artists that we sent the information to.

But Father Meehan, when he saw one of these artists that 
we had invited, would not permit the work to be shown because 
he said it was an inferior material, and it was beautiful 
stainless steel. And this rocked us all because, to us, this 
was as precious and as beautiful as gold or silver or alabaster 
or what have you. Stainless steel was our contemporary medium, 
which was beautiful. It was "My Peace I Give unto You" by 
Elah Hale Hays, a very well-known Berkeley woman who taught 
sculpture at Arts and Crafts for many, many years.

It was exquisite. It was abstract and yet it was recogn-
izable. It was done beautifully, a beautiful thing. Well, we 
were just not only horrified and embarrassed that we had to tell 
her that, but that a priest, who was supposed to have been so 
aesthetically sensitive and an artist, would have this totally 
erroneous concept; it was just staggering. There was nothing 
we could do, he was adamant.

Riess: And what was his role on the committee?

DuCasse: He was head of the jury. But even though this was a nonjuried 
work, he would not allow it to be shown.

Riess: I thought he was down in Carmel. I mean I thought he was 
connected down there.

DuCasse: No, no, he was San Francisco. He was a great friend of Effie's, 
but he worked out of San Francisco.

So immediately we realized there was a gulf between the 
clergy concept of art and the artist. So evidently that got to 
Father Monihan—I don't know how that got to him—and this whole 
thing started.

Riess: Well, that's very interesting. Who organized the exhibition in 
the first place?

DuCasse: That was probably Ruth Cravath and Ninfa Valvo, I would imagine, 
who was then curator of painting at the museum.

Riess: So this was the seminal moment, the show?

DuCasse: Yes, and then, with our experience of that show, came the 
necessity for the Art Forum.
Okay. Could we go down the list of these members of the exhibition committee for that Religious Art by California Artists show and see how they fit in? Ruth Cravath we know is a sculptor.

Right. And already had done work for the Church.

And Ninfa Valvo?

Yes. She was curator of painting at the de Young Museum at the time, and she was in charge of the exhibition. She mounted the exhibition, with our help.

And Aleta Jennings?

Aleta Jennings was an interested laywoman who loved good art and was a very informed Catholic laywoman.

Did she continue to be part of the Catholic Art Forum?

Yes, she did right through to the end, and recently she gave us some papers.

George Benigsen?

Benigsen? I assume that he was probably from Grace Cathedral. I'm not sure, let's look that up, that name sounds familiar to me, but I think he was an Episcopalian minister.

And Norman K. Blanchard.

Was an architect.

The Right Reverend Karl Morgan Block.

He was from the Grace Cathedral.

Who put this committee together?

Probably Ruth and Ninfa, I would imagine.

Okay. Mario J. Ciampi.

Yes, you know who he is.

Right. And Monsignor Harold E. Collins.
DuCasse: Yes. I guess he was the pastor of the cathedral. Usually the bishop is never the pastor of the cathedral; he has his seat in the cathedral. But I think Harold Collins was then the pastor of the cathedral. He was also the liturgist, not the art but the actual rubrics of the liturgy. I have his book that he wrote at the time. [The Church Edifice and Its Appointments, Dolphin Press, 1940, Monsignor Harold E. Collins.] We had to have a good liturgist on our board.

Riess: Of course, this is not your board yet.

DuCasse: No, I mean for the committee for the exhibit.

Riess: And you. And the Reverend E. C. Farnham.

DuCasse: He also sounds to me like he was an Episcopalian.

Riess: And Rabbi Alvin I. Fine.

DuCasse: He was from Temple Emanu-El.

Riess: Was he active on this committee?

DuCasse: Oh yes, yes, all of these were. We met together many times, we all met.

Riess: Louisa Jenkins.

DuCasse: Who, of course, you know.

Riess: Peter Macchiarini. He's a jeweler, isn't he?

DuCasse: Yes. Metalcraft. He did some liturgical pieces I think.

Riess: The Reverend Leo T. Maher.

DuCasse: He might have been the chancellor at that time. He was sensitive to art, was interested in art, and he was the one that we dealt with when we formed the Catholic Art Forum. He was not always as open as we had thought he was going to be, but he was one of the few Catholic prelates we knew who was interested in art at least.

Riess: Dr. Elisabeth Moses.

DuCasse: She was also working at the de Young Museum. Very shortly after that she left. She may have been just a visiting curator. But she went back to be the head of the museum in Milan. Ninfa gave me a letter to her, and when I was in Milan I went to see her.
DuCasse: and she took me all through the museum and showed me what they were going to do; you know, the Italians had never done anything about updating or cleaning or using any restorative techniques on their art work. She had learned a great deal in America and she was taking the message back and she was setting up this whole structure. It was magnificent what she was doing. So it was wonderful to see her.

Riess: Oh, that's interesting.

That was the end of her time in the Bay Area?

DuCasse: Yes, she had just come here I guess maybe to learn the techniques and so forth. A most wonderful person, a lovely person. I think she was here and then she went to Europe and then she came back. But she must have been just back for a visit because—and I'll tell you that too, when the time comes—when I went to Europe in 1952, you see, it was just before the exhibit, and I had been given carte blanche to find artists. We had hoped in the beginning to make it international. By the time I got back, three months later, they found the cost was prohibitive, and they scratched that part of it.

But I went to her to find out about artists in Milan. I found artists in Amsterdam. I found contacts in different places. It was a wonderful project for me to work on as I travelled.

Riess: I don't understand how Father Meehan could have been so presumptuous. It was not an all-Catholic show; it was called religious art, wasn't it?

DuCasse: True. But he was the Catholic priest-artist, you see, so he was very conscious of his position. Or maybe he took on more than he should have. But he was the only one who was a priest as well as an artist, and vice versa.

Riess: And was it a particularly Catholic-looking piece?

DuCasse: Oh, it could have been. What it was was these two beautiful pieces of steel, thinned, squared pieces, which made the body, and then the arms came out from that, the same, but very stylized, and beautiful hands, and they were the blessing hands. Then the head was very stylized, but it was just as recognizable as you'd want. It was only the torso; this came down into a beautiful block of wood. Well, we had it in the next exhibit; the Art Forum exhibited it many times!

Riess: Was the show reviewed? Did it get a great deal of press?
DuCasse: Oh, it did. I was looking through here; I don't seem to have the copies of those reviews.

Riess: This catalogue has an introduction by Walter Heil. And I see that your selection jury was headed by Rudolph Schaeffer--hardly a likely person, I would think.

DuCasse: You're right; I don't know how that came about. Maybe because he may have been very interested in the whole idea, and being a teacher and a colorist and designer, they probably thought that he could contribute.

Riess: And Margaret Bruton was also on the selection jury. She was a muralist, or what was she?

DuCasse: Well, the three Bruton sisters often did things together, and they were muralists, mosaic, yes, and paint, I think they've done some painting; but most of their work was mosaic, a medium ideally adapted to church decoration.

Riess: And Dorothy Puccinelli Cravath.

DuCasse: Right.

Riess: And Michael Goodman.

DuCasse: That name is familiar but I can't recall the connection.

Riess: Well, he's an architect, and he did the decoration on the 405 Sutter building in the city.

DuCasse: Oh yes, oh yes.

Riess: I think that, looking at this selection jury, I can see why the Reverend John E. Meehan felt that he had to represent God, because nobody else here is particularly religious.

DuCasse: Exactly, exactly. He was overly conscientious, I must say. [laughter]

[referring to materials] This is the exhibit, this is the review by [Alfred] Frankenstein.

Riess: Yes. [reading] "Religion and Modern Art Go Hand in Hand."

DuCasse: See, and this is quite a nice long article too. We should get a copy of that.
Riess: They give as an example something by Jacques Schnier, lent by the Temple Emanu-El. And Elio Benvenuto.

DuCasse: Elio's was one of the statues for Corpus Cristi, which was just being done at that time.

Riess: And by Frances Rich.

DuCasse: Yes, that famous St. Francis of hers, which is a very lovely thing, almost life-size.

Riess: Had you conceived of this being an annual thing at the time that you were putting together the religious art show?

DuCasse: No, we were just glad to get it in a major museum.

It started out to be national or international, and we finally had to pull in our horns because we just didn't have the funds for that. So it turned out to be mostly let's say West Coast or the western part of the United States. So it was local, to a great extent local.

Riess: Okay. So then the next event is the actual Catholic Art Forum.

DuCasse: Right.

Riess: [reading] "Desirous of carrying on the work begun in our area by the large exhibit of religious art held at the de Young Museum in the fall of 1952." Then, "Since it's organization in 1953, the Forum has held quarterly meetings. The artist-founders: Elio Benvenuto, Mario Ciampi, Peggy Conahan." Now, we haven't heard anything about Peggy Conahan.

DuCasse: No. It's impossible. I haven't been able to find her; she's not in the phone book.

Riess: What kind of an artist was she?

DuCasse: Well, let's see, she painted, and I'm trying to think if she did any fabric works too, banners and altar frontals, but I don't remember now. I think mainly that she painted. She was very much an individualist, and always difficult to get ahold of, you know, elusive is what I'm trying to say. She was kind of an elusive person. I did see her once when I was still teaching at Lone Mountain; something came up and I got in touch with her and saw her briefly at that time, and now there's nothing in the telephone book, I haven't been able to find her. So I don't know if she's moved out of the area or what.
Riess: [continuing to read the list of artist-founders] And Ruth Cravath. And you. And June Foster Hass.

DuCasse: She died two years ago. She's the one who did the two pieces of sculpture I have over there, the crucifix and the madonna.

Riess: Louisa Jenkins. Del Lederle.

DuCasse: He was a painter.

Riess: And Antonio Sotomayor. Are these all Catholics?

DuCasse: Let me see.

Riess: That's my first question. How did you get from this "Religious Art by California Artists"--.

DuCasse: Well, Ruth is not. The first three are, or at least as far as I know. And June was.

Riess: So it was not a requirement of the original planning?

DuCasse: No. Louisa and Del, Antonio, yes. No, it was not. The only one now of that group that isn't technically a Catholic is Ruth Cravath, though she was [laughing] as much one as anybody. It just happened that all of those were Catholics.

The Catholic Artists Organize--Aims and Achievements

Riess: When you were shocked at Father Meehan's decision, it was Catholics who decided that something had to be done?

DuCasse: Right, definitely. And as you noticed, in our aims was "the Roman Catholic tradition." Do you remember we said that?

The Episcopalian Church and the Lutheran Church, and maybe even the Presbyterian Church, some of the non-Catholic, Protestant churches, did have good taste already in their use of art, long before the Catholic; the Catholic Church was way behind in that.

Riess: Yes, you mentioned also a couple of years ago "feeling that the Protestant churches were in better taste, truer to the Vatican II spirit of sweeping clean." Of course, that is more recent.

DuCasse: Right. That's exactly what it was.
Riess: What happened to Father Meehan and the Catholic Art Forum? Did he participate in it?

DuCasse: Oh yes, he did, and he even gave us a talk and possibly more. We never could really face him down on that, you see; he knew that we were very upset about it, but we just didn't make a big scene. What could you do?

When the Catholic Art Forum was formed, he must have gotten the message. Fundamentally he was absolutely in agreement with us, except that he just felt there were certain materials that were not precious enough, which is ridiculous. But I don't remember that that ever came up again. He may have changed his mind, too.

Riess: There was a lot of energy in the beginning of the Catholic Art Forum.

DuCasse: Oh, my yes, indeed there was.

Riess: And by the end?

DuCasse: Well, it was after Vatican II, where the emphasis was away from the need to embellish the church and the liturgy. In other words, they were talking about going back to the simplicity of the apostolic period, where the mass was said at a table at which people sat around. In other words, it was a meal, it was a festive meal between friends, a gathering of the community.

So they were going back to that—and like that English architect, Peter Hammond, who said, "Maybe we don't need a church building at all anymore." I mean they were going to the other extreme, which was ridiculous, that was too much. But all of a sudden, art was not important. The important thing was that the community came together and celebrated the Eucharist and that Christ came down in their midst; that was all that was necessary for a while, to get us back to the fundamental principles.

In other words, there were so many devotions which were taking people away from the central devotion of our religion, which is the Eucharist. They were saying the rosary during mass, and mostly the little old ladies were doing that, and then they would be running to side altars and saying their prayers, you know, when the mass was going on.

So in order to just really shake them up, we just said no, we don't need statues, we don't need pictures, we don't need anything but the table and the Eucharist and all of us gathered
DuCasse: around. That's why out at Newman Hall many times people will just all go up at the consecration and hold hands around the table, which is very lovely to see and experience. So, the emphasis changed radically.

Riess: I don't know whether you take issue with this report of Robert Dunavan's?

DuCasse: I haven't read that in years, I should read it over again.

Riess: In 1967, when the question was what to do about the Catholic Art Forum, whether you should continue to meet or not, he concluded that the purpose of the Forum at that point should be [reading]: "1) to act as an agency for those who are seeking the services of artists and architects." Now, I won't go through these things that he thinks it should be, but they're all very interesting, and I wonder whether any of them were ever realized.

DuCasse: No, they never were. That statement was prepared, as I remember, when we were trying to see if we could keep the thing going. But just as that statement was prepared, we realized that with Vatican II and with all the work that we had already done, and that was having a good effect, that really we had lost our reason for being anymore.

We didn't feel that that was part of our aims, you see. In other words, nobody wanted to be the person that had to sit in the office and be at the telephone to be the entrepreneur or the middleman or whatever you want to call them. Who wanted to do that? Nobody wanted to do that. Nobody was going to be paid and they wouldn't do it anyway, you know.

Riess: Right. Somebody's wife would do it.

DuCasse: That's right, exactly. And nobody's wife was interested.

[laughter]

Riess: The second aim is a nice one too, and you can deal with that. That was "to exhibit the best religious art available in the Cathedral Art Museum." Now, what happened to the Cathedral Art Museum?

DuCasse: Well, that was one of the things that we did try to work on. And for a while there it looked like we might be able to use that space. But there again, you had to have somebody who would be there to sit. You would have to have somebody to get the exhibits together. And most of us had all done that work in the beginning when we did those traveling shows which were
DuCasse: very, very complicated. We had to have insurance on all of that, that's costly. And it was just one of those jobs that nobody was free to do. Most of us were not free to do that anymore. And it was a question of logistics.

Riess: I understand. Three was "to encourage a continuing dialogue between artists and priests by fostering a regular monthly series of film showings and discussions."

DuCasse: Yes, it's all a wonderful idea, but it takes organization.

Riess: Okay. And the fourth one is more of the same: "supplying films and lectures to local schools in order to augment their art classes."

DuCasse: You see, if our organization had been solid enough at that time, with a good working force, we could have done all those things. But by that time it was just falling apart anyway, naturally, you know, and very few of us had the time to give to do those things. And we couldn't afford to pay anybody; that's what should have been done, really. That would take an organization with funds.

Riess: Yes, and that's what he started out by saying: "it's money that's what's needed."

DuCasse: Absolutely.

Riess: In the beginning, back in the early fifties, where did you meet and what did you do at your meetings?

DuCasse: We immediately got together a traveling exhibition, and we had it at USF first, and then we approached different Catholic colleges, non-Catholic groups. That's why I can't imagine what happened to it or whether I've got the wrong name, but I know we took our exhibit to the Lutheran Seminary which I thought was out in east Oakland somewhere, but there's no such thing now. Concordia College it was called at that time.

We took it down to the seminary, our Catholic seminary, which was exceedingly important because here were the young priests that were being formed and this was our exhibit there. We had three lectures. I gave one. We had one by a priest-theologian. And we had one by Paul Ryan, an architect. We got a great response from the young seminarians; they were just delighted with it.

So, you see, this was what we felt was our educational aim. And we took it to Santa Rosa, to the convent in Santa Rosa. We took it to Stockton some place. I think we even took it up to
DuCasse: Sacramento. It was a period of our greatest momentum. You see, we had dues from our members—we had a fairly large membership—so we could pay for the insurance. Darrell Dally arranged that for us. I think he was connected with an insurance firm at the time. So he was able to get an insurance rider on the exhibit. We had an exhibit at the arts festival when it was held in Washington Square.

Riess: Was there just one traveling show?

DuCasse: I think we had two traveling shows. We had the first one, and then we regrouped and got new things and did a little bit more. Then it became, again, a difficulty to move the artworks, to take them carefully, to insure them and all the rest of it, and finally we felt that we had gotten that show around to as many places as we could, and to do it a second time was not completely necessary. But we still had a lecture program in San Francisco.

Riess: Where?

DuCasse: At USF. Or the Junipero Serra Shop. Either of those two places we had it.

Riess: And as the years went by, were you asked to come in and consult? Was your group recognized as an authority?

DuCasse: Maybe not the group as such, but members of the group, because of their affiliation I guess. For instance, an architect would know, you see, already would know. Or he, as a member of the board, would go out and approach other architects who he felt would be interested, and that's where we got Paul Dachauer and Paul Ryan and, people like that, who were in on the founding of it.

Riess: And didn't Mario Ciampi say that it was through you that he got the commission at Newman Center?

DuCasse: Right, yes. Because we did that. As members of the organization, we were trying to put people in contact with each other. We would hear about artists and we would check them out; we did do that.

Riess: And what did you do for that massive mailing list of members? What kinds of events?

DuCasse: They came to the lectures. We would have a general meeting once a year where the new board members and the chairman would be elected. So we gave them one large meeting per year. The board meetings were closed, unless we invited specific people for some reason.
Church Art in the 1960s: A Retrospective Look at the Junipero Serra Shop, and the Catholic Art Forum

Riess: I wonder if sometimes the discussion would go beyond the scope of the forum to where people would talk about issues in general meetings of their religious identity, or that sort of thing?

DuCasse: Probably. I'm just trying to think back. I don't remember; those meetings are all kind of hazy because it would only be once a year.

In the beginning we had a fair turnout. Our membership really was interested in what we were doing, and, of course, they came to the exhibits or the special programs. We usually had a very good turnout for lectures of any kind. There was discussion, that was encouraged, but I don't remember just how it came about.

Riess: Did it have any spin-offs, other groups that developed out of it?

DuCasse: I don't remember, I don't think so, but that I don't know. It might have been, say, a Lutheran group might get the idea and then do something of their own, because they were very active. Also, of course, Grace Cathedral, they had a religious art exhibit, ["Church Art Today," April, May 1960] and I think certainly it was probably stimulated by the Art Forum's activities, and they got the names of artists and everything from us, from the Art Forum.

Riess: I asked you, and I believe you then checked with Ninfa Valvo, about Eric Locke, what the Eric Locke Galleries were that apparently lent so much to the Grace Cathedral exhibition?

DuCasse: As she explained it to me, they were not primarily or exclusively a religious art gallery, they were general, but they did have contact with some artists who did religious work. But she knew Eric Locke personally, and was a good friend of his and his partner, and often spent an evening with them. So she had very good feelings about him, she liked him, she thought he was a very fine person, that he had an excellent gallery. But she said it was not primarily religious.

Riess: [brief tape interruption] I think that other churches have more of a committee structure than the Catholic Church does. Maybe. I don't know.

DuCasse: Yes, that's true, they do.
Riess: You were just saying that other congregations were able to put together shows because they have a committee structure and art committees.

DuCasse: Right.

Riess: Has this changed at all in the Catholic Church?

DuCasse: Yes, it has. But I don't know that it's necessarily an art committee. Most of the parishes now have a parish council, where they have representatives from all the parish areas. If they have a parish school, they'll have somebody from the school board, or somebody from the mother's club, they'll have people from the senior group, they'll have them from the youth group, and so forth. They have a parish council and others elected from the parish at large to help the priest in doing the business of the parish.

Riess: Pope Paul VI, in the Sistine Chapel on Ascension Sunday, May 7, 1964, had a Mass for the Artist.

DuCasse: Oh, what a lovely idea.

Riess: In essence he seemed to be welcoming artists back into the Church, sort of reaching out to them.

"Consequently, we have always remained friends, but as happens among relatives and friends this relationship has suffered some damage. May we speak even more frankly? It is to say that you have, in a measure, abandoned us. You have gone to places afar, to drink at other fountains, seeking, though it be legitimately, to express other things."

Do you remember any of this?

DuCasse: I remember hearing of that.

Riess: "Shall we make peace again today and here? Do you wish to be friends? The Pope once more the friend of the artist? Would you like to receive suggestions?" And so on. "Beloved artists, we shall say but one word more, arrivederci."

DuCasse: Oh, isn't that lovely? I do remember the instance of that. I didn't get to read the whole thing, but I do remember it happening. It's true that that did happen in Europe. I think after that great sort of surge of working for the Church by the contemporary artists, that gradually it sort of petered out. Well, there weren't too many churches being built, anymore. And maybe there wasn't work for the artist. This is a possible explanation.
Riess: What was the actual year of Vatican II?

DuCasse: Well, it was about that time, earlier. 1962? I think it was '62, or it was before '62. But Pope John, just after he was elected, started that. So it probably was the late fifties and early sixties. It might have been concurrent with it almost, or just after the end of it. Because as I said, there was this sort of different emphasis in the liturgy that came out of the Council, and maybe that's what prompted Pope Paul VI, who followed Pope John in the papacy, maybe he felt that the artist needed to realize that he was still needed and he was still wanted.

Riess: You might enjoy reading it.

DuCasse: Yes, yes, I would very much like to.

Riess: Would you like to say something more about the Junipero Serra Shop, more than was said in your interview with Ethel Souza?

DuCasse: Yes, I remember that the Serra Shop was not only a tremendous focus for anybody who was interested in contemporary religious art, but the fact that they did have small, little exhibits. Some artist would come to their attention and they would decide maybe to have their work in the shop. So then they would have a good showing of their work, a small showing of their work.

They would have lectures by fine people that were coming through. People coming from the East or maybe from Europe or from the Orient or wherever. Any ideas that they felt would help the community here, they would sponsor.

Riess: Was it always a place of modern thinking?

DuCasse: Very much so, absolutely, from its very inception it was. And they had priests that backed them and priests that came and advised them if they needed advice. They were always at the hub. That was a center of people coming through San Francisco from all over; if they were in that field, they always went straight to the Junipero Serra Shop. That was the one place they knew that they could feel accepted and among their own.

Riess: In what field, though? What do you mean by that?

DuCasse: Well, art, literature, liturgy, the priests, the laity, educators. And they had such fine examples of genuine art works, and they had a beautiful line of cards. For instance, so often someone will still say to me down at Vallombrosa, "Oh, it just terrible that we don't have the Junipero Serra Shop. We can't find a good
DuCasse: religious card anymore." You know, they just had such good taste and so many people became dependent upon them for that that it was really very sad when they closed.

Riess: You say it was a center, but it was not a center enough to change taste apparently. It wasn't enough to solve the problem.

DuCasse: No, no, it was an adjunct. It was another voice, and another ground upon which this kind of thing could be fostered and encouraged.

Riess: The two traveling shows probably takes us up to around 1957 or so?

DuCasse: Right.

Riess: And then after that period what was the Catholic Art Forum doing?

DuCasse: Mainly, it was programs, lectures, and I think occasionally we had small exhibits; again, probably either at the Junipero Serra Shop or at USF, at the library. But we didn't travel them, we would have them maybe just for a specific reason.

Riess: Here are the minutes of an annual meeting held at Edith Hamlin's studio in May, 1969.

DuCasse: Yes, that was one of the last meetings that we had, if not the last.

Riess: In October, 1969, Ruth Cravath sent out the minutes, and that sounds like that's kind of the end.

DuCasse: Yes, I think that would be it.

Riess: And there's a nest egg for a future revival of the Catholic Art Forum. (That must be worth something by now.)

DuCasse: Yes, I wonder what's happened to that. [laughter] Well, you know what we did with that nest egg finally, because it was impossible to decide on who to take care of it, we gave it to the Gleeson Library. Father Monihan was to buy a fine art book with it in the memory of the Art Forum. That's what happened to our nest egg. That was officially turned over to him.

Riess: Well, between our review of things today and the interviews that you've done, do you feel that the Catholic Art Forum is documented?

DuCasse: I think so. I think I filled in some little empty spaces there that we didn't get from some of the others. I hope that I have. It seems to me that I have, as far as I can remember.
Riess: Of course, the bottom-line question—which is hardly fair, just because it's such an easy question—is, did it work?

DuCasse: Yes, I think I can say it worked. It provided that necessary impetus in its time. Now, whether it worked on a wide scale, we don't really know, but the little bit that we did see of it we feel that it did work, at least in our area, in San Francisco.

Riess: There must have been some little skirmishes among the people, because you get a bunch of artists together and it's terribly idealistic to think that they're all going to be in anything that even resembles agreement about what good taste is.

DuCasse: That's true, too. But I think what helped was that we had individual artists whom we had confidence in, fellow artists had confidence in them, and when we would put a show together it was just a few of us that did it, and it's just like any museum show: you decide on who is going to mount the exhibit and that's it, and then you don't quibble with them. You may not like what they've done after it's all over, but you can't do anything about it while it's being done. This is the usual procedure in museums and galleries anywhere.

Riess: From the most lofty view that you can conceive of yourself, what do you think are the really major pieces of liturgical art that you would point to with pride?

DuCasse: Well, I certainly would say that Newman Hall is one of the high points, because that is unusual. Some of the others were churches that—and I'm eliminating Corpus Christi because that was just before our time; we didn't really influence that at all—but I'm thinking of some of the other churches, like some that Paul Dachauer did. They were where they had to provide both a meeting place and a church, and they were not always truly and completely a church. So that what was done was the best that could be done, but it was well done. But it's not an example of a beautiful little church that was just to be used as a liturgical function, alas.

We didn't really have a great deal of influence on the cathedral. We would have liked to have had more influence than we did. So we can't take credit for that one. And I can't think of any others that had the complete benefit—. Well, of course, Paul Ryan mentioned several, and that one he did for the Carmelite sisters.

Riess: Of course, that's a kind of throwback.
DuCasse: Yes, that was not really what we were trying to get the church architect and the church artist to do, it was not contemporary in that sense. But it was for a specific need and it's perfect for those nuns; they would not have been happy with a modern, contemporary church. You can say that that was done in the spirit of what we did: it was done with good taste and with the best kind of art that Paul Ryan could get commissioned, and most of it was done by live artists, which is good, which is what we were trying to get them to do.

I think as far as the whole working out of a plan that Newman Hall would be one that I would send people to. Now, they might not like it! I love it, but others might not. I was there last week, went to mass last Sunday, and everytime I go into that place I'm impressed with the spirit of it. And I just love DeStaebler's work. I think it was the perfect medium and form for that place.

Riess: Good, good.

What was happening in the rest of the country? Were there Catholic art forums all over the land?

DuCasse: I doubt it, I doubt it. I think this is maybe a kind of a western thing, you know; westerners have a lot of courage and they'll get together and do something which maybe some other parts of the country would not. Maybe they didn't need it.

I know that Effie worked out of Kansas City for a while and did some nice things around there. She did it on the East Coast. I think there probably were maybe other little enclaves of people of taste who were trying to do something in their area because they knew about what was being done in Europe, and they knew, of course, about Effie, and maybe they knew about us for all I know. I don't know how far that went outside of California.

Riess: Was it publicized in the Liturgical Arts magazine? Did you get coverage?

DuCasse: That I don't know. I don't remember. It should have been.

Riess: We've been talking about liturgical art, but in religious art in general, now, what has happened to the paintings and the decorative things, the stained glass of a religious theme? Were you concerning yourselves in the Catholic Art Forum with that or was it always the liturgical pieces?
DuCasse: Oh yes. After all, stained glass is part of the surroundings of the liturgy, so that's very important. And murals, if they are near the altar. And the stations of the cross, though they're not liturgical, they are part of a church's embellishments. The stations, whether they are actually pictures or sculptures, there's got to be that little cross fourteen times in a church; that's just one of the traditional parts one always has. So this brought in a chance for artists to do something that was not technically liturgical, but it was part of the interior of the church decoration, so it had to have bearing on what was already there.

Riess: Hadn't the worst of the offensive taste in religious art been in the big paintings?

DuCasse: Well, mainly in the statuary. Because, you see, often they wouldn't be able to have big paintings—they couldn't afford that—but they could go to a catalogue and buy these terrible plaster statues, which sometimes were copies of better things, but by the time they had been redone and then painted with these horrible colors, they had lost all relationship to anything that had been good, if it had been good in the first place.

Riess: Does religious painting even exist anymore?

DuCasse: I doubt if it does. Because you can get reproductions of good contemporary art or some of the great men of the past, you know, if you want something in your home. If you're a fellow artist, then, of course, you'd have something of Del's or something of June's or maybe somebody that I knew would have one of my pieces in their home. Of a devotional nature.

Riess: And if anyone wanted to go and buy something?

DuCasse: That's it, there's no place. See, that's what you could do at the Junipero Serra Shop. They had paintings and they had sculptures that were good contemporary things. And many people bought them for their home, for a devotional reason. Well, like my little altar up there, they would have it in the home because they loved a certain saint or they wanted a picture of Christ or the Blessed Virgin Mary or other saint, they wanted that as a devotional thing in their home, and they wanted good art.

Now, for instance; Grace Cathedral bookstore, I think they have some good contemporary art. I haven't been there for a long time, but I knew they used to. There would be one place where you could find it. There again you see much more in the non-Catholic field than you would in the Catholic field.
Riess: Did your career actually grow out of the Catholic Art Forum or would your career have been intact without it?

DuCasse: I think it would have been intact because most of those commissions were from people who knew me or knew others who had had work done by me before the Art Forum began. I think Paul brought that out too, that very often an architect would know certain artists and would come back to them again and again, and this very often happens in the Catholic group because they prefer sticking with somebody that they know, so that I think I really would have gone on, in spite of it. And I stopped doing things, you know, pretty much after the fifties.

The Mural of the Ascension of Christ over the high altar and set of stations of the cross for the Naval Station Chapel, Treasure Island, I did that in 1943. That was the next major thing, after the Franciscan mural.

Riess: How did you get the commission? Was it through the architect?

DuCasse: No, strangely enough. They had a beautiful house, like a reception center, for the naval men going in and out of Treasure Island. This was during the war. The woman put in charge of it was a very good friend of mine, and she heard that they wanted to have a decoration up over the altar. She got in touch with me right away, and she said, "I've talked to the admiral and he's very interested. Would you come up and meet him?" And so I did, and that's how I got the job; it was through a layman, a friend of mine.

It was very interesting. The admiral at that time was, I believe, an Episcopalian. He liked this idea of course. And I said, "But you know, you do have Jewish chaplains and you do have non-Catholic chaplains, other denominations who might not like a depiction of Christ." "Ha!" he said, "if they're not around here to tell us what they want, it's just too bad. I want that, that's what we're going to have." [laughter] And I was really in charge of doing the decorating and everything, you know.

Riess: Well, those were earlier, simpler days.

DuCasse: Those were the dear old days, you know, when whoever was on deck had the say. So the poor Jewish people did have to make a big tapestry which they put up over that mural. And I don't know if
DuCasse: it's even seen today. I have an idea that it probably was covered up eventually. There might have been a little bit too much flak.

Riess: Then you had a mural at Monterey Naval Air Station, executed in 1944.

DuCasse: It was in a temporary building, so I've no idea what happened to it after the war was over. It was in three panels with the fliers on the left side panel, and the mechanics on the right side panel, and a large panel with Christ, between them, who blesses their work and tries to keep them safe during their activity. And that's why we used Christ in the center with the airplanes going out from Him.

Riess: And then a Nativity Group, high-relief, cast stone, for the main portal, Old Saint Mary's Church, Christmas decorations.

DuCasse: Yes, that's probably gone by the wayside because that was only used a few years.

Riess: And then the rest were many sets of stations of the cross.

Riess: And Mural of Our Lady of Guadalupe for the shrine in her honor, St. Boniface.

DuCasse: Yes, as far as I know that's still there, in St. Boniface Church. The first commission I had, which was the library, is right next door to the church building.

Riess: Did you come up with separate conceptions each time?

DuCasse: On two or three occasion they were, but there were one or two places where they were the same because people liked them and they were a certain group that I had done, so it was much easier and quicker for me to produce them for them.

Riess: Were you able to support yourself as a religious artist?

DuCasse: No. These commissions came in few and far between, and in those days I didn't really charge an awful lot for them. I should have charged more than I did. So, no, it was not enough to provide total support.
Religious Art Outside the Bay Area

Riess: How did liturgical or religious art in the West differ from the same kind of efforts in the same kind of creative area by East Coast artists? Have you actually gone back to look and see if there are those characteristic East-West differences?

DuCasse: I don't know if it would be obvious. A good way to ascertain that would be to look in the Liturgical Arts magazines because they give very good examples of churches from all over the country. The only thing that I would suspect would be that in California at least the mission tradition is so strong that we might find more reflection of that kind of style that you would ever find in the East. That's not just a general thing, of course, but I think you might find a little more of that style.

But, of course, after the Forum began to really try to stir things up and get people to see things in a contemporary way, then I think maybe you would not see such a great difference; it might be more like forms that you would see throughout the country.

Riess: I want to ask you about a group in Big Sur, the Hermits of New Camaldoli.

DuCasse: Camaldoli, oh!

Riess: They're a Roman Catholic order dedicated to propagating the arts.

DuCasse: Right. Well, I'll tell you about the beginning of them. When they first came to California, it was back in the, I guess, sixties--.

Riess: In 1959 they appeared in a Life magazine article on life in Big Sur.

DuCasse: Right, okay, '59. Two of my friends went down with me to visit the monastery, and it was in a beautiful old home, very rustic, perched on the side of this great hill, and you look down to the sea, and that afternoon when we got there it was still sunny and then all of a sudden the fog came in. And we were on a beautiful sort of a porch that hung out over this, with the trees all around.

And the priest at that time, who was the abbot of the group, was a most extraordinary person. I think his name was Modotti. He was Biblical, you know. He had a great white beard, and he was a tall man and a little bit on the heavy side, and he had
DuCasse: this beautiful robe they wear, sort of a grey, very full, with big full sleeves. He was just the prototype of a monk out in the wilderness. He was perfectly charming, Italian.

He showed us around, and the place was so beautiful. And the little bit of art they had was just wonderful. His presence, the whole thing was just great. So I was very thrilled. I thought, "Oh, at last we've got something really true. The true monasticism has come to California." This was before I knew my dear Benedictines down at Valyermo.

We didn't get down again for some time, and the next thing we heard was that he had been removed. (He had formerly been a Jesuit, incidentally.) He'd been removed and sent back to Italy, and they sent another man in his place.

The next time I saw it, that beautiful old house had burned, the one where they had originally started their community. And they set up these prefab huts and they had a great, huge shapeless building which was the chapel. And they had a reception center with the most tasteless things that the monks were making. I was so shocked! That marvelous man who had been the head of it, he was the one that had the taste in the art and so forth. It was just so sad.

Riess: Were they producing things then that were sold?

DuCasse: They were producing things of their own, and some of them were not bad. They were trying to get together the natural things like pinecones, driftwood, seashells, but the way they put them together and--well, I don't know.

Riess: What is Valyermo?

DuCasse: Valyermo is a little tiny place in the Mojave Desert, up in the hills on the opposite side of Highway 126, from Edwards Air Force Base. It's called St. Andrew's Priory. It was a group of Benedictines who had gone from St. André's in Belgium to China back in the forties. They established a community in the interior of China, and were very happy there. They were way out in the wilds and near a little town, just a little peasant town, and were very much loved by the people, and in turn loved the people because they said the Chinese are just simply wonderful people.

When the communists took over, they were ousted. The communists kept three of their members behind, and they never heard from them again; they don't know if they're alive or dead. They never could contact them.
DuCasse: The poor monks came to California, because that was the closest point from the other side of the world that they could get to! And they wanted to settle here in California. They wanted to settle in northern California. And the monk who was sort of in charge of this because he had this great education, Father Vincent Martin, O.S.B., tried to find a place up here. At that time, in the fifties, the archbishop was not interested in another order coming in; he had enough of them and they take the money away, they think, from the archdiocese. So they don't really favor other orders coming in.

So they went down to Los Angeles, and the archbishop down there—I guess he was cardinal at that time—was willing for them to settle. They found Hidden Springs Ranch up in the mountains above the desert, and it was a beautiful place. It had its own water, it had a spring and everything. It had a pear and apple orchards which were producing, so they could perhaps do that. And they settled there.

Ethel Souza heard about them, went down to visit them, and had a great rapport with Father Vincent Martin. He came up to the shop often. He did a lecture for the Catholic Art Forum, and he is a very highly educated man in every way, very sensitive to art.

One season of trying to prepare for and harvest the fruit orchards made them realize it needed professionals to handle it. So the orchard production was turned over to professional growers. After some thought and discussion it was decided to go into the production of ceramic artifacts. There was a monk in Belgium who was a talented designer of international reputation, Father Maur. He came each summer and still does, to design the plaques and windchimes which are then produced in the ceramic workshop at the monastery. The priory gift shop carries the ceramic line, which is also placed in many other cities throughout the United States. This emphasis on art, as well as the aesthetically oriented liturgical functions in the daily life of the monks, shared in by visitors, attracted artists, and still does.

Riess: Artist-priests?

DuCasse: Well, all kinds of artists. You know, laymen and priests.

Riess: Who would do the designing?

DuCasse: No, who just wanted to come to this place because their mass and liturgical life was so beautiful. They took over the old barn, and they made this lovely little chapel out of the barn.
DuCasse: The monks with their own hands built their own altar out of the boulders they got from the creek down below. Everything they did was real, and was part of what they wanted to have for themselves. Simple but very, very aesthetically satisfying.

I decided then, I'd been fishing around, and I loved the Franciscans and I loved the Dominicans, but I really loved and felt closer to the Benedictines, and here was an art-centered group, so I became an oblate, which is a member of the community out in the world. It's more satisfying than a Third Order. The Third Order is a little group that is tied to the order, but just completely separate. An oblate is a member of that community, but he just lives out in the world. When he goes back to that community, he goes home.

That's what I wanted. I loved that spirit. So now I'm attached to that monastery, and I go back every year at least. And it's beautiful. They are enlarging. They are a retreat group. They have beautiful retreat rooms where you can go and stay. They're built of cinder blocks, very simple, very rugged, but with a lovely slanted ceiling.

The place is just gorgeous. They're, of course, in the desert, but up in the hills, and they have the desert landscape all around them, their own little Shangri-la with a beautiful pond and cottonwood trees.

They have a very beautiful gift shop there which has other work than their own, but they try to get the best. For instance, they'll have a series of lovely bells for the garden which are handmade by artisans in the area. They will also have statuary and paintings. Some things, of course, are commercial, but the good commercial things. And they have things from the Orient; you know, the religious groups that are connected with Rome and the Orient and so forth. And it's just a hub of a cultural emphasis entirely. So they are the ones that really are carrying on something of that tradition.
Renaissance of Religious Art and Architecture
in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1946–1968

Mario Ciampi

ART IN ARCHITECTURE--THE NEWMAN CENTER, BERKELEY

An Interview Conducted by
Micaela DuCasse and Suzanne B. Riess
in 1983

Copyright © 1985 by The Regents of the University of California
TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Mario Ciampi

INTERVIEW HISTORY

AN OVERVIEW OF URBAN ARCHITECTURE 227

A PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO ENRICHING THE RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT 231

NEWMAN CENTER, BERKELEY 233
Naming Ciampi Architect 233
Site Choice 235
Design Proposals 236
Interior--The Review Committee 238
Stephen DeStaebler's Sanctuary Sculpture 239
The Future of the Sanctuary 242

THE CATHOLIC ART FORUM PHILOSOPHY CONTINUED 243

ST. MARY'S CATHEDRAL, SAN FRANCISCO 246
For me, Mario Ciampi has always been, and still is, the most gifted and inspired architect of our area and time. I came to know him through our participation as founding members of the Catholic Art Forum in the mid-1950s. Already his controversial Corpus Christi Church had been a spearhead in the movement for contemporary art and architecture in the Church in the Bay Area in the early 1950s.

It will always be a deep satisfaction to me that I had a small part, with my colleague and founding member of the Catholic Art Forum, June Foster Hass, in bringing together Mario Ciampi and Father Joseph Quinn, C.S.P., of Newman Hall, Berkeley, in June's home to discuss plans for the new Newman Hall back in the late fifties. The final result, as the Newman Center that stands today at Dwight and College Avenues in Berkeley will verify, is indeed an inspired solution to handling the many complex elements that had to be considered for a special place and its varied activities.

