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Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

California Jewish Community Interview Series
of the Judah L. Magnes Memorial Museum

Jacques Schnier

A SCULPTOR'S ODYSSEY

With Introductions by
Dorothy Lilienthal Schnier
and
Gregg L. McKee

An Interview Conducted by
Suzanne B. Riess
in 1986

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DOROTHY AND JACQUES SCHNIER

August 8, 1981

Photograph by R. Thomas Dunkin, D.D.S.



Memorial services set for Lafayette sculptor Jacques Schnier

Memorial services will be held Saturday, April 2 for Lafayette sculptor Jacques Schnier who died Thursday, March 24 in Walnut Creek at John Muir Medical Center.

The gathering will be held at the Walnut Creek Civic Arts Center, 1641 Locust St. at 2 p.m.

Schnier, 89, a Lafayette resident for 29 years, was a sculptor for more than six decades and a retired professor of art from U.C. Berkeley.

He is survived by his wife, Dorothy Lilienthal Schnier; children, Claude Lilienthal Schnier, Rebecca Lilienthal Schnier and Max F. Gruenberg, Jr.; grandson, Bruce Gruenberg; nephew, Jack Heilfron; and niece, Carla Schnier Bass.

Schnier is best known for his monumental stainless steel geometric pieces, one of which he was working on until shortly before his death. He was also working on bronze castings of his sculpture.

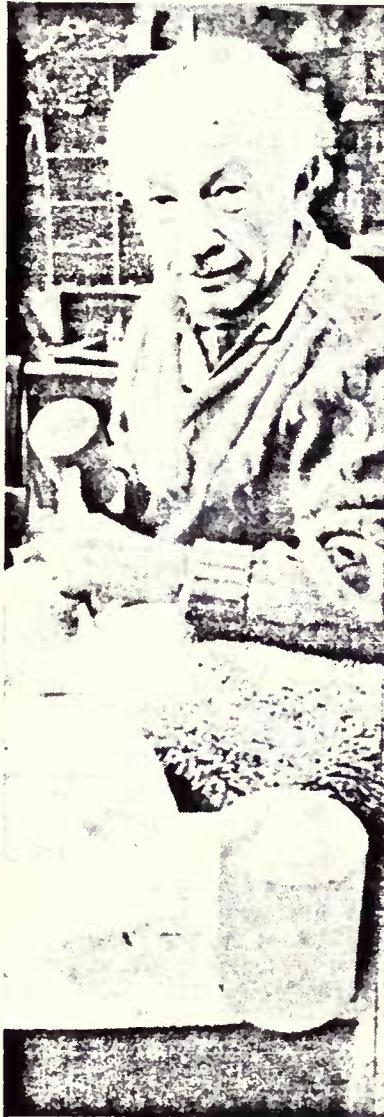
Examples of his geometric pieces are in Concord where "Four Cuboids on Three Points"; sits on a reflecting pool in front of Corporate Center One and "Three Interlocking Rings" is located high on a stainless steel column in the courtyard behind the Corporate Center Two. The buildings are located at the corner of Willow Pass Road and Diamond Boulevard.

Lafayette Developer Peter Bedford commissioned the Concord sculptures and called Schnier's death, "a great loss." Bedford added, "he was a wonderful person. I hope that all of us can follow his wonderful feelings of life."

Born in Constanza, Romania on Christmas Day, 1898, Schnier arrived in San Francisco at the age of four. He studied civil engineering at Stanford University and earned a degree in 1920. He then studied architecture and art and turned to sculpture in 1927.

Prior to World War II, Schnier had a studio at the edge of San Francisco's Chinatown. His work from the early days was often figurative and done in an art deco style in stone, wood and bronze.

His exposure at the 1939 World's



Jacques Schnier

Fair on Treasure Island built his reputation in the Bay Area. A gilded bas relief plaque called "The Soil," hangs in the library of the San Francisco Art Institute. His art deco sculptures are currently being cast in bronze at Artworks Foundry. His work from the 1930s is also touring with a Smithsonian exhibition titled "American Art Deco."

Schnier joined the U.C. Berkeley art department in 1936, founded its sculpture section and created a program for bachelor's and master's degrees in sculpture. He taught at the campus until 1966.

Meanwhile, he earned a master's degree in sociology from U.C. Berkeley in 1940 and became a lay psychoanalyst. He once corresponded with Sigmund Freud and wrote extensively on art and the mind in national and international academic journals.

He enlisted as a private and served in China with the Army Signal Corps during World War II and resumed his teaching and artistic careers after the war.

In the late 1960, Schnier used crystal acrylic to make crystal-like sculptures. He fused several layers together and carved into the surfaces.

'I hope that all of us can follow his wonderful feelings of life'

— Peter Bedford

About 1980 he began to make the large stainless steel cuboid forms and in 1983, the Walnut Creek Civic Arts Gallery mounted the 25-year survey of his work, in celebration of his 85th birthday.

"Schnier's creative journey over the last half century moves through frontiers explored by those innovators who are compelled by visual and intellectual curiosity to continually seek new combinations of form and materials," wrote Gallery director Carl Worth in the catalog.

Schnier was also honored with a U.C. Berkeley Citation in 1970, the university's highest honor, for compiling a collection of essays, "There Was Life." The book was edited by Irving Stone.

Contributions may be sent to Hospice of Contra Costa, 140 Mayhew Way, Suite 606, Pleasant Hill, 94523 or the Jacques Schnier Fund c/o Regional Center for the Arts, P.O. Box 31392, Walnut Creek, 94598.

Local arrangements were made by Hull's Walnut Creek Chapel.

OBITUARIES

MARCH 24, 1988

Jacques Schnier

Jacques Schnier, acclaimed abstract sculptor and former dean of the department of sculpture at the University of California at Berkeley, died Thursday at John Muir Medical Center in Walnut Creek.

Mr. Schnier, 89, worked systematically through base materials, from concrete to wood to metals to crystal acrylic plastic, which he was still forming, shaping and polishing in his Lafayette barn studio well into his 80s. He habitually worked seven hours a day, six days a week.

Annoyed by comments about continuing to work at his advanced age he would reply, "Michaelangelo produced well past the age of 90 and Ben Franklin invented bifocals at 85."

He preferred abstract art to figurative sculpture but said it is much more difficult to produce "because there is no natural point of reference."

"Everything depends on its organization and form, much like classical music," he said.

A native of San Francisco, Mr. Schnier earned an engineering degree from Stanford University in 1920. He worked at that profession for three years and then decided to study architecture.

During his coursework, he was required to take art classes. Within a year and a half he had opened his own studio, received commissions for sculptures and held one-man shows.

In the mid-1930s, he was asked to organize a sculpture department at UC, and he stayed on until he retired in 1966.

Mr. Schnier is survived by his wife, Dorothy, of Lafayette; son, Claude, of Madrid; daughter, Rebecca, of Paris; stepson, Max Gruenberg Jr., of Anchorage, and one grandson.

A memorial gathering is planned for 2 p.m. on April 2 at the Walnut Creek Civic Arts Center, 164 Locust Street, Walnut Creek.

Donations are preferred to Hospice of Contra Costa County or to the Jacques Schnier Fund, Regional Center for the Arts, Box 31392, Walnut Creek 94598.

SCHNIER, Jacques — In Walnut Creek, March 24, 1988; devoted husband of Dorothy Lilienthal Schnier; father of Claude Lilienthal Schnier, Rebecca Lilienthal Schnier and Max F. Gruenberg, Jr.; grandfather of Bruce Gruenberg; uncle of Jack Heifron and Carla Schnier Bass; a resident of the Bay Area for eighty-five years.

A Memorial Gathering will be held at the Walnut Creek Civic Arts Center, 164 Locust St., Walnut Creek, Saturday, April 2, 1988, at 2 p.m. Contributions may be sent to Hospice of Contra Costa, 140 Mayhew Way, Suite 606, Pleasant Hill, Ca. 94523, or the Jacques Schnier Fund, % Regional Center for the Arts, PO Box 31392, Walnut Creek, Ca. 94598. Local arrangements by HULL'S WALNUT CREEK CHAPEL.

Donors to the Jacques Schnier Oral History

The Judah L. Magnes Museum and The Bancroft Library, in behalf of future researchers, wish to thank the following persons whose contributions made possible this oral history of Jacques Schnier. Special thanks to Naomi and Jeffrey Caspe, Bernard Kaplan, and Claude Schnier for their leadership in organizing the funding.

A Jacques Schnier Admirer

Anonymous
Bruce Beasley
Peter Bedford
Morrison Belmont
Robert and Alice Bridges
Lester H. Brill
Earl Brodie
Naomi and Jeffrey Caspe
Lin Emery
Frank Fries, Jr.
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Mr. and Mrs. Richard Goldman
Max F. Gruenberg, Jr. and
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Jacques Heilfron
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PREFACE

The California Jewish Community Series is a collection of oral history interviews with persons who have contributed significantly to Jewish life and to the wider secular community. Sponsored by the Western Jewish History Center of the Judah L. Magnes Memorial Museum, the interviews have been produced by the Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library. Moses Rischin, professor of history at California State University at San Francisco, is advisor to the series. Serving as an advisory committee is the board of the Western Jewish History Center. Present members are co-chairs Norman Coliver and Daniel E. Stone, and Seymour Fromer, Douglas E. Goldman, Barbara Gronowski, James D. Hart, Louis H. Heilbron, Rabbi Robert Kirschner, Elinor Mandelson, Esther Reutlinger, John Rothmann, Dana Shapiro, and Sue Rayner Warburg.

The California Jewish Community Series was inaugurated in 1967. During its first twenty years, former board members who served in an advisory capacity included Harold Edelstein, Cissie Geballe, James M. Gerstley, Philip E. Lilienthal, Robert E. Sinton, Frank H. Sloss, Jacob H. Voorsanger, and Alma Lavenson Wahrhaftig.

In the oral history process, the interviewer works closely with the memoirist in preliminary research and in setting up topics for discussion. The interviews are informal conversations which are tape recorded, transcribed, edited by the interviewer for continuity and clarity, checked and approved by the interviewee, and then final-typed. The resulting manuscripts, indexed and bound, are deposited in the library of the Western Jewish History Center, The Bancroft Library, and the University of California at Los Angeles. By special arrangement copies may be deposited in other manuscript repositories holding relevant collections.

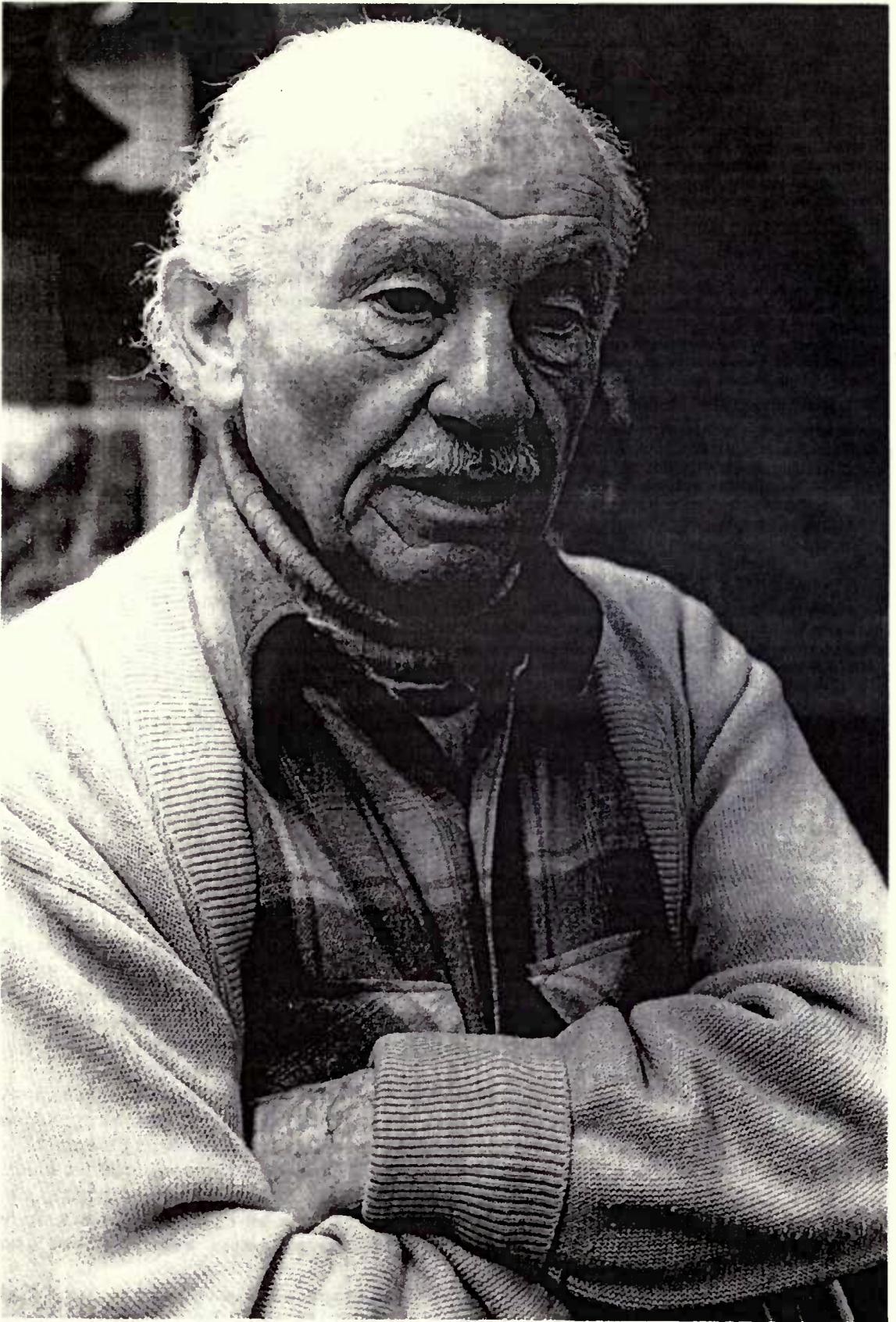
The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons prominent in recent California history. The Office, headed by Willa K. Baum, is under the administrative supervision of Professor James D. Hart, director of The Bancroft Library.

Seymour Fromer
Executive Director
The Magnes Museum

1 August 1987
Berkeley, California

CALIFORNIA JEWISH COMMUNITY INTERVIEW SERIES
OF THE JUDAH L. MAGNES MEMORIAL MUSEUM

- Rinder, Rose (Mrs. Reuben R.), Music, Prayer, and Religious Leadership: Temple Emanu-El, 1913-1969. 1971.
- Koshland, Lucile Heming (Mrs. Daniel E., Sr.), Citizen Participation in Government. 1970.
- Koshland, Daniel E., Sr., The Principle of Sharing. 1971.
- Hilborn, Walter S., Reflections on Legal Practice and Jewish Community Leadership: New York and Los Angeles, 1907-1973. 1974.
- Magnin, Rabbi Edgar F., Leader and Personality. 1975.
- Fleishhacker, Mortimer, and Janet Choynski (Mrs. Mortimer), Family, Business, and the San Francisco Community. 1975.
- Haas, Walter A., Sr., Civic, Philanthropic, and Business Leadership. 1975.
- Haas, Elise Stern (Mrs. Walter, Sr.), The Appreciation of Quality. 1975.
- Salz, Helen Arnstein (Mrs. Ansley), Sketches of An Improbable Ninety Years. 1975.
- Sinton, Edgar, Jewish and Community Service in San Francisco, A Family Tradition. 1978.
- Kuhn, Marshall H., Marshall H. Kuhn: Catalyst and Teacher; San Francisco Jewish and Community Leader, 1934-1978. 1978.
- Hirsch, Marcel, The Responsibilities and Rewards of Involvement. 1981.
- Koshland, Robert J., Volunteer Community Service in Health and Welfare. 1983.
- Stone, Sylvia L., Lifelong Volunteer in San Francisco. 1983.
- Schnier, Jacques, A Sculptor's Odyssey. 1987.
- Fromm, Alfred, Alfred Fromm: Wines, Music, and Lifelong Education. In process.
- Treguboff, Sanford, Administration of Jewish Philanthropy in San Francisco. In process.



Jacques Schnier, 1980

photograph by Joffré Clarke

INTRODUCTION

Jacques Schnier has been called a "Renaissance Man." It has been my life's experience to watch this evolve. As he explains in his oral history, we first met when he was about thirty and I was a child of six. I do not remember the occasion! I know from hearsay that we saw each other at irregular intervals over the next ten years because he was a good friend of my parents, Jesse and Dorothy Lilienthal, and they enjoyed his company and admired his serious, industrious, persevering way. I knew they appreciated his sculpture: several of his pieces were prominently placed in various rooms in our home. My mother had a plaster cast of a small model of the large statue "Sea Breeze" which Jacques did for the Treasure Island World's Fair of 1939 on the mantelpiece in her dressing room where she displayed a very few of her favorite pieces.

As the years passed, and I grew up and took my place with the adults, Jacques and I discovered each other. I was in awe, then surprised, and finally pleased, that this "older man" found me interesting. I remember that feeling well. Jacques was so intense, almost lacking a sense of humor, and this intrigued me. He knew so many things!

Our first real conversation which we both vividly remember and about which he speaks in his oral history was the evening after the "Big Game" which was in Palo Alto that year. Jacques talked to me about Buddhism and his two Wire-haired Fox Terriers. He invited me to his studio/home to see the litter of pups they had just produced. He knew my mother would not allow me to go there unchaperoned, so we arranged for some friends to accompany me. We "dated" for three or four years. I grew up, but not enough. He did not ask me to marry him, but he did ask me to pose for a portrait bust which I did ambivalently. I was enormously flattered and delighted when he included the piece in an exhibition of sculpture at the San Francisco Museum of Art.

World War II happened. I married and had a son, and later was divorced. I had no idea what became of Jacques, and I do not think even my parents knew where he was during the war years.

Probably, fortunately, we do not know what life has in store for us. But for Jacques and me, as in a fairy tale, after the war and my divorce, we met again. I had "grown up" and I soon realized I wanted to be with him the rest of my life. But Jacques was not easy to persuade! It took twelve months to get a California divorce back in 1948, and he did not commit himself for eleven of those months. He was fifty and I was twenty-six when we were married, twenty years after we originally met.

And now, as I write this introduction to my husband's oral history, he is almost eighty-eight and I am sixty-four. My son, Max Gruenberg, Jr., is forty-three; our son, Claude, is thirty; and our daughter, Rebecca, is twenty-eight.

Jacques says he wishes his father could be here to see his successes. I say I wish my parents could see my family. They would be very surprised to see the changes in Jacques--and me. He is still the thorough, conscientious, reliable, profound man, but now there is a feeling of security and relaxation about him. He still concentrates and pursues his projects, whether it be a new sculpture, the drawing plans for the base of a big stainless steel piece for the engineer to follow, or a letter to one of our children, as intensely as ever. He still "relaxes" by studying the Chinese language. He is interested in new inventions and the modern developments in science. He keeps up with national and international events. He continues his search for new sculpture forms having pioneered the use of acrylic in carved sculpture just a few years ago. In order to do this, he studied diamond cutting to learn about light refraction, reflection and brilliance. When a new problem arises he does not rest until he has solved it or eventually accepts the fact there is no solution. But that is hard for him to do. He still wants to find the answer--if possible.

Jacques has been successful in three careers: engineering, psychoanalytic research, and sculpture. He has worked hard at all of them, devoting his life to each in turn. He now, occasionally, pulls back and we talk about events in his life. I learned many things about him, even after all these years of living with him, when I proofread this oral history.

A "Renaissance Man"? I do not know about that, but certainly a man who has made my life complete.

Dorothy Lilienthal Schnier

Lafayette, California
September 1986

INTRODUCTION

Nanking, August, 1945, hot and humid in the Yangtze River Valley but not as hot as Captain Jacques Schnier, Corps of Engineers, on duty with the U.S. Army. He was justifiably "hot," because I, who was to become his commanding officer, had failed to send a vehicle to pick him up at the airport on his arrival from the interior. It was not a comfortable place to spend a hot afternoon. The field was barely usable. Bomb craters had been filled, but the field was ringed with the carnage of wrecked hangars, vehicles and the charred skeletons of Japanese fighters, burned out on some earlier day by raids from either the Flying Tigers or the U.S. 14th Air Force. Many of the quarter million armed Japanese troops in China were posted to Nanking, their theater headquarters, and to the airfield. They were still armed! Telephones were few and seldom worked: he could not call. Jacques waited two or three hours, probably longer the way he remembers it, and then caught a ride with the motor sergeant who had gone to the airport on a hunch to see if anyone might have arrived.

Before he and the sergeant reached headquarters, I found time to read deeper into a stack of radio messages from Chungking, one of which advised that he was enroute. I went to the motor pool intending to instruct the sergeant to fetch him, but arrived only after they did. I offered my apologies and explained as best I could the reason he had not been met. He cooled, graciously accepted the apology, put the sergeant "back together," and began immediately his duties as "Post Engineer and Facilities Officer" for the Nanking Detachment of the U.S. Forces China Theater. Let me tell you, he was "good at it." I relate the story of our first meeting and Jacques' anger because I don't think he has been angry in the forty-odd years since then.

We were in Nanking to set up advance headquarters to support the American role for the surrender of China-based Japanese forces. This was to be signed in September. Certain American assets were to be reclaimed and new facilities were to be established for an operational HQ to feed, house, and care for the needs of many transients. Thousands of service personnel were expected to be returned to the United States by sea across the Pacific rather than by air back over the "Hump" into India. Several hotels were taken over, along with a large Japanese middle school compound and miscellaneous other buildings.

Considerable construction was required to convert these facilities to our use. We had no American personnel to perform these tasks, so they were accomplished by Chinese laborers and contractors. Jacques handled the design work and cost estimates, located the Chinese firms with qualifying capability, negotiated for the work, and inspected and supervised its accomplishment. He was one of the last of those almost legendary project managers who completed projects on time and within budget.

Jacques had been in China even before World War II. During the war he had enjoyed the advantage of Chinese language studies under Army sponsorship before being sent to China; and he had an engineering background. But his success in that environment rested also upon his clear thinking, good planning, calm, unflustered manner, and good rapport with the Chinese. He was among the gifted minority of Americans in China who operated with such intercultural personnel skills as to minimize the frustrations that plagued most Americans there. Jacques bolstered the dignity, self-esteem, and pride-in-workmanship of all the Chinese working for us, and it paid off in the quality of the work they did. He took time to admire the carpenters' joinery and the care the painters gave to the woodwork trim. Several of the Chinese contractors who worked for him expressed their appreciation to me and contrasted the experience to that of working for the occupying Japanese which had been their lot until then. He was an excellent "ambassador."

There was some free time in Nanking after the surrender was signed. We spent as much of it as possible visiting the local sights, especially the antique and curio shops. The Japanese thought they had "stripped" Nanking, and indeed they had; but within hours of the surrender, those venerable old Chinese antiquarians were getting their shops back in business. Each day brought a new supply of treasures--some really were--as family heirlooms began to surface in Nanking and trickle in from the countryside.

It was fascinating because each day brought not only new items of the same general sort, but entirely new categories--porcelain and silk, bronze, jade, cloisonné, ivory, lacquers, gorgeous brocades, and occasionally even rugs. How different and exotic it all was! Interesting to be sure, and strange and largely indecipherable, but for Jacques. He befriended us all and shared generously of his knowledge and experience in China, and of his sense of taste in Chinese art. It didn't stop with external appearances. He knew the symbolisms, their historic development, often the techniques that had been employed, and above all, I felt, he knew the materials. I have never asked him, but I would suppose the rich variety of materials-in-art that we knew in the Orient may have influenced his own selection of materials as he worked progressively through the years with wood, copper, bronze, plastic, lacquer, crystal acrylic, stainless steel, and probably others unsaid.

Jacques' knowledge didn't stop with knowledge of art; it included also the "art" of dealing with the antiquarian. The Chinese dealer always had a few items that cost mere pennies. Insignificant as objets d'art, but very significant in human relations. Jacques taught us that you always buy at least one of these if you have spent considerable time in the shop. And the same thing happened to the dealers that had happened to the carpenters, masons, and painters: they "felt better" after a visit from Jacques, whether or not an expensive treasure had been sold.

Jacques helped me acquire and develop a lasting fascination and fondness for China's land, people, history and culture, and he did so by helping me learn how to truly appreciate them. It has greatly enriched my life. That

may not be the normal function of a "Post Engineer and Facilities Officer," but surely it's the very essence of being a professor and an artist.

We were seldom together during the next twenty years as my military assignments carried me afar. But our friendship grew through correspondence, and I learned that he writes with the same clarity, thoroughness, and precision that characterize his thought; and I believe, his art.

My bride and I did have two opportunities during those years to visit Jacques in his studio-home on Russian Hill. Those were his bachelor days. I was intrigued anew by the man, the scope of his interests, his energy, his work, and his accomplishments. I think it was only then that I truly grasped the degree to which Jacques is capable of focus and dedication toward the goals he has set for himself. I should have seen it sooner. It is, after all, Clausewitz's "First Principle," that of the "Objective." Jacques, to a most uncommon degree, has the ability to set clearly defined objectives and march toward them without distraction. He has demonstrated this characteristic throughout our acquaintance.

It was early in this post-war period that we asked him to be the godfather of our son. He agreed, perhaps with some surprise, and has "never looked back." That was thirty-seven years ago, and I think that not once, no matter where in the world we have been, has Jacques failed to acknowledge the relationship and send a message of inspiration and encouragement on Glenn's birthday. I insist that loyalty and faithfulness be included in the list of Jacques' attributes, and I am sure his children, Claude and Becky, would applaud their inclusion, with hearty agreement from their mother, Dorothy.

The last twenty years have further strengthened our friendship as I moved my family to California upon retirement. We have seen the Schniers often and delight in our friendship. I am no longer surprised, but always amazed that one man can put such wonderful, unfailing enthusiasm into his world and his work. I have been present upon his receiving a new commission. I don't believe I was as delighted as he, even when receiving my first bicycle! And it shows in his art. How clearly can best be appreciated by viewing Jacques' crystal acrylics and the behaviour of the light that couldn't resist going inside; or by the intersecting, stainless "cubes" that intertwine and poise on "tip-toe" with the grace of ballerinas.

I wonder what he will give us in the next ten years.

Gregg L. McKee
Colonel
U.S. Army, Retired

Carmel, California
September 1986

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Jacques Schnier's autobiographical essay in There Was Light begins with his statement, "A man's life and his accomplishment result from determinate and indeterminate factors. Looking back over my own past, the indeterminate factors were of major importance."*

This oral history memoir is a reminiscence, in depth, of the indeterminate factors in the life of sculptor, teacher, and student of psychoanalysis, Jacques Schnier. Schnier came to the University of California in 1924 to study architecture after receiving his bachelor's degree in civil engineering at Stanford University. During his two-year period of architecture study at Berkeley, from 1924 to 1926, he "discovered" sculpture. He rented a studio and trained himself. He traveled. He taught. He lived in San Francisco, ate in Chinatown, studied Buddhism. He acquired an M.A. from the Department of Social Institutions. In 1949, at the age of fifty, he married Dorothy Lilienthal.

A self-characterized slow starter, Jacques Schnier felt that his period of greatest productivity arrived in the late 1950s. It occurred, as he wrote in There Was Light, because "I felt I now understood my drive to create, as well as the unconscious meaning of what I created." Now he is surprising and surpassing himself with his success. In 1987 he is eighty-nine years old, a positive man, unplagued with hindsight, an argument for slow starters lasting longer.

Actually there is no need for me to "interpret" Jacques Schnier. He understands himself very well. He discovered psychoanalysis not long after he discovered sculpture. Reading Freud's lectures in a Modern Library edition, An Introduction to Psychoanalysis, he was struck by the analytic understanding of the artistic drive. Those thoughts took hold; the questions he had been asking of what it was that attracted him to art might have answers. So strong was this need to comprehend that Jacques Schnier said to himself, "I'd like to be a psychoanalyst."

He started an analysis with Joseph Thompson in 1933. "The experience was like an entirely new kind of education, only far more important than anything I had experienced before" (There Was Light). That psychoanalytic work provides the intellectual underpinning to the life of Jacques Schnier, and it also makes him an exceptionally interesting interviewee.

In 1978 the Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library first approached Mr. Schnier to consider being a memoirist, but we were unable to pursue arrangements at that time. Seven years later, in May 1985, with the

*Irving Stone, ed., There Was Light, a collection of reminiscences by thirty-nine of the University of California's most distinguished alumni, Doubleday & Co., New York, 1970.

encouragement of his son Claude and the sponsorship of the Judah Magnes Museum, the office was able formally to invite Jacques Schnier to be a participant in the oral history program.

Before the taping began, Mr. Schnier met with the interviewer to discuss how to structure the interviews and to review other oral history memoirs dealing with the arts in the San Francisco Bay Area in the same approximate period of time. That was when I had my first look at the very pleasant country life of Jacques and Dorothy Schnier. Their ranch-style house adjoins considerable acreage. An orchard of apple and other fruit trees lies across a creek spanned by a stunning bridge, designed by engineer Schnier. A great stand of redwood trees, footed in the creek, appears as a border to the lawn and pool. Visible from the house, in the garden and tended lawn, is a mini-sculpture garden displaying pieces from different periods of Mr. Schnier's sixty years of sculpting.

We interviewed in the living room at first, and then later in the study. The former was an open space with expanses of glass, a grand piano which Dorothy plays very well, and several of Schnier's early teakwood and later acrylic pieces. The study and library was crowded with books--psychoanalytic texts, art books, and reprints of Schnier's writing in both fields.

My first impression of Jacques Schnier was of the power of his handshake. This was definitely the hand of a man who molded resistant materials, I thought, and I anticipated having to meet that strength throughout the interviews. I was not surprised when at the end he admitted his ambivalence at doing the oral history. It was for his family he agreed to do it. He had little enough time for the new creative work he wanted to do. As well as exhibiting and designing, he was responding to a burst of demand from collectors for his intense and beautiful earlier work. Yet once engaged in the taping, he was committed to doing a good history. He brought out in me a more than usual demand to find meaning and motivation, and there was a lot of energy in the interviewing.

The interviews, edited by the office, were turned over to Jacques and Dorothy Schnier, for Dorothy's review. A capable and concerned editor, she worked hard to bring out the exact meaning of her husband's words and to give a bit of polish to the surface--somehow a task pleasantly befitting the sculptor's wife! After the final typing, Dorothy Schnier once again volunteered to proofread, and--to extend the metaphor--polished whatever had roughened in the firing.

Dorothy and Jacques were generous in offering photographic material and provided the fine color picture taken by R. Thomas Dunkin, D.D.S., in 1981, a bright addition to the frontispiece. We asked Dorothy Schnier to contribute an introductory statement, and her personal and heartfelt words were the happy result. The Schniers then suggested Gregg L. McKee, Colonel, U.S. Army Retired, Jacques' commanding officer in World War II and a continuing friend, to provide another introductory view. In accepting the invitation to write an introduction, Col. McKee referred to Jacques Schnier's having "as many facets as the Kohinoor"--another fitting metaphor for a sculptor.

The appendices contain considerable examples of Mr. Schnier's many ways of working in sculptural media over the years. We have also included a complete resumé, newspaper interviews and critical comments, and with the cooperation of Carl Worth, curator of the Civic Center Gallery in Walnut Creek, we are able to include illustrations in color of Schnier work in situ.

A Summer 1987 presentation of the memoir will bring together the sponsors, the donors, the honoree, the family, and representatives of the Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library. A grand finale. And meantime, life goes on for Jacques Schnier. In 1985 he said to an interviewer catching him in his studio way up the road beyond his Lafayette home, "I find it hard to leave my work. My wife calls every day to ask when I'm coming home."* Jacques chose the oral history's title, A Sculptor's Odyssey, and odyssey is a good word--"an extended adventurous wandering." It describes the interviews, as well as the life's work, and this volume should be a gratifying adventure for the reader and researcher in art history, social history, and intellectual history.

Suzanne Riess
Senior Editor

10 March 1987
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

*Diablo Country, July/August, 1985.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please print or write clearly)

Your full name JACQUES SCHNIER

Date of birth Dec 25, 1898 Place of birth CONSTANTA, ROMANIA

Father's full name Benjamin Schner

Birthplace Romania

Occupation merchant

Mother's full name Matilda Liebo.

Birthplace Romania

Occupation housewife.

Where did you grow up? San Francisco, Calif

Present community Lafayette, Calif.

Education Stanford University, Civil Engineering, 1920

University of Calif. M.A. Sociology, 1940

Occupation(s) also University of Calif, studied Architecture, 1924-1926
California School of Fine Arts, 1925-1927

Engineer, 1919-1924; worked for architects, 1925-26;
sculptor, 1927 to date; instructor in sculpture, California
College of Arts and Crafts 1935-36, Faculty, University of
California, Berkeley, Lecturer to Professor of Sculpture, 1936-6

Special interests or activities ,

Civic art, sculpture world wide.

I EARLY YEARS

[Interview 1: June 28, 1985]##

Family

Origins

Schnier: Why do people leave their homeland? That applies to probably everybody, and it is appropriate to ask everybody in America how their parents came here. A lot of people came because of religious persecution and I think that would apply to my family's case. Being a Jew in Rumania without citizenship privileges, you were a second class citizen--I guess that is what they call it. Eventually my father had the gumption and the insight to feel he ought to get out of there.

I have a feeling that this was a thing that constantly happened with previous generations, that they kept on migrating, because in talking with my father I got the idea that his family came from Austria-Hungary and that suggests a move prior to moving to America. Before that time it could have been Germany or Poland.

My mother's name was Liebo; I've seen the name Liebovitch. Now if it was Liebovitch that had been reduced to Liebo, that suggests that her family came from Poland. And the name Schnier suggests to me that perhaps they had come through Germany to Austria-Hungary and then on to Rumania.

Riess: Do you mean that they are adapting their names to where they are?

##This symbol indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes see page 178.

