

Raymond Puccinelli

Sculptor: San Francisco to Florence

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Raymond Puccinelli

Sculptor: San Francisco to Florence

An interview conducted by Ruth Teiser,  
September 21, 1974, in Florence, Italy

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## INTERVIEW HISTORY

This interview with Raymond Puccinelli was suggested by Ruth Cravath, who gave us a note to carry to him on a visit to Florence, Italy, in the autumn of 1974. Catherine Harroun had known him and his wife, and many of their friends in San Francisco. On September 19, we called upon the Puccinellis in their large, high-ceilinged studio on Piazza Donatello, for a social visit and to ask about the possibility of an interview. Mr. Puccinelli agreed, and Mrs. Puccinelli indicated that their daughter's tape recorder could be put into action. Before leaving, Ruth Teiser took photographs in Mr. Puccinelli's stoneyard.

Late in the afternoon of September 21, we went again to the studio and conducted the interview. Mr. Puccinelli is a ready speaker, phrasing and sometimes rephrasing, showing echoes of his experience on the stage.

Since 1974, Mr. Puccinelli has kept us informed, by sending notices and catalogues, of his continuing work and exhibitions. They are filed with this interview.

Other interviews conducted by the Regional Oral History Office which mention Raymond Puccinelli are those of Ruth Cravath, Dorothy Wagner Puccinelli Cravath, and Valenti Angelo.

Catherine Harroun  
Ruth Teiser  
Interviewer-Editors

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INTERVIEW WITH RAYMOND PUCCINELLI

Date of Interview: 21 September, 1974

Interviewer: Ruth Teiser

Transcriber: Ann Weinstock

1 Tape, 2 Sides

RT. — When & where were you born?

R.P.: 1904, May 5. South of Market Street.

Teiser: Oh really. Where?

R.P.: <sup>?</sup> Jessie Street. And well, I don't know how long we stayed on Jessie Street, but we then moved to Henry Street in San Francisco.

Teiser: Who were your parents? What were their names?

R.P.: My father's name was Antonio; he could hardly speak any English. And my mother's name was Pearl.

Teiser: Had she come from Italy too?

R.P.: No, she hadn't. Well, anyhow, my mother was very interested in music. So I got kind of a musical start. She'd studied singing, and kept on singing all my childhood. German lieder music, and mostly Schubert, and old Italian music. Scarlatti and so on. <sup>SO</sup> that I consider a very good start. I met many musicians in my life, great composers and musicians, many, many of them. The first one, however, is interesting to me, and that is that I met, when I was eleven years old, Saint-Saens, the famous director; my mother went to see him for something about music, ~~was~~ which I didn't know.

Teiser: He was in San Francisco?

R.P.: He was in San Francisco in 19]5, and I still remember him.

And in 1910, I was six years old, and that's when I decided

R.P.: to be an artist. My mother would go out shopping or something in the street, and there was an artist who was just from Italy who could hardly speak English, and his name was Mateo Sandona<sup>?</sup>. One day he came up to her and said., "Madam, I've been watching you for some time, and you're the ideal Madonna. You look just like a Raphael--the first time I ever heard of Raphael--and I would like to paint or draw your head." So my mother said, "Well, you 'll have to ask my husband whether that <sup>would</sup> ~~will~~ be all right or not"[laughter] in the godd old-fashioned way, and ~~xxxx xxxxxx~~ so he was there that evening. And my father and he got along very well, and of course she posed, and so I had a brother <sup>that</sup> ~~who~~ that was much younger and he was the child, <sup>so</sup> and he did a mother and child, or <sup>a</sup>Madonna and child. I would play amongst his paints. He had some very large reproductions of paintings too, which I thought were wonderful. I watched him work, and he had a very nice studio, near St. Josph's Hospital, is that Buena Vista Avenue? Buena Vista Avenue, and it's probably still there.

And so, from then on, I wasn't quite satisfied with other work or doings; I wanted to draw and paint and so forth, although I'd done lots of drawing before. You know, child drawing, crayons<sup>?</sup> were always around. Well anyhow, I ~~fix~~ <sup>fixed</sup> myself to that, and I never gavé it up.

Teiser: Amazing.

R.P.: Then at school, I was considered very good at drawing. I got to high school, Lowell High School, which was very important in my life. I think my other schooling might have been slightly

R.P.: negative, but Lowell High School became positive in my life. And I have a great feeling for Lowell High School even to this day, because I was able to do many things which I wanted to do. It was a liberal arts high school, and I could-- well, to make it short, I had twelve years of history, twelve years of language, and twelve years of literature, English and American literature, in four years of high school. I didn't star too much in some of the classes, that is, in some others, but in these I was very good, and the teachers all wanted me to be a writer that ~~a~~ taught writing, and the painting and art teacher wanted me to be ~~an~~ an artist.

She--her name was Miss O'Malley, a very fat Irish (I suppose) dissenter, maybe from Ireland; she was ~~was~~ very Irish--Miss O'Malley, was my first real drawing teacher. We drew from plastic casts. And she named me Leonardo, from Leonardo da Vinci. Well, I'm ashamed to say I was already about fourteen, and I didn't know about Leonardo da Vinci, but I went to the library and I looked him up. [Laughter.] Well, just last night I was <sup>still</sup> reading the words of Leonardo da Vinci <sup>right here,</sup> sitting right ~~je~~ here. So I'm still with Leonardo da Vinci too.

Then of course, at the end of a school year or two, I don't remember, she sent my drawings in for an all-California exhibition of high school students, and my drawings were sent to every high school in California in exhibition. And that I suppose was quite encouraging.



Teiser: What kind of subjects ~~were~~<sup>were</sup> you drawing?

R.P.: Oh, this was mostly plaster casts, or just figures, or a head, ~~or~~ or a lion or something. It was kind of academic, I would say, but it was really the best academic training I ever had~~k~~, because it was very solid. She had studied ~~at~~ here in Florence, and was quite crazy about Italian art, and since I was Italai~~n~~ she thought that was just wonderful. So, it was a big help.

Then the English teachers were also very big helps to me. Because ~~though~~<sup>o</sup> I really have even to this day an excellent background in English and American literature. So that although I did not take any university courses, in these, I would ~~not~~ draw back from discussing these things with a university professor, which I have done *0206* I'm not saying this to brag; I'm talking about how good Lowell High School was.

And in history, I had a very good background. These things helped me in later life, these twelve years and twelve years and twelve years, because later on when I began becoming a professor, for instance when I taught art history, at Queens College, I was able to use my historical, literary as well as my art background. So that I became a very able teacher in art history at Queens College. So I'm very thank~~ful~~ for these things.

Teiser: Did you go to the San Francisco Art Institute or did you just go--

R.P.: Well, that is something difficult to answer because I went there for such a short time. It was on Market Street at the time when I went, and I went for a very short time. I was--

Teiser: Right after high school? Right after Lowell High was that?

R.P.: No, it was a few years later. While I was still in Lowell High School, during my last year, I don't know how I did it now, I don't know where I got the energy, it's incredible--during the last year I had a try-out at the Greek Theatre at Berkeley, California, and much to my astonishment was given a scholarship for the school of the theatre. And that's how I met this Hedwig<sup>a</sup> Reicher<sup>ch</sup> that I mentioned.

Teiser: Hedwig<sup>e</sup>--

R.P.: Reicher, really, Reicher; I can't pronounce German. And many other great names of the theatre of that time. Maurice Brown was the head of this group; Maurice Brown<sup>c</sup>, Irving Pichel, many other great people of the time including John Co<sup>w</sup>pper Powys, and many more famous people but less good. And <sup>the</sup> less famous ones. Though I later learned just now here in Italy I learned that Maurice Brown<sup>e</sup> ~~is~~ did some of the greatest things that have ever been done in England in the theatre. A man of the theatre just told me that; he looked at me in astonishment when I told him that I was a scholarship pupil of Maurice Brown<sup>e</sup>. But I didn't quite realize that at the time. I knew he was marvelous, and I hero-worshipped him and all of these people.

Well, so I went to high school, and in the night I acted in plays and things, and at the University of California there were the Wheeler Hall Players, and I acted in a number of things there.

Teiser: This was while you were still in high school?

R.P.: Yes. But then when I finished high school, I went more deeply into this same thing. And acted in ancient Greek--all in English, of course--Greek plays, and various other things. Modern plays, Paul Claudel, and different modern ~~were~~ writers of the time. Many others, there're so many of them I can't remember, what we did.

The first play I acted in the professional theatre with Sam Hume, and it was quite successful. I got a good write-up in the newspaper, but I didn't have a speaking part. This school of the theatre was quite wonderful; it's too bad that San Francisco couldn't go on with it. I later found out that the scholarship I got was paid for by a wonderful old gentleman, poet, who I met many years later by the name of Charles Erskine Scott Wood. And the other half was paid for, and I didn't know it till many, many years later, by Albert Bender. They didn't advertise this, and we didn't know it, but they were responsible for this wonderful experiment in the theatre of San Francisco which is probably now forgotten. But not by me.

Well, then when this was over and ~~we~~ they left San Francisco, I also used ~~at~~ work. I worked for my father a great deal.

Teiser: At what?

R.P.: He had a store. Groceries, and so forth. And even while working in the theatre and doing all these things, I had certain things to do in the store. I did all of the buying of the groceries, for instance, for many years. So I became an expert in the grocery business, actually. Through my childhood right through. And as time went on I ran it more and more. My brother got older, and he came in, and we used to trade between the two of us because he was a musician, very talented musician. He died too young, but anyhow, he was a very talented musician. He was good enough; I know, when he was about twelve years old to play in a quartet with Yehudi Menuhin, Isaac Stern, an elderly, elderly for us at ~~the~~ <sup>that</sup> time--he was probably forty-five--cellist ~~with~~ <sup>of</sup> the symphony whose name I've forgotten and then my brother. They didn't play for the public, but they had this quartet which was very good, I heard it only once. They only played in their homes. But still he was that good.

Well anyhow, he joined in in the business to help my father. My father was an excellent businessman, but everybody cheated him. And so we had to watch out to see that my father wasn't cheated; that was a very important part of the business. [Laughter.] It's true.

Teiser: And you were able to--did you continue your interest in art--

R.P.: In all this time? Yes.

Teiser: Were you drawing all the time?

R.P.: All the time, that's right. Whenever a customer would stand there and wonder what they were doing, I would draw on the

R.P.: wrapping paper. Yeah, I drew constantly. <sup>9</sup> And one time at the school of the theatre, I had already studied with a pupil of Rudolph Schaeffer's, very little, but not much <sup>?</sup> named Brewer. And I got an inkling of what modern design was, and it was very ~~different~~ <sup>difficult</sup> for me to get on to at first because it was so different from drawing from the life thing. However, during the school of the theatre set-up, there was a man who deserved special mention <sup>?</sup> because he continued in my life, and his name was Rudolph Schaeffer. He was in charge of the theatre stage sets. He had studied in Germany and in Austria, and well, I don't know, he was extremely influential in my life, but I think now not without reason because he was a marvelous teacher, and perhaps now forgotten as a stage designer because stage designs are only there for the month or whatever they're there, but I still remember his stage designs, and costumes and handlings.

So I became very interested through him in also that part of the theatre. You see, the idea of this school was not to make an actor or a stage designer or a dancer or whatever it was, but to make a <sup>2.0387</sup> foreman of the theatre with the idea more or less of what Gordon Craig would have believed in. And some of the people in this group had worked with Gordon Craig. Or with Adolph <sup>^</sup> Appia, who was ultra-modern at the time.

I got introduced also to the dance at that time, which I've never left, and which still influences my work, that is the

R.P.: movement of the human body.

Teiser: Through some one person?

R.P.: Well, the first one was-- what was her name?

Teiser: Ann <sup>Mun</sup>~~Wood~~stock?

R.P.: No, no, the first one.

Teiser: Betty Horst?