Mario Ciampi is not only an architect of great imagination and daring, but he has developed a philosophy of contemporary architectural form and usage that opens wide the doors to a more inspired and practical plan for civic architecture in all its variety of needs. Everything he has ever done has contributed to the development of timeless but appropriate buildings that can adapt to change when necessary; these qualities are built into all his plans from their inception. Often they may be ahead of their time, but eventually they are proven to be the right solution to an early problem that is only later recognized and accepted.

Mario is also an artist who is sensitive to all the aesthetic considerations encompassed within the walls of his buildings, whether they be religious or not. He has always planned for what decoration is required, and worked with the artists involved for the greater perfection of the completion of the whole. This is exceedingly important in church building in order for there to be a harmonious result. To have seen Corpus Christi Church, or Newman Center newly completed, proves the wisdom behind the vision and direction of one man coordinating harmony out of the many who contributed to the completion of the whole.

The interview took place in Mario's studio-office on Front Street in San Francisco. Suzanne Riess and I shared the honors of interviewing Mario Ciampi, as we sat before a scale model of his suggested plans for the
future development of Yerba Buena Project. This brought home to us so strongly Mario Ciampi's involvement in the problems of civic architecture, to which he brings all his imagination and energies undiminished! San Francisco is indeed fortunate to have a native son who has devoted himself to its needs with such wholehearted enthusiasm and love.

Micaela DuCasse
Interviewer

September 1984
Piedmont, California
Your full name: Mario Joseph Camardi

Date of birth: April 27, 1907

Place of birth: San Francisco

Father's full name: Guido Camardi

Father's place of birth: Italy

Mother's full name: Palmaia Liampi (Grieco)

Mother's place of birth: Italy

Where did you grow up: San Francisco, Sonoma County

Education: Elementary and High Schools, College, Harvard University

Employment: Architect, Mario Camardi & Associates, 1945-83
MARIO J. CIAMPI and ASSOCIATES
ARCHITECTS and URBAN CONSULTANTS

BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE
MARIO J. CIAMPI, ARCHITECT, FAIA

Born
San Francisco, California, April 27, 1907

Education

1927-29 San Francisco Architectural Club (Night College)
1925-29 Apprentice draftsman
   Alexander Cantin and Dodge A. Riedy, Architects, San Francisco
1930-32 Harvard University Graduate School of Architecture, Special Student. Winner of two National Design Competition Scholarships to Harvard. (1930 and 1931)
1932-33 Beaux-Arts Institute of Design, Paris, France
   Studied Architecture (summer)
1935 Received Certificate to practice architecture in State of California

AFFILIATIONS

American Institute of Architects, National, State, and local chapter
College of Fellows, American Institute of Architects
Board of Trustees, San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco
Board of Regents, St. Mary's College, Moraga, California
Board of Directors, Convent of the Good Shepherd, San Francisco
Member, San Francisco Urban Renewal Association
Member, Modern Art Council, San Francisco Museum of Art
Member, San Francisco Chamber of Commerce
Member, San Francisco Symphony Association
Member, University Art Museum Council, Berkeley, California
Family Club, San Francisco
Olympic Club, San Francisco
Lagunitas Country Club, Marin County
Serra Club of San Francisco, International Knights of Columbus
Who's Who in America
1975-73  Urban Design Consultant - Yerba Buena Center Project for the City of San Francisco. City-owned facilities, including Convention Center, Arena, and public open space. Estimated cost: $200,000,000. Privately-owned facilities comprised of office buildings, hotels, commercial areas, housing, and open space. Estimated cost: $200,000,000.

1975  Ferry Park, Phase III - Construct park in two block area, Clay/Washington Street corridor. See Phase I and II. Estimated cost: $800,000.

1975  Directed by the Civic Theatre Corporation to prepare preliminary designs for a Performing Arts Theatre for downtown San Francisco. Project to house 2,400 people; primarily intended for the Civic Light Opera Association. Estimated cost: $10,000,000.

1975  Developed Master Plan for the construction of an automotive parking center, a component of the Embarcadero Park, Steuart and Mission Streets, San Francisco. Estimated cost: $3,500,000.

1974  Retained by the Fisherman’s Wharf Association, Inc. to prepare a development plan for Pier #45 in the Fisherman’s Wharf area of San Francisco. Estimated cost: $35,000,000.

1974  Seton Provincial House, an administrative and residential center, Los Altos Hills, California. Project cost: $3,000,000.

1973  Appointed as Architects for the development of an office building complex, 19th Avenue, West San Mateo, California. Estimated cost: $19,000,000.

1972  Tennis Center - Olympic Club, Lakeside, San Francisco. Developed Master Plan and schematic design for construction of a tennis center. Estimated cost: $1,000,000.
PROJECTS - Continued


1971  Menlo Circus Club - Atherton, California. Developed Master Plan and schematic design for expansion of existing tennis facilities and club house. Estimated cost: $750,000.

1970  Design consultant for Junipero Serra Freeway, Highway 280, for the California State Division of Highways.

1970  Completed University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley. A $4,000,000 project. Winner of a national competition.

1968  Commissioned by the Trustees of the California State Colleges to design and construct a Humanities Complex for the San Francisco State College. Estimated cost: $7,000,000.


1967-74 Commissioned by the Trustees of the California State Colleges to select a site for a new State College located in San Mateo/Santa Clara Counties. Total enrollment - 20,000 students. Estimated project development: $100,000,000.

1967  Commissioned by the Archdiocese of Oakland to design and construct a Newman Center and chapel, University of California, Berkeley. Project completed. Cost: $1,500,000.
1966 Commissioned by the City of San Francisco in association with Architects John Carl Warnecke & Associates as urban consultants to prepare a study of the Panhandle and Golden Gate Freeways. A $300,000,000 project.

1965 Commissioned by the City of San Francisco in association with Architects John Carl Warnecke & Associates as urban planning consultants for the Market Street Development Plan, Stages I, II and III - a three-year study.

1965 Completed campus development plan for the expansion of Saint Mary's College. Estimated cost: $20,000,000. Projects included Science Center, Student Union, Performing Arts Theater, Library, Housing, Rehabilitation, and site development.

1964 Master Plan for entire Jefferson High School District. Site selection studies and site development plans for Pengate High School. A $7,000,000 project.

1964 Master Plan and construction of increments of Oceana High School, Pacifica, California. Covers approximately 60 acres; serves as part of the City's recreational system. Estimated cost: $6,000,000.

1963 Commissioned in 1963 to prepare design for Embarcadero Plaza, Phase I, Master Plan. The San Francisco Redevelopment Agency and Department of Public Works commissioned this firm in association with Architects Lawrence Halprin & Associates and John S. Bolles. Estimated cost: $10,000,000.

1962 Commissioned by the Department of City Planning to prepare a comprehensive master plan for downtown San Francisco. Plan now approximately 50% completed.

1959 Developed a long-range plan projecting campus growth for the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, for an enrollment of 5,000 students. In association with Architects Lawrence Lackey & Associates and Knorr-Elliott Associates. Estimated cost: $100,000,000.
1958
Commissioned by the Department of City Planning to prepare a master plan proposal for Ferry Building Waterfront Area, San Francisco. The work was developed in collaboration with Golden Gateway Project, Area "E". Estimated cost: $20,000,000.

1958
Prepared master plan study including site selection and construction of first increment for Siskyou Junior College, Weed, California. Total enrollment 2,000 students. Estimated cost: $5,500,000.

1957
San Francisco Golden Gateway. Special consultant to the San Francisco Planning Commission to review the redevelopment of the downtown area comprised of the area "E" and the San Francisco waterfront.

1956
San Francisco Flower Terminal - San Francisco. Constructed for the San Francisco Flower Growers' Association, California Flower Growers' and Peninsula Flower Growers. Project cost: $2,500,000.

1954
Westmoor High School, Daly City, California. Master plan and construction of increments. Serves as part of City's recreational system. Covers approximately 60 acres. Total cost: $6,000,000.

1950
Hanna Center for Boys, Boyes Springs, California. Design and construction of spiritual, cultural, and residential facilities for this center in association with Ward and Bolles, Architects. Estimated cost: $2,000,000.

Design and construction of the following:

Corpus Christi Church, San Francisco
Saint Peter's Church, Pacifica
Numerous recreation centers, schools, industrial, and commercial work.
ART IN ARCHITECTURE, THE NEWMAN CENTER, BERKELEY

[Date of Interview: October 13, 1983]

An Overview of Urban Architecture

Riess: I'm interested in the Catholic Art Forum and the liturgical arts movement, but I'm also interested in the picture before and since that organization came to an end. I'd like to hear about your connection with the Catholic Art Forum first of all, and then to go into your work--or the other way around.

Ciampi: Why don't we begin with the Catholic Art Forum, for it was the principal motivator for this project. There will be two aspects of this interview. One has to do with my involvement in the Catholic Art Forum, and then following that you say you have an interest in my work and career and what I've done and what I am doing now.

Riess: Absolutely. I'm very interested in the Newman Center and in all of your church architectural work. And I'm interested in your work now insofar as there are probably interesting things to say about people who like to do public places and like to do churches also.

Ciampi: Yes. Well, this, the Yerba Buena Center project, for example, is very significant to the city. I don't want to digress, but I just want to call your attention to something here. [looking at a model] This has to do with underground architecture. This is Yerba Buena Center Project from Third to Fourth Street; this is Mission, Howard, and Folsom, and Moscone Center is here. I am proposing that the city continue with future exhibition halls, and then locate the stadium in this position. The stadium they're talking about now shouldn't just wander all over the city, but have this specific place for it. So that's why this study has been made.
Ciampi: These are future halls and developments which would come in time; it isn't that the city would be torn apart, but these are components that are integrally related both functionally and culturally in a way that would enable the city to grow incrementally. As time goes on it would become more beautiful, much richer and more viable as a functional city. No one thinks in these dimensions. It is a component of a comprehensive plan.

Riess: Yes. Very complex.

Ciampi: So, there's an awful lot here, and when I describe it people are aghast and they say, "You're going to tear the whole city apart!" No, no.

And in addition to that, of course, one of the most important elements is the Asian Museum, which I believe should be built on top of Moscone Hall. And the idea of an Asian Museum created like the great monastic centers in Southeast Asia with gold domes and decorative tile, and surrounding gardens that are rich and beautiful up on that roof plateau—it would be magnificent as you would look down upon it from the highrise buildings of the city. With that I'd integrate elevated transit on roofs, stopping at principal points, and continuing north connecting Marin County with the Peninsula. So all of this can be done, it's here. Getting people to listen and to have patience is the problem.

This is where I am at the moment, and the difficulty with this is that I'm interfering with everybody's work. The city has a fractured, governmental structure in which the various commissions and organizations move very independently of one another, in some cases very autocratically. They begin to arrive at decisions only to meet their own needs, and create problems with what happens in other surrounding areas.

To attempt to coordinate and bring all these forces together in a way that gives continuity and order leads to complexities in their relationships. I'm interfering with them, getting in their way, and it makes me unpopular. They don't want to talk to me!

Riess: You've got a reputation for doing this successfully.

DuCasse: Oh yes, he keeps needling them!

Ciampi: Right. In the meantime, the faith that sustains me is my own track record, in which the ideas I proposed twenty years ago we are implementing today. I'm now concerned with what is going to happen in twenty years. This keeps me involved all the time.
Ciampi: It's gratifying to know that at least what I proposed twenty years ago in many instances is realistic today. Urban transformation is going on, is real, dynamic and is happening. The city is reshaping and regenerating itself based on many of the recommendations I made twenty years ago. Few people in the city realize it.

DuCasse: If that has happened before, it can happen again.

Ciampi: Well, it's certainly been happening all these twenty years. Year after year I see change all moving toward what I have been recommending over the years.

I travel all over the world, Paris and Vienna, Naples and Milan. Each year I go I bring back all these ideas on the transit systems they're building and their relationship with the functional city. When I talk with them in San Francisco, they have limited knowledge of what this is all about!

Riess: Well, you have to be a good salesman.

Ciampi: Yes, first you have to create an attainable direction for yourself, which is the most difficult, and then hopefully your enthusiasm enables you to sell it—or defer it and wait.

Riess: I love this model and I could study it all day, but since you've only given us an hour—.

Ciampi: Well, let's begin with the hour now because this may have been a diversion not included in our agenda!

Riess: About the Catholic Art Forum, why did you get involved as an architect? After all, it was mostly artists, wasn't it?

Ciampi: Yes, that's right. I recall that when we first became involved in religious work, or prior to doing religious work when I got back from college and opened my office, I found that there was a prevailing attitude in the city—and it was characteristic of the culture—that art was not considered an important aspect in design and essential to solving problems. And realizing through my own travels and experiences, emotionally, that art is an inherent part of our environment, and because this consideration has defended itself down through time and in history, I felt that it would be necessary to orient myself that any solution that I would propose in any civic or semipublic work should include works of art. In the design, whatever it was, art should be merged with the architecture. I began with these experiences early when we designed schools, including public schools for the city of San Francisco, the bay region and so on,
Ciampi: and each time I found that the concern was just to provide basic shelter and not much concern or any awareness of the kind of environment that was created, that people could learn from visual experiences they were exposed to.

Because of all these events, and the disappointments that I had, and lack of understanding of this need, I felt that anything the city or the community would do towards reorienting people to an awakening of what life is about, what environment is about, what the relationships of art have to do with one's relationship to cultural and social life, drew me to make an effort in my own professional work to motivate this renewal of consciousness.

Riess: So it started with secular work.

Ciampi: Yes, it was an awareness that was motivated by anything that I created; whether it's spiritual, social, cultural or functional, utilitarian, whatever it would be, all related around these same concerns.

Riess: Have you always been in the Bay Area?

Ciampi: Yes. I'm a native of San Francisco, and I've always been in the Bay Area, other than when I went back to college.

Riess: And your college was?

Ciampi: The graduate school at Harvard University.

Riess: So often people experiencing the Bay Area for the first time are shot full of enthusiasm, like post-World War II, but you were returning to a place that you felt was really very dry in terms of an artistic climate?

Ciampi: Right. And this gets back to a basic principle that I have related to ever since I became involved in advanced education and my own role as an architect. When I got back from my travels in Europe I was offered work in New York City as a designer, and I told those people at that time, even though it was a prestigious office, that I had a responsibility to San Francisco. I belonged in San Francisco because this was the city of my origin, this was a city I felt I understood, this was where I felt in time I could make maximum contribution. If I stayed in New York, I would be absorbed with other influences and individuals making it difficult to have a positive effect on the city.
Ciampi: So I came to San Francisco and determined that this was where I would do my work, because not only was this the city of my origins, but the city of my experiences as a child in elementary and then higher education. I always held before me the image of the city, and felt that anything that I would do would be consistent with my historic knowledge of the city and my intimate understanding, and that I could make a more significant contribution here than attempt to go to Los Angeles, Chicago or wherever. So these were the beginnings of my notion of what the architect should be concerned with and how to relate oneself to the city.

A Personal Commitment to Enriching the Religious Environment

Riess: What are your memories of early impressions of Catholic Church buildings? Is it a sense of a beautiful place, or a sense of a place that needed to be made more beautiful?

Ciampi: Of course, naturally, first of all, being of Latin origin, my experience was in studies and actual travel in European countries where I saw these very beautiful churches that are monuments that have defended themselves so well in history. I observed the relationship that people have to religious art; the immortal quality of religious architecture seems to expand and grow as the years go on. I related those experiences to what I discovered in San Francisco, especially in the religious community, where religious leaders were given authority to build structures for the parishes and community centers in the city and did not take art into account as a basic concern. They were really oriented to prevailing attitudes of the time, that functionalism and economics were the overriding considerations. And because of that I felt that something had to be done to reorient the direction of new work.

As a result of that, not only did I become involved as chairman of a committee for arts and architecture with the American Institute of Architects, and later established the committee for the California Council on Environment, but also I endeavored to relate my activities to whatever forces that were in the community to establish the necessity for art and architecture in religious work. Along with that I gave a design, art and architecture prize at the University of California for years. I paid for some of the works of art in Corpus Christi, the crucifix over the altar there, personally; in order to motivate this because there wasn't any money for it, and in many cases it created great controversies and difficulties.
Riess: Controversies about the works of art or the spending of the money?

Ciampi: The spending of the money, and the creation of a proper environment. I was dealing with influences here, where it was me competing against some speculative contractor who could build so many square feet of space cheaper than I could do it for. And if one looked at what the "spec" builder would build in an impoverished religious community—surely they needed a roof over their heads—you know the odds were against me to do what little I hoped I could accomplish. So it was in this manner that I felt something very basic had to happen. Better to build a good building of four thousand square feet than a mediocre one of five thousand square feet; take the difference of one thousand feet and put it in the quality of the environment, and then later, of course, one could add to that.

As a result of that I encouraged people to direct their attentions to enrichment and embellishment of religious art. In the early days I met Father [Vital] Vodusek, who was pastor of the church on Fell Street near Franklin. It was in a terrible state of disrepair, and he retained me as the architect to help rehabilitate it. I began to discuss with him these concerns I had, which were very sympathetic to his own interests. It was through that relationship that we brought artists in together. We'd already built Hanna Center for Boys and encountered the problems up there, and I was involved in other works at the time. So we, with other architects and artists, felt that the best way to do it would be to establish the Catholic Art Forum.

The Catholic Art Forum would be a vehicle by which people who were interested in art and architecture and involved in religious work could come and share their experiences, interests and directions. Through that we could invite then these spiritual leaders in the community to come and share their experience with us and we could share with them our concerns for introducing art in the architecture of the work of that time. That is the way the Catholic Art Forum was started by Ruth Cravath and Mary Erckenbrack, Elio Benvenuto and many other artists who were so sympathetic and enthusiastic about bringing this change about.

Riess: That's very interesting. Father Vodusek's name has not come up very much.

DuCasse: He comes up in Elio Benvenuto's interview more in detail.

Ciampi: He was a very important person, because he was the one link we discovered, the common denominator between artists—and artists where the architect is the artist too—and the religious
Ciampi: community. He was the one that said they were inseparable, and then exerted his influence in the Catholic hierarchy, as well as with other religious denominations in the community that also began to share in this concern. It was through that influence that Father Vodusek was able to establish a liaison between the artist's role and that of the client as represented to these religious communities, and how talent could be brought together. The Catholic Art Forum functioned as a very effective vehicle for the work that was done at that time.

Riess: I thought that one of the things you were saying also was that even some of the architects needed to be encouraged to use more art in their buildings.

Ciampi: Yes, I believe this is so.

Newman Center, Berkeley

Naming Ciampi Architect

Riess: I know that the Newman Center comes sort of later in history [1967] but I wonder, would it be appropriate to talk about that as a case in point, in terms of how you had to educate people or how you had to educate a community?

Ciampi: Yes, it was a very trying and difficult time. As a result of this Catholic Art Forum development, this awareness that we had initiated, they established a new diocese in Oakland, with Bishop Begin at head of that diocese. Because of the recommendation that we had originally made to our diocese in San Francisco, an architectural review board was appointed to review the work of the diocese of Oakland, composed of professionals who were sympathetic to art and architecture.

When we presented our designs for Newman Center for approval— even before that, when my name came up as architect to be appointed for the work—the Catholic Art Forum committee gave endorsement to the review board that I be selected as the architect to design the project, because of their knowledge of what I had done with religious architecture in the community prior to that time, because I had been very active in the Catholic Art Forum. It was the recognition and the appreciation or the acceptance of our work in the community here that gave support to my name to be the architect for Newman Center. That's how it all evolved.
Riess: When it was decided to build a new Newman Center, were you working with a committee at the center or was that a project of the diocese?

Ciampi: I believe at that time you were involved in some way, weren't you? [to DuCasse]

DuCasse: Yes.

Ciampi: Because you knew Father Quinn, didn't you?

DuCasse: Yes. It was June Hass, who was also on the Catholic Art Forum board with me, and the two of us talked with Father Quinn and told him that the architect he should appoint is Mario Ciampi. So we had a little hand in that!

Ciampi: Yes, very much so, because if it hadn't been for your recommendation to Father Quinn at the time, Father Quinn would never have called me since he didn't know me. So that's how influential you were. As a result of that introduction then I found a man who was very sympathetic to what we had been talking about.

Riess: Father Quinn was the client then?

Ciampi: He was the client. Father Quinn was a member of the Paulist order, not a member of the local archdiocese and its clergy, and as a result of that he enjoyed certain autonomous decision-making prerogatives that enabled him to proceed with the development of Newman Center on a rather unilateral basis and not be exposed to all the influences surrounding it. Although at that time, you realize, most of the religious work that had been done in Oakland was very mediocre and uninspiring. History speaks for itself there. If you consider when Newman Center was started and look back at what had happened in Oakland at that time, you would conclude the level of design was rather dismal.

DuCasse: It certainly was.

Ciampi: So beginning with that tradition, and relating our work to the old Newman Center up on Euclid, which was a handsome building, problems existed. The university very definitely wanted to take that building site and develop a large complex there, which to me was a rather tragic development in itself, but that's beside the point. Father Quinn then was obliged to look for a new location.
Site Choice

Ciampi: We started searching for a new site after we were appointed architects, and we agreed that we should try and secure land there at the corner of College Avenue and Dwight Way which would also make it contiguous to the university as its spiritual center, a proper substitute for the old center we had on Euclid. And in that context we then began to study what a university chapel should be designed to be, consistent with the philosophy of collegiate Newman Centers in the United States, elsewhere.

What you see there at Newman Center today we almost failed to realize. The original designs we had developed for Newman Center include a large seminar center and spacious library, which when we took the bids the new Bishop [Floyd L.] Begin and his committee decided that Father Quinn would not be able to pay for because of his limited financial resources. Further, since it related itself to students of the university, they didn't have the money to pay for it.

From there the Newman Center concept underwent a great evolutionary change. We had to transform it from the kind of concept that Father Quinn wanted, with more elaborate educational facilities related to the university, and transform it into a parish center. The Oakland diocese established St. Peter's Parish, and named Newman Center St. Peter's. They depended on St. Peter's parochial community to support and pay for it. The bishop in those days was very precise that the parish pay for the project. And in all fairness to the bishop, Newman Center had no money.

You know, to build such a project we really had difficult times endeavoring to relate what Father Quinn wanted to do and to retain the concept of the original collegiate center in consistency with the parochial center the bishop had in mind. But it was the integration of these two influences that led to what you see today as the Newman Center. And within that context we have built the first increment of a master plan which takes care of future possibilities for its expansion and development. Those opportunities are there and can be realized, and have to do with acquisition of the adjoining property.

Riess: I think it's probably a project you love because you like to solve problems. [laughter]

Ciampi: Right, right. In the life of the Catholic Church the lifetimes of people are incidental.
Ciampi: Those difficulties that we encountered at the time, those attempts to prevent Newman Center from establishing it there, rejecting it or not even allowing it to grow, the difficulties that we experienced, today as we look back upon it now—I presume perhaps twenty-five years ago it was first started—these are realities and Newman Center will in fact continue to expand. The adjoining lands will be available and there are ways of developing them. I also have kept in touch with each succeeding pastor of the center to acquaint them with these opportunities.

What happened right after we received our approval to proceed was that then Father Quinn was moved to San Francisco, to Old St. Mary's, and we had a new pastor appointed.

Riess: Was that Father Ritzius? [C.S.P.]

Ciampi: Father Ritzius.

Riess: Who also sounds enlightened.

Ciampi: A very enlightened man and very dedicated, who became very disenchanted with the demands that were being made on him by the Oakland chancery office. He could appreciate what we were endeavoring to do, and was also receiving the support of Father Quinn, who was no longer there.

Design Proposals

Riess: Was your original Newman design the one that was built, or is it radically different? Were there design issues that the diocese became involved in?

Ciampi: This is very interesting because it was in those days that the ecumenical movement had started, and this trend had to do with abandoning the conventional church, with its long nave terminating with the altar at the end, and developing a form within which people grouped around a central altar in a more intimate and ecumenical way. Oscar Niemeyer, the architect, had designed the cathedral in the capital city of Brasília, which was a circular building. These were the prevailing trends. I felt that this ecumenical concept should be established with a church in the round, so it was therefore a church in the round which I first proposed. I didn't realize until it was published later that Oscar Niemeyer had the same idea. It's strange how the energy forces, the intellectual forces, permeate people's vision, whether you talk to them or not, but what I felt and what Niemeyer felt was in the same direction.
Ciampi: So I accordingly proposed at that time for Newman Chapel, a church in the round, the historic tent in the desert, the notion of the Temple of God. In the teachings of St. Paul, "the Temple of God is in you," since the early temple or church out on the desert was a tent. I designed a concrete tent, which form in itself expressed the spirit in contemporary technology.

Riess: Your current Newman Center design is a circle within a square, in a way.

Ciampi: That's not this, it was another design, a circular design. The whole thing was entirely different from this.

Niemeyer's project had ribs going up this way, and mine was the same thing. It was amazing how consistent they were. It had a great deal of validity in itself as a spiritual concept reflecting the ideas of the time. And Niemeyer was able to do it because he was building a new city in Brasília, and so therefore he had this great freedom. But we discovered when we presented our proposal that while in itself it had validity, it didn't seem to relate itself very comfortably with the surrounding environment of Berkeley.

Riess: Even you felt that?

Ciampi: At the time I was carried away more with the notion of the idea that the church in the round needed to be recorded. Also we had placed buildings around it which would relate to it. But the community never really understood, they just simply looked at the preliminary sketch we made at the time.

DuCasse: Had you built the Pacifica church yet, which was in the round?

Ciampi: That church came later.

At the time that Father Quinn was still pastor of Newman Center, the community and the school of architecture all became involved in this question, and they campaigned to see if they could discourage what they considered a far-out design. Father Quinn was very concerned because I was alienating some of the community against him, they didn't like what we were going to do. It wasn't "appropriate" for Berkeley. Somehow the ecumenical religious movement and the liturgical concepts should really be made less powerful and the community urban character should be preserved. These people were talking about shingled buildings and the kinds of buildings that you see over there, and it was understandable; these were logical concerns.
Ciampi: After going through two or three of these acrimonious debates about what the church should be, I concluded that while the idea that had been presented was defensible and would have been very appropriate with further study, that perhaps we might take a new approach in which we would study a design that revealed a transition between the monumental character of the university, which was on the one side of the site, and the residential community on the other. And through that process then we developed the idea of Newman Center as you see it today, which in fact is one story and low on the residential side, with the chapel on the corner which faces the university. There again we discovered that in buildings of this magnitude, and projected for growth, that wooden buildings with shingles did not meet the building codes, that we had to consider a different kind of architecture, which is the architecture you see today.

Interior--The Review Committee

Riess: As an idealist in terms of involving art and architecture, when did you start thinking about what was going to be in there in terms of the furniture and the liturgical appointments and so on?

Ciampi: The position I found myself in at the time of the design of Newman Center was substantially influenced by what I had learned—not only in terms of the relationship of religious art to architecture, but the method of implementation—through my relationship with the Catholic Art Forum and former experiences when we built the chapel for the Hanna Center for Boys, in Boyes Hot Springs. (I don't know if you've ever seen it or not, because you should go and see it.)

You don't mind my digressing a bit? It has to do with your questions. I have to "go by Sausalito" all the time! [laughter] The notion of what a church should be began there at the Hanna Center Chapel where we had Mary Erckenbrack do the stations of the cross in the Sisters Chapel, and we had Ruth Cravath do the crucifix inside and Our Lady of Lourdes outside, and several other works of art that we were successful in doing. That was one of the projects that influenced the relationship of art and architecture.

Corpus Christi Church, of course, was really the great crossover point in my art in architecture career. At great risk to myself, we were able to design this controversial church, and actually there I paid for the crucifix over the altar, which they later removed. Elio Benvenuto's beautiful sculptures in the sanctuary were also removed, but his magnificent stations of the cross are still there.
Ciampi: Having been through this process, and experiences in the design of religious architecture, when we designed Newman Center we had basically these same ideas in mind. And now we're talking about a diocese which was in its early formative stages, which was financially impoverished and merely concerned with just the need for shelter. So, in order to convince the diocese this needed to be done, to include the work of art in this center, the first thing I did was recommend to Father Quinn—who supported our ideas at the time—that since this was a church oriented to university educational activities, that an art commission be appointed by the university to determine how the interior of the building should be embellished to include the art. So this procedure is part of why the art is there. There we invited Walter Horn, Peter Selz and I've forgotten, an architect, to assist in the selection of the artists.

Riess: Was Wurster involved in it?

Ciampi: No, Wurster was not. These people and another artist established a committee. This committee, with Richard Jorasch, who was my design associate, and myself, then began to do a review of religious art and artists in the community. Not only did we want religious art, but then there was the kind of religious art that would be appropriate and convincing the diocese not to purchase cheap conventional store-bought art versus what we thought it should be. It took us into explanations of contemporary modern art and its costs. If we, as architects, attempted to defend it they would just simply have rejected it, but coming from the head of the department of fine arts at the University of California, the head of the university museum, and all of these people who were so prestigious making their recommendations, the client had to listen. As a result of that search we selected Stephen DeStaebler to design the sanctuary with us.

Stephen DeStaebler's Sanctuary Sculpture

Riess: How did he come to your attention?

Ciampi: We, with the committee, selected the names of I believe four artists whom we could consider for the work. As a result of that decision, then we visited their studios.

Riess: Who else? DeStaebler was awfully unknown, wasn't he?

Ciampi: Oh, he was very obscure in those days. He had a little hole in the wall studio over there in Albany, you know, worked out of an industrial plant in a back room there, a cold and poor
Ciampi: corrugated iron shack. That's a DeStaebler right there.

[gesturing] The committee went to DeStaebler's studio and had him show us the nature of work that he had done and his concept of what the sanctuary could be like there and how he conceived it could be developed in a very appropriate and beautiful way. Then we visited Peter Voulkos's studio—he was another candidate—and he gave us his notion of what he thought it should be.

Riess: That's interesting. Both of them are ceramic artists.

Ciampi: Right, they both do ceramic.

Then there were two more, Robert Hudson and I've forgotten who the other artist was. We continued the interviews, visiting each one, reviewed the work, and unanimously agreed that DeStaebler would do the sanctuary. We then had to convince the diocese that he should be the one to do the work.

By the way, the diocese had a supervising architect, who was a civil engineer, who was principally concerned with economics and providing space. He was very critical of our building design because he couldn't understand how you would design a church in rough concrete. Up till then in the buildings of the diocese they would cover the concrete. The concrete was considered "raw, rugged and inhuman, and it was not appropriate for a church."

"But in Europe they build them in stone, in rugged stones, heavy materials and so on," we said. Their attitude comes as a result of a kind of British, New England, colonial influence, which is American culture, descending down through an Anglo-Saxon clergy, who are pretty much the people who have been establishing the character of the environment in churches historically in this area. Reluctantly they agreed to approve the church built in concrete, since we couldn't afford money for fine materials, so we actually constructed the finishes and rustica-tions by the use of forms in many ways. That's why you see the textural surfaces, which we believe are very successful.

Then to get approval from the diocese for a contract of $15,000 for DeStaebler, we explained that after all you had to buy an altar someplace, in marble, wood, and you had to buy a hand-me-down corpus, tabernacle, lectern and the president's chair, and that that could cost $15,000, and also the floor of the sanctuary, carpets, tile or whatever they use. So based on that they then agreed to award Stephen DeStaebler the commission to be the sculptor. DeStaebler then proceeded to make the designs and execute the work in collaboration with our office.
Ciampi: Then when he came forth with his design in the form of a model, it had to receive approval, and that required a great deal of persuasion.

Riess: Do you think that any part of their concern was that it just simply didn't look Catholic enough, that it was not recognizably religious?

Ciampi: Well, it just wasn't consistent with their notion of what a church sanctuary should be, compared to other, traditional directions which had been taken by the church that we've seen. But there was a very strong character in what DeStaebler was doing—it was ceramic art built in the ground to look very natural, very logical and difficult to be critical of, so they finally agreed they would allow him to proceed. The corpus itself was the replica of a very life-like average human being; it wasn't a sculpture that would give them concern, something perhaps like what Elio did for others which was more abstract, that had become so controversial it was rejected by the bishop himself.

DuCasse: Was that Stephen's own concept from the beginning, having the naturalistic approach.

Ciampi: Oh, yes.

DuCasse: Because that to me is just a stroke of genius throughout.

Ciampi: It's a stroke of genius, it's beautiful.

So DeStaebler proceeded with his model studies. We did this in stages, and then this was carried out, and, of course, we were very close to the development work. Father Quinn would come with us at regular intervals to see the early studies that were done to give approval and express his notion of how appropriate he thought the art was. Little by little we developed the sanctuary.

And also in the chapel that's not finished there's supposed to be in addition a very wonderful ceramic work of art, especially on College Avenue; there's a great niche in there that you see, and we hope to get that some day. This could be a project now, to start up a fund for that that they could contribute to. Also in the entrance there is a niche for another beautiful ceramic sculpture of a kind that great sculptors have done, powerful in form and color—because without it the church is inclined to be a little drab.
The Future of the Sanctuary

Riess: It is difficult I think for much of the congregation to understand the whole spirit of it. There seems to be a need to put up plants and banners and things to make people happy.

Ciampi: Right.

And then the organ, we had a $45,000 organ included, which today may be worth about $100,000. We developed an organ design which had to do with the existing configurations on the south side of the building. Did you see that? It's blanked off by wooden panels that are painted in color; when you remove them the organ loft is ready for the organ installation.

Riess: What can be done about that?

Ciampi: Well, it's all there waiting to be done. All you have to do is decide this is an incomplete project. I'm recommending that the parish over there, through its leadership, appoint a fine arts committee which should establish a development fund which the community can contribute to. They can have social events, raffles, they can approach people who are very wealthy and could give them money; if the parish would only take the time, I'm sure they would be delighted to do it, and this organ could be dedicated to them.

This organ which we have designed—in collaboration with the organ manufacturers—is an innovative work of sculpture. In all the organs that you see which are conventional the pipes come down on the sides and the organ is an element that is applied against the wall. We said, "Why can't we take those pipes and turn them into the room, so they may cascade down in a different way and become a more powerful work of art?" These pipes would actually project out into the room. We see no reason at all not to do it. So we see not only projecting the organ into the space, but creating a metal sculpture which could be magnificent.

Riess: It is a magnificent idea. But when I talked to Stephen DeStaebler, he said that there's a move afoot to remove his stuff.*

Ciampi: Yes. I had not heard.

Riess: So how are you going to get this spirit that you're talking about underway at the same time?

*See pp. 275-278.
Ciampi: Well, this has to do with social-cultural behavior and growth. Social-cultural behavior is very dynamic and moves from one position of what the community advocates to another one. That which is black today may be white tomorrow, and this is what we live with.

There was an element dominating the community at the time which were irreligious, they were against Newman Center. They were sleeping around it at night, and the pastors had to allow it, up in the terrace. They were abusing and mutilating the center when the church would close its doors so they couldn't get in, and it was so oppressive they were calling it "Fort Newman." This was Fort Newman at the time, and yet this is the history of the church. But now that attitude has changed, and people are beginning to accept it. It's very popular for marriages. I understand at least a few years ago you couldn't reserve the chapel for at least a year because it was so popular.

Riess: I didn't even know marriage was that popular. [laughter]

Ciampi: Well, in those days, in that church, I understand you had to wait a year. So there the church went through that cycle, and now today this is all changing, where the notion of the idea of art in architecture is becoming important, and people are realizing it. And these works of art are still to be realized in Newman Center.

The Catholic Art Forum Philosophy Continued

Riess: You think that the notion of art in architecture is important today, and the Catholic Art Forum got itself together in 1953 to propound just such a notion. Do you think that the Catholic Art Forum was a failure in its undertaking?

Ciampi: No, not at all, not at all. It did not fail because without its influence the things that we have for us today, for good or bad, would not be here. It served a purpose in its time; today the Catholic Art Forum is not a viable medium by which these works can be done. The Catholic Art Forum had to deal with the problems generated within the kind of work that was done in the archdiocese of this region. And since that time the church itself has changed its religious position, so that now we need an ecumenical council. Ecumenism is the influence, so while we no longer have the Catholic Art Forum, we should have an "Ecumenical Art Council," embracing all of the denominations and all forms of religious activity.
Ciampi: My thrust today is still a continuation and a projection of the Catholic Art Forum in which I see the immediate opportunity before the people of this region to direct themselves to ecumenism. And ecumenism has to be identified through the resources that a community has. For me I see today the next center of ecumenical development will be in Yerba Buena Center. Yerba Buena Center there has the old St. Patrick's Church which exists there in isolation, you know, lonely, ignored and abused, with the pastor within it struggling for survival. But St. Patrick's is going to be surrounded by hundreds of millions of dollars worth of new work, which is now in its formative stages. The pastor is concerned with this development because it is not integrated in what's about to happen. So there it is, you know, this individual struggling for survival and requiring the help of the community, and the community needing him.

And based on what's happened there and my travels to India and Egypt—in recent years I found very powerful forces that are asserting themselves in Buddhism, in Sufism, and the Mohammedan religions, or in the primitive cultures of Africa; wherever you go all over the world, the urge for world peace is the most powerful force that exists.

So I am recommending, and I'm going to begin work on it right away, a "Center of Understanding" contiguous to St. Patrick's Church. The "Center of Understanding" I hope will draw people in a way so that contiguous to the church there will be this great open space. The Catholic church will be remodeled. But with that these facilities will be built so that the "Center of Understanding" movement will be a movement oriented toward bringing world peace, which is the most powerful concern we have and responsibility that we have, which I feel the community will respond to. That's my immediate work, which comes as a continuation of the work that we began in the early days with the Catholic Church and the Catholic Art Forum.

DuCasse: It's very definitely a contemporary need.

Ciampi: Yes. So here I'm right now going to be recommending—I can't say too much about it now because I'm very much involved directly with important people in the religious community—but I'm going to try and bring these people together. And they're here and they're waiting and want to do it. It was Sadat who proposed the "Temple of Understanding" be built in Egypt. The same in India, and in the Middle East. I've been there and talked with them. We have no visual manifestation of this need. There is no significant effort being made toward world peace anywhere, and the way we're going to bring about change is construct this kind of a center.
DuCasse: That has been such a perfect process of your thinking and of your working.

Ciampi: A process of evolutionary change in the community, a process of evolutionary spiritual growth, awareness, an evolutionary change within me in which I feel I've grown and have come to understand where my responsibilities are, the unique talents I can contribute. We built the art museum at the University of California. It was a national competition. We were here. They could have given us the work, however we entered a national competition of 367 competitors, won it and built it!

DuCasse: And here you were here already.

Ciampi: I was here all the time! When Newman Center was completed, the people in the community were saying, "That's the best building we have. Why don't you design the museum?" [laughing]

Riess: Awhile ago, Kai gave me this issue of Liturgical Arts Magazine. In it is the project called the Prototype Church. Do you know this? It was the work of Jean Labatut and André Girard.

Ciampi: Oh yes, the two design critics back at Princeton.

Riess: That seems a little bit what you had in mind, that round church on the corner, though theirs is a transparent structure with a tremendous amount of color.

Ciampi: That was the first proposal for Newman Center. That was it, all glass surrounded by the garden, the spiritual garden. Once you arrived in the garden, which was walled separating you from the street, then you walked into this glassed-in sanctuary, which was the church.

Riess: Do you think Labatut and André Girard were very important in influencing a kind of thinking about churches?

Ciampi: They were influential in their own way for the commissions they had to find solutions for. Yes, they were an important part of this movement.

Riess: I'm interested in what other church buildings or religious buildings you particularly like in the Bay Area?

Ciampi: First of all, of course, we have the historic First Church of Christ, Scientist by Bernard Maybeck in Berkeley. Then another beautiful church in the Bay Area is the one over in Tiburon by Warren Callister. Mario Corbett's church in Pacifica. Then, of course, our own Corpus Christi Church which we built.
DuCasse: That was a very controversial building! Was that the first religious building that you built, or had you done others before that?

Ciampi: Well, we had just completed the Hanna Center Chapel in Boyes Springs.

DuCasse: Ah, I see. But that was your first in San Francisco?

Ciampi: Yes.

St. Mary's Cathedral, San Francisco

Riess: What about St. Mary's Cathedral? You were chosen originally as the architect?

Ciampi: Yes. At that time a commission was appointed by the archdiocese to do a search and select the architect to design the new St. Mary's Cathedral. After this search, it was unanimously agreed by the commission that I should be appointed as the architect for the new cathedral. I had recommended to the church that the famous structural engineer Pier Nervi and I design it together, since Nervi and I were very good friends. Our work was compatible.

After we were recommended for this, a new archbishop was appointed, and he felt that the work that we were doing would be too far out, and he wanted to construct a cathedral that was more conservative. So the recommendation of the committee was rejected by the archbishop, and a firm of architects made up of McSweeney and Ryan and Lee were appointed to do the cathedral.