Schnier: I thought so. But when I was in Israel, two people who had an interest in the derivation of the name, the genealogy, they looked it up and they told us that the name came from "Schnee." Not a Hebrew word. There is another language that is spoken in that area that sometimes the Bible is written in.

Riess: Aramaic?

Schnier: Aramaic, yes. That meant everlasting snow, that is, snow on the north side of the mountain that doesn't melt. Then I thought maybe the German word schnee came from this Aramaic word and also that Schnier wasn't of German derivation. I thought that was fine because a lot of times people would say that probably it came from the German word for tailor. On the other hand, someone, a Jewish gentleman who knows a little about Yiddish, said that he thought that Schnier came from a Yiddish word that means daughter-in-law. Be that as it may, I know that the name was not Schnier when my people lived in Rumania. That is what the immigration official decided we were going to be called when we came to Ellis Island.

My sister was married to an army officer. As things began to heat up before World War II, everybody with a German-sounding name wanted to be sure there would be no question about their loyalty. Her husband's name was German, his family came from Germany. His name was Heilfron. My sister went to the Rumanian consul and asked them if they would look up the records in the town where she was born in northern Rumania and get her birth certificate to show that she was Rumanian, not German. Anyhow she wanted her birth certificate. She finally got it, and I have a copy of it. In the records the name is Snir. I could see how somebody in the immigration bureau would say, "Christ! that name will never do in America," and changed it to "Schnier."

Riess: Your sister then was born over there?

Schnier: Yes, and I was born there too. She was born in the northern part of Rumania because my father's family settled in Transylvania. After he married, he moved down to the seacoast to Constanza, one of the main ports on the Black Sea.

Riess: When did your parents and you come to this country then?

Schnier: Our naturalization certificate shows 1903.

Riess: Do you remember anything of Rumania as a child?

Schnier: No, I don't remember anything prior to getting to Portland, Oregon except I have what you might call a "cover memory" that may be tied up with something else. That is of the big black hold of the ship we came over on. We came in steerage. We were down below and we would come up and walk around the deck when the hatches would be off, and this is how I reconstruct it, I could look down into the hold of the ship. That is the only memory I have. We all came together, which was somewhat unusual: father, mother and three children.

I don't have a memory of the time we settled in New York for a while on the East Side. Then eventually we moved to Portland.

Riess: Had you been preceded by relatives and friends from Rumania?

Schnier: One of my mother's brothers had married and had settled in Portland. I think that's why we went to Portland from New York. We stayed either with them or moved into quarters nearby. I have vague memories of Portland. I remember the rain, the drizzle.

Parents

Schnier: I think the first positive memory I have of my youth is when we moved to San Francisco.

Riess: When was that?

Schnier: That would have been between 1903 and 1906 because this memory is before 1906.

Riess: Before the earthquake?

Schnier: Yes. My father preceded the family in moving to San Francisco in order to get a job and get settled and find a place to live. In the old country he knew something about wines. In San Francisco he worked for something called the California Wine Association which owned Swiss Colony that is still in existence. He was connected with the finishing of the wine. After the grape juice is made, it has to be fermented and finished and clarified, especially the white wines that must look clear. He had something to do with that.

Riess: So, this was a skill that he was bringing from Rumania?

Schnier: Yes, but this wasn't his only skill. While in Rumania he had a lumber yard at one time. He had an inn because he used to talk a lot about the teamsters who would be coming in with big logs from the forest, from Transylvania. They would stop at his inn. Inns like his were the forerunners of modern motels. He would talk about that and he would also talk about the business he had before he left Rumania. It burned him up when the police would come in and look at the shelves and say, "I want that," "I want a bottle of Martel cognac." I think it was a general merchandising store, maybe groceries too, like the old country store. They would say, "That and that," and they knew my father couldn't say anything. He couldn't bring them to court because he was a Jew and these were the police. So that's why he decided, "I'm going to get out of here."

Riess: Were the Jews in a ghetto where he lived?

Schnier: In Rumania?

Riess: In Rumania.

Schnier: That was never mentioned. But I'm pretty sure that when he came to America, although this was never mentioned either and I don't remember the situation there, I think it was like a ghetto on the East Side because my sister used to tell me of the grocery store that he started. So many Jews went into the grocery business, just like the Chinese after they exhausted the laundry business here moved up, became upwardly mobile, and they moved into the grocery business. Now they are out of the grocery business and are in real estate. The Palestinians and the Arabs, a lot of them have taken over the grocery business. But anyhow, to answer your question, I think that definitely must have been a ghetto on the East Side. Although as I say, I don't remember anything.

About San Francisco. We must have been here in 1904, allowing for some time in Portland and then coming to San Francisco. I know there would be more time here because I remember we lived in two different houses. In other words we had made an upward move.

When we first came here, my father found quarters on a little side street south of Market Street. At that time it wasn't the most desirable place to live if one thought of a nice home and maybe a tree or so. It was on a street called Shipley Street. There were a number of small alleys between Mission and Howard and Howard and Folsom and this was a side street. That was near where my father was working, where the California Wine Association had its warehouses and the like.



Top left: San Francisco, 1908.
Left to right: Leo Liebo, Dora
Schnier, Carl Schnier, Jacques
Schnier, Pearl Liebo.



Top right: Carl, Dora, and
Jacques, 1903.

Bottom: Jacques Schnier,
photographed by a street
photographer, Shipley Street,
San Francisco, 1904.



Riess: You mean the wine was brought down from--

Schnier: Napa.

Riess: And all the finishing took place in San Francisco rather than at the winery?

Schnier: Yes. It's different, it's different now. A lot of these small vineyards bottle their own wine.

I remember later on, when my father became independent. He had a terrific drive to be his own boss, to be independent. The first wine company he founded, and that he kept until Prohibition, was called the Independent Wine and Liquor Company. I remember that emphasis on independent. That's why he had the drive to come to America.

Riess: Let me ask a few questions so you don't get too far ahead.

Schnier: Yes.

Riess: Is your recollection of the whole coming over that it was a happy time? Was it an upbeat thing, this coming to America?

Schnier: You know, I have no recollections of that at all. I don't remember anything about emotions at all except after we got to San Francisco, then I begin to remember a few things. If you are ready for that I'll tell you more things. No, I don't remember at all. I don't remember anything about the family, the interaction between my father and my mother. In fact, I don't remember much emoting like you might find in an Italian family or an Arab family where they shout at each other and the like. So I would have to give you a negative reply there.

Riess: You said there were three children?

Schnier: Yes, my sister Dora, who was two years older than I am, and my brother Carl, who was two years younger. One daughter and two sons.

Riess: You said that you remember your father talking about various things. Did he like to reminisce about the old country or was it a closed subject?

Schnier: I think I would pick up a bit of information here and there. After I was married he had several attacks of one thing and another. He was getting old but living alone still. My sister had been taking care of him when necessary although he was mobile. She lived

Schnier: near him out in the Marina. All four of us were living in San Francisco at the time. We once had a meeting, my brother, my sister and myself. We talked about this matter of taking care of our father. I took over going to see him every other day or maybe a couple of times a week. We would have lunch together and I would pump him for information about his childhood and his experiences. That's how I found out that he came from Transylvania where they were building a railroad at that time. A railroad meant a lot of business, a lot of people employed in one capacity or another.

Riess: When they came to San Francisco, did they stay in an old world community?

Schnier: No, I don't remember any Jews in this area. I remember Italians. I remember an Italian restaurant where almost regularly we had dinner out on Sundays, that was in a boarding house. The restaurant was downstairs but there were a lot of Italians who lived in the hotel up above. I remember that, so it must have been a mixed neighborhood.

Riess: Were they religious Jews?

Schnier: No, no. My mother did go to Temple occasionally. My father very seldom. I think he was sort of singled out by his parents to be a rabbi and he revolted against that. He wasn't religious. Oh, well, when my mother passed away I remember we would go to Temple to pray. I don't remember if it was every evening after sundown for a while. There is a tradition amongst the Jews. There are a lot of things he couldn't give up. It was part and parcel of his upbringing. I remember going to the Temple with my mother on the High Holy Days. I remember I fell into this idea of Jewishness and went to a little school to study Hebrew and went to Sunday school. But I gave it up. I'm not religious at all. I don't feel there is somebody up above there looking down on me and putting the black marks or the red marks in a book. There is no feeling whatsoever. So we were not religious.

Riess: What was the quality of life? In your autobiography you have said that your parents stood for hard work and independence of thought.* I've heard you talk now about the hard work part. What's the independence of thought? How does that manifest itself?

*There Was Light, Autobiography of a University, Berkeley, 1868-1968, edited by Irving Stone, Doubleday & Co., New York, 1960, pp. 91-106.

- Schnier: Because my father, in the first place, gave up religious belief. He had tasted it and it didn't taste good to him. He didn't need it. He wanted to have an opportunity to do his own thing. I think that is where I inherited this idea of being an artist. Because that is one field where you are independent. I mean unless you are doing commercial art. So there was this terrific drive to have his own business. For a while he was working for other people because after he left the California Wine Association, he worked for a gentleman who owned some wine companies.
- Riess: Who was that?
- Schnier: It was a gentleman named Weintraub. My father worked for him just before the fire of April 1906. He kept up his friendship with Weintraub after he left him and decided to open up his own business in the same neighborhood.
- Riess: Was he successful, your father?
- Schnier: Oh yes, he put my brother and me through college. He gave us everything we wanted. He worked for us. He never denied us when it came to financial support. He never denied us anything or said, "You have to work hard," or "If you are going to be an artist, I can't help you." No, he was very supportive. That was a very fortunate thing. Maybe that came from his encouraging a person to be independent.
- Riess: Was this the satisfaction of his life, to see his children successful?
- Schnier: Well, we were very late starters. I had started engineering and I had a good income. Then I went to study architecture using my income to support myself. I didn't need his help then. I just wanted to say this. After that I became an artist and I wasn't earning anything. And yet he never, never complained. He was, I would say, very supportive. But of course, after I became a professor at the university, after I designed that half dollar for the United States government when they opened the Bay Bridge--which didn't amount to much as a commission but it was a big thing, a lot of publicity in the newspapers--after I designed the big statues for the World's Fair, there was a lot of publicity in the newspapers. I was winning sculpture prizes at the exhibitions. He couldn't help but have felt, "He's arrived, I let him alone and he has finally made the grade." But he never emoted about it. He didn't show me off to anybody. He was--I wouldn't say the reticent type, but he just wasn't a glad hander or a back slapper. He wasn't much of a politician or anything like that, but I think he was content. That was important.

Riess: That is a good memory of a parent.

Schnier: Oh, yes.

In the beginning I had negative feelings about my father. When I was at Stanford, as a young man, I thought the other students' parents were well-to-do. Some of them were driving big cars. They came from typical white-collar upper-class, and some of them from the higher classes too. As you know in the university, you have a cross-section of many people from different classes. I used to think, "Gee, my father has a wine company. He is not a banker. He is not a stockbroker. He isn't in the investment business. He is not high up. He doesn't wear starched collars." Maybe he did at that time, but he didn't have his suits made. They weren't Brooks Brothers suits. You might say that I was ashamed almost. But as the years went by, other values, other things for evaluating him came into play. Then I looked back upon him as being--I was very fortunate in having a person like him.

My mother was the same way too, so I have no complaints. Freud used to say that anybody who was positive that his mother loved him--he did not mention his father--if his mother loved him, he was going to get along all right. I was lucky that way. I changed the picture toward my father and I began to have greater and greater respect for what he had done. He was independent. He was honest and he made a comfortable living. He was able to retire. We didn't have to support him. He had built up enough capital to have property, an apartment house where he had his own apartment out in the Marina in a nice area.

Riess: Did he and your mother come from the same class, background?

Schnier: I had the feeling from little snatches of conversation that my mother probably came from a higher class, came from a different class. I know that she had gone to the gymnasium, where they studied French, but my father never had studied French. Another thing that makes me believe this about my mother's family is that her father and mother were living with my father and mother, and my father often dropped remarks about how his father-in-law was such a dandy. How he smoked his imported cigarettes.

And also when he ordered the black coffee--. Do you know that Turkish coffee that they serve in little cups with the foam on it? In Rumania and Turkey, in that area, and in the Near East, there are a lot of coffee shops that make their existence just selling these little cups of black coffee. And they deliver it. You see the boys with trays with these little cups of black coffee. But my

Schnier: father repeated several times that his father-in-law was so dandy-like and so particular that he wouldn't drink this black coffee if the foam had dropped. [laughter] So I got the picture that he came from a different class. And also the fact that my mother could speak French.

Riess: Did your parents speak English as the home language in this country?

Schnier: Yes. They must have picked it up very early, either studied it before they came to America by going to some private tutor, or picked it up in New York, Portland, or San Francisco because they spoke English mostly. But now and then they would speak some Yiddish or Rumanian. I never did pick up any words of Rumanian, but I heard a number of Yiddish expressions which are quite common today. So they must have spoken some Yiddish too.

Riess: I wonder what situation the Rumanian language would be good for that the Yiddish wouldn't cover.

Schnier: Maybe there were some phrases that were very appropriate in certain situations. You wanted to say this is this and this is this and the Rumanian word just hit it right on the nail.

Riess: Interesting. Did you have books and music and paintings around the house?

Schnier: No, I remember my father once either bought or he traded some of his goods for a little oil painting. All he knew, and told us, was "You can't tell, some of these oil paintings bring huge prices." You know the common talk that you hear on the street that oil paintings are very precious. I suppose it was made by an amateur and was absolutely worthless.

As far as art goes, no. No music, no books. I wasn't exposed to reading until I got to high school. The library was close by and I would go down there almost every day to pick up a bunch of books and read. I became a very voracious reader and that came not from the family but just from high school exposure.

Riess: Were your parents political?

Schnier: No, I never heard any politics discussed in the home. I tell you they were struggling to make a living and to send their children to school and also to be upwardly mobile. Because later my father started buying property and we moved into one of his houses.

Riess: What did your mother do? Hausfrau?

Schnier: Yes, she was bringing up the family. But then later on, once we became sort of independent and could make our own lunch to take to school with us, she used to help in my father's company. It wasn't hard work and didn't require any special training, but she helped out until she passed away. She passed away when she was sort of young, I guess in her early fifties, from cancer.

Earthquake

Riess: Do you have memories of the earthquake?

Schnier: Yes, I do, I have vivid memories. We had moved out of what you might have called sort of a slum area.

Riess: That was Shipley?

Schnier: Shipley Street. I've been down there since and it's a factory area, warehouses, maybe one or two old flats that have been retained from that era. We had moved out to Golden Gate Park, if you know San Francisco. It was actually what is called the Panhandle, that narrow strip of park, leading to the main part of Golden Gate Park. We had nice quarters. We didn't own the house. It may have been a two flat house, that I'm not sure of. But I do remember that the building was shaking. It didn't bother me. I just slept through it. I was dozing and I felt a pull on my leg. I awakened to my mother pulling me out of bed. We finally got out of the house and were told to stay out. Later on the National Guard began to come into action. The reason that they wanted us to stay out of the house was they were fearful that the brick chimneys--in those days they didn't use reinforced concrete for the chimneys--the brick chimneys would fall down. There were so many of them falling down in the rest of San Francisco. They were afraid a fire would start, that the gas mains would break and then catch on fire.

We were given tents and cots by the National Guard or whoever was helping with the relief, and encouraged to move over to the park. We set up our quarters in the park, set up the tent and were told where we could get provisions. A lot of the stores had been wrecked. Our food distribution center was a Catholic church on Fillmore and Fell Streets. It's still there. Every day or whenever we needed provisions or when we knew that the provisions were going to be distributed, we'd go down to this church and stand in line and get

Schnier: a certain amount of cans of condensed milk--Carnation was the popular brand, I remember--and eggs and bread and coffee and maybe vegetables and fruit. We were provided with an outdoor camp stove so we were camping out in San Francisco.

Now, so much for how we were living. The fire, my actual observation of the earthquake and fire: The fire went on for three or four days. The city was just raging, a raging fire downtown. I remember walking from the park past Divisadero Street, if you are acquainted with the city, on towards Fillmore Street. But before I got there, there is a hill near Fell and Scott Streets with a park called Alamo Square. Later on they built Girls High School there. And if you got up on the hill you could look right down on the city and see it burning and see the buildings toppling when they dynamited to stop the fire. That went on for days.

It wasn't long before my father was asked by the company that he worked for, not the California Wine Association but the wine merchant Weintraub, to come to him in Stockton. So the whole family moved up there. My father worked in the business there. That was my first experience of country living with sloughs with minnows and catfish, and barns with the smell of stables, and tree-shaded dirt streets. And fruit trees. That was a happy experience. I loved that and the warmth, the summer warmth. But I don't think we stayed there very long. Once the city was back to some sort of normalcy, Weintraub moved back and we moved back with him. He opened up a business in a new location. He had been burned out, the business had been burned out. [end insert]

High School

Riess: Where did you go to high school?

Schnier: I went to Polytechnic High School in San Francisco. That's out by the University of California Hospital and Medical Center.

Riess: The Affiliated Colleges?

Schnier: Right across the street.

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Schnier: I was never very good in wordy subjects like history or civics or even English. Polytechnic High School attracted me because the emphasis was on science, arithmetic, math, things like that.

Riess: So that was your breakthrough to reading then, when you were in high school?

Schnier: My friends were reading a lot. That was our recreation you might say. I never went in very much for sports, maybe to a lesser extent than fantasies that were aroused by reading and things of that sort. But at Polytechnic High I learned a little about electricity, so I became interested in radio. Radio wasn't around too long at that time. I'm talking about 1912, 1913. I built myself a radio set, and I was so excited when I picked up a message from another ham who lived not very far from where I did! Finally we met and formed a friendship.

Riess: I can imagine how exciting that must have been.

Schnier: Yes. Of course it wasn't voice at that time, it was Morse Code. I had to interpret the code and that was a sort of slow process. Anyhow, I did have that experience in making a radio set and transmitter.

Riess: Why do you think you didn't go on to become an electrical inventor?

Schnier: I took up mechanical drafting in high school and got by fairly well with that. Then I got by fairly well in mathematics because that's concrete. In my estimation two and two makes four and in the algebraic equations you know how they work and you can get an answer. I was attracted to those subjects, but I was very poor in English and civics and history. I didn't know what they were talking about. History, I remember, I'd just sit there and it would just pass me by. Especially English history.

I often wonder how I went into engineering, especially civil engineering. I know that I was attracted to engineering and mathematics and those things because I could work them out. They are concrete. There was an answer. But I never thought there was a hard and fast answer in civics. I guess I was right because what you have is the opinion of the person who is writing the book. He could talk about American politics but American politics has a lot of ifs, ands and buts in it. It wasn't a hard and fast thing.

So I went into engineering, but then I wondered why I picked out civil engineering. You asked me why I didn't go into radio, electrical engineering. I often wonder if that word "civil" had something to do with civil, civilized. You become something. You get out of this rut of knowing very little. I don't know, I really haven't any idea. Engineering made sense to me until I got into it and worked at it and found out that it didn't provide the opportunities for exercising your own imagination.

- Riess: So inevitably you did get back to abstractions, but you had to make your own way.
- Schnier: Yes. And now I find abstractions are not abstract at all. They are a matter of forces. I'm working on a model [a sculpture work] for a suburb of Washington, D.C. As I turn the turntable around to get views of it from all different angles, I am constantly seeing that this is a problem of the stress and strain and the thrust of these lines. Of course, I am using my personal judgment in deciding when the thrusts are satisfying, are viable, are artistically, aesthetically significant. So there is a matter of value judgment there, but I don't think of it as being something without reason. That is quite positive. And then, of course, it lends itself to greater opportunities for creative invention than doing a figure. But I should amend that. As I look at the use of the figure today, I can see that it allows you a lot of personal interpretation. You can elongate it. You can squash it down. You can pull it out. You can distort it to express feeling.
- Riess: Did any of your teachers in high school take you under their wing?
- Schnier: Yes and no. I'd say that I got along with a number of them and some of them I respected. But they weren't the kind who would take students under their wing. They were sort of aloof. I respected them because they were good teachers. They were very thorough in their attempt to get their information over to the students. I had some good teachers there in that respect.
- But there was one teacher, an art teacher, who discouraged me. I had taken one semester of free-hand drawing in her class and found it so interesting I wanted to take the second semester. When I showed her my drawings, she said I wasn't good enough to go into the advanced class. This squelched my interest in art for many years.
- Riess: Did that high school send most of its students on to college?
- Schnier: That I don't know. I know my good friend, a classmate of mine with whom I used to chum around, never went to college. He went to work for Standard Oil. I always thought of him as being much brighter than I was. He was a straight A student, very sharp and he used to outclass me in sports too. We played tennis and he'd just clobber me.
- Riess: He was successful without college?
- Schnier: Oh, yes. But he was just what they call an organization type of person. He did his job and he got ahead. I renewed our acquaintanceship after the passage of fifty or sixty years. And as I see him now,

Schnier: I certainly don't look up to him. I don't have much to talk to him about except some of his experiences when he was with Standard Oil.

I don't remember any other high school classmates I thought of as being--what do they call them?--an example to follow.

Riess: Mentor?

Schnier: I had only two true mentors, both of whom came much later. But in college I got along with the professors and again there were a lot of them whom I admired. I remember there was one fellow who used to teach calculus. His name was Hoskins. He was very thorough in getting information over to the students. He had a way of testing them. He had a card system, little cards. Each card provided an opportunity for four different kinds of entries because on one card you have an entry here, and on the bottom, if you turned it upside down. Then another if you turn it around. I don't know how he used those cards, but he could figure out which students had answered the questions the last time they were asked, so he could pass them by. And then he could ask a student who was having difficulty or a student who missed questions twice or three times. He was excellent. Then there were other math professors who were excellent. Even the engineering dean was quite thorough.

Education

Stanford, 1916-1920

Riess: Why did you go to Stanford rather than Berkeley?

Schnier: You know, I didn't know much about the two universities. I think I went to Cal and looked at the campus and then I went down to Stanford and it looked so beautiful, large area, a wide expanse, a lot of trees and flowers. But I think also that maybe there was conversation either at high school amongst some of the students, or maybe around the house, that my mother maybe knew a little about the difference between Stanford and Cal. That it was a private institution. The tuition wasn't very high then, but it may have been very high for my family because I remember the tuition was ninety dollars a quarter. Now it is in the thousands a quarter. But I never heard any comment about it being expensive. Yet, it was a private institution and Cal was free.

Riess: And you had to live on campus there, of course.

Schnier: Yes, so I had the room and board.

Riess: Was it fun?

Schnier: I think I began to experience much more of life at that time on the campus, being away from home. And I think a lot of students find it the same way when they go off to college. There is a broadening out I'd say, definitely.

Riess: But you have said earlier that you carried the image of yourself as the son of an immigrant father.

Schnier: Yes, I carried that on through college, or even maybe later in the early years of my career in engineering, professional career. But when I started as an artist my values changed completely. I never thought of that especially after I was received by the art community, the older artists. I began winning prizes which were awarded by them, of course, on the jury. I think my chest began to puff out a little. In fact, I thought I was very good! I really began to build up a strong opinion of myself because here were concrete proofs of my ability and acceptance.

Riess: Did you feel accepted at Stanford? Did you have close friends and a community there?

Schnier: I'll tell you, at first I lived in a boarding house in Palo Alto. Then I moved to the dormitory on campus. Then in one of my classes, one of the students and I formed quite a friendship. We got along very well. He belonged to a fraternity and asked me up there many times for lunch and I got to know the other fellows and they took a liking to me. They asked me to join the club. I think that made a big difference, not from the academic point of view but the point of view of relationships to other people. I think I profited very highly from that experience, living in close proximity with a group of young men.

Riess: What about your Jewishness?

Schnier: I never heard the word mentioned. It was a fraternity. There were fraternities that had Jewish members. But it wasn't the common thing. There was in the by-laws of some of these clubs that no blacks or Jews or Chinese or Japanese--well it was WASP. But I never heard any discriminatory remarks. Of course, there weren't too many Jews on the campus. I don't know whether there are more now

- Schnier: than there were then. There were no blacks, I don't remember one black student. There were some Chinese and Japanese. They lived by themselves. They weren't accepted so they had their own club. I remember the Chinese had their own club and I think the Japanese did too.
- Riess: What you are saying is that if there aren't too many of a different group it is all right, they can be integrated, but if there had been a lot of Jewish students that wouldn't have been the case.
- Schnier: That's conjectural. I don't know. However, the question comes up: What is a Jew? I've seen blonde, blue-eyed persons and I find out through them or through others they are Jewish. It's probably intermarriage somewhere along the line because the true Jews are Semites just like the Arabs, no difference. They were dark eyed, black haired, probably swarthy. There are varying degrees of swarthy. They intermarried and it is difficult to identify them today by their appearance.
- Riess: You said in your autobiography that you were not able to enroll in art classes at Stanford. Your engineering curriculum was defined for all four years?
- Schnier: No. That isn't exactly how it happened. The point was that engineers were not accepted in the art department. I went to the art professor and I said, "I'm a senior here but I would like to get some exposure to art."
- Riess: Art history, or art practice?
- Schnier: Practice. I wasn't interested in art history--I don't know if they had much in the way of art appreciation or art history. Art was in its infancy at Stanford. It was tied up with the education department for students who wanted to get teaching degrees.

I was able to release this feeling, this desire to do art, by designing the cover of my graduation thesis. It was an engineering project down south, but I think I spent more time doing the pen and ink sketch on the cover of the binder than on the contents. And also, at the fraternity I was talking about, we used to have a dance once or twice a year and we had a guest book where all the invited guests would register their names. Usually one of the men in the house, who was a very good cartoonist, would draw some pictures at the top of the guest book register. One time he either was sick or wasn't enrolled and I had a great deal of pleasure making the drawings at the top of this guest book. That was the extent of my art work for many years.

World War I

Riess: Did you take other classes in the humanities?

Schnier: No, I had absolutely no exposure to those subjects. They were completely foreign to me, except one course that I took when World War I was imminent. Is that the word? Unavoidable. It was coming on.

Riess: Yes, imminent is a good word.

Schnier: There was a course called "War Issues," a very popular course. There must have been five hundred students in the class. The professor explained things about the war, how we might get involved, what was happening in Germany with the Kaiser, and the French situation and the American situation. I think Wilson was president at that time. I did not understand what the professor was talking about because I didn't have a background. I didn't come from a family where they would talk about presidential issues or things that were happening in Europe, in Germany or in France. I didn't know there was a Kaiser Wilhelm. That was my exposure to the humanities, that one course, and I got a "D" in it. I couldn't answer the questions; it was all Greek to me.

Riess: Did your family take newspapers?

Schnier: Oh, yes. We children used to read the comics in the newspaper regularly, meaning we subscribed to the newspaper.

Riess: But I mean at the dinner table, there wouldn't be talk about what was going on in Europe or anything like that?

Schnier: Probably, but I don't remember. My parents read the paper routinely so they must have kept up with the world and local events. When our children were growing up, we did more talking in five minutes at the dinner table than we would have done in five hours during my youth.

Riess: That's interesting. Were you in any danger of being drafted into the army?

Schnier: Well, yes and no. I remember when I became of age, I'll put it that way, in 1918, I was working up in Oregon with the U.S. Geological Survey that was tied up with engineering. They had jobs available. They usually sent notices to the universities and they were put on the bulletin board. That's how I happened to get the job. While in

Schnier: Oregon, I received notice from the university about the course of action I could take regarding military service. One was to enlist; one was to wait until my number was called and be drafted; one would be to join the S.N.T.C., the Student Naval Training Corps. I selected to do the latter. It was at Stanford, so then I was part of the Stanford navy. It was like enlisting and being allowed to carry on with my studies part of the day. The remainder was devoted to basic training in drill and in lectures about whatever naval specialty you were enrolled in. I don't know if grenades were invented at that time, so I don't remember if we had any throwing of grenades, but I think we had target practice, handling rifles, close order drill, physical ed, etc.

Riess: "Of age" means twenty-one. You were born in 1898, weren't you?

Schnier: Yes, December 25, 1898, so in 1918 I was nineteen years old. I guess I decided to join before I was drafted. But of course, what happened was that I wasn't in more than three months when the Armistice was signed. So that was the extent of my experience in World War I.

Riess: Do you remember discussions on the Stanford campus about pacifism or conscientious objection?

Schnier: No, not at all. And that wouldn't have been part of my make-up because my family never talked about that. I think they would have let the children make their decision and they weren't involved in that. Anything dealing with revolt or being a rebel.

Making Money

Riess: When did you start having summer jobs? In high school or college?

Schnier: Of course, I went through the regular thing of having a newspaper route. Oh, that brings up something about my business experience.

First I want to tell you about these jobs. I'll answer your question. A newspaper route while still in high school. I remember a couple of Christmases a friend and I bought redwood branches and made wreaths with holly berries and went around from door to door and sold them. And then sometimes fruit men would come along with big trucks of fruit that they would sell to the housewives. They would just call out their wares and the housewives would hear them and they would come to the window and say, "I want a watermelon,"

Schnier: or "Five cantaloupes," or so many grapefruit. And so these fruit merchants needed somebody to take these things up to the housewives. I did jobs like that.

Then in my last year of high school I went hunting for a job on the basis of just my high school training because I had studied surveying. I got a job with the Great Western Power Company. They were running a high tension power line from their power house on the Feather River down to San Francisco so we did the surveying in Solano County running the line. This was outdoor work which I enjoyed. We lived in a hotel, the whole crew, the engineering crew. That was my first main summer job.

Riess: You were very young for such a thing.

Schnier: Oh well, I had had that surveying. All I did was run the 100 foot measuring line. The other fellows in the outfit were a little older than I was. But I remember one fellow was a freshman going to college. He was the same age as I was. After that I worked almost every summer in an engineering job.

Riess: And did your parents allow you to keep the money?

Schnier: Oh, yes. That was never mentioned in the household, to turn any of the money over. So that was spending money.

Riess: And they allowed you to be independent, obviously.

Schnier: Yes. They never said anything about, "We'd like you to stay home this summer," and work around in my father's company. So that was good too.

Riess: How was your sister treated? Was she equally independent?

Schnier: Yes, and so was my brother. We were treated all the same. There was no favoritism in the family, as I remember. I always wanted to be the favorite. My brother was unruly one time. He was stubborn with my mother and I raised my hand to strike him to show my mother that I loved her, that I wouldn't let him be rude to her. That didn't register well with her. She didn't say, "Bravo!"

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Schnier: These remembrances tie up with my being able to turn to art without any possibility of making a livelihood for some time until I had arrived. This reminds me of a business venture from my early youth. When I was still going to grammar school fire crackers were very common. There was no law against shooting fire crackers off on the

Schnier: Fourth of July. I found out where there was a fire cracker manufacturer or distributor, down on Front Street, in San Francisco. I used to go there and buy the fire crackers from the company and get them wholesale. It was a lot of fun, shooting them. I found out that my friends wanted to get some fire crackers too. They wanted to know if I could get some for them. So I just thought I'd go into business. I'd buy these fire crackers and get an orange crate and set it up on the sidewalk in front of our house and just sell fire crackers. I probably made two or three dollars on each occasion. But then it would get boring. It was so easy to make money. I finally gave it up.

I frequently think about that. I wonder sometimes how I could have gone into art where there was little chance to making a livelihood. It was all going out, until people began to acquire my work or commission me to do work. And that partly comes from my family because I never heard much about "you must succeed and make money." I know that my mother thought that being a doctor would be a fine profession. That was the aspiration for a lot of Jewish mothers and other mothers. Well, I never have stopped to analyze it, but it was an honorable profession.

When I went into art, it never occurred to me, "Are you going to be able to make a living out of this like you were with the engineering? How are you going to get along?" Well, I just happened to have a little nest egg to tide me over and I lived very modestly and I never worried about it. I never thought I was starving here in these small quarters. I'm living like the traditional artist in the garret with the rats running around! That probably all stemmed from the fact that in our home the emphasis was on doing what you wanted to and being happy and not striving for a big fortune.

Riess: And because you had had that experience of being bored with your easy fire cracker sales!

Schnier: Yes, these kids would come around like bees around the honey pot. I'd buy a package of fire crackers for five cents and I could sell it for ten cents. A hundred per cent mark up.

Riess: After you graduated from Stanford then, you contemplated jobs?

Schnier: Oh, yes. I had been working in the summers while I was at Stanford so I knew how to go about getting a job. I was not very selective, not like my son. My son Claude recently interviewed four, five, or six companies till he decided which one he wanted to go to work for. And the same with my daughter Rebecca in New York. She went around and looked over the lay of the land.

Schnier: I would read the announcements on the bulletin board in the engineering department and pick out some job for which I was qualified, a job that was open, and then I would apply for it. It was easy to get a job in those days. I never had any trouble getting a job.

Riess: Is it partly California was just such a boom community and everything was building, building, building in California?

Schnier: I wonder today if it is not the same, if you are not choosy. I wonder if today a fellow who is graduating from the engineering department at Cal couldn't go over to the employment agency--is that what they call it on the campus?

Riess: Placement office.

Schnier: Placement office, yes, and look through the lists of jobs that are available and find something without any trouble. But mind you, only if you are not too selective. Now, I was selective in this respect: I wanted to see the world, and I was more attracted to foreign jobs. That is why I landed in the Hawaiian Islands between my junior and senior years. And then after I had graduated I worked for a while for a big international construction company on a power house up in the Feather River canyon. Then finally I decided that I'd had enough of that and came back and found out that there was another opening in the Hawaiian Islands on another island. I applied for that and got it.

Discoveries

Hawaii

Work and Life

Riess: The first job in Hawaii was the one with Hawaiian Sugar Company?

Schnier: The name of the company was Alexander and Baldwin. They owned a number of sugar plantations on the different islands. The first plantation I went to work for was at a place called Paia. That was their headquarters on the northern side of Maui. I have forgotten the name of that particular plantation, it may come to me later on. That was engineering, civil engineering, surveying.

Riess: Is that what is most generally meant by civil engineering? Surveying?