R.P.: Betty Horst was the first one. Betty Horst may still be in San Francisco, I don't know, I haven't heard from her. But she was with the Dennishawn group, and she ~~was~~ represented Dennishawn in San Francisco. Well, I took dance lessons also, there, and I wasn't any good at the dance, but nevertheless I got ideas of movement. And many people now notice in my work that there's the feeling of dance and movement within the work. Well it probably comes from these early days, because nothing comes from nothing, let's say; everything comes from something. And so, that very beginning which I got....Later on, a number of years later, I met someone who was much more influential to me in the movement of the body and the dance and so forth, and that was Ann <sup>Mun</sup>~~Mun~~stock.

Ann <sup>Mun</sup>~~Mun~~stock, ~~was~~ I can say, ~~was~~ was probably what could be called a great person. In personality, in ideal, and idea, in understanding of the human body, Ann was very inspirational. I did as a matter of fact a very small sculpture of her.

Teiser: You did?

R.P.: Yes.

Teiser: Where is it?

R.P.: I'd like to know. I'd like you to find ~~y~~out.

Teiser: I'll try.

R.P.: I'd like to know where it is. I'd like to have some good photographs of it. That was one of my early things of a dancer, but not dancing. Because dancing is something in movement, and dancer is another thing. But anyhow, that was one of my first things, of anything to do with the dance. She very generously posed for me, and so many years later I gave it to her.

Teiser: So she owned it.

R.P.: She owned it, yes, but now she's passed away.

Teiser: Yes, and so is her husband.

R.P.: Yes, so I don't know.

Well, anyhow, one thing always leads to another in life, if you'll let it, and from the theatre I worked in the stage set thing and I got quite interested in it. And I don't know what I could have done in the theatre. I'm not sure, everyone said I was talented, but they tell me that about everything I ever tried, and people like to encourage young people, so you never know. So anyhow, I left the acting, quite a bit, here and there I did some things, and then the children's theatre of San Francisco and a woman by the name of Cubby<sup>1</sup> got ~~ak~~ a hold of me, and through the insistence of Ruth Cravatt, <sup>Donna Bothwell</sup> ~~Dore Batwell~~ and Dorothy Wagner, they made me act in these plays. And so, I did many parts ~~ax~~ for the children's theatre. That is, this

R.P.: is acting. And I'd help with the stage sets, which these three girls did. And they were very good, and very marvelous stage sets. I doubt that anything has been done since for children's theatre up to us. They were imaginative and creative and so forth, and they had learned from Rudolph Schaeffer because they had all studied with him, and so forth. And they made the most marvelous masks of animals and different things for these different plays. I did the prince in Cinderella and the King of Hearts in another one, and so forth. I had a fairly good time doing that. Mrs. <sup>Cuddy</sup>~~Cubby~~ was quite good too. It's too bad that all of these things became lost, that they stopped. It was lack of funds, basically.

About this time Hedwiga Reicher called me up and said,

0485? "Oh ~~come on and see you~~ <sup>how come I don't see you</sup>, you must come to see me," so I went to see her. She said, "The reason I wanted to see you was I had a phone call from Max Reinhardt," and he wanted some young person in the theatre that she would know that would know something about theatre mechanics and so forth, and that would also help in the working out, the working of the miracle, and I would be paid.\* And I surely needed money. Because by this time I was very tired of the grocery thing, really tired. I was over twenty, I can't remember exactly, maybe twenty-one, and by that time ~~was~~ I was very, very dis--you know, I didn't want to stay at the grocery at all. I told my father every week that I would stay with him till he could get somebody else, but he didn't try to get <sup>anyone</sup> ~~somebody~~ else of course.



R.P.: And so, I kind of left the grocery business, and I went to help just for the buying of the stuff, and my brother ran it, much to the dismay of my father. I felt very bad doing that to him, but I just couldn't see myself doing that any longer. Because I suffered really doing it; the more I did it, the more I suffered.

Max Reinhardt offered the possibility of making money. I went to see him; I didn't meet him at the time, he had so many assistants, you couldn't count them. He had an assistant for everything. When he came <sup>into</sup> the room, the auditorium, he was surrounded by ten or fifteen people always.

Teiser: Where was this? In San Francisco?

R.P.: This was San Francisco. They did The Miracle in San Francisco. This was the San Francisco production. They had marvelous stage sets done by Norman Bel Geddes, and costumes, they were really good.

I was on the stage the whole time for The Miracle, either behind the wings or in front of the wings. I think I was the only person who had that honor. Although there may have been one other, I can't remember now. I think there was another person in the other side of the stage that had a similar job to mine. And that was to keep the thing going. When the crowd did shouting, for instance, and I would do something like raise my hand, they'd all begin going "Ooh" or something. [Laughter.]

I never will forget the actors in that, because there were

R.P.: some very fine actors. They were all from Austria or Germany. And I never will forget one very great actor by the name of Fritz Reiner. He was really very great. He did the dance of death, he did two or three parts, and each one of them was truer to itself than one can imagine. He did the part of the bishop or archbishop, and I memorized all his speeches in Latin.

[Laughter.]

Teiser: But even that didn't ~~project~~ project you then into a theatre career.

R.P.: No, no, no, I had decided. But I needed money, and it was very interesting to do this too. So I made some money at that, and I put every cent of it that I could aside. Max Reinhardt paid me more money than I expected. He was pretty generous, I guess, because I was just a boy. So I had enough money. And in the meantime, without me, my father got disgusted running the business, and he sold out. He said to me one day, "I'm about to go to Europe, to Italy, and would you like to go along?" I had some money, saved of my own money, and so I said, "Yes, I'll go along."

So we went, and we landed in the island of Madeira, and we stayed there a while. Then we went on to Algeria, the city of <sup>0568</sup> and then we landed over in Italy. That was a very nice trip, by way of New York--I'd never been to New York before that--and New York was ice cold, because it was about January when we left San Francisco beautiful weather. We got to cold New York,

R.P.: and then we got to the beautiful warm island of Madeira, and then Algeria, and <sup>v</sup>ery nice Italy. So that's how I got started in Italy. That was the year 1927; I remember that. Definitely. January 1927 we left <sup>for</sup> Italy. We left San Francisco, and took a trip across the continent in a train. We left New York after a few days; it was terribly cold.

Teiser: Did you come to Lucca then?

R.P.: Yes.

Teiser: Other places first in Italy though?

R.P.: Oh, we stayed in Genoa a bit, and my grandfather was there to meet us. We liked each other immediately, so he became the big hero of my whole family. [Laughter.] He was an architect and an engineer, and a very cultured man. Unlike my father, not at all interested in business, finance or money. He thought it was all foolishness, which I still think [laughter]. I really do too, I mean I can't get accustomed to anything that's involved with money or fame or fortune or anything else.

Teiser: Did your grandfather encourage you to be an artist?

R.P.: He had studied art when he was young. He was quite wealthy when he was young, very wealthy, but then he spent the money little by little, because he only wanted to live a cultural life. His parents died when he was nineteen years old, so he immediately got married. He'd already studied architecture, but

R.P.: he went on studying architecture, and then engineering.

And so he studied all his life, the eternal student, which I find myself to be. I'm still studying everything, like Dante, and perspective, and mathematics of art, and history of art; I got piles of books there, I study all night. I don't know, I've just been that way all my life. Probably people inherit some things in a certain line of <sup>genes</sup> ~~genes~~. I don't know whether it's true or not, but I seem to have inherited more from him than directly from my father, for instance, or from anyone else that I know of.

Teiser: Did you stay here long enough to really get to know him then?

R.P.: Oh yes, we lived with him, and I went back in 1928.

Teiser: You were here a year.

R.P.: Yes. I lived in Lucca, and he gave me a studio. I had a beautiful place there for a studio, and that was my first studio. I got models, and I worked from models. I learned quite a bit, because of the museums and the works of art.

Teiser: Were you doing sculpture yet?

R.P.: Yes.

Teiser: When did you start doing sculpture?

R.P.: It was just kind of like a side thing. When I started sculpture, I'm not sure exactly. ~~DD~~ During the school of the theatre thing, we made constructions with Rudolph Schaeffer. They were kind of like half-way between sculpture and constructions. It was influenced by things of the time; the Russian constructionists and so forth, which I see has now become very important again.

R.P.: But not improved upon one bit today, in fact I don't think they're quite as good. I saw an article just last week in a very recent San Francisco newspaper of some enormous constructions that they've been making, but I don't think they're very well designed. Compared to what we were thinking of.

Teiser: You mean these great curtains and that sort of thing?

R.P.: Well, it's more--I call it the stick thing now, beams and things like that. But I learned a great deal doing those, so I'm not being critical or anything else, because everything I've done I feel has led up to what I do. So I'm not complaining.

And then I learned abstract painting and so forth with Rudolph Schaeffer. I didn't do much sculpture; I did some abstract sculpture, we could call it. It would be nearer now to what Henry Moore's would be. But I'd never seen a Henry Moore, but I suppose it's the same sort. I was influenced at that time by <sup>0658</sup> Archipenko I think, and you know, that type of thing. There was nothing else around that I really-- Rudolph Schaeffer was the big\* thing, you see. And I

<sup>0662</sup> Rudolph Schaeffer, and helped him. I did lots of work for Rudolph Schaeffer, by the way. As I said, he was a marvelous decorator. I learned how to make furniture and different things with him because he was a craftsman, and then he had other craftsmen around him. He got commissions to do different things. I helped him in the house for Mrs. Cuddy, to decorate her house. He was quite marvelous in interior decoration.

R.P.: It was very modern at the time. He did things which I think would still stand up, mostly. You know, it was good solid design, because he had studied architecture.

Teiser: Did you start working with him that closely before you had come to Italy, before you came to Lucca?

R.P.: Yes.

Teiser: I see. So you brought that much with you.

R.P.: Oh, I brought quite a bit with me, yes. Yes, I did, I guess I skipped there. Because with Rudolph Schaeffer I also did various other jobs, like, oh, decorate Christmas trees. Let's see now, in the year 1925, that I remember, I helped him. I only worked for him; I didn't do designing. I worked for him on an enormous project of all of the Emporium store windows, which were all glass at that time, and I helped him to do those and various things, I modeled some things. I think I modeled some little masks; they may have been some of my first sculpture. I also did some theatre masks-- that was really my first sculpture--with Rudolph Schaeffer. I liked that very much, doing these masks. So I wanted to do some more of that. That's how I got started in sculpture really. Doing these masks, and doing these different things with Rudolph Schaeffer, and gluing things and so forth. Papier mâché.

I did learn a great deal from him. He never talked much about sculpture as such, although he had some wonderful books there, of Oriental sculpture, and similar things which I didn't know at the

R.P.: time and which of course attracted me very much. The sculpture of India. He used to take myself and maybe one or two other students through Chinatown, and we might have dinner. Then we would go--and he knew all the Chinese dealers; at that time San Francisco was a center, even for museum buying. Many of the pieces are in museums that were bought in San Francisco. These Chinese dealers, who were very nice people always, and very proud to show their wares, would take us, on account of Rudolph Schaeffer, into the basements. And would show us these piled one upon the other Buddhas and horses and so forth, Ming this and that, and of course that had me just-- out of my head, I might say. This was a part of an enormous experience. This Chinatown thing was--I can't leave that. I can't leave Chinese philosophy either. At that time I already got to know quite a few Chinese people. But later on when I came back to San Francisco, I had my studio in Chinatown, I got to know lots of Chinese. But maybe I'll leave the Chinese out for now.

Anyhow, I got to Italy. Then I traveled up and down, alone mostly.

Teiser: Did you come to Florence and look at the museums there?

R.P.: Oh yes, of course. That wasn't very far away. Then my grandfather had an enormous villa very near. The Pescia <sup>0138</sup>  
 abpve . My grandfather was a man who knew practically everybody at the time, in the arts. You know, the writers and the poets, and the artists. So it was very nice knowing him. He

would recite Dante, and we would discuss poetry, and so it was a wonderful thing for me.