The reason they needed a new cathedral was because the Old St. Mary's Cathedral on Van Ness Avenue had burned down. Angus McSweeney and his firm were retained to do the fire reconstruction of the cathedral. However, the insurance company decided that based on the enormous costs involved in the reconstruction of this old brick building—the roof had caved in—that they would build a new cathedral instead. And so the Redevelopment Agency made available a site, which they called Cathedral Hill. In those days Cathedral Hill was seen as this cathedral complex up on the top of the hill. The Redevelopment Agency developers around that project, instead of relating to the designs of Cathedral Hill, they built these highrise towers around it, ignoring the position of prominence the cathedral would have had to the cityscape.
Ciampi: So my notion of a cathedral in those days had to do with--. Well, first of all my recommendation was that you should not build a cathedral on Cathedral Hill right away, but you should appoint a commission to select a proper site, and I said that the site for the cathedral should be chosen after various sites were evaluated. One site that I had in mind was up on Twin Peaks. Where the two peaks come together there's a swale, and up on that swale between the two peaks a suspension structure could be extended and within that you would experience a dramatic panoramic view of the city.

Riess: Well, you would need Nervi for that! [laughing]

Ciampi: Exactly. That could have been done. I did not think that the redevelopment site in that location was the right place for a cathedral because it was out of the way, inaccessible, and related to a hodgepodge of work that hasn't developed into a very attractive environment. I was also recommending that it be built in Yerba Buena Center so you would have an urban cathedral convenient to the rapid transit system; wherever you were in the Bay Region you could come for the services, and it would be downtown in a proper location, an urban cathedral incorporated in the pedestrian network. I saw this as a very powerful low-key kind of building that depressed down into the ground.

But instead now you have a situation in which that church is isolated in a windy plateau. As I was saying, "If you're going to build it up there, it should have been located in an enclosed plaza or atrium in which you have some screening around it, and not as it is, in an exposed parking area as you walk in" (which you have now). Because of these limitations, and poor environment, people just won't use it and it diminishes the desire for the spiritual community to congregate in a great cathedral complex such as are found in Europe.

In those days they held an international competition for the cathedral in Syracuse, Sicily. The winning design for the cathedral which was to be build in Syracuse was a similar kind of an idea which I proposed. You can find it in the record. The attitude in San Francisco was, "Well, we don't have the time. We want a cathedral, but we don't want to wait. To do all this work is not necessary, we're going to build it here."

So the decision was to build it right now. "We're going to have the plans finished in six months, and we're going to start construction right away." And I said, "If you don't select the right site then you're not going to give the cathedral the proper position it deserves in our urban environment. Further, it is going to take at least six months to write the program for the cathedral."
Ciampi: A cathedral is a great work in history, you know, one of those rare opportunities we have. It would require a liturgical commission to write the program. You would require two commissions: one that selects the proper site and--entirely different people--one to develop the program for its design construction and future incremental growth. It is not conceivable that a complete cathedral complex be built at one time.

The answer was, "We haven't got time for all that, we want to start construction in six months." So they selected the architect, who agreed. "We'll get you finished plans in six months."

These architects set out to do it, and they discovered however that each design they proposed was rejected. As I recall they developed over nineteen different designs for the cathedral over a period, I don't know, of a year, year and a half, and they couldn't get an approval.

I was in Rome at the time talking to the head of the Pontifical Commission in Rome about this, talking about what a cathedral should represent in San Francisco and their feelings about it. There was a competitive situation going on between the Church hierarchy here in San Francisco concerned about my going back there and talking to the commission. As you may know, I speak Italian fluently and had been talking to them and that, of course, wasn't accepted very well. [laughter]

So these conversations were going on, and I had contacted my friend Pier Nervi, the world-famous structural engineer in Rome. He indicated he would be very happy to participate with me in the design of our cathedral. However, in the meantime these other architects had already been appointed and were attempting to find an acceptable solution, which as time went on they were not capable of doing.

Finally the archbishop made another trip to Rome, and I met with him there. Father Vodusek, as member of the rejected architect selection commission, said afterward, "I thought you were going to Rome to meet with the Pontifical Commission with you and Nervi to be the architects for the new cathedral."

I said, "No," I wouldn't be, because we had very different opinions about what a contemporary cathedral should be. The archbishop and I had discussed this in our early conversations and he differed very diametrically from what I thought it should be, of course. He wanted to build a pseudo-Spanish type cathedral. So as a result of this difference I was not considered for the commission.
Following this I met with Pier Nervi and said to him, "There are a group of appointed architects all attempting to design the project and unable to secure its approval. If you want to join that group, from my point of view that's fine, but I'm going to withdraw from our agreement because we have so many cooks in the soup, we can't possibly do a proper design in this context."

I had sent my prospectus into the archbishop setting forth the joint venture of Nervi and myself. I said to the archbishop, "If you wish to have Nervi without me, that's fine with me." And I said to Nervi. "If you want to work with them that's fine, except you know as structural engineer that you have to abide by the decisions of what those architects want to do."

Then the architects decided that they would talk to Pietro Belluschi, who was dean of the school of architecture at MIT. The archbishop, who liked Pier Nervi, then formed a joint venture for them, Belluschi and Nervi.

Nervi had said to me, "If the archbishop wants me to design the cathedral, this is the design I'm going to have. It's going to be constructed of four hyperbolic-parabolic shells coming together in the form of a cross. That is what the design for the dome is going to be." I said, "That sounds as though it has great possibilities."

In the meantime, the architects were designing the plan of the cathedral underneath. What finally emerged is the plan of the cathedral by the original architects and Belluschi which the archbishop wanted underneath, with this hat over it which is Pier Nervi's four hyperbolic paraboloids! [laughter] You may go and you look at it, and that's what you will see.
Renaissance of Religious Art and Architecture in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1946-1968

Stephen DeStaebler
THE NEWMAN CENTER SANCTUARY

An Interview Conducted by Suzanne B. Riess in 1983

Copyright © 1985 by The Regents of the University of California
INTERVIEW HISTORY

This interview with Stephen DeStaebler, an extraordinarily creative and vigorous ceramic artist, is in the main a carefully considered description by Mr. DeStaebler of the Holy Spirit Sanctuary of the Newman Center Chapel, in Berkeley. He takes the reader through the history, from first contact with his future clients down in the bone-chilling studio by the Bay, to the red-hot heat and tension of the firing, to the mixed warmth of the reception of the work by the congregation, to the presently cool acknowledgment of this liturgical art piece by the current users.

The richness of the interview is a result of Mr. DeStaebler's thoughtful approach to his work and his self. He was as conscious as one could wish an artist given a religious work to be of the nature and seriousness of the task. Certainly it came to him at "the right time." He was grateful for the commission and brought to it an exceptional background.

The description of getting all those tons of clay in and out of the kiln and up on the "mound" and on the wall is dramatic. But it is enriched by knowing that Stephen DeStaebler went to Italy when he was nineteen and was overwhelmed by the richness of light and detail and kinesthetic pleasures of the Byzantine churches. It is also enriched by knowing he received an education in every subject that might be considered desirable as an adjunct to sanctuary-making. He was first an art history and then a religion major at Princeton; he was a member of the college choir, sensitive to antiphonal singing; he was a boy artist and tentative stained glass maker.

It is a pleasure to have this interview part of the liturgical art series, and to have come to DeStaebler with a topic that he seemed to relish considering. As he says, he has not had a commission like that one since. The interview took place in DeStaebler's home, an unusual, very pleasurable work of art itself.

Suzanne B. Riess
Interviewer-Editor

October 1984
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley
BIographical Information

(Please print or write clearly)

Your full name  STEPHEN LUCAS DE STAEBLER

Date of birth  MAR 24, 1933  Place of birth  ST. LOUIS, MO

Father's full name  HERBERT CONRAD DE STAEBLER

Birthplace  ST. LOUIS, MO

Occupation  VICE-PRESIDENT, PHARMACEUTICAL FIRM

Mother's full name  JULIETTE WHITE HOILES DE STAEBLER

Birthplace  GREENVILLE, IL

Occupation  FARM MANAGER

Where did you grow up?  KIRKWOOD, MO

Present community  BERKELEY, CA

Education  PRINCETON UNIVERSITY, A.B. 1954

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY, M.A. 1961

Occupation(s)  SCULPTOR, CERAMIST, PAINTER

PROFESSOR OF ART, SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIV. 1967-

INSTRUCTOR OF SCULPTURE, SAN FRANCISCO ART INSTITUTE 1961-67

DRAWING & CERAMICS

Special interests or activities  SWIMMING & DIVING, BASKETBALL

BODY SURFING, WHITE-WATER CANOE TRIPS,

LANDSCAPING, ARCHITECTURE, READING
STEPHEN DE STAEBLER

BORN:
1933 St. Louis, Missouri.

EDUCATION:
1950-54 Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, A.B.
1951 Black Mountain College, North Carolina, studied with Ben Shahn.
1958-59 University of California, Berkeley, California, General Secondary Teaching Credential.
1959-61 University of California, Berkeley, California, M.A.

TEACHING:
1957-58 Chadwick School, Rolling Hills, California.
1961-62 San Francisco State College, San Francisco, California.
1961-67 San Francisco Art Institute, California.
1967- San Francisco State University, California.

AWARDS:
1954 Fulbright Scholarship to Italy (awarded, but declined by the artist).
1960 Richmond Art Center, Richmond, California, Prize for Ceramic Sculpture.
1961 Richmond Art Center, Richmond, California, First Prize for Sculpture.
San Francisco Annual, San Francisco, California, Sculpture Prize.
The Oakland Museum, First California Craftsmen's Biennial Exhibit, Merit Award.
1964 San Francisco Art Festival, San Francisco, California, Major Purchase Award.
Walnut Creek Art Festival, Walnut Creek, California, Grant Purchase Award.
1965 Zellerbach Memorial Prize in the Art of Sculpture.
1979 National Endowment for the Arts, Artists' Fellowship.
1981 National Endowment for the Arts, Artists' Fellowship.
1983 Guggenheim Fellowship
COMMISSIONS:

1961  Welded Bronze Wall Sculpture, Consumers Cooperative of Berkeley, California.
1967-68  Altar, tabernacle, lectern, priest's chair, and large crucifix commissioned for the Sanctuary of the Holy Spirit Chapel, Newman Hall, Berkeley, California. All five pieces are of stoneware clay.
1969  "Farnsworth Memorial Sculpture," stoneware clay sculpture commissioned for The Oakland Museum, Oakland, California, by the Women's Art League of the East Bay.
1970  Seating Environment, stoneware clay sculpture commissioned for the Lower Lobby of the University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley, California.
1972  Water Sculpture, constructed of stoneware clay and concrete commissioned for the Bay Area Rapid Transit District, Concord Station, Concord, California.
1976-77  "Wall Canyon," monumental wall sculpture of high fired ceramic commissioned for the Bay Area Rapid Transit District, Embarcadero Station, San Francisco, California.
1980-81  Ceramic Sculpture, New State Building Department of General Services, San Jose, California.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

1974  The Oakland Museum, Oakland, California.
1977  James Willis Gallery, San Francisco, California.
1978  James Willis Gallery, San Francisco, California.
1979  James Willis Gallery, San Francisco, California.
1981  Winona State University, Winona, Minnesota.
1982  Hansen Fuller Goldeen Gallery, San Francisco, California.
1982  Tortue Gallery, Santa Monica, California.
Encounters with Church Architecture

Bay Area

DeStaebler: In my own mind I don't have a very strong sense of Bay Area church architecture. It's studded, I'm afraid, with a few glaring examples of what I feel to be bad church architecture, great concrete things that throw stained glass at the congregation indiscriminately, a broadside of color, without really much content. That is an example of the kind of design that I'm sorry to see having emerged out of the period we're talking about.

I think [Charles Warren] Callister, on the other hand, is really a sensitive architect. I think his Unitarian Church project there on Geary and Franklin is really a masterpiece. That's amazing sensitivity to the existing church, which is not desecrated in any sense by what he did. It's enhanced, and yet his style doesn't try to imitate the older church. That's a fine example.

Riess: I know that what Callister wanted to do in that Unitarian Church addition was not to put in stained glass--I think they ended up with stained glass because that's what the congregation wanted--he wanted macramé-type hangings, rope hangings.*

DeStaebler: Is that right?

Well, you know, I came rather close to doing a commission for the church. One of his assistant architects, [Ian McCleod] was a friend of an architect I got to know at Cal--I'll think

*See p. 295, 296.
DeStaebler: of his name if I just let it ride in my mind, but he's a very gifted designer—and he came over and talked to me about doing the fenestration for the major window that faces on Franklin. It's about a fifteen-foot window. I don't believe it's in a worship area; I think it's more in the office area. And he was talking with me about doing a ceramic fenestration which would then hold what I think was going to be clear glass; I don't think there was any talk of stained glass. But it never got past the talk stage, and every time I drive by there I wonder what I might have done and whether it would have worked in that setting or not.

It would have been an extremely demanding assignment because the fired clay shrinks about 12 percent from the time it's wet to the time it's fired, and the fitting of the components would have had to have been very exact in order to mesh with the glass. I could have done it, because I've done other kinds of demanding sorts of fired clay work, such as fireplaces, but it wouldn't have been, I don't think, my forte.

There was a time I was extremely interested in stained glass. That little window over the door I did when I was about eighteen. I was totally absorbed in stained glass. I learned how to do it by myself; there was no class or anything where I was in school. In a recent Princeton alumni magazine on the cover there was one of the Princeton Chapel transept windows, and God, I fell in love with it all over again. It's not Gothic glass, it's not the greatest of stained glass, but it's very good glass, and it was just overwhelming to me at that time in my life.

I think, given slightly different influences, I could have gone in that direction, although making the stained glass myself palled after a while. I made about three or four windows and realized that for every hour spent in the creative part of it there were just hours and hours of tedious work, which in traditional stained glass studios is done by specialized craftsmen.

But this is a little bit far afield. I just wanted to mention that I came very close to being involved with Callister in that project.

Riess: What happened in that?

DeStaebler: Well, I don't know whether it was more dragging feet on my part or on their part. I never did talk with Callister, and I don't know whether it was ever something that he was excited about; it might have been his assistant's idea primarily.
DeStaebler: That would have been about 1966 or so? It was before the Newman Center commission came along, and I probably didn't pursue it with enough active interest to pull it out of the doldrums.

I think it's probably just as well I didn't because it would have been a highly technical challenge, and I don't know if it would have contributed all that much to the overall feeling of the project. I think Callister's fenestration, actually, using things like anodized aluminum, is very good, and cast concrete where the fenestration gets heavier. So, at any rate, that's the closest I've ever come to anything with Warren Callister, although I've admired his work; I've seen his church over in Belvedere too. He's really one of the great handlers of wood, much more refined than Maybeck.

By temperament I really like Maybeck. I mean I like his straight-forwardness, although he can be extremely refined too. You can see by looking at the beams here in the studio, I like kind of a crudeness. These joints are a very intricate, American barn type joinery with a dash of Japanese wood technology in it too. I just love things like that, just very honest, straightforward, simple technology, but it's very aesthetically pleasing.

At any rate, getting back to the Newman Center, I guess that's what we ought to talk about because that's what I have the most experience with.

Riess: What do you think are the great churches around here? The Maybeck Christian Science Church?

DeStaebler: Yes, just down the street from the Newman Center. And, there's a church, or maybe it was never a church--what is that little building on the campus right near the Student Union?


DeStaebler: Great, big redwood logs and a great round window at the end.

Riess: Yes, a Unitarian Church. [located at Dana and Bancroft and built in 1898]

DeStaebler: Very nice. And there's still a big redwood tree at the entrance of the church, it's kind of a big sentinel and then the building set next to it. I really like that.
Riess: And St. John's Presbyterian, the Julia Morgan, do you include that?

DeStaebler: Do you mean the one on College Avenue?

Riess: Yes.

DeStaebler: I don't know that well. I've always loved it from the outside, but, I guess to be honest, I've never been on the inside. It's in such stark contrast to the church that that same congregation built diagonally across the street. That one would be an example of "wowser" church architecture.

Riess: I'm getting a fix on you as a romantic, as far as church architecture is concerned, and yet the Newman Center is far from a romantic-looking space to me.

DeStaebler: I don't know if "romantic" is the right word. I've never been to a Greek island, but I've studied lots of the photographs, some of those very simple Greek Orthodox churches with a dome which dominates the small nave and sanctuary, and that probably comes as close to what I feel is at the center of my own aesthetic. I love that play of the light on the whiteness. And again, although I've never been in the really High Greek Orthodox churches like Daphne, you know, the Byzantine period, those really satisfy something in me.

I did get to Ravenna when I was about nineteen, and I'd studied medieval art just before going so I was immersed in that whole period of religious art. And when I got to Ravenna I was just overwhelmed by the mausoleum of Galla Placidia, the very small cruciform chapel. Do you know it, by any chance? It's hard to describe.

Riess: Well, there are three or four places in Ravenna that I remember.

DeStaebler: It's the least imposing. It's the smallest of all the remaining Byzantine churches. There are a couple of stunning baptistries, and then there's San Vitale, which in one bay is just overwhelming. It's essentially an octagonal church and one bay is complete with all the mosaics. I don't think they ever completed the whole church, but this bay with the Empress Theodora and her entourage on one side, and the king, Justinian, on the other. And it just goes on and on, up and up and up up.
DeStaebler: Well, the mausoleum of Galla Placidia is very intimate, and yet it is so overwhelming in its intimations of space. It's like walking into what you think is going to be a little closet and emerging into the universe. It's just an incredible experience. The church is very humble on the outside, it's just of Roman bricks and I think there's some cruelly shaped stone for the corners and all. It can't be over twenty-five feet high. It's a cruciform with a dome sitting on a squinch construction. And you go in and here's this dim interior space, because the only lighting once the door is closed comes from small alabaster windows up in the dome.

The dome is this deep, ultramarine blue mosaic with gold tesserae stars and this beautiful cross right on the top. I tell you, it's just like seeing infinity and eternity all just bathing you. And because it's so small, you know, you look up and it's right there. It's just incredible. In the barrel vaults of the transepts, there are almost like stylized Persian carpet designs, circles and colors. And then at the ends are pictorial scenes of the Good Shepherd and whatnot. As is typical in Byzantine architecture, the walls up to about I think in that church six or seven feet high are just simple marble, unadorned marble.

I had a Greek friend in college who gave me a real insight into that device of having the space where the worshiper is very neutral, very plain, and then above and out of reach very voluptuous. His point was that it symbolically dealt with the realm of the world (the world we live in) and the realm of heaven and afterlife, that it gave this duality very directly to the worshiper. It's an interesting thought. Rather than just bombarding the worshiper at all levels with the promise of the future life, this clearly makes a line of demarcation!

That would be, I think, an example of religious space that really overwhelmed me. I fell in love with Gothic too, but I'm not so sure I feel the same attachment to Gothic architecture that I did earlier. I mean at the time I'd fallen in love with stained glass and began making windows myself. I went to Chartres and had an incredible experience there because it was everything I'd hoped it would be.

You know, often what happens when you study art history, you get inklings of what something is like based on slides, and then you go see the actual work and it's very disappointing because instead of transmitted light you're looking at some dim, usually very dirty opaque surface like a painting or a fresco, and it just doesn't have the intensity. Fortunately with stained glass it's transmitted light also, so the slides haven't lied so much!
DeStaebler: But I had this vision when I was that age of somehow being able to unify the beauty of stained glass with the beauty of mosaics all in one environment, and I never carried it anywhere, and I don't think in retrospect I could have. Because I think the very thing that makes stained glass so powerful in its Gothic use is the play between the cool, neutral stone and the windows. It's just the right balance. In its way it's like that balance between the marble lining the nave and the mosaic above in Byzantine architecture.

Another thing, too, is all that light being transmitted onto the neutral grey of the limestone in a Gothic church is completion of the window. If it were playing upon anything colored like mosaic or fresco it would just be counteractive. Likewise if you tried to use stained glass in a Byzantine situation with its total expanse of tesserae, it would be all wrong. The alabaster is just right, you know.

Riess: Yes, that was a revelation to me, the slices of alabaster; that was a wonderful light.

DeStaebler: Just an incredible mysterious light. Just warm enough. What happens, I forgot to say, in the dome of Galla Placidia, is the stars literally burn. There's just enough redness I suppose coming in from the windows so that it picks up the tesserae and just makes them burn, and the cross just looms up over your head, just on fire. Of course, they knew what they were doing when they set those tesserae at random angles, because when you move then the reflection scintillates just like light does off of water, you know, when you get that fluttering effect of water.

We better get down to business, I guess. The Bay Area. But I just wanted to say that because I didn't want you to get the feeling that I was a romantic in the Maybeck tradition. And I don't know if Maybeck was all that much of a romantic. I don't know, I think he was just an extremely rich inventor of form, and it tends to get a little bit cloying in certain circumstances, and I don't know how I would like the Christian Science Church down the street there on Dwight Way if I were a worshiper. I think I might find it a little heavy, day in and day out.

There are two chapels there. The chapel that intrigued me was the secondary one, the one that has a very long nave, and it's very different from the kind of dish-like main church area. But I like what Maybeck did on the painting of that. He used very simple, almost like watercolor on the stone. And doesn't it have a limestone altar, as I recall?
Riess: Yes, right.

DeStaebler: And then it's kind of painted very delicately, almost like Art Nouveau. And also the walls and all are very kind of delicately, joyfully dealt with. I like that very much.

Riess: Well, Christian Scientists, unlike the Catholicism that we're talking about, wouldn't be at all interested in making that distinction between the here and now and the afterlife.

DeStaebler: Well, that's true. It's not necessarily popular in the way we look at religion now.

The Newman Center Sanctuary

Meeting Father Ritzius

Riess: And that's a kind of nice way to lead into what we should be talking about. Changes had occurred in the Catholic liturgy.

DeStaebler: Well, that's true. Okay, let me just give you a running narrative of how it came about. I was teaching at the San Francisco Art Institute in the early sixties, and I had a student named Dick Jorasch, who was an architect, in the class. This would have been about 1965. He's an important person for you, and when you talk with Mario Ciampi ask him about Dick, because Dick was his chief designer, and in fact, although he doesn't get the credit for it, he was the major designer of the University Art Museum at Berkeley. He and another architect that worked with Ciampi in the sixties named Dick Wagner--I believe that's his name--entered the competition for the Art Museum design, which was an international competition; there were some really important architects competing. And Mario, I think, let them spend their office time to finalize their design, and then when they won it became a project of Mario Ciampi and Associates. So Dick Jorasch is, I think, an important person. You might even want to talk with him about the conception of the Newman Center, because I think his hand is very strongly in the Newman Center design as well.
DeStaebler: At any rate, Dick was in my class, an architect yearning to be an artist! You know, we were talking earlier, if you're one or the other you're never complete! And he said one day, "How would you like to do a church sanctuary?" I must have seemed rather unenthusiastic. I kind of muddled some answer, and didn't certainly leap at the idea. But that was the beginning of it. That would have been about in October, and then come December he told me more about it and said that the architect and the priest would be interested in talking with me if I'd like to consider it.

That had given me time to think some more about it, and I was kind of intrigued by the idea. Come December, right before Christmas, Mario Ciampi and Father Ritzius, the head priest at that time at the Newman Center, and Dick came down to my studio, my old studio, which I still have as a matter of fact but it's kind of secondary to this one. It's down in Albany about a hundred yards from the Bay. It's about four feet above sea level, and I believe it's the coldest place in the world in the wintertime.

They came to see me—and I think this was a critical experience in my getting the commission. I'd become accustomed to this cold, and I just keep adding sweatshirts to stave it off. When they arrived late one afternoon, I was in about five sweatshirts, like a teddy bear or something. And they came in and they had these heavy coats on, like czarist Russian coats. They stood inside my studio freezing to death, and I'm sure they got the impression that this guy is some kind of ascetic, that he's our man because he suffers intentionally! [laughter]

But it was a nice meeting, and I really hit it off with Father Ritzius. John Ritzius is his name. I've heard he's no longer a priest. I think he dropped out of the priesthood not too many years after he left Newman Hall in probably about 1969 or so. I can't remember his term.

You have to realize—and we'll talk a little bit more about this—that the priests in Newman Hall serve for only about three years and then they're transferred to some other location. It sounded to me always like the army, where they kept their personnel rotating all the time, and I think there're probably some good reasons for that, but it seemed to me the price was awfully high to pay, because about the time a person got his bearings and really sank some roots, they'd yank him out and a new crew would come in.
DeStaebler: I just happened to be there—. Or, put it this way. Father Ritzius was there at the right time and I came into a relationship with him at the right time for this all to take place. I firmly believe that had there been any of the other priests that came after into that position at the Newman Center that I wouldn't have gotten the commission.

Riess: Would the building in fact not have been built in the same way?

DeStaebler: That's quite possible too, but I can't speak with any real knowledge in that regard. You might ask Mario Ciampi about that.

At any rate, Father Ritzius and I really saw eye to eye. It was just an incredibly satisfying experience, because it's as if we just made the same assumptions about things. There was never any nit-picking about how something should look. It was always kind of caught up within a greater sense of how it works and kind of feeling right rather than looking right.

So we got rolling, he and I, on how this should work, and I had him come back down to the studio.

The Scheme

Riess: What was he able to see when he came to see you that first time?

DeStaebler: I had nothing prepared. I just was working on my clay sculpture, and I'm sure there was a lot of it around because it isn't a very big studio. It's about half as big as here, and very cluttered and cave-like almost. He would have seen probably just works in progress because there wasn't very much space to store finished work.

They had a certain faith in me I think from works I had done to date. In '66, I was just five years out of graduate school, and I had done one public commission. It was in Salt Lake City. I hadn't had a great deal of experience. But Dick Jorasch, I know, really responded to my work, and it turned out that Father Ritzius did too in his way.
DeStaebler: When we got going on it, trying to get a scheme, he came down to my studio a couple of times, and I cleaned out as much of the floor area as I could and we made a mockup of the sanctuary space. It was way smaller than the actual Newman Center dimensions, but we were able to kind of make a mockup altar out of some boxes I had. (In fact I have some of the same boxes around the corner here. I'll show you.)

My scheme from the very beginning was to place the sanctuary on a raised mound. And so I simulated that with some plywood ramps. Then when it came to figure out what the crucifix might be, I climbed up on some shelving and painted this crucifix on the wall just using some water paints I had handy. It's still there as a matter of fact, I wish you could see it.

It turns out that the sketch off the top of my head was amazingly close to the final proportions and size of the crucifix that I did make.

Well, just to try to keep it a little brief: What Father Ritzius and I did was not try to arrive at an appearance of the sanctuary, but rather an organization of it that would permit the mass to take on a choreography. I'm not Roman Catholic, so I didn't have that to fall back on, but I had studied religion in college and I was very interested in meanings, not just the way something looked. I'm finding I'm saying that over and over again; I'm not quite sure why, but it's important I think to distinguish between the appearance of something and the essence. [tape interruption]

I was starting to say, you can use the analogy of people; a person is much more than what he or she looks like. The first impressions and all can often be the most erroneous. Well, I felt that Father Ritzius and I were getting at something like the core of the mass, and what he helped me see was how in the course of celebrating the mass the priest would go from one position to another. He might go from the altar to the sedilia, the chair, and sit down. And then he might come back to the altar and then come to the lectern, pulpit. Then later as the mass progressed he would go over to the tabernacle in the altar of repose and take the Host out of the tabernacle and bring it back to the altar.

What was generated by all these little motions was something like a cross-like configuration, and the positioning of the altar, the lectern, the sedilia, and the tabernacle all fell into place to enhance and formalize this movement.
DeStaebler: The Vatican II conference had already gotten people thinking about the traditional placement of the altar against the rear wall of the sanctuary. We didn't have to fight that battle. Father Ritzius was very intent upon reversing that position, which forced the priest to turn his back to the congregation when he was actually celebrating the mass itself. So that determined the positioning of the altar a good fifteen feet forward from the rear wall, and it meant that all of this choreography was with the priest facing the congregation.

This is a real big change for Catholics. They were so accustomed to this high altar notion, with the steps going up and the priest on high like someone unreachable, inaccessible, with the incense kind of puffing up, and not seeing his face. So this positioning of the altar forward was then enhanced even more by bringing the lectern a good fifteen or twenty feet in front of the altar.

Now, the Newman Center nave is like a semicircle, and the pews radiate around almost 180 degrees—not quite, because they took some pews out as a matter of fact, so it's probably more like 120 degrees now. At any rate, by bringing the lectern way forward it meant that instead of standing on high and removed from the congregation, the priest was now right in their midst. I've heard later from subsequent priests they don't like this at all, they're not accustomed to talking and rotating, because if you don't rotate and meet people eye to eye, you stand up there like a wooden effigy. So this was another one of the ideas Father Ritzius loved, but subsequent priests have disliked!

Riess: Had he seen things that had influenced him in his thinking? Did he talk about anything else that he had seen and liked and wanted to emulate?

DeStaebler: If he had I don't recall. It's as if we built our own common denominator, in almost kind of a nonverbal way. We just seemed to hit it off in the realm of emotion. He had a great sense of trust. I know he trusted my instinct, and it was not unguided instinct because of this careful work we did together. We spent hours and hours and hours delving into how the mass unfolds.

Anyone listening to this tape without knowing the sanctuary itself would probably have a hard time following what I'm saying. But the sanctuary is not separate from the total chapel space, it's merely a great segment along the rear wall. How would you describe it? It's not an elongated chapel space—.
Riess: Let's plan on having a floor plan. As a matter of fact, you must have sketches around.

DeStaebler: Well, they used to have a brochure, a wonderful brochure, and they let it get out of print. Mario Ciampi for sure will have floor plans, and I'll go in after we finish up here and look in my library and see if I can't find the floor plan of it.

At any rate, what makes it so different from a traditional church is that the sanctuary is practically like a theater-in-the-round. It's practically like a stage, not placed in the center of the congregation but it moves into the congregation, while being very strongly wall-oriented along this long rear wall.

The scheme that I gravitated to almost immediately was this soft mounding, of raising the sanctuary itself about a foot and a half or two above the nave level and having it feather into the lower floor level with a very gradual mound, so it's very soft, not a mountain idea but a plateau. The reason I liked the soft, gradual ramp was that I liked the idea of the communicants, the worshipers walking up the incline to the altar to receive communion.

The plan was to have the congregation move in two columns up either incline, which brought them up to the altar, receive communion over the altar, and then have them return to their pews down the steps in the middle of the mound. Or it could be the other way around.

In practice I saw a very satisfying communion taking place where people—it was a small group—would just kind of meander part way up the mound, some closer, some farther, and the priest, instead of giving the wafer over the altar as was planned, walked to each person and just kind of made a little meandering trip along the brow of the mound giving the wafer to each person, which in a way I liked as much or more than the formal approach that we had arrived at.

The Vatican II guideline, or at least spirit, was to have the priest stand behind the altar facing the congregation. The communicant would come up to the altar from the other side, he would literally be standing on the feathered base of the altar, and receive the communion across the altar. In other words, he would be brought into the realm of the altar, and then he would descend. Psychologically I was thinking this was the way it was meant to be; the slight ascension, going up the mound, was kind of symbolic
DeStaebler: of reaching a certain purification. It was very much like
the idea of the inner sanctum, which in older church design
was limited only to the priest, only the priest went up to
the altar, but here the communicant could go up to the altar
and see the Host and then return.

I think it was a very satisfying merging of the exper-
ience of the communicant and the experience of the celebrant.
And Father Ritzius was really enthusiastic about it. The
real problem we had early on was with Mario Ciampi.

The Approval

DeStaebler: Now, I want to preface this by saying I had an incredibly
satisfying experience working with Mario and Dick. But in
this early confrontation I was wondering whether we were ever
going to get together.

Riess: Actually, I'm surprised that so much of the design was going
on between you and the priest.

DeStaebler: The priests—there were a couple of other men there—were
the clients, at least the representatives of the clients,
the clients being the Church. (And I'll tell you in a minute
how I had to go to the diocese to get my idea approved.)

At any rate, there we got this scheme worked out, I made
a quarter-inch-scale model, and we took it over to Mario
Ciampi's office and there was an immediate problem because
Mario's original design for the sanctuary called for an
elevated platform, one which had a number of very compli-
cated step approaches to it. It was in spirit very much
like the architecture of the sanctuary itself, which is
made up of a number of very sharp-angled walls that kind of
slice like planes into the total chapel space. It was almost
the antithesis of this soft mounding scheme which I was pro-
posing.

So it was just looking very hopeless there. Mario
wanted his scheme, but Father Ritzius was supporting my
scheme. It seemed to sit in limbo for at least a month.
This would have been like March of '66.

Riess: There were no problems about the weight of the materials?
There were no structural problems?
DeStaebler: No. The church you should realize was under construction at the time. The walls were all up, but the floor, which was practically the last thing to be done, was really untouched, it was just a gravel base. It was advantageous to have the project that far along for me, because I was able to go over to the project and get a real feeling for the space, which is really essential.

If you're going to collaborate as an artist with an architectural project, knowing the space for what it really is is everything. If you depend upon drawings, plans, and whatnot, and don't comprehend the true nature of the space, you can make some terrible decisions. You can think you're working within the spirit of the space and be way off. In this case there was very little room for error because the space was already defined. The roof wasn't up yet, but that wasn't so important, it was high up and you could imagine the effect of the roof. And it allowed me to really sense what this mound was going to do, and I was convinced it was the right solution, so I wasn't about to compromise.

Well, about a month after that impasse I got a call and went back over to Mario's office and Mario had had time to really consider the merits of the proposal. He kind of handed it over to Dick, and Dick and I worked out some modifications of it, which Dick had, I imagine through a lot of study, felt would be superior. I was open, and there were several changes that came about which were very good.

One of them being, instead of the steps being niched into the mound, they emerged out, so it was kind of a more assertive form. And we arrived at certain bevels: where the mound comes around and approaches the back wall, it gets steeper, and there're very sharp bevels, which I thought were good details. Also the little seat for the acolytes to sit on got refined from this revision. They have a concrete bench that kind of rises up out of the concrete floor near the presider's chair and it's very simple, it doesn't intrude on the fireclay objects, like the chair and the altar and so forth. So I feel very good about that.

After working out the design further and involving Dick and Mario in its final appearance, we ended up with something that we all felt very good about. Then it died again. I can't tell you exactly how it went, but I went to see this fellow named Clem Finney who was at the diocese office in Oakland. He lined up a meeting between me and a priest somewhere down in San Leandro who was considered something of an
DeStaebler: expert in liturgical objects. I went down there with this schematic drawing, showing him how it looked. And it was all right, he just made a few suggestions on how to handle the tabernacle and so forth.

Then as far as I recall, nothing happened. That would have been like early summer of '66, and I don't think I heard anything about it being approved until like March of '67. Practically a year elapsed, during which time I got very discouraged. I fortunately wasn't set on just moving in to do that work. I kept doing my own sculpture, and it was an important lesson for me to learn for all time not to base my own expectations on other people, because decisions are often very slow in coming about, especially in a bigger organization like a church.

Riess: The client, you said, was the diocese?

DeStaebler: Well, the diocese was the real client, yes. And I have no idea what might have gone on at that level. I don't know whether there was a conflict or what accounted for the delay, because the church construction was moving right along all during this time, and it was essential to get the plan in place in time to have the floor shaped to receive my work.

Riess: Your offering! [laughter]

DeStaebler: Right! I mean, if the floor got poured before we had the scheme firmly in place, it would have been disastrous, because there would have been no way to really modify just a generalized flat floor.

But just to make a long, drawn-out, agonizing period short, the approval came through. The working drawings for the floor got drawn up in Mario's office and to the contractor in time and it got poured, and very nicely done.

It's integral black concrete, as you might have noticed, which is quite different from what is called a dust-on surface, where the color is just a kind of veneer on top of regular grey concrete. You really sense the depth of color in the concrete because of its being mixed integrally into the batch. It has a certain disadvantage in that it has tended to leach kind of a whiteish, blotchy powder in certain areas, but that doesn't bother me. It's bothered other people more. Also they've tended to wax it rather excessively, and gets too thick a coat of wax. It should be cleaned down periodically, and I think wax used more sparingly.
The Firing

DeStaebler: Getting back to the schedule, I think the contract was finally firmed up in March of '67, and I got to work rather quickly after that. I meant I felt kind of pent up, I knew just how I was going to go about it. I guess the first object I made was the chair, then the lectern and then I think I made the tabernacle and then the altar. At any rate, by the fall of '67 I had the major work done in the wet clay on the floor objects. I wasn't to get to the crucifix till much later; I finished that in '68.

I just worked like a demon, if that's the right word! [laughing] for months, getting those works done. I must say, for large-scale, ceramic sculpture, they were real tours de force. They taxed my enormous kiln, which I'd built several years before, to the limit. To give you an example, when I loaded the tabernacle into the kiln—. You have to realize this is a walk-in kiln; I built it myself and I made it high enough so when I walked into it I wouldn't knock myself out on the arch bricks. It's about five feet, nine inches high and it's as wide as my stretched arms, five and a half feet wide or so, and it's about four and a half feet deep; it's over a hundred cubic feet.

I knew I wanted the tabernacle to be just as tall as I possibly could make it. So I calculated the shrinkage. As I was telling you earlier, clay shrinks about 12 percent from wet to fired. Well, about 6 percent of that is in the time between drying out before it's fired. So I calculated another 6 percent onto the total height of the tabernacle, and when it shrank down, dried out, and I pushed it with the hydraulic jack into the kiln, it just scraped the arch! I mean it just left a little trail of clay dust up in there, it didn't hurt the piece at all. That's how close it was.

Then, when I fired the altar—which was in three sections—I had to modify my kiln rather basically in order to make it fit. I mentioned earlier how it flares out at the base so that the communicant would actually stand physically on the altar instead of the concrete floor. That made the total width or depth of the altar about four and a half or five feet wide, and my kiln door is only four feet wide, so I had to knock out the bricks down at the base of the door so that these flanges, these flared-out forms, could slide into the kiln without hitting the bricks. And it worked fine. I got them in.
It is easy to distinguish Stephen DeStaebler's house from others on his block in the hills of Berkeley, California. Long, flat slabs of fired clay edge the front and side yards, holding the hillside in place. The juxtaposition of earth and fired-earth landscape sculpture is appropriate since it is one of the dominant themes in his clay work. These slabs also reflect the impact Western scenery made on him in 1957 during a first trip to California from his Missouri home. In contrast to the worn-down and softened topography of the Midwest, the jagged, stratified Sierra Nevada Mountains so impressed him that distillations of their forms began to surface in his work.

Since moving to California more than twenty years ago, Stephen has created sculpture tenuously balanced between exploration of landscape and figurative images. Horizontal forms suggest the earth moved by cataclysmic forces—earthquake, geological drift, lava flow. Wall sculptures, some as tall as 37 feet, dwarf the human figure, yet create an exalting environment. Stoneware vessels and seating arrangements of throne-like forms seem to be prepared for use by the nobility of a primeval age. Larger-than-life fragments of figures, embedded in columnar forms, confront the viewer with a sense of man's relationship to the earth—his birthplace and his ultimate destination.

Landscape and figure images appeared simultaneously in Stephen's earliest sculptures. As he explains, "I realized that in everything I did, whether a landscape or a stele, there was always a figure underneath." The "X" form is many of his walls is a sort of shorthand for the body flexed out. For many years a more clearly defined figura-
tive form eluded him; none of the images he tried seemed to work. His first success, a horizontal sculpture of a female form, lies on the patio of his home to remind him of his struggle with that problem.

Although that sculpture was satisfying then, Stephen's vision of the figure was tied to a vertical axis. He thought he had found the answer to sustaining a column of clay when, during a visit to John Mason's studio in Los Angeles in the early 1960s, he saw many vertical sculptures built around an armature of two-by-fours. "I had a strong mental picture of what I wanted and spent quite a while making several slabs. I got one of those up and slapped it on the armature but it didn't do what I wanted. My first reaction was strong disappointment. Then I looked at it again. It was as if my eyes had been peeled and I could really see what was there. My preconception was tawdry by comparison. What was there was infinitely better than what I had anticipated. I realized that clay had an inner instinct for form. Much of what I've learned in the years that followed has been a growing awareness of what clay itself wants to do."

Not long afterward, Stephen found a different successful method for structuring a vertical form. He shifted his attitude toward clay and began to incorporate the facts of its nature—cracking, shrinkage, warping—into his ideas. Because he is not dealing with containers, he can utilize many of the "taboos" of clay technology. But negative attitudes about some of clay's characteristics, such as cracks, he feels, are deeply ingrained in the human psyche. Cracks in an art form give us a sense of wholeness broken; yet according to Stephen, "If you let the clay do what it wants to do, it will do incredible things. But it takes a spirit of risk because it may fall flat."