Schnier: No. Civil engineering is pretty broad. At Stanford at that time it probably had been divided into several specialties, but we studied structural engineering. I remember we designed a big bridge. We studied hydraulics to learn about the property of liquids, and that led to the designing of big dams. The dean of our engineering department was an expert on that. His name was Karl Marx, not the Karl Marx, but he was a German-trained professor. There was that field, and then there was railroad surveying and maybe a few others. But I had a job in the engineering department after the second year, I think because of my summer jobs. I was an assistant in the railroad engineering course because I knew how to use the transit and the like. I'm trying to answer your question, "What does civil engineering encompass today?"

It so happened that later on I had a number of jobs connected with road building, but that just was a matter of chance because when I took the second job in the Hawaiian Islands after I had graduated, that was for a sugar plantation on the island of Kauai, and the engineer had to do a variety of things. I remember in addition to surveying the sugar plots so they'd have some idea of their acreage, I had to lay out a small choo-choo railroad line so they could transport the sugar cane down to the mill on the little steam line. It was narrow, about this big, but the cars for carrying the sugar cane had large capacity. Then I had to design a small hydro-electric power plant up in one of the canyons where there was a lot of water. They had what you might call little villages--they weren't as large as a village, but they had groups of people living in different parts of this enormous plantation, the workers. They had housing there and all the facilities for living. But they were having problems with their water supply because they got typhoid fever. It was a primitive water supply. There was a lot of water there, fresh water, but it was the way it was brought into the villages. So another job was to work out a sanitary water supply. You can see it was very broad--civil engineering covered a lot of territory. And I was completely ignorant, you might say, except for surveying. I had to learn fast. I remember sending to the bookstore at Stanford for books: "Send at your earliest convenience."

Riess: Did the jobs pay your passage across?

Schnier: Oh yes, because the sugar plantations owned the steamship lines.

Riess: When you talk about the workers, were they Islanders? When you talk about the houses for the workers?

Schnier: No, the principal working stock at that time were Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos and some Portuguese. Usually a work crew was all of one ethnic group; they didn't mix them up because they would have a leader who really ran the show. I don't know if they paid the leader and he distributed the funds. I remember on this little hydro-electric power plant dam project I was assigned a crew of Japanese and I noticed how one man ran the group and how they lived together. For example, at the food break--there were a couple of breaks during the day--one man knocked off and did the cooking. He'd boil the rice and the vegetables and they all sat around and ate like they do at a traditional Chinese restaurant. Have you ever been there after the crowd has left and you see the crew from the kitchen and they sit at a big table along with the owner and they have their meal together?

Riess: No.

Schnier: It's changed now. It is not as prevalent as it used to be.

Riess: Was it exotic to be in Hawaii?

Schnier: Yes, in a way. It was different and the natives on some of the jobs I had were wonderful, the Kanakas. I had two jobs on that second trip to Hawaii. One was on Kauai with the sugar plantation, and then I went back to Honolulu and joined the City and County of Honolulu's engineering department. While I was there, I lived out at Waikiki and that was idyllic. I lived in a small hotel. They ran it European style. They served a breakfast and made up a lunch for you and served a dinner. It was a beautiful place out there.

Riess: Who ran the place? Who ran the hotel?

Schnier: She was an old lady called Mrs. Grey. I think the place is still out there, the Halekulani.

Riess: I've stayed at a place called the Halekulani. It's an old two-storied place.

Schnier: Shingled?

Riess: Probably.

Schnier: Was it right on the beach?

Riess: Yes.

Schnier: I think that's the place. It's right near the big hotels, on the town side of the Royal Hawaiian and so on. That's where I stayed. She leased a number of the old houses along the beach. My room wasn't in the place where the dining room was. It was in another house that had belonged to an old missionary family and was right on the beach. It was a beautiful place. That's where I read Somerset Maugham's The Moon and Sixpence.

Riess: Now why did you say in your autobiography that it was the Thornton Wilders' home?

Schnier: I didn't say Thornton Wilder. I said the Wilder place. They were old time missionaries there. I thought it was the old Wilder home. It may have been the Bishop home--that was another famous missionary family. It is sort of important if you mention it to get the right name. But it was right next to the Seaside Hotel which was torn down and the Royal Hawaiian was built later. Beyond the Seaside Hotel was the Moana Hotel. The Seaside was a picturesque one story, white complex with verandas going from one set of rooms to another with gardens all around. It's like what you read about, the setting, in some of the South Sea Islands.

Riess: Sounds blissful.

The Moon and Sixpence

Riess: Who gave you The Moon and Sixpence to read?

Schnier: At the Halekulani there were some young ladies working in different offices in town and I got to know them. One of them had a boy friend in town. He worked for Castle and Cooke. You've heard of them. I met him and he was very friendly. We used to go out together to dances and to Chinese restaurants. He introduced me to Chinese restaurants. He also introduced me to his sister. She recommended this book to me. She said, "Gee, it's wonderful." I never talked about art, but of course The Moon and Sixpence is tied up with the South Sea Islands, and Honolulu has the same sort of atmosphere in a way as some of the South Sea Islands, less native though. So that's how I happened to read it. It was just by chance that she mentioned it. It had just been published, I think.

Riess: Do you think of it as a formative book in your life?

Schnier: Well, I think of it in this respect, that it made me aware of the fact that you didn't have to be stuck to one profession. Here was Gaughin, a successful stockbroker, who was supporting his family rather well. But he was interested in art. And finally he decided to give it up, this business that was bringing him in funds to live by. He went down to the South Sea Islands and lived as a native. In other words, there was something that pulled him away from the material aspect of life into doing what he wanted to. I think that was in the back of my mind when I decided I was going to try something else beside engineering. Because it wasn't satisfying.

Riess: What about the responsibility aspect of Gaughin's actions?

Schnier: Oh, but you see at that time I wasn't aware of what that meant to his family. I don't know if Somerset Maugham had played upon that as much as the fact that he had made the change. He may have touched upon that. But since that time I've run across references to what a sacrifice it was for the family to miss out on the monthly allowances.

Riess: The people that you found in Hawaii, I mean the Americans who had gone to Hawaii, were they escaping America or rebelling or doing something so that you could say collectively, the people who went to Hawaii were like people who went to Paris in the twenties, or anything like that?

Schnier: I just don't know. I do know that in the Wilder house where I lived there were a number of army officers. They weren't escaping from the provincial life they were leading in America; they were stationed there on account of their orders. And they would even soon go to another post in America maybe.

This gentleman I was talking about who was with Castle and Cooke, eventually became the president of the company. He was born in the Hawaiian Islands. He knew a lot of people who were important in the city, but he didn't know many natives. The white people didn't mix with the natives at all.

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Schnier: I had the experience of mixing, of getting to know them, because the survey crews were made up of Hawaiians or part-Hawaiians. I got to know them and they were wonderful people. They were so generous and so carefree, "not a worry in the world." You should put that in quotation marks because who is free of worry? And it may be that they were having problems that weren't apparent because they were discriminated against.

Riess: Do you think of your time in Hawaii as the beginning of an interest in Asia?

Schnier: No. What Hawaii did was give me more experience with people and the world. It was very profitable for me and enjoyable.

Bridges

Riess: And it was where you discovered that there was an aesthetic aspect of life, right?

Schnier: Oh, that was an experience when the chief engineer said that he'd like me to work out this new assignment. "We want to study the bridges in the park. I think they need to be revised or strengthened or changed or upgraded." He left me at that and I went into the little library they had in our engineering department in Honolulu. There were a few books on bridges; they weren't very much but I remember reading one in which they were talking almost entirely about the looks of the bridge. They didn't talk about the formula for designing it and the dead load or live load. Then I went out to the parks and looked at the bridges. They were all kinds of styles. That's when I realized that an engineer can actually have something to say as to the appearance of his bridge.

Riess: Did you in fact pursue that interest any more? Bridges can be beautiful and charming, like the bridges and roadways that Olmsted did on Mt. Desert Island in Maine.

Schnier: No, but I know that there are some bridges that artists themselves consider to be works of art, like the bridges of the Swiss engineer Robert Maillart, if that name rings a bell. He designed arch bridges in Switzerland, and probably in other parts of the world, that are just delightful to look at. In addition to solving engineering problems, he solved aesthetic problems as well.

Riess: What did you do with your new information?

Schnier: I was not on that very long before I decided to leave the Islands. There was something about being over there, isolated from the mainland, that created a certain feeling of being separated.

Riess: Does this have to do with family?

Schnier: No, not with family. My mother had passed away in the meantime. No, it had nothing to do with that. It was the nature of the work, being there in the Islands. I had not gotten into the park bridges very deeply before I was assigned to another project. We were building the road on the north side of the island at a place called Kaneohe. When you go up the Pali and you look down, north, it's now a naval base. I was assigned to that project and that meant moving out of Honolulu and living out there. We had a mess hall and dormitory arrangement. It was then that I decided to leave because the work was becoming--there was no challenge to it. I wanted to be challenged. That's when I finally left and went back to Stanford and registered in the graduate department.

Riess: Looking at those bridges and realizing that this whole aesthetic angle was something new and different, was that a moment of truth for you also?

Schnier: I think so because I have vague memories of saying to myself, "This is something new. This is where you can express yourself or get creatively involved with the design. It's going to be presented in a permanent form in perpetuity. It won't be just an ordinary bridge. It won't be like the viaducts or bridges we are designing over on the north side of the island to go across the rice fields." They were plain and they would go on for a mile or two the same thing, the same design. Once you design a single element of it with the piers you just repeat it all along the line. There were no features there, no enrichment. So here was something different. I'm sure it played a part in my making a decision to try my hand at art. Later on I'll tell you what was the clincher of my giving up even architecture.

Riess: Had you ever set foot in a museum?

Schnier: I used to go to the de Young Museum. They had a sort of historical, not exactly archeological, but they had an ethnic collection. They had Japanese things, things from South America. Like all kids we'd visit the museums and also the one up at the medical college that Kroeber started. That was where he had his first anthropological museum before he came to Berkeley.

Riess: And he was studying Ishi.

Schnier: And Ishi was up there. I saw Ishi because Polytechnic High School was just below the Affiliated Colleges. And Ishi was quartered up there at that time.

Now let me answer your question about the museum. I have memories of going into the Stanford Art Gallery, not the museum but the gallery right across the street from the quadrangle--it had

Schnier: just been built--and looking at the paintings there and trying to see if I could understand why these were works of art. That exhibition, as I remember, was made up of landscapes from Australia. There was some connection between the Stanfords and Australia, or her family, maybe Mrs. Stanford. I looked at those things--here this is a museum, a temple of art, a sacred place, you've got to understand why they are works of art, why they are beautiful. I don't remember them moving me at all. You know, prosaic landscapes. [laughter] What is there? If you had come from Australia and it was a scene that you knew, like Alice Springs where the Aruntas are and you'd had a big experience there, you'd look at that and it would bring back memories. So I want to answer your question about having been to a museum that way.

Riess: In fact, when you were in the landscape, when you were in Hawaii, when you were in Stockton, did you feel that you responded to the place where you were, in an aesthetic way?

Schnier: Oh, I loved Stockton because it was so rural, a new experience. There were trees to climb, and fruit to surreptitiously pick in our neighbor's yard.

Riess: So it was more kinesthetic.

Schnier: Oh, it was. And then there were the sloughs where we'd go down and catch the minnows and the catfish. It was a great experience. And then also in the Hawaiian Islands, it was so beautiful there. Maybe it was pretty much the same when you were there although I went there first in 1919 and had a nice reception. Two of us went together, another Stanford man and myself. There were two jobs available. We were cordially received by the head executive of Alexander and Baldwin. I remember that he invited us to his home for dinner. You see, we were Stanford men, and that was like having a stamp of approval.

Riess: Oh, yes, absolutely.

Schnier: We were acceptable.

Riess: Yes.

Schnier: They had such a gracious home with little Japanese waitresses and servants, and it was quite an experience for me. There were many aspects to my stay in Honolulu that were memorable and had deep implications.

Riess: I'm saying that maybe just being there had opened you to beauty in a way that you had never been open to beauty before.

Schnier: Yes, people would talk about it. I remember them taking me around to see the hibiscus and the trees with flame-colored blossoms. There are so many beautiful flowers in Hawaii, and they referred to them as they would about art. It made a deep impression on me.

Father, A Tribute

[Interview 2: July 10, 1985]##

Schnier: You put a question to me as to what kind of a home I was brought up in, as far as laying the foundation for an interest in art, and I have told you that definitely there was practically no conversation about art, there were no pictures on the walls except probably five- and ten-cent store reproductions of Maxfield Parrish's paintings. And, oh, maybe calendar art. We had no small art objects around the house.

But when I think back about my father's activities I realize that his interests definitely indicated a drift sort of similar to the direction I was taking. Not as far as art goes, but as far as an interest in creativity. For example, I recall vividly that after he started his own business and things were running smoothly, one of the executives at the California Wine Association asked him if he would come to the company and supervise the clarifying of their select white wine. My father had become an expert in that. That is a very important thing in white wine because of the fact that it's so easy to look through such wine, and if it isn't clear, it isn't as attractive as when it's crystal clear. And there's a way to do that. I won't go into the process. It's quite common, maybe, today. But he was thought of highly enough to be invited to come and do that job.

Then, secondly, I remember he set up some shelves in the back of his company, with test tubes and things that I had seen in the chemistry department at high school. Beakers and a little scale. And he was making his own cordials, aperitifs and tonic wines under his own label. I remember that Dubonnet was already on the market and it was quite popular as a drink to take as a tonic. A lot of people accept Dubonnet, but not port or sherry. He made a wine somewhat similar. He had his own labels and he had the trademark and the title, or the name, registered.

Schnier: I remember the designer brought in samples of the new label and to show the trademark registration. It was called Ambraduro--a nice name. It was very popular with the old ladies who wouldn't be caught drinking hard liquor or sherry or port or muscatel. They would drink a tonic like that. It's supposed to be good for you. I remember he had some quinine in it, the bitter flavor--I don't know whether it added a medicinal effect or whether it was just to give you the idea that it wasn't a sweet, pleasant-drinking wine or liquor.

Riess: And he marketed that?

Schnier: Yes. And it was very popular with the people who drank Dubonnet. That helped me sort of raise my opinion of my father. Now, as I look back upon him, I realize what a wonderful thing he was doing. He wasn't satisfied with just the money rolling in; he wanted to make something creative, to do something different.

He also started marketing his own cocktails. You know, there were Manhattans and Martinis, and a few others. Well, he had his own mixture called "Yosemite Cocktail"--I remember that. It had its own label. And also, before each Christmas, he used to figure out something to give his favorite customers. Little jugs with the name of his company, Independent Wine and Liquor Company. Or, in this case, with the cocktail, he had little cocktail glasses with "Yosemite Cocktail" etched into them. These things all had to be ordered six months in advance. There were people who went around to the stores and took orders, then they were probably manufactured in Bohemia or some place in Europe. It was cheaper that way, to have it done there than done here.

Riess: I'm interested in the Ambraduro. How long did that product last?

Schnier: Oh, Prohibition came in 1920, just after the war, so then my father had to give up this business. He had to find another business. Here again, he showed me his creativity. He had made friends with some people who were in the insurance and the building business, and he finally decided to go into home construction. It attracted him; he would be making something. So he would buy land, buy lots out in the western part of San Francisco--not big projects, but small projects, just for homes, and also markets and apartment houses. He bought the land and put up the buildings. He was in partnership with a Scotchman who had more experience than he had, and he also had a crew of carpenters and masons to start the ball rolling before they brought in the electricians and the plumbers.

Schnier: My father then went to night school to study drafting and layout work. He would take stock plans for these houses, let's say in the Richmond or the Sunset district, for small lots. These were just twenty-five foot lots, for small homes. He would work and work on the plan to see if he couldn't improve the layout, the closets, the arrangement of the hall. He wasn't satisfied doing this stock plan which many of the contractors or developers were following. They just would turn it over to the carpenters and they would do one after another. That's what you find in some parts of San Francisco, the tract houses that look exactly the same. Sometimes photographers take pictures of them to illustrate repetition of pattern.

Riess: So would his changes be in evidence on the outside of the building, or on the inside?

Schnier: Oh, on the outside, too. Anything to make it different.

Just to show you how he, in a way, got to be more reliable than an architect, there was an architect in San Francisco who--he wasn't famous like Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill but he did small apartment houses or stores. He didn't care sometimes whether his name appeared on the building or not. It was a job with him, and my father hired him to design an apartment house out in the Richmond district. They got all the plans from this architect because my father was going to do the job himself.

He didn't need any specifications from the architect. But the point is, he got the plan, and he put up the foundation and all of the framework. Usually they use ladders to go from one floor to another, that's the stock procedure, the common way until they get to the point where they put the stairs in, when you have more difficult, heavier stuff to carry. And my father found out that the architect had left the stairs out of the building plans! Well, why I mention this is that I told you in the beginning, I was almost ashamed of my father being just a businessman. He wasn't president of the United States. You know how little kids think of their parents, sometimes they are very critical of them, it's common. And it's only as the years rolled by I began to have more and more respect for him. Also my analysis, my interest in becoming an analyst, helped me considerably to change my viewpoint about him.

Riess: Well, it sounds like he was a very successful capitalist, too.

Schnier: Yes and no. He was not interested in accumulating a big fortune, so he didn't have much of a fortune when he passed away. After he got involved in buying a large number of lots for an inventory so he could build more houses on them, then the stock market crash came in

Schnier: 1929. That wiped him out. As big businessmen do today, they take out mortgages, they borrow money, this is considered the thing to do. That's how you make money. You borrow it, and you use that as leverage, and you put in maybe one-tenth of your own capital. He lost a lot there.

Eventually he had to go into another business. He bought a service station. That was an awfully hard job. So I would say he deserved our love and admiration.

City Planning

Riess: Where we left off last time, you had decided to go to Stanford for your graduate studies. I don't remember whether we talked about how you discovered city planning.

Schnier: It was there at Stanford. I used to go to the engineering library in the evening, just to mull around the books and because I was groping. I didn't know what I really wanted. So here on one side of the engineering library was a large collection of books on a subject I'd never heard of before, city planning. I didn't know that engineers did anything like that. I pulled down some of the books, and I remember one of them dealt with Inigo Triggs. I don't know whether planners today know about him, but he was quite a well-known English planner. And another book dealt with a great European planner called L'Enfant. And a third book about the Frenchman who did the last big plan of Paris.

Riess: Haussmann?

Schnier: That's right, Haussmann. I would look at these books, and they had a lot of drawings in them. Little sketches, and of course, renderings. This must have made a very deep impression on me because I remember that at this period, since I was at loose ends, I would just wander around San Francisco, go to a hilltop and sit and look at the view, and read. Maybe I was waiting between jobs when I would do that. And I also wandered along what is now the Embarcadero area, tying up what I saw with the idea of city planning. I thought how wonderful it would be, right near the waterfront where you have this beautiful outlook, to have boulevards going through and buildings, and outdoor cafes.

- Schnier: As I mentioned in my autobiography, others came along with similar ideas but had the drive to follow them through. They were city planners. When I go down there today and see what's happened to that area as compared with what it was when my studio was there, and it was the produce market area, I think, "My, what a transformation!" It's so beautiful to wander about in that part of the city. There are so many good restaurants around there and interesting vistas and trees and the like, which you don't have in many other parts of the city.
- Riess: In the books you were looking at, at Stanford, you had not seen pictures of this sort of waterfront planning in Europe?
- Schnier: Not exactly this type of waterfront planning, but what I did see was enough to turn me on. The impression it made upon me was that here are engineers who are creative, who are artists. They are using their imagination and they are not using the Carnegie books-- we used to have little books put out by the Carnegie Steel Corporation, how to design steel structures, bridges and things like that. They had very extensive tables of steel sizes for different loadings.
- Riess: Who guided you to the city planning classes that you might find at Berkeley?
- Schnier: It was my brother-in-law who had graduated in architecture from California or somebody who was an architect, who suggested that since I didn't want to go back East, why didn't I study architecture because it is closely tied up with city planning? Which is true. A lot of architects also go into city planning.
- Riess: Your first wish was to go to an eastern university and study city planning?
- Schnier: Well, I investigated the subject of courses in city planning. There was no such thing as city planning given in any of the western universities. It was a very new specialty. The way most people got into city planning was by way of architecture or engineering. An engineer sometimes would be called in by a big developer who had a big piece of level land, let's say, or even rolling land. "Will you divide this up into blocks, and lots of about this size, and work out the drainage and the utilities and so?" So there were a lot of engineers in the field. But it had nothing to do with art, at that stage. That was just straight civil engineering, surveying. But some of the architects would come in and add a little more of the aesthetic quality. They might suggest a type of building, like St. Francis Woods was nothing but empty land, and some developer's planner proposed a Spanish architectural theme.

Riess: So you had a brother-in-law who was an architect?

Schnier: Yes, but he got into the army during the First World War and remained in and became a career army officer.

Riess: What is his name?

Schnier: His name was Milton Heilfron. He has passed away.

Berkeley, School of Architecture, 1924

Riess: So then you moved to Berkeley? Where did you live as a student at Berkeley?

Schnier: No, wait. So then I decided to go to Berkeley. First I stayed with my sister and brother-in-law. They were stationed at the Presidio in San Francisco. They had very nice quarters, the officers' quarters there. Quite sumptuous. Quite adequate. And my sister asked me if I wouldn't come and live with them. So I used to commute every day to the university. I had to go all the way down from the Presidio to the Ferry Building, get the ferry across the bay, get the train, the Southern Pacific or the Key Route, out to the university, and walk up to North Gate, the entrance to the architectural department. And then come home in the evening! I did that for a while, and finally I moved over to Berkeley.

First I went to the fraternity that I belonged to--they had a chapter house in Berkeley. Then I got a little cottage up in the Berkeley hills that the Creeds owned. They also owned the Berkeley Book Store on Telegraph Avenue. It was a little shack on some property they were developing, up on Shasta Road. About the time I decided to give up architecture, Mrs. Creed built an actual studio addition onto this little shack, and that's where I did my first sculpture which is a female figure that I carved on the door jamb of the bathroom! When I met Steve De Staebler a few months ago, he told me it's still there!

Riess: Was there any difficulty in being admitted to the architecture department when you decided that you wanted to enroll?

Schnier: No. When I applied for admission to the School of Architecture, the person who ran things for John Galen Howard was a woman whom he really depended upon a lot.

Riess: Bessie Sprague?

Schnier: You've heard about Bessie Sprague? Yes, Bessie Sprague ran things. And she looked at my credentials, knowing how architects loathed the courses in engineering, but had to take them. They were required. She looked at my transcript, I remember, and said, "That's an excellent record. All of your engineering is completed, Mr. Schnier. But I don't see any art here. You will have to take some art courses." She had no idea, no inkling of what was going on in my mind when she said that! I thought, "How wonderful! Finally I'm going to be accepted in an art course, a university art course." Because at Stanford, as I told you, they refused me a couple of times. But at Berkeley it was just the opposite.

While studying architecture, I did very well. Actually, I was doing so well that when, at the end of my third semester, the architectural students in the graduate department and the graduating senior class were given a prize problem--the Alumni Association Prize--Bessie Sprague told me, "You can now take this problem." Actually I wasn't really qualified, I mean, I was not as yet in the graduating senior class. But I took the problem along with all the graduates and seniors. Michael Goodman was in this Alumni Association Prize competition and Theodore Bernardi, who later on went to work with [William] Wurster, and quite a number of men who did very well in the architectural profession later on. Especially Theodore Bernardi. Bernardi won first prize. I forgot who took second. But I came in third in that whole class of the seniors and graduates. So when I left architecture I can honestly say it's not because I was a failure at it.

Riess: Oh, of course.

Schnier: But in the meantime the appeal of sculpture was so great that when I went back the following semester to start in the graduate division, I decided I was going to give it up.

Professors

Riess: I'd like to hear a little bit more about the architecture department though, and how you worked with John Galen Howard. And also about some of these other very impressive names, like Michael Goodman and Bernardi.

- Schnier: Well, Michael Goodman was one semester ahead of me in design. There was a lot of competition, regularly, because the projects were judged on the wall. They had critiques. They were judged 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, right down the line.
- Riess: Who did the critiques?
- Schnier: The faculty members.
- Riess: Did they invite outside architects, like Bernard Maybeck perhaps, to come?
- Schnier: Oh, Maybeck actually was one of the patrons, one of the members of the staff, when John Galen Howard took a sabbatical. Maybeck and George Kelham and Arthur Brown were the three who came in as patrons. They were famous San Francisco architects.
- Riess: They were called patrons?
- Schnier: They sometimes used to refer to a faculty member as a patron. It's a misuse of the term, in a way. But he was the person who was trying to train you and had a lot invested in you. It's like the old patrons who had the warriors, the mercenaries. I think that's where it comes from, be that as it may.
- Riess: Okay. So you're saying there was a lot of competition.
- Schnier: Oh, a lot of it. And of course a great emphasis on your own initiative and your own inventiveness, each one trying to work out something personal. This was the first opportunity I had to do something truly creative, my own. It was not like engineering. I remember one structural engineering class. We had a bridge. We all were doing the same bridge. We all were working out the size of the members and the like, for the instructor to check on. This was different, completely--a new experience for me.
- Riess: Who did you get the best teaching from in that department?
- Schnier: There was one man named Stafford Jory. The Jory family was well known in Berkeley. I liked him because--the others were hacks, in a way.

I remember Charles Warren Perry. He took over the deanship when John Galen Howard retired. He was a nice fellow. In fact, I worked for him in San Francisco and I liked him. I knew his wife and children. I did a portrait of his son, Buzzy, which is now in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Perry was a gentleman of the

Schnier: old school but had little understanding of personality, of being dean of an architectural college. So when he came around and said you ought to do this, or this, or this, a lot of the students were turned off. Sometimes they would try to escape these criticisms by being absent.

But Stafford Jory was a person who would come around and he might say, "What do you think of doing it this way, or that way?" Or, "It seems to me that this would not be a good solution." There was a world of difference. One was trying to impose his views on the student, and the other was trying to educate the student, encouraging the student to make his own decisions.

Riess: And how about John Galen Howard himself?

Schnier: I had very little dealings with him because he was on sabbatical.

Riess: Would you say that the people who had the Beaux Arts training were not the inventive people?

Schnier: I can't say. But I do remember that some of them would say, "Now, why don't you look up this and this and this in the architectural library." It was always a series of looking up buildings from the past: Roman architecture, Greek architecture. I thought I ought to be able to work out a modern design, but they were still tied up with classicism. Be that as it may, you had the same trouble in architecture as in art. A lot of the art instructors were pretty didactic.

Students, Colleagues, Influences##

Riess: As a student did you meet Walter Steilberg?

Schnier: Oh, yes, he was an architect and an engineer.

When I was at Berkeley I always tried to have a job to bring in some more cash. The first job I had was inherited from one of the other architectural students who was graduating. It was teaching a drawing class at White's Preparatory School. Did you ever hear of that?

Riess: No.

Schnier: Well, right on Piedmont Avenue, about three doors north of Bancroft, was the White's Preparatory School for kids who couldn't get into college because of their low high school grades, and who were trying to better themselves. Or kids whose parents thought they could get a quicker and better, more fundamental education, at White's. I taught drawing there for a while.

Then I got a job with Steilberg. He lived right on Piedmont. He had a nice home, opposite the Deke House,* about half a block, on the corner. The house is still standing. He had his drafting room on the first floor. It was easy to go up there between classes and help him with his drafting. He turned out to be a wonderful person. He was a damn good engineer. He was the type of fellow the architects loved because he never said, "You can't do this." They would give him an architectural problem, space problem, and he would solve the engineering for it. I remember Gardner Dailey used to hire him a lot. And Julia Morgan--he did all the engineering for Julia Morgan.

Riess: Was Gardner Dailey in your class?

Schnier: No, he was older than I was. He was an established architect when I got to meet him. I met him through a young architect friend of mine who was also an artist and lived in the artist quarter on Montgomery Street, near the Montgomery Block. He was working for Gardner Dailey, and he would paint on the side. So I got to meet Gardner Dailey through him.

Riess: Who else in your class went on to become sort of superstars?

Schnier: I would say Bernardi, especially. There was another fellow, Alec Wilson, who was in the graduating class and in that competition I was telling you about. He was not the dreamer that Theodore Bernardi was. He did average architecture, but he did some big jobs. He worked for Pacific Telephone & Telegraph Company, putting up big buildings.

Riess: How about the landscape architects? Did you have contact with them?

Schnier: Not very much. We were supposed to take a course in landscape architecture, but I happened to take one just on plants, from an elderly lady who was good in botany. But I did very little in landscape design. John Gregg was the chairman of the department, and he wasn't a very great innovator, but maybe these men were excellent teachers. Later on they got some good men, like [H. Leland] Vaughan. He was a wonderful guy. I liked him. But he was my age, he was my contemporary. He wouldn't have been my teacher.

*DKE, Delta Kappa Epsilon.

- Schnier: Later I got to know a number of the younger men. One of them, Bob Royston, designed the garden of this house. He was on the faculty. He is very creative. Garrett Eckbo, who became dean of landscape architecture, is very imaginative. I knew them. I knew Royston better because he designed a little garden for us for our previous home on Russian Hill.
- Riess: So the sense of a discipline called "environmental design"--that didn't really exist?
- Schnier: At the university? No. The man who started that at the university, young Jack Kent, had studied with me at one time.
- Riess: You said that it was exciting to be over in North Gate because of a kind of singlemindedness, and a different society that it represented.
- Schnier: Yes. You got to know the different students and there was competition between us.
- Riess: And cooperation also?
- Schnier: Yes. There was cooperation in this respect: Have you ever heard of the term "niggering"? "Niggering" is where you do some of the monotonous work on the architectural plan, the type of work that doesn't entail imagination. It would be like, if you're drawing a foundation for a rendering, usually it's all in black. So it requires patience to fill in the lines. That's what the "niggers" would do. And also some of the lettering, the outlining. But not anything dealing with design.
- Riess: Were there any women in the classes?
- Schnier: Yes, there were. One woman went to work for Wurster and stayed with him until she retired. But she finally shifted into specifications. I've forgotten her name. Then there was Ernest Born's wife, Esther. She studied architecture, but then gave it up when she married him. Or maybe she helped him in the office for a while. Her father was chief engineer for the Pacific Gas & Electric Company. Then there was Geraldine Colby, who after graduation worked in many architects' offices, actually ran the offices for them. She was a good designer. She worked for Julia Morgan. Then there was the sister of the man who established the Russell Tree Farm which now belongs to the University of California. Her name was Louise Russell. But by and large, there weren't as many women in the field as there are today. The opportunities are open for both men and women. My daughter Rebecca had no trouble being hired by an office in New York which is

Schnier: owned by a man and his wife. All three of them are graduates of Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture and Planning. Before that she worked for an architectural design firm in San Francisco, also owned by a husband and wife.

Riess: Did the men in your day cooperate with the women?

Schnier: I had a feeling that the women were--

Riess: --second-class?

Schnier: They were second-class citizens and they were the target of jokes sometimes. Somebody in class would make a joke and all the men would laugh and invariably it was aimed at one of the women who couldn't answer back. She probably was too inhibited to stand up on her own.

Riess: I've heard about John Galen Howard's poetry readings and I know that you were still not very much exposed to culture in general. Was this the beginning for you of an introduction to the "finer things of life"?

Schnier: No, because I never attended one of his poetry readings. Oh, I remember once he read a little bit, a little poetry, after he came back from his sabbatical. But poetry doesn't touch me very much and I don't think John Galen Howard's would have! He was brought up in the Beaux Arts tradition and the Library and the Campanile, and whatever buildings are left of his, are pretty much dated. You can't blame him, he was a product of his time.

II THE SCULPTOR

Teachers

Riess: The real importance of architecture school for you was that you then got to Ray Boynton?

Schnier: Yes, in the art class. He was a teacher who I felt was not scolding me, but was trying to help me. He would always say--I remember the phrase he would use--he would say, "It seems to me." "It seems to me that if you would do it"--this way or that way, "it would improve it." Or, "This might be better." But he left it up to me to make the final judgment. He encouraged me to find my own solution.

Riess: Did you choose the Boynton class?

Schnier: No, I didn't. I just got in by chance.

Riess: What is this name Cummings?

Schnier: Oh, Earle Cummings was the instructor in clay modeling, a course that was included in the architectural curriculum as an introduction to art, fulfilling one of the art requirements. It had nothing to do with creative work. It was just copying some plaster ornament and the little sculpture fragments from the Roman or Greek periods or from the Renaissance period. It was part of the system of teaching in the Beaux Arts tradition. That was the way they started the students. You copied these things and then you later on were allowed to do figure work. So he was the instructor, and he gave a one-unit course, two sections a week. It was his course that finally encouraged me to make the jump.

I worked for him later on after I left the university because he was in with the social group and was given sculpture commissions. He was a great favorite of John McLaren, who ran things in Golden

Schnier: Gate Park. Also he was in with the Bohemian Club crowd so he got commissions through that connection. I worked at his studio in San Francisco. In fact, he let me use it in between jobs. That was the first big spacious area I worked in.

While I was still enrolled at the university, Cummings noticed how much time I was devoting to the modeling course and how intent I was in my work. He said, "If you would like to spend more time in here, I'll let you have a key to the studio. You can come in here at night." So I started spending a lot more time in there than I did on my architectural designs. It got sort of lonely there at night; sometimes the rest of the building would be locked and dark. But I was absorbed in whatever I was doing. I remember I would get photographs of famous modern sculpture including the statues and reliefs of miners by a Belgian, Constantine Munier, to use as models. Finally I gave this up, it was too limiting. I got bored being tied down to somebody else's work. The point is I got a key to use the modeling studio after regular class hours, on my own time.

Riess: Was the experience with Ray Boynton as important as that with Cummings?