Then I took Italian lessons from an Italian writer up there who was the director of the library at Lucca, and learned to translate. I translated a lot of English poetry into Italian. For many years I understand that the translation that I made of "~~O wild west wind~~" by Shelley was used in the schools here, the translation I made into Italian: "O vento selvaggio" 0752

*Ode to the West Wind?*

I still remember, because I tried to get the music of it. See, having studied a lot of poetry at Lowell High School, I was prepared to do such a thing. The teachers all thought I was a poet, see, that is, in the English department. So I wrote a lot of poetry when I was very young. So it helped me to translate this. That was used, and then I did other translations of Italian, mostly poetry. My grandfather used to say, "Yes, you know poetry, but when you get in the streetcar, you don't know where you're going." [Laughter.] And that's true you know, I don't know how to say many common things sometimes, but I can recite them in the altitudes of poetry. I'm the same that way in other languages. I memorized a great deal of Shakespeare when I was young. Whole plays, a whole part of Namlet, a whole part of Romeo and Juliet. So I still recite them. When I'm teaching, when I used to teach, I used to recite poetry to back up these things. I'm saying this because I think this early background was very important; to know Shakespeare, to know this,



R.P.: to know that, to know the other, ~~wo~~ that you can compare. Because I think--I don't think, I'm sure of it--that an artist that does not know just one art, his little sculpture, or his little painting or his little poetry, but if he knows at least quite a bit about all of them, he's a greater artist. I didn't know at the time that--well, I got the idea really from Leonardo. "Il pittore <sup>0792</sup> universale." The painter must be universal. So I started on that background. That's why I always worked on these different things and took these different opportunities basically, because I always kept those things in my mind. This one little sentence. And I never lost them. I didn't want to lose them. I studied music too. At the school of the theatre I had piano lessons too. The school of the theatre was really something. <sup>0790</sup> was a very good teacher. Piano, he was a very good pianist. So I learned something about the piano.

Teiser: Did you miss San Francisco when you ~~were~~ were here in Italy? Did you want to get back?

R.P.: I didn't have time to miss anything; I was on the go day and night. I got up during the whole summer of 1927, I never missed getting up at 4 a.m. Once. Because that was when the light began, and that's when I began to work. Then I worked till ten o'clock. And then if I weren't traveling, I got to see ~~w~~ everything, and running around, until finally I got very ill. I got very sick, and

R.P.: that's when they took me back to San Francisco, as soon as they could get me well enough.

Teiser: I see.

R.P.: But I never did get well, and I'm still on diets from the same illness.

Teiser: You <sup>have</sup> certainly led a vigorous life for someone <sup>whose</sup> health...

R.P.: That's true, but I have to be very careful, because I have a liver condition which I got in those days. I was kind of foolish. I'd go to Venice and not eat any lunch and all kinds of foolish things. I had to see everything.

Here in Italy, I decided not to do any more abstract art. I made that decision. I decided I learned a lot from it; I learned about color, ~~and~~ I learned about this and that and the other, but seeing the things here and seeing things from over centuries, not just one century like the twentieth or the nineteenth, but having seen things from the darkest ages of man down through our time, I decided that I didn't want to do any more abstract art. So I stopped. Although I had done some figurative as I said before in San Francisco, my main work there originally was the abstract. So I left the abstract, and from then on I worked only with the figure. It was somewhat of a struggle I must say at first, because it was a battle between the two still left someplace in my mind. So I had to struggle, and I really began over again, if such a thing exists as over again, because I had all the other knowledge, which you don't lose.

R.P.: I began all over again, working from models, and working from models, and working from models here in Italy. I had a young man pose for me constantly who had a marvelous figure as I remember, he <sup>was</sup> ~~had~~ very, very muscular. And I did lots of things in clay. I had previously done, you see, from life, with Ruth Cravath in San Francisco <sup>0838</sup> I had done things in clay too. It was a continuation of that line that I went into.

I didn't have any instructor here at all in sculpture. I did know a sculptor that was a friend of my grandfather's and a friend of Puccini's, who was also a good friend of theirs, the composer, Puccini was already dead as I remember, but I knew his son then, and he was doing a portrait of Puccini, the sculptor was when he died. So I worked on that a bit. That was the first marble I think I ever touched. I worked on this head of Puccini--it was a relief. He let me work on it, and he gave me clay, but ~~...~~ then I had right near by my own studio. It was a marvelous situation that I lived in. It was just outside of the city walls of Lucca. Do you know the walls of Lucca?

Teiser: We were there yesterday.

R.P.: Did you go round the walls by any chance? One of those walls--you know they have ~~these~~ little barracks houses, I don't know what they were originally--in one of those was the studio that the sculptor had. Just below those, across, was where I worked. Across that little river. It's called il fosso <sup>0840</sup>. The ditch. My grandfather had a very nice place there.

R.P.:           Anyhow, I traveled all over Italy. And worked and traveled, and worked and traveled, and worked and traveled. He also had a place--I'm basically, I'm quite a solitary person really, and so he had a place in the mountains, at Pescia, Collodia really. I used to go there quite a bit. And draw, and draw, and draw. And draw from trees--I had already drawn many trees in Buena Vista Park, in San Francisco. Along with a young English artist by the name of Frank Ro<sup>?</sup>cher. And we used to draw trees and trees and trees in Buena Vista Park. So it was a continuation. I even tell students now when they begin sculpture, I tell them "You have some homework to do. You go out and draw the biggest and strongest trees you can find. It's good sculpture." It's true, too; it's marvelous. Some of them have done it, and with great success, while others don't want to do it, strangely enough. But some of them have very great success at drawing trees.

Teiser:       So you returned to San Francisco with still more experience?

R.P.:       Then I returned to San Francisco, yes. 1928, I forget the exact time. Early, I think the first part of it.

I got a studio on Hotaling Place, which I kept for fifteen years. I got married at the same time to Dorothy Wagner, who had worked with the stage sets. That's when I got to know her. I got to know her through Dor<sup>?</sup> Bothwell. I had this studio on Hotaling Place, and I worked and worked and worked. And I never went home very much. I just worked and worked, day and night. George Harris, a young artist friend of mine at that time, a

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R.P.: student, said that he used to go by and see the midnight lights there on all the time, and he's say, "There goes Puccinelli," he said it just-- he was here visiting, not long ago. There he's still at it. I used to work all day and night.

Teiser: Mainly in sculpture?

R.P.: Yes, well, drawing. We also used to draw in groups. That would be Ruth Cravath, maybe Dork Bothwell, these different people. Lots of artists, or young artists, or students would come around. I did that drawing in one of those groups--the top one. It's just on wrapping paper, San Francisco wrapping paper, that drawing. Yes, that's one of my very early drawings, done in those days, probably 1929. That's about what I was doing. We had models, and we'd sit around. We'd go into different peoples' studios. One of the people was Adeline Kent's studio; we used it a lot. And then I had my studio; we used that part of the time, and different people, we would use. And Jay and Edna Ed/0 Risling would come, various other people. Some of them quite good artists. Many of them became well-known, and some of them who were just as good never became known. Anyhow, I drew and drew and drew and drew from life.

Teiser: By then were you getting any commissions?

R.P.: At this time--my dating is a little difficult from now on. I got a job immediately at that time. I can't say exactly the date, but at that time I got a job. I decided I had to have money, so

R.P.: I got a job. I had tried in Italy, and before in the United States, and then again in San Francisco, I had tried to get apprenticeship jobs, because I felt that I didn't have enough craft to be called a sculptor. And I wanted to know the craft, and not just chop or something. And I didn't think the art schools seemed to give that very much, and so I didn't go to the art school, and besides I couldn't afford it, I didn't have any money at that time at all. There was none left. So I went around, I couldn't get any jobs, and finally I found a shop on Sutter Street around Polk Street, a furniture shop. He did a lot of fake antiques as well as not fake, modernesque let's call it, antiques. He was a Portuguese from Portugal, and he had his brother-in-law and his relatives there, and they were all Portuguese. And I went in there and I asked if he needed any assistants there, any help or anything I could do to learn wood-carving. I felt that any craft that I could learn that would be a trade--I didn't have any high ideas about art to that extent that I could do a masterpiece right off, which I find the students today all think that they're going to do a masterpiece in six months. I was just the opposite, I must say. I felt that I must do this, and I was already about twenty-four years old, I think. Anyhow he took me. He said you'll have to work six months free, and then we'll see how it goes. [Laughter.] Well, I thought, it's worthwhile, six months free, it'd be free lessons. I'd have to pay for

R.P.: lessons. So I lived on hard-boiled eggs and bread, and a couple of things like that. Eggs were cheap then [laughter]. I went to a bakery that sold bread a week old, and they gave me a <sup>full</sup> bag for five cents. It was dry bread. I still like dry bread better than fresh bread [laughter], I guess from those days. I really do like it better, don't I?

I worked and worked and worked at that job. I had to be there at seven in the morning and I went home at seven at night, a twelve-hour day, and my back really got pretty bad. I began to get sick a few times, but I didn't let anyone know. I stayed the six months, and I got along pretty well. He made me do patterns, the egg<sup>?</sup> and dart pattern, these patterns, and I just did miles of these patterns. I guess he made money on that because I really began to turn it out. There's not much to doing that, surprisingly enough. You know, you can learn it in a few days and then just turn it out and turn it out. Then I began doing more and more important work. Then after six months he gave me eleven dollars a week, so I had eleven dollars a week.

In the meantime I had this studio, which I'd just about gotten that simultaneously more or less, and I began fixing it up. I had as partner, quite a wonderful fellow I think. His name was Clifford White. Clifford White had just come back from Mexico, and had worked as assistant<sup>s</sup> to numerous artists, lucky artists is all I can say. One of the artists was Diego

R.P.: Rivera, and the other one he was working for at the time was Ralph Stackpole. He wasn't a great artist himself; he was a craftsman even in his own work, but it was very decent work that he did. He had some good ideas for fixing up an old Chinese blue jeans factory. Fifteen Hotaling Place, upstairs. Well, that place was really in a mess when those Chinese left it, with oil over the floor from their machinery and the whole thing, from their cooking rooms <sup>and everything</sup> -- it had been used since the ~~early~~ earliest days of San Francisco until 1928 I think. It was in awful condition, so Clifford and I set about in our spare time to fix it up.

And we fixed it up. We made four studios, each <sup>one</sup> of them about this big. ¶ So Clifford White had worked for Diego Rivera, and then in 1929 about at the same time (it's hard timing this) I stayed over a year with the wood-carver. The wood-carver was a marvelous wood-carver craftsman, and he had an Italian with him that would come around only part time because he worked for other people. He was very expensive so this Portuguese didn't want to spend much money so he only got him part time. So I learned a lot also from the Italian; his name was <sup>1009</sup> Continola, he was from southern Italy.

The Italian took a deep interest in me, and wanted to help me. So I learned a great deal from these two men. I learned how to handle tools. How you take a tool in your hand, how you handle it. I began by never pointing a tool toward yourself and so forth and went right through it. I must give them credit; I must give the Portuguese credit. But he was



R.P.: really very hard to deal with and was always angry at his brother-in-laws, and especially at me. Hurrying me up and hollering at me and standing ~~by~~ me, and well, I can only say, when I was in Brazil later I understood lots of Brazilian from being there. And I told the people in Brazil, don't swear before me because I know every swear word in Portuguese. [Laughter.] He used to swear, my goodness. They're not too different from Italian swear-words, most of them, strangely enough. If you know one, you know the other, more or less; I mean it's the same world.