Often Stephen intentionally breaks the clay forms to create crack lines in floor landscapes, architectural walls and figurative columns. This procedure enables him to liberate form by recombining different sections, producing "an energy the original monolith often didn't have." For vertical structures he builds from the base up, a section at a time as the clay becomes leatherhard.

Once a large sculpture, made in five days with drying forced by fans, was on the verge of collapse as the last piece was added. When the sculpture sagged after completion, he cut the clay from the bigger mass and reassembled it differently. "It's like making a three-dimensional collage where you take fragments that speak to one another and bring them into some kind of field that is more than the sum of the parts."

The procedure can be compared to film editing where segments are rearranged for a more logical or rhythmic progression. Moreover, "the beauty of clay, when you start to segment and recombine it while it is wet, is that the fragments can be modulated intrinsically, not just superficially. It gives a feeling of basically reforming an idea as you go along."

One clay with which Stephen constructs sculpture is:

DeStaebler Stoneware Body (Cone 9)
Ball Clay ....................................... 2 parts
Fireclay ......................................... 4 parts
Sand or grog .................................... 1 part
\[ \frac{7}{7} \text{ parts} \]

He also works with several porcelain clays, with short or plastic bodies and a low-fire clay fired to Cone 9:

Talc Body (Cone 9)
Ball Clay ....................................... 3 parts
Talc ................................................... 2 parts
Sand ................................................. 1 part
\[ \frac{6}{6} \text{ parts} \]
Working on a monumental scale necessitates firing his work in sections—some as large as the kiln. By constantly shifting and changing the relationship between these handbuilt parts, Stephen keeps the clay from becoming a passive medium completely under his control. It is an increasingly difficult concern, disproving the adage that art becomes easier as you progress. In Stephen's experience, just the opposite occurs. "I've never really subscribed to the idea that art is a skill. Skill can become camouflage for an artist." A concentration on technical aspects of clay is part of Western rational thought in which a problem is defined and the artist proceeds to seek a solution. Stephen's attitude is more closely allied to Zen philosophy in which the artist becomes one with the event and is "not separated out by the calculating mind, manipulating the event. This is the distinction I try to make between the approach to clay I've attempted over the years and the approach I see around me so often."

This attitude is responsible for what Stephen speaks of as a "reverence for clay," a principle advocated in some of the classes he attended at the University of California at Berkeley. Although he had flirted with art classes and clay during his previous educational experiences, he had not considered art as a career until he came West. After graduation from Princeton University with a degree in religion, he had entered the army for a tour of duty in Germany. Thereafter he spent a year as a group leader in a Harlem settlement house, then was hired to teach history and art at a private high school in southern California. At the end of that year, in order to continue teaching, he went to Berkeley, in 1958, to earn a secondary teaching credential, and enrolled in a sculpture class to fulfill a requirement. Halfway through the semester, he realized that most of his time had been spent in the lab, and decided sculpture was what he really wanted to do.

When his work for the credential was completed, he enrolled in the master's program in sculpture, and ultimately joined a class taught by Peter Voulkos. Pete and John Mason (who taught a summer sessions class in 1960) were part of the excitement and ferment that created an unusual working environment for Berkeley art students in the sixties. Stephen recalls that Pete didn't talk much in class, but the atmosphere was electric. There was a drive to push clay to its limits. "Just making something in a large size was like taunting fate because the structural dilemma escalates."

Working alongside Pete, as students did in his classes, gave Stephen a sense of identity with clay and an understanding of how to be guided by instincts in making creative decisions. Stephen decided against using glazes, seeking instead, a way of forming shape and color simultaneously. At the beginning, he sprinkled and rubbed dry oxides onto the wet clay, later mixing oxides into the body. Color as an interior rather than exterior element (as a glaze would be) is important because: "If you want the color to be in the core of a cut plane and you have to paint it artificially, you can tell it's a contrivance and not the immediate 'thereness' of color. There aren't too many approaches to art which have both color and form welded together as clay does." Experimenting with combinations of oxides, he has developed a spectrum that includes delicate pinks, pale yellows, pastel greens and blues as well as earth tones. Their hue and density are affected by variations in firing temperatures.

Along with making color an integral part of his sculptures, Stephen doesn't use tools in the common understanding of the term. He doesn't use a slab roller because the time required to make a slab has become a mental and physical "warm-up" period. His own body pushes and pounds the clay, shaping his images much like the forces at work in nature. Stephen's physical appearance belies the strength required to build his monumental sculptures. He faces such demanding physical exertions like an athlete. After exhaustion comes a second wind that gives the strength to continue and often to do his best work.

Although the idea of going beyond exhaustion is not unusual in sports, Stephen finds this a difficult concept to convey to students where he teaches at San Francisco State University. He feels an artist needs to make that kind of commitment in today's world where so much art work is being produced and the artist is constantly bombarded and bludgeoned with images. The endless smorgasbord can induce artistic indigestion. Stephen's advice is what he himself practices, to "try to get away from it all, be by yourself, and just work."

The author A frequent contributor to CM, ceramic artist writer Elaine Levin resides in Northridge, California.
DeStaebler: Where it was especially a tour de force is this altar fired in three sections shrank to within an eighth or a quarter of an inch of one piece to the other. In other words, when you have all this weight in clay, especially the force of gravity pushing down on the clay, in the firing of such a work you know the clay is getting molten practically, and if it isn't designed right it will slump. Well, I did it right because these three sections shrank exactly.

Riess: Did you have to do little models and fire them first? Do you do that kind of thing to see whether it's going to work?

DeStaebler: I did small clay studies. I did about a one-inch-to-the-foot clay model, which generated a big clay slab and made the altar about six or seven inches long, but it was very informal; it was a working model. The final model was quarter-inch scale. I made the altar about so big [gesturing], and I did this in plaster.

But a model is not necessary. In fact, I don't even like to depend on larger-scale models. Once I know the image and once I've figured out the structural system, then I really don't want to look at a model.

Riess: You didn't have any question but what this would work?

DeStaebler: Right. I'd had enough experience working with clay to know what the limits were, but what was extremely anxiety-provoking was whether I could deal accurately enough with certain specifications, like the shrinking specification.

What was really nerve-wracking was whether my work would shrink laterally on the floor dimensions at the rate that I calculated the niches in the concrete for. In other words, all these pieces—the chair, the altar, the tabernacle, and the lectern—nest into niches in the floor, which is a very important aesthetic concern. It means that the forms emerge up out of the floor, they're not just pieces of furniture sitting on the floor. So that the niches were about two, three inches deep in some cases. Others are kind of exposed on one side or two; that's true of the chair and the tabernacle. And it meant that after the pieces were fired they had to sit down into these niches with the right amount of leeway.

Riess: And the timing was such that the niches were already there?

DeStaebler: Right. The floor was poured in the fall of '67, I suppose.

Riess: You couldn't have said to them, "Wait"?
DeStaebler: Not really, because they had to have that floor in in order to continue with the rest of the church.

It turned out that my calculations were very accurate. I didn't have to touch the concrete at all, which means my pieces were within the limit. I did have to shape the pieces a little bit; the three sections of the altar needed trimming, which is possible with a Carborundum saw. In other words, I solved these problems, although I'd never had an opportunity to do it before.

There're a lot of risks involved. Firing big pieces of sculpture create real problems of--. Well, for instance, the greatest problem of all is blowing the pieces up, which I've done on other occasions. I've had enormous pieces of sculpture in my kiln and advanced the temperature a little too fast and reached 212 degrees before the moisture was all out. Fortunately, God was with me in this process! [laughing]

Riess: I was going to ask you whether in fact you thought about blessing it before you put it in there?

DeStaebler: Well, I don't know. I have never been an overtly religious person, in the sense of ritual or prayer, but you sense doing your work with purity in hopes that it will progress safely.

Riess: The Japanese potters, the fine old masters, there was so much of that Zen kind of thinking about what they were doing. It should carry over into the kiln.

DeStaebler: A lot of it is just pure technical attention that you have to take in order to avoid the explosions, but a lot of it is so intuitive. I mean there's no manual that says, "Let them pre-dry for one week." In fact, that's just about what I ended up doing. I'd load the work into the kiln and let it pre-dry with just the slightest amount of warm air blowing into it for about a week, and then I'd brick up the door and start the firing process, which would take about another week, and then it would take a few days to cool down, so it's a long, drawn-out process.

With my homemade kiln, what I'm looking at when I'm advancing pressure is a u-tube--a monometer, it's called--with fluid in it, and when you advance the pressure one column lifts up and the other pushes down and you measure the space between the high and the low in the water columns and that tells you your inches of pressure, so you go by like eighth-inch increases, just ease it along. Once you get up to red heat, you can then go rather swiftly up to
DeStaebler: peak temperature, which in this case was about 2300 degrees Fahrenheit; in ceramic terms it's about a cone eight-to-nine firing. At any rate, they fired really very well.

The Installation

DeStaebler: Then let me tell you about the installation. This came about in the summer of '68. The church was already in operation, and they were using their old funny Victorian furniture from the old Newman Center from the northside of campus. We brought all the work in at one time. Mayflower Movers, and a wonderful forklift operator named John Tosselli (?) I got to know on this project, did the job. He brought the work in ever so carefully and positioned the pieces in their niches.

Riess: They had to bring the forklift into the church?

DeStaebler: Right. We laid down plywood so it wouldn't leave any marks on the floor and made a road of plywood right up to the sanctuary. It was very strenuous work and extremely anxiety-provoking for me because any misstep on the part of the forklift operator could have resulted in some damage.

Riess: But the pieces weren't fragile, were they?

DeStaebler: Well, fired clay is extremely tough, but it's not something you can drop around, just like a marble sculpture or something, you don't go bouncing it around, so it has to be handled with great care. But we lowered the pieces all in one day as I recall. I made special neoprene rubber pads to shim the sections on so that it was absolutely dead-solid. So the pieces sit just by gravity in their niches, and they're so heavy that they can't really be moved around. They aren't cemented in, but held just by gravity.

Then the placement of the crucifix was the most excruciating experience of all! I took a lot of care in the positioning of the crucifix in the first place. I made a great, full-size template of the crucifix out of paper and put it on a long bamboo pole. It looked like a great Japanese kite. And my friend Mel Henderson, a teaching colleague of mine, would hold the bamboo pole and I'd be way in the back of the church, then up in the balcony, saying, "A little to the right. Up one inch, two inches." Boy, it just homed right into where it felt right, where it should be, and-- [tape interruption]
DeStaebler: As I was starting to say, the position of the crucifix, which felt just right, turned out to be the point that would be generated if you extended the lines of the diagonal walls that are on either side of the sanctuary down to the point where they intersected, somewhere deep in the ground, and then constructed a vertical from that point upward, that's just about the axis.

Riess: Good geometry.

DeStaebler: It helps explain how your eye often seeks some kind of geometrical resolution to a complex situation. There're all kinds of things where angles and lines want a resolution—and this church by the way is an extremely complex design. There's hardly a parallel pair of walls. You know, every wall is askew and only a few right angles. And the walls are really dominant, you know, they come zipping down, these truncated diagonal concrete edges, and they vanish into the floor.

Well, this places the crucifix way off-center; it isn't centered on the altar at all. And this bothered many traditional people. They felt that, you know, crucifixes are always lined up directly behind the altar. Well, if we'd done that it would have been way out of whack, it wouldn't have participated in the energy of the space at all.

At any rate, we got the position located just right, and with the assistance of Mel I developed a very elaborate mount system made out of steel angles which were bolted onto the concrete wall with expansion bolts. This I did all myself—I want you to realize that on all my commissions, this one being the second big one that I had to do, I tend to all details myself and do all the work myself.

We got the mount on the wall—this is up about ten, twelve feet in the air—and we rented a scaffold which was about the same height, and we brought all the ceramic sections of the crucifix up on top of the altar, and then we positioned them. We made a dry run. We mounted them on their brackets, some of the smaller pieces required new anchor bolts, and we got those all drilled and saw that everything fitted just right. Then we lifted all the sections back off and we had them sitting on top of the scaffold.

Well, I wasn't paying much attention. You know, when you're in the middle of doing something you don't notice what's going on often. And I got off the scaffold and stepped back
DeStaebler: and here was this scaffold platform bowed like that. [gesturing] I swear, I thought, "My God, we're going to lose the whole work!" It looked like the whole thing was going to collapse, all thirteen sections or whatever lying on top of that scaffold. That's when I prayed! [laughing]

Riess: Oh good, I'd hoped you were going to say that!

DeStaebler: Because it looked to me as though it was imminent disaster. The reason we had to do it all at once like this--put it all on, take it all off, and put it all on again--is there hadn't been developed yet a one-part adhesive. Now there're silicone sealants, which are wonderful materials where you just apply them out of a cartridge and they set up, but back in the sixties the best that I could come up with was a two-part adhesive, which meant we had to add a catalyst to the base material.

We quickly mixed up our adhesive material, which was necessary to keep the pieces from moving on their steel mounting pins. We would place the adhesive around the pin and then set the piece on the pin. We did it all. This was with my graduate student at the time, Mike McMillan. He was a rock climber, a good qualification for the job! [laughing] We got it all up that same night, and it just fitted beautifully. I mean, again, everything couldn't have gone better. But there was that moment I described where I felt that it could have been an absolute disaster.

I feel very good about how everything worked. I mean I really feel as though it was one of those rare experiences where a very complex project integrated itself, where the work links to the architecture, enhances it. It doesn't just mimic it, it's a dialogue, it really seemed to provide what the church itself didn't provide, kind of a warmth and softness, because the clay forms are quite soft in contrast to the hard-edge concrete.

The Congregation's Reception, and Some Hindsights

DeStaebler: Mario Ciampi brought Isamu Noguchi by fairly soon after it was finished, in fact just weeks after it was finished I think, and I had the opportunity to go to the church with them. I'd never met Noguchi before, and he's a very solemn man. He stood with his arms folded and he looked at it a very long time, and he said, "This is very good work." And it was like
DeStaebler: getting a kind of a blessing from the Pope himself! Then he said, "You know, it might have been interesting if you'd placed the crucifix in a niche also." Well, the fact of the matter is I couldn't have because the wall had already been poured by the time I was even brought in seriously to the project.

Then he made one other observation about a certain tonality of clay. I never really looked at it that critically, and I got it through his eyes and he was right. I toned the clay a little bit after he had left.

Riess: That's really interesting. You'd been aware of his work, of course? His mounds?

DeStaebler: Yes, I've really been an admirer of Noguchi, not influenced by him so much I felt, because I have my own feelings, which are quite different from his. But that was a real boost to get that approval from him.

But the approval from the congregation wasn't so forthcoming. It was interesting.

Riess: Yes, I'd like to have a sequence of the dedication of that and the kind of reviews it received.

DeStaebler: I don't recall any formal dedication, it just kind of then was in use. If there was, I've blanked it out. Funny how things like that do tend to get buried in my memory, but I don't recall any kind of formal dedication.

Riess: What is the congregation there? Is it mostly students?

DeStaebler: That's what makes it a very interesting situation. It's a mixture of a student center, Newman Center, and a parish church. As a parish church it attracts people of all ages. And the difficulty I think they have is finding some common ground between two rather different contingents. The parish congregation is apt to be much more conservative than the university congregation or the younger members. But that doesn't really bear out. Some of the people who liked the work most were older people, so I don't think you can make any distinction by age.

What did happen though is that there were strong supporters and strong detractors. I mean the controversy is never settled. It's still going on. (I'll talk about that in a moment.)
DeStaebler: I was really interested in how some people approached the work very warmly and poetically. The one person that comes to mind is almost the archetypal little old lady in tennis shoes, and she was from the parish, but she certainly was no reactionary. I was there at the time she was in private prayer, and she came up when she learned that I'd done it, and she said, "Oh, I think that altar is just wonderful."

[whispering] She said, "I think of it as the anvil of God." You have to know the design to see what she's talking about. The middle section of the three sections of the altar is shaped very much like an anvil, because there are two holes which penetrate the altar, and so the holes cut into the central section, kind of scalloping it in like an anvil. And she said, "I can just imagine the hammer of God striking the altar!" [laughing]

Riess: It is a kind of masculine space.

DeStaebler: Actually, I think the architecture tends to be severe, and my work I think tends to modulate that and brings in a softness. I mentioned how the forms tend to be soft. But it's also played against a very planar, strict kind of counterpart to that softness.

The bases, for instance, are for the most part trim. The lectern has a very trimmed base, which makes it very rectilinear. Then it softens into like a leaning, inclined pyramid and opens out into a very precise rectangular platform for the Bible. So in a way I think there's male and female woven into the forms of my work. In fact, I think that's one of the problems that people who found themselves disliking it had; they thought my work is too sensuous. In fact there is—how to put it?—a kind of voluptuousness about some of the forms. The lectern itself is, in its secondary form within the pyramid, quite voluptuous. The presider's chair is a very soft seat form.

I was very conscious of this desire to again somehow mediate between the severity of the space, and religious feelings, which I think are much more sensate than the architecture was dealing with. The architecture tended to be more cerebral, and my work hopefully was finding some commonality between mind and emotion.

The color of the work that I did is very muted, but rich. It has kind of a golden, yellow ochre, orangish tonality that plays on a cool, grey green clay body. And since the church itself is just the austere, natural concrete in the walls and this dark, almost black concrete in the floor, this warmth is just enough to give it that edge of feeling.
Unfortunately, the church, almost since the day I installed the work, has tended to be a potpourri of aesthetic ideas, and it's never, unless they become extremely revisionary and return it to the way I envisioned it, going to read properly.

What happens, there're different factions within the church which is predictable because so many of the people, especially the parish church people, have an old-fashioned notion of what a church should look like, so they bring lots of potted flowers and place them around the tabernacle in particular. There are some potted plants which seem to be there all the time that turn it from this kind of sensuous austerity into some junglelike motif!

Then there're the banner people, and they're often the younger people from the university, I think, who are caught up in this folk-rock liturgy. In themselves, there's nothing wrong with these banners, but in this setting it's just like hearing some strange music being played while your own concept of the music is going on. They've just been disastrous, these bright colored, enormous hangings on the wall. They're there periodically, they're not permanent.

What seems to be permanent, unfortunately, are the altar cloths. They have these enormous, bright, garish pieces of cloth that hang over the altar, the altar of repose, and over the lectern. In fact there's one on the lectern that hangs down all the way over the front of it, hiding probably the objectionable sensuous forms that are in that object.

When I go back I just retch! I feel like Jesus in the temple with the money-changers; I want to throw all this out. For a long time I'd indulge in certain guerilla tactics, like hiding a cushion that they would put on the acolytes' bench behind the altar. It was made out of some garish, puce green Naugahyde! Or chartreuse would be closer to the color. So I would keep hiding that. Fortunately it hasn't been around in my last few trips; maybe somebody finally did it in. I couldn't bring myself to literally take it away and just destroy it.

The same thing with altar cloths: when I was there showing guests of mine I would roll up the altar cloth and show them at least the form of the altar as it was meant to be seen. These cloths just desecrate them. I have nothing against the idea of the cloth, because in the liturgy of the church a particular church season has a particular color.
DeStaebler: But if they were really serious about the environment, they could commission a weaver or someone to deal with it. I don't understand why this hasn't taken place.

Riess: There was no consideration of that in the very beginning when you were working with Father Ritzius?

DeStaebler: Well, no, unfortunately there was never a real concern about that. I think it was always understood that it would be dealt with tastefully, and as I recall there was some talk about having a commission, someone who could hand-weave them and do that.

Riess: The problem is that you've had since his time nobody, it sounds like, who was really committed to it the way he was.

DeStaebler: That's right. Let's see, Father Ritzius left I think about 1969 or '70, and in the intervening years there have probably been about four groups of priests who have come and gone. In one case, a young priest has come back. He's the only returnee that I know of.

I was just realizing that in all of our planning one thing that we overlooked were the candlesticks. So as a gift I made some bronze candlesticks for the church that picked up on this flaring form where the base flowed out and it made them look as though they were growing up out of the top of the altar. I cast them myself down at my foundry in my old studio. They lasted about two years, and someone stole them. Can you believe it? [laughing]

Riess: Well, obviously you didn't have them in their niches!

DeStaebler: They didn't have niches. I mean, had we thought of them at the time I think I would have proposed a niche. I did make a niche for the reliquary stone; that fits into a niche and makes it flush with the altar top. I also made the bronze holder for the candle, which flares and nests onto the wall near the tabernacle. I think that's a very effective minor form.

I also cast the tabernacle itself in the altar of repose. I'm very, very proud of that because it involved a hinging system which I developed and cast integrally with the two doors. The two doors open out like this [gesturing], and because they had to have it lock, I incorporated a brass locking drum in the door, and so it just takes a simple key twist to open it. I noticed that they placed a new lock in there. They must have lost their keys or something and had
DeStaebler: to replace the whole drum, and they didn't bother to patina the front of the brass lock, so it kind of blares out at you. Little things like that hit my eye, and those are real sour notes.

At any rate, these doors open out and inside is this almost apse-like space, a bronze casing that fits inside the ceramic entrance. It's very much like a cave. It kind of locks like this [gesturing] and then the entrance opens up the doors and then it opens wider inside. And there's nothing quite so beautiful as those shiny gold chalices in that muted yellow bronze that I cast it in. But you know what's happened in all these church reforms, they now have wooden vessels! They don't use the gold chalice anymore, and so that beautiful aesthetic is lost, they just have the funky little wood things in there.

But these are just symptomatic of I think a general lessening of aesthetic concern; I don't want to say church-wide, but certainly at the Newman Center there's been a loss of what the aesthetic presence of the sanctuary is. Father Ritzius knew what it was, he appreciated it, and in subsequent generations of priests there's been a real indifference to it. For a while I tried to educate them in what the aesthetic was, which would mean keep the banners away, keep the potted plants out of the sanctuary proper, and resolve the altar cloth problem. But it was like spending my life as an educator and I gave up on it.

The Challenge of the Work

DeStaebler: Then in more recent years there's been outright hostility shown toward the work by the priests. I don't know whether it's still the same group, but last year I got notified through a friend who is kind of a go-between that they were seriously considering removing my work because they were wanting a more flexible space to do other things with, like dramatic presentations and anything of a communal nature where they needed that kind of flexibility.

Now, I don't quibble with that as a concept for a church, but if it isn't incorporated in the initial scheme, to come along later and just throw out the original solution without really weighing what would be lost would strike me as a very unfortunate, unjustifiable act. They never contacted me, so I just waited until something came more to a head, and it
DeStaebler: never did. I think what they discovered is that whatever they had in mind as an alternative was going to cost way too much money. They did renovate the ceiling, which had asbestos in the plaster. I think that much they did do.

I personally feel that with a little creative wherewithal the space as it now exists can accommodate the tremendous amount of activities, such as plays. Also the altar itself provides a great place for a free-thinking speaker to sit! Somebody told me that the first time they saw the church it was to hear Jean-Luc Godard give a talk back in the late sixties, and he was sitting right up on the altar.

I don't think that work would come out lightly. I mean certainly anybody who tries to do it is going to, I think, meet with a lot of opposition, and not just from myself. I also have been told—I'm not sure of it but I've been told—that there's some law in California that a public work of art cannot be removed or desecrated or modified for fifty years after its completion.

Riess: And in fact you might argue that the altar cloths are modifying it.

DeStaebler: Yes, if you wanted to try to drive it home. You see then the problem is that very few people are visually literate, and I don't mean to say that in any kind of elitist sense, but we know that for a fact in other walks of life. Some people have a musical ear and some people don't. Some people have an extremely developed sense of taste and others don't, and those people with that sense of taste, and a lot of haughty talk about wine, seem to push a lot of other people the wrong way, because they think the connoisseurs are making it up.

But there it is. Some people are extremely sensitive visually and some people are not so sensitive. And you cannot make a person who isn't visually aware see a problem. If he can't see it, there's no problem. What's happened affects a minority of people with a visual orientation, and the others are off in some other realm which is important to them but it just doesn't include the visual sensibilities very much.

Riess: It sounds like it also demands some sense of theatricality from the priests, and they're resisting. I'm not surprised that they feel very challenged by that whole situation.
DeStaebler: I think it does run into conflict with their traditional notions of celebrating the service. For instance, rather than accept our concept of the sanctuary—which calls for the congregation coming up to the altar—the last two or three generations of priests there (or longer, perhaps since 1970 on) have placed this funky little wooden table down at the base of the steps, and the priest comes down to the table and the people don't even get up on the mound of the sanctuary at all. All they did was move the barrier forward. Aesthetically it's a disaster, this little table. It's not even a good Victorian table, it's just some old dark veneer-wood table that they have a little white cloth on—it's like serving lemonade on a picnic!

Riess: So that all of your work becomes a backdrop.

DeStaebler: Yes, right. It doesn't involve the communicants kinesthetically.

I should say a word about that, because I've felt very strongly in my work in sculpture that the experience the person has of sculpture is very kinesthetic. By that I mean it's the experience of the body moving in space. Just by way of explanation of the word, I'd say that we all realize that people have the sense of touch—when you talk about the senses you mention seeing and hearing and smelling and taste and touch—but kinesthesia is the inner touch, the awareness of our own bodies in space. A dancer has to have it to a high degree, otherwise he couldn't coordinate the complexities of dance movement. We all have it, we all know where our bodies are in space, and likewise we know where we are in relation to objects, so that when we experience sculptural form or architectural form we are coding it kinesthetically; that's what lets us walk backwards in space, because we've already coded it, we know what that space is. And the pleasure of the experience is largely a kinesthetic experience.

When you, in the sanctuary of the Newman Center, walk up the incline there's a great sense of private, secret levitation. It's a very slight rise, but it's just enough to lift you above where you were before. It's that dual plane idea I was referring to in the Byzantine church. Just by changing elevation a couple of feet you are in a different mind-set, and to deny that, as these priests have for the last few years, is to take away from the heart of the experience of the sanctuary. It isn't just something to look at, like a backdrop, it's something to participate in. And so I'm very disappointed that that's been lost.
DeStaebler: Another thing, while I'm expressing disappointment [laughs], we tried to get a baptismal font in the initial scheme. I made a quarter-inch-scale model to show what I would like to do. It called for a reversal in the mound over in the far corner of the chapel. That would be the southeast corner, and it would have been a slight dip, like going into a pool. It would have been about a foot below the grade of the floor, and the font would have nested into a niche like the other objects and would have been formed with a small basin for water. That just didn't get anywhere.

One priest, years later, back in the mid-seventies, was trying to resurrect it. He called me, and I said, of course, I'd be interested in doing it, but nothing has come of it. That's again one of the problems. They don't stay long enough to carry through complicated projects like this. You know, it takes long-term dedication.

Riess: Have you ever had a chance to do something like this in another church setting?

DeStaebler: No, I must say that I felt a lot of disappointment in that regard because I felt I made an original contribution to this church. In fact, I think very few people could really sense the originality of it. This most recent group of priests who wanted to remove all the work clearly couldn't see any virtue in it. I mean they were willing to go to thousands and thousands in expense to get rid of something.

What's kind of disappointed me is that at least some architects who might, you know, be doing a church somewhere down the line haven't seen the potential of what I did.

What I was trying to do, I'd say, was to integrate my forms with architecture to a degree that most liturgical art doesn't do. Most liturgical art, in my opinion, tends to be veneer, decorative, after-the-thought application. Stations of the cross are stuck on the wall. The crucifix is stuck somewhere. The other objects are, as I was saying, like furniture resting on the floor, and not integrated. And the attempt to get at certain earthlike sensibilities—you know, this merging of the forms out of the floor and this kind of eruption upward—I've never seen anywhere else. And I think it's an especially appropriate expression within the religious context.

Religion which deals only in ethereal matters tends to lose the duality of human existence; you know, our feet in the earth, emerging out of the earth and returning to the
DeStaebler: earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. The religious dimension of life comes in spite of this earth-rooted reality that we all share. To try to whitewash that, as I think so much of liturgical art does, is to end up with a gutless sort of half-truth, which is no truth at all.

The Crucifix

DeStaebler: Let me just say a word about the crucifix. The crucifix itself is life-size. The figure is about five and a half feet high and the cross is about eight feet tall and the span of the cross is about seven feet. The figure is done quite naturalistically. It's not stylized in the sense of so much modern art. I think there's been a tendency in crucifix art to stylize the human being out of existence, or to make Christ so hyper-realistic that there's no room for poetic metaphor.

The crucified Christ in the Newman Center is very naturalistic, but he's in a bed-like cross. The cross is very soft. In fact the space behind his head generates the sense of a halo, or aura. There's no mechanical halo. The head exists in its own niche, kind of a soft, hemispherical depression. And the cross undulates with the body. It's almost as if he's being absorbed into the cross and also emerging out of it.

Surrounding the cross itself is an undulating earth shape. It creates a kitelike configuration, which I like. It doesn't look like a kite, but in my mind I think of a kite soaring, it's as if it floats. And the position of the crucifix, in that critical point that I was telling you about earlier, makes it both hover and ascend. It isn't placed up so high that it seems inaccessible to the worshiper. It's not down so low on the other hand that it's intimate. It's at some hover point between being of the worshiper's space and of a higher space.

And also, again with Father Ritzius's encouragement, the crucifix itself is a—I think his term was a transcendent Christ. It isn't a Christ overtly suffering, although I did the whole iconography of the wound, you know, the lance wound of the soldier, but no blood, nothing like the Spanish Baroque would have done! And nail holes, but again very muted; no nails, in other words. He isn't physically attached. It's there in transcendence with the remnants of the wounds but not the source of the wounds.
There was this desire on Father Ritzius's part that the crucified Christ be at that point beyond the suffering itself. So he looks out. There's none of the torture of the whole period of Christian art which seemed to really get going with the Counter Reformation. Well—it was there before. One of my favorite crucifixes, the Cimabue crucifix in Florence—the one that got damaged so badly in the flood—that's an agonizing crucified Christ. The head is so far over that these neck muscles are practically horizontal. I have a photograph of it in the house, I'll show you.

The Bottom Line

Riess: How much were you paid for your Newman Center job?
DeStaebler: Oh, gosh. It's so little now. I kind of hate to make public these things, but I guess it's all right.
Riess: You don't really have to.
DeStaebler: Well, let me leave it this way! [laughter] At the time I think I felt it took courage to ask as much as I did, but in retrospect it was so little money. It was just not enough to pay me a minimal wage for all the time put into it. That doesn't bother me. I mean I'm just so fortunate to have done it that I overlook that fact. I've discovered in sculptural commissions, you seldom really are remunerated in accordance with what you put into it. It isn't like some other walk of life where production is mechanical with a setup where you get the jig ready and then turn out the product. You live it and breathe it for the whole time that you're involved in it, which is what you live for; I mean you do it for that experience.

And it did help me at a very critical time in my life, because it was a time when the kids were starting to demand more, and we also wanted to move to a bigger house, and getting the payments for the Newman work let us move over to our last house on Tamalpais Road. So it had some material rewards in that sense, but in answer to your question I don't even want to quote the amount because in 1983 dollars it's a different value of the dollar and it just makes me wince!
Stephen DeStaebler's Background, and Influences

Experiencing Places of Worship

DeStaebler: Let me finish your question [asked when the tape was not on]. What I'm saying about scale in a Gothic cathedral is that when everything is in proportion, you can have this vast space above you and it isn't intimidating, it isn't a power trip, it isn't too much. In a Gothic experience there's something about the stained glass imagery I think that's awfully important to it, because if you have this hierarchy of human figures which occupy the higher spaces, it makes for an identification between you on the ground and them up in space that makes the church itself somehow intimate, even though it's so vast.

I've never been in a Byzantine cathedral like Hagia Sophia; I'd love to have that experience of this vast dome space. I think that must be one of the great architectural experiences ever made. There's something about the vastness of those domes. I've only seen them in photographs so I don't know what it's like in reality. But if a dome in Galla Placidia is twenty-five feet high and can do what it did to me, I wonder what a vast dome a hundred or so feet above would do.

Riess: You've seen the Pantheon?

DeStaebler: I've been in the Pantheon, yes. And there's something about that which is a little different in that the dome comes down very close to the ground. You know, the wall itself, the vertical, flat wall, is not all that high as I recall. Again it's a matter of proportion. We project out from our own bodies, proportionately to our own body units. Corbusier did that very systematically with his elaborate ratios between parts of the human body.

Riess: Well, it's a kind of rationalizing of that kinesthetics thing you were talking about.

DeStaebler: Yes, in a way, kind of echoes or reverberations or ripples out from ourselves; like a pebble in water we tend to resonate with an architectural space if there is that resonance going on. Churches that fail to resonate then become the wowsers; they create a big space, but without any proportional approach to it.
Riess: I would think it would be wonderful if you could find a client who would have you do a small chapel, a small, pure, famous chapel like the Ronchamp or something like that.

DeStaebler: Or Vence, by Matisse. With just the optimum conditions it would really be a wonderful experience. What I'm trying to do with the painting is largely a kind of religious yearning, and the formal canvas is a compromise in a sense, it's not the same thing as the wall itself. In Christian art, the fresco wall or the mosaic wall or the sculptural relief wall are so critical to the experience.

For instance, when Rothko did the paintings for the chapel in Houston, he was really compromising. The canvases will convey a certain amount, but not the same as walls resonating.

Art History and Religion Studies at Princeton

Riess: The Rothko exhibition recently in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art was in a little room, and it was like a little chapel, very beautiful. I never thought of Rothko and religion.

DeStaebler: Well, I think it was his only religious commission. I think many artists are very religious if you take away the specifics of that term. Who isn't religious, when you get right down to it? We are all concerned about the ultimate questions that religion attempts to give some shape to. Whether we subscribe to someone else's shaping, some formal religion's answers or not, doesn't make us religious or unreligious. It means that I think many artists who would be the last to call themselves religious have these yearnings. They somehow want to create an order that includes them but transcends them at the same time.

Riess: Why did you major in religion in college?

DeStaebler: Well, I don't know how much tape you've got, but I'll try to give a short answer. I'd always thought of myself as an artist from a young kid on, I had gotten all this encouragement from my family—if anything, too much encouragement so that I reached that point somewhere where I didn't know whether it was me who wanted to be an artist or my parents who wanted me to be an artist. But by the time I got to college I reasserted my image of myself as an artist and I wanted to go to an art school.
DeStaebler: My dad argued against that and said, "Well, look. Why don't you go to a liberal arts college and see how it goes."

So I said, "Okay, I'll make a pact. I'll go two years to get a liberal arts education, and if I'm not happy in my art I'll transfer to an art school."

Well, the fact is I was completely happy in my first two years at Princeton. My sophomore year is when I did the stained glass window and some other work. And that was without an art department. They didn't have, and they still really don't even have a studio art program on a curricular basis—they have an extracurricular program. It meant I did this all extracurricularly. Then when the junior year rolled around I had to declare a major, and I chose art history because I liked it and had done very well in it up to that point.

But when I got into the major, which required extensive research papers, I got into a block. I couldn't do my own art anymore, I couldn't do the art history; there was a real conflict going on. So my solution was to retreat entirely. I gave up the idea in my mind of being an artist, I quit the art history major, and I swung to another interest, which had been latent in my first two years in college.

Essentially the choice of religion was because of one professor, George Thomas at Princeton. I'd taken a course with him as a sophomore and I kind of loved the man; not kind of, I really did. I mean, he's one of those few teachers who really touched me and brought the whole world of the eternal into my life. I can't describe it, it was just because of his own bearing, his own kind of glow, that I had this feeling and attraction. So I majored in religion largely out of that problem of escaping the conflict in art, and attraction to George Thomas.

I had an exciting and a dismal experience studying about religion. The dismal side of it was reading about religious experience of others and wondering what the hell it was! And being frustrated ultimately because it was verbalized and not embodied in living, so I was very glad to finish formal education.

It was a humanitarian approach to religion, it was not denominational in any sense. It certainly wasn't theological, although we studied about theology. But it was a broad study of religion and culture, and I found it very interesting. I wrote my thesis on St. Francis of Assisi and developed a real empathy with him, so that that was a very positive experience.
DeStaebler: I think what I was encountering and didn't know it at the
time was almost a classic confrontation of left-brain-right-
brain worlds. What happens when you study art history is
that you begin to depend more and more on your left hemi-
sphere. The whole structure of art history is articulated
according to meanings not intrinsic to the art work. The
work has meaning in a certain context, and what happens is
you become trained to see the work in the contextual way
and you cease to experience the work in an immediate
aesthetic way.

And I was so good at it—I was getting A pluses—it
would seem crazy to not major in it. But it was one of
those survival decisions that I realize now was everything.
Art history has somehow lost its own juices, and maybe it's
been just terribly vulnerable to the academic mind.

Riess: Well, a lot of the juices were the juices that were
close to religion, the symbols and iconography.

DeStaebler: Yes. I mean these powerful things that are really beyond
words; as soon as you reduce some of these powerful symbols
to words they seem mundane. They lose their magic by being
translated into an inappropriate vehicle. That's why, say,
liturgical art cannot be substituted by something else. I
mean if you want to have the senses contribute to the relig-
ious experience, then you've got to give them their sway.
You can't somehow truncate them, like the Protestant Reforma-
tion tried to do. You can't have your cake and eat it too,
and I think the Protestant tradition by and large has been
an impoverished tradition for liturgical art, say, in
contrast to the way the Catholic tradition has gone, or the
Byzantine.

The Mesh of the Visual and Aural

DeStaebler: There is a point at which you have to let it go or stop it
short. A New England church is a good example, where it stops
short. No stained glass, you know, but there's something
about the light on white walls which is so overwhelming that
that in itself is its own aesthetic and its own symbol.
There's something about a New England climate, something
about that austerity of the air. It's right, it's a perfect
resolution of the religious impulse to have a purified light
and whiteness and an unadorned quality.
DeStaebler: In other situations, the kitchen sink, everything is thrown into it, like High Baroque and German Baroque, say. It's not really my cup of tea, but I find I'm drawn to it because I think there's a kind of an honesty in the theatricality of it. (Now, if it was a different conversation I might say just the opposite though. Sometimes there's a time when I think the theatricality is really working against the religious impulse, and I'm very ambivalent about it.)

Human beings fall in vastly different ends of the spectrum between asceticism and sensuality, and I'd say that that church which embodies one or the other with open arms can be extremely satisfying. Churches which get somewhere caught in compromise often are the worst. There's kind of like a timid reach toward the opulent, the stunningly beautiful, and then a retreat to something austere. But austerity itself is an art form, like minimal art; it needs to be cultivated with a very fine sense of reductionism and if it isn't done well it's dead. You can't just keep a church clean and have it have the spirit. It takes a certain kind of reduction that is a high art in itself. You know, less can be more, like Mies van der Rohe liked to say. It's not clear that by adding opulence, like the Baroque did, that the spirit is really enhanced.

Of course, we separate the visual from the aural. You think of hearing some Baroque music in a High Baroque church, now that's really something, you know, to get the full impact. Baroque music is doing in sound what Baroque architecture and liturgical art were doing visually. A certain underlying order which is really architectonic is embellished with so much playfulness and counterpoint and overlap that the underlying order is all but forgotten. You know, that wonderful return to the sense of order after having been in a kind of a fantasy of almost random lushness; it's really a satisfying counterbalance to have order and seeming nonorder coexist and yet never become chaos.

Riess: What's the best music for the Newman sanctuary?

DeStaebler: Well, they never got their organ! [laughing] That was the pet project of the previous priest, the one that Mario Ciampi began working with, I think in the late fifties. I don't know.

Riess: But I mean for your work.
DeStaebler: Well, funny, I never thought about it! I don't know; I don't know what the music would be. I haven't minded folk-rock, but when I've been to a mass or two when they had that kind of singing it didn't seem at all appropriate. But I never figured out what that music might be.

The music I fell in love with when I was in college was church music our choir sang, and that was Renaissance church music. I sang in a choir with a director who was extremely involved in recreating some ideas that were developing in the Renaissance. We sang a lot of Giovanni Gabrieli's music. He and his brother Andrea were the developers of the antiphonal choir, and what it involved was one unit of the choir sitting on one side of the sanctuary and the other on the other, singing back and forth.

Well, this developed at the cathedral of San Marco in Venice, and by sheer coincidence I arrived in Venice when I was a kid, you know traveling around on my own, in the middle of August, and I walked into San Marco and the High Mass for the Virgin—you know, the Assumption of the Virgin—was going on, and here was this Gabrieli music being sung in San Marco, and the acoustical interchange was just overwhelming. Now that was a fusion of architecture and sound, music, that I'll never forget.