Schnier: Oh, well, quite different. Cummings just made an opportunity for me to get this art exposure because in addition to copying the ornaments, later on I could take a head of Lincoln and make some slight changes. But even if I tried to copy it, it was sort of a creative work. I remember doing this head of Lincoln. And when I looked at it I thought, "My, that looks alive." The wet clay reflected light from its surface, and I was deeply impressed by the effect. That sort of encouraged me to go in this direction.

But Ray Boynton was a person who was trying to encourage one's confidence, you might say. I wasn't a world-beater. I hadn't had this experience from childhood of doing a lot of drawing. I remember some of the fellows in the life drawing class, how clever they were. They used to get A's all the time. I never got an A. Maybe later on I did. But it was hard work, and it took me years before I really became more proficient.

Riess: With the drawing?

Schnier: With the drawing, and then later on with the creative work of being able to do something original.

Riess: How important is it in the training of a sculptor to have that ability to draw in a modeling way?

Schnier: Today I practically never draw. All of my designs I work in three dimensions from the beginning. I have found that if I start my sculpture design from a drawing, the finished work is mostly successful from that single view. The other views may not equal the front design. With sculpture in the round, I am confronted with 360 degrees of profiles. For this reason I now always start with a three-dimensional maquette.

I am working on one now for a city outside of Washington, D.C., Rockville, Maryland. Did I tell you I was sent to Washington by my client since you were last here? I am making countless little maquettes about six inches high for this sculpture design, and slowly turning them around. From the front, the view that I had conceived in the beginning still dominates it. I am trying to spread that interest all the way around because this sculpture is to be viewed three-dimensionally, from 360 different degrees.

Riess: So the danger in drawing, then, is that one view dominates?

Schnier: That's right, yes. But I think it's important to be able to draw. Just like an architect, who is conceiving something in three dimensions, can draw that and give you some idea of its three-dimensional quality, just by sketching it on a piece of paper. Some architects are extremely competent in doing this. It's like describing something, but instead of using words, he uses line and shadow. So let's answer the question positively. Drawing is important for the sculptor, but in working out a three-dimensional design, the three-dimensional maquette eventually becomes the more important tool.

Riess: Maquette is just a little model?

Schnier: Yes. It's a French word meaning a little model.

Riess: When you have said that some of your artist friends included Gottardo Piazzoni and Maynard Dixon, and that they were an influence on you, I wondered what kind of an influence they had on your art.

Schnier: Did I say that in my autobiography?

Riess: Yes.

Schnier: Well, I was being generous! [laughter] What do they say? In the beginning, with the intolerance of youth, I thought of Maynard as being an opportunist. No, not an opportunist and not a hack, but like a commercial artist, which he was. Much of his livelihood was obtained through commercial commissions. Later on I got to know him better and I liked him. There was something sweet about him.

Schnier: Now with Piazzoni it was different. Piazzoni's work was very soft, misty and dreamlike. Have you ever seen any of his work?

Riess: Yes. I know his work.

Schnier: But he was a gentleman. When you talked to him and he said something to you, you felt you could trust him. He was not thinking of using it as an opportunity for himself. Frank Van Sloun I didn't know well. Ralph Stackpole I got to know fairly well. I saw him working with his clients and his commissions. He had a studio right across the alley, Hotaling Place, from mine. I could look right down and see him working outdoors. To answer your question, I credit these mature artists in helping me establish my own identity.

Fellow Sculptors

Contemporaries

Riess: The landscapes that Piazzoni and Dixon are famous for are very powerful to me. I thought that since you were doing things that were called "Mountain" and "River" and "Stream" that you would have been moved by the kind of artistic vision that these men had.

Schnier: No. I think that idea of the intolerance of youth was overriding, definitely. But when it came to--maybe with the stone carving. I question if Stackpole had much influence on my own work. I liked him but I never thought of him as being a great sculptor.

Riess: [chuckles] You really were intolerant!

Schnier: You see how intolerant! With Boynton it was different. Do you know Boynton's paintings? Have you ever seen them?

Riess: Well, I know his things at Mills College.

Schnier: Yes. They are very decorative. Then there are some pastels he did of the Bay Area from the hills. Oh, and they included a lot of his work in that one-man show at the Oakland Art Museum about four years ago. The history section put on a very nice show with drawings and paintings. So you see, I was a damn intolerant little rat!

- Schnier: I think part of it stems from the fact that I was associating with a group of artists, one artist in particular, who was extremely critical of anything that he felt was facile. His name was Edward Hagedorn. He was one of the finest draftsmen I've ever run across. I had a chance to observe him continuously. He had a group that I got into through Ray Boynton. Ray Boynton used to teach both at the university and at the California School of Fine Arts. He had observed Hagedorn who had left the art school and was working on his own. To keep up with life drawing, he and a group used to hire models, sometimes two models, and draw for three hours straight, two or three afternoons a week. There were about five of us in the group. We would share the models' expenses which were not very much. I think in those days we paid them fifty cents an hour. So I saw Hagedorn drawing. Of course he had had much more experience than I had and he was a painter. Sometimes he would use color in his drawings. But he was just a master, a master of line. I was almost just copying his work at times. I learned a lot from him.
- Riess: So part of your self-teaching then, was to continue these drawing sessions?
- Schnier: Yes, that helped a lot. I found out through the drawing I was getting an idea of the figure, how it worked. That, coupled with the anatomy dissection course they allowed me to take in the medical anatomy department at U.C. Berkeley, helped me build a sufficiently broad vocabulary of human anatomy, human body movement, which enabled me to compose figures without a model. I could just compose them out of my head. And I think that's the way Michelangelo did. A lot of the big artists, the famous sculptors, would use a model for detail and the like, but they couldn't have a person posing in a special pose for hours. The model couldn't hold that pose. So this was important. That's why I was always a strong supporter of life modeling for sculptors. Although later on I noticed with my colleagues in college, at the university, that they didn't want to teach the life modeling course. It was boring for some reason or other. I felt that it was very important for sculptors. I feel that in all these abstract things that I do, the essence of it, the relationship of one form to another, the movement from one form to another, even if it's very geometric like a piece of architecture, all this stems from our experiences in life, our own kinectic experiences, as well as our observations. Be it the human figure or animals or anything that's living, organic. So I'm still a very strong advocate of artists continuously studying nature. I am a proponent of drawing, as an essential to the creative process.

Michelangelo

Riess: You just dropped the name of Michelangelo. When did you have a chance in your education to catch up on the whole tradition of sculpture?

Schnier: The tradition of sculpture?

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Schnier: When I was studying architecture I came across a newly published biography on Michelangelo which stimulated my interest very much. Later, I looked through all the books in the U.C. Library on all periods of sculptures. Those that caught my fancy, I signed out and studied carefully.

I ran across a book--here, I'll get that for you--a book on modern sculpture about Gaudier-Brzeska. Does that name ring a bell?

Riess: No. Spell it.

Schnier: He was a sculptor around the time of World War I. He died very young so his oeuvre was limited. But he was one of the early Modernists. He would take natural forms and distort them depending upon what he was trying to express. That was one thing. I inevitably came across the name of Michelangelo. I remember when I was working in John Galen Howard's office one summer, one of the architects was a man who had studied at Cal, Winfield Scott Wellington. He had a world of knowledge and he had a good feeling for art. They used to talk about books and he mentioned a new one about Michelangelo. I got it, and it was an eye opener. Then I read other books. But I wasn't a great one for studying from books alone. In fact, I didn't start building a library then. It wasn't until later on, years and years later, that I began acquiring art books.

Riess: How about going to the collections in the San Francisco Museum?

Schnier: Oh yes. I used to go to all the new shows.

Riess: And how about the ancient things?

Schnier: Whatever I thought was good. Of course the only museum in San Francisco for a while was the de Young Museum, and that was mostly ancient material. No modern things at all.

I experienced some modern art at the Palace of Fine Arts, the Maybeck building left over from the 1915 World's Fair which they continued to use as an exhibition hall. When I came back from

Schnier: Honolulu and was trying to find myself I remember going there to see a big exhibition of paintings. I carried away an impression of vivid colors as contrasted with the experience I had at the Stanford Museum looking at those landscapes by the Australian painters that seemed to be sort of washed out. Very foggy. So I had that exposure. Then the Mills College Art Gallery was one of the few to have changing shows, and the Oakland Art Gallery would put on shows of modern things. I would come across the bay to see their shows.

Riess: But as far as seeing four hundred years of European sculpture?

Schnier: Nothing. I saw more of Chinese art. That's why I have this love of the Orient. When I think of ancient art, I think of the Orient. I don't think of Europe as the primary historical source of sculpture. I used to spend the evenings after dinner in Chinatown wandering around the antique shops--I think I've mentioned that. I would see those wonderful things they had there.

Architectural Context

Riess: Eugen Neuhaus wrote a book about the 1915 fair and one about the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition on Treasure Island. In both of those books he makes the case that sculpture is kind of a handmaiden to architecture.

Schnier: I knew Neuhaus fairly well. As a matter of fact, before he wrote that last book he wrote the book on American art, the history of American art or something like that. And he reproduced my work although I was a newcomer. I was really surprised that he asked me for some photographs of my work.

Riess: Well, he had a lot of respect for your work.

Schnier: Yes, that's right. He was like Roi Partridge who wanted to get me into Mills College as the instructor of sculpture.

Riess: Neuhaus says in his 1939 book that "the sculptor conscious of the highest aim of his art is never happier than when he is called upon to decorate a public building, not in terms of a portrait bust in the foyer, but in grand scale figural embellishment as part of a monumental architectural setting." Do you believe that is essentially true in any way?

Schnier: Yes, many sculptors are driven and are inspired to do large scale outdoor works. Of course, today it wouldn't necessarily be anything dealing with figurative work. There is a certain satisfaction in doing a large piece of sculpture whether it's in conjunction with an architectural setting or just in a park-like setting. It could be the same. I know, I have a large stainless steel sculpture I finished last year for a building in Concord. It has a beautiful setting, and I was given an opportunity to do exactly what I thought proper for the site. I wasn't told it had to be subservient to the architecture. I enjoy that work very much; I think of it as being something that I'm proud to show people.

The sculptural relief I did for the Berkeley High School, for Corlett and Gutterson--which now is in very bad condition as they painted over the concrete and it is peeling--that work I don't have the same feeling about as I have for this piece in Concord. The Berkeley High School work is subservient to the architecture. It was to enrich the architecture. They had a blank wall, it looked barren, and they wanted something to doll it up with. On the other hand, I think the composition was innovative. The first composition that they proposed was like social realism of the Russian artists.

Now let's get back to your question about Neuhaus. That statement that he makes--it's a broad statement, a very positive statement. I don't know. Some sculptors condemn the architects because the architects make a lot of suggestions and they don't like the particular solution that they're proposing. Of course that doesn't invalidate Neuhaus's statement. I don't think it's the highest form; maybe it would be much nicer to have a whole park as a setting for one's sculpture. Make everything else subservient!

Riess: A whole world!

Schnier: Yes! Like this fellow--have you ever heard of Paolo Soleri, in Arizona?

Riess: Yes.

Schnier: We had him once at one of the International Sculpture Conferences.

Riess: Yes, I remember.

Schnier: He showed fantasy drawings of a city way up in the sky as if it were separate from the rest of the world.

Big Names

Riess: Who were the moderns you were seeing?

Schnier: Well, there were some books out.

Riess: Like Rodin? Rodin would be considered modern?

Schnier: Yes, but I think that I was critical of Rodin. There was something about his work--he was an Impressionist in a way. He became very much interested in the surface and the play of light on the surface. Because of my architectural and engineering training I wanted a shape that was more definite. So I was never attracted very strongly to Rodin's work.

These were sculptors who came a little later: Aristide Maillol, and Charles Despiau and Antoine Bourdelle, mostly French sculptors.

Riess: Where does Paul Manship fit?

Schnier: Later on I became interested in his work because I was made a member of the National Sculpture Society. And the National Sculpture Society was made up of mostly Eastern sculptors who had had a very sound academic training in art, either in Europe or in America. Paul Manship was, you might say, the leader of that group. He was elected president over and over again because of his reputation. Evidently in addition to being talented he was tactful and the members admired him.

By the way, they got their funds not through dues, but mostly from the sculptor member Anna Hyatt Huntington. She did the two big bronze equestrian statues in front of the Palace of the Legion of Honor, which she gave to the museum. Her husband was a Huntington, of the same family that started the Huntington Library in San Marino.

Manship was really the most outstanding sculptor in that whole group. There were a couple of others who were truly inventive like Paul Jennewein and Adolph Weinman. I mention them in the book I wrote that the University of California Press published titled Sculpture in Modern America.^{*} But Manship was the top man, you might say. The most versatile and the most prolific and the one who got the most commissions. He was the most successful of all those artists, on a par with Daniel Chester French who before Manship's time was one of the idols of the art-loving public, as far as sculpture goes.

^{*}Jacques Schnier, Sculpture in Modern America, U.C. Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1948.

Riess: This is a little side-track I want to take you on. I want to name five sculptors. They all, in a way, are contemporaries of yours and I want to know whether you knew them, were influenced by them. Don't get carried away on each. Just like a short essay.

Schnier: All right.

Riess: First of all, Constantin Brancusi, a fellow countryman.

Schnier: Yes, I admired his work and I learned a lot from his work regarding the return to the simple essence of form. Definitely. I think in the beginning some of my things were strongly influenced by him.

Riess: Did he ever have a realistic period?

Schnier: Oh, yes. That's another thing I admired about him. He just didn't turn to the simple form because he was untrained. I remember seeing an anatomical study that he made. I don't know whether it was for the art academy in Bucharest or just what was the occasion for his doing it, but it is perfect for art teaching purposes. So he could do the figure. I would say that I admired his work and what he was doing at that time, without reservation.

Riess: Did you ever meet him?

Schnier: No.

Riess: Alexander Calder.

Schnier: I have never felt that there was anything about his work that I was going to adapt or use as a starting point to do something different and innovative of my own. The moving sculpture has not caught hold with me. So I can't wax enthusiastic about his work. And the big works like the stabiles, they don't move me very much. Like the one in front of the University Art Museum. And I just saw his big one in the East Wing of the National Gallery of Art, his last sculpture.

Riess: Henry Moore, also born in 1898.

Schnier: For a while--I'm trying to think back, when I first became acquainted with his work. I would say that I find a lot of things in Henry Moore's work that are original. His use of openings through the mass. I don't recall many sculptors making an issue of that. Barbara Hepworth did, but they were contemporaries and we don't know who influenced whom. Anyhow, I find his work innovative. I find that he has profited by knowing Brancusi and being exposed to

Schnier: Brancusi's work. And some of his early things, especially stone carvings, I find appealing; they move me. But in a lot of his later work, I can't find the essence of the design. I looked at his big piece in front of the East Wing while I was in Washington two weeks ago. I studied it from all angles and I got very little out of it. But I think I'm prejudiced somehow or other against his work. I try not to be. I've looked through some of the recent books on his work and I find that there are some things that are rather innovative, with form quality that suggests power. But some of the things I can't understand. Especially those big things he did based on the shape of sheep for his estate that is going to be the Henry Moore Museum. He's putting all his resources into this, into the foundation.

Riess: Jacques Lipschitz.

Schnier: Yes. I think highly of his work. He is innovative, he is original, his sculpture is well organized. Yes, he deserves his place in the history of sculpture.

Riess: Did any of these people come to San Francisco for any reason?

Schnier: By the way, when I was going on sabbatical from the university, I got the cockeyed idea of inviting Henry Moore to take my place. He wrote me a very nice letter. [chuckles] When I think of how infantile, in a way, it was to offer him the job when I was getting--I think I was an associate professor then at a modest salary. And besides, I think he had given up teaching. It wasn't attractive any longer. He originally used to teach. Well, he wrote a nice letter and said he was just preparing a new show on the continent someplace or other, and said he wouldn't have time to come.

Lipschitz, I don't remember him ever coming out. Brancusi, no. Alexander Calder, yes, he had a sister in Berkeley [Peggy Calder Hayes].

Riess: Did you go to study with any of these Europeans?

Schnier: No, never. It never occurred to me. As I recall that's one of the things that Boynton told me when I was thinking of going up to the California School of Fine Arts. He said, "I think it's best for you to work on your own. Just struggle on your own." I think he could see, probably, what the influence was there at that time, at the school.

Riess: That's interesting.

Schnier: Of course there also was this matter of expense. I was living on my own meager resources that I had saved from my engineering days and the modest income I got from my mother's estate. So I was just figuring on a very tight budget. It would have been impossible to go there unless somebody had given me the money.

Riess: How about [Isamu] Noguchi? The fifth on my list.

Schnier: I didn't know Noguchi in those days. But of course, I've met him since, and I know him. He's a very innovative and original artist, but never sticks to one style. There are Noguchi styles but no single Noguchi style.

Riess: Is that good or bad?

Schnier: I don't know, I can't say. I read his autobiography and found it fascinating to see how he developed. And also how he, at one time, was making a living by designing lampshades and doing stage designs for Martha Graham. Doing hack work just to get along. But now he has hit the jackpot. Now he's like Henry Moore.

Riess: Public sculpture.

Schnier: Oh yes. He has an interesting piece in the East Wing. It's based on his Japanese background. It's just a stone. A big granite stone that's been worked on a little by drilling, knocking off pieces with the drill in the back, drilling holes and then knocking the pieces out. It has a lot of presence to it. But you can't put your finger on a style that he's developed. Critics have noticed that. So he's different in that respect. But very innovative and hard working. Now he's throwing all his resources into his own museum that he's going to set up on Long Island. It's in the process of being built now. It will be interesting when it's finished to go out there and see it, to see a full cross section of his work.

On Innovation

Riess: I'm very struck by the fact that, if you have anything positive to say about anyone, it always includes that they work imaginatively or innovatively. That seems to be the essence of this for you.

- Schnier: Well, how else would I be attracted to somebody's work? I could also be attracted to their work from the point of view of the perfection of their technique. But we don't think of that as being unique with the individual artist, as being the essence of the artistic endeavor.
- Riess: How about just plain beautiful? Do you use that word beautiful?
- Schnier: The word "beautiful" is one that somebody could use as a new research theme for a Ph.D., because--look at so many things in this world. There are tragic and there are great works of art. And we just say "they're beautiful." Could you use the word "beautiful" to describe them? Look at, let's say, some of Rodin's pieces that show sorrow and the like. The pose is an interesting composition. The form is exquisite, the form is so meaningful, or--
- Riess: Okay, meaningful--that's a good word.
- Schnier: I have dealt with this subject of beauty in some of the papers I've written when I was teaching, writing on psychoanalysis and art. And also, let's look at the great tragedies, the Greek tragedies. Or look at Shakespeare's tragedies: Take Hamlet--and his killing his mother and his stepfather--I wonder, could we rightfully use beauty to describe it? But the way he writes about it and the words he uses, that's beautiful. So tragedy is another part of artistic expression. Some of the greatest things we think of in a culture's art history deal with tragic themes.
- Riess: All right. Then following along from that, you might say of Henry Moore that his work is very moving. "Moving" might be your idea of the ultimate--.
- Schnier: Yes, if it affects me, I could say that. Yes.
- Riess: But you are saying that originality is the hallmark for you.
- Schnier: Originality. He's innovative, he's creative. His forms are meaningful.
- I wonder what you--you being in the field of writing--when you read somebody's work, and you're reading a group of writers' work, I wonder how you would differentiate those who you find less interesting from those who you find really exciting. I'm not talking about the plot because a lot of books you read, the plot is so exciting you can't put the book down. I'm talking about style and form.

Riess: Well, I would stay with something on several levels. I would stay with something because the words were put together in such an extraordinary way. Like a Henry James novel.

Schnier: That's form.

Riess: Yes, that's form, right. But the psychology of Henry James is also interesting. Then I would stay with something because I identified with it so strongly that it was important for me to know what the outcome would be. And a lot of things I don't finish reading.

Schnier: I like the way you evaluate a literary work. A sculpture could be evaluated in a somewhat similar way. For me, as an artist, what makes something worth looking at more than once or twice is its form. And that's a word that wouldn't register much on the layman, but for me it is the essence of an artist's design. I think form also has content in spite of the criticism of abstract art: "Where's the content?" But the content is in making the form appear alive. And I could go into detail and explain that to you. Maybe we'll have a chance to explain that.

Riess: We could do that, yes.

Schnier: It's so important.

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Riess: In the Irving Stone book you say that as a sculptor "inwardly [you were] experiencing the 'creative' aspect of art." Outwardly, you were "getting this sense of accomplishment." Is this differentiating of inner and outer a reflection on your awareness of psychology then?

Schnier: "Accomplishment." Let's see. Of course it has given me more satisfaction. Well, maybe I was thinking of it from the point of view of the outside world, the observer. I was finishing something to offer as a communication. Maybe that's it--I think there's a strong tie between creativity and the idea of communicating with somebody, even if it's an imaginary person. You would like to know that somebody understands what you're thinking of, or is in tune, or approves. Or is reacting the same way, vicariously, to the ideas that you're expressing. I'll explain that to you when we get to that point.

I've gone through and studied and given a lot of thought to this subject. In the beginning, I thought a person could create even on a desert island. That was a revolt against doing it in order to please somebody. According to the academic way, you're going to

Schnier: follow this way. When I got into the art colony there was a lot of talk about self-expression and being critical of doing something that would be a potboiler. Doing the classical manner and the Renaissance manner. We thought--or I thought, maybe discussed, that really the sign of a true artist was one who could go on a desert island and still create and be satisfied. Now I think that there is this matter of an audience, real or imagined. Because you find it in certain forms of art, in the playwright and the director who is putting on a play. He is very conscious of the audience. Well, that's beside the point. I'm trying to answer that--.

Riess: Well, I don't know when we would discuss it. It is interesting, so we have to make sure that we talk about it sometime.

Schnier: Will you excuse me? The reason I say maybe we could discuss it later is that, when I present it--I would like to present it in such a way that you could see the reasoning behind it. Not just to tell you, this is this, which would make it like a subjective statement. That I think this is this and that is that. I would give you some reasoning behind it.

Riess: Your thinking about this evolved at a different time, you're saying?

Schnier: Oh, that came later in my analysis. It was at the very end of it that I arrived at this explanation of art.

Riess: Okay.

Beginning of Studies in Sculpture, 1926

The Montgomery Block

Schnier: Let's concentrate on sculpture.

Riess: So you say you finally made that decision.

Schnier: It was 1926. I told Bessie Sprague, "I'm giving up architecture." I had already enrolled for the semester.

I looked around for a place to study. I went to the California College of Arts and Crafts which was in Berkeley at that time. But [Frederick] Meyers, who was moving the school down to Oakland,

Schnier: said he wasn't scheduling any sculpture courses for the time being. Cal had no sculpture courses, except that modeling course given by Cummings which was no way to study to be a sculptor. The California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco was moving over to Chestnut Street from the Mark Hopkins site. They told me there were no scheduled courses in sculpture at that time. They said that Ruth Cravath, a sculpture graduate who had studied with Stackpole, had started a little studio course in the Montgomery Block. "Why don't you go down and see her?" So I did. I told her that all I would like to do was to pay for working in her class, to work from the model. I would supply my own clay and everything else. And my own stand. And that's the arrangement I made. And that was still 1926.

Riess: Ray Puccinelli was also in this group?

Schnier: Yes, he was taking a course from her. And I guess there were about three or four other students. It was enough to pay the rent.

Riess: There was no critiquing?

Schnier: Not for me. She never said anything about my work, and I wouldn't have tolerated it!

Riess: Why not?

Schnier: Because I just felt I didn't need it. On the basis of what Ray Boynton told me: "You start working on your own." Ruth's work wasn't anything that moved me. Definitely.

Riess: But in a way you needed the feedback, maybe, didn't you?

Schnier: Yes, and I probably was so egocentric at that time because of the setting with Hagedorn in his drawing group, where the idea was anti-instruction, anti-academy. Anti-formal training was cultivated. Now I am more open and feel that someone else might give me an idea. For example, I sometimes let my wife and my daughter, Rebecca, look at my work, when I reach an impasse. I respect their judgment even if I don't follow it. But at that time I was quite different.

As a matter of fact because of my attitude I became--not the talk of the town--but the talk of that two-block area in the artists' quarter, on account of being so independent and so deeply involved in my art. I was oblivious to everything else. Ruth would mention it to Stackpole or Piazzoni or Adeline Kent--she had a studio in the same building. I was surprised how my name and my

Schnier: work became well known. And at the annual shows I started winning prizes. First I was awarded second prize and then the next year I won first prize for sculpture.

Today, if there is somebody whose opinion I respect, I certainly would invite his judgment.

Riess: So you had that contact with the other artists?

Schnier: Yes. It was an ideal setting. I was very fortunate.

Riess: Were you living down in that area also?

Schnier: Well, I still had the place in Berkeley that the Creeds had built, and my brother Carl had come to live with me because he was going to Cal. In the evening returning to Berkeley across the bay, before I got on the ferry I would go to a market down there and pick up a couple of chops and some vegetables and take them home and cook dinner, and then I would help wash the dishes. But then that trip back and forth got too much and I rented a studio in the Montgomery Block. In fact, the first studio I rented I sublet from Helen Salz. She aspired to be a writer. She was also a painter. She left some old furniture in there which I was thankful for. So we became friends. I made the move to the Montgomery Block so I wouldn't have to commute.

Riess: You had your little living space and then you had your working artistic space?

Schnier: Well, I finally gave up the room that I rented from her because it happened to be in a corner of the building where the rooms were smaller. There was a larger room available down the hall and I rented that and set up a sculpture bench at one end, by the windows, and had my couch at the other end. There was a little washbasin with cold running water, and that was it. I lived and I worked in that room. I never cooked. For years I never cooked breakfast or anything. I would just go out for it. Later on, I saw the wisdom of having a little kitchen in my studio.

Riess: Would you go out with other people for meals?

Schnier: Occasionally, yes, with some of the artists. Have you ever heard of Clay Spohn?

Riess: Yes.

Schnier: Well, he and I formed a friendship and we would go out together. As a matter of fact, I rented part of my studio to him. Later on I got a big loft. He was one of my tenants, so to speak. So I had a good chance to study him. He was a character. Then also Matt Barnes, who was a very gloomy painter. And I rented to Puccinelli for a while. John Howard and I shared the studio for a while. That's Robert Howard's brother. He's still alive.

But I don't want to evade your questions. You asked me if I went out with the artists. Infrequently. However, the artists used to have parties and we would get together then. They had a lot of parties.

Riess: You mean in the Montgomery Block?

Schnier: In the Montgomery Block. Another attractive feature was socializing. We would visit each other's studios. A woman artist named Dorr Bothwell--she was in the building at the time. It was an ideal situation because you felt that you were in a family there, even if you didn't go out for dinner together in the evening. You might go out for lunch more frequently than for dinner. Some of these people didn't live in the building. Ruth may have stayed there. She and another friend of hers, an artist named Trace, her last name was Trace.

Riess: Marian Trace.

Schnier: Marian Trace. My, you know all those names! That is interesting. And Dorothy Wagner. I don't think she stayed there, she had her studio some place else.

Riess: Did you all talk about art when you went out to lunch?

Schnier: Frequently, yes. Not too deeply. We didn't get into deep discussions. But we talked about it. They had good taste. I remember the girls used to collect stuff in Chinatown. Nice pieces of pottery or knick-knacks that someone else would pass over and not see the beauty of it.

Riess: Did you find yourself formulating ideas about aesthetics?

Schnier: Yes, gradually, but they were very ephemeral. Sometimes I didn't know what I was doing. I was just going by impulse, playing it by ear, so that in the beginning I would do something like a child. It was very crude. But when it was finished, notwithstanding the crudeness, I had no interest in changing it. "This is my expression at this moment."

Riess: This is what you mean when you say, "I followed the principle of expressing each theme within and up to the limits of the means I had acquired."

Schnier: Yes, that's right. In other words, I didn't worry if it wasn't like a Rodin or a Michelangelo. "This is me. That's the limit of my ability at that moment." I picked that up from maybe Brancusi or maybe my interest in child art.

Oh, that was a theme also that was quite prevalent, the emphasis on and the interest in child art at that time. I remember seeing some exhibitions of children's art done under an instructor of art in Czechoslovakia, that circulated in the United States, and how impressed I was.

Riess: Would you describe these people as Bohemians? Was there a lot of free love and high living going on there?

Schnier: No, they were pretty serious. I don't know how much the Bohemian and the "beat generation" affected the serious artist. Later there were artists in that "beat generation" who really were considered productive and whose work is meaningful. I've never read Kerouac, On the Road; he was part of the "beat generation." But this group--no, I would say there wasn't a great deal of that. Ruth Cravath was very serious and Marian Trace and Dorothy Wagner. I wouldn't say exactly straight-laced, but almost. Adeline Kent was the one in the group who was exposed to more art than anyone else because she came from the Kent family of Kentfield and had studied in Europe on several occasions. She knew what was going on. Later her work became freed from the traditional approach, and she was quite innovative.

Riess: How come there are so many women?

Schnier: There were men too. The sculptors--there was Robert Howard, who had already arrived, and he had commissions to do. He had no problem getting commissions because he was well grounded and he had come up in a tradition where he was prepared for that. He had a big studio in the next block. That's where Stackpole and Piazzoni and Maynard Dixon had studios, the arrived artists. But I'm speaking of the ones in the Montgomery Block.

Riess: And what's the name of the next block?

Schnier: The Montgomery Block was a building. It didn't occupy a whole block. But the next block, from Washington to Jackson, it didn't have a special name because there were about ten different buildings. You would just say, "The 700 block of Montgomery Street." That's where Dixon had his studio, and also Stackpole.

Schnier: I'm trying to think of how many men there were, men artists, in the "Monkey Block." There weren't many. There were some writers and painters. Oh, Hagedorn had a studio in the building. Hagedorn-- he didn't mix very much with this group. He was a loner, quite a loner. How did we get on this subject? Oh, about life in the artists' colony.

Riess: Well, I'm just interested in why there were so many women, for one thing.

Schnier: Yes. Cheap rent, I guess. Somebody started going there, like Ruth Cravath, and then the others followed suit.

Riess: Ruth Cravath was teaching in Room 427.

Schnier: Yes, up on the fourth floor, I remember that room. And mine was on the opposite side, but I've forgotten the number.

Riess: Then she also had her own studio, which was Studio 316.

Schnier: Yes, that was on the third floor; that she shared with Marian Trace. By the way, it was more like a salon. I don't remember it being a place to work in. She had nice pottery in there and nice Chinese artifacts, and drapery on the couch. It looked very gemütlich. It was nice to go in there and have a cup of tea.

By the way, these people weren't drinkers--I mentioned that. So what we would have if we went there would be tea and maybe some fortune cookies, if I was invited down there for tea. I had the feeling that these people were conservative. Some of the women wore Chinese denim smocks, and they looked very neat and handsome. It was not the "beat generation" where they were scoffing at the standards of society to belittle them, where they went around barefooted or with tattered clothes or not bathe for three weeks.

Riess: Actually, I have other names of some men who you have forgotten: Paul Hunt and Ward Montague.

Schnier: How the deuce did you get those names?

Riess: That's my part of this job. [laughs]

Schnier: Oh, Ward Montague. He was a helper. He helped Stackpole. He studied at the art school the same time that Ruth Cravath and Marian Trace did. Ward Montague was also a sculptor. Paul Hunt evidently studied painting and sometimes he drew with our group. They had other activities. I never thought of them as full-time

Schnier: artists. Maybe they were Sunday artists, Sunday painters. Weekend painters. Not Ward Montague, he was trying to make a living from sculpture. I don't know what happened to him. He went away for a long time and disappeared. Now he's living in the Bay Area.

Riess: How about Geneve Rixford Sargeant?

Schnier: Oh, yes, I knew her. She rented a studio around the corner, or a room in an Italian hotel, or an apartment house. She was part of the group and very heavily exposed to French art because she studied in France, especially with a teacher called Andre L'Hote. She was a respected artist. Her work was--I'd say she was professional. I happened to be talking about her lately with a woman who used to work for Maxwell Galleries and now has gone into business for herself. Her name is Jan Holloway. She is trying to collect Geneve Rixford Sargeant's work because there is a demand for it; she thinks she can build up a good clientele for it.

A Typical Day

Riess: Would you describe a typical day in your life at that point.

Schnier: I got up early, I wasn't a late sleeper, and I would start the day at eight o'clock. I went down to some Italian restaurant where they served coffee and French bread. That was my breakfast. I hadn't yet become accustomed to the Chinese rice gruel breakfast. Then I went back and I would start working at that bench by the window. In those early days it was all wood carving. I would make a design, a drawing or several drawings of a composition, and then start carving.

Then I would go out for lunch, invariably to a Chinese restaurant because that was the cheapest meal I could get and the most wholesome. Probably far better than anything else. All the vegetables were fresh. They cooked the food after you ordered your dinner. You got a pot of hot tea and frequently they would bring you a bowl of thin soup on the side. So that was a very fortunate situation having that available.

Then I went back. I wouldn't spend a lot of time horsing around or trying to avoid getting back to my studio like some of the artists. Some of the artists I used to see sitting out in the sun. Matt Barnes, he used to sit out sometimes for a couple of hours in the middle of the day. He was having problems. Then I would go

Schnier: back to the studio and work until it got dark--they didn't have very good light in those studios. Maybe one electric bulb. There must have been a base plug because sometimes I had the drawing session in my room and I know I had a little electric heater for the model.

Anyhow, I worked until five or six o'clock, went out and had dinner at a Chinese restaurant, and then wandered through Chinatown to see what new things they had in the shops. There were three very good antique shops in Chinatown. They had work of museum quality. And they never bothered us when we browsed through their collections. They kept open late. Almost every shop in Chinatown was open until at least ten o'clock, and sometimes some of them until twelve, to catch the tourist trade.

Riess: Did you talk to the Chinese merchants a lot?

Schnier: No, not very much. They weren't the talkative type. A lot of them couldn't speak English. And the waiters at the restaurant couldn't speak much English either. Sometimes I had to point to a dish that a Chinese gentleman at the next table was eating if I wanted to try the same dish.

Riess: Was the menu in English and Chinese?