Diego Rivera came to San Francisco to do a mural at the Stock Exchange. They were building the Stock Exchange, and though I didn't know I'd <sup>had</sup> such good luck-- I no longer could stand this man, <sup>any more</sup> hollering at me. Because I must admit, I made a mistake on a piece of wood, I really did. I went to him with the piece of wood, and I said, "I'm very sorry Mr. Viéra; I made an error and I sliced this too much, I slipped, and I want to pay you for that." And instead of that, he threw the piece of wood on the floor and turned red and began hollering, his hair all over and so forth, and made such a scene that I didn't think I could stand it any longer because it made me nervous. Standing around me to watch; he'd watch how you'd work you know, <sup>right</sup>, over your shoulder. Most of the time <sup>he</sup> it was pretty good because I didn't make many mistakes, but this one mistake--it was awful. Or maybe good, because there's

R.P.: always good in the awful, I always feel. So I said, "Well, Mr. Viera, good-bye." He owed me about half a week's wages, in the middle of the week. I didn't stop for the wages or anything, I picked up my coat, the lunch that I had there, it was the morning, and I left Mr. Viera's forever.

A few days later--I used to eat in the a restaurant there some place, lunch time--I was walking away from my lunch, and I met my old friend ~~Jack Schneer~~ <sup>Jacques Schnier</sup>. He says, "Oh, I was just thinking of looking you up." And I says, "Oh," you know. And he said, "I was just to see an architect who called <sup>for</sup> me by the name of Ken Weber, and he had a commission for me. But I know that you're a <sup>f</sup>aster and more able wood-carver than I am (which was pretty nice of another sculptor to say to another sculptor, I must say), so he said "I already gave him your name, and if you go there this afternoon I think you'll have a commission." [Laughter.] You can imagine what that meant. And that was my first commission, with Ken Weber from Germany who spoke some kind of a broken way English. He spoke English pretty well, but he'd always make German constructions. It was for <sup>r</sup>Somer and <sup>h</sup>Kaufmann's. It was an enormous job for me, but I knew how to carve, I could really go. He wanted this thing carved, but it was a big job to be done

*Jacques Schnier*

*Sommer and Kaufmann ✓*

R.P.: in a short time. But I said I'd do it.

So I worked and worked and worked doing this job, handles for Somer and Kaufman for Roos Brothers. It was in Roos Brothers store, but it was Somer and Kaufman, It began to be where I just couldn't do it alone; it was too much carving in the amount of time. So I got the Italian to come and help me late at night. So he came and helped me. And then I saw Ken Weber, and he says, "Well, how's the work going," or something like that. And I said, "It's going all right, but it's pretty hard to get it done in that amount of time." That's an awful amount of space that I had to cover, with very little pay really. But I didn't mind. I'm very strange; if I'm saying I'll have something done, I have it done. I've never missed on a job yet. So I said something about the pay was kind of low for me. He said "Somer and Kaufman are nice people; I'll speak to them about it." They came around, Somer and Kaufman, they were the heads of it, came around the next day to look at the work as it was being done. I had in the building there with me in the studio Ben Cunningham, who became a fairly well-known painter and who else... somebody else was there...

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R.P.: No, some other young artist there. Anyhow, I said "Please--they did wood-carving, you <sup>see</sup> know--take a chisel in

R.P.: your had<sup>dy</sup> and act as if you're working, because I told this man that I have a worker, and he only comes after hours." He would work way into the night, to twelve o'clock at night. He worked a full day's work but in the night. But I couldn't explain that so easily. Then Cunningham's standing there, going like this with a chisel [laughter]. Kaufman<sup>M.A.M.</sup> said, "We have to stick a couple of hundred dollars on this at least." So the job paid for itself anyhow.

Teiser: Let me<sup>return</sup> this tape.

[End of Tape 1, side 1]

Begin Tape 1, side 2

R.P.: Well, I could make <sup>^</sup> dollars in my pocket, that was a lot of money. You know, it was more money in those days too then it is now. So I felt quite rich.

Then there came--I might have donw some other small commissions, I don't remember--but then there came an exposition, a decorative arts exposition in San Francisco. That was another time that I got comm<sup>i</sup>ssions. Speaking of comm<sup>i</sup>ssions, that was about 1929, they had a big decorative arts exposition. It was well put up and very well--and that's when I became madly interested (I was always interested, but madly interested) in hand-woven fabrics. Because I met someone who was doing hand-woven fabrics there. Well, I could talk about it all night, so I'd

R.P.: , better stop now. So I was invited to show, and Dorothy Wagner was given a job to design furniture for this. She was a good designer as well as a painter. She designed a breakfast set, kitchen <sup>you know</sup> side set. Then I designed some big panels for this, in this section of the exposition. You know that exposition brought the possibility of clients. We got write-ups in newspapers, and I was written up . Somehow or other an interior decorator got in contact with me by the name of Dorothy Truebell. She had lots of work for me to do, and I worked for her for a long, long time.

I worked at sculpture ~~at~~ on the side--clay sculpture, portraits, models, drawings. I was able to pay--I didn't make much, of course--but I was able to pay my way doing wood-carving of decorative furniture. I designed a lot of furniture. I also in 1928 or '29, the two years are mixed up with me, I can't tell--I also designed furniture as I told you before, for the Stock Exchange. That was an early commission.

Teiser: You said it was in the Stock Exchange club?

R.P.: Club rooms, yes. It may be still there. I designed all of the furniture in those club rooms at that time. And made the models in Ivory soap so that I would have an exact model to show aside from the drawings, because Sloane\* and Company carried out the furniture, and the people that carried it out weren't very pleased with

W + J Sloane

R.P.: the idea of an artist designing their furniture. So I had to convince them with these little models that it would work [laughter]. So it worked too. <sup>[Timothy] Flueger</sup> ~~Flueger~~, later on--he was the architect--a few years later (I didn't know that he appreciated the furniture so much) said, "You know, you should copyright that furniture and make more of it, you could make a big thing of it commercially." But I never did it. I didn't know that he appreciated it that much. He was a very strange man. He ~~didn't~~ didn't say much; he never talked appreciatively. He always said, "Oh, what the hell you doing that for." [Laughter.] But he liked it I suppose. But he was all right.

Teiser: Was it he who brought <sup>Rivera</sup> there? Or who was it?

R.P.: Well, as far as I know, the person that brought Rivera there-- one of the people I can say, and I think the person, was a man by the name of William <sup>Gerstle</sup> ~~Gerstall~~. His wife was related to Gertrude Stein, that same family. I know he paid a lot of the bills that Diego had 0180, and he was quite interested. But I can't remember the exact details. At that time I got to know <sup>Gerstle</sup> ~~Gerstall~~ too, and his wife.

Well, when Rivera came around, I got to know him pretty well. Number one, he used one of the studios we had, <sup>one of those</sup> ~~he used~~ four studios, for enormous drawings, which were about--

Teiser: How big is this room? You mentioned that the four studios were about the same size as this one.

R.P.: Yes. This is about--

Teiser: Thirty feet by thirty feet?

R.P.: Thirty by thirty, and about twenty-five high. Something like that. They weren't too different in size.

Teiser: So it was large enough for Rivera--

R.P.: Large enough for Rivera to do the enlarged drawings. But Rivera worked in a special way, and this begins another epoch in my life, the number one that--well, the first teacher who was the woman in high school, the second was Rudolph Schaeffer, and the third teacher became Diego Rivera. The third big teacher influence let's call it.

Diego Rivera was a very good man from my viewpoint, and very brilliant, intellectual, intelligent, and so forth. I speak Spanish, which I learned at Lowell High School. I also had twelve years of language at Lowell High School, I forgot to mention it, which I've used ever since. So I was able to speak with him. I got to know him and his wife, Freida Kalo, who was also very wonderful. And a marvelous painter, you know.

She was a great painter--many people say she's greater than he is. I wouldn't be able to judge. They both were very good in their own way, because they were both very different.

Anyhow, Diego Rivera began to show us--he showed a number of San Francisco artists, by the way, but I had it all privately--but he used to come around in the morning, really to see Clifford White. Clifford White had the job, along with a man named Albert <sup>B. Arrows</sup> (they were both mathematicians), of enlarging--<sup>and</sup> artists also--to enlarge the

R.P.: drawings, the small drawings, that Diego Rivera made, in order to lay out all the mathematical construction. This of course was a revolution to me, because I didn't know about the mathematical construction in a work of art, and I'm still working at it, trying to find out more about it. The diagonals and lines and so forth. The shapes, the forms, the cylinder, the cone, etc. And their relationships in space.

Diego Rivera had a terrific training. He had worked four years with Picasso during the cubic period. He came here to Italy, traveled all over Italy, and made sketches on the murals. He had a vast culture. I guess he seemed to like me quite a bit, because he spent quite a bit of his time talking with me and telling me all about these things, which were really new to me. Then of course, Clifford White working there on these drawings helped, although I tried to stay out of the way. Albert Barrows I knew also. Albert Barrows was a mathematician by profession. But Clifford White also was a graduate from Oxford University in mathematics, so they were just the thing. Diego Rivera was very, very intellectual about art. He never put down anything without a reason. And that was a good--I can't say he trained me, because I never was a pupil of his, I was a friend. Talking as we are talking perhaps now, without any basic direction or motif. But from this I got to know various people also. I got to know Ralph Stackpole a little better than I'd known him before, because he knew Diego Rivera very well too.



R.P.: In fact Diego Rivera lived in Ralph Stackpole's studio and worked there too. So that I got to know Stackpole better, and some other artists better, on account of this group. Nearly every day we would have lunch together. Many distinguished people would arrive at these lunches. One of them the most distinguished and the most admirable was another man who had an influence on me, and that was Elie Faure.

Elie Faure was a French surgeon. He was a very dear friend of a person we all loved and highly admired by the name of Leo Eloesser. His family was of the blue jeans fame. You know the blue jean originated in San Francisco; the word blue jean originated in San Francisco. He was a very great surgeon and doctor. We all knew him quite well, because he loved art and loved the arts, and was a very dear friend of Diego Rivera's, and had helped his wife who was in an automobile accident. And operated on her a number of times. So I got to know them all in this tiny restaurant, which was big enough for maybe three tables. Perhaps a fourth, I'm not sure. I don't remember their names, but there were two North Italians, Piedmontese, and they would be called Mama and Papa. Diego Rivera ate there, and us others eating with him. Stackpole, various other artists. I was a daily eater there, because it was just <sup>right</sup> at the corner across from my studio.

Meeting Elie Faure was also an interesting experience to me because I had never met a famous art historian as he also was.

R.P.: He had the two professions. So I began discussing art history with him, or he would discuss it. He was on his way to Mexico, and I'd studied lots of things in Mexico, and I became very interested in them. Also Diego Rivera used to talk about them. A number of times he would discuss these things with me, and I felt kind of flattered that a man of his fame-- and that gives you a lot of courage too, to talk with people like that. And so knowing these various people helped my--what shall I say--my inner self to some extent. And I liked them too.

Then we got to know all kinds of other people that came around in those days. So many it's kind of useless to mention, except that some time in those years--Dorothy Bothwell, I asked her the year, and it seemed to be that her year was about a year earlier than what I thought, but it doesn't make any difference. Anyhow, some of us got to know Henri Matisse.

Well, I had had some background with this Rivera thing. I was stumbling and working at it, but I was in doubt whether every artist--you know, these great artists--whether they all used this. And I wasn't quite sure yet. So Matisse --I met him with some people, I think Stackpole was there, and some different people were there, a group. I also speak French, learned at Lowell High School. And so I spoke with Matisse, and there were people around that didn't speak French, I guess that's why he spoke more with me. I had quite a little talk with him, and he asked me what did I do, and I said sculpture. I said, well,

R.P.: I was just a struggling young sculptor, and I tried to let him know that I was, you know, just battling.

I was still doing wood-carving jobs. He said, "You know, I'd like to go and see what you're doing." I said, "Yes, my studio's just around the corner." "Oh, I must go and see it; I'd like to come tomorrow." And I never will forget; I said, "Oh, you don't want to see my sculpture. You've seen so much great art in France, you don't want to see mine." And he says, "Oh yes, I do, I want to see it." I felt very funny, I really did. I felt I didn't want to show--[laughter]. I didn't know at the time that he was a sculptor. So I said to him, "Why is it that you're so anxious to see my sculpture when you've seen so much great sculpture in France?"