We tried it, when I sang in the Princeton choir, in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Carl Weinrich, the director, got permission to give a concert in the great bay of the museum, and there are these domed spaces, and we set ourselves up antiphonally, but it wasn't like San Marco, although it was a great, great performance. I really liked it.

The thing about sound in space, we all know how potent it is, but usually it's totally random, and architects are probably in the dark as to what creates that optimal situation for resonance, acoustics, and whatnot. They're always over barrels. They say, "Do it right for the music," and then the human voice when the priest talks is lost. They had to do all kind of complicated baffling in the Newman Center to make the spoken word audible. You know, they had to muff it through an amplification system, so I doubt if it's an ideal musical space.

Music can kind of make a space throb. Certainly it happened at the Princeton Chapel. I can remember Weinrich on that organ hitting some of those low registers with the foot pedals where the cycles per second it was so few that it was hardly a sound anymore, but the pews and everyone just [making low sound]. Oh, just the energy in that organ!
DeStaebler: So that was probably the formative experience for me, when I think about it. Perhaps that more than the visual. But it came simultaneously. I never thought about that, but probably what was the great gift of that college education—while I was in a sense fulfilling my father's wishes—was to have that experience of seeing religious art for the first time, like the Medieval art through Kurt Weitzmann's course, and then singing in the choir—both my sophomore year, the same time I did the window, St. Peter denying Christ.

And I have a feeling that something was set in me forever, that all the art that I've done since then—although except for the Newman Center it hasn't dealt with religion per se—somehow aspires to a sense of the human condition. You know, what we are caught up in, how we persevere in spite of what can be looked at as really a pessimistic scenario. Because what we're all up against is this realization that sooner or later, some of us I'm sure sooner than others, that we're not going to be around for very long, that death is there, inescapable—and our love is directly or indirectly a response to that.
Renaissance of Religious Art and Architecture
in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1946-1968

Charles Warren Callister
CREATING PLACES OF WORSHIP AND CONTEMPLATION

An Interview Conducted by
Suzanne B. Riess
in 1983

Copyright © 1985 by The Regents of the University of California
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Charles Warren Callister**

## INTERVIEW HISTORY

**POSTWAR BAY AREA PEOPLE AND PLACES** 288

**CHRISTIAN SCIENCE CHURCH, BELVEDERE** 292
- Getting the Commission 292
- Craftsmen, Then and Now 293
- Participation in the Design 296

**THE MILL VALLEY CHRISTIAN SCIENCE CHURCH, AND THE IDEA OF ARCHITECTURE AS PROCESS** 302

**COMMITTEES, DETAILS, DECISIONS** 304

**MILLS COLLEGE CHAPEL, DESIGN IN THE ROUND** 306

**ARCHITECTURE TODAY, SEARCHING FOR MEANING AND COMMUNITY** 311

**THE MARKETERS OF ARCHITECTURE** 315

**BAY AREA CHURCH ARCHITECTURE** 318
INTERVIEW HISTORY

High up on the list of admired and emulated California church buildings is the First Church of Christ, Scientist, Belvedere. It is a very fine wood and concrete church, with faceted glass windows by the Cummings Studio, a beautiful interior color scheme, perfection of siting, and a happy evocation of the original log cabin meeting place of the congregation, which had grown to need new quarters after the post-World War II population boom.

After that church was completed in 1951, the Callister and Payne firm did the First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Mill Valley, in 1965. With J. Martin Rosse, in 1968 Warren Callister did a chapel for the Unitarian Church in San Francisco, and in 1978, in Pasadena, the All Saints Episcopal Church. In 1967 the firm was given the choice commission to do an interdenominational chapel at Mills College. Those buildings constitute the religious body of architectural work that Warren Callister has been involved with. He shares his thoughts on work with church clients, the need for places of worship, and sticking to absolutely first-class workmanship.

The interview was recorded at the Callister office in Tiburon, under the most gracious of circumstances. Warren Callister's architectural practice is, by his testimony, just about ideal. The place, the people, the interpenetration of work and home community all serve to make it so. The reader will gather that the interviewer was given a slide show that developed visually the California context of Callister's ideas for church forms, as well as given a tour of the variety of projects underway in the Callister, Gately & Bischoff office. It is the major drawback in a subject-oriented oral history series that the whole story of the man who has worked out such a satisfying creative life has to remain only a dimly perceived background text.

Suzanne B. Riess
Interviewer-Editor

October 1984
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please print or write clearly)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your full name</th>
<th>Charles Waven Callister</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date of birth</td>
<td>Feb. 27, 1917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of birth</td>
<td>Rochester, N.Y.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father's full name</td>
<td>William Henry Callister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birthplace</td>
<td>Rochester, N.Y.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Salesman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother's full name</td>
<td>Elizabeth Young Callister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birthplace</td>
<td>Ithaca, N.Y.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Clothing Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where did you grow up</td>
<td>N.Y., Ohio, Fla, Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present community</td>
<td>Titusville, Calif.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Art &amp; Architecture - University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation(s)</td>
<td>Architect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special interests or activities</td>
<td>Architectural History, Art &amp; Music</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
April 22, 1983

Ms. Suzanne Riess
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720

Dear Suzanne:

The list you requested - Charles Warren Callister - churches

First Church of Christ, Scientist 1951
Belvedere, California

First Church of Christ, Scientist 1965
Mill Valley, California

Chapel for Mills College 1967
Oakland, California

First Unitarian Church* 1968
San Francisco, California

*joint venture with J. Martin Rosse

All Saints Episcopal Church 1978
Pasadena, California

Sincerely,

Marcia Felton
CHARLES WARREN CALLISTER

studied architecture and fine arts, University of Texas, 1935-41

Corps of Engineers and U.S. Air Corps, 1941-45

1946 established architectural office in San Francisco

1946 to 1955 developed architectural practice of essentially custom residences

1955 moved office to Belvedere/Tiburon just north of San Francisco

1955 extended practice to include public schools, churches, university projects, and large scale community planning and housing

1955 to 1969 formed joint venture project partnerships with John M. Payne and J. Martin Rosse

1968 first established Eastern office, now located in Amherst, Massachusetts

1969 established formal corporate venture of Callister and Payne

Callister, Payne and Bischoff established 1972

Callister, Gately and Bischoff established 1981 (John M. Payne deceased, 1977)

Lecturer in architecture, Stanford University, since 1961; visiting lecturer in architecture, Syracuse University, 1962 and 1965; Columbia University, 1962; Universities of Colorado, 1963, British Columbia, 1964, California, Texas, Oregon, California Polytechnic Institute, and East-West Center of the University of Hawaii, 1966; University of Massachusetts, 1973

Urban Land Institute's 1982 Award for Excellence for Large-Scale Development -- Heritage Village, Southbury, CT

San Francisco Art Commission Award of Honor for exceptional achievement in the field of architecture
Postwar Bay Area People and Places

Callister: They're giving me an award for our architecture from the art commission of San Francisco, so I've been writing a brief autobiography, and I've really tried to say what are the past things that had the greatest influence on me--rather than necessarily what were the sequences of my architectural events.

The Bay Area was a great enticement to me. I was in the service during World War II as a pilot, so I would fly out here and land in this area. Even from the air, this place looked so marvelous. [laughs] The Bay Area was absolutely infatuating at the end of the war. There was an inspiring mood then that I have not seen since. There were a tremendous number of people here waiting for the war to be over--particularly women, waiting for the soldiers to return. And it was at this time that I arrived in San Francisco.

San Francisco had a friendly, wonderful sense. And its weather and its climate were in such contrast to what I had known up to that time. I had lived in Texas, and Texas was terribly hot. This was at a time in Texas a bit before air conditioning had become very prevalent.

Riess: You got your architecture training in Texas?

Callister: Yes, I did, at the University of Texas.

Riess: When you're talking about the mood, and the climate, you're talking about the kind of creative stuff [William] Wurster and [Thomas] Church and people like that were doing?
Callister: Yes. This came to my attention right away, although I knew a good deal about the Bay Area when I arrived here. The Bay Area already had a stance in terms of architecture, more so than any other place I had seen. It had a grand feeling. It was not just the architects of the time, it was also the total sense of the city itself, and the beauty of the place. Then the Oriental influences and the whole cosmopolitan aspect was very persuasive, which I think influenced the culture tremendously in the Bay Area.

Also, the climate gives you great freedom that you don't have in other places; with no extremes of temperature, the climate generates a reposeful atmosphere. Around the Bay Area, of course, you have all kinds of climates, too, and that's nice in giving great variety.

Riess: Did you come with some idea, some kind of passion as a young architect, for what you wanted to do in architecture?

Callister: Well, with architecture at that time—I suppose it was a combination of things that occurred. Planning at that time was new, you know, there was not such a thing as planning, per se. In fact in order to study planning at the University of Texas, the nearest I could come to planning was to study sociology. Although, there was one man, Hugo Leipziger, a refugee from Germany, who was holding informal seminars in planning which were inspiring to many of us. He was a great teacher. Hugo's a dear friend of mine. I always accuse him today that part of his success as a professor was because we didn't understand what he was saying. [laughter] But that was the very beginning of teaching planning at Texas University.

When we came out here there was a group called Telesis which was into city planning and that was an interesting event. Jack Hillmer and myself, and I guess Philip Buskirk and Johnny Pryor and Victor Probst, all from Texas University, sort of joined forces with that group. We went to their meetings, and we entertained, and all that sort of thing, in trying to generate public interest in planning.

And that was a beginning of sort of an excitement that came about after a war among architects, of what might now happen. We thought, "Now that we're through with the war, what are we going to do." It was very stimulating.

Riess: Did you do a lot of public work then?
Callister: No. Well, actually, I started an office with Texas friends without any of us having experience, because after five years in the service we thought we had to get on with our work. I remember Ernest Kump—going to see him, just to discuss architecture—and he thought it was outrageous that we didn't want to first gain any experience, and have a license, but simply intended to start our architectural office. Ernest has since become a very good friend, and later assisted me in making my way through the trauma of beginning an architectural practice.

Anyway, the Bay Area is and was an inspiration to me, there's no question about it. Although Sibyl Moholy-Nagy once said, "No great art would ever come from here because there are no seasons." I'm not so sure about that. Maybe it's that all of the seasons here are inspiring and we need not suffer winter to find spring.

Riess: Well, that's the old Puritan ethic.

Callister: You have to agonize to do great work, I suppose. I don't believe that at all.

Riess: What were the big excitements architecturally?

Callister: As I say, the mood of the place, the grace of the place. And then wood, in a sense, is an exciting Bay Area phenomena; its prevalence here, of course, is an architectural influence. And the lack of any masonry statements, mainly because of the earthquake problems, and so forth. You saw very little masonry. As we saw just the other day in the Coalinga earthquake, it's the masonry buildings that are falling down. Wood, particularly in smaller projects and in residential work, and so forth, becomes very important.

Riess: It never occurred to me to think about liturgical art in terms of the environmental excitement and the post-war Renaissance, but I suppose maybe it fits in as well as anything. Do you think so?

Callister: Oh, no doubt. There was a resurgence of religious faith at the time. It was very strong, and there was a post-war anticipation, an anticipation on every side, in everything, that peace would bring about a great new life. And so that excitement just carried into religion as well.

Religion was a way of joining into the Bay Area life, too. There were a lot of people who came here, you know, a lot of strangers. I think that the religious communities that were
Callister: set up were very, very important in finding a social home, a community home. That became very important. Otherwise you were at a loss, in a way.

I think schools, and churches, and all the institutional things became significant.

Riess: Yes. And they all needed to be built.

Callister: All needed to be built. They were all without homes—schools without homes, and churches without places, really. The expansion was tremendous. Everybody dreamed in the Pacific arena of the war of coming back to the Top of the Mark. Why they ever changed its design, I have no idea. They should go back to [Timothy] Pfleuger's original design there, because that's a historic thing. It was a symbol, a crazy symbol. It was one of those architectural historical things, within that space, within another building, indeed on top of the building, which Pfleuger did, which was very important.

That's a very sentimental thing, I suppose, but nevertheless, it was part of what generated this terrific excitement for the Bay Area, which certainly has caused it to be a home for a certain type of people, I think. It's changed now, but for a while, you had to appreciate the aesthetic or the pace and so forth of those times. It is and was slow-paced compared to New York or compared to Chicago or compared to, even the south, even Dallas, I'd say. And particularly Los Angeles—it always had and still does have a different pace. I think it's a very luxurious place to live, but it takes time for people to live with each other, and not pass by so fast you can't see each other. You have to determine that maybe you won't achieve as much here in terms of your career as you might in other centers—particularly in the world of art, I suppose.

Riess: Well, that's only measured by the New York measurements.

Callister: Oh, and Los Angeles measurements.

And this would be true of all the arts. Actually I think some people look at the architects that are in this area as being rather folksy, rather than in the realm of the avant-garde. I think that's still true.

Riess: In the fifties and sixties there was that terrific struggle over high-rises. Was that an effort to go big-time, also?
Callister: Well, the economic potential of the place was great, mainly because of people wanting to live here. That was one of the persuasions. So headquarters were established here for many industries and many commercial ventures, because people couldn't think of a better place to live. And particularly for the people who wanted to have this more reposeful place. I mean, if they wanted the more dynamic thing, they certainly didn't stay here. They would go to New York. Or even Boston, or even Philadelphia, or Washington. All those places had a dynamic sense. Even in the manner and way people drive. [laughter]

Christian Science Church, Belvedere

Getting the Commission

Riess: How did you get the commission for that first Christian Science church?

Callister: Well, my family and I went to a Christian Science church, and so we did have some contacts, just by being a member—but not of that church; we were members of the Mill Valley church. Actually it happened at the foot of the old Sun Yat Sen statue in St. Mary's Square. That used to be a beautiful place, before they put the garage under it. And it was a very lovely sloping little knoll. The Rudolph Schaeffer School of Design was right at the foot of that knoll. There was a little allee that went through there. It was a very popular lunching place. I bring this up because it was actually through just sheer accident that the chairman of the Belvedere church's building committee was having lunch next to where I happened to be sitting. I don't know whether they intended to get in touch anyway. I find many commissions come by accident.

Riess: That probably could only happen in a community that's paced like this, then.

Callister: I think so, too. And so he said, "We are going to build a church in Belvedere. Why don't you come over and let us talk to you about it." I think they'd talked to others, too. I'm not sure.
Callister: It was a very small group, less than a hundred, and they had a log cabin as their church here on Belvedere. In fact, the log cabin was just lost last year. It was the oldest building in Belvedere, a true log cabin. And it just slid down the hill. That was too bad. That little log cabin had a lot of romance to it for the people who were then members of the church. It had a fireplace in it, it had skylights, it had all the things that the new church finally had, in a sense.

Riess: Was that an older congregation? I'm curious.

Callister: No, that was a young congregation, mostly. They were made up of people, many of them, who were from out of town. Then there was a basic group that had been here a long time. Harry and Winifred Allen, who developed Seacliff and much of Belvedere, they were members of the church. They actually gave the land for the church. Winifred Allen was a very wonderful person. She was a landscape architect and she had also studied architecture. She was most influential in doing the landscaping.

Riess: Yes, I wondered about that site.

Callister: It's a triangle, and they had thought of the entrance being on the other end, right across from the City Hall. City Hall is an old church that they moved down the hill and built it into the City Hall. It was the old Episcopal church, as I recall.

And then there was another connection there, too. My wife went to school with Harry and Winifred Allen's daughter-in-law. So there was a connection there, I suppose, too, that made it possible to become their architect.

Craftsmen, Then and Now

Callister: Anyway, the old log cabin had a great influence on my design. That was nice, to find real history, and to find an existing mood to work with, such as the fireplace, and such as the skylights. It was very moody and dark, in a sense, and very Japanese. I suppose this was true of early Berkeley, Bay Area sort of architecture, which of course was very brown then. [laughs]

Riess: Did the building committee refer back to the Maybeck in Berkeley?
Callister: Oh yes, yes, the Maybeck church, of course, in Berkeley is a very, very great building, the Christian Science church in Berkeley. Both Gutterson and Maybeck did just wonderful architecture in this church; Gutterson more or less, I gather, did the Sunday School addition.

Riess: Was that an expensive church to do? What kind of a budget was involved?

Callister: No, it was not—it was expensive, I suppose at the time. We had a wonderful man who was the superintendent, a Mr. Black. He was a Scotsman. He was the old-fashioned type of superintendent who knew all the trades. Today we have contractors and superintendents who have no idea what the other trades are about, or what they're doing. He could follow through with everybody, and nothing was impossible to him.

Well, I have recently run into one builder like this, actually two, on our All Saints Church project in Pasadena. In fact, for these two men—the All Saints project was the last that they did before they retired. But there was a capability in those early people who perceived that they could do anything. And today there's a diffidence, almost, about building that's much different. You have to work with uncertain quality and uncertain concern and all that sort of thing. You never know—now, this is a generalization. I'm just saying in broad terms, because that's not always true, even today.

Specialization has come in to where the electrician does the electrical and the plumber does the plumbing. The coordination of them has become more complicated. I know we did Haviland Hall at the University of California—Jack Payne and myself—we did the remodelling of it. The original number of sheets for the whole building was twenty-three. Just in remodelling we did eighty-four! You grasp the sense of the differences of the technical side of building.

Then also, the realm of that time, in the 1920's when Haviland Hall was done—this was true of the All Saints Church in Pasadena, which was also done in the 1920's—people in the trades had a follow through. Well, I have a famous example, because Maybeck would show in his drawing an ornamented newel post of a stair way. And he would then put a little note on the drawing that said, "Make the bosses on the ceiling in harmony." Well, now, if I wrote that on a drawing today, they wouldn't know what to do. But you see, they in the past knew. They had a sense of their craft and if it's a carved newel, they could carve a boss to relate to it. You know what a boss is? Are you an architect?
Riess: No, but I've studied it a bit.

Callister: The ornament would be started from the drawings or suggested, and then the architect would leave it up to the wood carver to continue the ornament after it had been suggested. All of the trades were given a larger hand than they are today. They don't do that sort of thing today.

Riess: Yes. Well, they were craftsmen then, back in the days when you talk about arts and crafts.

Callister: Artisans and arts and crafts—more than today. Today they're mechanics, and then they were artisans, I think. There's artfulness in their processes. I just spent a couple of months in Europe, and this was true through the whole of past architectural history. Everything craftsmen touched was an expression of art, expression of love, expression of all these things in their work. When you see this process, it's just mind-boggling in the results. What we're seeing today of the history that post modern architects are trying to restate is really a caricature of what was carefully thought of and innately expressed in the past. Look at a Romanesque capital—it's just beautifully carved. Each one different, each one with great expression. There must have been a fervor for their religion expressed in the art of the artisan.

Now we have specialists who are called in to do the stained glass, or to do the mosaics—it's sort of separate now, they didn't seem to participate in the same way. (Although the stained glass is probably an exception.)

Riess: The stained glass is an exception, you think?

Callister: Well, I think it sort of established itself as a unique art and craft and a very special sort of thing. I think that architects today are recognizing it as such, and are again calling these new artisans. Although I don't think of very many stonecarvers as being available at all. Woodcarvers, in fact, are also very rare. And so many of those historic crafts are gone.

In the Unitarian Church I know that Jack Payne and Martín Rosse and myself didn't necessarily feel that there should be stained glass or leaded glass—which there now is—in the little chapel. We all were thinking of great rope weavings hanging down the wall. But we couldn't find such art or craft at that time. Now there are several artists who do rope weavings, but at that time, no. But we wanted that
Callister: crudeness, and that heaviness, and that rusticness. We didn't want a refined tapestry. Well, it would have been possible within the budget to be able to do it. But the committee decided they wanted to have stained glass.

I remember Martin and Jack and myself—we went to so many meetings where they were trying to select the artist that finally we couldn't stand the meetings any longer. We stopped going. And they finally did the stained glass without ever consulting us. It sort of got out of our hands because of the enthusiasm of the chairman of the committee for stained glass. And it was not anyone's fault, for we couldn't find the artist who would do the kind of thing that we envisioned for the chapel.

Riess: Where was Mark Adams then?

Callister: Mark Adams was around, but his things were more refined than we wanted. I think his things are very beautiful—have you seen the museum exhibit, just recently, the Collectibles Show at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art? There are some Mark Adams drawings. My goodness, they're stunning.

Mark Adams was available. We looked at all kinds of approaches and artists—but the glass was a committee decision. I found in my experience in working with churches that you do work with committees. That's a whole field in itself. Different churches have different kinds of committees and bring about unique results into the architecture.

Participation in the Design

Riess: Did the Christian Scientists give you the design program? You always do have the first and second reader in the back and then the choir loft—was there any flexibility in that? They were doing a new church—did they say, "Let's try something a little bit different?"

Callister: In the Belvedere church I put the architecture together with a sense of the people. And there were artful people on that committee—Joe Wallace, who is an artist, and Pat Cummings, who had the Cummings Stained Glass Studios. Winifred Allen, Harry Allen.

Riess: You had a very enlightened committee.
Callister: Oh, one of the most brilliant I think I've ever had. No, not really, no, I can't say that. They're different. No, that group was just splendid. Then there were others I have to recall who were equally great.

Riess: But they wanted to do something new?

Callister: They wanted to do something that would be exciting and different. One of the requirements that they put down was that they wanted a fireplace, for they had had a fireplace. They wanted a skylight, for they had had a skylight. I don't know whether I should tell the story here or not, but the skylights were interesting because about that time of building the new church, Sally Stanford bought the house next door to the log cabin church, and painted it a bright color that reflected into the church. It was a purple sort of shade, and so everyone was upset, and they actually persuaded Harry Allen to buy the house back so that it could be repainted. For she had bought the house not as Sally Stanford, which was her business name! [laughter]

And the steeple—that was another thing. They all wanted a steeple. And bells, which have never materialized. You can still see the brackets up there on the steeple for bells which have never come! Winifred Allen wanted the bells in memory of her mother, but the price of bells kept going up, so we never got the bells. I don't think we ever will.

The bell out here in front of the office has some ramifications out of the proposed church bells. David Allen and Betty Allen and Mary Lang, a whole group of us, were trying to do bells for Belvedere out in the harbor, since we couldn't do them on the church—for it would disturb the neighbors. Bells in the harbor would disturb more neighbors. So I've ended up with a sample bell!

Riess: It would be nice to have in the harbor.

Callister: It would, and we had thought of maybe three bells that would simply not play anything, but simply be tones. They would play occasionally, but not all the time. Everyone is so afraid that someone is going to play "Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer" or a school song. Only three bells were planned—you have to have three bells to even have a peal of any kind.

So the bells never arrived at the church. The description was that the bells would be wonderful, and there would be a bell ringing rope hanging in the foyer. Much of this was Winifred Allen's dream, as well as the fireplace.
Callister: The congregation is small—the church only seats 96 people. I was familiar with the services and so forth; I have been in Christian Science most of my life. Due to the triangular shape of the site—the church is virtually on the setback, two feet from the setback of the two streets—I turned the entry around, which was the only thing you could do, actually. They had seen it the other way, with the entry at the street intersection.

I'll have to show you the pictures of the model, and the slides, and some of the construction. It would be interesting.

Riess: I'd like to see that. In other religions at that time, there was an interest in a more participatory service. That I can't imagine with Christian Scientists.

Callister: Well, Wednesday evening service is emphasized here. As you'll see, the inside of the church, the form of it, is that the seats are at an angle, facing each other, you see. That thought came from the ease with which you could stand and face the congregation.

Then too, there's that thought of unity in Christian Science—the sense of the church. It's not from the pulpit, it's actually from the congregation. I suppose that a spiritual sense of participation expresses itself in the form of architectural emphasis. In the Maybeck church there's also an enveloping sense in the design. I think that the whole definition of church is within that sense. I felt that.

Also it seemed as though the triangular prow-like form related to the aspect of the boats in the nearby harbor with their masts, relates to the steeple. It's a ship, if you wish, it's a fish, if you wish, in plan, which is an early symbol of Christianity.

Riess: The experience of working with that group and that committee sounds like it was fairly inspired.

Callister: Oh, it was very inspiring. In fact, it was a very, very exciting group to work with.

Pat Cummings later was chairman of the building committee. He had stained glass studios, and, of course, he did wonderful stained glass. His son now carries on his business. Of course, Pat said, "Just because I have stained glass studios you needn't feel that you have to use stained glass." I think
Callister: my comment to him was, "You'd be crazy if you think I don't want to use stained glass!" Actually the leaded glass was pretty interesting. I learned a lot about stained or leaded glass from Pat at that time. Pat was a very wonderful man and a very inspired person.

The committee, Pat Cummings and several colleagues were involved in that project. Joe Montgomery, and Lois Davidson Gottlieb were involved at the time of designing the church, as well as Alan Tanaguchi, who later became Dean of Architecture at the University of Texas, and Rice University.

Riess: You had such a full-fledged office then?

Callister: No, not really, this was sort of a shared enterprise as far as salaries were concerned. It was a great devotion to architecture by all of us.

Which really comes to another point about the log cabin I remember. I had a convertible car that had a top that I couldn't put up because it was so shattered, in such shreds. So I remember that I took a model into the church to show to them, at a committee meeting. While I was in there it started pouring rain. I remember I had my only suit on, too. [laughter] After the meeting my problem was, "How will I get to the car and take off my suit and put it in the trunk and drive away before they come out and before they can see me in my underwear?!"

Riess: In tatters!

Callister: So I just made it, I just pulled away as I could see them coming out of the front—in my underwear!

This was during the Korean War, too; we couldn't use hardly any steel reinforcing, particularly. So this was another influence on the design of that church. Arnold Olette and Gus [August E.] Waegemann were the structural engineers. Olette did some very beginning work on it, but Gus Waegemann really was the one who carried it further. I guess they both are included, certainly. But the heaviness of those piers is mainly because we couldn't use much reinforcing steel. Well, not altogether, but we were allotted so many pounds, and you had to use it sparingly. No copper. Mr. Black, the job superintendent, was very capable of handling the concrete form work, which was very well done. The steeple
Callister: is a stressed concrete steeple—it's only two inches square at the top. This was quite a feat, because the 80' spire has only a single rod in the center within the 2' square section at the upper part of the spire, which was then post tensioned.

It was very interesting. While the steeple was on the ground, the church looked not too interesting. Then the derrick came and lifted the steeple—an event, for there was quite a crowd of people. And it suddenly gave excitement to the whole building. In fact, people stood there and applauded when it arrived in place, because it was just like—well, it was like a ship without a mast, you know how strange they look? They look like rowboats. It was very exciting.

Riess: So you were doing some innovative design there.

Callister: In the steeple, and in the heating system. We had originally hoped to have radiant heating of copper coils. Again because of the war—. We did use a forced-air radiant heating, actually through closely spaced channels in the concrete floors, forced air was circulated to slits alongside the base of the exterior walls. It worked out very well, with the forced-air radiant heating.

Riess: How about the landscaping? Who did that?

Callister: Winifred Allen and myself and a committee did the landscaping. Winifred was such a fine person for finding things. We picked special rocks and she had the people who knew how to haul the rocks. Unfortunately somebody, lately, has planted the wrong scaled ivy, overgrowing all of the Hahn's ivy, which was very small in scale.

Riess: Practically hides the name of the church.

Callister: It hides everything. It's unfortunate. To get rid of it now is impossible. You'd have to take everything out and start over, which we might do sometime. To have put the wrong ivy in—that was somebody being too helpful.

There have been members who wanted to paint the church white, too.

Riess: Oh, that's interesting.

Callister: They always thought of Christian Science churches as white.

Riess: Have there been any changes, really?
Callister: We just made the addition to it, which cost as much as the original church. Two 14 x 14 Sunday school rooms and a bathroom.

Riess: Was there some excitement in the architectural community about the church?

Callister: Oh yes, it was pretty well known. In fact, I think that it was liked and disliked. Most people liked it, I think.

Riess: Did it become a magazine piece?

Callister: Yes, it was published. And then Morley Baer took some very fine pictures of it. Several photographers did, in fact.

Riess: Has it been copied?

Callister: Well, sure. But it's not that original a shape, I suppose. Copying to me is incidental. I don't find that there's originality in that sense in architecture. You do the appropriate thing, and sometimes it's similar. Some things are copied, but I don't think per se that it was copied.

Riess: What strikes me is that it's a combination of being very small and very rich at the same time. Usually small means simple. It doesn't look simple from the outside.

Callister: Well, it's not. It has its complexities. The shapes and forms and so forth are some early ideas I had. If you notice, all the horizontal muntins or leaded divisions in the glass all go to single vanishing points, which are the same vanishing points of the structural elements of the church proper. Having all of the lines of the church radiating from the vanishing points gives the building an inherent sense of upward movement. Although there's one terrible mistake in the two interior screens on either side of the entry, that do not follow the radiating lines. I see it every time I visit the church, but I don't think anyone else sees it; of course I know it's not in harmony with the rest of it.

[laughs]

Then, this design device is true of the Readers' desk, it's true of the organ screen, et cetera. All those elements are vanishing points. Which I think gives a certain dynamic to the design. But maybe it's rather amateurish too in another sense.
Riess: Let's move on to the next church, which was the Christian Science church in Mill Valley. That church is very differently sited.

Callister: Actually, there was probably as much reason to do that in a redwood manner as it was so with the Belvedere church, in a way. We found this open hillside site, and it was actually a fairly large site, right at the edge of town.

It was a very barren site. There was nothing. Now the trees are growing and so forth. I suppose the church members envisioned a church in the redwoods, and later we planted the redwoods. It was a gully, in fact. So we reshaped it to create a site on the sloping land. The property was a portion of a larger piece that was about to be developed, so the developer had arranged that we could buy a piece.

Being quite familiar with the northern coast here of California—

Riess: Fort Ross—

Callister: Yes, Fort Ross, and Tomales, and, of course, Mendocino, and the whole area where a much different kind of architecture can be found than in the Bay Area. And there's a mood in that coastal architecture that's quite interesting, because it is New England, in a sense, coming around from New England, with its carpenter architecture, so that seemed appropriate to think about for the Mill Valley church.

Riess: Was the feeling in the church different? It sounds like it was.

Callister: Yes, I think so, although I think it was probably disappointing to some people in not being so much in the very local redwood style. [gets scrapbook] It is a shingle building with very white trim and formal white interiors, much different compared to the Belvedere church, and so it's a different statement in that sense.

This beautiful lighting fixture was done by actually some of the 1960 so-called hippie crafts people. Very beautifully done. Handsomely done.

Walter Meinberger was the contractor.
Riess: I see it has another handsome steeple.

Callister: Yes, it has a steeple. I think that the form really generated itself from the past out of the early northern coast churches, which I'll show you. Jack Payne and myself were very much involved and interested in this regionalism. Others, too, but mostly Jack and myself were personally involved.

Riess: What do you mean "personally"?

Callister: Well, all architecture is done by a number of people. It's never any one person singularly doing it, without including the building committee and the builder and everyone else who has an influence on the accomplishment of a project. I look at architecture as more of a social art than I do an individualized expression. You just can't find through architecture an individualistic accomplishment, there's no way. You're immediately given a program from outside your own persuasions by a client, as an example. In this exhibit that's coming up for the San Francisco Art Commission, I indicate it's more like filmmaking. You can't say that there's one creator of a cinematic film. There's a whole group of people, from the cameramen to the actors to the storywriting, to the whole thing. This is true in theater, it's true in opera, it's true in all these arts which are participatory arts of a kind. So they're different than the art of a painter, sculptor, or writer, et cetera.

Riess: Would the most successful thing have the strongest single design control?

Callister: I don't think so. Not in my experience in architecture.

Riess: How about Frank Lloyd Wright?

Callister: Well, Frank Lloyd Wright exaggerated the situation of what he did. He said he did everything. But you only had to know that there's just not that time in the day to do everything. There's just not. He was exploitive in a sense. I tried not to be exploitive in that possessive sense--I've always felt that I shared the accomplishment with others, and I give that great importance. I find that the doing is more important than the result, sometimes, much more important.

I'll show you our office in a minute--this place is so enjoyable as an environment to work in, it is a social event. I find that architecture is the sharing. For instance, as I said Jack Payne was very much involved with this. He and I
Callister: would work very closely together. He did a lot of designing and the drawing and so forth on the Mill Valley church, the Mill's College chapel. And as I've mentioned, Montgomery and Davidson in the Belvedere Christian Science church over here, as well as Alan Tanaguchi and I were all involved in that project. In the Mill Valley church project Jack took a special interest in it's regional motif. I did, too. So we were both involved very heavily in west coast regionalism.

Riess: Things like the seats, the rugs, the carpets, the pews, were they decided upon in the early stages of talking about the building?

Callister: Well, they often are, although at the time, I know in both churches, we worked with interior designers. As an example, in the Christian Science church in Belvedere, Francis Mihailoff, the interior designer, decided it would be nice if we would match the velours on the pew cushions with the stained glass. That was her contribution and it greatly added to the architecture.

Committees, Details, Decisions

Riess: Was there any expectation that because you were then a Christian Scientist that it would be done for less, or non-profit, or, you know, free, or anything?

Callister: No, no--I have been asked by other congregations, none that I've ever done work with, to do it for less fee. Roman Catholic clergy particularly sometimes expect you to be very economical in design efforts, and to minimize the fee. At least, it was true in the East Bay at one time.

Riess: Were there any individual donors who wanted any particular thing done that you had to deal with?

Callister: Often there are, but in Christian Science I know that it's more or less metaphysically thought through. They try not to allow personality to prevail. It was particularly true in the San Francisco Unitarian church, where almost an absolute consensus had to be agreed upon before anything was done. The Episcopal church in Pasadena was also a very consensual sort of thing. You almost didn't move until everybody had resolved their thought about it as to how they wanted it, what would be emphasized.
Callister: I think that this process is part of committee work, and committee work can be very time consuming. Well, different churches have different kinds of meetings. I'd often caution my students—when I was teaching at Stanford—or cautioned my colleagues, that if we ever did churches, why, you allow just so many committee meetings within the fee, and then after that you charge by the hour, which may cut down the number of meetings. And actually in the church for Mill Valley, I think there were seventy meetings. Of course, I was with the church, and so I guess I couldn't quite count all those meetings. But they paid the fee. They didn't ask to not pay the fee. The Episcopal church in Pasadena, why, it went to 114 meetings and I hadn't put that clause in the contract! [laughter]

In the Unitarian church they smoked. This was during that time when smoking was quite popular. I couldn't stand the meetings—it drove me out of my mind. I remember asking the mechanical engineers to enlarge all the duct work to take care of the smoking meetings, which they did; a lot of the meetings are filled with smoke, even today.

Riess: Do you think that the meetings were necessary?

Callister: Oh yes, I found the meetings to be very helpful. And I don't try to prevail with just my ideas on things; I try to listen, and maybe suggest, and then hear response. Then there's more or less an interplay in developing an idea. The people who contribute—you just don't know where it's going to come from. Good ideas, and great things, inspired ideas. I think I'd rather listen to all of this, and prefer to, rather than say, 'Well, it's going to be like this.'

Riess: Well, I think there's a lot of expectation of that. My own instinct would be to be very deferential to the architect; once I'd bought his services, I would leave him alone.

Callister: Well, I really look for concepts from the client. In fact I ask, for everybody on a building committee to put in their ideas. I do this even for a residence. Particularly when it's for an individual client.

When we're doing development work, you're sort of imagining the market. When you have a client—I try to respond and do appropriately for the client, not for my own thinking. I wouldn't have done the Pueblo architectural approach in the Cibola project the way it now is, except the client wanted it in that mood. And it was interesting
Callister: to suddenly have to do it in that manner. This was in Arizona, a resort. The client had a dream, and this was the dream that they had. Both of them, a man and wife, and they wanted it very sincerely. It was not superficial.

I think that when you go to a church group, why, you often find that there are factions, and there is always somebody in the Christian Science church who will stand up and who will say, "Let's not pursue this too hastily," even after you've gone to meetings for maybe two years. [laughter]

Riess: Somebody who just woke up!

Callister: "We musn't pursue this too hastily." And that's actually in all congregations, I find. All of a sudden people wake up, as you say. And then, for instance in the Unitarian church, the money for that church was a gift, a sizeable memorial gift, which made it possible for the project to commence at that time. Then there was a very hard time for the church to raise any further funds, or to get real participation, because everybody thought, "Well, that fund is there; that's it, and we won't have to do anything." That was too bad. In fact, it split the church almost. If money is given, then each person sees how they're going to spend it. Different groups thought they would spend it differently.

Riess: So you end up kind of mediating that?

Callister: An architect mediates a lot, a tremendous amount.

Mills College Chapel, Design in the Round

Callister: Dr. [George] Hedley had written one of the first discourses on the modern church-in-the-round. And so he felt that this was significant to achieve in the sense of the liturgy that he saw. His book--I don't know whether I have a copy of it here or not--but anyway, he was a pioneer on these issues.

Riess: He was somebody at Mills?

Callister: Yes, he was the chaplain, Dr. Hedley was.

Riess: Mills has a resident chaplain?
Callister: They had a resident chaplain. It's a famous Bay Area college chapel because so many couples are married there! And so that was one of the uses for the chapel, as a marriage chapel. They had an old one that they gave up. I think the highway took it away when it came through.

Dr. Hedley was Episcopalian, but they had all religions to accommodate at Mills College, everything—Oriental religions as well as Christian, Jewish, et cetera. The chapel was also a place for the Holtkamp Organ, which is important as an instrument, which the music department uses.

Riess: Holtkamp?

Callister: Holtkamp's a famous organ builder; he did the one at the University of California in Hertz Hall.

Riess: You worked with a committee there?

Callister: There was a committee and then there was the president of the college, and then there was a business manager, a really difficult man to work with. We finally hired two acoustical engineers who disagreed with each other. [laughter] It turned out fine acoustically, but it's very interesting—this has been true in other projects we've had—acoustical engineers are very subjective, I think, as to what they hear. You almost have to ask them what they like in the manner of sound, and then you begin to find out what their acoustics are really like. Some hear in different ways, or think you want something in different ways, so one must choose an appropriate consultant.

Riess: For such a small building you would need an acoustical engineer?

Callister: Oh, yes. Very much so, because music is important, and voice. It's not amplified; none of our churches have amplification. In the All Saints Church, we have what we call a Forum Room. They insisted upon the amplification there. It's not necessary; the room is fine acoustically. They feel as though there are people who can't hear unless you amplify; that may be.

The circular Mills College chapel was quite complicated. In fact, a model was built and taken to Belgium by one of my colleagues, Phil Molton—I don't know if you know Phil Molton, he's an architect and a photographer. He took the model to Belgium where they submerged the model in a tank—
Callister: but I don't know just how they handled that. The nature of the liquid in the tank allowed them to test the models acoustically by making electrical sparks which generate visible fluorescent wave movement in the liquid simulating sound wave movement within the models.

The testing determined the seventeen nodes or undulating wall panels which encircle the chapel. The interior treatment of each panel was such that the room could be tuned later. But there was never any need; it was very fine from the very beginning.

A round form is very, very difficult. One of the most difficult forms. Have you ever been in an empty water tank or anything round like that? If you say anything, it comes back to you a thousand times. If you say "Hello," you'll hear, "Hello, hello, hello, hello," just going on and on and on.

Riess: So your design preference would have been for a completely round form, but once they determined the nodes, it didn't make any difference to you how many?

Callister: Well, we sort of worked it out together. The testing also indicated that the conical or truncated form seemed better acoustically. Also, the conical form works better relative to the engineering of the tension rings, and so forth. It gave a better structural strength to the building by slightly canting it in. So there's a combination of things. Actually, I learned the importance acoustically of the truncating.

Mills College chapel was being done at about the same time that the Christian Science church over here was being done, in Mill Valley. So there the truncated shape we learned was very helpful—probably the ideal form for a church, for there are no parallel walls, which is helpful for good acoustical characteristics.

The church over here really has six sides, so to speak. It's essentially more five-sided, which also was an assist in the acoustics.

But anyway, those are determining factors in a church as to how it sounds, and what the acoustics are. In a round church it's very, very difficult. That was a real problem from the beginning in the chapel as to what could we do. The only point in the chapel that you hear any reverberation of sounds is directly over the altarstone in the middle of the circular space.
Riess: The altar stone?

Callister: Yes, it's a stone.

Riess: Whose concept was that, having an altar stone?

Callister: It's a flat granite stone in the shape of a cross; it's a cruciform. In some services they cover it up when it is not appropriate. They may put a table over the stone for whatever the need may be.

Riess: Stone seems to me to have suggestions of primitive sacrifice.