Schnier: English and Chinese. And the food was excellent. When I think back, I realize how fortunate I was. Fresh vegetables and always very little meat because meat was expensive. These dishes were for the Chinese of modest means or the Chinese who were working hard and saving their money and sending it back to their wives in Canton.

Now, let me continue. Then sometimes I would jump the street car and I would go out to the library. I would spend the evening looking through the art books. See, I had had limited exposure to art. No history of art. I would frequently even look up the foreign art books that they had on file there. That exposed me to something that was not covered in the American art journals. And I would sometimes take the street car back, or walk back home to the studio. I repeated that day after day.

On Sunday I might go to a museum or Clay Spohn and I would sometimes take a hike over on Mount Tamalpais or someplace like that. Sometimes I would be invited out to dinner.

Hagedorn

Riess: When you were talking with Hagedorn, what would be the kinds of things that you were talking about: art and life?*

Schnier: Yes, pretty much. After our drawing session, usually at Hagedorn's studio though sometimes it was at my studio in the Montgomery Block, we would walk up Kearny Street to Foster's at Market and Kearny, in the old M.H. de Young Building, and have coffee and donuts. This was about midnight, sometimes, or we would talk until midnight, or until we were thrown out.

The subject was art, maybe local artists, the things that were on exhibition. About French artists, about Matisse or Picasso or Derain or Vlaminck, or the sculptors Bourdelle, Despiau, Barnard, those who were in the limelight at that time. I must say that because I was a newcomer, not a novice but let's say a freshman compared with the other artists in the field, that most of the time I listened because I didn't have an opinion.

Some of their opinions were very strong and after listening to them I got to respect the opinions of some of them because when I examined what they said, for example, about an artist's work, I could see the justification for their very strong opinion and criticism, or their acceptance. So that opened my eyes, that helped me to see.

But there were others in the group whose opinions I didn't rate very highly.

Riess: Whom did you respect most?

Schnier: Hagedorn. And I notice that Ruth Cravath mentions him in her oral history.** After I had left the artist area down there on Montgomery Street, these drawing classes continued with a group of artists hiring a model. She mentions the fact that Hagedorn used to come early to her studio and bring up the firewood for the space heater, the little stove they had to heat the studio. She mentioned the fact that he was a fine draftsman.

*From Interview 4, tape 7a.

**Ruth Cravath, Two San Francisco Artists and Their Contemporaries, 1920-1975, an oral history interview conducted 1974-1975, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1977, p. 365.

Riess: In 1926, didn't Matisse come to the Bay Area?

Schnier: I read in Puccinelli's oral history that he came to the Bay Area, I think it was '26 or '27, and I believe Puccinelli to be correct there. I know the restaurant that he speaks about, where he met Matisse.

Riess: But did you meet him?

Schnier: No, I didn't. The only artist I met from Paris who was of any consequence was Foujita, if you've ever heard that name. He was a Japanese artist who was an exquisite draftsman. His work was very popular at that time and is still popular amongst the Japanese collectors. He came through San Francisco and a friend of mine, Lucien Labaudt, an artist who came from France, brought him to my studio. As a matter of fact, he brought him to a big party I had there one night and that's how I had a chance to meet and talk with Foujita.

Parties

Riess: Tell me about your big parties.

Schnier: The artists frequently, maybe as a result of a seasonal urge like you find in cultures all over the world during the spring or the fall harvest, they would want to have a party, to get together and release their emotions. So every now and then an artist would send around either a written notice, or would pass the word around, he was going to have a party. These parties usually consisted of something to drink--those were in the days of Prohibition so it was usually wine, very seldom hard liquor--and some music. Usually you'd get some little band, maybe two-piece, three-piece band, or sometimes a radio. And frequently there would be a theme, so you'd come dressed up.

Now, the party that I had, to which Lucien Labaudt brought Foujita, had the theme of the bullfight because Hemingway's Death in the Afternoon was at its height of popularity. I remember we had a bullfight in this little studio; it wasn't an enormous studio, I don't figure it was as large as this room. There were papier-maché bulls, like the kids have in Mexico [piñatas] and in Spain. We had a bullfight and we played flamenco music because at that time I was very much attracted to the flamenco style. There was a music store on Broadway that specialized in Spanish music and that's where I could get the records.

Schnier: I had a beat up old phonograph that I played the records on. Everybody had a good time, it was very informal and there was very little reason for people to feel standoffish and the like. Then, I had another party I remember in another studio. Again, we had punch with some wine in it and some food, and that was a great thing for artists, to have a spread because usually they were living on a shoestring. It wouldn't be long before all the food was gone. It would consist of salami and cheese and cold cuts, a lot of cut French bread, and salad, and stuff like that.

At this other party we had a phonograph for music, but rather late in the evening Richard Gump--if you've ever heard of him, I'm sure you've heard of the store--brought in a group of South Sea Island musicians from Samoa. This group was playing at nightclubs, and he was very friendly with them because his sister had gone down to live in that part of the world. So he brought them in, and that livened up the party considerably because they are almost like children, the South Sea Islanders. The real Hawaiians are the same way. They are uninhibited, friendly, generous as can be, easy to get along with, and they were so delighted to be there and to have fun and play their instruments and dance some of the South Sea Island hulas.

After the party had quieted down and I went to sleep I thought I heard something like a breathing sound in the studio. In the wee hours of the morning I got up and I turned on the light and I looked all around. Then I opened up a closet, and here was Dick Gump sound asleep in the clothes closet! Of course, he was a playboy at that time, trying to find himself. Anyhow, that's another story.

Riess: Why was he there?

Schnier: I knew him. We were friends.

Riess: From where?

Schnier: I met him in art circles. This is before I took the trip around the world, so I didn't know Martin Rosenblatt, who was head of the oriental art department at Gump's, which is another story. But I met him in the art circle. I guess that's how he happened to be there.

Riess: Part of finding himself was hanging out with the artists?

Schnier: I think so. Later on he settled down a little more.

Riess: Would Albert Bender come to your parties?

Schnier: Early in our friendship I didn't think he would enjoy our artists' parties, but years later I would include him. Sometimes some of the people from the Beaux Arts Gallery would come. They felt very comfortable with the artists and they knew them personally. So that livened things up.

Riess: How about girls? Where did you get the girls?

Schnier: They were girl artists. There were many well-established, recognized female artists at that time. There was Cravath, and Dorothy Wagner and--.

Riess: Oh, yes, right. How about models? Did you invite them?

Schnier: Sometimes we'd invite the models. Maybe the artists felt that they were of a different intellectual group than the women artists. But there were other girls too, and the artists invited their own girlfriends. But I wouldn't say they were wild parties like you read about in some of the books, where they became orgies. Not the parties that I went to.

I remember now. There was a group of people who we called "camp followers of the arts." Some of them did a little art on their own, some of them just knew the artists. Some of them had big studios, or studios of a sort, and they would have parties and I heard they would get pretty wild. But I never went to those parties, they didn't appeal to me.

Riess: That's what I was wondering, yes.

Schnier: I had no need for it.

Riess; How about drugs? Were people taking any?

Schnier: I never heard the word drugs mentioned in all of my time in the artist colony, or in the days when I was close to the artists. Not aspirin even.

Riess: Did the artists and the writers mix?

Schnier: Some of them did mix. George Sterling--I think he committed suicide early in my stay in the artists' quarters--he used to have a room in the Montgomery Block, but he was living at the Bohemian Club when he committed suicide. There were, amongst the camp followers, some aspiring writers. One of them was Rexroth, if that name rings a bell.

Riess: Yes.

Schnier: Many of these writers tended to be communists, I'd call them communistic inclined, and they would come around trying to proselytize and that bothered me a lot. They'd knock on my door and they'd come in and talk. Many of them had nothing else to do so that was a way of passing the day. It was very annoying sometimes because I didn't have much respect for them; they were people at loose ends, trying to find themselves.

Rexroth was a little different. I guess he was doing some writing there. He wasn't recognized as yet but he kept at it and finally did become recognized.

Riess: It's interesting to hear about the "camp followers." Artists do have "groupies" that hang around them.

Schnier: I think that this is what people are thinking of when they think about the orgies at artists' studios. By the way talking about writers--oh, this will come later, I guess, about the PWA, because at that time there was a writer's project devoted exclusively to writing the history of the California artists. Maybe you've heard about that project?

Riess: Yes.

Destroyed Work

Riess: Is there a body of early work that you did that you have destroyed?

Schnier: Yes, I did destroy a number of things. For example, that statue called "Mt. Whitney"* that brought me the second prize at the first exhibition I ever entered. I destroyed that because it was so heavy. It was cast in concrete. After I had it a number of years, since I had no dealer, I figured that I didn't have the room for it and it cost so much to move it around that I destroyed it.

There were a couple of other pieces, one or two pieces that I destroyed. Also a number I, you might say, threw out when I went to war. I had to vacate my studio, and I had the problem of finding someplace to store them.

Riess: Were any of these destroyed because you were dissatisfied with them, looking at your own work retrospectively?

*Catalog, Forty-Ninth Annual Exhibition, San Francisco Art Association, 1927, p. 79 (illustrated). See also pp. 19, 26.

Schnier: Yes, being displeased with the final outcome, the final design. After years, when I was on the move, I would destroy them. There were a few in that category. But in recent years I've always found ways of changing a work of art and saving it, making it better, after several years have passed after I finished it.

Riess: I'm interested in how you feel about it.

Schnier: Generally speaking, as I look back upon my very early work, I still am satisfied with it, and I have some of it displayed in our home, or some place where I can look at it. One of my very early works, "The Family," a relief carved in teak in 1927 while I was still in the Montgomery Block, working and living in this one-room studio, was acquired by Jeffrey and Naomi Caspe at an exhibition at the Willis Gallery in 1977.

Another one, "Woman Doing Up Her Hair," in teak, which was done in 1929 was in a traveling exhibition organized by Rutgers University.* It was purchased by a collector who saw it in the exhibition.

Riess: I know that your stuff has been collected from very early.

Schnier: This was years later. In other words, I still had it, and I was still exhibiting it. This was fifty years after it had been done, and the same with the other piece, which happened to be a relief. As a matter of fact, my wife was very put out at my having sold it because she loved it. She wanted to keep it in the family.

This piece [gesturing towards work] was done in 1932.

Riess: And what's the name of that?

Schnier: It's "The Kiss."** I am still pleased, you might say, and satisfied with my early work, although I would never think of repeating that style because I've gone a long way since then. I've progressed, or traveled, or changed, and I think my style is richer now, to use that word, or more innovative.

*Vanguard American Sculpture, 1913-1939, traveling exhibition organized by Rutgers University Art Gallery, 1979, illustrated in catalog of exhibition, p. 62, figure 81.

**Illustrated, plate 50, Jacques Schnier, Sculpture in Modern America, U.C. Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1948. See also p. 49 fn.

Riess: I think that for many creative people there's an embarrassment about the early effusions. But you don't feel that?

Schnier: No. I have a piece, the first piece I ever exhibited, along with that "Mt. Whitney" piece which I told you was awarded the second prize in my first San Francisco Art Association annual exhibition. I still have it, and it's a good record of what I was doing at that time. It's called "Marriage of Water and Earth."

More on Innovation

[Interview 3: July 18, 1985]##

Schnier: I feel that I ought to respond to a question you asked last week, in a little more depth. You spoke about my frequently evaluating art, or a particular artist's work, by saying, "He's innovative, he's original." I can understand your question because frequently people think of the artist as being involved with doing something beautiful--you mentioned the word beautiful--and that is part of art.

But I think of there being two aspects of art. One is where you do art like a person would play a composer's composition, and put some of yourself into it. Then there is the situation where you as the artist create a symphony that's different from the symphonies that were traditionally acceptable and you think of it as being original. Although I'm not trained in music, people classify Mozart and Chopin and Beethoven and some of those composers as being great because they were original, or innovative. I use that word. I think they were like an inventor; they were creating something new and, in addition, something that was expressive. I am interested in this phase of art work, I'm just not interested in potboilers: making my living by just doing popular art for the masses.

It's a great challenge to me to work out new compositions, a new one each time, and not to repeat myself. Very seldom have I worked out editions of my work. Sometimes in bronzes, and sometimes in acrylic, but usually each one is unique, an entirely new composition. And frequently while I'm finishing one composition, I'm thinking of a new composition that I'll be tackling with a new set of elements in it that are challenging; I may not have used these particular themes in the past, and now I'm prompted to explore them.

Riess: I wonder if the general public is prepared to respond to the newness.

Schnier: There is a great lag in the public's appreciation of invention or originality in art. I don't think it applies to such a great extent in science--yes and no, in pure science. Einstein's theory of relativity took some time to be digested even by the scientists in his field. But when it's the application of a scientific discovery, it may catch fire quickly, like the computer and different aspects of computer science. People are going for it like wildfire.

Riess: Because it's utilized, and because there are performers, and with the music also, there are performers who bridge the gap, but in art there's no intermediary.

Schnier: That's right. I know with my own work it took a long, long time for people to appreciate my abstract work, maybe not so long with my early work because probably it was not as strange. It was appealing, and it had sort of an original approach, but not so far out because I was still using the figure. Although, in the beginning it was very primitive.

If I remember, I'd like to bring you a picture of one of my early works that won a first prize. Acceptance of my work by my colleagues was different. For example, my wood carving, "The Stream," that won the first sculpture prize the next year at the second exhibition I participated in of the San Francisco Art Association, that one was accepted by my colleagues, they composed the jury. But the layperson found it a little hard to understand, although finally my dealer, where it was exhibited, sold it to a woman who evidently was a little more advanced in her appreciation of a new type of sculpture.

Accepted as an Artist

First Commission, and Dealers

Riess: Did you have a high price on your early pieces?

Schnier: Oh, no. Did I mention the first piece I did on order? You're sure I didn't? I don't like to repeat myself, but you can knock it out later on if you find that I'm repeating myself. One day Robert Howard stopped me on the street. He had a studio in the next block from the

Schnier: Montgomery Block; he had a big studio because he was already an arrived sculptor. He had studied in Europe right after World War I, after he got out of the army and had been to the California College of Arts and Crafts. He was thoroughly trained. So he had a lot of commissions. He was one of the most prolific commission-doing [chuckles] artists who I knew because he always had something to do. The architects and patrons knew that he was competent and could handle big jobs.

Well, he stopped me on the corner, right at the corner of Washington and Montgomery Streets, and said, "Jacques, what are you doing now?" I told him I was still working up in the studio in the Montgomery Block. He said, "Say, do you ever take commissions?" I said, "I haven't had many, I haven't had any!" He said, "I've got a request from a client for whom I'm doing a big set of murals. They have a son who's interested in lions and they want to give him a birthday present. They want to give him a piece of sculpture and asked me if I would do a piece of sculpture of a lion for the boy."

I said, "Oh, that sounds interesting." He said, "Would you be interested in doing that?" Before I could answer, he said, "They've got fifteen dollars for it." [laughter] I liked Bob, he was a nice fellow and also it was sort of a challenge just to do the job. So I accepted the job, and I think the wood cost me fifteen dollars, but I eventually did it, and I used a different pose from the traditional pose. I used the lion crouching on his front legs but with his rump up in the air, sort of ready to pounce.

Later on, I started getting some commissions. The next piece I sold was for \$35, to a young architect friend of mine. That was a relief sculpture. And then a young couple who were in the newspaper business, writing and editing, saw a little porcelain piece I had done in an edition of ten, and they fell in love with it and they wanted to buy it. But they had practically no money and asked me if they could pay for it on the installment plan of five dollars a month--it was \$45. So that was another one.

After that I began to sell. But I never charged very high prices. Because I lived modestly, I could get along on little. It wasn't until before World War II and I got to be better known--I had moved from Montgomery Street up to Russian Hill and that was a jump in living expenses--that I began to charge more. By that time I had the position at the university too, and that made me feel I was worth more.

Riess: The reason I asked about what you charged is because if you had a dealer taking your work from the San Francisco Art Association annual, the dealer, then, of course, was also getting some money out of that.

Schnier: Oh, yes. At that time they were getting about a third, 33 1/3 percent. As a young artist I resented that and I was never very happy that they would take that much, but I'd try to price my work to include the dealer's commission.

As I look back on it, the dealers were worth every bit of it. That was their business, to know the clients, call them up, and interest them in an artist's work. I remember the dealer who sold this wood carving in teakwood which was called "The Stream." He had a woman working for him, an assistant, who made a point of just calling up clients every morning, and they'd come in because this woman had a good reputation. She was well thought of amongst the art colony, the artists and the art collectors. To me that was a sign that they were artists themselves, that they knew how to be salespeople. There's an art to it.

Riess: But that's the pushiest thing I've ever heard.

Schnier: I am surprised to hear you say that. This is common today, if the dealer knows somebody is interested in a person's work, or interested in sculpture. I don't think I would go to a dealer who just sat at his desk in his office and waited for people to come in. There are people now who get degrees in marketing from the university. My son, Claude, is interested in marketing and administration in the health care field. I don't know exactly what that consists of, maybe making it attractive for people to sign up with certain health plans and the like, or certain hospitals.

But, I'm surprised at your comment! I don't think that's pushy at all. It's to be admired. It certainly takes a burden off the artist's shoulders. I think of the dealers in New York, not the auction houses but the dealers who have a certain work, and they're calling up the museums, the curators and the directors to tell them, "We've got this and you ought to come in and see it." I know that almost any museum of any consequence has an endowment fund, a purchase fund, and they're buying things for the museum and the dealers know that. That's part of their livelihood, tracking down things the museums or collectors are interested in and selling to them.

Schnier: In the beginning, I couldn't even talk about price, I thought art was sacred. But now I don't think it's sacred, it's important--

Riess: As it is, you don't have to talk about price because you have the dealer talking about it for you.

Schnier: Yes, of course, but a lot of the things I sell right here. A lot of people come to me directly. They don't even know I have a dealer, some of them, especially since I left the Willis Gallery since Willis had to give up his modern sculptures and concentrate on primitive art. So many people come here that I've gotten used to it and I don't feel embarrassed. I mention the price of a piece, and if they are able to buy and they are interested that's fine, and if they can't it doesn't bother me at all that they can't buy it, if they can't afford it. I always try to protect the gallery, too, so that somebody who's seen my work in a gallery--where the gallery has gone to the trouble of displaying it, and has this very high overhead, and does the advertising, and provides the artist's work with some exposure--I've decided he has to be protected. [also see p. 229]

And now some of these pieces--well, a piece like that [acrylic] could be from \$6,000 to \$9,000. When I was young, in the early years, I never sold a piece over a thousand dollars. To get over the three digits was a great step, and that happened for the first time when I was doing the big sculptures for the World's Fair on Treasure Island for the architects. Each architect had an allotted sum of money for his building, and then so much for art which was already set aside in the contract between the fair corporation and the architect.

Riess: We'll get to that. When you say about six, or \$9,000, I'm curious. At what point do you decide whether it's going to be \$6,000 or \$9,000?

Schnier: A lot depends on the time it took to do the piece and secondly--now I'm going to apply the word "innovative." What is it that is new? What new theme have I explored that does not occur in any of my other works? So that plays a part. And, of course, the size, too. I have three pieces in carved acrylic that I figure are my major works in that particular medium, and they're priced at \$35,000.

Years ago, I'd never dream of that. But I'm going to hold those pieces because they represent, you might say, the depth of my creative ability at that particular time, and the motif that I worked out, and the liké. Like if Picasso had one particular painting that he felt was superior to any of his others and put a high price on it.

Riess: It's interesting that you say the "depth" of your creative activity, rather than the "height" of your creative activity.

Schnier: Yes, maybe the height would be--I was thinking of the depths inside of me, but the height would be a more appropriate way of describing that.

Riess: Either one.

"Mt. Whitney" and Other Early Work

Riess: Would you describe some of these early pieces? The 1927 piece that received the second prize in the Art Association Annual called "Mt. Whitney." That's the one you said was difficult to understand?

Schnier: No, that wasn't. I did that in this studio where Ruth Cravath had the model available. That was one of the first pieces I did in there. That was influenced by Maillol's work. I'd become acquainted with his sculpture at that time. My work was a figurative piece, you could make it out immediately. But for this area, for San Francisco, it was, you might say, different, it was distinctive.

That, by the way, I cast in concrete.

Riess: Okay, and then "The Stream."

Schnier: "The Stream" was the next one. That won the first prize. That was carved in a big block of teakwood. That's the one in which I was trying to do something differently. With "The Stream," instead of doing a frontal figure, sort of static, bisymmetrical, I took the figure and twisted it, I wanted to get a spiral movement in it. That was something new for me. It was not new for sculpture, if you studied some of Michelangelo and Donatello's work you'd find it.

Riess: Contraposto, right?

Schnier: Yes, what do they call it?

Riess: Contraposto.

Schnier: Have you run across that with reference to sculpture?

Riess: Yes.

Schnier: They use it in music, too?

Riess: That's contrapuntal, I think.

Schnier: It's a good word.

That intrigued me. This goes back to my interest in exploring new themes in sculpture, the challenge. And that's what you'll find in an inventor, and that's why an inventor is a creative person, just like an artist, and also the scientists who are trying to discover new mathematical formulae.

I'm going to digress for a moment to illustrate this point. When I was researching this idea of creativity in my own modest way--it never went very far--I ran across a paper by a famous French mathematician called Henri Poincaré, around 1903. Poincaré presented this paper at a conference of mathematicians, in a conference section devoted to creativity in mathematics. He discussed how he arrived at his mathematical solution of what's called the fusion theory. He said he'd been working for some time and he came up with two or three or four different solutions, and each one of those solutions was viable. There was no question in his mind. So then he was confronted with the problem of selecting the one that he would propose as being the solution for this particular higher mathematical problem.

He mentioned, in so many words, that he selected the one that was most aesthetically satisfying. That word "aesthetically" stuck in my mind because it is not usually associated with science, it is usually associated with gut feeling, a subjective feeling. And that made me realize how, even in higher science, this matter of subjective feeling and aesthetics, which is nothing but form--aesthetics deals with how--well, beautiful is a word to use there, but actually, as I say, sometimes a solution doesn't appear that you could use the word beautiful to describe it, so I think the word is form. Anyway, the form is so exquisite, that he selected that.

Riess: You think of aesthetic as subjective; you don't think that there's an objective aesthetic?

Schnier: Yes, and it's the form. Actually, it's the way that things are put together, the exquisite organizational quality. And if a person were interested in investigating literature from this point of view, it would be the way words are put together, the choice of the word, the rhythm, the onomatopoeia between words. You read that stuff and you become all absorbed in it because it's so beautiful. Again, I'm using the word "beautiful" here.

Riess: Interesting. We're getting off on my favorite topic again.

Schnier: This really is important when you're dealing with art.

Riess: So all of these pieces that you have given nature names to, like "Stream," "River," and "Mountain," they are all the human figure?

Schnier: They are, yes,

Riess: Oh. Why did you title them in that way? What was the inspiration?

Schnier: With Mt. Whitney--do you want to see a picture of it? I've got it in a catalogue. I could just say that she was sitting on a base and resting on one arm, and she looked very majestic. Then I thought of Mt. Whitney being majestic. I've never been up Mt. Whitney, but as a boy, during a summer while I was still in high school, I worked in a cigar factory in the office typing the bills and the letters, like a receptionist or a clerk or stenographer. I remember the two men who owned this cigar factory had just come back from a hike up Mt. Whitney. They were American occidentals although the staff in the cigar factory were mostly Cuban and Mexican. The owners were college men. They had taken many pictures and they talked a lot about Mt. Whitney. I never forgot that. Of course, later on I followed through and learned more about it and had friends who also climbed it.

With "The Stream," a female figure is standing and I cut it off at the lower legs so it looks as if she is in water. She is sort of wringing out her hair, and looks as if she were in a stream. That's why the title "The Stream" came to mind as I worked on the composition.

It isn't that I started with these things, with the idea of doing something about "The Stream," or "Mt. Whitney." Of course, in the back of my mind I probably wanted to do something very monumental and majestic, so the name I chose seemed to be appropriate.

Different Sculptural Mediums

Riess: You were certainly trying out all the sculpture media in those days, the different kinds of wood, and so on.

Schnier: I started out in wood. The reason I started with wood is because Ray Boynton suggested I do that instead of working in clay. In so doing I ended up with something in a permanent material, and

Schnier: also--I don't think he mentioned it--but it was a finished work of art which I might be able to sell. I wouldn't have to worry about having just the plaster cast of my piece as I would have, had I worked in clay, and then have to think about how I could ever put this in a permanent material.

The best material would have been bronze, but that was prohibitively expensive at that time. So I did some in cement, concrete, but I didn't like concrete as much as wood. There's something very attractive about working in wood and then sanding it and getting the added feature of the grain to support the design. So for years I worked in wood and then I started carving in marble.

Riess: How do you produce something in concrete?

Schnier: You have to make a mold, and that mold is made in plaster of Paris, and reinforced so it will stand the pressure of the concrete. Then you paint the inside of the mold to keep the plaster from absorbing the moisture from the wet concrete, paint a coat of something like shellac or varnish. Then coat the surface with a separating material so that the concrete won't stick to the mold. That separating material is sort of a--we used to use stearic acid which actually shouldn't be confused with an acid. It's like paraffin chips, fine paraffin, which is dissolved in kerosene to make a slurry, and then brushed on the inside of the mold. Then you take the different pieces of the mold and tie them together, and seal up all the joints so no water can leak out. Turn it upside down, support it and begin pouring the concrete into it. You have to tamp it well because concrete settles as it hardens; to compensate for shrinkage you have to build it up a little higher than the actual top of the mold.

Riess: Do you do it in many stages, or just one pouring?

Schnier: There are different theories about that. In some cases, the men who work doing cast concrete in a mold might do it in three steps, but do not allow it to thoroughly dry so that there's a bond between each layer. But competent cement workers, who do a lot of that type of work and have a feel for it cast in one stage, and their castings came out perfect. No shrinkage or cracks in it.

Riess: You weren't doing the casting?

Schnier: Oh, some of it I did myself because during my engineering days I supervised the construction of bridges cast in concrete. It wasn't anything new to me.

Riess: Could you do it in your studio?

Schnier: Oh, yes.

Riess: When you were working out the techniques, did you learn from the other folks in the Montgomery Block or where did you pick that up?

Schnier: Oh, I think I could have taught them a few things! As far as mold making and plaster casting goes, I had already assisted Cummings with this type of studio work.

Developing One's Own Expression

[Interview 3: July 18, 1985]##

Schnier: Regarding this matter of being self taught. There are people who I respected very highly. Amongst those whom I place at the top was Ray Boynton because he was so different from other professors. And he was the one who encouraged me to work in wood. He was on the faculty at the University of California at this time and also on the faculty of the California School of Fine Arts, which is now the San Francisco Art Institute. He told me that he'd be glad to help me, even if I wasn't one of his students, like he was helping some other young artists who had been former students at the California School of Fine Arts. So, about every month I would go up to the California School of Fine Arts, wait until he finished with his class, and ask him if he could come to my studio and look at my latest work. I had, you might say, a critique from him, comparable to what I used to have with the architecture instructors at the university. I had great respect for the things he had to say.

Riess: Would you say that you were resisting influences, though? It sounds like you had decided to go at this with a kind of single vision.

Schnier: No. I was an inexperienced novice trying to separate the chaff from the wheat. There were a lot of hacks in the realm of art education. I had great admiration for Hagedorn's art. Incidentally, he is mentioned in Ruth Cravath's book--he continued with the drawing sessions after I'd left that neighborhood. She mentioned the fact that he used to even bring up the wood for the stove--they had a wood stove in the studio. She also supports my opinion of Hagedorn: She said he was an expert draftsman, his drawings were exquisite. She didn't use that word, but I gathered that she had the same feeling towards him that others had.

Riess: But this idea of resisting influences is what I was getting at.

Schnier: No, I've answered this already--my opinion of Ray Boynton and Ed Hagedorn. If the influence was good and passed muster as far as my own judgment went, I accepted it. I liked Bob Howard's work, and I liked some of the European artists whose work was already recognized, like Maillol, and the French sculptor Charles Despiau who did portraits. He also did figures. Bourdelle's work appealed to me.

Riess: Yes, I think we mentioned them last week.

Schnier: Yes, okay. And I spoke to you also about going out to the library in the evening; I spent many of my evenings out there. I would start with one series of art books, let's say Die Kunst. That was a popular and established German art magazine.

I went back to the first volume they had on the shelf, maybe 1900, 1906, or '10, and each evening when I'd go out there, I'd get maybe five volumes, and slowly go through those pages and try to absorb new ideas. That way I avoided getting in a rut because I was trying to broaden my vision. Then I'd go through Dumas--that's an Italian art magazine. Then I would go through the British magazine called The Studio. And then there were French and American art magazines that I would go through. So that maybe answers your question.

Riess: Speaking of other artists, when you mentioned "The Lion" I was reminded of Arthur Putnam. Did you know the work of Arthur Putnam?

Schnier: Oh, yes. But his style was close to Rodin's style. Rodin's was impressionistic; I mean he was interested in the play of light on surfaces.

I was interested in big, simple masses because maybe unconsciously I was going to start from the very beginning and work like a primitive, or like a child, so when carving in wood the forms were very simple and rudimentary. They were rounded, and very full, and lush. If they were a female figure, they would be very sensuous. But Putnam's work had a play of light like Rodin.

Riess: Each time you've said that, you used the thumb like the sculptor does.

Schnier: Yes, [laughs] we were almost taught that. The instructors would sometimes go like that or we'd see it in the movies. And also, that's the way we did it.

Riess: Yes, it's very tactile.

Schnier: That's right. If you look at Rodin's pieces, they're that way. And incidentally, talking about Rodin, I remember my first exposure to that name. This was before I'd ever thought of being a sculptor. I was working on an engineering job up in the extreme northeastern part of California around a place called Alturas, where the Bureau of Public Roads was putting through a highway.

We were billeted in a small hotel in a little town called Adin. Very quiet, I don't know if there were more than three hundred people in the village. It was a problem to decide how to spend one's spare time in the evenings and on weekends. It was too far to go home, and I wasn't an enthusiastic hunter. I did a little hunting, that was my first exposure to it. I also didn't do any fishing. So I used to read. I would write down to Paul Elder's Bookstore and order the books that I'd see advertised in their pamphlets or in the newspaper. I remember there was a publishing house that published books with the title Modern Library Series. They were little books small enough to put in your pocket, and beautifully bound in soft leather, and easy to carry around.

I saw the title Rodin, the Sculptor. It was about art. I guess in the back of my mind I felt I ought to be educated about art, so I ordered that book and vividly remember examining the pictures very carefully and studying his different statues that are now famous. This was in 1923 or '24. I remember distinctly a photograph of the "Hand of God." Do you remember that one? I don't know if you've ever looked at those photographs. Later on, I tried to do one of those hands when I was using Cummings' studio. But that was my first exposure to Rodin, and it stuck in the back of my mind, and maybe that's why I also became interested in sculpture later on.

Riess: Very interesting. Speaking of other sculptors, Bufano was teaching sculpture at the California School of Fine Arts.

Schnier: He had just left. They'd had trouble with Bufano, or probably Stackpole came back, and took over his former job. Bufano was very hard to get along with. Puccinelli mentions the fact that Bufano had tried to ruin the big panther he did for Salinas High School. He was jealous of Puccinelli doing this commission. He wanted Puccinelli to be under his thumb, to become his assistant--but that's beside the point.

- Riess: I don't want to get too sidetracked, but maybe you can tell me where your figurative work would fall between Rodin and Putnam--you say they're impressionistic--and Stackpole and Bufano, whose works I think of as big solid masses. You said that you were interested in the mass, so what is it that you were doing that's different?
- Schnier: It's a matter of one's own particular way of composing. There are so many ways even if you're using simple mass. It is the difference in the form or style. It's like writing. You can have a bunch of similar adjectives, but it's the way you put the words and sentences together that differentiates your writing from that of whoever you admire, Faulkner, or Hemingway, or T.S. Eliot, or so on and so on and so on.
- Riess: I think of their simple masses as very weighted, or very gravity-laden.
- Schnier: Mine was at the beginning, too. Oh, that "Mt. Whitney" just looked as if it was there for eternity! But [chuckles] it wasn't anything like Bufano, no. I wouldn't say I developed an aversion, but Bufano was suspect to me at a very early point, partly because of what I heard from his students and partly from his work. However, I saw some of his porcelains, the glazed porcelains that he did either in China or after he came back, and they were really superior. They, from my point of view, were some of the best of his works especially the one of his mother. Just in that particular period.
- Riess: During that period did you do glazed porcelain?
- Schnier: I did it just about then. I was influenced by the talk about ceramics and maybe the fact that he had done some porcelains. I saw a show of his at Liebes's. Liebes was one of his collectors; he had a big show of his work shortly after he came back from China.
- Riess: And when was that?
- Schnier: That must have been '24, or '25?
- Riess: Who was doing your firing then?
- Schnier: That was a kiln in Berkeley that also had done some of the Bufano pieces. It was called the Wahl, or Wahlrich, Pottery.

Modern Gallery, Beaux Arts Gallery

Riess: You started entering the annual juried shows early, like Seattle. You went in as an exhibitor but you came out as the prize winner.

Schnier: Yes. Evidently my work was quite outstanding. It wasn't because I had political connections; for example, up in Seattle I was unknown. In San Francisco I'll admit that I was known because the art circle was rather confined and most of the jurors were people who I'd either met or who knew my work.

Riess: Even in the twenties?

Schnier: Yes, but the work stood on its own merit.

Riess: Were there any societies of sculptors like there were societies of artists? Was there an organized group of sculptors?

Schnier: No, not an organized group of sculptors, but there was an organized group of artists called the San Francisco Art Association. Later on, after I'd been asked many times by some of the older artists who were members, to join, I finally acquiesced. I say acquiesced because I wasn't interested in being a member. I wasn't a joiner.

Riess: In 1927 there was a review of a show of yours at the East West Gallery. Was that Rudolf Schaeffer's?