He said, "Well you know, I'm a sculptor. But no one will look at my sculpture. And no one will consider me a sculptor. And so I'm very interested in sculpture and sculptors, and some of my best friends are sculptors."

He came up to my studio, and I had there a piece of work which landed in the San Francisco Museum a number of years later, that "Maria" in terra cotta. I had that there, as I can remember, and I had some other big things. I did big things this big--half bodies, torsos, a head. I did one of a young man this way, and the woman was this way. They were big and they were very <sup>0472</sup> out this way. I had to destroy the man; when I had to move I couldn't move it. Which broke my heart but I didn't know what to do. Anyhow, he saw those

R.P.: things, and he said that he liked them very very much. He said, if you're in New York, I must look up a certain man <sup>And say that</sup> ~~he~~ sent me because he thought that he would be interested in my work because he was an expert in sculpture. Well, I wrote down his name and thanked him, and said good-bye to Matisse. I also discussed a few mathematical problems, and he said that everything that I learned from Rivera, that's the way he worked. And of course the main thing is to work with your center, and <sup>then</sup> to work out. You work around this center. I never will forget, he never said good-bye to me. He raised his hand in kind of a little wave, and he said, "N'oubliez pas la ligne plombe," don't forget the plumb-line. Well, you know, that plumb line thing's still got me whirling, because, you know, it's easily forgotten. It's very easily forgotten, you know, when I keep changing on a piece of sculpture the way I work. So I tried to stick to that one piece of advice, plus some of the advice from Diego.

At the same time in these years, I got to know and become a very dear friend of Diego's wife. Diego used to come every morning at 10 o'clock to see me, or nearly every morning, and she'd come about every night at eight o'clock and pass the evening while I'd be doing my commercial wood-carving jobs. Sometimes I would do them at night with a lamp over me, and in the day I'd be doing some clay work, my own stuff, which had no sale of course. I got to know her very well, and she would sing for me all evening. Mexican folk music, with a little

R.P.: tiny guitar, or maybe it was a ukelele, I don't know what it was exactly. It was a small string instrument, and she used to come--in her blue jeans--and play the guitar and sing for me and sing for me and tell me Mexican poetry, all folk. Diego Rivera and his wife were both very interested in folk music. Once they sang for me together, duets. [Laughter.] It was a very nice time in my life.

From then on I got to know other Mexican artists, like Carlos Merida came around, many others, I can't remember all of their names now. And I was beginning to get to know a lot of Chinese artists. One of these is a life-long friend who I still know, who I saw in Venice just about two years ago, Dong Kingman, who is quite well known in the United States for his watercolors. I also passed on a lot of my knowledge to him, which I learned from these people. He was working as a houseboy, and he used to go out on location about five, six in the morning, and work till about nine or ten, I forget exactly, Then he would come to me with the work and show it to me, and say, "Well, you like? I think no good, but I work." So he kept on working and slaving, and I'd say something. I'd say, "Well, you know, you're still not beginning with the middle," or something like that, and various other things. Although he also had --he didn't have a terrific knowledge of composition in a way, but he had a marvelous knowledge of painting, and he also had the background of Chinese writing. So I learned a great deal from him at the same time.

Teiser: You were really learning more from artists in other than sculpture.

R.P.: Yes, mostly.

Teiser: Rather <sup>than</sup> from Howard or Stackpole directly, you were learning from artists in other disciplines, were you? Is that right?

R.P.: Yes. I taught Robert Howard wood-carving. You know, that kind of thing. Speaking about Robert Howard.

ABOUT the same time--1928, '29, '30; I can't separate them-- in there Stackpole got a big commission to do the Stock Exchange, and he farmed it out as it were to some stone-carvers who were experts. They roughed it all out for him, then he'd come around and finish it. <sup>n</sup> Jack ~~Schneer~~, again in my life, got to know these people and began learning how to carve stone with them on Stackpole's job. Stackpole was a little scared at first, but grinding's pretty hard, to even knock off one chip, so it didn't make much difference. So <sup>Jack</sup> ~~Schneer~~ said to me, "Why don't you come down and learn too?" So I went down every morning and learned stone-carving. I'd studied a little marble-carving here in Italy, but not much.

So there was an Italian named <sup>n</sup> Bona who was the man who had the contract. It was an enormous job;

to do something 0631 like that. It's surprising that a few men could have done it; it was an enormous job. It's like being a miner. So I learned a little bit how to use the electric hammer, the pneumatic hammer. At that time that was my first experience with it. Then I also learned how to

*Jacques Schneer*

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R.P.: handle the chisels and so forth. And Bono would stand over me. They all swear at you. He used to say, kind of swear at me in Italian, say, "Ave Maria like this, no no no." If I made one stroke that was slightly wrong he would holler at me. It was good training. But he was funny, he wasn't like the Portugese. So I learned quite a bit about stone-carving on this job. I'm going to stop now I think. I really have to, I think.

In the meantime I kept on drawing, drawing, drawing. Constantly. At night. We had these drawing groups. Constantly, constantly. All the years. Drawing from the human figure, a male or female. Dancers, non-dancers, boxers, anything. It was a great help to learn the figure.

Teiser: Maybe I can ask you something . What directed you then, I think it was 1934 or 1936, you had your first one-man show in a large museum. I think '36 at the San Francisco Museum.

R.P.: Really?

Teiser: And '34.

Harroun: 1929

R.P.: Oh yes, the first time I ever exhibited. The first time I ever exhibited a piece of my work was at the Seattle Museum in 1929. A Decorative Arts Exposition. It was more or less the same time.

I had an invitation to show up there, and I sent up--it was reliefs. They were decorative reliefs. Then I exhibited from time to time, . and someplace

R.P.: ~~some place~~ in those years a number of us struggling young artists--some older ones too--started an art gallery ~~at~~ at 728 Montgomery I think is the address in one of the studios there. We all pitched in to rebuild it. There was Victor <sup>Arnautoff</sup> ~~Arnautov~~, there was Renato Cuneo, a very able artist by the way, and ~~Don~~ Kingman came and Valenti Angelo came. I saw Valenti Angelo here just last year. You know who he is?

Teiser: He was in San Francisco about a month ago. He <sup>was given</sup> gave a dinner party.

R.P.: Yes. He keeps going back and forth. He moved to New York about when I did. Of course he lived in San Francisco for many <sup>years.</sup> ~~he was~~ ~~born with me~~ He had a little <sup>0703</sup>. That's how ~~we~~ I got to be such a good friend of his, I guess.

Well--she's looking up; I know, I have a lot of things I can't remember too. I might get a date wrong.

Teiser: I have ~~at~~ that '34 you had a show at the Art Center in San Francisco.

Harroun: A one-man show.

R.P.: Was that a one-man show? WE had group shows.

Harroun: the group show, 1929 in Seattle. Los Angeles Museum, 1932; San Francisco, 1933; and '34,

R.P.: Gee. I won a prize in the <sup>1915</sup> Museum once. Don't put it--

Harroun: The first one-man show was the Art Center.

Teiser: That was what I had. As long as these thiggs are a matter of record, we don't have to straigten out the dates.

R.P.: 1934, that was the first one-man show at the Art Center.



✓ R.P.: Did Dorothy have the text out? It's terrible, I don't--  
they kind of become ~~one~~, you know.

9 Harroun: I think it was '35 that she showed.

R.P.: Then in 1935 I had another one there, and it was very well  
written up by the newspapers too. I had very good write-ups  
in San Francisco. I had very good critiques. One of them  
died very young. He wrote very well about me for the Stanford  
Daily News. One name I remember is Alfred Frankenstein. He  
did it big--you know, gave me half pages.

Teiser: Then you did follow up Matisse's suggestion, and that led to  
shows in New York, did it not?

R.P.: That's right.

Teiser: '36 and '37 I have.

R.P.: This man in New York turned out to be a German. He was an  
international German who had had a gallery in Rome, and he  
at this time he headed, when I met him, headed the art gallery  
of Westerman's in New York. It was a beautiful gallery. So  
I went to see him. He liked my work extremely much, more than I  
ever would have expected, I must say. These gallery people are  
usually very difficult--those artists, you know. He was very  
enthusiastic about my work, and said, "Well, I'm putting up a  
show of Barlach and Lehbruck in a few weeks, and if you could  
have a few things ready by then we'll make it a three-man  
show." That was my first showing that I can remember in New York.  
I might have shown previously in some group shows. That was my

R.P.: first showing. That was 1936? It had some success, although Barlach and Lehmbruck, you know, they were the big artists of the time.

Teiser: What sorts of things did you show?

R.P.: I showed some bronzes and some terra-cottas. I still have a couple of the pieces here that I can show you if you want to see them later. They were cast and all that, and I got them cast on Long Island by an old Italian bronze-caster. I just had them cast in time, and then this came up, you see, so I was very lucky.

Mr. Buechner was quite a personality in the arts. He was a publisher, a writer, an art critic. He knew everybody in Germany. At that time he was exhibiting art which Hitler didn't approve of in the United States, which included Barlach, and Lehmbruck, and Kathe Kollwitz, and this Grosz, George Grosz, of whom he was a dear friend, and so forth. I always felt very sorry for Mr. Buechner, because when the war came and the United States got in the war, he evidently was still a German citizen, and so was Mr. Westermann, the owner of the gallery. They closed up the gallery, the government did, and they lost everything. After the war, Mr. Westermann made a big suit against the <sup>1103?</sup> fort, and won the suit, but didn't get anything out of it except satisfaction. But they were anti-Nazis, because I know it, and besides, they were showing art that wasn't accepted in Germany, what they called Jewish art in Germany, Jude. That was terrible, you know.

R.P.: My wife went through Germany in 1928. '38 I guess, not much before the war. She said it was very depressing. Jew--Jude--written all over the store window, and she said army officers marching up and down, and people all scared of the army officers. They were dodging them. She said she was scared too, and got out fast. She was passing through Germany to get to Holland or something.

Teiser: You were living in New York then at the time you had this exhibit at the gallery or not?

R.P.: Well, not living. I went there.

Teiser: I see. Your headquarters were still in San Francisco.

R.P.: I had my studio there, yes. At 15 Hotaling Place. I didn't give up my studio in 15 Hotaling Place --I'm not sure of the date. I'll have to ask her. It's fifteen years. From 19--fifteen or sixteen years.

Teiser: About the time you went to Mills, did you give it up?

R.P.: No, I still had it then. I had it for a long time. They wanted to rebuild the building, and got me out. I was very broken up about it because I didn't have any place to go.

Teiser: I have that you began teaching at Mills in 1938?

R.P.: That's right.

Teiser: The same year that you had an exhibit at the San Francisco Museum of Art.

R.P.: Is that the first San Francisco exhibit did you say?

Teiser: San Francisco Museum of Art show.

R.P.: By that time I was exhibiting quite a bit.

Teiser: Were you by then doing private commissions too?

R.P.: Well...1938...let's see. 1936 I went to New York and stayed there for a while. Then I went back to San Francisco. And I got on the WPA in I think 1938.

Teiser: What project were you on?

R.P.: My own project.

Teiser: Wonderful.

R.P.: I didn't want to be in anyone else's project. Bufano wanted me to be in his project, but I didn't want to do Bufano's, oh. I don't know, I felt that I was far enough along, to do my own. So that made him very angry because he wanted everyone to work for him.

So I worked this project, and it was an interesting thing for me, because I never was in the position to have a number of workers work for me. I had had jobs previously in these years intervening of which I have not spoken, which I'd have somebody work for me for a few weeks to have me build up something. But never steady real help. So I had a project at WPA, and the project was for granite sculpture. Fortunately I'd had the background with that Bona to know somewhat about it. So I designed things for them, and I had workmen help me to build them up. I did some very interesting things during this time. I also taught part-time at Mills College. I just would rush over there a couple of afternoons a week. To me it was a very important period,

R.P.: because I was able to do a panther for the Salinas Junior College which was ten feet long, a seated panther. That was their animal, emblem. I made small marble and then a large marble.