Callister: I think it was partly my feeling about the central altar. We tried to go back to some of the early primitive symbols just in some connotations. Another example is the church in Belvedere. It's quite primitive in the forms and symmetries of the structure. It's quite symbolic, very early Christian, which I think is very interesting. If you go to the early churches in Italy, they're often very much better than the later ones. Very simple, very profound in their statement. There are hardly any contradictions. I feel that the altar was something that Dr. Hedley also had much to do with.

Riess: And the Shinto entrance to it was--

Callister: The narthex is perhaps more of a Shinto or Buddhist concept of gateway, with the purification of thought as one passes through a gateway—a tradition in Shintoism, which is a very interesting thing. A whole tradition of Japanese and Oriental architecture, particularly Japanese, where passing through the gate is a symbolic moment. Not that it purifies you, but you have some thought of changing your own thinking. And a portal, say, is important even in western civilization as a contemplative moment when entering a place of worship.

In Japan, if you will notice in the traditional times, they even bowed before they went through the doorway, and then they bowed again when they passed through it. That portal sort of idea goes with their tea ceremony as well.

Riess: A transition zone.

Callister: Transition of your thought. And when you go from room to room, you should change your thinking, not just go through the door. I suppose we always do that, subconsciously. They do it ceremonially. So the chapel's narthex or gate is sort of
Callister: similar. The chaplain's office is on one side and then there's a classroom or meeting room on the other side. There are two toilets, all very minimal.

Riess: Did they ask for such a space?

Callister: No, that more or less came from the site. There was a little garden glen there at the base of the slope where the students, the girls lunched often because it was pleasant, and so we kept the glen. We put a mound on either side of the chapel and made it exclusive from the entrance road and the traffic sounds—it is sort of a contemplative retreat. The narthex serves as a gateway to the chapel as well as to the gardens.

I had at that time been to Japan a couple of times, and I was very impressed with the Japanese concepts, and their historic buildings and gardens and their whole idea of architecture. When you got to Ise, which is the number one Shinto shrine, you go through a whole series of gates instead of stations of the cross, you go through a whole series of, so to speak, locales that are defined often by the woods and the gates and the bridges and so forth. Each one is a point of contemplation, a different point of contemplation. So partly the idea of the noon hour contemplative sort of place, with music inside and so forth was the concept at Mills College. I don't know that it's now used that way even, everyone seemed to like the idea very much.

Now this was in the sixties, when this project was done. Concepts were beginning to change at the time, attitudes toward many things. We should realize that the mid-sixties represented the beginning of the whole Haight-Ashbury and free speech movement. The whole process of architecture was beginning to change then at that point.

Riess: And so you would because of that decide to give a kind of neutrality to a place?

Callister: I suppose. I think that as much as anything, even the respect of different cultures and different concepts of religion was beginning to come in. The whole greening of America was also, I guess, a greening of a sense of attitudes, too. The whole concept of relationships among people were changing. It didn't last too long. I thought it was a very exciting time, very dynamic, very tolerant.

I can remember one of the first services in the church was right after Martin Luther King was shot. I can remember the feelings were very strong. Mills at that time really
Callister: had very few minority students. A very great effort was then made at Mills to have involvement of minorities. So the Oriental and the Black students were then sought out, as well as new ideas in all fields of learning. You know that period.

Riess: Did anyone say, "What is this building going up for anyway? We don't need a chapel here." Kind of picketing the concept of a chapel.

Callister: Well, Dr. Hedley was a very interesting and gregarious person and had a lot of influence. I think his point of view was one of tolerance of such change. I mean, it was not heavy religion in any sense. I think he set a sense of unification with the student concerns. I remember a particular meeting in the chapel with many of the women students there, the faculty and so forth. It was a very, very exciting moment; it was the beginning of the student protests.

I was also visiting at Yale and I can remember when Reverend [William Sloane] Coffin staged one of the first sit-ins in their chapel. At that time there was again a sense of unity, I think, possibly with the help of the chaplains. And the round church contributed to that prevailing feeling and the student mood. There was an acceptance, almost, a togetherness. Authority was changing then. The chapel was a gathering place.

Riess: In a round church you're face-to-face rather than shoulder-to-shoulder.

Callister: Of course, in history the forms of Christian churches influenced the forms of our law courts. The jury could be the choir, and the authority of the judge is esteemed or alluded to in a pious way. The churches are turning around away from absolutes. It almost is time that the law court turned around, too, and stopped being the judge, so to speak. Maybe being more consensual.

Architecture Today, Searching for Meaning and Community

Callister: Now I think we've had a turning back on this, at this moment, as you can see everywhere. Authority is expressing itself more strongly, and that's too bad. I think we did have a very exciting moment then, where we were exploring other ways. I'm disappointed, really. I think it will come again, but it's almost becoming superficial now. As I see architectural design today, it's almost "trends of styles" that are not
Callister: necessarily concerned nor terribly profound. Even our design of a new restaurant, I feel it is really a stylish lark in a sense. Although I think a restaurant, or commercial projects like that, are pieces of temporary showmanship. It's only going to last a few years before they remodel it in any event. So it's not terribly long-lasting; its style is fleeting.

My caution to the students at Cal Poly recently was to maybe not bother with the persuasions of the styles that are actually put forth by the journalists just for editorial reasons, if nothing else. And even the journalists agree with that. I stopped in New York and talked to the Architectural Record and they're even reconsidering where they are and how they stand relative to the post-modernist thing. Architectural journals, wherever we in the design field are, may be advocating what else we might do in design, and then when we get there, why then they say, "What else?" again. It seems almost endless in order to make a headline, I suppose. It's hard to write a headline unless you contradict the status quo!

Riess: I went to the post-modernist show at Fort Mason, and at the back end of that was a huge display of international architecture. And wordy!

Callister: Oh, terribly.

Riess: It was like the words didn't mean anything, because it was the design of the words that was more important than the words. The words would just go on and on and on and back and forth. I was interested in the idea, displayed in front of me that architecture is such an articulate business. Or rationalized, or something.

Callister: And a very pretentious social influence there, too. It has to meet a certain fashionable mood of society and culture. It has to respond to current trendiness, and that is difficult to explain by way of words. I found that show theatric, but very poor theatrics, in many ways.

Riess: But why is it that architects talk so much about what they're doing, or is that part of being a good architect?

Callister: They've asked me to write a three or four-hundred word comment in this current honor awards for the new art commission in San Francisco. And I'm finding myself writing explanations. But when I read someone else's explanations, I think it's awful.
Callister: There was recently a show of women in art, painters and sculptors, at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and all of the women explained, too, what they were doing. In fact, some of the things written were very fine, and I was enjoying it very much. I also enjoyed and was amused by the long texts that people generate.

One woman said, "Painting is simply paint on canvas." I was so grateful for that simplicity! [laughter] It was just like a knife cutting through all this other stuff. Yes, I guess that's what it is. Architecture is probably "just doing building" and really is not in need of all the explanation. Some people have said that we invent the explanation after the fact.

I think that I'd take Minor White's advice. He was one of the great photographers who died a few years ago. He photographed the first house that Jack Hillmer and I did. He was a marvellous man. Some of the photographs that I have around here are his. I took a summer course of his at the Art Institute in San Francisco which he gave. He was a tremendous teacher. He later had a chair at MIT. He was just superb.

His kind of teaching was always interesting. He used to say that you put your camera aside and then you "listen" for the photograph. You don't look. And wow!--things like this--he just had all kinds of thoughts like that, that were inspiring. Something I learned when I went to the Orient, too, is that the doing is more important than the end accomplishment. This is very Japanese, the ceremony of doing. And this is an influence in doing our kind of environmental work; the way we work--I think the doing is the important thing. "This is the moment"--right now, this is a very nice moment. "It's not going to get better" kind of philosophy, you know.

Riess: That makes it very individual.

Callister: I think there's the interaction among all of us who have had this going on all the time. Out of this comes an ambience, I think, that is very determining in what we do. We're probably forming our own living community, in a sense, here, right in this little community of architects.

I think, actually, this is the mistake we've made in urban planning. We've made suburban housing, then we've made urban places to work. I'm not so certain that the community is where you live, your house; it's actually where you work. This is a suburban community of work and living. You know, I live next door, and others live next door. We sort of have
Callister: this unique place; it's a beautiful place. That is the excitement, I think. As Jack Payne used to say, he didn't know whether he went home to get away from work or whether he went to work to get away from home! And I think there is this split that we have of two places.

As I see it, in this Architectural circumstance we have made an ideal combination in this singular location. That's the dominant thing in this place of doing architecture. The schools, the kids, and all those other domestic things are certainly important, all that activity, but also they're always here. They're around here, in and out, all the time. So it's sort of a center.

I really think that this is the form that possibly things will take in the future; as we decentralize because of our electronic capabilities, I mean our Communication emphasis, I think we can depart from that great centralization. My great disappointment is that down here in the old Tiburon railroad yard they're trying to put in housing. They haven't succeeded yet, but they may. My feeling about that is that they should wait, because I think it's a great place to work. All the people who live around here and could work here, and not have to commute. Although it is a lovely commute by boat and car--it's great. Nevertheless, I think we're going to see a reforming of the community. I just don't know how this affects the whole, such as churches, and all the institutions; they may change again, too.

The Episcopal church project in Pasadena was a good experience, because they have a very large congregation there. They do a great many things. It is a great community. It in itself is a community. So I think there are different kinds of communities, and the churches can become that.

I sometimes feel that the Christian Science church doesn't always develop a strong community participation. Other churches, like the Unitarian, have a very strong sense of community. That's very, very nice. It's a lovely environment.

There are not very many churches being built right now, are there? This is a moment when things have cooled, in a way. There was a great fervor.

Riess: That's what we're finding, that there was a great fervor. And in some instances, a great use of the art of the area, and a sense of the art community that would allow an architect to call on his neighbors to produce their best things instead of having to go to a catalogue to order stained glass.
Callister: Speaking of that, I can remember going with the committee to select church seats one time. This is an interesting thing that you might mention, and that is that there are people who make pews, who make church seats—which is a big business—was, not now, I guess—but it was a big business. And they had different sizes and different shapes of pews for different denominations. They had found distinctions, which I have thought was terribly amusing. [laughter] But Christian Scientists apparently were fatter and larger, and took more space than the Catholics and the Episcopalians. But anyway it's very amusing to find that the people who had looked at the one end of the religion found these distinctions!

I was visiting Charles Moore. One of his colleagues was there, and he showed me the new model that they'd done for the Beverly Hills City Hall, which was very, very interesting, very nice. Just excellent. Although their office or studio environment is just the most awful I think I've seen. I'm sure that it's a group of architects that has sort of gotten together, and Charles has— you know, while he's teaching, it's sort of an extension of the school, in a sense. I suppose it's all right, in a way.

But their environment had none of the wit and fun that I feel Mr. Moore represents! I was disappointed in that. I suppose that the feeling that I have is that one of the things that seems to be missing is just the pure, simple idea of making something quite beautiful, if you can use such a word now; I guess you can't; but I do.

The Marketers of Architecture

Callister: I take architecture to somewhat be like flower arranging, you know; you find the circumstance or the material you have. (And I did arrange flowers for years in the church.) You have the container, you have an environment, you have something that's available, and you begin putting it together. In the Orient, of course, that's a very profound art. Sculpture, flower arranging, and poetry and calligraphy, all those arts blend together. It was very interesting to me in Japan. Here in our office Jim's [James Bishoff] art work is very fine; this is one of his prints on the wall announcing the birth of his child. And this is his Christmas card, over here. He's very, very talented, very great. He was one of my first students at Stanford.
Callister: We've tried to plan more artfulness to things in this office. We're rather disdainful of the very hard presentations we see other firms make, very bordered and clean-lined and, you know, graphs, and all this. [laughs] We've attracted a group of clients who don't like that and won't put up with it, who are probably more interested in the aesthetics of architecture.

We're so self-conscious about being up-to-date. I guess I've gone through the whole period of the International Style; I never had a conflict with it, because I never thought I particularly would be involved or had to be involved in that sort of a project. Here we were in a very romantic area; here I saw no need of that kind of approach. It was never necessary. I didn't argue with it, I thought it was great that it was being done. And I think it was done more sincerely by many people than I see things being done today, work which I think is sort of indifferent—to anything.

Today you can do anything—the pluralistic aspect of things today is great, I think, and there should be all that variety. Not really to try to tie it down to what is current and not current.

Riess: Don't you think that, as new people continue to come to the Bay Area, the first thing they're always going to be attracted to is the wood? That slide show you gave me downstairs—that will always be the Bay Area tradition, and you're part of that.

Callister: There is a beautiful tradition here; very exciting, as you know. Just walk around, just be in it. So, if that doesn't influence you, I say, "Go away!" Some of the things I see that are happening such as this dreadful thing in the East Bay, called Blackhawk, which is so pretentious and so dreadful—I don't know if you've seen it or not.

Riess: I thought it had been stopped because of its location on the side of Mt. Diablo?

Callister: Yes, it's way out there, yes. But it's carrying the Disney approach to architecture, which is to miss the whole inherent opportunity. We were doing a project in the East Bay, and, of course, marketing people have an influence today upon architecture. They will tell you what people want, rather than you yourself listening and interpreting. Which is too bad. [buzzer rings] Excuse me.
Callister: They do have the insight as to what people want. So we did this project in the East Bay; and Jim was very much involved in this, and was carrying the project, really. He did up a very nice presentation which we worked out together, in the sense of doing a design interpretation of the old vineyard and winery that was there on the site. A nice motif to extend to the new project. But the market people said, no, it wouldn't work, it had to be half timber or French provincial. Because they had tested the market. [laughs] Well, sure, you could do French provincial. In fact, Jim did an interesting thing; he did a very nice French provincial and a very nice half timber right away. But we didn't keep the job.

I'm just interested, though, that we're finding that where the role of the architect used to be more of translating listening and feeling, now we're being told how high it will be, how wide it will be, what the kitchen sinks will be. I spent so many months on a project I'm doing right now that's being built, and it's been so discouraging, because everybody wrongfully participates. Particularly the salespeople and marketing people saying, "Well, you need walk-in closets." No matter what it does to the architecture, they don't care. They don't see the architecture, they just see whether there's a walk-in closet or not. Or whether the bathroom is in the middle of a carpeted sea. All these strange sort of things that they feel are the most saleable things. Normally it's out of context.

They ask the question, "Do you want the car convenient to your house, or even in your house, or attached to your house?" People will say, "Yes." But we've demonstrated time and time again that if the car is detached, and the amenities are worth it, people pay less attention to the fact that the car is detached.

Riess: This is a whole different thing; this dialogue that you have with clients is fruitful, but you're having a dialogue with the people who are the middlemen.

Callister: Yeah. There are different specialists and things are specializing out of the architect's hands. And even in church design and building, now there are people who will come in and counsel the church as to what design they should have. They will tell you the style they can best raise money for, which is too bad. There are firms that do nothing but go around the country and raise funds for the churches. They're paid a large fee for their services. Then they have a lot of authority.

Riess: Yeah. If there's so much authority, you'd think they could use it well.
Callister: Well, some can. But often it's abused, because they don't know, their training is not in the design area. Their training is sometimes in the mundane: "Don't do anything controversial, because we'll have a hard time raising funds." If you're really an imaginative fund-raiser, you'd say, "Let's do something controversial." That demonstrates something; those are the differences in people, even fund raisers.

Bay Area Church Architecture

Riess: Who do you think of as good church architects in the Bay Area? You are one. How about others, contemporaries whose work you think is interesting?

Callister: Oh, yes. The man who did the Greek Orthodox church in the Oakland hills, Bob Olwell [with Reid and Tarics]. Olwell has great talent in church design.

Riess: Mario Ciampi?

Callister: Mario Ciampi, yes. Well, he's done some fine church and religious buildings.

He shared an office in the same building that I did, on Bush Street. I can remember he was doing a very elongated church that's out in the South San Francisco area. I can't think of the name of the church now. He was doing the work for the local diocese. But they didn't like his building. And I remember meeting him in the elevator and he had a model of his church, which was very shoebox-like—the model was about a shoebox size. He's a wonderful man, I like him—I think his museum over there is delightful; I don't care what Allan Temko says about it. [laughter] Anyway, he was carrying this model in the elevator, and he says, "Warren, I'm going to see the Pope." He was getting nowhere with the local diocese, so he was "taking it to the Pope." [laughter] He did get it approved, too. They built it, so he was right. In spite of the local priests who didn't like it.

Riess: How about St. Mary's Cathedral?

Callister: I think it's an interesting tour de force. I find it's overwhelming in some ways. My first impression was that I didn't think God would like it, but that was my own first impression of the building. I felt it seemed too institutional in some
Callister: way. I mean, it almost seems bank-like somehow. Maybe the refinement of rich materials overwhelmed the architecture. The old one was so rich and so loving in its feeling; the new one is so harsh and acoustically difficult. I highly respect [Pietro] Belluschi, so I really don't like to criticize. I suppose for its purposes it's outstanding.

Riess: I think of it as [Pier Luigi] Nervi's work.

Callister: Well, it started out with the local architects who did a lot of the diocese work. A couple of generations, in fact—father and son. [McSweeney, Ryan and Lee] Fortunately they decided to get outside counsel, which was very good. I'm glad Belluschi came in to give it some form, some shape, because initially it was very poor. So that was great. I don't know, maybe as it weathers and so forth it will be fine.

Vivian Cummings and Harold W. Cummings
CUMMINGS STAINED GLASS STUDIO

An Interview Conducted by Suzanne B. Riess in 1984

Copyright © 1985 by The Regents of the University of California
# TABLE OF CONTENTS — Vivian Cummings and Harold W. Cummings

## INTERVIEW HISTORY

- **CUMMINGS STUDIO BEGINNINGS, 1922**
  - Designers
  - Triumvirate with Arnold Constable and Father Blank
  - Gothic Revival, 1930, 1940s

## TECHNIQUE

- Lucent Mosaic
- Faceted Glass

## THE CLIENT-STUDIO RELATIONSHIP

## BAY AREA STAINED GLASS COMPANIES, CHURCH ART CATALOGUES

## FACETED GLASS AND LIGHT

## THE DESIGNER-STUDIO RELATIONSHIP

## CHANGES

- Educating the Client's Taste
- Experimentation
- Architecture and the Ministry of the Church
- Hilda Sachs
- "God's People"

---

1

320

323

325

327

329

329

333

334

338

339

343

345

345

349

353

357

359
INTERVIEW HISTORY

As our series of interviews on liturgical arts in the Bay Area expanded to several points beyond works for the Catholic Church, possibilities for interviews opened up to include such fine workshops as the Cummings Stained Glass Studios, founded by Harold "Pat" Cummings. Until it moved to North Adams, Massachusetts, in 1977, it was located in San Francisco, California. Much of the early work of the studio, as the interview discovers, was sacred, ecumenical, and inspired.

A major source of the inspiration was Vivian Cummings, "the spiritual leader of the whole thing," as her son says. The interview makes clear that work in stained glass requires a lot of excellent cooperation among artists whose approach and limits are different, a finely tuned ear for what the client wants, and an ability to maintain creative control, politely. Vivian Cummings' son Bill, the co-interviewee, with his BA in music education and performance, obviously has a finely tuned ear. He laughingly says his mother, who was always down at the studio when it was in San Francisco, has "a very loud voice"—but seriously that she was the nurturing spirit of the studio.

Charles Warren Callister had "Pat" Cummings right at hand when he wanted glass for the First Church of Christ, Scientist, Belvedere. In 1959 Armitage says, in writing of Cummings Studio's breakthrough in glass work, "In the now famous little First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Belvedere, stained glass has been used in vertical shafts of coloured glass on clear glass fields together with native redwood to form the walls of the church. The shafts themselves vary in width, and there is a play in the widths of the leads used as well. The coloration runs the spectrum, with celestial blues leading out from the high apex of this kite-shaped building."

Another technique the Cummings Studio is credited with perfecting is Lucent Mosaic, "a cast process in which very small tesserae of glass are used with sparse or no painting. This method is especially effective where detail is important." (Stained Glass, E. L. Armitage)

It is interesting that stained glass experienced a renaissance of its own in the 1950s at a time that that same rebirth of feeling for the spiritual embodied in the arts of the church was a lively cause. Particularly satisfying for this project is the fact that the Cummings work allows us to look further at the client relationship and the creative process at work in religious art.
I met with Vivian Cummings at home in Tiburon. Bill (Harold W.) Cummings was in the Bay Area for business and a family visit, and what follows is a joint interview that brings out the developments for which Cummings Studios are responsible, the kind of commissions they had, the way they worked together, and the combination of technology and joy that this group discovered.

Suzanne B. Riess
Interviewer-Editor

October 1984
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley
BIографICAL INFORMATION
(Please print or write clearly)

Your full name  Vivian Cummings

Date of birth  Aug. 20, 1904  Place of birth  Fargo, N. Dak.

Father's full name  Lawrence C. Olson

Birthplace  Minnesota

Occupation  Merchant - Real estate

Mother's full name  Martha Olson

Birthplace  Minnesota

Occupation  House maker

Where did you grow up? California

Present community  Tiburon, Ca. 94920

Education  A.B. Stanford University, etc.

Occupation(s)  College administration

Periodically - Stained glass

Special interests or activities  Writing, family first and foremost, Travel
RESUME

HAROLD WILBUR (BILL) CUMMINGS

PERSONAL:

1941  Born: Berkeley, California
1970  Married: Judy Lee Jurs
       One daughter: Elisabeth Ann Cummings

EDUCATION:

1954-1958  TAMALPAIS HIGH SCHOOL, Mill Valley, California
          Sophomore Class President
          Junior Class President
          Student Body President
          Drum Major Tamalpais High School Marching Band
          American Field Service (AFS) student to Germany
          AWARDS: Math: Algebra Award
                   Music: Clarian Award
                   Fine Arts: Bank of America Award

1958-1959  PRINCIPIA COLLEGE, Elsah, Illinois
          Freshman year

1959-1962  SAN FRANCISCO STATE COLLEGE, San Francisco,
          California. Major: Music—Specialty: Oboe
          First Chair in Orchestra
          First Chair in Band
          Gump Award
          Baritone Saxophone in Stage Band

1965  BA—Music Education and Performance—Oboe

AWARDS:

1958  Bank of America: Fine Arts
1958  Bank of America: Music
1958  Clarian: Music
1960  Gump: Music—Oboe
1964  Stained Glass Association of America (SGAA):
     Apprenticeship
1977  A.I.A. (Central Valley Chapter of Northern California)
     Award for Design and Craftsmanship for faceted glass
     windows designed by Hilda Sachs for Mosaic Law
     Synagogue, Sacramento, California
1977  Lighting and Industry Award for Design and fabrica-
     tion of light fixtures designed by Hilda Sachs and
     fabricated for American Bank & Trust Co., San Jose,
     California

SHOWS:

1964  Museum of Contemporary Arts & Crafts, New York, New York
1979  Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield, Massachusetts
1979  East Central Junior College, Washington, Missouri
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF MAJOR COMMISSIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Saints Episcopal Church, Palo Alto, California 1968 Sowers Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Roseburg, Oregon 1968 Rees Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Olympia, Washington 1968 Pinart Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Methodist Church, Los Gatos, California 1970 Pinart Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madonna del Sasso Catholic Church, Salinas, California 1971 Pinart Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officers Open Mess, Fort Lewis, Washington 1972 Sachs Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Brigade (Col. Durham) Chapel, Fort Ord, California 1972 Sachs Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ide Residence, St. Helena, California 1974 Pinart Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Vine Garden, St. Helena, California 1974 Pinart Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langford Residence, San Anselmo, California 1974 Pinart Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keating Residence, Tahoe City, California 1974 Sachs Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Building #1, Honolulu, Hawaii 1975 Karavin Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wasatch Presbyterian Church, Salt Lake City, Utah 1975 Sachs Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breuner Residence, Alamo, California 1975 Sachs Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. James Catholic Church, Davis, California 1975 Pinart Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Armenian Presbyterian Church, Fresno, California 1976 Sachs Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olsack Brothers Liquor Store, Atwater, California 1976 Rigan Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Baptist Church, Fresno, California 1976 Sachs Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musaeic Law Synagogue, Sacramento, California 1977 Sachs Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Paul's American Lutheran Church, Lodi, California 1977 Grandin-Sethler Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, Colusa, California 1977 Sachs Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novato Presbyterian Church, Novato, California 1978 Sachs Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter's Lutheran Church, Lodi, California (Restoration) Original windows by Povey Bros., Portland, Oregon 1978 Grandin-Sethler Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosenberg Residence, New York, New York 1978 Cummings, J.L. Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faxon Hospital, Utica, New York 1978 Sachs Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Methodist Church, Corvallis, Oregon (Chancel) 1979 Ekeus Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Congregational Church, Berkeley, California 1979 Sachs Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilgrim Congregational Church, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1979/80 Restoration Davies/Kibbins/Henderson Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Methodist Church, Brentwood, California 1980 Sachs Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consant Residence, Potomac, Maryland 1980 vanHeukelom-Eckstrom Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate Lobby, New York Senate Chambers, Albany, NY 1980 Sachs Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Francis of Assissi Catholic Church, Windor, Vermont 1980 Pinart Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Wakefield, Massachussets 1980 Pinart Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willowbrook Regional Shopping Mall, Houston, Texas 1981 Sachs Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neiman-Marcus, Union Square, San Francisco, California (Restoration) 1982 Restoration Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Judiciary Building, Honolulu, Hawaii 1982 Karavin Cummings Studios</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Major Commissions, Continued

Metropolitan United Methodist Church, Detroit, Michigan
Pastor's Study
Thompson Memorial Chapel, Williams College, Williamstown, Massachusetts (Restoration)
First Christian Church, Hanford, California
St. Paul's American Lutheran Church, Lodi, California (Narthex)
Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church, Seabrook, Massachusetts
Old Museum Building, State Capitol Complex, Harrisburg, PA (Restoration)
Yaddo Corporation, Saratoga Springs, NY (Restoration)
St. Michael's Church, Troy, New York
St. John the Divine Armenian Church (now St. Mark's Church), Springfield, MA (Restoration)
New York State Senate, Albany, NY (Phase II — Historic Regeneration)
Van Vleck Residence, Lake Almanor, CA (Adaptive Re-Use)
Superior Court, Harrisburg, PA (Restoration)
Olympia Centre, Chicago, ILL
Andrews Air Force Base, MD
Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Atlanta, GA (Adaptive Re-Use)
Masonic Temple, Salem, MA
Ontario County Courthouse, Cooperstown, NY (Restoration)
Temple Emanuel-El, Atlanta, GA
Temple Sholom, Cedar Grove, NJ
St. Francis Xavier Chapel, Cumberland, RI
Massery Residence, Boston, MA (Restoration)
St. Michael's Church, Mendon, MA
Peace Dale Congregational Church, Peace Dale, R.I. (Restoration)

Class Architect
Designer
Interior Designer (I.D.)

1982 Pinart
1982 Elkus
1982 LaFarge
1982 Pinart
1982 Sachs
1982 Gilson
1982 Tiffany
1983 D. Wilson
1983 R. Kouryapian
1983 Mendel/Nezick/Cohen/Waite
1983 Day & Zimmerman
1983 Skidmore, Owings, Merrill
1983 H. Smith
1983 S. McDermott
1984 P. Ratner
1984 D. Wilson
1984 H. Sachs
1984 H. Sachs
1984 P. Belhumeur
1984 LaFarge

Cummings Studios
Holmes & Edwards
Geddes, Brecher, Qualls
& Cunningham

Class Architect
Designer
Interior Designer (I.D.)

1982 Pinart
1982 Elkus
1982 LaFarge
1982 Pinart
1982 Sachs
1982 Gilson
1982 Tiffany
1983 D. Wilson
1983 R. Kouryapian
1983 Mendel/Nezick/Cohen/Waite
1983 Day & Zimmerman
1983 Skidmore, Owings, Merrill
1983 H. Smith
1983 S. McDermott
1984 P. Ratner
1984 D. Wilson
1984 H. Sachs
1984 H. Sachs
1984 P. Belhumeur
1984 LaFarge
CUMMINGS STAINED GLASS STUDIO
[Date of Interview: January 16, 1984]

Cummings Studio Beginnings, 1922

VC: Although people were reaching for abstract design, I think the churches weren't very willing to accept them earlier, but I think one thing that helped that a great deal, helped make the change, was the bringing in of faceted glass. There were a few men in this country who did a great deal of research and experimentation. And my husband [Harold W. "Pat" Cummings], before he was a stained-glass man he was an engineer, so he had a great deal of technical knowledge that most stained-glass people don't have. He was the first man who actually made and installed faceted glass in this country.

Riess: Would you explain how faceted glass and stained glass are and are not alike.

VC: Well, the traditional stained glass, as it was practiced from the Middle Ages until our own century, was a leaded glass, and its styles over the centuries changed very radically too, and its use of color changed radically. So that just like everything else that's human, it was never a static thing, except that the technique for putting it together was pretty established.

Riess: And where does the color come from? The color is in the glass or applied?

VC: No, the color in all stained glass is in the glass, and it's obtained through the use of metals, metallic oxides. Of course, glass is made from sands and various chemicals, you know, and when it's in that stage the color is determined by the chemicals that are added in the pot, so that everything in that pot is one color as it's blown.
VC: Then the traditional form of making that kind of glass, which we term "antique glass," is to blow it. The blowers have very long pipes, and they make what they call a gather from the pot, and they start to blow it and to roll the pipe in their hands in order to keep balancing that bubble. Then every once in a while they have to return the bubble to the fire in order to keep it in a plastic stage.

Then when it's in a nice big bubble, you know, like so [gesturing], it can be put into a mold which makes a cylinder of it [American method]; and then when the mold is released, the cylinder is cooled—the ends cut off—and scored down the length (thus cutting it) so that as it is reheated, it is flattened out at about 1100° by men who reach in the kiln with long sticks. It's usually annealed on steel. A rather rough texture is achieved by the steam escaping the watersoaked wooden mold as the molten glass comes in contact with the mold.

Riess: That's interesting, and that's been the traditional way of doing it?

VC: That's the way it's done.

And, you see, each piece of glass that's blown will have different thicknesses in it, and the thickness of the glass determines its intensity, or the degree of the color value. So that a thick piece, which could be almost a quarter of an inch thick, would be very deep in tone, whereas a very thin piece would be lighter in tone. So that as the man who is selecting the glass needs variations from the same piece of glass, he can get many tones. So there's an infinite variety.

Riess: When your husband started the business, he was doing this kind of glass?

VC: No, he never blew glass. He designed windows and fabricated the windows and installed them. The business of making the glass itself is a different business. The glass that my husband used came from France or England or Germany or from this country, and Blenko glass in West Virginia was the leader in the making of hand-blown glass in this country, and still is I think.

Riess: And so in 1922, when the Cummings Studio started, your husband's background, you say, was in engineering? Would you explain how he got started in the whole business, how it all began?

VC: Well, his training was in engineering, but he came from quite an artistic family, and he was just absolutely entranced with stained glass. He couldn't pass a church that had stained glass
in it without stopping and looking at it, and he studied it and he made it a real interest, a deep interest. Finally he bought a stained-glass studio, but it wasn't doing the kind of stained glass he was interested in; it was doing back bar, you know, this sort of thing, and so he worked to change that. He wanted to do beautiful stained glass that would stand up, you know, and he used the old medieval as his standard.

Riess: You mean stand up artistically?

VC: Stand up artistically.

Riess: And when you said "back bar," you mean barroom?

VC: Yes, that's what I meant. Then he went to Europe to study stained glass as well. He studied in England and France, and he went to one place in Spain, but that's a different story. He was always a scholar so far as stained glass was concerned. He'd come home and have his dinner and go off to his room and study stained glass, and there was never an end to it.

He could actually do everything that was needed to do to create a stained-glass window. But when you have a studio you just don't have time for that sort of thing, so you have a staff. But you have the concept; and this is where I think sometimes we don't give the master craftsman the credit he deserves; it's his concept, he'll talk with the client, for example, and he'll have this vision of what it could be.

Of course, the first thing is always the consideration of the architecture, and you'll remember that in this period in history, early in his career, there was a great renaissance of the classical forms, the Gothic, and that sort of thing, and so that was the type of stained glass that was appropriate to make for those churches. And so then he would have the concept. Then he would talk with one of his designers, and say, "This is the way it's going to be. Now you can research the detail on these things, but at any rate let's see a sketch on it."

Riess: The detail might be some of the iconography?

VC: Yes.

Riess: Is that what you would mean by the detail, what episode in the Bible was being illustrated?

VC: That's right.
Riess: What kind of designers did he have?

VC: Well, the first designer that I knew anything about was a remarkable Dutch woman who was a beautifully trained artist in her own right. She had been a painter, but she was intrigued with stained glass and she pleaded for the opportunity to learn, so she came and was with us for a long time. Her name was Wilhelmina Von Ogterop.

Riess: How do you spell the last name?

VC: V-o-n O-g-t-e-r-o-p. So she was one of the designers.

We have a designer now, Hilda Sachs, who came from Berlin, fled Berlin, fled the Nazis, you know, and she was basically a graduate of the finest art school in Berlin. And she had worked in various fields, such as theater sets and costumes, the designing of wallpaper and designing fashion, and then again, you see, she was absolutely enamored with stained glass, and she came and asked my husband if she could serve an apprenticeship. My husband said, "A person with your training wouldn't want to serve an apprenticeship, you couldn't afford to serve an apprenticeship." So she asked what an apprentice got, and he said 55 percent of the journeyman's wage, and she said, "I can do it."

I was in the studio during the time of her serving an apprenticeship, and she served four years as an apprentice, so that she has the feel and expertise. She knows what can be done and what can't be done. There're certain cuts that aren't natural to glass, you know. She's very clever, she's very good.

Riess: You were saying that the master craftsman is ultimately the designer.

VC: It's his concept, and he keeps, of course, in close touch with what's being done. Now, there are times when a designer is particularly gifted in certain things. For example, we had one designer whose name was Norbert Graves, and he had a master's in heraldry, and so he was particularly good in those fields. He had also started to learn to be a priest, and that didn't work out for him. So, you see, he had quite a background. And while my husband had a fine library, still Norbert had access to libraries that none of the rest of us had.

Riess: Where did he put his heraldry skills to work?
VC: Well, sometimes there would be a fine home, say, in a library or a dining room or somewhere, where there would be a large glass expanse of, say, leaded glass, and then every once in a while there would be some expression of heraldry: the husband's family's coat of arms, the wife's family's coat of arms, the university's, the fraternity and the sorority, the honor society's, and the whole thing, a regular family history.

Riess: Oh, it's splendid; it's just nothing I ever associate with San Francisco.

VC: Well, there are, there are things like that. It makes a very interesting wall, you know, very interesting.

Riess: Are there any other designers who worked with your husband that come to mind?

VC: Oh yes, I should say so. Let me see. [refers to papers]

Riess: Quite frankly, what I wonder is were there any that were famous before or went on to become truly famous in their own right as artists?

VC: Well, after my husband passed on in 1962, my two sons were involved in the studio for a while, and they introduced into the organization of the studio a different type of designing. My husband always had resident designers—permanent members of the staff, you know—and my sons felt that that was a limiting way of doing it. So they worked with Mark Adams and others.

Riess: In that kind of situation, would they have asked Mark Adams or would the architect have asked Mark Adams?

VC: It could be either way. Let's see. [refers to papers] I made some notes here. There was Gyorgy Kepes, who was the head of the art department of MIT; he did some designing for the studio.

Riess: Was that for work out here?

VC: Yes, in Oregon.

And then Robert Sowers; you remember, he's the man who designed the side of one of the airports in New York. [American Airlines terminal at John F. Kennedy Airport] He designed a number of things for my sons when they were working it out.

Then, there's Robert Pinart, who's a French designer and a very, very fine designer, and he's still working with Bill [Cummings] right now. I want Bill to come and tell you about the people that he's working with at the present time because he's doing some very contemporary things.

Bill Cummings/Hilda Sachs

Bill and Hilda depart from the other glass artists documented here in two major ways: first, they are trying to maintain in a large studio an atmosphere conducive to the creation of artful stained glass; and second, they work together as interdependent artists/designers. Bill's image of the ultimate stained-glass studio is a place for spontaneous work on a very large scale—the production of works that a single artist, acting independently, could not achieve.

Cummings Studios was founded by Bill's father. It is located in an unlikely corrugated metal warehouse, in the light industry district of San Rafael, California. The feeling of the studio, from the inside looking out, contrasts sharply with the used-car lots, body-and-fender repair shops, and boat marina that dominate the area. The studio consciously works at creating a relaxing and workable atmosphere. Often I've walked through the industrial-like entryway to discover an environment filled with sounds of classical piano being performed live specially for the working artists.

Hilda, who was raised and educated in Berlin, has worked as a stage designer (Berlin), a fashion designer (London), and a designer of wallpapers and textiles (San Francisco). She served a formal apprenticeship with Cummings Studios starting in 1952 and has been working with stained glass since that time. Bill was educated as a musician. After finishing college in 1964 he studied with his father for four months until his father's sudden death. Bill and Hilda have been working as a team since 1968.

We have known each other since 1952. Our close working relationship began in the midst of individual and collective emotional turmoil and struggle. As we work together it is increasingly evident that the idea of community works. Individually we can only grow as fast as we allow or push ourselves. Together we spark ideas in one another and the growth is staggering—this is truly an example of 1 + 1 = 3. As our working relationship has grown, so has our studio situation, and working together with five other people we are able to demonstrate wholeness and totality as we never would have imagined.

The rules we play by demand a coming together with no preconceptions in approaching new problems. They demand total loyalty, dedication, openness and trust—to ourselves, to one another, and to our individual and collective aesthetic aims. In our community we are in a continual state of equilibrium/disequilibrium. We find we are continually strangers and continually changing, but is this not the basis of a good piece of art? Stained glass is our way of life—through this medium we are expressing our lives, our aims, our hopes.

CHAPTER 22

Firing

There is no particular mystery about firing. The writer once trained a bricklayer’s labourer to do this work. He enjoyed it and within a month was firing as well as any kilnsman one would be likely to find. Nevertheless it is a responsible job requiring constant care and attention. A bad kilnsman can spoil much of the work, and a man who does his job well deserves recognition and respect.

It is analogous to the art of cooking. Skill can only be acquired by practical experience of which glasses are hard and need to be put in the hottest part of the kiln, and which are softer and requires less heat. As with ordinary cooking stoves the characteristics of kilns vary, and the best results can only be obtained by experience with any particular types. The fundamental principle is to heat the glass slowly and to cool it gradually. If this is done carefully and the glass watched through the peep-hole in the kiln, nothing can go wrong.

The painted glass to be fired is brought to the kiln room and transferred to metal trays. These metal trays have first to be fed with plaster of Paris. It is wisest to buy the best quality and to make sure that it is thoroughly dry before using. One method is to heap the plaster on to the metal trays and then heat them thoroughly in the kiln to remove any possible moisture. It is then removed and allowed to cool ready for use. Damp plaster will cause blisters and bumps on the even surface of the glass, and can easily necessitate recutting and repainting. Most kilnsmen put the bags of new plaster on top of the heated kiln. This is quite a sound method and the whole point is to make sure that the plaster is not damp.

The plaster with which the trays have been loosely filled must be pressed down to form a fairly firm and smooth bed for the glass. Any dents or impressions on the plaster can act as a mould into which semi-molten glass is liable to sink. This smoothing and flattening can be done either with a small trowel, a roller or with a long, wide and flat palette knife.

In the Cummings’ Studios in San Francisco it was noticed that the usual metal tray with plaster bedding for firing had been discarded and composition trays requiring no plaster were used instead. This seemed to be an improvement on the traditional method as it saved labour in bedding and changing the plaster. Mr. Cummings explained that the trays were made of Johns Manville marinite and were supplied by Western Asbestos Co., San Francisco. The material is in thickness and grey in colour when purchased but changes to terra cotta when the moisture is driven out. One of the American studios found that the sheets warped; the Cummings’ Studios, however, experienced no such difficulty, being most careful to ensure that the sheets are separated so that air can circulate round each sheet when moisture is being driven out in the kiln. The drying out must be done very slowly.
CUMMINGS STUDIOS

We are all familiar with the progress of an idea through discovery or re-discovery (as in the case of stained glass), slavish imitation, and eventual emancipation into the creative stage of fresh concepts, all the while adhering to the basic principles of the old. In the United States stained glass experienced a re-birth around the turn of the century, and for decades followed well the traditional patterns of design. In the last few years, however, another significant step seems to be occurring: the emergence into the creative stage, alive to adapt itself (as is becoming to the 'handmaid of architecture') to the dynamics of modern architecture.

Here in the West is this particularly true. The contemporary influence is seen in basic design, materials and techniques.