Schnier: No, the East West Gallery was a gallery that the wife of Blanding Sloan started, in what is now the Marines' Memorial Building at the southwest corner of Mason and Sutter. On the second floor there was a big area where she started the gallery, and I had a show in there.

Riess: In 1927 you had enough material for a one-man show?

Schnier: Yes. Oh, wait a minute. Did I have a one-man show?

Riess: Maybe you were just part of a show.

Schnier: Yes. Now, I remember that at that group show an artist bought one of my wood carvings. His name was Lucien Labaudt.

Riess: Oh, yes.

- Schnier: Also they sold one of the little ceramics that I was telling you about that the newspaper couple bought. The nice thing about that is they paid the artist immediately. They sold some of the things on installments, but then they took the installment papers and sold them to somebody who bought notes like that, at a discount.
- Riess: Let's talk about the galleries. There was the Modern Gallery.
- Schnier: Yes, and Ruth Cravath talks about that at great length. Incidentally, she doesn't mention the fact that I was one of the charter members. [laughs]
- Riess: How was it a membership?
- Schnier: A group of the artists in the Montgomery Block, young artists who had no gallery affiliations, no place to show--except when they'd be invited to group shows--decided to get together and rent an empty street level store in the next block, and then have shows there. Being a member, we'd have the privilege of having one show a year, and we paid dues to pay the rent. And if we had a show, we'd have to take care of keeping it open ourselves; we didn't hire anybody. That was good exposure. I got some very good exposure although I didn't sell much. None of us sold very much at those shows, but it was a wonderful opportunity. I was with that gallery for I don't know how many years and later on I was invited by a real gallery, a regular gallery that had a group of patrons supporting it. It was called the Beaux Arts Gallery. Have you ever heard of that?
- Riess: Yes.
- Schnier: It was on Maiden Lane, and was run by Beatrice Judd Ryan. Evidently some artist had suggested that I become a member of the gallery. They didn't accept everybody, they were very choosy.
- Riess: Seems to me she made or destroyed a lot of reputations. Wasn't she very powerful?
- Schnier: Yes, but I don't think Beatrice was the type who would attempt to destroy anybody. She was a businesswoman. It was the main art gallery in San Francisco at that time, on Maiden Lane, on the second floor. It was different from most galleries inasmuch as it was supported by a group of art patrons who paid a certain amount each year as dues. In return, the director had a lot of parties there which was fine for keeping up the interest of the members who liked to associate with artists. Also, at the end of the year, Mrs. Ryan asked each artist to donate a work of art, some small thing, that would then be either bought or raffled off. That, coupled with the dues, was how this gallery existed for quite a number of years.

- Riess: And the proceeds went to support the gallery.
- Schnier: To her. She had to have a salary and pay the rent. And she would take care of the announcements.
- Riess: So aside from commissions, which she also got--.
- Schnier: Yes. But she didn't make a fortune out of it. She kept it alive and it was a contribution to the culture of the city.
- Riess: What kind of clientele did she have?
- Schnier: She had a lot of the well-known collectors in the city.
- Riess: Who were often the Jewish families?
- Schnier: A lot of Jewish families were collectors. She had a wide clientele but I think families like the Crockers and the Spreckelses were accustomed to buying in Europe. I remember in the museums there were Van Goghs already at that time, from the Crocker collection. There'd be Mrs. Haas, and the Walters. Micky Bender was a member. The Gerstles were. But I wouldn't say just Jewish people; it was a mixture of anybody interested in art and who liked to associate with the artists because of the parties.
- Riess: Then she moved her gallery into the City of Paris.
- Schnier: But before she did that she moved over to Post Street just west of Gump's, on the second floor, to more elaborate quarters. It wasn't until later that she went to the City of Paris. The Depression came along about this time and maybe that's why she had to give up Maiden Lane. And then she got some support, a subsidy, which enabled her to open this more spacious gallery on Post Street. But she was the main gallery in San Francisco at that time, the main legitimate gallery.
- Riess: Yes. Did Gump's gallery show modern work?
- Schnier: Not very much, a little bit. With the Gump's gallery, their main business was in picture frames. They did a lot of framing of prints. They had a lot of lithographs, etchings and prints for sale, and contemporary art was a sort of side issue because most of their money was invested in their inventory--oriental art or decorative arts downstairs.

They asked me to exhibit there, and for a number of years I did. But it wasn't like what I would call a legitimate art gallery, just devoted to art alone. They did well, incidentally, with my work. I had no complaints.

- Riess: They certainly had a clientele that they could call up, too.
- Schnier: Oh, yes.
- Riess: And what about Vickery, Atkins, and Torrey, did they have modern work?
- Schnier: That was another one that would show some contemporary art, but again, that was an antique shop on Sutter Street, and they had a lot of beautiful old furniture, porcelains, etc. Sometimes they would have a special showing of, let's say, historical antiques. I remember the fellow who ran the art gallery called me up once and said that they had just put up a show of ancient Luristan bronzes.
- Riess: Luristan?
- Schnier: Early Persian. Not prehistoric, but very, very early Persian bronzes. Horse halters, bits, shaft ornaments and things like that, or parts of a saddle. I don't know why he called me up because I wasn't buying things like that; these were museum pieces. But I just mention it to show you that Vickery, Atkins, and Torrey did play a role. Etchers sometimes would have shows there, or artists would have shows of small paintings. They didn't have a big gallery. But you hit the nail on the head when you mentioned them. They are to be included in the overall picture of the galleries.
- Riess: How early did Marcelle Labaudt have a gallery?
- Schnier: That didn't happen until late in the thirties, just sort of the tail end of the Depression, when Lucien and she decided to buy their own building out on Gough Street. So you're talking about a little later period. We're still in just let's say the thirties, or up until '35.

The Photographers, Lange and Cunningham

- Schnier: I had gone in with a young architect, Don Works, and we had leased the second floor of the building on the northeast corner of Jackson and Montgomery Streets at 802 Montgomery Street. It had been a whorehouse with about thirty little cubicles that had been cleaned out. It looked ideal for subdividing into studios. He and I leased it jointly, and we put in six studios, three on either side of the middle axis, which was the hallway. We invested our own money in it, and then rented the studios.

Riess: You had enough capital to do that?

Schnier: Yes. Not very much, just barely enough to pay the rent and a little to pay for the investment. I did it primarily to have a new studio of my own because I moved out of the Montgomery Block.

Riess: What were your impressions of Dorothea Lange?

Schnier: I first met Dorothea Lange through Maynard Dixon while they were still married. I was invited to their home for dinner to see some movies of a trip around the world that Robert Howard had taken. I didn't know much about her, I didn't know that she was a famous photographer. I knew more about Dixon, because he was already well-known. He had a lot of charisma and was quite a character. Later on I think I met her at artists' parties, and again, my knowledge of her was limited.

When my partner and I had remodeled the building at 802 Montgomery Street, Dorothea rented one of the studios I managed. It had formerly been used by another photographer, Roger Sturtevant, but he moved out to bigger quarters. There was a darkroom there, and that was good for her. The rent was very modest, thirty dollars a month. That included the utilities because we had not had extra meters put in. She paid me the first month, and then the second month, the third month, but then the time between payments began to extend until it had overrun another month. I got no results from sending her notices; it dragged out more and more. Eventually she paid up all the rent and then the studio was rented to somebody else, but I found that she was very difficult in that respect, that she didn't accept her responsibility. I wondered whether she felt I should be honored to have her as my tenant, and that she could use the studio rent-free!

Riess: I wonder what year that would have been.

Schnier: I left on my trip around the world in the fall of 1932. I would say '31 to '33, a couple of years, maybe two or three years.

Riess: So she was still married to Dixon then.

Schnier: Yes. She wasn't divorced yet. I was surprised when I learned they were divorced. I didn't know too much about her personality. I learned more about her after she married Taylor, and I used to meet her at parties. She was very self-centered and very ambitious--which

*From Interview 6, tape 12.

Schnier: is something I shouldn't hold against her--but I felt she was inconsiderate of people in certain situations. She was a remarkable photographer, we're not talking about that, we're talking about this other aspect, her social makeup. Okay, that finishes that chapter on Dorothea Lange!

Riess: Yes. You knew Imogen Cunningham?

Schnier: The first time I met Imogen Cunningham was through her husband Roi Partridge, who was an early admirer of my work. He arranged the purchase of my first piece of sculpture to go in a public museum, the Mills College Art Gallery. He brought the art club from Mills College to my studio, and invited me to go with them to a Chinese dinner before an opening of one of my shows, all of which would indicate his admiration.

Mills had some visiting people go through there now and then. One of them was a gentleman named Warburg--I think he came from the well-established Warburg family that was noted for its philanthropy. The Partridges had a dinner for him, and Roi asked Imogen to invite me. That was the first time I met her. I enjoyed myself very much and thought well of both of them. Roi was sort of egocentric, but who the hell isn't amongst the artists? He was a good etcher, and a pretty good photographer, too. I don't think I met Imogen again until after they were divorced, and after their sons had studied architecture at the university. I might have had one or two of them in my sculpture class.

So it was long after World War II that I met her again. I think highly of her as a master photographer. She was a character, an individualist I will long remember with admiration.

Art Colonies

Riess: I hear about a lot of divorces among these artists. Do you have any observations on artists in relationships?

Schnier: Offhand, I would say I've never been conscious of them. I've never given any thought to there being more divorces among artists than there are among other professions.

Riess: You were showing me the picture of Jan Zach up there, and you said something to the effect that artists are more banded together in friendly peer relationships when they're young. What's that all about?

Schnier: Yes, maybe before they're married, when they're in an art colony. For example, I just bought a book on Herbert Ferber's work. Have you ever heard of Herbert Ferber, a well-established American sculptor?

Riess: No.

Schnier: He speaks about the early period when he belonged to the art club down on the East Side [New York City] where Pollock and Motherwell and DeKooning used to meet weekly, and how they exchanged ideas and how friendly they were. Later on in the book he mentions how that has changed. He says now the artists have drifted apart, each one is involved in his own life, and he attributes this to the fact that they had become well-known, and the matter of making a living, of producing and so on, has taken precedence over the need for these early friendships. He no longer sees any of his old artist friends, or quite infrequently. His life has changed.

Riess: Do you agree with that?

Schnier: Yes. It's the same with me. At one time I thought that I could never move out of that little colony in San Francisco down there in the Montgomery Block area. It fulfilled such a need in my life and, I think, in the other artists' lives, because it was a clique-- not a clique, a banding together.

Riess: Is it like "us against the world"? It's the assumption that the world will never understand the artist?

Schnier: Well, yes, of course there was that because you were talking to people who understood your language and your motivation, and sometimes your art although there was a difference of approach amongst these artists even at that stage. It was like a group with similar values. As I grew older I began to feel less and less the need for this; I became more independent, so I started moving away from that hub.

I first moved to Broadway, to a studio right across the street from where New Joe's Restaurant used to be, Broadway and Columbus Avenue. Then I moved up to Russian Hill, which was quite a major move from the hub, and eventually I left that area entirely and moved over here to Lafayette. Now I have very little contact with my old artist friends.

Riess: And by moving into the university hub, that was going far away?

Schnier: Yes. Because that differentiated me from the artists who were not in an academic situation.

Riess: And it differentiated you from the artists who were teaching at the Art Institute, which was different.

Schnier: Yes, they were different, too. Although some of the faculty members were moonlighting, were teaching there at the same time they were teaching at Cal. But I'll say primarily it differentiated me from those artists who were still struggling and trying to make a living without teaching.

Riess: Did you know Sargent Johnson?

Schnier: Oh, yes. Fairly well.

Riess: He was really the only black sculptor?

Schnier: He was the only black visual artist who I knew of at that time. Very few of them went into the visual arts. I had a chance to observe that at the university because in the entire time that I was on the faculty, for thirty years, I had no more than two black students in my classes. See, I think there was instilled in those young black people who went to college that they must get out and be a success and make a living. Of course, nowadays you find more black artists. I know now two black sculptors who are very well-established.

Riess: But you're saying it hasn't really changed so much?

Schnier: No. Of course maybe percentagewise, comparing the ratio of blacks to whites, there is a drift towards more equal representation amongst the two.

Riess: In The Federal Writer's Guide to Artists you are listed among the "young moderns." [interruption in tape]

So now that I've read off that list of the Federal Writer's Project PWA artists who were considered to be "young moderns," it sounds like the two Russians were particularly interesting, Sergey Schuerbakoff, and Victor Arnautoff.

Schnier: Yes, but there was another one. Zygmund Sazavich who should have been included in that group. They were pretty well-trained, either had initial training in Russia before they came here, or had a very sound training at the Art Institute.

Riess: And so that's what you're responding to, that they were really, as you say, competent artists.

Schnier: I would think of them as being professionals. People don't ordinarily use the word "professional" with reference to an artist, but among my colleagues, sometimes they differentiate the competent persons, who they think of as being real artists, from those who are trying to be artists but probably really don't have the makings, or they're just mediocre. But these Russians I would say had the qualifications to be called "professionals."

Riess: So the key word in this case has become competent instead of innovative.

Schnier: I would say that, I would give them the benefit of the doubt, and I'll use innovative. They were good artists. I thought highly of their work.

It seems to me a lot of other names are missing.

Riess: There are a lot of other names, but--.

Schnier: Is Ruth Cravath's name there?

Riess: No, but these are people who were grouped as something called the "young moderns."

Schnier: She was younger than I was, she was a "young modernist." And Adeline Kent, I'm surprised they don't--.

Riess: They're there, but they're not considered to be "young moderns."

Schnier: Oh, that's interesting. What category is Adeline Kent in?

Riess: They're just all back in the category of all the other artists who were around.

Schnier: Oh, I see. And Bob Howard, and Langley Howard? Stackpole?

Riess: Oh, yes, they're all there, but you're one of the "young moderns."
[end insert]

Benner and Swift Commissions

Riess: When did you start doing your bas-relief work? Were you doing that at the same time?

Schnier: Oh, at the very beginning. And the reason for that was my architectural background. During the architectural design projects we'd frequently come up with some problem of enriching a wall or the like, and of course, studying ancient architecture, which we had to, architectural decoration frequently featured bas-relief sculpture. So in the very beginning I started to do that. I'd say for years I carried that on. I even did some portraits of children in bas-relief, carved in wood or cast in bronze. Then I got a reputation for doing bas-reliefs, and so I got some large architectural commissions.

Riess: Are you thinking forward to things like the World's Fair now, when you say that?

Schnier: Yes. But before that, I did a relief for the Benner family, who lived on Tamalpais Road in Berkeley. The house is still there. I think one of the married children has moved into the home.* But long before that, in the beginning of my career, I did one for a woman artist named Florence Allston Swift. Her husband was Henry Swift, who was at one time president of the San Francisco Art Association.

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Schnier: They had just built an addition to their home on Tunnel Road and she wanted a sculpture over the mantel in her studio. Some of her friends suggested that she get me to do this work, to do a relief, so she came to San Francisco to see me, and that was one of the larger commissions I had, the first large commission. It is in black walnut, a big relief which is set into the wall over the fireplace, and is still there. It is about three and a half feet by about two and a half feet, of a reclining figure. In that, talking about trying to be innovative, I tried to get perspective in the relief. That's not anything really new, you'll find some of the Renaissance artists did it.

Riess: The Ghiberti doors.

*See p. 233.

Schnier: Yes, but this was all sort of a flat type of relief, in comparison with Ghiberti's because he used almost half-round figures. Anyhow, space and perspective were already done, but this was sort of my own. Also, the composition was something that I was engrossed in, filling the space. And that came from my experience with Boynton: he was interested in composing the space, being a painter.

Riess: Do you have a record of where everything you made is now?

Schnier: No. My wife, Dorothy, has promised that she's going to help me make it. I don't have the energy and the interest to sit down and do it. I know some artists are very well-organized in that respect, but I try to save my energy for new creative projects. I wish I had more organizational aptitude. Somewhere along the line, in the Depression years, I just closed up my studio. That was in the early fall of 1932. Are we up to '32 yet?

Riess: I think that I would like to hear about your meeting with Albert Bender, and something more about your patronage. You've implied that you were now well-known on both sides of the bay, and something must have made that happen.

Schnier: It wasn't through Albert Bender I got this commission for the Florence Allston Swift's wood carving relief. No, it was through the artists' grapevine. The art association was small, and I was a new artist on the scene; there weren't many sculptors.

Riess: In fact, would you say something about Edgar Walter? Was he a serious sculptor?

Schnier: He was a good sculptor, but he didn't have to strive, he didn't have the need. What I'm trying to say is he was affluent. I've seen some of his early work, he was competent. But he sort of leveled out. He had other interests; for example, he became active with the art association, and became a key figure.

Riess: But you're saying if he had been hungrier he would have been a better sculptor?

Schnier: I think so. I remember a nice little bronze of his that we had in an exhibition once. There's no question he was good.

Later on, I'm sort of jumping up to the World's Fair, he was asked by one of the well-known architects, who was hired for the World's Fair, to do the sculpture for his building. Edgar Walter was sick at that time. He asked me to come up to his apartment to talk over the matter of his Fair work. He asked me if I would do it,

Schnier: not under his name, but he'd like to turn over the whole commission to me, which he did, and I did the work for the architect. He was that kind of a person; he helped the artists, he was encouraging, and he was civic-minded. He was also a very good speaker, so he was in demand to speak at art functions.

Bender and Other Collectors

Schnier: I first met Albert Bender at a meeting of some sort of art committee. I don't remember if it was a meeting the San Francisco Women Artists called to discuss a decorative arts exhibition, or if it was some other meeting. But he already knew about me and after greeting me in a very friendly manner, he asked if he could buy a piece of my work. I don't know if he told me what he wanted it for, he just wanted a piece. I had a work, a relief, a wood carving of a religious subject, it was of Moses and Aaron. I told him, "I've got a sculpture for you." Later I showed it to him, and he bought it and gave it to Temple Emanu-El. That was my first contact with him.

The second contact was when he called me up and said that he had a friend who was very much interested in art, who would like to come over to my studio and see my work. So he brought him over to my studio in the old third floor loft on Hotaling Place. We hit it off immediately, because this man was sort of an artist himself. Although a businessman, he was an investment broker, just like Henry Swift, on Montgomery Street. His main interest was writing fiction, and he had already published one or more books. So we hit it off. Also we were both Stanford graduates, and that helped a budding friendship with Jesse Lilienthal, who later became my father-in-law.

But in the meantime, I got to know Bender better, and sometimes if I had something I thought he would be interested in, I'd just go to see him to talk it over; maybe about a new work to buy, or about helping another artist, or something of that sort, all because he was so easy to approach.

Riess: He had an office in the area?

Schnier: His office was on California Street. He had his own insurance brokerage business which was called Albert M. Bender and Company. He was very successful. He was a bachelor, his needs were modest. He lived in a studio building on Post Street, which may still be

Schnier: there, I'm not sure. It was sort of semi-apartment, semi-studio. It adjoined an apartment with a studio which was occupied by his cousin. That was Anne Bremer. She was a painter. When I knew him, she'd already passed away because I don't remember ever meeting her. It got so I felt very comfortable with him. I never hesitated to call on him.

Riess: Among the other patrons and collectors in the city was Grover Magnin?

Schnier: He never bought anything from me, but he commissioned me to do some things for his I. Magnin stores. I think the reason he commissioned me was that my future father-in-law was a director of I. Magnin. I think he encouraged Grover to give me the commissions.

Riess: You mean decorative work on the building?

Schnier: I tried not to do decorative work. I tried to make it a deeper work [chuckles slightly] of art than something decorative, but they were bas-reliefs.

Riess: Yes. I'm sorry.

Schnier: They were enrichment. That's right. But I don't think my work ran to his taste. He was more of a collector, with an eye for work by famous names and little investment risk factor. For example, he would buy a small Renoir because he knew that it was like buying AT&T or IBM stock. By the way, he was a competent painter himself. After he retired, he and his wife Jeanne spent much of their time painting. Who else?

Riess: The Joseph Branstens?

Schnier: No. Mrs. Manfred Bransten--she was his mother--commissioned me to do a wood carving, somewhat like one she had seen at her friend, Mrs. M.C. Sloss's home. Mrs. Bransten had been attracted by it so she said, "I'd like to own a piece of your work and could you do something like that?" Her son, Joseph, before he passed away, gave it to the Oakland Museum, and it's in their permanent collection now.

Riess: I see you have a look of amusement when you think of these women deciding that they want to purchase one like their friend has.

Schnier: Oh, I can understand how a person commissioning an artist without any specifics would feel there might be no recourse but to accept the finished work. Because an artist could come up with something

- Schnier: that was out of their world and they had no interest in. So they give the artist some idea of what they like. That's all right. I made changes for her work. I made improvements. As a matter of fact, I even made it larger.
- Riess: And the Crockers?
- Schnier: No, I never met the Crockers or the Spreckelses. Or Crocker's sister.
- Riess: Mrs. Henry Potter Russell?
- Schnier: Yes. No, I never met her.
- Riess: The Walter Haases?
- Schnier: I met Mrs. Haas. She never bought anything of--oh yes, she did, she bought a piece from a much later period from an exhibition at the Judah Magnes Museum. After keeping it for a while, she donated it to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art where it was accepted by the acquisition committee, and I guess it's a permanent piece now.
- Riess: Mrs. Alexander Albert? Agnes Albert?
- Schnier: No, I don't know who she is.
- Riess: How about the Macks? Mrs. Charlotte Mack?
- Schnier: No. I did a couple of portraits of Charles Ehrman's daughter, Jacqueline.
- Riess: How about Mr. Mason Wells?
- Schnier: No. I knew Mason Wells, but I never did anything for him. I never realized how important a figure he was in the art community until I read his obituary and references to him. He impressed me as being a sincere, friendly person.
- Riess: How about Helen Salz?
- Schnier: No. I was friendly with her because I had sublet her studio in the Montgomery Block, and knew about her pastel painting and the like. She was a collector, but she never collected anything of mine.
- Then Jesse Lilienthal commissioned me to do some work.
- Riess: How about the Steins? Or were they much earlier?

Schnier: No. I did something for Mrs. Steinhart. I don't know if she was related to the man who founded the Steinhart Aquarium, whether he was her husband or not, but I did a portrait of her son.

All of these commissions evolved by word of mouth, by the grapevine. These people interested in art, when they got together would talk about what was happening in the art world, and they might mention my name along with other artists' names. That's how I'd get these commissions. I had not met many of these people before they contacted me.

Riess: Among these people, I would think that it would be the more enlightened and forward-thinking of them who would purchase some of your pieces. Is that correct? I mean, weren't you more modern than others?

Schnier: Yes. It must be that these people were interested in new things. They were not interested in the prosaic and the traditional things. They were definitely more adventurous.

Riess: And yet it sounds like, for instance, Mrs. Sloss, and Mrs. Bransten, were not that adventurous. They only want it because the other has it.

Schnier: No, I don't think so. Mrs. Manfred Bransten had one of the finest Pissarro paintings I've ever seen, museum quality without question. So she evidently was not unexposed to modern art. She was more than just a camp follower or a fadist.

When I got to know Albert Bender better and he felt comfortable with me, he would actually call me up and ask me if I would have dinner with him. In a way, he was sort of a lonesome soul. We'd go to his favorite place to have dinner which was Blum's on the corner of California and Polk Streets. He was well-known there, the waiters and waitresses knew him and knew his likes and dislikes as far as food went.

Riess: And he liked to talk about art?

Schnier: Yes, not only about painters and sculptors, but about writers, musicians, poets, and actors. And by the way, I did his portrait. He came up to my studio on his way home; after work he'd grab a taxi and come up to Taylor Street, and I would work for a while, and then we'd go out to dinner together. Or he might stop by in the afternoon and I would work on his portrait, which I finished before he passed away in March, 1941. While I was doing the portrait I got to know him even better.

Riess: When you were doing portrait heads, how did you make them innovative?

Schnier: I had my own idea. I wanted to do something that would catch the spirit of the person, but I did not experiment too much because I was not too sure of myself, and this was a very important thing, a livelihood from the portraits. Some of them I did because I wanted to, others were outright commissions.

As I look back at these portraits, the thing that strikes me as being different from other artists' work was my handling of details. I tried to enrich the forms like working out the design of the hair. That stems from my exposure to Chinese art, the beautiful enrichment and decorative features you find added to the main masses. It is like, maybe, the extra dividend you get in literature by the artist's choice of words. He might be making a strong statement, but he gives you the extra enrichment by the choice of adjectives or his construction of sentences. That would be the characteristic feature of my portrait sculpture.

Riess: I think of a head that you did of Mrs. Walter that I've seen reproduced.

Schnier: That would be a good example. She is Ethel Walter, the wife of Herbert Walter. I loved doing her head. Her patrician features were set off by beautifully groomed hair. I felt indebted to her because when I came back from the war I had lost my studio up on Russian Hill, and she and her husband asked me to come live with them. They had an enormous house on the very top of Russian Hill and their two daughters were married and living elsewhere. That was a very generous gesture because I had a nice room at the top of the house with a beautiful view of the bay. It was a godsend until I bought my own house just below them on Russian Hill, next to where I'd had my studio before the war. So they were important to me. She commissioned me to do portraits of her two grandchildren. The portraits I did of her and her husband were my way of repaying my debt to them.

Courvoisier and Braxton Galleries

Riess: Two galleries that we didn't mention that I want to just sneak in here are the Courvoisier Gallery--.

Schnier: Yes. That was one of the first really legitimate commercial galleries that handled my work in San Francisco. It was different with Beatrice Judd Ryan, she had continuing patronage support. With

Schnier: Courvoisier, it was first a picture framing gallery and then, like a lot of these establishments, their work involved so much art that they started their own art gallery in conjunction with their other business. He was up on Post and Mason Streets and had been after me for years to show my work. Finally I acquiesced.

At that time I was hard to get, you might say. I don't know whether I played it that way, or whether I was uninterested in the world of commerce. Actually I really needed a dealer to handle my work in order to help me make a living.

Riess: You were supporting yourself by your art, though?

Schnier: Yes, because I was getting a few commissions and selling some work directly from my studio. It wasn't very much but it helped. He's the one at whose gallery I had the most success.

Riess: And who was the owner?

Schnier: His name was Courvoisier. He married later on, moved down to Monterey and went into the business of producing plastic trays with coins or designs set in them. He has passed away, but before that a company bought him out and they still manufacture these trays. They are well-thought-of items in that particular field. We have bought some for ourselves and as gifts because they are so attractive.

Riess: And then in Los Angeles you had a gallery, the Braxton?

Schnier: Oh, yes, that was one of my first one-man shows, now that I recollect it. That show was the result of the enthusiasm of a painter friend of mine, Arthur Ames, who lived in Los Angeles, but who had studied in San Francisco. He thought so well of my work, he was drumming it up in Los Angeles on his own accord. He spoke to the art dealer, Braxton, and I received an invitation to show there.

Riess: Does that mean that you got a following, then, in Los Angeles?

Schnier: Not exactly. He had a moving picture clientele. But the most interesting part of that show was that right after it I had a show scheduled at the Seattle Art Institute. This was the forerunner of the Seattle Art Museum.

III TO SEE THE WORLD

The Outer Trip, 1932, 1933##

Motivation

Schnier: How do you remember whether you've done both sides of these tapes?

Riess: If I can't remember that, I've got to turn in my badge! [laughs]

Schnier: So, three weeks after the Braxton show, all the work had to be repacked and sent up to the Seattle Art Institute. Normally an art dealer likes to retain an artist's work after he has had a one-man show because often there's a lag between the show and a decision to actually purchase something. Three months is not unusual for a gallery to hold the work after the closing date. But he had to send everything up north, except what he had sold. About a month after that he went bankrupt. In the meantime he'd paid me everything he owed me and my work was safe. But the other artists, who had their work on consignment, had it stored in a warehouse for a year or more pending the bankruptcy settlement. So I was lucky.

Riess: Yes. Were you lucky in the Depression, too? Did you have any money in the stock market?

Schnier: I didn't know what the stock market was; I didn't know the difference between a stock and a bond. The financial district was four blocks down from where I lived, but I didn't even know that there was a Depression! I did know that the commissions were sort of tapering off at that time, and that is why I had decided to close up my studio, buy a knapsack and a blanket, and take a trip around the world.

- Schnier: I was also influenced by the fact that Robert Howard had completed a trip around the world the year previous and had come back with some wonderful moving pictures and stories of what he'd seen. That inspired me to see the world. I remember the pictures he took of the Balinese dances. They were out of this world! I'd never seen anything like them before. The dancing was so exquisite. One time he showed them in my studio. I invited a group of friends there, so we had a little party. But that's how I happened to take the trip. I don't know if I'd have taken it if it hadn't been for the inspiring contact with him after he returned from his trip around the world.
- Riess: That was the first such glimpse of Balinese dancers that people around here would likely have had?
- Schnier: I'd never heard of Bali before. I think it was an early experience for the people who were in the art circles and who saw the film, because I saw it several times at other peoples' homes.
- Riess: Did Howard go the way you went? Did he go to the Orient first?
- Schnier: No, he went the opposite way. Some of the letters he wrote on his trip were published in a little art magazine, a monthly magazine called The Argus, edited by a French woman named Jehanne Beatrice Salinger, the mother of Pierre Salinger, President John F. Kennedy's press secretary. So I kept up with his experiences on his trip through reading his letters in The Argus. He was a very good writer. He was literate. He came from a well-educated family. Quite different from his brother John, who shared a studio with me too, for a while. John Langley Howard, who was a painter, was very, very ingrown, didn't talk very much when I knew him. But a dedicated artist. He's still active and recently had an exhibition of his work in San Francisco.
- Riess: So did Howard do his trip in the grand manner?
- Schnier: Howard wasn't the type to splurge and do things in a grand manner. It wasn't his nature. I think he traveled somewhat the way I did, modestly. Living in pensions, and taking rickshaws or riding bullock carts. Maybe he traveled third-class, or steerage--I'm not sure about that, but Robert could rough it, there's no question about it.
- Riess: This is a traditional trip for a young man in his twenties or thirties, is it not? His wanderjahr.

Schnier: Yes, and I called mine just that: a wanderjahr. But I think it is much more common in Europe than it is in America, or was in those days. I think the artists probably did it more than others because their art interests tied up with foreign countries eventually. As an art student you'd study oriental art, you'd study Italian art, French art, Renaissance art, Russian art.

Chinatown Antique Art Stores and Purchases in China

Riess: I thought your trip to the Orient was inspired mostly by your wandering through Chinatown.

Schnier: Yes, that had a lot to do with it, a fact that I mention in my autobiography.* I wanted to see the actual places about which I had read and from which I had seen examples of sculpture that had been vandalized. Like some of the carvings from Yun Gang and Long Men which I used to see in the Chinese antique art stores.

Riess: Were you buying oriental art when you were wandering through those stores? Were you buying small pieces?

Schnier: Yes, whatever strongly appealed to me if I could afford it. Purchases on my trip were dictated by what I could carry with me until I got to a point where I could wrap them up and ship them home. Oh, yes, I bought a lot of little statues. In Japan I didn't buy anything, but in China I bought some little jade pieces. I was attracted to anything that had a sculptural form.

One of the simple forms that I found was of the cicada carved in different colored stones and jade, and I began to collect a lot of them. I loved the shape of them, and in addition to being in jade, they were sculpture pieces. This is the object that the Chinese put on the tongue of the dead when they bury them because the sound of the cicada has quite a symbolic significance to the Chinese. So much so that they collect them and have them as pets.

My first experience with this matter of a pet cricket was when I landed in Peking and put up at the College of Chinese Studies, where the missionaries used to live and studied Chinese. That's

*There Was Light, Autobiography of a University, Berkeley 1868-1968, edited by Irving Stone, Doubleday & Co., New York, 1970, pp. 91-106.

Schnier: where I stayed. I was walking down the hall to the bathroom one day and I heard a chirping sound. I thought that was strange inside the building--there were so many houseboys around this Chinese establishment that everything was spick and span, no flies, ants, cockroaches or other insects. So I followed the sound until I finally found it came from a beautiful little cage in which there was a cricket. It was right on a corner table with some flowers nearby. It belonged to one of the houseboys. Later on I learned that the Chinese, for lack of space and funds went in for small pets, like birds and fish, as well as crickets. You'd see in the market, or in a flea market, vendors selling birds that had strings attached to them. They'd have many birds on a perch. The people would buy them, and they'd have the bird as a pet, and they could let the bird fly because it was attached by a string.

Riess: That's interesting, isn't it? What did you do with your collection of carved crickets?

Schnier: Oh, I gave some away to friends, and once we had a burglary and I lost the best of them.

Riess: Oh, too bad.

Schnier: I still have some of the things that I collected. Later on I tried to collect more serious works of art when they were available. For example, in Thailand--it was called Siam in those days--in Thailand I collected some little bronze Buddhas that I prize very highly. I remember going to one place and looking through a barrel full of just little heads of Buddhas that had been knocked off of statues, and picking out about half a dozen exceptionally beautiful ones.

Riess: When you were shopping in San Francisco's Chinatown, did you have any guidance as to what was really super stuff?

Schnier: No, no guidance.

Riess: Did you buy things?

Schnier: Not extensively, they were very modest purchases. But I'd buy what was within my means, and also what I liked. I would buy little wooden carvings that had come from temple decorations. A lot of things were very ornate, and there were a lot of things that--accoutrements that were prizes in addition to the main objects. I'd buy some of these, and I still have some of them. And some of them I'd give away as presents.