↓ Beniamino Bufano tried to hold back my project in every way he could. He tried to take my workers away. He became very mean. But I can get stubborn, and I stuck it out. [Laughter.] I became quite stubborn. I stuck it out. It was very difficult for a while. He went one day to the studio while the panther was being done in plaster cast, and he went with a hammer and it took four workmen to pull him away from wanting to break up my model. We had quite a time with him. He was a very jealous person. But I didn't care. Just like water on a duck's back. I went ahead, and I got the panther done.

It was an enormous job. Having workmen is one thing, but finishing and doing the job yourself is another. I would work at night --and the WPA was only a three or four-day week anyhow-- but I worked night every day of the week except the two afternoons at Mill S College. I worked every day of the week including Sunday on this

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Bender then bought from the WPA and gave to Mills College, which I understand they still have there. They have it at the entrance to the administration building. That was in marble, white marble.

Harroun: It's still there.

R.P.: At least they tell me it is. I'm glad to hear it's still

R.P.: there.

Anyhow, I did other things, and I designed lots of things for them. The WPA of course, at least in San Francisco, was quite a marvelous project. They had some very fine designers. They had a very marvelous tapestry design project. Some young artists were given a chance to do things that they never were able to do before. I think it's too bad, and if I can put in my word for it, it should have continued until today! It should've just gone right through. The WPA project was something that gave the artist something to , let's say, live for. It was a job, and he had to do it and he did it. It proved that they could do it. The murals that were done in San Francisco--Dorothy Wagner did some murals there that were very good too. Many of the artists did, too many to mention. To me that was very important though, to be able to have this project and carry out... And although the pay was an absolute minimum--I was lucky to have the job at Mills College to carry me through, because I had to pay my studio rent at the same time. I was getting ninety dollars a month although I headed the project. My workers were getting just a little bit less, eighty-five or something like that.

That's the panther photograph. That head you see was nearly-- well, I had to get up, had to climb up on here to work on it you see. I did all the head mostly by myself on Sundays.

Teiser: That's still in place, I presume.

R.P.: Yes. That weighed thirty thousand pounds, so I guess it was hard

R.P.: to move. They've changed the name of the college. It was Salinas Junior College at the time. I had an awful hard time putting that through. A really hard time. Really, really terrible. Because Bufano opposed this animal to such an extent that when it was already made he tried to stop it from going through and being put at the college. Well, I heard this, so I wasn't going to let this job be left. Esther had a car at the time, and she drove me down to Salinas. We went to see the president of the college, and I told him the exact story. I've never told this story before to anybody. But it's so many years ago, and Bufano's no longer available. So I want to tell him. <sup>[the president of the college]</sup> I said, "Do you like this? Is it something you really like? Do you really want it?" I was very frank with the president. He says, "I absolutely want it. I says, "Maybe you'd prefer a Bufano, and I'd like to know." "Oh no, no, I wouldn't have it around," he said. I said, "Well then you want this and we're going to put it through." I said, "Well, help me to put it through." So he helped me to put it through, and it got placed. Otherwise the home was lost for a while. Everyone was pleased with it, and it was my own work, it wasn't somebody else's. I put an awful lot of work into it. I got ill on the work with my illness that comes back every once in a while, this liver thing, and I did this head while lying down here with the pneumatic hammer this way, because I couldn't stand up. I did this most of this lying the down, stone-work, pneumatic hammer. Because I just

R.P.: couldn't stand up. I had this thing with my liver, and it was such a pain there. I'd been operated on my liver here in Italy, fortunately by very great doctors who partially cured me. But they said my liver had been let gone so far that it wasn't really curable. But I'm all right.

Anyhow, I got that done. And I got many smaller works done, and many plaster models done, and I was given an enormous commission, which would've been something to make anyone envious, and that was a whole hillside outside of Oakland would be a fountain of running water going down the hill, and then at intervals its steps would be sculptures. And it would be the whole story of animal life. Like reptiles and molluscs and so forth, up to --well, we didn't reach man, but all the different animals, bears and different things. I began making studies for this. I was also given other commissions, but they never were able to carry it out, because finally the War came along, and they closed up the thing.

So at the end I was stuck with hundreds of drawings of different things, and some little models. So I made them on my own. I made a frog of my own which I still have, an owl--and having gotten interested in owls I made a number of owls for myself. I made some fish, one of which I sold. I got started on fish there too, you see. I got started on a lot of things. Then I had time to go <sup>on</sup> drawing and be paid for it, instead of wondering <sup>now</sup> can I afford this. So it helped a great deal, as I said, although



R.P.: I had the expenses of the studio as well. I paid . . . ninety dollars a month. And the workmen didn't. Yet I also was able-- I supplemented it with a very small wage from Mills College. So I really made a living at the time. Which of course . . . is kind of important. Kind of important. [Laughter.] Even though I'm not too interested in money. So anyhow, the WPA was a great boost.

The War came along, and I kept on working. At first we didn't feel the War very much, as I remember, and then we began to feel it more and more. People began getting drafted. I had this awful liver trouble, . . . and I was sick at the beginning there. Then ~~Jack Schneer~~ went off to war, and I took his place. He was some kind of an officer, I think a major, in the army, in the army intelligence I think, it was something like that. So I took over his job as the professor of sculpture at the University of California. So I held that for about five years, until he came back.

Teiser: Did that leave you time to do other work too?

R.P.: It didn't leave me much time, unfortunately. I must say I learned a lot teaching such large groups of students. A large part of them were architects, because the sculpture department was then in the architecture department. And I was free with my own department, which was very good. Because the art department was not in my line, actually. To me it was manneristic, that is, the painting, not the art history, but the painting was kind of manneristic. I feel that people should not learn a manner when they're teaching--when they're learning. I don't believe in

*Jacques Schnier*

R.P.: teaching a manner. I always try to have students not influenced by me. To be influenced by art, and what is in them. The laws of art and what is in them. It's a little hard in the beginning but when you get it it's a great help. You don't have a manner, you don't have a manner of somebody or other. So I was very glad to have my own apartment. <sup>9</sup> I think I--well I know, I should say, that I did a very good job. I was very popular on the University of California campus. I know that. The students used to come to me. I used to give lectures, You see I had such large classes that I couldn't go from student to student very much. I used to give lectures on the works of great arts of the past. How they were designed, how they were made, how they were thought out, and so forth. With my experience from people like Matisse, and Rudolph Schaeffer, and Diego Rivera, I had a pretty good background for this. So I was able, with my own studies of course, to tell how a Michelangelo-- they had marvelous casts at the University of California. Romanesque, and Renaissance, and Greek plaster casts. Previously they'd copied them years before, but I didn't have much copy work done. I had them understand them, since they were architects. When I would lecture I would take a piece of Michelangelo--they had small models about this big of the Night and Day, about three feet long--and I would describe the diagonals and the shapes and the forms and the cubes and so forth, and the way they fit into space, and about Michelangelo. Because I tried to have everyone know that space is <sup>a</sup> very important ingredient. It was especially

R.P.: for architects, and I told them, and I was very mean to modern architecture--I said, "One of the things that modern architecture today lacks, and that is an understanding and a feeling of using space so that it would become a visual thing for the eye. The use of optics." So I taught sculpture using ideas of optics and space. I was very successful. I still--I got some of them-- a letter about a few weeks ago <sup>1051</sup> by a woman architect whose name is Koustritsky. He's a big architect now; he's one of the people who helped re-design the city of Philadelphia. And he's down in Baltimore and is now working in Washington D.C. He wrote me a letter thanking me which I haven't answered, thanking me for what he'd learned from me. So I was kind of successful at that, I would say.

I had one competitor at teaching, and his name was Ernst Bloch, a man who I forgot to mention. So I'll have to talk about Ernest Bloch for a moment, in my life, because Ernest Bloch in my very early years when I was working around the theatre -- and I can't tell the year, but I was quite young, maybe just finished high school--I met him, with a friend. Ernest Bloch was Swiss, and this was with a Swiss architect who I learned something from too. Ernest Bloch asked me what I did, and I told him. He said, "That's too much," with his very strong accent. He gave me a big lecture, and he says, "You know I believe in--" Oh, he believed in all kinds of things, like the

R.P.: shape of your hand, and the shape of your head, what they make you. And he said, "You're a sculptor: keep to the sculptor." He says, "You're nothing else. The shape of your forehead's that of a sculptor, and you're a visionary artist from here..." Well, I kind of took it half-way at least, and it helped me to decide to stay with sculpture and not to deviate. He was quite an influence there, and I saw him a number of times. He was a most marvelous man. Very learned, and he knew many artists in Europe. It was very good to know him. I'm sorry that I left him out earlier; it's just that I --he's one of a number that really helped me. Because I must say that many people have helped me; I've not gotten along alone by any means. I don't think any man gets along alone anyhow. Because we can't get along alone; it's impossible. But lots of people think they do, it seems. But nevertheless, I was helped by all of the people I've mentioned, even Bufano, who by being very hard on me on this thing made me perhaps work a little harder.

To come to Ernest Bloch again--

Teiser: At the University of California.

R.P.: Oh yes, at the University of California he was teaching. He taught part-time or something. It seems as though just the time that I gave my lectures he gave his lectures. When I gave my lectures, all of the students of the art department, including the theatre department, they all came in in 1999 so that they had windows above--they'd get up on ladders, and stand on ladders

R.P.: at the windows to listen to me lecture on these various things. Because I didn't know that I was so unique, not having too much formal education, a great deal of university, I just took it for granted that everybody would do this. So I would act out all the things, and throw out my arm, act the use of an arm, and show how they'd move, and how the figure moves. The students all liked it. The theatre department found out about it, and all the actors came to it. All of the music department came. So I had this place that was--I was afraid the building would fall down. And the days I would give lectures. Previously they didn't have lectures in sculpture. But I didn't see how you could teach so many people otherwise. Just going around telling them this is too big and this is too small, why don't you make this a little rounder, you know, <sup>it's</sup> kind of foolish I thought. It's kind of individual.

Anyhow, Ernest Bloch was giving lectures on the same afternoon. So a committee of students came and said please change your afternoon. You know I couldn't, because it was set by the University, and my program was set. I tried to fix it so they could get to Ernest Bloch's lectures as well as mine, because the other attraction and the man that must have been some--well, I heard him talk. It was somewhat the way I was. He'd bring in everything. He wouldn't just talk about sculpture or music; he'd talk about everything. About living, and about poetry, and how poetry is part of it. So we had a more or less similar way of teaching. So the same students would want to hear him and hear me. I had to change the hours

R.P.: of my lectures so that Ernest Bloch's lectures would also be attended. His room was full and standing up too.

Teiser: Let me turn this off a moment and ask you... We have a short tape with this.

R.P.: You have a short tape with you?

Teiser: Yes.

R.P.: Is it -- will it fit this machine?

Teiser: Yes it will.

R.P.: Isn't that strange. I thought they were all different companies and different things.

Teiser: No, fortunately this is a standard. So there's a little more on this, and if you will not be exhausted by talking longer--

R.P.: I won't be exhausted, but I can't remember--

Teiser: It's hard. You certainly remember wonderfully well.

R.P.: Then I studied a lot of lighting-- I was supposed to be good at lighting--with Rudolph Schaeffer. I did some 1143 into lighting too.

Teiser: A But Ernest Bloch really made--

R.P.: He helped me to decide. The day after this long talk from Ernest Bloch, giving me the dickens as I might say, I took a long walk through Buena Vista Park, I remember, looking at the trees, trying to decide. I thought of all the things that I like in art, and which did I like better, and I measured do I like Rembrandt better than this, and the lasting thing. Finally that day at Buena Vista

R.P.: Park I decided I would remain a sculptor. That was quite early, maybe--quite early, I forget.