While the abstract in design is by no means new in stained glass, new uses have been evolved. For example, in the now famous little First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Belvedere (Marin County, California), stained glass has been used in vertical shafts of coloured glass on clear glass fields together with native redwood to form the walls of the church. The shafts themselves vary in width, and there is a play in the widths of the leads used as well. The coloration runs the spectrum, with celestial blues leading out from the high apex of this kite-shaped building.

The development of the technique of thick faceted glass in concrete (which we call 'Vitrolith') has been considerably forwarded technically, overcoming many of the early problems of fabrication. This challenging medium has been most effectively used in modern concrete buildings where it speaks with power and forthrightness.

Another technique perfected and proven is Lucent Mosaic, a cast process in which very small tesserae of glass are used with sparse or no painting. This method is especially effective where detail is important and has been used mostly in secular buildings.

Everybody's problem is one of cost, but often this leads to inventive thought, such as in the case of Sierra High School (Catholic), San Mateo, California, where a tremendous window area was covered by a background of variegated bronze, sherry and honey-coloured glass, on which a bold cross was imposed together with a free form band in primary colour and heavy lead, depicting the missionary travels of Father Junipera Serra establishing the Pacific Coast missions.

There is presently some movement toward the use of large sheets of coloured glass without benefit of tracing, matting or lead came in some ultra-modern buildings. However, it is usually the expedient of the limited budget, although when inherently beautiful glasses are used and colours are sensitively chosen, dramatic effects are sometimes obtained.

The photograph submitted for this book is one of a series of stained glass windows for Mission San Jose, California, and is an example of a modified style designed to compliment a modified type of architecture. The geometric background harmonizes with the rectangular form of the window opening, and a freer approach to matting.
Modern Practice

is used. The stylized figures, the even more untraditional colour (witness a blue donkey for St. Joseph), and the general dynamics of design meet the challenge of an architectural form breaking away from the old but not fully embracing the radically new.

Technically, the increased use of electricity in this country has brought a threat to the old gas kiln in which the successful firing of all the glass in the kiln was by no means a foregone conclusion, the glass on the outer edges of the trays often being imperfectly fired, only to be discovered during a later process in the making of the window. In the electric kiln, increasingly used here, heat is not only controlled but distributed evenly by a blower so that the many trays of glass being fired simultaneously are fired reliably regardless of their position in the kiln. We regard the use of the electric kiln as one of the most useful advances in the actual making of stained glass, eliminating disappointment, and labour that must be duplicated because of breakage or imperfect firing.

As we all know, lead creeps; that is, it expands more than it contracts. This partially accounts for some of the bulging of old stained glass windows. We observed through the years that chemical companies lined their acid tanks with lead and they found that the addition of a little tellurium increased the life of this lead to the extent that the relining of the tanks was not necessary nearly so often. We are able to have made lead came with a little tellurium in it; this greatly reduces the bulging previously mentioned, and we also find that this lead does not seem to oxidize so rapidly when held in stock.

Our government has interested itself in the problem of training stained glass apprentices along with those for other crafts and trades, and in cooperation with the Stained Glass Association of America, standards for training are set up and enforced. Apprentices are required not only to fulfil their time with the studios to which they are indentured, but they are required to attend school, studying specifically outlined subjects. Arrangements for this training are worked out with local school authorities and classes are held at night either in a technical high school or in one of the local glass shops where special equipment is available for the teaching of its use.

One of the most thrilling facts about the stained glass craft in the United States is the ‘grading up’ of the calibre and training of young men and women entering the craft. In recent years newcomers offer increasingly excellent background and training and the real feeling of craftsmanship. This was evidenced recently by the Third Apprentice Competition conducted by the Stained Glass Association of America in which were submitted, on the whole, by far the finest exhibitions of promise for the future of the craft yet seen.

Stained glass is indubitably in a true renaissance. Many of the medieval traditions which were the glory of the craft in its inception are no longer applicable to the demands of today. ‘Time makes ancient creeds uncouth.’ But cherishing the principles of this old and revered craft as its life’s blood, the craftsman now starts again where the first craftsmen started, in the need of the hour to glorify the architecture of its own time, to create fitting atmospheres, and to inspire.
PLATE 91. Window in the Dominican Convent.
Motherhouse and Novitiate Mission, San Jose, California, U.S.A.
Designed and executed by the Cummings Stained Glass Studios, San Francisco.
Riess: Yes, but you're talking about the period that is most interesting to me.

Triumvirate with Arnold Constable and Father Blank

Riess: Can you remember priests or ministers coming right down to the studio and getting themselves personally involved?

VC: Oh yes, indeed so. I remember one day when a monsignor came in and introduced himself to my husband and he had a roll of blueprints in his hands, and he said, "We're building a church, and we want you to do the windows." So after a long conversation about it, my husband said—it was a very unique sort of thing—"I must say that I admire your fortitude in starting something so original as this." And he said, "You know, a few people will like it, many more won't like it, but nobody will ignore it."

Riess: That's interesting. What church was that?

VC: That was a church in Los Angeles. I need those records to tell you.

Riess: Well, maybe after this is transcribed you'll have a chance to be in touch with the people in Massachusetts and they can fill in the blanks.

Did you work on St. Albert's?

VC: St. Albert the Great? Oh, yes, and it's an important thing because it's a training center for the Dominicans. The church itself was designed by Arnold Constable. Have you come across him?

Riess: No, I don't know that name.

VC: Well, you should. He's the man who actually did the designing of St. Dominic's in San Francisco; he was the project designer on St. Dominic's, and that's a beautiful Gothic church. Do you know that?

Riess: No.

VC: It's worth your while to go and see it.

There was a sort of a beautiful triumvirate that operated over many years, during the period that you're interested in, and that was Arnold Constable, who was a master in the field of
Gothic architecture, and then there was Father Blank, who was the head of the Dominican order, and my husband. They did all kinds of things together, and they had the greatest brotherhood. Oh, they just had more joy in doing things together.

Riess: Did they first come together because of St. Dominic's?

VC: No. St. Dominic's was designed and committed before my husband was in the field, and the same thing for the Grace Cathedral; that was designed and committed before my husband was in the field.

But Father Blank and Arnold Constable and my husband did all sorts of things together, including St. Albert the Great. And they also did the Dominican novitiate in San Rafael, and--

Can you think? [turns to speak to Bill Cummings who has joined the interview]

HWC: Was Mission San Jose part of that?

VC: Yes, Mission San Jose.

Riess: That name, Arnold Constable, doesn't appear in Bay Area architectural history.

VC: It should. He was regarded as the finest Gothic architect in this part of the country. He was trained in England, and he worked first in Seattle, and the architect for St. Dominic's was a Seattle firm, and he was the project designer on that. Well, then when that was complete and a smashing success, he moved down here and established himself here, and, of course, he became acquainted with Father Blank, who was the head of the Dominican order. So the three men had a great time, did lots of things together.

Riess: Are we talking about the thirties? Forties?

VC: No, we're talking about later than that. Let's see. Daddy and I were--[speaking to Bill] When did we see Father Blank?

HWC: Fifty-two?

VC: Yes, it was '52. Yes, it was in your period.

Riess: Were there any touches of the modern at all in that, or was it purely Gothic?

VC: In that group it was pretty strictly Gothic. Father Blank was devoted to the Gothic period, and St. Albert the Great is a Gothic church.
Riess: And yet you have just described to me the monsignor who had come in with radical plans. You know, it's probably the same time period.

VC: Yes, that's right.

Riess: Both things could be happening.

VC: There are as many different tastes and desires among the Catholic priesthood as there are among, say, Americans. They're a varied lot, a very varied lot. You'll find them very varied.

Gothic Revival, 1930s, 1940s

Riess: Do you think there were particularly conservative tastes in the Bay Area?

HWC: Compared to what?

Riess: Well, the premise of this whole liturgical arts project is that some really great changes were made in the church liturgy and also in church architecture and design here, but I'm wondering whether the Bay Area was really in the forefront.

VC: Well, you know, we were talking about faceted glass. That's one thing that forced a freer design, don't you think so, Bill?

HWC: Yes, but I also think that the Gothic revival building in the thirties and forties in California was an avant-garde type of thing to do. It had passed its prime in the East and certainly was way past in Europe, but it was just catching on here. So it depends on where you are.

Riess: Oh, that's a very interesting thought, yes.

HWC: Isn't that right?

Riess: It's avant-garde, but it's terribly safe, on the other hand.

HWC: Oh, it wasn't safe at all. I can remember reading Dad's letters in our files to the Presbyterian church on Fillmore and Jackson, and they had Tiffany-style picture windows.

VC: But we didn't do them.
HWC: No, we didn't do them, but Dad was trying to get that commission early on, and he was talking to them about doing a new type of window, in the late twenties, one which would be really wonderful for that building, and that was the Gothic window. And they were afraid to do it.

Riess: But they were comfortable with art nouveau, art glass. That's very interesting to think about that.

HWC: Isn't that right, Mom?

VC: I think you know more about that than I do. [laughter]

HWC: The Gothic revival really started in the early 1800s in Europe. And so in early stained glass in America, you find the windows in New York City in Brooklyn Heights, St. Anne and the Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, where the William J. Bolton windows are, having a very strong Gothic influence, and those windows thereafter having a very strong Gothic influence. And then about 1875 the curtain fell like the fog coming in at four-thirty, and there was no more Gothic art. It was cut off, and it was cut off before it really developed. And so then the picture window came in, ran its course, and in the thirties, when Tiffany died, that was really the end of that school, and then a whole profusion of Gothic windows came, and in a much more sophisticated way.

VC: And that's when Daddy got into it.

Riess: I was reading California Design: 1910, and it's about the arts and crafts movement here, the Matthews work, art nouveau sort of. How did that manifest itself in church buildings, in stained glass windows?

HWC: Significant work? [pauses] That reminds me of an article I saw in the [San Francisco] Chronicle one time of some Tiffany windows at Mare Island, and I came and I said, "Gee, did you see this article, Mom?" And she said, "Yes, did you like it?" (Maybe she's told this to you?)

Riess: No.

HWC: And I said, "Yes, it's interesting." And she said, "You should; your father made those windows."

VC: No, he made part of it.

HWC: But the one that was photographed was Dad's window.
VC: That's right.

HWC: In the Tiffany style.

VC: Of course, they said nobody could make Tiffany windows but Tiffany. [laughter] And so that's the way it worked out.

St. Ignatius Church at University of San Francisco was one of Daddy's big commissions during this period we're talking about. It's a very big church, and that was--

HWC: Nineteen thirty-eight.

VC: But it wasn't finished until 1963.

HWC: But that began in '38, so that began just when this whole Gothic thing was beginning.

VC: Those windows aren't quite Gothic though. They're more classic. They're made for a Roman type of architecture.

HWC: That kind of a building, yes.

Riess: If you go back into history and see a building that took 200 years to build, you see an evolution of style. From 1938 to 1963, would there be an evolution of style?

VC: No. When you start out on a big job like that, you have an iconography, and you know exactly what's going to happen all over, and you do that to unify the whole job.

Technique

Lucent Mosaic

VC: Then the chapel at the University of the Pacific. That went on over a number of years actually. The two main windows in that chapel were made by the studio quite early, and they're beautiful Gothic windows. One is a rose, which I consider one of the really great windows, and then the other is three lancets over the altar, and those are made of lucent mosaic, which was an invention of my husband's, and it was made with little paint, and very fine pieces of glass, and it was cast in a metal alloy. Those windows were
made for a great Methodist church that was built in San Francisco. The building itself was a highrise and it was a hotel, but in this hotel was a great church, and these windows were made for that.

At the time of the Depression, the church lost the whole building, but the windows still belonged to my husband, because there had been actually a mismanagement of funds; the funds that were given to pay for the windows were used for something else. So my husband was allowed to take the windows out, and they were stored in boxes for a long time. But somebody remembered them and asked if at least one of them couldn't be taken out for the World's Fair at Treasure Island, and this awoke people to the fact that they were there.

So when the chapel [at the University of the Pacific] was to be built, Mr. Parr—you know, of the old, historic Parr Terminal family—was on the board for that, and he asked if the windows were available to use for a chapel. Then he spoke to the architect, and the architect said, "No way." So Mr. Parr said, "Well, come down and have a look." And when the architect saw them, he said it would be an honor to create a setting for these windows. So that's what the University of the Pacific Chapel is; it's a setting for those windows.

Then in the latter years, in your period, you see, because these things were stored for a long time, then in order to finish this chapel, the aisle windows and the triforium, the whole thing, were made by the studio, and they're made in traditional stained glass. Okay? [speaking to Bill]

That's right.

Is that right?

Interestingly enough, that medium [lucent mosaic] had been seen by a number of people, and I'm finding that medium from Atlanta to Boston, and it never worked; nobody's ever been able to figure out what Dad did. It's very interesting. Windows that are buckling with six-inch buckles in them. And people are saying, "Do you know what that is?" And I said, "Yes, I do know what that is." "Do you know how to fix it?" "No, I don't; not without recasting." We've had some work to do on the windows that Dad made, and they're fairly easy to repair, but the ones that didn't have the right alloy have not stood up well at all.

Well, I think it would be nice to hear more about the development of the lucent mosaic.
VC: [under her breath to Bill] You can tell.

Riess: I take it you're almost giving away secrets. [laughing]

HWC: No, not at all. I don't think we have any secrets. [then, to his mother] You'll have to fill in for me, in that I wasn't there. [then, to interviewer] But as I understand it, we had been involved in making mosaics for some years, and in the creation of mosaics, which are terribly exciting—

Riess: This is ceramic mosaics?

HWC: Regular ceramic mosaics, like on a wall.

Riess: Right.

HWC: In the creation of those, when you also happen to be a leaded-glass or a stained-glass person, you start envisioning what that mosaic might be like if light could be transmitted through it, and that gets to be pretty exciting. And so Dad then started taking his engineering background and putting it to work and trying to see how it could work.

Riess: What are the problems?

HWC: Each piece of glass, varying in its thickness and its color, has a different coefficient of expansion and contraction. And inside of a regular leaded-glass window, where it fits like this [gesturing], that glass has the opportunity to expand and contract like this, as does the lead have the opportunity of expanding and contracting, inside of its own sleeve.

In a mosaic, where you want very narrow lines to come up, you cast it in such a way where there is no overlap, so that the glass is here [gesturing], and the metal goes from edge to edge, and there's no overlap. So you don't have that opportunity for movement, as you can in the other. So, it's a very, very delicate balance that has to be done. And the process is a long and involved process that nobody can afford today. It's just a very, very costly process. The last one we did I guess was at—. Is it St. Patrick's, down on Howard or Mission? [speaking to his mother] When they had the fire?

VC: I think there's one round window down there.

HWC: They had a fire, and it was destroyed, and we replaced that in about '64 or so? Sixty-five? And I think that's the last one we did.
Riess: But the solution was in the alloy?

HWC: Yes, it's a lead alloy. It has all kinds of additives to it.

VC: And not only that, but it had to do with temperatures and things of that kind.

HWC: Most of the glass in one of these pieces is unpainted--and this whole thing leads on into the development of faceted glass. Most of it is unpainted. There are heads and hands specifically which had painting on them, and if you take a big piece like that and you pour a hot metal surrounding around it, it will crack the glass.

So you end up by developing a long metal table with gas heat underneath. The table is heated to reduce shock to the glass when the alloy is poured. Then you put asbestos down--in the days when asbestos didn't hurt anybody--and then you glue all the pieces of glass to the asbestos. What you're doing is you're making a sandwich. And then you put a perimeter around that, and then you put another piece of asbestos on top of that so that you now have a glass sandwich--as opposed to Sandwich glass. [chuckles]

Then you put holes in the top at different strategic locations, and you make cones out of asbestos, and you glue those cones on top of the holes. And then you have two pots. One is pretty much just straight lead--it's a weight--and the other is your alloy. And you heat them up. And what you really are doing is you're pouring the alloy in through those funnels, and it finds its way around, which is all well and good. But as it does, it comes to a spot and it'll start pushing the asbestos up, so you'd have to put a weight on top of the asbestos so that it can't be pressed up. So you're putting lead on top and alloy underneath, all at the same time, keeping an equal pressure. And you really get down, and you blow on those things once in a while. It's a hot and time-consuming process.

VC: Very few men can do it.

Riess: And does it have to be perfect, each pour? Or can you repair it?

HWC: You can repair it. You try for perfection, of course, but you can repair it.

Riess: How about new resins and plastics and things like that?
HWC: Well, that's a whole new subject which I guess I know a fair amount about, and we can talk about that. But basically the new resins, my feeling is that it's going to be proven that they're not successful. We use them. Particularly in restorative work you have to be very careful about what resins are doing, because all restorations must be reversible so you can bring the window back to the way it was when you found it, and resins don't allow you to do that very readily.

Riess: Interesting. You're saying that nobody was able to master this on the East Coast? Is it also that there the temperature is a problem?

HWC: I don't think so. If you go around and look at Cummings Studio's windows from 1922 on out, one of the things that Dad just fought for is structure. If you took his windows apart and took all of the aesthetics out of them they look like a jail cell. I mean he had them really barred extremely well. And consequently, his fifty-year-old windows are still in, and they aren't offering us any new work, unfortunately. [laughing]

They're extremely well manufactured. He was an engineer and it showed all the way through. And when he went from that, lucent mosaic, into faceted glass—which is a logical progression, which we can talk about in a minute—again, well, he has faceted glass windows in Waverly, Iowa; now, that gets pretty cold, and they're doing just fine, but nobody else could make concrete work.

Faceted Glass

Riess: Gabriel Loire, isn't he the person who started faceted glass?

HWC: No. Gabriel Loire is not the person who started faceted glass. Wait a second. [thinking] Labourett is a French artist who started faceted glass in the 1920s, '30s. In the late 30s, Labourett installed the first faceted glass in North America at St. Anne de Beaupres, in Quebec, Canada. He had an apprentice who was then working for him who went off to war and came back, and after the war that apprentice designed windows for Labourett, and they were then shipped to St. Anne de Beaupres is Canada, and the church was finished. About that time Dad saw the windows, and that's where he said, "That's the next logical step," and he started working on it. The designer of those windows for Labourett was a man named Robert Pinart.

VC: And he works with Bill now.
Riess: That stretches way back, doesn't it?

HWC: I didn't know that until two years ago.

Riess: Really?

HWC: Yes.

VC: He's been designing windows for a long time, and he's still very fresh and great.

Riess: Did you take tours of those wonderful European churches, the Matisse chapel and so on?

VC: Well, we didn't go to the Matisse chapel, but we certainly did a lot of both the contemporary and the old windows, yes. Bill studied in France for a while, and he knows more about them than I do.

Riess: But after you went to France and looked at that, did that mean some changes in the studio when you got back? Was that a source of inspiration?

VC: Well, without doubt everything that you do is, you know; the whole process is a process of becoming, isn't it? Continually.

The Client-Studio Relationship

Riess: Something that you brought up earlier, the question of whether you have a resident designer in the studio, or whether you go out and seek somebody to fill a particular need, perhaps after you had come back from France you might have been more inclined to go out and bring people in to design things for the studio?

VC: No, I think not. And I think that the French studios were very tight. Don't you? [speaking to Bill] And their setup was very much like ours. Actually, I think that it was the young thought of our own young people, you know, the freer thought of our own young people, who brought the other designers in. It was Bill and John.

HWC: John really started the whole idea of that system, which is a very German school. The bigger German studios work that way and have for years. And John started that around 1964, something like that, and we're continuing that today.
VC: And the people who worked during that time we were saying were Kepes and Sowers and Pinart and Hilda Sachs.

HWC: Mark Adams?

VC: Mark Adams, we have that.

Riess: Which one did you work on with Mark Adams?

VC: The only one I can think of now is something that was called "A White Rose," and it was an exhibition piece.

HWC: There's also a Catholic church in Napa I believe. That was when I was not there, but I think so.

Riess: What is the usual order to business? It would be the priest who would be the client, or the architect? What's the client-studio relationship?

HWC: What year? Because with Vatican II a great deal changed.

Riess: Okay. Well, that's exactly the kind of question I'm asking, yes.

HWC: The best jobs that we have done historically and today really begin with the architect, or if they don't begin with the architect, they revolve around the architect, where you're really playing hand in hand with one another and making the spaces work together, because it's an architectural problem.

In the Catholic Church, before Vatican II, you were working with the priest. In many ways that was a really ideal way to work because it was very fast. The priest looked, he liked it or he didn't like it, you'd make the changes, the committee was very easy to get ahold of, you made one call and you had the whole committee together, and things went together. In some cases, when you had a priest who was very, very creative, I think you came out with churches that were very free and lovely. But so many priests are not trained in the visual arts I think, and sometimes it was not as good as it could have been.

Riess: Perhaps the priest is competing for the same sum of money that's going into the window. Since windows are major donations, aren't they usually, from parishioners, in honor of something, maybe the priest has some ambivalence about $5,000 going in on that--

HWC: The priest has always been very supportive of windows. Well, not always, but I mean the priest has been supportive of windows and supportive of money going into windows. It's a source of
HWC: sometimes; sometimes he gets something not from us but he charges the church more or whatever. We don't know all about those things.

Riess: The very idea!

HWC: Oh, that happens today I know; I don't know historically. I thought it was just one particular religion, but it's not. There are some churches that will charge their donors twice what the window cost them. This creates maintenance money.

Riess: But you're saying that in some ways it can be ideal to work with a strong priest.

HWC: From a cost point of view it's much more expeditious certainly to do it. But since Vatican II, where the laity got much more involved, it varies all over the ballpark now within the Catholic Church. There are some priests that still make all of their own decisions, and there're some priests that don't know when they wake up in the morning; that's done by committee. So it goes all over the ballpark.

The Protestant churches—I guess as they always have been—have their own kind of democracy, and it ranges from one church to the other. And I think each denomination also buys a different kind of window; they have a different theology and a different aesthetic sense because they think differently.

So traditionally we have done a lot of Episcopal work, a lot of Methodist work, a lot of Lutheran work, not a lot of fundamental work—Foursquare Gospel or Southern Baptist, not much of that. Most of the Catholic churches that we've done tend to be the bigger ones.

VC: And the institutional ones.

HWC: Loyola.

VC: Like St. Albert the Great, which is actually the chapel for the college where the priests are trained.

HWC: Holy Names.

VC: And Holy Names, yes.

HWC: St. Ignatius.

VC: Yes.
HWC: Dominican College. And the orders; we've done a lot of business with the orders.

Riess: But business is essentially with the architect? Or do you end up going back and doing presentations to committees and to-- [he indicates they do] You do? The committee things.

HWC: Oh, yes. The educative part of it is probably the biggest part. The difficulty is, and I think it's more so today than it was thirty years ago-- Thirty years ago or forty years ago, if you picked up the phone book in San Francisco and looked up under Glass--Stained and Leaded, you found three of us? Four of us?

VC: Yes.

HWC: Not many. And now you'd probably find seventy-five. So it's very difficult to know what's what; anybody can put their name in there. So I think the clients tend to be much more leery now than they used to be. And I think rightfully so; I think that's fine, and they should be. But it means that as a studio you need to be much more patient in going through the educative process with them, and assume that if you have a product that can stand the test of time that the longer they spend looking, the better off you are.

Riess: But it's the architect who's come to you in the first place.

HWC: It used to be more of a guarantee than it is now. There used to be church architects; you're finding that I'm sure.

Riess: Paul Ryan, for example.

HWC: Okay, yes. There were lots of architects that were church architects in the fifties and in the early sixties, and then the church backed off its building program and the state backed off its educational program, and very often church architects you'll find were also educational architects. All of a sudden clients started going everywhere for architects. So now there's hardly such a thing as a church architect. So to have repeat business coming to you again and again from the same architect is not nearly as prevalent today as it once was.
Riess: What were the other three names in the phone book besides Cummings, forty years ago?

HWC: The ones that didn't count. [laughing]

Riess: That's right. [laughing] The ones that we passed over quickly.

HWC: Let's see. Church Art Glass?

VC: Yes.

HWC: And Century?

VC: Yes.

HWC: And Dombrink.

VC: Hunecke.

HWC: Hunecke owned Century, didn't he?

VC: I guess that was it.

HWC: And Church Art Glass was John Lucas. And Dombrink was in Oakland. And those are really the three, and they did the more fundamental work, generally speaking. We tended to do the higher end.

Riess: I don't understand that distinction. This is not a religious distinction anymore between "fundamental" and "higher end." [laughing]

HWC: Oh, excuse me. I switched in the middle of a sentence. We tended to do more expensive work, requiring better trained craftsmen and artists.

Riess: I see.

VC: How about a cup of tea?

Riess: When it gets to the end of this side, okay?

VC: Okay.

Riess: That would be very nice.
Riess: I'd like to develop that point you're making, that you were the studio of choice for anyone with money or taste, is that what you're saying?

HWC: I think that you'll find that that's true.

Riess: And what about the possibilities of ordering by church art catalogues?

HWC: We never got involved in that.

Riess: I do think that there are even recent examples of church art being ordered from catalogues.

HWC: That's not peculiar to the Bay Area.

VC: Oh no, not at all.

HWC: That's peculiar to people's buying instinct. If in a Catholic goods catalogue, one can see a picture of an ugly candelabra and it says $4.98 on it, and one can get six of them for $2.98 apiece, he thinks that's something that the Catholic Church must endorse, if it's in there. And I don't mean the Catholic Church does so, but there's something that makes it have a lot of credibility in the eyes of the purchaser.

And I don't think that that's work that we're going to get anyway. Those people are primarily people that are buying by the dollar; they're going to buy whatever they can get for the least amount of money. So I really don't think that the church catalogue is a threat to Cummings Studios. There are people that need to buy that kind of work, that's the only thing they can buy.

I think it's unfortunate that church catalogues don't have better work. I think that it shouldn't cost that much money necessarily, but for some reason good art fails to get in catalogues. We have talked, in the last fifteen years I know, to several church catalogue people about changing designs, changing concepts, but that doesn't happen. So a higher aesthetic is a whole ballpark that we stay away from.

Faceted Glass and Light

Riess: I was telling your mother about the Catholic Art Forum. I don't know whether you actually know of that as an organization, but it started in 1952, and there was an exhibition of religious
Riess: art at the de Young Museum, and Mark Adams contributed some things, and Dirk Van Erp, and a lot of, you know, really good designers.

VC: That probably was when the lighting fixture from our First Church of Christ, Scientist, Belvedere was part of that exhibit.

HWC: It should have been, if it wasn't.

VC: It was; it was there for a month.

HWC: Excuse me for interrupting, did you go over the fact that St. Stephen's is the first faceted glass commission in the United States, by an American?

Riess: No, we've been going in so many directions that we have to follow through with something.

HWC: Yes, it just occurred to me when you said Belvedere. St. Stephen's Episcopal Church here in Belvedere is the first faceted glass commission done by an American. It was done in 1954.

Riess: So after the church in Quebec--

HWC: European work continued to be sent in, but the Americans started really working on it. And in 1954, Dad was the first American to have a commission in faceted glass, and that was at St. Stephen's Church. Right after that Willet and Conrad Schmidt came out with commissions, but everybody recognizes that that St. Stephen's was the very first one.

Interestingly enough, these early stained glass windows were all in concrete. Other studios had tragic results; Dad's work is still there. We continued using concrete until 1970. Concrete is a wonderful material. It's hard to sell people on it, but it's a wonderful material.

Riess: Hard to sell them because of the rate of failure?

HWC: No, because of the public's concept of it.

Riess: Gosh, I think that's so much the California church now--concrete.

HWC: The thing is, when you get within the industry, the industry has had little success with concrete, and therefore they have switched to epoxies. They have used epoxies, and there have been failures in that, and we can go on into that, but--

Riess: Oh, all right. You're just talking about the setting for the glass?
HWC: Yes.

Riess: Oh, I see.

HWC: Faceted glass, by definition, excuse me, is an inch thick glass set in concrete, or epoxy resin.

Riess: When you were talking about concrete I was just thinking of the use of concrete as the building material.

Charles Warren Callister said about the windows in the church in Belvedere [reading]: "Pat [Cummings] was a wonderful man, a very inspired person. He would experiment with the different kinds of lead. I took Arthur Stern over there the other day... I said that Pat Cummings had learned that with very narrow slits of glass the light bent around the very wide leads and made them seem much narrower on the inside of the church than they do on the out."

I wondered if this is describing something that's significant or interesting that we should get your point of view on.

HWC: He's talking about halation. [Vivian Cummings is out of the room, preparing tea]

Light comes through glass and it goes like this. [gesturing] In Violet le Duc's translation of Theopolis's work of the 1200s, about making of windows, he talks about halation in there. The idea though is that on reds, as you get distance from it, a red will get more intense in color and smaller in size. A blue will wash out in color and will expand in size.

Now, they spent a lot of time talking about that. In actuality, that's subject to some dispute to some degree, but there can be no question about halation in general, the fact that, well, when you look even here [gesturing toward a clear glass window], you start to see a glow around the windows, and with certain colors you see it more than you do with others. And in faceted glass, it's unbelievable. Dad used to say you can't have any more than 33 percent glass in a faceted glass window, or you lose its gut; the space, the negative space is very, very important.

So the halation is really, really important. I think that Dad followed that extensively, and I never understood why other stained-glass artists didn't, because it seems so natural to me.

Riess: You mean he took advantage of his understanding--
HWC: Of the understanding of what halation is doing and why. It's not the fact that it's a big, inch-and-a-half lead; it's the space that it puts in between. It's like Mozart said, you know, the black space, the negative space is what's important, the quietness between spots is very important. And this is the same thing; it gives yourself a chance to rest and then it crisps up what you're looking at.

For instance, if you have a piece of blue glass and a piece of red glass side by side, with just a very narrow slit in between, and if you will give it enough distance--say this is blue and this is red [gesturing]--you'll see a thin film of violet coming down like this.

Riess: Did your father know the color theory part of it instinctively, or by study?

HWC: Oh, there're books on it, but the best way to do it is to do it. I think, and I don't know how Mom feels about this, I think that Dad was number one an engineer, and number two he was a colorist; he was a tremendous colorist. Excellent colorist. Really understood what was happening in glass, just really very, very good at it, and I'm discovering that as I go on, what a good colorist he was.

But I think, in defense of other stained-glass artists from around the country, you don't deal with the quantity of light that you do in California when you're in New England. And because of that, halation doesn't play as big a role in windows in New England as it does in California.

Also, the character of the geography. A tall mountain in Massachusetts, say, would be 3,400 feet; well, 3,400 feet is scarcely taller than Mt. Tamalpais. So California tends to be a state of greater contrasts. Death Valley to Mt. Whitney. Hot to cold. Skiing to surfing. All in the same day. Spring flowers to desert. Whatever contrast you want to give. I just left San Diego this morning and it was bright and sunny, and I came up here and it was almost raining. And that's what we are as a state. So our windows and our art forms, I think, very often take on that same kind of character, although in recent years it has not. There's been much more of a drift towards the very subtle and grayed tones, which has been a rather nationwide trend.
The Designer-Studio Relationship

Riess: What was your job in the studio? [speaking to VC] It sounds like you were always there.

VC: [laughing] Well-- [pauses to think] It's a little difficult. Sometimes I ran the office, and I was Daddy's ghost writer; I wrote for, you know, magazines and that sort of thing. And whatever needed to be done, you know. I was not involved in fabrication at all. I said I'd like to learn, and my husband said, "Never."

Riess: Why?

VC: He didn't want any interference, and he thought that, you know, if I thought that I knew I might say; he just wanted to keep the decisions where the decisions should have been made.

Riess: Well, then, how did he work with his designers?

VC: Oh, I never-- No, no, no.

Riess: Well, no, I'm not asking the question right.

HWC: I think that the question, as I understand your question, is did his feeling of wanting to have that control interfere with his relationship with his artists?

VC: Oh. I don't think there's any doubt but what in any artistic venture there're differences. Now, Bill has worked this out better than anybody I know--and I know the country so far as stained glass is concerned pretty well, I think--and Bill has a great respect for his designers and at the same time he holds the reins, he makes the decisions, and he has to because he's the person who's responsible.

HWC: In the traditional studio setup, it has always been an adversarial relationship.

VC: Between the designer and the studio owner.

HWC: The designer and the studio owner. I think it's by design an adversarial relationship and it's one of great delicacy. The way we're set up now, I'm very clear about it. Through accident--nothing is planned in my life--but through accident I happen to be a musician, and I'm interested in performing the work of Bach and Beethoven and Mozart and Brahms and whoever, and I like
performing it the way they wanted it performed. So our studio is
the "orchestra," and I am the conductor, and our designers are
the composers, and there's very clear delineation, and we all need
one another, and we all rely on each other to do our jobs.

Riess: Well, if you're the conductor, then you're working in the service
of your designers is what you're saying.

HWC: That's right, that's right.

Riess: Well, then, where's the control?

HWC: Where's the control?

Riess: Yes.

HWC: As far as--? I don't want to have control over a designer.

Riess: Okay. You say it's adversarial.

HWC: No, I'm saying that in order to get around the adversarial rela-
tionship, we have set up our studio situation so that there is
not an adversarial relationship in our studio.

Riess: I see.

VC: At the same time you do have the veto.

HWC: Yes, we hire. I mean the orchestra hires the composer, doesn't
it?

Riess: Yes.

HWC: If you don't like the composer's work, you don't work with the
composer, I guess, do you?

Riess: Yes, right.

HWC: And you don't work with somebody that you don't respect.

But our job in going out and talking with a client--it's so
easy to sit down and drink a little tea and take some notes and
say, "Yes, we're going to do a window of Mary and a window of
Jesus" and a window of whatever, and it's going to be this way
and this way and this way, and come home and give it to your
designer and say, "It's going to be like that," and your designer
starts out with their hands tied.
HWC: So we start out by saying, "Let's not talk about Mary and Joseph and Jesus and all of that. Let's talk about what it is that we're really saying, in abstract terms, and what this building is saying, and then let's choose a designer, and let's come to that designer and give that designer as much free rein as we can possibly give him." And that's my role, to run guard for the designer.

VC: But you're in control.

HWC: But it isn't a dictatorial thing at all. We're all shooting for the same thing, I hope, or shooting for a great window for that particular church or corporate building or whatever it is.

Riess: It's subtle though; I mean if you tend to start visualizing things as soon as people start talking to you, why, it's hard to keep that kind of tabula rasa.

HWC: Well, I try to keep on going back to the vague. I really try to. I think when we get down to very specific terms in talking about what your windows are going to look like, I think, "Why hire a designer?"

Changes

Educating the Client's Taste

Riess: When you were talking twenty years ago to people who wanted windows for churches, when you got into faceted glass, did that just by definition mean that the windows were going to be abstract color symphonies, and no longer--

VC: But they'd have to be more conventionalized.

Riess: So you were doing conventionalized faceted glass?

VC: Oh, yes. And abstractions.
HWC: Actually, these windows at St. Stephen's were abstract, but most of the early windows are of symbols or figures...

VC: And that's all that would be accepted at that time. You know, it takes a long time for, say, the public to be brought to the point where they're receptive to abstract design.

Riess: Can you remember any great breakthroughs in public taste or in your clients' taste?

VC: Well, the one I think of first is a very old one, and it's not in your period of time, but when the Robert Dollar window was made [San Rafael Presbyterian Church], there was a committee who came to my husband and said, "Captain Robert Dollar has passed on, and we want to do this window, and the openings are three windows like this [gesturing] with tracery on the top. We want all of that to be taken out and have a beautiful big window and a nice ship for Captain Robert Dollar."

So my husband said, "Why, certainly you can do that, but I won't do it."

And they said, "Oh yes, we've decided you're going to do it."

My husband said, "I wouldn't be guilty."

So they said, you know, "Why?"

So he said, "Well, in the first place it's bad manners in stained glass; I just couldn't possibly be involved in that sort of thing."

"Well," they said, "What could you be involved in?"

So he talked to them first about respecting the architecture and whatnot, and working in symbols rather than in, you know, the picture window sort of thing. So they finally decided that he could do it. So he did the two, the Captain Robert Dollar window, and then later when Harold Dollar died he did that one.

The pastor of the church—who was a marvelous old Scot, just a wonderful man—his church sent him around the world as a sort of bonus, sent him and his wife. When they came back—of course, they'd visited the great cathedrals of Europe—Pat said, "Now, tell me, now that you've seen some of the great old medieval wonders, what do you think?" And they said, "First, I'd like to say, thank God you didn't let us do what we wanted to do." So that was a breakthrough.
VC: And then when St. Ignatius was beginning on their big window program, of course, you know, they were quite sure that there wasn't a good stained-glass man in San Francisco, so they asked nine eastern firms to submit sketches, and they did, and it just led to confusion, and they didn't like any of it. So they wrote to the editor [Maurice Lavanoux] of Liturgical Arts magazine and said, "What do you suggest?" And he said, "I suggest Cummings Studio in San Francisco."

So they called Pat, and they said, "Here we have these nine sketches, would you like to see them?"

And he said, "I certainly would not." So he said that he'd like to show them what he could do by taking them to some jobs that he had done close at hand. So then he was awarded the contract, and went ahead and did that over a period of years.

Riess: That's a good story.

HWC: Did you speak about the Poor Clares Monastery in Los Altos?

Riess: No.

HWC: That is a tiny job, but that is a beautiful job.

VC: What is that, Bill?

HWC: The Poor Clares.

VC: Oh yes.

HWC: A really beautiful, beautiful job. The windows are that big. [gesturing] They're tiny. [12" x 14"] They're the fourteen stations of the cross, but they are exquisitely done.

VC: They're a closed order, and you never see the sisters when you go up. We drove one time and they were working in the fields, you know, with their hands, and their long robes and whatnot. When they saw us, they looked up like, well, frightened things, and ran, and we never saw them again.

However, we had been invited up. We didn't see anybody; we didn't even see the person who would know us. We talked through a screen, and the person said, "Now, in a moment I'll unlock the door and you can go in." But except for those people who were working in the field, we never saw anybody.
Riess: Who brought that commission to you? Who designed it?

VC: I don't remember.

HWC: Bob Halbrook, I think, designed it.

VC: Bob Halbrook, yes, probably.

HWC: You don't go as far as Sacramento, do you?

Riess: Oh, I'd like to have you say whatever it is that you want to say.

HWC: The St. Philomene's there has those beautiful stations of the cross. They're in mosaic, but it's a very unique use of mosaic, very unique, and they are beautiful. They're some of my favorites. Again, they aren't terribly big [18" x 24"]; they're this wide and this tall. [gesturing] They also have stained glass windows, but the church is very dark, and so a lot of gold tesserae was used in the mosaics to catch light and glisten.

Riess: And Cummings did that?

HWC: Yes.

VC: Well, they did the windows first, and then by the time that was finished, of course, they were very good friends, and my husband said, "Now, I hope to heavens that you don't order your stations of the cross from a catalogue or go down here to this little Catholic goods store and buy them, but, really, have them custom made and have them just right." So the priest said, "Well, would you do them?" And so he said yes, he would.

HWC: And that's another case where the architect was very supportive of us.

Riess: An architect like Paul Ryan, I have the impression he would come in with a drawing for you to execute; he would have thought the whole design right through.

HWC: The design of the window?

Riess: Yes.

HWC: That wouldn't be true in our studio. In the period that you're talking about, we would not have worked that way, and very few architects do work that way. In my lifetime, I can only think of one architect's windows whose sketches we've fabricated. [then, speaking to mother] How many windows have been designed by architects?
VC: Generally speaking, their training doesn't include the supportive arts, and they don't understand the medium and what's possible.

HWC: Today you're in a different situation because the field is not as strong and not as well respected as it used to be, and so it may be that an architect comes in with a design and you have to really try to do your best, but the fabrication of that design will usually cost more than one where we supply the designer, because in order to realize that design, we have to hire a designer that can then interpret that, and it takes longer to interpret that design than it does to start off from scratch.

Experimentation

Riess: In Liturgical Arts magazine [Vol. 20, Nov. 1951], there was an article about a "prototype church." The prototype church was a little round church, and it had some glass walls, and it was to be on a corner and accessible to the public and the inside was to be visible from the outside, and there was to be a lot of use of painting on glass.

VC: Oh. [said with recognition]

Riess: Jean Labatut was the architect. André Girard, who also worked on St. Ann's Chapel in Palo Alto, was the artist.

VC: Let's see, was St. Mark's in Palo Alto the one that had the-- [speaking to Bill]

HWC: All Saints Episcopal Church.

VC: All Saints. All Saints in Palo Alto is a job that you might enjoy seeing sometime.

HWC: Done in 1968.

VC: And that was designed by Garwood?