- Riess: Were there some shops in Chinatown that were particularly authentic and full of superb things, or were they all good?
- Schnier: There were three or four of them, and they'd frequently have some very good things because that was their business, selectively buying antique things. The other shops were sort of like they are today, catering to the tourists. Ordinary things.
- Riess: What was the best one? Can you remember the name of any?
- Schnier: I do remember one that was not run by Chinese, it was run by a Caucasian. It was called Nathan Bentz, and it was patronized by the bona fide oriental art collectors, you might say, as well as some of the others. Later on it was run by a Japanese called Scotty Tsuchiya. He had quality items, so much so that later on I saw one of the pieces that came from his shop in the Fogg Museum at Harvard, in their oriental collection.
- Riess: Would a San Francisco art collector, pretending we're going back over all those names I mentioned to you before, would those women themselves go into Chinatown and buy anything?
- Schnier: I think they knew Nathan Bentz, if they were at all interested in oriental art.
- Riess: And Nathan Bentz would be the "safe" place to go?
- Schnier: Not the safe place, but that was run by a Caucasian, and maybe people felt more comfortable dealing with him. He was a suave, cultured gentleman, and the shop was exquisitely arranged. Some of these other shops, the Chinese shops, they'd look like junk shops. You'd have to prowl around the balconies or down in the basement to find some of the fine things.
- Riess: Was Rudolph Schaeffer someone you knew in those early days?
- Schnier: Oh, yes. He's the man who Puccinelli mentions quite frequently, he influenced Puccinelli quite a bit. Yes, he was the man, as you probably know, who ran the art school in Chinatown, and then later on in that little alley where there's a parking garage now.
- Riess: He had the East West Gallery, his own gallery, and he had a great deal of interest in the Orient, so I wondered whether he was somebody who you used as a guide in any way to your interest in that art?

Schnier: No, I didn't know him that intimately. I would say we were friends, but I never knew him like Ruth Cravath, who had studied with him, Ruth Cravath and Dorothy Puccinelli and Raymond Puccinelli. Later on I observed some of the things that he collected, and I would unreservedly say he has very good taste. He took advantage of being in or near Chinatown.

Riess: You were free to take this trip because of the Depression, you say?

Schnier: I didn't know it was going on, really. As I said, I didn't know there was a Depression. I didn't know the difference between a stock and a bond. I didn't know anything about investing. All I knew was that if you had a savings account and you left your money there it'd collect some interest. [chuckles] A slow way to collect money.

But the trip that Bob Howard took had its influence on me. When I took the trip I leased my studio at 802 Montgomery Street. And then I borrowed a little money. I didn't have enough for such an extensive trip. I took off and took it very modestly. I sometimes traveled steerage, down in the hold of the ship, which is the best place to get seasick, because of the lack of fresh air. But I made it all right. My money lasted. I came back by way of New York. And then I stopped in Chicago where they had the World's Fair. So I ended the trip on a good note. The whole year's trip cost me about \$2,000.

Letters Home

Riess: What kind of a record did you make of the trip?

Schnier: I used to write letters to some friends of mine here. I used to write to [Stephen C.] Pepper. He saved all my letters and he returned them to me years later.

Riess: How did you know Pepper?

Schnier: I met Pepper through the Modern Art Gallery. Pepper was very much interested in art, he loved to be around artists. His father had been one and also a collector of Japanese prints. One evening, at an opening of the Modern Art Gallery, he came in with his wife and we struck up a nice friendship. They were very much interested, so much so that I invited them to my studio in the Montgomery Block.

Schnier: That friendship kept developing, so that when their son was killed in an explosion of a boiler in an apartment house that he was passing by, the Peppers came to me and asked if I would do his tombstone. He is buried in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord, Massachusetts where their families are buried.

I wrote him letters while on the trip around the world which he saved and returned to me years later. That was one record, and then another was letters to a group of artist friends. There was one fellow who was sort of the ringleader. I wrote him, and later on, when I came back, he had all the letters collected in a portfolio with all the postcards I had sent as illustrations. It's called The Odyssey of Jacques Schnier, so on and so on and so on. So I had these letters too. Otherwise I didn't have any record of the trip.

Riess: Did you do a lot of sketching?

Schnier: No, not very much. I was just absorbing everything I could.

Riess: Did you photograph at all?

Schnier: No, I didn't even own a camera at that time. So I just absorbed these experiences through my eyes.

Riess: Were you very gregarious on that trip?

Schnier: Yes and no. Let's see now. I know I must have been sort of outgoing because on the boat trip from Japan to China I met some missionaries. I must have been talking to them, or set up a friendship or conversation with them. They saved my life, you might say, because they directed me to the College for Chinese Studies in Peking. In French Indo-China I met a young man who was traveling alone like myself, trying to see the world, so we hooked up for a while until we got to Siam.

I remember in India, on my way to Darjeeling, I met a young American college student from a university in northern India who was on a holiday sightseeing trip. For a while we traveled together. I would just strike up acquaintanceships like that. But I would say I was not the gregarious type. There could have been many more than that, there were many opportunities to make friends.

Riess: Would you say that it was really important to write those letters, though? In other words, that you can't just take it in through your eyes unless you either write about it or talk about it?

Schnier: Yes. I'd stop sometimes at a certain place on my trip, just to write the letters. Writing letters took time, it was not easy for me. I'm not a very facile writer, I am not able to just write off without giving a little thought to it, and studying it first. I had to actually set aside a day or two just to write the letters to report on my trip. So, I have those things. But I think that what I wrote were the superficial things, not very deep. I mean the things that I was seeing.

Riess: Are those letters going to be available somewhere?

Schnier: I'll see if I can find them, yes.

Riess: They might be nice to deposit with this eventually in The Bancroft Library.

Schnier: Especially the ones that I wrote to the artist friends, because they're all collected, and I wrote to them fairly consistently because I had an audience of a small group. It was not like writing to Pepper, or my father, or someone like that. But with Pepper, it was his wife, too.

The Buddhist View

Riess: How important was that trip in your life?

Schnier: It was very broadening because there are things that I would never have experienced otherwise.

Riess: Apparently you said to someone that you were impressed and inspired by what the Buddhists call mankind's three greatest conceits: that one man is better than another; one man is worse than another; and that one man is equal to another. You were apparently fascinated by the philosophy that you were encountering there, as well as the art.

Schnier: Yes. Now, if I said that after 1933, when I started my analysis, it would have been under the influence of [Joseph] Thompson. Thompson was a Buddhist, and that's where I first became exposed to Buddhism in depth, real depth. Thompson shared with me a lot of his knowledge of Buddhism, and I went into it a little more than just the casual person who would read a little about Zen, and that's it.

Riess: So you're saying that it was not from your observations on the trip.

Schnier: But that helped because I think one of the things I was prepared for, and I was interested in, was Buddhist sculpture, Buddhist art. I'd read about Buddhism, and there was something about the quietness and the freedom from strife you sense in a good Buddhist sculpture that had appealed to me. I was on the lookout for that. I'd seen it already in some of the things in Chinatown, in the oriental art books, or in museums.

Riess: Can you see the quietness even in the little pieces?

Schnier: Oh, yes. For example, the little heads that I collected from the bronze figures, the heads that had been broken off. Oh, yes, I had a series, and I've given a lot of them away as presents. But I have a few left. I had one favorite. When I recently offered my son as a present a Buddhist sculpture, he looked over all of them and he picked out this favorite of mine. I gave it to him willingly.

Yes, you can see that quietness. The quality of a Buddhist sculpture, in my estimation, is not necessarily tied up with its age, it's tied up with the artist who did the piece. Because, unless he had that feeling in him, he couldn't capture it in the head. When you talk about an eleventh century Buddhist sculpture, to compare with one of the eighteenth century, that doesn't mean that the older one is better. However, from a collector's point of view it may be worth many times more than the eighteenth century piece.

One couldn't help, if one were at least halfway alert, being affected by what he was seeing on a trip like that--going all the way around the world, and not living with the tourists. I had very little contact with tourists except now and then I'd meet strays who were traveling somewhat the same as I was. So when I came back I think I felt like a different person.

Oh, incidentally, at the end of this trip I passed through Germany, which I must say made me aware of what was happening there as far as the Nazi went. I arrived in Berlin on May 1, 1933 which had been proclaimed by them as the "Day of National Labor."* Berlin

*Thousands of banners were unfurled all over the city acclaiming the Nazi regime's solidarity for the worker, and out at Tempelhof Field, Goebbels staged one of the greatest mass demonstrations the Germans had ever seen. But all of this was only Hitler's sop to the workers whose unions were outlawed the next day, May 2, 1933 and their leaders arrested. See William Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich, Ballantine, 1983, p. 281.

Schnier: was crowded with "Brownshirts." That was a sort of civilian army. It was frightening because when these "Brownshirts" crowded the sidewalks the civilians had to step off into the gutter. [tape ends]

[Interview 4: July 30, 1985]##

Schnier: Last time, when you were asking about that wanderjahr, or the trip that I took around the world, you said, "Was there anything else to cover regarding that trip?" You said, "Was it important?" and then we terminated that session. But there were some experiences that I didn't touch upon that to me were extremely important. One, for example, was my experience in Rangoon, Burma. I was on the boat going from Singapore over to Calcutta when we stopped at Rangoon for the day. I went ashore, and although I hadn't planned to explore Burma, I was so impressed by the expression on the peoples' faces, and what I experienced there in the city, that I decided to change my ticket and go up the Irrawaddy to Mandalay, just to see more of the people and the country.

They all looked to be so at ease, so satisfied. I didn't see any, or very few beggars. I don't remember if I even saw any beggars in Rangoon. The people going to the temples to pay their respects to the Buddha at the main shrine, they were so at ease that I couldn't help but be impressed. So I stayed there for a while. Later, when I came back home, I realized that what I was experiencing was the effect of the Buddhist teachings on a population, because that was one of the few countries in which early Buddhism was still practiced.

The teachings are such that it makes the lay person, who decides not to become a monk, still show some of the signs of the Buddhist teaching in their behavior, their attitude, their facial expression. No tensions. So that was a very important experience for me.

Riess: The other eastern countries didn't have the Buddhist background?

Schnier: Not India, which was the place of its birth. In India, basic Buddhism, or any form of Buddhism, is practiced only in a few areas, if any. I don't know of many places where it's practiced in India. The main religion of India now is Hinduism, and in Pakistan it is Muslim beliefs, Muhammadanism. So there's no Buddhism practiced there. But it's practiced to a certain extent in Thailand, and also maybe in Java, and a little in Bali, where there is an influx of Hinduism, which came later and pushed Buddhism out, because it appeals more to the people with all its demons and gods and goddesses. That's what the people need. The great majority

Schnier: of the lay people drift in that direction. They can understand it, or it satisfies a need in them. So I would say Burma was the place where Buddhism manifested itself to the foreigner in its strongest form.

Also, the trip was very important to me for it gave me the opportunity to see the great sculptures in these various countries. I don't know whether I've covered that or not, but in Japan, seeing the beautiful sculpture in Kyoto--oh, by the way, the finest things I saw there were old Buddhist statues, although in Japan I think those who practice Buddhism in the form of Zen are far from following the teachings of early Buddhism. But they do have these beautiful Buddhas from the sixth, seventh, eighth century AD, when Buddhism flourished in Japan.

Then seeing the Buddhist stone cave carvings in China had a strong effect on me. Made a deep impression.

Riess: What are cave carvings?

Schnier: The Buddhist artist would open up what appeared to be the beginning of a natural cave and then carve Buddhist-related sculptures or figures inside the cave. Sometimes they were freestanding, that is in the round, but most of them were in relief, low relief or high relief carved on the walls. All dealt with Buddhist iconography.

Riess: How are they used?

Schnier: They're not used today, but in those days--that's a good question. There would be a drive to--maybe somebody donated funds, a layperson donated funds for the Buddhist sculptures. I imagine they were Buddhist sculptors, but they may have been hired by the Buddhists in that area. There must have been a monastery there. They were places of pilgrimage for the Chinese. Chinese are great on making pilgrimages to famous shrines or mountain peaks or temples.

Riess: Did the Eastern idea of what the best Buddhas were coincide with your idea of what the best Buddhas were?

Schnier: The purest.

Riess: The purest.

Schnier: This is not a Buddhist concept, thinking there's such a thing as the best. But the purest, I would say--you're talking about Buddhas the closest to original Buddhism?

Riess: I'm talking about whether our Western aesthetic and their Eastern aesthetic agreed about representations of Buddha.

Schnier: I would say so. The scholars do, but I don't think the lay people know much about it, today. Like I guess a lot of lay people know very little about the system, if you call it that, of religious beliefs of the Greeks, or the Romans, or the Egyptians. So a lay person can't evaluate it, but the scholars are qualified to do so. But amongst scholars there is a great difference of opinion. There are many scholars who are great exponents of late Buddhism, like there might be scholars who are great exponents of later sects of Christianity, the Protestants being "better," or purer, or closer to Christ's teaching, than the Catholics.

Riess: But I'm not speaking of the sect now, I'm speaking of the sculptural manifestations. Did you change some of your initial impressions of things once you were dealing with a different aesthetic?

Schnier: No, because when you look at the objects in the Indian museums, let's say in a room where they are showing Buddhist sculpture, these sculptures, at least in my judgment, are the most aesthetically satisfying. And I find the same also in the books--there are many, many books written on Indian sculpture. I have a feeling that the basics of aesthetics are pretty universal; that is, aesthetic appreciation is pretty universal.

They change, go through cycles where people change from very simple presentation of an iconographic element, to a florid type like we have in Europe, as in the Baroque and the Rococo which are very ornate. I think that many Americans and Europeans have been exposed to that, and they know what that means when you mention either of those periods in European art.

But generally speaking I've found that over a period of years what I call meaningful fine art, or the great art works, they pretty well stand out above the rest, at least in this span of a hundred years that I'm better acquainted with, our period. In other words, that it's not my judgment, it's the judgment of many people who are close to art, are scholars, have studied it and are more than just mere writers about it.

Riess: When you're in a different culture, then you have to find a way in, sort of a key to what is really fine, and it sounds like you also looked into museums. You weren't just looking into caves.

Schnier: That's right. There's something about the art of these foreign countries, foreign nations, that has a kinship to our art heritage, tied up with European art.

I wonder if I'm answering your question directly.

Riess: You're not allowing for the absolute strangeness of the Orient. Maybe it wasn't so strange to you because you had lived in Chinatown and you had been exposed to so much oriental art and the pieces you acquired when you were in San Francisco, and so you were very open to it, I suppose.

Schnier: And also there were books on oriental art that I had a chance to look through and to study, especially books just specifically on sculpture. I had already collected some books on the sculpture of India. So I was prepared for what I saw; in fact, my goal was to search it out and experience it in actuality.

Riess: I don't think that the Orient is accessible to a lot of people. I'm not much interested in traveling there.

Schnier: That's interesting. This shows you how people's tastes vary, and how their outlook on the world varies. For me oriental art is much more attractive than European art. I know Europe, but the Orient is so much more exotic. It allows you to whet your visual experience, to experience new customs and costumes and fantastic architecture.

I'll tell you one thing about India though. Of all of the countries that I visited, there's a greater evidence of poverty there than in other countries because of the great mass of population and the limited resources they have. It can be very depressing for some people so that they avoid going there. My wife, for example, is very much affected by poverty and beggars, and I've never suggested that I take her to India.

China is different. There may be poor people, but they have accepted their lot and they've found a solution. Even the Chinese laborer who's doing very hard work has adjusted to that life, and he manages to work, to live, and to eat--and he has a different outlook than the Indian. There's something, it seems to me, in Hinduism that almost encourages a pessimistic outlook. The people look so depressed. I'm talking now about the lay people, the people of the lower class, because there are Indians who are driving Rolls-Royces and flying their own planes.

Schnier: All right, so I wanted to tell you about the effect of my travels. It was very important because I went to many sculpture caves in India, both the Hindu and Buddhist. I was attracted to the Buddhist, but I also found that there was a lot of great Hindu sculpture, and great Jain sculpture. That was another sect that had sprung up in India after Buddhism had sort of lost its hold on the people.

Riess: Did you need guides to go to all of those places or were you free to visit?

Schnier: I pretty much was on my own because I had a good guide book, like a Baedeker. It covered all the important information I needed, including the historical sculpture monuments. Occasionally I would pick up a guide at a temple or at the site, the caves themselves, but I did not need a guide to go into a museum in a city. I'd just wander through and see what I wanted.

Riess: Were you drawn enough by Buddhist philosophy to consider becoming Buddhist?

Schnier: Not a Buddhist. You must differentiate between a monk and a lay person. A lay person can follow it just like a churchgoer here who doesn't want to become a priest. But I was attracted to it very much. I did not pursue the study of it until after my acquaintance with Thompson, my mentor. You might have called him a guru if he had lived in India, but he was a psychoanalyst here in America. Joseph Thompson had made an extensive study of Buddhism, had gone through all of the old primitive scriptures, the original scriptures, had made records of them, and he passed the important findings on to me.

Berlin, 1933##

Riess: On your way back from the Orient you said that you were in Berlin and that it was crowded with "Brownshirts"?

Schnier: Yes, because as I walked down some of the main streets that would correspond to our Market Street or our main shopping district, I noticed the windows had been broken and there were placards on them that had "Down with the Jews" written in German. Something to that effect.

Riess: Tell me what that all meant for you.

Schnier: Oh, it was frightening. I think it was like what the Negroes must have experienced in the South when the whites would go haywire and went after them as the scapegoats. Of course, I was an American citizen and was actually not in danger.

Riess: Did you ever have to prove that you were an American citizen?

Schnier: No, I had my passport. I'd go to any hotel. But even in the hotels I didn't feel too comfortable because in the dining rooms there was a lot of celebrating going on, and it was packed with the "Brownshirts."

But it wasn't comfortable. I looked up a relative of my brother-in-law, my sister's husband. His family came from Germany and he still had some relatives living there. I looked up this one relative, a young cousin of his, who was in the German air force. He was telling me how bad it was for the Jews. Later on he was killed in an airplane accident.

Riess: He was a Jew?

Schnier: Yes. But he was in the air force. It hadn't reached the point where the Jews were excluded from the military activities of the German people. Many, however, had already been denied holding academic or political positions.

Riess: Did you meet any people who were already planning to leave?

Schnier: This young cousin's family were hoping to leave, but they didn't know how they could get out. As a matter of fact, he asked me if I would consider taking out some of the family money--he was living with his mother and his sister at that time--when I went out of the country into France. I could have, I think, but at that time I worried about being caught, or what the chances were of getting out of Germany.

In other words, I hadn't researched or explored that type of activity. It was getting quite dangerous. It was 1933, and Hitler now was chancellor.

Riess: How long did you stay there?

Schnier: In Berlin or Germany as a whole?

Riess: Either.

Schnier: I was about a month or six weeks in Germany. I came up from Italy and went to Munich first, and then traveled around to see some of the old German towns where they had cathedrals with very fine sculpture. I'd researched this before I left home. I went to a place called Bamberg which is famous for the sculpture in the cathedral, and then I went to Leipzig. Although I wasn't there very long, I was there long enough.

Riess: Yes, because after all if you're admiring the Gothic cathedrals and you are aware that your fellow Jews are being persecuted, you're in a very ambivalent position, aren't you?

Schnier: Ambivalent is right, because I was attracted to many features of the German people. The hotels and restaurants were so well-managed, the streets were so clean, and the people in general were so neat and well-mannered. It was quite a, not a shock, but it was an interesting comparison between what I saw in Germany and in France where people are more laissez faire. They're not fastidious about the way their city looks. Some of the streets were littered and little alleys were dumping grounds for refuse. You wouldn't find that in Germany.

Riess: Did you at that point find yourself thinking more about what it meant to be Jewish?

Schnier: Yes, I couldn't help it. As a matter of fact, when I came back I was agitated by what I had seen and experienced. It was a little hard to digest because I hadn't studied it enough. Now I've studied and found this is a history not only of the Jews but of other races where there are religious differences.

Look what's happening in India today between the Muslims and the Hindus, and the Hindus and the Sikhs. Between the Muhammadans and the Israelis in the Near East, between the Muhammadans and the Muhammadans, the Shi-ite sect and the Sunnites, and there are a few other Muhammadan sects. They're fighting each other and killing each other. So this is nothing new, but when it strikes home it affects you more deeply. It becomes personal.

Riess: A couple of times you've used the expression that you more or less didn't know what to think because "you hadn't studied it." Where's the instinctive reaction?

Schnier: What particular instance do you have reference to?

Riess: If you see this persecution of the Jews, you don't have to think about it, do you?

Schnier: No, so instinct--.

Riess: Yes. Where's the gut reaction?

Schnier: Yes, but the point I'm trying to make is that it was deeper and more overwhelming than if I had already studied the matter of religious persecution through the ages.

Riess: Then you would have a context that you could put it into.

Schnier: And I would realize that this is human nature: people are looking for scapegoats upon which they can thrust all of their anger and hatred, and use them as an excuse for their lot. It is nothing new with the Jews, it's a problem in human nature.

Riess: So it's a way of getting some distance from the situation, the studying.

Schnier: Then you feel a little different; you realize that this is it, this is the way mankind is made. And then also, I made a study later on when I became interested in analysis, of the institution of the scapegoat throughout the ages.

Riess: That's interesting.

Then you came back from Berlin, and from France--.

Schnier: The last foreign country I was in was England.

Riess: When you came back to San Francisco you told people about this situation in Germany?

Schnier: I don't know if I made much of an issue of it. I remember doing a work of art that was sort of a protest. It was a drawing. But I don't think I talked.

It wasn't until I was in analysis that we talked a lot about it. That helped relieve both the anxiety and the distaste of it all. It was deeper than that, how revolting it was, how frightening that it could happen in any country, a civilized country like Germany. Then I began to resolve it more and resign myself to the fact that this can happen with any ethnic group, and it could happen at any time in history because it doesn't disappear. This quality in human nature, of fighting, of war, anger, is deeply rooted and

Schnier: it has to find an outlet. When they talk about "Peace on Earth," I feel it's just an illusion. There will have to be some way of sublimating man's innate aggressiveness so thoroughly that people are satisfied with sublimation. Of course, sublimation deals with a socially acceptable form of whatever is being sublimated so even war can become acceptable to some nations. I think war and killing of neighbors and foreigners is going to go on to the end of the world.

The Inner Trip, 1933-

Introduction to Psychoanalysis

Riess: There are lots of ways for us now to approach your re-entry into San Francisco, but I guess the most interesting thing to me is that you chose to go into analysis at this point.

Schnier: First I must say that my introduction to psychoanalysis took place many years previously, and it happened through my younger brother while he was a student at the University of California. He wasn't majoring in English, but he took an English course in which he was introduced to a little book called An Introduction to Psychoanalysis in the Modern Library series. It contains Freud's five lectures that he gave the first and only time he came to the United States, a paper by Jung, and many other presentations by other analysts. Carl recommended this book to me. When I read it I was struck by the fact that these people, who were not artists, had such an understanding, I thought, of what the artist was driving at. Because I had been thinking about, "What am I doing? What does this mean? Why did I give up engineering to do this? Why am I attracted to it so much? Why is it that I wouldn't want to do anything else?" I thought, "These people really have some idea of what's going on in the back of an artist's mind." Also, they made interpretations of human thought and behavior, although later on I got to feel that a lot of Jung's interpretations were blind; they weren't based on a huge stack of statistics where you could say, "This is it." Anyhow, that was my first introduction.

The second was that after I came back I met a person who was in analysis. This person was a woman. She was a camp follower of the artists, but a little better adjusted than some of the others. She was a social worker and through her social work she had met a psychoanalyst. He was the only one in San Francisco at that time, and he was getting to be known amongst the people in the field, like social welfare.

Riess: Who was the woman?

Schnier: I forgot her name, but she's passed away. She borrowed a book from the analyst which was called Psychopathology, and it was chockablock full of art done by psychopaths at the St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, D.C. I looked at some of the illustrations and read some of the cases and I was fascinated by what could happen by way of psychosomatic anomalies, just through mixed up thinking, unconscious thinking.

I said to myself, "I'd like to be a psychoanalyst," and probably unconsciously the idea was, "Maybe I'd like to learn a little about what's going on in my mind."

Riess: Your first response was that you'd like to be a psychoanalyst, rather than that you'd like to be analyzed?

Schnier: Yes, it was to be a psychoanalyst. I wanted to practice because there was so much art in this book. So I was invited to meet this analyst. On Sundays he sometimes would have a group of people come up to see his cats. He had a wonderful collection of Siamese cats which he bred. I went up there and he sat on the floor and he was completely at ease, just like you and I are sitting here. He was sitting on the floor playing with his cats. That impressed me, how informal he was, and how unassuming. He wasn't dressed up with a bow tie, high collar and the like. He had on a woolen shirt and golf knickers. Knickers were still popular in those days. I liked that, and I figured he would be an understanding person, and that's how I decided to consult him to be my mentor.

Riess: You're saying he was one of the few, or the only analyst?

Schnier: He was the first, the first real psychoanalyst in San Francisco. He had been trained at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, which already was becoming psychoanalytically oriented.

Riess: And who was he trained by?

Schnier: He was trained by a man named Gravens. In those days it was not a very deep analysis. He was an M.D., by the way.

Riess: So he wasn't identified as a Freudian?

Schnier: Oh, yes, he was a Freudian. Of all the material that he had studied and he had been exposed to, he found that the Freudian material was the stuff that he accepted before all others.

Riess: Did he go abroad to have an analysis?

Schnier: Oh, no.

Riess: Nothing like that.

Schnier: In those days it would be a short analysis. I've read Jones' autobiography--Ernest Jones, who was as close to Freud as any other person. Like if you talked of Christ, Jones was John the Baptist.

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Schnier: Jones, in his autobiography, mentions three to five months as the length of analysis of some of the people who were close to Freud. So it's not surprising that Thompson didn't have a European analysis. I had thought myself of going back to study with Freud while he was still alive.

Riess: You mean after you had read the book and--.

Schnier: Got to know more about analysis. Also, I corresponded with him. I have some letters.

Riess: What kind of questions were you raising?

Schnier: At first I sent him a reprint of the little article I wrote on the occasion of his eightieth birthday. Then I sent him a little oriental bronze as a gift. When I did the Oakland Bay Bridge half dollar I sent him one of the coins.

The Local Freudians, and Lay Analysis

Schnier: The most important correspondence I had was regarding the matter of lay analysis. Freud, very early in his career, came out with a little book called The Problem of Lay Analysis, in which he supported the concept of a non-medical person practicing psychoanalysis. He felt that the ideal training of the analyst was not strictly medical, but one that dealt with sociological, with psychological problems, with psychopathology, like what you have in psychology today, an introduction to psychology. He felt a person who's thoroughly groomed along those lines would be amply qualified, assuming he had a personal analysis--they call it didactic analysis--to help other people. Of course, the didactic analysis would help the aspiring analyst find himself, and put him on firmer ground.

Riess: So why did you write to him about that?

Schnier: Because at that time a number of European refugees who were M.D.s had settled in San Francisco and had established a psychoanalytic society and an institute for training. I knew a number of them, I was friendly with some of them, but I could see that I was going to be excluded once I arrived at a point where I could be on my own, after working with Thompson for a while. They were trying to save themselves. I can see that now. They were going to build their own little clique, and they would have the medical profession for referrals of clients. The young psychiatrist who wanted to go on to psychoanalysis would have to come to their institute to be trained, because they were recognized by then by the American Psychoanalytic Association which in turn was recognized by the International Psychoanalytic Association. It was a closed union. They remarked that Freud had changed his viewpoint about lay analysts, that he was not in favor of them any longer. That's why I wrote him and his answer was such that it was clear he had not changed his views one iota. In fact, he supported it more strongly than he ever did before, in the earlier times.

Riess: Were you able to use that?

Schnier: Yes, but later on when I went to get a refresher analysis with Ernest Jones, he built up my confidence. "Hell, you could go out and analyze now. If you were here in England you'd be a member of the British Psychoanalytic Association, if you wanted. As a matter of fact, they're having a meeting next week in London." We were living near him in Sussex in a little town called Midhurst, but we would sometimes take the train up to London.

He said, "If you're going to be up there I'll tell them to expect you at their meeting," which I attended, by the way. So he built up my confidence to quite an extent. But later on, when I came back home and began to have a family, and couldn't get any malpractice insurance--I had no license, no degree in clinical psychology or anything like that--I realized this was a dangerous situation for the whole family. I decided I was going to give it up, and I was going to "stick to my last," like Pliny said of the shoemaker who aspired to be an art critic. I decided to concentrate on my art.

And of course I had to realize I would never get to first base because in this type of work you need a source of referrals. With all the M.D.s and psychiatrists going into analysis, and the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Institute becoming established, they had the pick of the patients and very soon could start recovering their investment.

- Schnier: Also in the meantime there were repercussions at the university. [William] Wurster called me in and practically told me that I was not going to be advanced in the department at all because of my interest in psychoanalysis, and the fact that I was spending so much time writing about it. So it was a matter of publish and perish, not publish or perish. This was an example of Wurster's dictatorial management.
- Riess: The European analysts, you're saying, came in maybe a year or so after Thompson got here?
- Schnier: No, he was established here a number of years before they arrived. I started with him in '33. About 1935-36 they came. The first one was Bernard Berliner. He became an important figure in the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Institute. He came from Germany. I met him and was friendly with him, had dinner at his home and tried to get him to exchange German lessons for my teaching him American slang, because if a patient lying on the couch began to use a lot of slang, it would go over a foreigner's head. He had a very, very rigid personality. I doubt if he ever had a deep analysis.
- Riess: Who were some of the others?
- Schnier: There was Emanuel Windholz, a charming person who later became the president of the Psychoanalytic Society. He was friendly, but I could see that since I had no M.D. I was an outsider with him professionally. Definitely. Another one was Siegfried Bernfeld. He had a Ph.D. and had been analyzed by Anna Freud. He had already built up a reputation by the time he came here, so that he was accepted in the group, although later on he withdrew because of some internal dissension.
- A number of years later they did have a lay person who was without official qualification and who eventually became president of the society. That was Erik Erikson. Have you ever heard of Erikson?
- Riess: Yes.
- Schnier: He was a suave person, and I guess very diplomatic, so they were charmed by him.
- Riess: Were the earlier group also refugees from Germany? Jewish?
- Schnier: Yes, they were predominantly Jewish. Some were Germans and some of them were from Austria, those two countries. I don't think they came from any other country.

Riess: Was there a sort of general welcome on the part of San Francisco to the idea of analysis? Did people want analysis?

Schnier: I don't know about the city as a whole, but amongst the artists the word spread around and there was one man who Thompson had already trained. His name is Aaron Morafka. He asked me if I could arrange some lectures for him for the artists' groups, which I did, and that attracted a number of artists in my own little circle. I know that Puccinelli was analyzed by him and also Dorothy Wagner. Ben Cunningham and his wife, Marion Cunningham, were other artists who sought his help. I don't know how many others.

Schnier's Analysis

Riess: How much did it cost?

Schnier: I'll tell you, that's what was very helpful then. I went to see Thompson and told him that I wanted to train as a lay psychoanalyst after I learned about Freud's opinion of it. I had a session with him and I found out how much it cost. He said he would take me on for five dollars an hour. So I said, "Fine," but I could only afford one day a week. He said, "All right." So I started one day a week. And then I got to thinking this wasn't enough, so I went to see him and asked him if I could do his portrait for extra hours. He said, "I'll tell you the truth. My main concern is feeding my cats. I've got a big bill keeping them in fish and meat, and I couldn't use a portrait for that purpose."

So I figured that I'd have to get some work in a hurry because I was living off the little income I had. In addition to writing letters to art departments, I went to the California College of Arts and Crafts, and since I was known through having built up a certain reputation in the art circle of the Bay Area, they hired me. It was for two afternoons a week, for which I got sixty dollars a month. That meant I could take on another hour or two with Thompson.

I then did a commission for Albert Bender for the library of the San Francisco Art Institute. That enabled me to increase my hours further. Finally I got the position at the University of California, after one year at the College of Arts and Crafts. I was paid \$1,800 a year, with summers off. So I began increasing my sessions, at five dollars an hour.

Riess: His fee wasn't going up, I guess.

Schnier: No, not until I was on my feet and supporting myself with what I was earning, and then he charged me so much of my total income, before taxes. I think I paid him--I forget, I'll have to look it up, but it took a big chunk out of whatever my income was. I was never ahead, I wasn't saving anything, I was putting everything into it. So finally it was seven days a week. I went to him every day because I wanted to get over this training period as soon as possible so I could start on my own.

In the meantime, I had left the studio where I'd been living when I started with him, which was on Broadway, right in the heart of the nightclub district, with a lot of brothels around there, so that frequently I would have people knocking on my door thinking it was a brothel. I moved up to Russian Hill, very close to him, just a few blocks away. I had no trouble walking over there early in the morning or whenever he could see me.

Riess: Did you get impatient with the whole thing?

Schnier: Yes, but I resigned myself to this situation because he was the only analyst and I just had to stick with him. I had to have guidance when I started. So I just went on and on. And to tell you the truth--I don't like to have this on tape but I guess it's important--towards the end I thought he needed me more than I needed him. But this was in keeping with what is said about it being a poor student who can't excel his master.

Riess: What made you think he needed you?

Schnier: He didn't have an enormous practice, but he had gotten used to these analysands, and he was well along in years. I remember he would fall asleep while I was talking to him. That made me angry. [laughs] He had two couches. Maybe he had heart trouble, but he'd lie down on one over in one corner of the room, and I'd lie down on the other, and I'd start talking and pretty soon I'd see that he was sleeping. Did I show you that wood carving of the analyst with the words going in one ear and coming out the other? It was a gift from a psychiatrist when I lectured at the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas in 1969. He made it while he was in analysis. It was a little like that, although he was asleep.

But I learned a lot from him. He changed my life, because I learned a lot about myself, how the mind works and the basis of human nature. It was the most valuable experience in my life. Everything that I put into it was worth it.

Riess: Did it have to be him, or could it have been just anyone?

Schnier: It could have been somebody else who was--Ernest Jones, I felt, was a very important person in my life. Although I was with him only a short time, I had great confidence in him. With Morafka, who was much younger than I was, I had a feeling there was sibling rivalry between the younger brother and the older brother, so to speak. Because sometimes he was very--anyhow, it was different. But I learned a lot from Morafka too, I must say.

Riess: Did you do analytic work with him?