Teiser: So I suppose it was not only Ernest Bloch that affected your--

R.P.: No, there were many things, many things. But it helped a great deal to help me get this--

Teiser: When were you married? When did you marry Esther?

Harroun: 1940 was it?

R.P.: Something like that.

Harroun: In the book it says 1940.

Teiser: So this was before you taught at the University of California.

Esther:

1164? { ~~Harroun~~: We just had an anniversary. In September. Thirty-four years I think now.

Teiser: So you were really not doing much of your own work during the University of California period.

R.P.: Well, I did. I worked on Sundays, and Satur--I taught on Saturday morning. I had one day of the week free, but I taught on Saturdays, Saturday mornings. Saturday afternoon I would work over there so as not to lose daylight traveling. I worked, yes--vacations. Oh, I worked. I made trips to New York on vacations because I tried to keep up contacts which I made in 1936. I tried to keep up the contacts some way. I made a couple of trips to New York, quick ones, like Easter vacation. I would work, work, work all the time though.

Teiser: Was your work changing at all? Or was it just developing--

R.P.: My work has constantly changed. As I said before, my earliest works

R.P.: were decorative, consciously decorative, I'd say. I think that  
 could be a fault. Then when I came here to Italy for the  
 first time, I found that the decorative is part of it un-  
 doubtedly, but it's only a part, that art has to say something.  
 So then I tried saying something. Then--so there were changes  
 that way. Then I got into the stone, and that made a big  
 change. Because the problem of stone is so different from  
 the <sup>problem?</sup> period of terra-cottas, because this is very important.  
 Previous to all of this stone work, I did a great deal of terra-  
 cotta work, and I decided to master myself in the art of clay,  
 in the use of clay. I worked a great deal in terra-cotta, in  
 firing it and so forth. Then later on I taught terra-cotta  
 work at Mills College, and got deeper into the terra-cotta than  
 ever. So that I have a whole--my work could really be divided,  
 in answer to your question, rather into periods, which I  
 have never clearly thought out, and which some periods paralleled  
 each other.

First was decorative, and rather meaningless linear decora-  
 tive, I'd say, the wood-carving thing. Then I went into sculpture  
 in the round; I was trying to break away from just the decorative.  
 Then I did the clay modeling, always on the side, I did portraits  
 and so on, trying to approach something which would have, let's  
 say, more reality to it, if there's such a word



Begin tape 2, side 1.

R.P.: So I did a great deal of clay in these number of years, and I can't give the dates, because it went over a long period. I learned and learned and . . . learned, of course, mainly because there's a great deal of technique involved in terra cotta too. I did some porcelains, and that was very interesting. I worked over in Berkeley for a while, with a man named Mr. Wall, who had done a great deal of work for artists. He was an Englishman, and his wife ~~was~~ also worked with him. They had done all the firing, or most of the firing of the works of Beniamino Bufano's, because he had a big period of terra cotta too. He was a very able man. We fired porcelains with him. Then I lost contact with him, maybe because he died. I know he died in that time some time. Then I did terra cottas on my own, and I went from kiln to kiln. I can't give any dates, because they're just not in my mind. I can't remember them. Along with some wood-work, I did a great deal of terra cotta.

In the year 1935, I got a rather large commission, which I finally found that I lost money in because it was expensive to do. But I did it anyhow, and it was a marvelous experience. I did some sculptures for a new church being built, and that kind of cut off the terra cottas, because this was all in wood. That kind of ended the terra cotta thing to a great extent.

Teiser: What church was it?

R.P.: It was Corpus Christi Church in Oakland. It was a new church at

R.P.: the time being built. I did an enormous relief with many figures on it, and all carved in somewhat flat relief. I did a number of statues in the round. I had the help of a young Englishman by the name of Frank Rocher, who was a very able helper, and glued wood together; he was a craftsman, an excellent craftsman. Quite a good craftsman in sculpture. I don't think he ever tried hard enough to be an artist, but he was really--quite a lot of talent and ability. He helped me do all the roughing out and laying out and tracing, then I did all the job myself, but it was an enormous job to do.

As soon as that was finished, that's when I went to New York. Right after. Which was in 1936. I left that out before.

Teiser: But you had taken work with you to New York?

R.P.: I had some work. I had a few pieces. Then I set to work immediately. I didn't have much money. I got two students that somebody *towed* over to me. They were both pretty funny women, but I got paid for it. I got paid for teaching them. That helped a great deal.

I did a couple of terra cottas at the time too. I did some terra cottas at the beginning. There was a German fellow who had learned about terra cotta in Germany, and he fired for me. So I went back to terra cotta, and I did a few pieces.

I did a couple of other pieces. I did two bronzes at the time. I really set to work, and again day and night. Aside from the teaching, which didn't take up too much time, I worked at the same

R.P.: time with these two women. I worked while they were studying, and then I'd go to them and criticize them. So I worked day and night. Sundays, holidays, all the time, and produced a few pieces of work. I had a couple of pieces from San Francisco, and that's what made up the work that I had there.

Then I got to know another dealer in New York. The Ferragill Galleries at that time was a very famous gallery. I can't tell the dates exactly in here, when they showed; it's probably written somewhere. But the <sup>0165</sup> Gallery showed me again in a three-man show. That was pretty important, because I was shown with the sculptures of Degas, bronzes, and with Maillot. And Maillot, there were some rare pieces of his work, because they were stone carvings. They were owned by the man Mr. Price. Mr. Price is the man that brought over to America all of the Degas sculptures, the bronze sculptures for the Metropolitan Museum. He was a very important dealer. He liked my work, and he put my work in in another three-man show. So I showed again there.

Teiser: This was still in the thirties though. This was before the University of California period.

R.P.: It might have been '36 or '37 or something. I'm not sure. It was in that time.

Then I did those terra cottas, and I brought them; I still have a couple of them. Then I was short of money,

R.P.: so I also on the side worked for a plaster caster, casting  
 some big what I would call junk sculpture for  
 Washington, D.C. Then I went back to California. I was again  
 sick. Getting sick is-- So I went back to San Francisco. It's  
 recorded someplace; I can't remember. But within about a  
 year I went back to San Francisco. That was 1930.

Then I worked at my work, and then I got the WPA, 1938.

Teiser: Back to the period following the University of California then--

R.P.: That's later of course. Now the University of California,  
 that's another epoch.

Teiser: I think you've given us a good description of that, really,  
 good.

R.P.: The University of California, as I said, was to me a very  
 interesting experience. It really was. I met mature students--  
 architect students, mature, intelligent, hard-working, at that  
 time at least they were. They were very fine students, I must say.

Teiser: Were the ones that you met then later in ~~the~~ North Carolina  
 similar?

R.P.: Well, I wasn't in the architecture department.

Teiser: Ah yes, that's right.

R.P.: I just got a letter from North Carolina, the day before yesterday.  
 The student thanking me for the hours of teaching. Isn't that  
 strange that you should mention it.

Teiser: Did you go directly from the University of California to  
 North Carolina?

R.P.: Yes I did.

Teiser: How'd you happen to decide to go there?

R.P.: Well, some of the reasons. Number one, at the moment I was without a studio. I looked and looked all over San Francisco, I bought a place in Clara Street, and then I found out that they were going to fill in the street so that my studio would be half under the level of the street, which I didn't want to even feel being in such a studio. It was a nice little place. And so I sold it. Then I looked and looked, and I couldn't find anything. I was teaching at two places, but not getting much pay for it, frankly. I felt that I was being quite underpaid. I told you that I made three trips to New York because I wanted to keep up contacts with certain people I met. Some of the people were important people in the Modern Museum of New York. Just by chance, I received a phone call from North Carolina, saying that the Museum of Modern Art had recommended me to teach there. They promised me these very good things. Some of the promises weren't carried out. They promised a teaching job for my wife at the same time. Then they didn't give it to her. They didn't have the equipment or a place or anything else. They promised me a studio. So I only stayed for a ~~few~~ short time. I stayed for seven months of the school year.

Teiser: I hate to ask you to skip things, because it's all interesting, and it's all important, but our time is running a little short, and

Teiser: because we're a regional group, we're most interested in San Francisco any way. So you've given us the Western side of it. But could you summarize what you brought ~~you~~ from North Carolina to this beautiful spot?

~~Esther~~  
Dorothy:

We did return to San Francisco.

R.P.: Oh yes, we came kept going back to San Francisco until the fifties. I kept going back to San Francisco. Esther's mother had a big house, so I had a studio in the cellar, and I kept that up through many years. Going back in the summer or some-time, vacation and so forth. Then we bought a place in New York. And even then we went back. In the summers. I got a job at Queens College. But these teaching jobs are very, very hard work, and time-consuming, and mind-consuming. So I was glad every time I quit one of them. From that viewpoint.

Teiser: Then you came to Italy.

~~Esther~~  
Dorothy:

The State Department. In 1955.

R.P.: In 1954 I was approached by the State Department asking me whether I would go and give a lecture tour and exhibitions of my work etc., a cultural tour, in Spain. I would like to see Spain I thought, so I said yes. The next letter came and said would you make it South America. So I said yes. In January 1955 I started out on a trip which took me throughout Latin America, with exhibitions of my work, and lectures at university on art, and different things such as that, learning of art. All in Spanish of course. I guess I did pretty well by it. I know I enjoyed it

R.P.: a lot, except it was awfully hard work. Because one day I'd be in Quito, and the next day I'd be in the other side of South America, and the next day I'd be in Quito again, and then I'd be someplace else. You know it was just back and forth, criss-crossing. Up and down too. It was a little hard on me, and I got sick a few times, but I carried it through. Because as I told you before, I'm terribly stubborn. A couple of times I was about to die. One of the times was in Mexico, when I hung on the desk in a lecture, and nearly fell over. Another time in Argentina, I was terribly sick. But I carried through the thing without letting anyone know I was sick.

When I got back to Washington, I don't like to brag, but I'm pleased to say that I was called in and surrounded by all the members of the State Department, quite a few . . . people. I sat in the middle of a great big room, feeling kind of funny, I wondered what they were going to say to me. I thought they were going to say, "Well, it was pretty good, but you could've done better." But instead they said, "We called you here to tell you that you were the most successful ambassador the United States has ever had in . . . Latin America." It . . . did please me a great deal, because I was never . . . sure of myself, you know. I mean you're never sure whether all this worked. That was very pleasing.

When I got back, I had a commission waiting for me to do an enormous church job of a number of sculptures in marble and a number of sculptures in terra cotta also for a seminary

R.P.: in Ohio. So I found it ~~was~~ <sup>would</sup> just have to be done in Italy because of the cost of marble, and I'd worked out <sup>0461</sup> systems to rough out the marble. At the same time, for some strange reason, I received a letter from an Italian gallery, the Schneider Gallery, asking me if I would have an exhibition, I had been recommended by a Mrs. Walter, who was a friend of ours, and she showed some pictures of my work. She was a woman from New York, American woman. The D. and E. Walter Company in San Francisco. She was of that family. She recommended me for an exhibition at the Schneider Gallery in Rome. They wrote me a letter saying yes, they'd love to have an exhibition. So two things in Italy coincided, doing a job and having an exhibition, all the same year. Just luck.