HWC: Correct. Done in 1968 and the building designed by Bill [William] Garwood. A magnificent piece of architecture, and a stunning piece of glass by Robert Sowers. It goes over your head; it's about six feet wide and 105 feet long, and it forms a cross. The three of us could walk up and down on top of it.

Riess: Amazing. What kind of glass was that?
HWC: Basically faceted glass, or inch thick glass set in three inches of concrete.

Riess: I was interested in whether this prototype church, jumping back to André Girard's work, had any influence on anybody.

HWC: I remember when that church was done, and it must have been the mid-fifties. I can't remember if we're talking about the same church.

Riess: Well, this thing I thought of was just a lab project.

HWC: At any rate, there was a church done in the Menlo Park-Palo Alto area. They were not windows that came down to the ground; they were clerestory, I think, in elevation. And it was a French man, or two French men, that came in and painted the windows in place—remember that, with all the enamels?

VC: Yes, I remember we were shocked.

HWC: And Dad said, "Ten years."

VC: Because the enamels peel off.

HWC: And they're still there, but they started peeling in about three or four years. They're in terrible shape. They'll never stand up. There's nothing you can do about them.

Riess: So there's no applied color at all ever in stained glass work.

HWC: Well, there's applied color, but it's fired in.

VC: The paint itself, the so-called paint itself, is actually a finely ground glass, so that it fuses with the glass and is at one with it. We never used enamels. The color was always in the glass.

HWC: In the nineteenth-century windows, and we don't have a lot of nineteenth-century windows in this area, in nineteenth-century glass, by and large, either they were putting too much borax in the paint in order to make it fire at a lower temperature—and that seemed good at the time, but a hundred years later we're finding that that was too much flux and it's beginning to come off—or they simply fired it at a lower temperature and it never got a very good fire, and we're having big paint consolidation problems with nineteenth-century windows. It's a very significant problem that this country has to face, and there's no real concrete solution on that yet. There're only two studios that I know that are working on it very hard.
Riess: Is yours one of them?

HWC: Yes, we're pretty well respected for restoration.

Riess: What would you say were the greatest artistic influences on your husband?

VC: Well, I suppose, to begin with, his family was a creative family.

Riess: Were they from San Francisco?

VC: No, they were an Iowa family. And his mother did oil paints, and his whole family was a creative family. I don't know. How would you answer that, Bill?

HWC: I'd say that the Gothic period is absolutely the most fundamental influence on him.

VC: Yes.

HWC: Even in his contemporary work that he was doing at the very last, you could still find very strong Gothic traces in his work. It's hard to look at any of his windows and not find very strong Gothic tendencies. And by Gothic I mean particularly in painting, his whole approach to painting. Dad didn't do the painting, but his painters painted the way he wanted them to paint. His whole approach to painting is very unique, and the more I get around and see other studios, the more unique I see it is, and it's very Gothic, extremely Gothic, and it's interesting because it's a West Coast Gothic in style. We were talking earlier about the strength of California, the contrast of California, and his figures are very strong and very angular and very bold, and I think that's a direct derivative of the Gothic.

Riess: Gothic as he experienced it from his studies, or did he travel a lot early too?

VC: Oh, he studied in Europe, and, of course, he traveled a lot.

Riess: Any other influences, besides his upbringing and the Gothic?

VC: Well, he was inventive, I think, wasn't he? [speaking to Bill] He constantly had experiments going on in the studio; the first big, important one was the lucent glass. And then the second one was the faceted glass. And he felt the same thing about design.
VC: But I think it really remained for the younger generation to make the real break into contemporary design. He did, as far as he could, make the jump, but as Bill says, he had a lot of the Gothic in him.

HWC: And also I think that, in his experimental work, he would experiment for years on something before he'd use it. If he came to you as a client and said, "This is something new I've been working on; I'd like to talk to you about it," you could just sit back in your chair and relax and know that it's going to be there for a long time. He never introduced anything before he had total research. I can remember him doing freezer tests and boiling water and this and that; he was always doing tests.

VC: He'd make a little test panel of faceted glass, you know, and then he'd put it in the freezer, in the deep freeze, and then he'd bring it out and put it in boiling water.

HWC: He'd put half of it in boiling water, and the other half would stay frozen.

Riess: Exciting. Yes, I can see why you wanted to be down there watching all that.

VC: Yes.

HWC: Yes.

Riess: You said in the beginning that you were getting your glass from all over.

VC: Well, that's not quite true. We're getting the glass from England and France, a great deal from France. And Germany. And in this country principally from Blenko Glass. Don't you think that's correct? [speaking to Bill]

HWC: Yes.

Riess: But not from the Bay Area?

VC: No. And there was no producer.

HWC: There still is no producer in the Bay Area. You can buy glass in the Bay Area, as when we were here we sold glass, but we bought it.

Riess: Is it a matter of materials, the silicas? I mean what's the problem here?
HWC: Well, everybody wondered why we didn't get into the production of glass. And from a stained-glass studio's point of view, through Bendheim in New York, there are probably twenty different glass manufacturers that you can buy from, and then Blenko, and then it goes on and on and on. And between all of these glass companies you have such a wealth of glass at your disposal that to set up your own production shop to get what you want is really gilding the lily. It's far less expensive to contact somebody who knows how to do it and that's their expertise.

Nowadays, there are new shops going on. Seattle and Portland have very good glass companies. Spectrum, Bull's Eye. Bull's Eye is in Portland, I believe, and Spectrum is in Seattle. I'm not too sure of that, but it's up in the Pacific Northwest. And they're fairly good glasses.

Riess: Well, then, the problems that you have in making sure that a window will still be there 200 years hence are not problems in glass, but in the putting together.

HWC: It's structurally, it's in the design of the window. How it's all leaded together and where the barring goes and all of that is the difference.

Riess: The editor of Liturgical Arts magazine, Maurice Lavanoux, was he someone you knew?

VC: My husband knew him.

Architecture and the Ministry of the Church

Riess: Have you an overall sense of how the quality of church art and decoration has changed in the years from 1945-1965?

VC: Oh, of course things have changed tremendously, you know, even in colors. I think of the tapestries, for example. This is a long way away, but what's—

HWC: Coventry.

VC: Coventry. Have you seen the tapestry over the altar?

Riess: No.
VC: It's grass green. Now, you never would have seen a thing like that, you know, a hundred years ago, or even sixty years ago I'm sure. So I think there's been a freeing up so far as the use of color is concerned. Don't you think so? [speaking to Bill]

HWC: Yes, I do. I think that a lot of the freeing up, some of it is very good and some of it is not so good. I think that a lot of it, like a lot of contemporary art, is being done on the basis that it's "contemporary art," and really what it is, it's an undisciplined artist. And I think that there's an awful lot of that going on universally, and I guess time will somehow weed all that out. It's important that we experiment, and it's important that we think up things, but I think there's very little liturgical thinking that goes on today, and I think that's unfortunate.

There's such a great opportunity to minister in whatever it is that you do, and I don't mean you necessarily have to be in the church, and I certainly, as Mom can tell you, I'm not a flag-carrying member of a church, but I do think that the opportunity of the ministry is an opportunity and it's also a responsibility. And I think particularly when you go into a church, you need to be able to put on the boots of the people that are in that church and understand that ministry and then do something with it.

You may do something very contemporary, and you may do something very wild, and you may do something that's far-out, and that's fine, I think that's great. But I think a lot of what's being done now is being done in the guise of all that because the artist wants to impose his id on the church, and I think that that's unfortunate because that's not what the church is about.

Riess: Right. One of the people I interviewed called it "wowzer" architecture, when your car practically goes off the road as you go past this structure that just shrieks at you.

HWC: Yes, you just have to wonder what the ministry is.

If you've been talking to Warren Callister, undoubtedly you've been to Mother's church over here [Christian Science Church, Belvedere]. That church is, gosh, thirty years old this year I guess. And that, to me, is still one of the freshest statements in the Bay Area.

VC: Well, you know, people come from all over the world to see that church.

HWC: Have you seen the Unitarian church between Franklin and Gough, on Geary? The addition there?
Riess: Yes. He did that, yes.

HWC: Actually, J. Martin Rosse did that. He did that in conjunction with Warren Callister, but Martin Rosse was the designer of that.

Riess: When Callister was talking about that, he said that he didn't want windows there; he wanted weavings, hangings.

HWC: Did he tell you my thought on that?

Riess: No. Tell me your thought on that.

HWC: We were hired to design windows for that chapel.

Remember when we were hired to design windows for the chapel at the Unitarian church? [speaking to VC]

VC: I think I must have been away.

HWC: Anyway, it was maybe the late sixties or early seventies, it was right about the time the church was finished, and I walked in there, and Martin was very enthusiastic about the fact that I was called in. And I just said, "The ministry of this piece of architecture, the way it is now, is stunning. It's slotted architecture. Through this window you see the children's playground and you see the mother church and you see downtown San Francisco and you see the administration wing, and you're in this little tiny cocoon."

Riess: "Slotted" architecture?

HWC: Yes.

Riess: That's nice, right.

HWC: And so you're in this little tiny cocoon, which is a fortress, and yet it's reminding you exactly where you are. You know precisely what your ministry has to be when you're in that building. Therefore, the fact that there's glass in the slots at all is almost unfortunate; there should be nothing in there. But the glass has to keep out the weather, and so that's the way it should be.

And I went and talked to Martin about it, and he agreed with me totally. I went to Warren and talked to him about it, and he agreed with me totally. The church did not. What I didn't realize at that time was that apparently there was a schism that had been going on between the architect and the church, and all my support from the architects put me on the bad side of the church, because the architects wrote and they said that I was right. So the church said, "No, don't do anything."
HWC: So then we came up, and remember that sculpture that I made?
[speaking to VC]

VC: Oh yes, yes.

HWC: Okay, I still have it. And I made a sculpture that was—we were in Fresno when we did that—it was about three-and-a-half or four feet long I guess. Those windows are a foot wide by twenty feet high. And so this was three-and-a-half or so feet long. If this is the plane of the window [gesturing] and you're looking out to it, the glass was like this, coming out into the room.

VC: With a free-standing thing.

HWC: The glass was like this and coming out into the room, and here it was almost flush with the window and it went out like this and then it came back like this, and it was metal and glass. It just hung in front of that window, about ten feet off the ground, the idea being that as you walked past the window, the relative position of those pieces of glass moved, and that emphasized the strength of the concrete walls.

And I felt there should be no tapestries, there should be nothing on the walls. Why are they concrete? Why are they cast concrete strong walls? Why cover those things up? They're gorgeous, they make a wonderful statement.

I didn't know how to draw it, so I made it, presented it to the church and they said, "Go ahead with it"—and then they chickened out. Then they asked me to design something else, and I said No, we wouldn't do it. So somebody else did the windows, and they're very satisfactory windows, but I just think the building is no longer architecturally what it was.

Riess: Have you ever had a chance to use that idea?

HWC: No. Right now we're doing something similar to that. We're talking to a church about it. I don't know whether they're going to be brave enough to do it or not. That's been fourteen years ago.

Riess: Were you here when St. Mary's was being done?

HWC: Our studio was in Fresno, yes, we were very much in the area.

Riess: Were you involved in any way with St. Mary's Cathedral?

HWC: No. That was done by the Willets Studios in Philadelphia, and those windows were designed by Kepes. [brief tape interruption]
Hilda Sachs

HWC: You and Hilda are the best colorists that the studio has seen.

VC: Oh, we worked together, yes.

Riess: Tell me more about Hilda. I think that stained-glass artists will probably remain virtually unknown.

HWC: I'd like to talk about that if I may. My great sorrow is that it looks at this point as if Hilda's going to go unnoticed. She is criticized by the industry tremendously because she does not have a school [a recognizable style], because you can't tell one of Hilda's windows from another. Yet I think that is precisely why Hilda is such a great artist.

Hilda comes in and looks at a situation, and she designs for that situation, and she loves doing it, and she loves walking right out to the end of the plank and putting one foot out over the water and just dangling it. She just loves to gamble. She is an excellent colorist. She's very spontaneous, and her sketches are hard to sell because her sketches are very sloppy-looking. And now she has enough work behind her so that people see her work and they go, "Yes, I'd like those sketches."

At first it was very difficult to sell her work, because they were sloppy, and yet we had long talks about it, and we agreed, "Let's keep them sloppy," because we've seen that either you spend yourself on your sketch, or you spend yourself on your cartoon, or you spend yourself in fabrication. And if you're going to spend yourself, you should be spending it in fabrication; that's where you should really reach the climax of your window, that's where it all happens. And if you spent yourself on your sketch, then it all begins to dissipate and lose vitality after that.

Hilda really understands how to pace herself so that she ends up reaching the right point at the right time. She is a team player like nobody I've ever worked with. I keep on saying that I'm going to retire when she retires, and sometimes I'm very serious about it. She is a real privilege to work with. You could write an opera on her life.

VC: Well, she designed the stained glass windows for the First Church of Christ Scientist in Menlo Park, and they're like nothing else, you know. And yet they attract more attention. More people say, "Is this a Cummings Studio job?" Yes, and it's Hilda's.
It's very simple.

Very simple, but it's so right. She just has a beautiful sense of rightness that is great.

She did those, and then contrasting on the opposite end of the scale would be the windows at Fort Ord, at the First Brigade Chapel down there, which are strikingly different; you'd never know they came out of the same head.

And then she didn't get the commission, and I'm very sorry for it that she didn't, but she was asked to design particular windows for a particular church, and she just didn't have time to do it. She wasn't kicked off or anything, she just didn't have the time to do it, but she began designing the windows. It was for a nineteenth-century church in the East Coast. They were restoring the church, and the windows they had in there were bad 1950 windows. We had convinced them that they weren't worth reproducing, and they had a very limited budget.

So Hilda took it over. They were a double-lancet window with Gothic tops, with a kite at the top. She designed each into one window, one single lancet, which apexed in the mullion, with borders going up around it, so it was already a play on things, and at the very top she created what looked like a gable, so it was like a trompe l'oeil, which is so right for the nineteenth century. It's so 1984, and yet all the rules for that solution came out of the nineteenth century. It was just exotic, and it had all kinds of stenciling on it. You didn't see those I don't think. [speaking to VC]

No, I didn't.

It would have been just wonderful, but it was far more than they could appreciate. But she does this. She just has a bag of tricks that goes on forever. She's in San Francisco, and she's really a stunning lady to work with.

And yet you're back on the East Coast. How does that work? Does she fly to Massachusetts to do this?

Yes. She'll design in San Francisco, and then sometimes I'll cartoon, and sometimes she'll cartoon, but at some point during that process she comes back and then corrects, and selects color.

There's no doubt about it that I miss Hilda. We were together three days a week before, and I learned a great deal from Hilda, but we learned a lot from one another. Both of us
feel that two people create as much as three people do, and we just believed in that fact, so it wasn't a question as to where the ideas came from or who did they come from, but "I'll do some work, and now I need some fresh eyes," and so Hilda would come in, and Hilda would do some work, and so she'd need some fresh eyes, and I'd come in, and you work that way, and it's beautiful. It's a very, very exciting way to work.

Riess: Actually, that puts to lie the sort of East-West Coast theory that you would have to be on the East Coast to be designing correctly for an East Coast building. Once again, back to the light.

Well, when you're talking about larger commissions, the larger commissions do not exist today like they did in the fifties or even in the forties, and so most of the larger studios in the country have to go nationwide in order to exist. When you're doing a whole room or a whole project over a long period of time, the mechanical coordination, the aesthetic coordination, the business coordination is just tremendous. I think that there are so few of us that do that well, that it really doesn't make any difference where we are. [tape interruption]

"God's People"

While I was out here I was attending a conference on art in the Catholic Church. They kept on referring back to the Vatican II Council, what happened then, what we have done since then, and what must we do now. This is only the second national forum they have ever had, they said. It was very stimulating. It was good for Hilda right now, because she is starting designing two full churches right now, so she is going to come to them with some different ideas, I am sure, than they were expecting to get.

The biggest change, that kept on being repeated, is to "remember, we're not building the house of God, we're building the house of God's people." That's a very dramatic change. The looks of it are changing. The narthex is now as big as the nave itself, and is called the assembly area, or something like that. It's for the social things, sit-down dinners and all kinds of things.

Remember we went through a period of having the church in the round, and that really didn't work out because the priest kept on doing this [gesturing]. And we finally ended up with
fan-shaped churches. But now rather than having fan-shaped churches with sloped floors, they're leaving the floors flat and raising the pulpit because of the fact that then they have more flexibility in the place.

The pews—there'll be a bank of pews facing this way, and a bank of pews facing this way, having them overlapping, so that these people are looking at these people, as well as looking up here [at altar area], the idea being that the worship space is the entire space. And the really sacred works of art are all movable. And I sat there, as a stained-glass person!

It's going to be interesting. I'm sure the church is going to continue to go through a whole lot of these things. Singing Martin Luther hymns, et cetera.

We're always in the process of becoming.

They're talking about stimulus now, and they're saying that the service has to be more than just visual or just audio. It has to be audio and visual and sensual; all your senses have to be involved in the service. [tape interruption]

Mom was the spiritual leader of the studio. And she still is. You are [to VC].

Yes. It's an important part of the whole thing, isn't it? [quietly]

That, to this family's operation, has been critical.

How were you the spiritual leader?

I really don't know. I live very much in the present, you know, whatever way you can to meet the need. It's certainly nothing that goes on paper, or that there's any proof of. Bill is very generous, I think.

Mother is the very epitome, I think, of the feminine characteristic of nurturing, and Mother does nurture. Mom, in a joking fashion—I've kidded her about it before—as you've found out today, Mom has a very loud voice. [laughing] Mother has this ability of getting up in front of a group of people and saying, "I think you ought to bury your head in the sand," and everybody turns over and buries their head in the sand and says, "Thank you." [laughter]

So behind this very quiet lady is a whole lot of power. And I think that it's a power that very easily could be abusive, but I think that she takes it very seriously. I really found out more
HWC: about it being away from the studio than I did being with the studio. The way we were raised, how you talk to people, how you look at people, how you think about people, it had to do with a theological approach to people, what man was all about.

Riess: Why don't you say it had to do with being a Christian Scientist?

HWC: To Mom it has everything to do with being a Christian Scientist. I'm not a Christian Scientist, and yet I guess I always will be. Mom says I am. We didn't work together for a period of five or six years, something like that, and then I came back and I was working with her and we frankly didn't know how we would work together at all, we didn't know whether it would be good, bad, or indifferent, and as we worked together I think we discovered that we had the same values, the same goals. And Mother came up to me one day and she said, "You really are a Christian Scientist."

I think God is good to lots of people, and so I guess I resist the idea that it's just Christian Science.

VC: And you know, he has a constitutional right to do that.

HWC: When we did the windows at Fort Ord, an Episcopal chaplain, Chaplain Burgreen—who I think you met, didn't you, Mom?

VC: Yes.

HWC: --he had worked with me about three months, and then at one time he came to me and he said, "Are you a Christian Scientist?" "No," I said. "Well, you sure fooled me," he said.

VC: To me it doesn't make any difference what you call yourself. How you think is the main thing.

Riess: How have you continued this sense in your business?

HWC: I think the thing that I was born and raised with is that integrity is not something that art has any corner on, or business has any corner on, or family relationship has any corner on, but as a matter of fact, if you have integrity then your integrity permeates everything that you do, or you don't have it at all.

So if we're wanting to do really significant work that has integrity, then our business characteristics must reflect that. And the way we work with the people with whom we work and the way we work with the clients with whom we work has to have that same integrity. The weakest link is going to break the chain.

Transcriber: Joyce Minick
Final Typist: Catherine Winter
INDEX — Renaissance of Religious Art and Architecture in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1946-1968

Adams, Mark, 1, 194, 296, 324, 335, art, 340, Int. 464-498, 520, 567
Adderton, Aileen, 365
Allen, Harry and Winifred, 293, 296-297, 300
Allen, John 537-538
American Institute of Architects, Committee for arts & architecture, 231
architecture, Bay Area, 145-147, 227-231, 288-292, 364
church, Bay Area, 144-174, 229 passim, 250-253, 292-311, 318-319
Byzantine, 253-255, 277, 366, 369, 380, 383
Gothic revival, 325-329
New England, 284-302
also see religious institutions index
Armer, Ruth, 9
Arnautoff, Victor, 186-187
art, "Ecumenical Art Council," 243-244
art
- caricature, cartoon, 139-143
- ceramic, 120-123, 127-128, 239-241, 251 passim
- fabric, hangings, 97, 108-110
- vestments, 41-43
- glass, sculpture, 397-401
- lettering, calligraphy, 525-526, 565-566
- lights, lighting, 302, 340-342, 381, 387-388
- lost wax casting, 539-540
- metal sculpture, silversmithing, 501 passim
- sculpture, 21-28, 35, 401-404, 420-421
- stained glass, 155, 251, 254-255, 295-296, 298-299, 320-361
- faceted glass, 320, 332-333, 340-342, 350-351, 484-487, 490-491
- lucent mosaic, 329-332, 351
- glass making, 320-321, 352-353
- designing, 322-329, 334-337, 343-352, 357-358
- tapestry and weaving, 475-477, 479-484, 488-489
- tile, Cosmati, 366, 374-375, 381
- wood, 126, 155
art, religious, European, 4-5, 70-74
Asher, Rabbi Joseph, 491

Bailey, Forrest, 438
Baldwin, Madeleine, 63
Bassett, Chuck, 497
Belluschi, Pietro, 14, 162, 164-167, 249, 319
Benigsen, George, 204
Benvenuto, Elio, 9-10, 12, 208, Int. 21-38, 232, 238
Berger, Minna, 69, 182, 195, 199
Berger, Sam, 155
Bethune, Ada, 67, 198-199
Bezalel School, Jerusalem, 507, 549
Bishoff, James, 315, 317
Blake, Barney, 475
Blanchard, Norman K., 204
Blank, Fr. Benedict Augustin, O.P., 326
Bloch, Ernest, 78, 381, 391-399, 408-413, 434, 451
Bloch, Ivan, 414, 416-417
Cravath, Ruth, 1, 8-10, 26, 29-30, 44, 64, 86, 121, 124, 126, 152-153, 203-204, 209, 217, 232, 238
Cumings, Bill (Harold W.), 298, Int. 326-361
Cumings, John, 334
Cumings, Vivian, Int. 326-361
Cumings, Pat, (Harold W.), 296, 298-299, 320 passim, 484-485
Cumings Studios [stained glass], 296, 298, 320 passim
Dachauer, Paul, 36, 213, 218
Dailey, Gardner, 363
Dali, Salvador, 79
Dally, Darrell, 44, 202, 213
Darcy, Sr. Jean, O.P., 12
Dean, Harriet, 7-8, 176, 181, 190-198, 467
de Patta, Margaret, 511, 546
De Quesada, Jorge, 488
De Rosen, John, 137
DeStaebler, Stephen 219, 239-241, Int. 250-287, 478-479
DeWit, Fr. Gregory, 190-193
Diebels, Fr. Joe, 64
Diebels, Paul, 61-62
Dimitroff, Lucienne Bloch, 374-375, 381, Int. 391-463
Dimitroff, Stephen Pope, 381, Int. 391-463
Dobbs, Bill, 372
Dollar, Robert [window], 346
Downie, Harry, 8, 193-194, 467-468
DuCasse, Micaela Martinez, 10, 12, Int. 175-226, 492
DuCasse, Ralph, 195
Dwyer, Abp. Robert, 50

École des Beaux-Arts, Paris, 144-146
Ellis, Havelock, 410-411
Erckenbrack, Mary, 9, 77, Int. 119-128, 232, 238
Esherick, Joseph, 364

Fabilli, Mary, 11
Falkenstein, Claire, 441, 537, 541
Farnham, Rev. E.C., 205
Ferguson, Marilyn, 91
Fine, Rabbi Alvin I., 205
Finn, Fr. William, C.S.P., 195-196
Finney, Clem, 263
Fitzroy, Dariel, 372
Fletcher, Marianna, 539
Fortune, Charlton ("Effie"), 6-7, 40-41, 47, 49-59, 68, 71, 95, 116, 196-198, 200, 219, 470
Frankenstein, Alfred, 3-4, 102, 114, 207, 482
free speech movement, and religion, 310-311
Fromer, Seymour, 104-105
Fuller, Buckminster, 92
furniture design, 517-519

Gaidano, Mario, 36
Garwood, William, 349
Geary, Ida, 457
Genung, Lyn, 155
Gibney, Luke, 9
gill, Eric, 198
Gillespie, David M., 137
Girard, André, 17-20, 245, 349, 470, 495
Golden, Joe and Janet, 63, 66, 116
Golden Gate International Exposition, 1939, Treasure Island, 330
"Art in Action," 120, 140
liturgical arts at, 55
Goldman, Rhoda Stern, 407
Goodman, Michael, 207
Gottlieb, Lois Davidson, 299, 304
Graham, Cecilia, 120
Graves, Norbert, 323
Gregg, Harold, 534, 544
Guermanprez, Trude, 442, 535, 537-538, 541

ecumenism, 9
"Center of Understanding," San Francisco, 243-244
Gulbenkian Foundation, 122
Gump's, San Francisco, windows, 474, 484

Haas, Elise Stern, 404, 490-492
Haas, Peter, 407
Haggerty, James, 192
Halbrook, Bob, 348
Hamlin, Edith, 217
Hanchen and Goddard, lighting, 381
Hanna Center for Boys, Sonoma, Chapel, 8-9, 12, 121, 232, 238, 246
Hannash, Monica, 13
Harris, Harwell Hamilton, 362-363
Hartnet, William, 513, 520
Hass, June Foster, 10, 209, 220, 234
Hastings, Viscount Jack, 422
Hays, Elah Hale, 13, 46, 105-106, 203, 206
Heasley, Clyde, 60
Hedley, George, 306-307, 311
Heil, Walter, 3-4
Henderson, Mel, 268-269
Hennessy, A.E., 119
Herr, Jane Brandenstein, 437-443, 533-539, 543
Herr, Gordon, 437-443, 533-539, 543
Hertzka and Knowles Associates, Architects, 146-147
Hillmer, Jack, 289, 313
Hobart, Lewis, 144-149, 161, 386
Hofinger, Fr. Johannes, S.J., 11
Hofmann, Hans, 464, 468-469, 476, 554
Horn, Walter, 239
Hudson, Robert, 240
Huneke, Carl, 155
Hurley, Msgr. Mark J., 25, 32

Iakovof, Archbishop, 372
Jackson, Msgr. Charles E., 488
Jadez, Victoria, 66
Jenkins, Louisa, 3, 9-10, 12, 17, 64, 74-75, Int. 84-94, 98-100, 102, 114, 205, 209, 470, 476, 497, 520
Jennings, Aleta, 204
Jewish art, 547 passim, Holocaust art, 523, 549-550, 558
Johnson, Sargent, 9
Jorasch, Richard, 239, 256-258, 263-264
Joseph, Emily [Mrs. Sidney] 401-402, 437
Jungmann, Fr. Joseph, 5
Justema, William, Int. 70-83, 85

Kahlo, Frida, 179, 418, 423-426
Katzaris, Fr. Steve, 455
Kazmarcik, Fr. Frank, 45, 476, 493
Kelham, George, 146
Kepes, Gyorgy, 324, 335, 356
Kump, Ernest, 290

La Barbara, Louis, 75
Labourett, _______ (stained glass artist), 333
Labatut, Jean, 245, 349
Lang, _______ (carpenter, artist), 537-538
Larkin, Carol, 108, 109
Lavanoux, Maurice, 2, 45, 63, 67, 78, 95, 199-200, 347, 353
Lederle, Del, 10, 12, 29, 63-64, 67, 156, 191, 209, 220, 476
Leipziger, Hugo, 289
Leslie, Jean, 9, 10
Liebman, Mrs. _______ [nee Meyer], 416-417
Lindheim, Mary, 544
Lippold, Richard, 31, 81, 132, 164
liturgical arts,
European background, 70-74, 96-97, 200-201
liturgical arts,  
"prototype church," 245, 349-350  
movement, comments, 470-474, 478, 492-496  
See entries under index to  
religious institutions  

Liturgical Arts Magazine, 1, 2, 13,  
40, 45, 49, 63, 67, 69, 78-79, 95  
112, 199-201, 219, 223, 245, 347-348  
liturgical music, 195-196, 285-287  
[Eric] Locke Galleries, San Francisco, 214  
Loire, Gabriel, 333, 484-485  
Luce, Clare Boothe, 88, 90  
Luptak, Emi, 13, 29, 112-113  
Lurgst, Jean, 480-482  

Macchiarini, Lydia, 22  
Macchiarini, Peter, 10, 205  
McCleod, Ian, 250  
McGucken, Abp. Joseph T., 4, 14,  
30-31, 158-174, 246, 248-249  
McKeever, George, 492  
McMillan, Mike, 270  
McSweeney, Ryan & Lee, architects,  
160, 166, 246, 248-249, 319  
Magnes Museum, Berkeley, 104, 547-548, 561-563, 567  
Maher, Msgr. Leo T., 25, 33, 46, 205  
Malone, Skewes-Coxe, family, 444-445  
Manfrini, Enrico, 171  
Maritain, Jacques, 181  
Martin, Fr. Vincent, O.S.B., 55, 66, 225  
Martinez, Elsie Whitaker, 7, 175- 
183, 190-198, 467  
Martinez, Xavier, 7, 175-180, 184,  
186-187  
Mary Antoinette, Sr., 12  
Mary Dolora, Sr., 101  
Masten, Louise, 67  
Maybeck, Bernard, 245, 252, 255- 
256, 293-294, 298, 386  
Meehan, Fr. John, 6-7, 9, 12, 39- 
49, 58-59, 68, 105-106, 197, 200,  
202-203, 206-207, 209  
Meinberger, Walter, 302  
Meinicke, Fr. Paul, 188  
Mendelsohn, Eric, 433-435, 443, 507- 
508, 510-512, 522-523, 533  
Merton, Thomas, 72, 94, 465  
Michels, Emily, Int. 39-48  
Mihailoff, Francis, 304, 483  
Milhaud, Darius, 78  
Miljarik, Louis, 101, 103  
Mills College, Chapel, 304, 306-311  
Mills, Barbara, 89, 92  
Mills, Paul, 102-103, 556  
Milono, Germano, 488  
Mitchell, Fr. Brendan, O.F.M., 188  
Mitty, Abp. John J., 25, 154, 189, 
246  
Molton, Phil, 307-308  
Monihan, Fr. William J., S.J., Int. 1-20, 
26, 45, 97, 113, 202-203, 217, 513, 
520, 529  
Monterey Guild, 7, 40, 50, 52, 54, 
57, 69, 71, 197  
Montgomery, Joe, 299, 304  
Moore, Charles, 315  
Moore, Mary Eggers, 60, 63, 492  
Morgan, Julia, 253  
Morris, Joan, 67, 194-195, 198  
V.C. Morris, shop, San Francisco,  
512, 533, 544  
Moses, Elizabeth, 205-206, 530  
Moya Del Pino, Jose, 77  
Moyer, Frances, 13, 46  

Nanny's, shop, San Francisco, 546  
National Council of Catholic Women, 193  
Nervi, Pier Luigi, 14, 31, 81, 162,  
164-165, 169, 246-249, 319, 496  
Neehaus, Eugen, 102  
Niemeyer, Oscar, 236-237  
Niendorf, Arthur, 425-427  
Noguchi, Isamu, 270-271  
Nord, Eric (Big Daddy), 475  

Oakland Art Association, 551, 555-556  
Oakland, Catholic Diocese, 109-110, 
233-241, 263-264  
O'Connell, Msgr. Michael D., 192
Selz, Peter, 239
Sessions, Roger, 451, 462
Sheldrake, Rubert, 91
Simoes, Santos, 122
Simoneau, Marian, 183
Skidmore, Owings, Merrill, architects, 484, 489, 497
Sotomayor, Antonio, 10, 26, 77, Int. 129-243, 209, 476
Souza, Ethel, 5, 12, 45, Int. 60-69, 112-113, 116, 225, 492
Sowers, Robert, 324, 335, 349
Spaeth, Otto, 13, 78
Spengler, Oswald, 181
Stackpole, Ralph, 187
Stamos, Jim, 366
Stanford, Sally, 297
Staude, Marguerite Brunswig, 76, 93
Stegman, Vincent, 67
Stern, Rosalie (Mrs. Sigmund), 404-408, 416-417, 437-438
Still, Clyfford, 468-469
Strasburger, Roy, 488
Strawn, Marie, 10
Sullivan, Noel, 8, 192, 195-196

Tanaguchi, Alan, 299, 304
Taylor, Michael, 483
Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre, 90-91
Telesis, group, 289
Temko, Allan, 318
Thiry, Paul, 119
Thomas, George, 283
Tiessielinc, August, 46
Tival, Brian, 367, 373-375, 381, 446, 447
Tolerton, David, 87-88
Traphagen, Peter, 171
Trettel, Fr. Effrem, 36-37

Unitarianism, Unitarians, 304-306, 355, 356
University of California, Art Museum, 245, 256, 318
Department of Architecture, 365, 385-386
and Newman Hall, 234, 237-239
University of the Pacific, Chapel, 329-330
University of San Francisco, Gleson Library, 1, 2, 217
Rare Book Room, 16-17
University of Texas, School of Architecture, 288-289

Valdespeza, Armando, 183-184
Valvo, Ninfa, 3-4, 84, 102, 203-205, 214, 476, 492, 513, 520, 529-530
Valyermo, see St. Andrews Priory
Vanderbruck, Franz, 8
van Doorslaer, Fr. Maur, O.S.B., 225
Van Erp, Dirk, 9, 58, 340
Van Hoesen, Beth, 469, 475, 480, 492, 498
Varda, Jean, 92, 96, 107, 114, 537, 541
Vlahos, Fr. George, 366-367, 370, 374, 376, 388, 447, 449, 453-454
Vlahos, Fr. Steve, 380
Vodusek, Fr. Vital, 26-28, 45, 232-233, 248
Von Ogterop, Wilhelmina, 323
Woulkos, Peter, 240, 541

Waegemann, Gus, 299
Wagner, Msgr. Alvin, 50
Wagner, Dick, 256
Wallace, Joe, 296
Weinrich, Carl, 286
Western Art 381
White, Minor, 313
Wildenhain, Frans, 442, 535-536, 538, 541, 543
Wildenhain, Marguerite, 441, 534-539, 543-544
Wilhelm, Stephanie Alioto, 12, 44
Wright, Frank Lloyd, 362-363, 393, 400, 414-416, 510, 522
Wolfe, Tom, The Painted Word, 487
INDEX TO RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

churches,
Catholic,
California,
Church of the Nativity, San Francisco, 28
Church of Our Lady of Loretto, rectory, Novato, 152
Church of St. Angela, Pacific Grove, 53-55
Corpus Christi Church, San Francisco, 10, 23, 218, 231-232, 238, 245
Holy Spirit Parish, Newman Hall, 12, 211, 218, 219, 233-243, 257-280
Old St. Mary's Church, Paulist, San Francisco, 154, 236, 473, 474, 486, 497
St. Agnes Church, Concord, 382-384
St. Aloysius Church, Palo Alto, 47
St. Ann's Chapel, Palo Alto, 17, 84, 88, 90, 470
St. Anthony's Church, San Francisco, 36
Dining Room, 133
St. Augustine's Church, Pleasanton, 131, 138
St. Basil's Church, Vallejo, 148, 153, 155

churches,
Catholic,
California,
St. Boniface Church, San Francisco, Marian Library murals, 187-189
St. Dominic's Church, San Francisco, 325-326
St. Francis de Sales, Catholic Cathedral, Oakland, 110
St. Ignatius Church, San Francisco, 329, 336, 347
St. Jarleth's Church, Oakland, 149, 155
St. Leander's Church, Oakland, 110
St. Luke's Church, Stockton, 27
on Van Ness Avenue, 14, 147, 246
art museum, 211, 212
St. Patrick's Church, San Francisco, 244
St. Peter & Paul's Church, Salesian, San Francisco, 34
churches,
Catholic
California,
St. Philomene's Church, Sacramento, 348
St. Stephen's Church, San Francisco, 526
St. Thomas More, San Francisco, 486, 488
St. Vincent de Paul, San Francisco, 520, 521
Washington, D.C.,
National Shrine, 159, 177
Missouri,
Immaculate Conception Cathedral, Kansas City, 56-57, 71
Christian Science,
First Church, Belvedere, 245, 252, 292-294, 296-302, 340-341, 354, 386
First Church, Berkeley, 245, 252, 255-256, 294, 298, 496
First Church, Mill Valley, 302-305, 308
First Church, Menlo Park, 357-358
Episcopalian,
All Saints Church, Carmel, 486
All Saints Church, Palo Alto, 349
All Saints Church, Pasadena, 294, 304-305, 307, 314
Grace Cathedral, architecture, 144-148, 386
bookstore, 220
exhibition, "Church Art Today, 1960," 214
mural panels, 135-139
windows, 326
St. Aidan's, San Francisco, 479, 486, 489-490
St. Andrew's, Saratoga, 487
St. Mary the Virgin, San Francisco, 432, 454-458
St. Stephen's Church, Belvedere, 340, 346
Lutheran,
Church of the Good Shepherd, Concord, 122
churches,
Orthodox,
Greek Orthodox Church of the Ascension, Oakland, 366 passim, 446-450, 453-455
Greek Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross, Belmont, 371, 374, 380-381, 455
Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, San Francisco, 389
Presbyterian,
Calvary Presbyterian Church, San Francisco, 327-328, 458-461
First Presbyterian Church, San Rafael, 346
St. John's Presbyterian Church, Berkeley, 253
Unitarian,
Unitarian Church, Kensington, 386
Unitarian Church, Berkeley, 252
Unitarian Church, San Francisco, 250-251, 304-306, 354-356
colleges,
Dominican College of San Rafael, San Rafael, 40, 42, 53, 55, 326, 336
Holy Names College, Oakland, 84, 87, 95, 98-100, 330
St. Albert's the Great, Dominican College, Oakland, 325-326, 336
St. Mary's College, Moraga, CA, 524, 525
St. Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana, 86
St. Meinrad's Seminary, Benedictine southern Indiana, 190-191, 493
missions
Carmel, 1, 72, 190-195, 467, 468
San Jose, 326
monasteries
Mt. Angel Abbey, Benedictine, Oregon, 72-78, 84-85, 91-92
monasteries
Portsmouth Priory, Benedictine, Rhode Island, 164
St. Andrew's Priority, Benedictine, Palmdale, 66, 92-93, 113, 121, 224-226
St. John's, Benedictine, Minnesota, 465, 466
Cristo Rey, Carmelite, San Francisco, 149-150, 173, 218-219
Whitethorn, Cistercian Nuns of the Strict Observance, Our Lady of the Redwoods Monastery, 93
Poor Clares Monastery, Los Altos, 347
Ursuline Sisters Chapel, Santa Rosa, 28-29

other
Casa Maria Retreat, Santa Barbara, Sisters of the Immaculate Heart, 65, 66, 92
Fort Ord, First Brigade Chapel, 358, 361
Treasure Island Naval Station Chapel, 221-222
Hanna Boys Center, Sonoma County, 8-9, 12, 121, 232, 238, 246
Mills College, Oakland, Chapel, 304, 306-311
Riordan High School, Catholic, 154
Robert Louis Stevenson School Chapel, Pebble Beach, 388
Vallombrosa Retreat House, Menlo Park, 40, 66, 84, 88, 106

temples
Temple Beth Abraham, Oakland, 523, 561
Temple Beth El, San Mateo, 504, 531, 532
Temple Emanu-El, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 433-436, 463
Temple Emanu-El, San Francisco, 15, 205, 208, 434, 486, 488, 490-492, 496, 567
Temple Sinai, Oakland, 557-558, 560
Micaela Martinez DuCasse


Studied fresco painting with Victor Arnautoff in 1938, and sculpture with Ralph Stackpole in 1938–9, at San Francisco Art Institute.

Liturgical mural commission in 1939 at St. Boniface Church, San Francisco. Career in liturgical arts through mid-1950s. Founding member, Catholic Art Forum of San Francisco.

Member, art department faculty, Lone Mountain College; chairman, 1955–78.

Organized a survey course in history of California art, as a preview to the opening of the Oakland Museum in September of 1969. The research and knowledge obtained in preparing this course was background for the oral history interviewing of Helen Clark Oldfield.
Suzanne Bassett Riess

Grew up in Bucks County, Pennsylvania.
Graduated from Goucher College, B.A. in English, 1957.
Post-graduate work, University of London and the University of California, Berkeley, in English and history of art.

Natural science docent at the Oakland Museum.

Editor in the Regional Oral History Office since 1960, interviewing in the fields of art, cultural history, environmental design, photography, Berkeley and University history.