So I took all the work I could with me. Partly finished, nothing finished. My models for my church job--it took all of that year to finish them, and working terribly hard. In the meantime I had another job too. Anyhow, I did the job. Then I came over here to Italy, and I worked up in the marble country, <sup>Cochacchia?</sup> Esther and Rhody, my daughter, were along. At first my daughter didn't like it, and then she began to like it more and more. We kind of just got stuck in Italy, let's say. Although I owned a house in New York. I went back to it, and I went back to a job which I then got at the same time, teaching at Maryland Institute in Baltimore. The



R.P.: Rinehart School of Sculpture, it was called. I was made the dean of it, and that paid a little better than some of the other jobs I had teaching. It offered quite a bit, because I had the use of a studio while I was there and all expenses paid. It was quite a good deal for me at the time. Although I hesitated in taking it, because it was so far away from home, which was then New York, I took it. And it was all right. I got some good commissions from architects there. One of the architects rang the bell the first night I slept in Baltimore, because I slept during the middle of the week there and went back to New York, Saturday and Sundays. The doorbell rang, and who rang but Kou sritsky, who was one of my students at the University of California, who's now a big architect there. That's the way the world goes. It was very pleasant knowing him, and I got to know other very nice people. I enjoyed Baltimore very much. The people are very nice there, and I had a nice teaching time there. But it was kind of far away from everything for me. And going back and forth to New York. And back and forth to Italy, because I already had the place across the hall from here in Italy. So finally one year I decided I wasn't going back. I didn't go back. They kept writing me letters and writing me letters, please come back. And I said, no, I didn't want to go back.

Then I had another show in Rome at the same time. Then I had a show in Milano. Things seemed to go very well here for me. In some respects, they went better than they had at other times, because I was then selling.

*Esther*

~~Dorothy~~: Selling the work you 0484

R.P.: Yes. And working at my own work.

Teiser: More time.

R.P.: More time. I only did one stretch of teaching here since.

They came to my studio, it wasn't much bother. It was very interesting again to teach. It was about two years ago. I met people from all over the world. International, university-- you know, just for a short time, a school year.

Teiser: That's a wonderful story, and you certainly have compressed a lot into a short time.

R.P.: Anyhow, we're here and I'm still getting along.

*Esther*  
~~Dorothy~~: Still show in America.

R.P.: I have a show right now in America, a very important exhibition, at Duke University it's showing. It's opening on the 29th of this month. I'm very pleased with that. It's all borrowed from American collectors. The Italian ambassador's opening the show. I had to refuse to go. I didn't want to tell them quite why, but I'm really not quite well enough to travel and afraid that this will return. Because I'm well, I'm well, but I don't want to get sick again. Changing food and things like that.

Teiser: Let me ask you before we tear ourselves away, what medium are you working in now mainly?

R.P.: My main medium right now is something that I really had started in San Francisco originally. Matisse even saw one of the things when he came; it's one of the memories.

That was the young man, the one <sup>of ?</sup> Greco He was my first

0526

R.P.: student, by the way. A young Italian boy from Lucca, named Raymond Scardigli. He was my first student in San Francisco and also became an excellent assistant. He was very able with his fingers and his hands and his brains doing it, and helped me a great deal. He posed for me (that's how I originally got to know him) for a very good work which I had to destroy because it was so heavy-- a solid block of plaster, much over my size. But that was one of my first things in direct plaster. Built up in plaster, not having been made in any other material but plaster, and then cast in bronze. It gives me a double thing. I carved and I modeled. I used both of my ancient experiences in this one type of work. I developed what is my last period in this material. Because it doesn't resemble stone or wood, but it has some of the qualities of carving wood in it, I feel. Sometimes a little of stone, and sometimes maybe a little of the other, but it's all made into one. Would you say that's correct.

~~Estlin~~

C 554

R.P.: I have some good news about San Francisco to give you. Not very long ago, I got a letter from the San Francisco Art Commission. They very nicely said that they'd like to have a piece of my work placed in the new San Francisco Hospital which is now being built. So they took photographs. It just happens that I'd made a piece of sculpture in San Francisco and never had sold it. I actually made the sketches in those days when I was doing the animals for this great animal thing which I never did,

R.P.: and I finally made the buffalo a couple of years after the WPA was over as a matter of fact, in the 1940's I made this buffalo. Because I didn't want to waste all this material that I gathered; it was an enormous job. So I made the buffalo in granite. It was a diurite granite, a very hard granite. Harder than granite, it's called diurite. It will never be placed in the San Francisco hospital, because that's the work they selected, but they didn't know about where it was done when I sent them the pictures of my work. So then I told them it had been done in San Francisco with California granite, *0590* granite. So I was very pleased that they should have it. *Is there a picture of it?* That's kind of a double pleasure.

Teiser: So that's a nice round circle for this story to come to.

R.P.: Yes it is. It just about reached San Francisco this week I think. I'm holding my breath.

*Esther*  
~~Dorothy~~: It went by air.

Teiser: Oh my.

R.P.: This work was taken to New York, and then to Italy. It has followed me in my travels.

Teiser: It's hard to pack things like that.

R.P.: Oh terribly, it costs a lot of money.

Teiser: This is a beautiful ending to this story. Let me ask just before we go one thing more that is not directly connected with your work, but our office is always interested in Albert Bender.

R.P.: So am I.  
And

Teiser: have the one thing I not heard before from anyone else was

Teiser: your story of his death. Would you tell what you told us the other day?

R.P.: I'd known Albert Bender from I don't remember how far back, it's so . . . far back.

Teiser: About '40, '41? Just after your marriage you say.

R.P.: Some time there.

*Esther*  
~~Coroony~~: That was a wedding present.

R.P.: He was always giving us--he was giving us wedding presents every time I saw him. He gave me some wedding things too. Anyhow he was quite ill and bad, and we went to see him. It was understood, and we would've stuck by it, not to stay very long. However, the nurse that was attending <sup>him</sup> kind of let us stay. But she went like this a couple of times, and every time, he knew it of course. He felt it I guess. He'd grab ~~our~~ <sup>our</sup> hold of ~~the~~ hands and hang on to them, and . . . said no, no, don't leave me. So we stayed and stayed. I felt that we ~~should~~ <sup>should</sup> go. We talked, and he said, "When I get well I'm going to do big things for you, and I'm going to buy a big piece of stone-work <sup>for</sup> the Modern Museum in New York, and you keep that work for me." I did keep it a long time, and I finally sold it to the city of Fresno. The city of Fresno bought it, and I'm very glad that it's there. But he wanted to buy it for the Modern Museum, ~~that place~~, in New York. <sup>But</sup> Because the Modern Museum wanted to get that. ~~They~~ <sup>They</sup> wanted to be a sponsor to pay for it, and he would be that. He was quite a fellow. As everybody knows. There's no use talking about

R.P.: Albert Bender, I guess. So we left, and he let us go reluctantly.  
He died within a few hours that night.

Teiser: You were the last--

R.P.: We were the last visitors he ever had. He just passed away.

Teiser: You said that he asked in his will, I think you said, that you  
and Ansel Adams--

R.P.: I'm not sure how this was, so I won't say in his will. He did  
ask that he have a wake. I don't know how Ansel Adams and I  
were selected, but we did stay with him remains the last night  
in his studio place there on Post Street.

Teiser: The photograph--it is on the Fresno Mall.

R.P.: Yes, this is on the Fresno Mall.

Teiser: I've seen it.

R.P.: Oh, you have.

Teiser: Yes. What is the figure called?

~~Penelope~~

Esther Mother and Child

R.P.: Mother and Child.

~~Doody~~

Esther: Pink porphyry.

R.P.: I designed that too in these years. ~~too~~, in the 1940's!

~~Doody~~

Esther: You said that you had a piece, a figure in the San Francisco  
Museum that Albert Bender had bought. And that you don't  
know whether it's there or not.

Teiser: What was the figure?

R.P.: The San <sup>to</sup> Maria. Is that here too?

Esther

Harroun: It's here. I'm sorry, I didn't realize it was here.

R.P.: I did this in San Francisco. In wood. In teak. That was one of

R.P.: the last things that I did in teak. That was sold to a man in San Francisco. In fact, while I was working on it, a man saw it and wanted it. And he bought it, for a new apartment house on Telegraph Hill. at the time.

Teiser: How large a figure was it?

R.P.: About as tall as I am.

Teiser: What is the name of it? Do you know?

R.P.: I don't know--

Teiser: Standing Woman in Teak.

R.P.; This is a strange story. Got <sup>0685</sup> . He wrote me a letter and he asked me if I wanted this piece of sculpture back. That he would give it to me, because he had sold the apartment house, and he was going to live in a room, an apartment or something. He had no place to put it. And he said it was too good, he didn't want to leave it in the apartment house he said. He wrote me a very nice letter. That's it in the newspaper. The San Francisco Chronicle. That's the one that was in the San Francisco Museum. Which I kind of hope will still be there. It's about this big. It's over life-size. That was done in terra cotta. It was an enormous job to do.

Teiser: That's Maria.

R.P.: That was possibly the biggest thing I've ever done ~~did~~ It had to be that thick. And then <sup>0702</sup> walls inside going like it had to be like a beehive inside or it would collapse you see.

Teiser: We thank you very much. My word. This has been a very interesting--

R.P.: I sent the photograph of it, and it wasn't very good.

Harroun: That's the University of California bear.

R.P.: When did I do this? Well, the story is long, a long story. It goes back to the WPA. This was going to be twenty-five feet long. An enormous bear for the University of California. Well this War thing came along, and it never got beyond about a half-finished plaster model. They stopped all projects. So I said I'm not going to let this go, I'm going to continue making this bear. I like bears anyhow. I continued making the model. Then I wasn't pleased with that, and I made another model. The other one I destroyed because it wasn't quite right. It was more static. I saved some of this, and then I did this over again. I worked a long time on things. Then I made this first plaster, and then I made it in granite, a little bit bigger than the plaster. The University of California didn't have the funds to buy it. And what happened, I stored it over there. Finally after some time, they bought it and they paid me something. They got a sponsor. That's right--oh Esther, we should remember. I've never met the sponsor, isn't that strange? They got a sponsor for it, and the sponsor paid for it. And they placed it, because he was an alumnus. Then the same sponsor that years later sponsored the thing for Fresno--



Teiser: For the Fresno Mall, Isn't that interesting that people will do that. Wonderful. Yes, that's a marvelous bear.

R.P.: I hadn't any contact with him or anything.

Teiser: A marvelous bear on the campus.

R.P.: I made one which is not

*the* same as this, but very similar, in bronze. Later.

Teiser: Is this--

R.P.: Yes, that's the one. It's a little smaller. But I used the same plaster, as a matter of fact, and did it all over again. I keep doing things over. He must be a nice man, the sponsor.

Esther: Well, it's a wonderful thing for a person to do.

Teiser: Yes, I should say.

Harroun: Woodward. O.J. Woodward of Fresno. He was a banker or something like that.

R.P.: Yes, he was a banker.

Esther: He wrote very nice letters, and also he was interested in

*0762*

R.P.: He sponsored two of my works.

Teiser: Well, we thank you, we thank you.

End of tape 2, side 1.

circa 1978

Fiermez

Dear friend:

Many thanks for  
your letter & the contents  
Glad to hear from  
you. Hadn't heard from you in some time.

The Exhibition at  
Panswell received, and very  
positive results. Also was  
given the Sculpt. prize at a  
collective exhibition at Nantes  
La Folie; plus an invitation  
to exhibit at the Salon d'Automne  
at the Grand Palais. - Next  
during the next month an exhibition  
is given to me by the city of  
Perpignan in Germany.

I'm sending you, under  
separate cover another catalogue  
so that you'll have one for yourself  
Many good wishes also to Ruth  
Harrold from Esther and myself  
Yours  
R Puccinelli

Catherine Harroun

Born, St. Joseph, Missouri.  
Educated in Pasadena, California; Carlsbad,  
New Mexico; Stanford University, B.A. in  
English.  
In San Francisco since 1930 as advertising  
copywriter, Wells Fargo Bank; curator and  
researcher, Wells Fargo History Room.  
Newspaper and magazine writer since 1950.

Ruth Teiser

Born in Portland, Oregon; came to the Bay Area in 1932 and has lived here ever since. Stanford University, B.A., M.A. in English; further graduate work in Western history. Newspaper and magazine writer in San Francisco since 1943, writing on local history and business and social life of the Bay Area. Book reviewer for the San Francisco Chronicle, 1943-1974.