Schnier: I went to him mostly for control analysis. But control analysis is inseparable from, in a way, dealing with one's own problems, because the way one reacts to the analysand, the client, has something to do with one's own thinking. Definitely. So you bring that up in control analysis.

Riess: My impression from what you've said about Thompson is that he was a little eccentric.

Schnier: A little, yes. For example, he had cats and he wore woolen shirts like a Pendleton shirt. He was very--what do they say in the jargon of the Haight Street generation?--everything hung out? Is that it?

Riess: Yes, hang loose, or laid back?

Schnier: Laid back, oh yes. Well, hang loose, yes. And it made you feel very comfortable, but he could be very strict. Not strict, but very firm in certain situations.

Riess: What was his attachment to Eastern philosophy? Why did he know Buddhism?

Schnier: He was a naval officer during World War I, and part of his years in the service were spent in the Orient, and that's where he was exposed to Buddhism. I think he had a friend who was a Buddhist who had entered the Buddhist monastery. Be that as it may, he had studied it thoroughly. He was a deep thinker. He was constantly searching. He wasn't the type who sits back and is satisfied with just reading the morning newspaper.

Riess: You're saying that it was really a didactic analysis? It was not an emotional analysis?

Schnier: With whom?

Riess: With Thompson?

Schnier: Oh, definitely emotional, sure. A didactic analysis is a personal analysis.

Riess: You've described it as an entry into doing analysis yourself, not so much that you went in there to get something.

Schnier: The psychiatrists who go into psychoanalysis at the institute, they have to have their didactic analysis. Everybody has to have his own personal analysis before he ever starts.

Riess: So personal and didactic are the same thing?

Schnier: It's the same thing, yes. It ended up that way. I mean, although I'd gone in with the idea of just training to be an analyst.

Riess: You needed Thompson to do that personal analysis, or could you have worked the whole thing through yourself?

Schnier: Well, I was studying the literature. That was part of the training for analysts, so I began to build up a library of psychoanalytic material, all of Freud's writings eventually. Everything he ever wrote. And the writings of other analysts who I respected, who were Freudians. But I couldn't help but begin to struggle with some of the things that I thought needed airing and looking at realistically. So it definitely was a personal analysis. Period. [laughing] Every analyst has to go through that.

Now, about doing it oneself. I guess there are people who can. I think Buddha found it himself, Freud did too. But there are only a few Buddhas and Freuds in the world. It's a short cut this way, having an analysis, compared with sitting down and meditating and thinking about these things for years and years and years.

Reception of Psychoanalysis in San Francisco

Riess: You've mentioned that a few other artists were in analysis.

Schnier: Oh, yes. I don't know how many. I'm only talking about the very small circle that I was part of for a while.

Riess: Were there any Jungians in the city?

Schnier: Yes, there were Jungians, and there were artists who were analyzed by the Jungians. I would meet artists outside of the circle.

Riess: How is it that Thompson was the only psychoanalyst in San Francisco in 1933?

Schnier: Remember that analysis wasn't very old. There were psychiatrists in the city--I used to go to hear their lectures, and he encouraged me to learn as much as I could about others in the field. I would listen to those men and think they were good subjects for analysis themselves! They were prominent psychiatrists, some with the highest academic credentials.

Riess: As well as Jungians, what were there?

Schnier: There were proponents of other systems for self-analysis that go under different names, like Dianetics which was also popular at that time.

Riess: Was it? That early?

Schnier: Yes.

Riess: That's interesting. You said that Stephen Pepper was in analysis. Was that later?

Schnier: Yes. I don't know how much later. He was analyzed by [Jean] Macfarlane's husband. It would be later because Macfarlane was analyzed at the institute, or under one of those men, either Erikson or Berliner. And also Pepper's wife. I know she was analyzed by Berliner because when I was doing her portrait bust she would talk about him.

Riess: Pepper's wife?

Schnier: Pepper's wife. Excuse me just a minute, I'll be right back.
[interruption in tape]

Riess: What were peoples' attitudes about analysis? Did people think you were doing something strange?

Schnier: Most people were very antagonistic. With the artists, however, if they were listening to a lecture, a very simple presentation, they could identify with almost every phase of it. I attended the lectures that Morafka gave in my studio and he was good at it, very simple. He was copying Thompson's presentation: Thompson used to speak to small groups, social welfare workers and psychologists and the like.

Riess: He would outline the id, the ego, that sort of stuff?

Schnier: Very cursorily, but he'd concentrate on illustrations. They just drove home with people who were not resistant to this idea.

To get back to your question about peoples' attitude, it was very antagonistic. Except when you talked to people quietly, person to person, and explained certain basic things about it. Not too deeply, not using complicated words, but words they could understand and identify with. I found at the university there was a great deal of antagonism, because most of the faculty members were concentrating on their own little territory and doing it very thoroughly. I remember sitting next to an historian at The Faculty Club at lunch, and talking to him. I could see that whatever I told him about analysis, it didn't register at all, he wasn't interested in it. He was interested in a traditional approach to history. Now psychoanalysis is being used in historical studies instead of just a matter of collecting the facts and trying to interpret them because when you interpret them you may interpret them subjectively, more or less, on the basis of what you think the facts mean. Even a man like Kroeber, who was analyzed and practiced analysis at one time, withdrew and rejected it as a scientific discipline. When he withdrew, he did so completely and gave me his whole psychoanalytic library. [see also p. 166]

Riess: Why?

Schnier: Because he didn't want to have anything to do with it. He gave up all his interest in analysis.

Riess: Because of the academic attitude about it?

Schnier: I think so, and also he felt that Freud's Totem and Taboo couldn't teach anthropologists anything. In fact, he wrote a review of the book which his wife mentions in her biography of Kroeber. But I want to answer your question with a five cents word, and say there was a lot of antagonism in the academic world, definitely.

Riess: Okay, and you're saying that the artists were more open to it.

Schnier: Yes, they were attracted to it.

Riess: You're quoted somewhere as saying that, "Psychoanalysis is the world's major recent contribution to the science of human thinking."

Schnier: I haven't changed my opinion one bit. I can see how it has spread, although many students and practitioners of the mental sciences have forgotten Freud; they haven't forgotten the concept of the unconscious, they have forgotten the man who established it.

Riess: And if you ever made a statement like that to any one at the university, they would be in agony!

Schnier: They would have been so resistant, they could very well have become aggressive and black-balled me. I feel confident that is why Kroeber relinquished his interest in psychoanalysis in favor of becoming a respected and honored academic leader.

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Schnier: Many people become very interested in psychoanalysis, and it's understandable. Human nature being what it is has all of these things going on in the machinery of the mind, the repressed material, experiences of childhood, and maybe material that is inherited. I'm not sure about how much, but I think quite a bit of it is conditioned by experiences. But also, just being a human being, stemming from an animal ancestry. Well, that's the situation. I found that many people were very receptive, many of them went into analysis. I could tell from the people who came to me that it was already in the air. So although I say there was a lot of antagonism, there still was a lot of interest and acceptance. Maybe not acceptance of psychoanalysis, but acceptance of the fact that maybe here is a person who can help me with my problems. Just like Thompson would attract somebody when the person found out about what he was doing, what kind of business he was in. It was a business. [chuckles]

Riess: And yet, for all of the decades that followed, psychoanalysis has still been the butt of jokes. It's still a New Yorker joke all the time.

Schnier: Sure, but not to the exclusion of other professions.

Riess: There is a lot of unease with it, and don't you think there always will be?

Schnier: Yes, it deals with such materials it's almost dynamite, some of it. But like in other professions the capabilities of the practitioner means an awful lot. In analysis the client brings up this material without terrifying the analyst, so he sees this as just thought, instead of being a reality. I've noticed that there are people I would never think of working with in analysis. Berliner was one of those men. I thought he was so rigid that he wouldn't be a person for me. Jones turned out to be just delightful.

Preparing to Practice Psychoanalysis

Riess: You mentioned Ernest Jones earlier. When did you go to him?

Schnier: I went to Jones before we moved here to Lafayette. It was 1955. He wrote a three-volume definitive biography of Freud. It's the best that I've read. Because he was so close to him he had a lot of factual material, observations, correspondence, anecdotes and so on to report on. He had finished the first book when I was there. It was published, and I'd already read it. When I told him how much I thought of it, he gave me one of the English editions, and autographed it with a very nice phrase, which I treasure very highly, "To Jacques Schnier, in admiration of his scientific contributions. June 1, 1955."

He told me, "You know, Schnier, you're sort of causing an interruption of my second volume on Freud." He was working on it then. I don't know how many other clients he had. I went to his home at eight o'clock in the morning. He had already retired from full-time practice. It may be he didn't have any others, but I was fortunate in getting in under the wire because he died a couple of years later.

Riess: Were you ready to drop out of the art world if you had become an analyst?

Schnier: If the problem of malpractice insurance had been solved, I probably would have, at least part time. While I was doing all of this, I was working on commissions. I needed the money. For example, I did that commission for Albert Bender for the Anne Bremer Library. Then I did the United States half-dollar, and then I did eight monumental sculptures for the World's Fair on Treasure Island. Then I did the relief for the Benner family on Tamalpais Road. So I was doing a lot of sculpture. Oh, yes, and I did the work for the Berkeley High School, the big relief [1940]. So I was doing it at the same time as I was studying psychoanalysis.

Riess: And you were teaching.

Schnier: And I was teaching. And I never felt that this was a big load. [chuckles]

Riess: But you wished to be a lay analyst as a full-time activity?

Schnier: Eventually. That's what was in the back of my mind, that I would become an analyst.

Riess: And you were really thinking that you could give up sculpture?

Schnier: This was all-consuming. Yes, I think I would have done it. I could have done both, but I was thinking at that time I wanted to be a lay analyst, I wanted to work with people. Because I think that we go into fields that are compatible with our personalities, and art, in a way, does deal with a lot of the problems that you deal with in analysis. Actually, I think an analyst is probably probing himself, too, all the time while he's handling these cases.

Gee, I go into a long rigamarole when you ask me a simple question! You should say "yes" or "no" from now on. [laughter] But yes, I would have.

Riess: That's a little alarming and disconcerting because we think of the artist as having a tremendous need to create, and you're saying that need to create was sublimated by this need to analyze other people.

Schnier: Analyzing people would be my research. And I thought I would publish like Freud had been doing. And these would be creative endeavors because they would be new findings.

Riess: Yes, but what about your hands?

Schnier: Yes, but the writing was creative, too. Actually, what transpired supports that idea. I was attracted to the research, seeing new connections. A paper I wrote called "The Cornerstone Ceremony" which was published in The Psychoanalytic Review in 1947 was selected out of fifty years of articles and reprinted in Psychoanalysis in America: Historical Perspectives in 1966.* However, I see now that art is more important to me, because even if I'd made new discoveries, new contributions, become well-known in the field, recognized in spite of not having an M.D. degree, I don't know if that would have meant as much as the satisfaction I get out of art now. Also, what do you call that type of profession where you're just sitting down at a desk, you're not moving?

Riess: Sedentary.

Schnier: Sedentary. It would have been very sedentary. When I work at the studio, most of the time I'm on my feet, from the time I get there--except for the time I sit to eat a sandwich at lunch--until I come home. And that's just the opposite of being sedentary. Although it isn't jogging, or swinging on the rings, or on the trapeze, it's active. I don't think that a sedentary life would appeal to me, especially sitting down for the fifty-minute hour all day long.

*Edited by Murray H. Sherman, Ph.D. Published by Charles C. Thomas, pp. 341-354.

Riess: You were in didactic analysis for how long?

Schnier: I was with Thompson for exactly nine years before I went into the service. That was a long time. The last five or six years was seven times a week.

Riess: When did Thompson die?

Schnier: He died shortly after I went into the service. That was about December of 1942.

Riess: But you were done with that analysis.

Schnier: Yes. I tell you, some of the people I meet who have been in analysis, I don't think they've gotten to the root of their problem. It's helped them, but I have a feeling that there's still a lot there they had never conquered, or come to grips with. But it takes a lot of application. Some people may be faster than others, and it may even be Thompson had reached an impasse--remember, he only had a short analysis--and he was sleeping. [laughter] He probably had heart trouble because, as I say, he passed away shortly after I left the city to go into the service.

Riess: Did you know Annette Rosenshine?

Schnier: Oh, yes, I knew her. She was in analysis, but Jungian analysis. With Jung himself, wasn't she?

Riess: I don't know that. Was she also known to be a lay analyst?

Schnier: I don't know whether she did any work along those lines.

Riess: I wonder how she was qualified.

Schnier: The Jungians very early recognized lay persons to practice their system. In those days there was no licensing of a psychotherapist.

Riess: Was she also an artist?

Schnier: Oh, yes. I went to her home to have dinner one night and visited her several times, and saw the little bronzes that she did.

Riess: You mentioned Erik Erikson earlier. When did he come to town?

Schnier: He came about 1937 or '38. I remember him coming to my office on the campus and asking if I could help a friend of his, an artist from Europe, get a job. Erikson was already in the psychology department. He didn't have a Ph.D., but was so well thought of that the psychology faculty invited him to join their department.

Riess: And he had an art background, also.

Schnier: I didn't know about that, that's new to me. But he had evidently had an analysis with Anna Freud. And that was open sesame, of course.

Riess: I have read that Anna Freud was trying to help him figure out how he could combine both the art and the analytic training, to help his patients to visualize better.

Schnier: Some analysts do encourage art, use art as therapy, and I notice that there are innumerable books being published in the last few years on art in psychotherapy. But it's news to me that he came from an art background.

Riess: Would you say that you combined the two in your practice? With any patients that you worked with, were you using art?

Schnier: No, I think that my training came out mostly with my sculpture students. Without attempting to do so, in encouraging them to express themselves, I had some very interesting examples, and interesting experiences. I can see how it could be used instead of words to bring out emotional anomalies or problems. But the people I had, there were few artists, actually. I remember one, an Indian, Hindu. No, he actually came from a Muslim family. He happened to be an architect. He could have been a lawyer or anything else, it was the same thing.

But with the students it was almost spectacular what they would come out with. I have a few pictures of some of the things that they did. I wasn't going to mix psychotherapy and teaching with them, but at least I was encouraging them to use their art as a means of bringing repressed material up to the surface. In other words, I wasn't discouraging it.

Riess: So it sounds like your teaching was a perfect outlet for what was happening with you in your analysis.

Schnier: Applying it, yes, and understanding the students. And teaching was such a pleasurable occupation. I never felt it was disruptive, or required a lot of effort. It was not tiring. I enjoyed it.

Riess: You went into your analysis in an effort to understand enough to help people, and your teaching became your means to help them?

Schnier: Yes. That's probably where I applied it more than any place else.

Riess: Okay, that's all very neat.

Thoughts on Buddhism and Psychoanalysis

[Interview 5: August 6, 1985]##

Schnier: I want to answer a question of yours, if you don't mind a digression.

Riess: No, go ahead.

Schnier: About two weeks ago you asked me how I decided which is the purest, or the best, of the various Buddhist sects, or systems? I told you that the word best is not very appropriate as far as I'm concerned. The better word would be pure. More fundamental, pragmatic, free from supernatural beings, would be the way to describe the sect that I would be interested in, or have selected, which is primitive, early Buddhism, the unadulterated Buddhist teaching as found in Hinayana Buddhism.

This question came up 2,600 years ago, over and over again, amongst the young Buddhist monks. They would go to the village, or the city, whatever was close to the monastery where they were living, and hear leaders of various sects claiming that theirs was the only truth, and all the other systems were false. The monks said, on this account, "Doubt has overtaken us, and we do not know which teaching to accept."

This is taken from the early Buddhist scriptures. By the way, there were no written systems, or at least the Buddha's teachings were not written at the time he was living. But much of it was recaptured, or retained, by word of mouth. This was a very highly developed institution in India at that time.

Riess: The oral tradition?

Schnier: Yes. None of it was put down in permanent form until several hundred years later. Now there are several books that supposedly contain his teachings that for hundreds of years were handed down orally. And this comes from one of those books. So the Buddha said that it's in the nature of things that doubt should arise, and then he went on to say that it's a matter of not closing your eyes to these various systems. Listen to them. But then eventually you have to make a decision based on what you think is reasonable. The actual wording is this, "If, after observation and analysis, it agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it, and live up to it." So he didn't force them to follow Buddhism, he wanted them to make their own decision.

Riess: What is this transcription that you're reading from?

- Schnier: Thompson, following the early Buddhist system, or Indian or Oriental system, copied down some of the pertinent teachings under different headings. He had them in this form, and I think it came from the system that the Buddhist monks used of copying the text on a certain type of leaf that was very strong and withstood a lot of handling. It was the precursor of paper. So he copied it down, and I copied his--he lent them to me a few at a time.
- Riess: You've got them on cards that are about three-by-eight inches.
- Schnier: His were on cards, too. They're all different, pertinent things.
- Riess: May I see how it works?
- Schnier: For one who isn't oriented, and doesn't know about the basic starting point, they're not very meaningful, and they are hard to understand. He gives the source [for each thought], and I also, as I began to read a lot, and study, added a few of my own. Not only from Buddhist teachings, but from material I picked up in even contemporary writings. Statements of Freud or statements of scientists about the universe.
- Riess: And how do you use this yourself?
- Schnier: I just went through them starting from the top. After I read one of the pages, I put it on the bottom and the next time I'd continue from where I'd left off. I don't do that anymore, but I used to. You can see they're sort of worn.
- Riess: And when would you do it, when were you doing it?
- Schnier: Oh, I'd do it anytime. During the day, or the night.
- Riess: As a kind of meditation? What would you call it?
- Schnier: It's just that. Look at these statements and try to absorb them. Then here are a few that I copied down. I didn't have the cards with me at the time.
- Riess: You call this the "nuclear concepts" of Buddhism.
- Schnier: That's what Thompson called them. This was before the atomic bomb, mind you, so it has nothing to do with that. Now here's one that I copied later on when I didn't have the set available. I don't know when, maybe during the war. This is from one of the books called the Dhamma pada [Way of Truth], that's supposed to be the teachings of the Buddha. It's a short one, so I'll read it off, verbatim:

Schnier: "This mind of mine went formerly wandering about as it liked, as it listed, as it pleased, but I shall now hold it in thoroughly as the rider who holds the hook, holds in the furious elephant." That was taught 2,600 years ago, and now it is what many psychotherapists and analysts and psychiatrists are trying to inculcate in their clients. You learn how to control yourself, you learn to be master of your destiny instead of allowing certain things to just overwhelm you.

Buddha always tried to draw an analogy. In this case, it's the rider. With that hook he gets the elephant, the furious elephant, to go just where he wants it to. Which means he masters himself.

Riess: That's very interesting, and it's interesting to see how deep and careful a study you made. You were not just flirting with it, you were really deeply engaged.

Schnier: I have some of the translations of the early Buddhist teachings in my library. There was a famous linguist named Max Müller who translated these early Pali texts. That was the language that was used in the earliest recordings of the Buddhist teachings. Later on, they were translated into Sanskrit.

Studying the translations helped me become a died-in-the-wool atheist, with a non-acceptance of any spiritual ruling of our destiny, anything "out there." It's hard for me to accept any of those systems that believe in a god or a spiritual being, or believe that man has committed some original sin that he has to make amends for in order to be saved. I don't understand that. It doesn't ring a bell.

Buddhism is the only early system of self-understanding I know of that seems reasonable, and therefore acceptable.

Riess: But the Freudian system involves so much original guilt. How would you reconcile Freud's view of the childhood complexes? Don't they originate from a lot of guilt that Freud assumes in the individual?

Schnier: Freud revealed the origin of these guilt feelings which is a different matter than stating that his system is based on the concept of guilt, which is at the basis of Christian religious belief. Freud's efforts were directed towards getting to the root of this guilt. If the origin is understood, one can, with help, overcome guilt feelings.

Schnier: Take, for example, the feeling of resentment of the father, who has property rights over the mother, or sole possession of the mother in certain erotic situations. The male child resents that, in the same way that the daughter may resent the mother having sole possession of the father, and have fantasies of his being her lover instead.

With analysis, one tries to overcome these feelings which in most cases are not conscious; they are deeply unconscious, they're repressed. Not suppressed. Suppressed we think of as being something that one unconsciously tries to drive out or forget, but repressed is something that one can't bring up by oneself except in certain situations. The aim of analysis is to overcome this repression and see the reality of it: that even if the father has sole possession of the mother, that is a reality situation. And later on the male child is going to get his own mate. And the same with the daughter. Eventually she will overcome this feeling of any resentment of her mother, and resentment of her father for not being her lover. We don't usually see this because so much of it is unconscious. Sometimes what we see is a very kind attitude towards the members of the family, very great concern about them, which would be just the opposite of what is down below in the unconscious. This is what I call a curbstone explanation, a five-minute free explanation of psychoanalysis! [chuckles]

Riess: It sounds like psychoanalysis is closer to Protestant concepts of original sin than you would be comfortable with.

Schnier: I don't like to drag this out and belabor the point--it might appear as if I were proselytizing.

Riess: No, I don't want to either.

Schnier: I just want to say this, that the concept of original sin in many of our Western religious systems--I guess I should say Christian systems because I don't know much about Muhammadanism--is carried on until death because the practitioner has no idea where it stems from. Throughout life one has to make tithes to the church and have the church ideology guide and direct one's behavior; one is not a free agent.

I'm just amazed at the contributions that are made to the churches of the different denominations, all over the Western world. I guess all over the world, because you find a lot of monuments and temples scattered all over the world.

Riess: But I'm amused that your arrangement with Thompson was in a way a kind of tithing, wasn't it? He asked a percentage of your income, which is what tithing is.

Schnier: Yes, but he had to live and he had to feed those Siamese cats! [laughter] It was worth it. By the way, his fees went up as the years went by. I think he took me on just out of charity, at such a low fee, but it was worth it, every bit of it. Nowadays, of course, I don't think you can talk to a psychoanalyst for less than sixty-five, seventy-five dollars an hour, and a hundred dollars an hour is not unheard of.

IV EVENTS OF THE THIRTIES AND FORTIES

Making a Living

Instructor in Sculpture, California College of Arts and Crafts, 1935

Riess: Last week you brought up your having gotten the job at the College of Arts and Crafts to support your psychoanalytic habit, as it were. Let's hear more about what was going on at Arts and Crafts in 1935.

Schnier: Arts and Crafts had moved from its small quarters in Berkeley down to its present location in a rather spacious estate on Broadway and College Avenue in Oakland. This was all the result of its founder, Frederick Meyer, a German who was trained in the thorough German system of the decorative arts and maybe some fine arts thrown in for good measure.

He had a strong conviction that the artist should be trained so he could make a living from his art. Everything was quite formalized, the teaching system and the courses. In addition, he realized that a lot of people interested in art probably weren't gifted as far as producing, but they could teach, so he instituted the art teachers' program. For many years, a large proportion of the art teachers in the schools of California at least, or maybe in the West, were graduates of the California College of Arts and Crafts.

They didn't have anything exactly like that at the University of California; I don't think the people in the university art department were much concerned about preparing the art students to be teachers. They had to go over to the education department to get their teacher's training to eventually get their teaching certificate.

Riess: Was it a four-year program at the College of Arts and Crafts?

Schnier: Yes it was, and they would bring in teachers from the outside to teach certain subjects that weren't normally taught in an art school, let's say economics or philosophy, certain courses you find in a College of Letters and Science, so that they would be able to comply with the state regulations for a teacher's certificate.

Riess: And you were teaching sculpture?

Schnier: Yes. It so happened that the sculptor who had been teaching there, just before I did, went over to Mills College. That's what happened because he married a woman who had graduated from Mills College, and her folks had some tie in with the college. He went over there and left the position open, and I just came at the right time, at the beginning of the year, summertime. I had this job for one year.

I enjoyed it because of Meyer's philosophy of thoroughness. And also the attitude of the students. They were all hard workers.

Riess: Was it mostly teachers whom you were teaching?

Schnier: No, a lot of them turned out to be recognized artists. Alexander Nepote studied sculpture with me. He's a professor of art at San Francisco State University. Maybe he has retired now. There were a number of others who went on and became recognized artists.

Another thing about Meyer was that he was quite visible, he wasn't an office man. I'd see him around the grounds taking care of the gardens, or working, doing some carpentry work. He was that kind of a fellow, and you couldn't help but admire him.

Riess: Did the students live on campus?

Schnier: They didn't have a dormitory then, but later on, after he passed away and they took on other administrators who were business-oriented, they got grants from the government and from other sources and built dormitories and a dining room right on the campus. Lately they've expanded so they have a bronze foundry, and also they do glass work. In my estimation, it is the best art school in the Bay Area for what they are attempting to do, and that is to teach artists to fit into our society.

Riess: I see. So the Art Institute in San Francisco is outside our society?

Schnier: Yes, I feel that way sometimes when I go over there and see a lot of students lazing around in the patio. They have a laissez-faire attitude that I don't find at the College of Arts and Crafts. Perhaps this has changed since I last visited the San Francisco Art Institute.

Instructor in Modeling, School of Architecture, U.C. Berkeley,
1936

Insightful Teaching

Riess: How did you teach sculpture since you had been self-taught?

Schnier: I first taught in a life modeling class, but I had already done life modeling when I used the facilities of Ruth Cravath's class in the Montgomery Block. And it wasn't very hard to figure out what to teach the students. I had no trouble. I never sat down and worked out a course outline. We'd start with a simple portrait study and then go on to the nude figure. I taught them a little anatomy, and would use different poses for gradually increasing their vocabulary of form, of design.

I never thought it was hard at all. That's probably why I was attracted to teaching. It was one thing I was quite confident I could do, there wasn't anything difficult about it. You didn't have to study at night. It gave me a lot of time to continue with my own work.

Riess: Were you directive or non-directive?

Schnier: I've never been too directive in my approach to teaching art. Simply stated, this would be my system: I'd go from one student to another, look at his work to give him the satisfaction of having his work looked at--although some of the students were frightened when I came to see their work. But generally speaking, I'd look at their work and then I would look at them and say, "How are you getting along? Is there anything you're having trouble with? Can I help you?"

I'd try to get them to see what was bothering them, what was wrong with their design. Then I would help them with the problem if they wanted help. I would try to avoid working on the model or drawing unless I was sure they wanted me to work on it. I knew from

Schnier: my own experience that sometimes I resented an instructor changing my design. I preferred him doing it on one corner of the paper if it were a drawing, or verbalizing his suggestions if I were working on a model. So I'd try to explain the thing, and then eventually, if they wanted me to actually show them how it was done, I would actually work with the plasticine or the water clay.

Riess: That's a very open-ended question, "How are you getting along? Is there anything troubling you?" Did you find that a little hard for some of the students?

Schnier: Oh, because they didn't know, they were lost, they might say, "Is there anything that you would suggest?" Or if it was obvious that the thing didn't comply with the basic principles I was explaining to the class, for example, balance, if the thing was leaning way over and looked like it was going to fall, I would point that out to them. Now, if it were a matter of proportion I might not say anything, because as you noted from the picture of "The Stream," that prize-winning sculpture, the size of the hand in proportion to the body--sometimes there's a distortion of realistic measurements for the sake of emphasis, for the sake of artistic expression.

Riess: How were you using your new-found Buddhist and psychoanalytic orientation in your teaching?

Schnier: I would use it in this respect: You might say it helped me in my teaching, because if a student was doing something that was just so violent and almost ferocious and destructive, I could understand it. For example, one summer I had a pre-med student in my class. We had a pose, a seated nude female that he was working on, and I could see he was exaggerating the abdomen--obviously a pregnant woman. At the end of the project, when the model had stopped posing and the students were all putting their finishing touches on their statues--which I always planned for so that they learned to work without a model--he came into the classroom and took one of the long wooden modeling tools that had a sharp edge on it. He said, "Now I'm going to perform an operation"--supposedly to deliver the child. But he didn't perform an operation, he slashed her torso.

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Riess: Did you call this to his attention, or how did you deal with it?

Schnier: Absolutely not. He was abreacting. Maybe you've run across that word? Oh, he was letting off steam. I was worried about him passing the requirements for medical school. I thought that his destructiveness was too open. There's a theory that surgeons are attracted to their specialty as a sublimated form of their own

Schnier: destructiveness. Instead of destroying, they are now going to make whole, put the pieces together and bring the diseased body back to health again. So this is one of the ways mankind takes care of its aggressiveness. The wise man sublimates his aggression, he turns it into something socially valuable.

Fortunately--to get back to this pre-med student--I ran across him a year or so later over at the Student Union and I asked him how he was getting along, and whether he was going to medical school. He said, "No, I didn't make it. I didn't have a chance." I don't know whether he even graduated, but he didn't make it that year. Some of these people stick to it, and in two or three years they overcome the obstacles that they've encountered as far as admittance to a medical school, or taking the Bar examinations and passing them, and so on.

That's one instance, and there were--you name it. You go down the line of all the stages of human erotic development that maybe you've been exposed to by conversation or reading the freshman introduction to personality study, you'd find that expressed in these works.

I was encouraging them to pick out any subject matter they wished, but I would give them a problem because I was trying to handle the visual aspect of sculpture somewhat the same way that the language teacher builds up the mastery of a language, the grammatical forms that have been found to be valuable in expressing oneself in words. I would teach them different kinds of volumes, the round volume, the concave volume, the cubical volume, and then go down the line. There were so many things in sculpture that I had learned through my own experience because a lot of them weren't in books. For example, duplicating rhythms or opposing rhythms. I found that I was applying it to my own work. Teaching helped me recognize these elements, so I got a lot out of teaching. It was a valuable experience.

Riess: In the thirties was it mostly figure work?

Schnier: No, because the elementary class, the introductory class, didn't have any models. When I began at the university, the elementary course was copying plaster casts exclusively. The students would copy a nose by Michelangelo, or a hand, or a Roman flower, or Lincoln's head, or the torso of Venus de Milo, or the Victory of Samothrace with the wings, and so on. Later I gave that up completely.

Schnier: But before I eliminated using the casts, I encouraged the students to use the cast as a starting point or a point of departure. For example, I vaguely remember a bull's head from either a Greek or a Roman temple. The bull's head was a plaster cast of the original marble carving. Some of the students used that and turned it into a design, pure design, transposing curved surfaces into planes or emphasizing some curves, but not copying the cast. And that I found intrigued many of the students, so they'd put in long hours, because this was their own creation. Prior to that time, a lot of the students would come in for an hour or so and just disappear because it was so boring. It was that way when I took the course from Cummings, who used to come in, take the roll, leave and come back again at twelve o'clock.

Riess: We are talking now about your teaching at Berkeley.

Schnier: Yes.

Riess: The teaching at Arts and Crafts was just one year?

Schnier: One year, yes.

Riess: The teaching at Berkeley then, you're saying, started out with the plaster casts?

Schnier: At Arts and Crafts I had an introductory course and a life modeling course.

When I went to the university, there was the introductory course and a life modeling course that had just been started by the previous instructor. He was trying to build up the department a little because there was a feeling that maybe the art department would start a sculpture section, and then the students would go over to the art department, not come to the architecture department. I'm not sure, I'm just guessing at this. But anyhow, that's what I had.

Factions in the Art Department

Schnier: Then later on I broadened it until there were enough sculpture courses, which, when added to electives and the requirements of the College of Letters and Science, led to a bachelor of science degree

Riess: In the School of Architecture?

Schnier: Yes, in the School of Architecture, which was strange because there was a certain tension between the architecture department and the other departments dealing with art, like the decorative arts department which later became the design department. There was a lot of in-fighting between [Eugen] Neuhaus and Worth Ryder. Once Ryder got on the faculty he resented the emphasis on traditional art and realism, because he had been trained in a different school. So the sculpture setup and the art department, dominated by the painters, didn't get together for many, many years.

Riess: Towards the end of the fifties?

Schnier: I would say the early fifties, when I finally decided I'd be willing to go over to the art department. I'd been asked by Pepper, who was chairman of the art department and with whom I was quite friendly, to join the art department. He went through a lot of planning, and exploring of the situation, and it was voted down by the majority of the painters, because Worth Ryder decided he didn't want it. He was afraid that I would be siding with the other faction, since they had all voted for me. Chiura Obata was one of my great supporters. There was a woman on the faculty named Margaret Peterson. She voted for me too. It was like the two-party system, the Republicans and the Democrats. [laughs]

Riess: And who else was in Worth Ryder's party?

Schnier: Erle Loran and John Haley. I think they were the ones who had the most power. Once I was turned down I followed an old precept, "If he fools me once, shame on him, but if he fools me twice, shame on me." So when our sculpture wing in the architecture department was courted again by Pepper to move into the art department, I decided I would never go there until I was a full professor and safe from being bandied about by the opinionated painter clique. I could see how they were rooting people out. Like Obata, they never gave him a full professorship although he was competent and a well-recognized artist. Then they ran out Margaret Peterson, who was quite a competent painter. So I steered clear of them. Actually I didn't make any approaches at all; it was Pepper who took it up with the dean of the College of Letters and Science, who in turn approached me.

I said, "I'm willing to go, but I have two other men on our staff. It will be up to them to decide. They're younger men and will be affected by the move more than I will. One was Richard O'Hanlon, who recently passed away. He had an associate professorship at that time. The other one was Stefan Novak, who was only an assistant professor, but very competent as a teacher and with the

Schnier: makings of a very gifted sculptor. The two of them were young and they decided they would like to go over into the art department. Well, the first thing that happened was the painters decided they didn't like Novak. He didn't have a big national reputation, he didn't come from the East, and they kicked him out. I couldn't do anything, I was overruled by the majority in the art department.

Riess: But you did have your full professorship by then.

Schnier: Oh, yes. I didn't care, they couldn't do anything.

Riess: To you.

Schnier: Yes, to me or O'Hanlon, but it was a very unpleasant situation.

Riess: When did the decorative arts branch split off?

Schnier: Instead of being accepted by the art department and eventually being incorporated into a college of art, the painting clique would have nothing to do with them. They tried to push them down. I remember, through the grapevine, hearing about how unsupportive they were of the woman who founded the department, Anna Hadwich Gayton. She was a charming, gifted woman, a protégé of Kroeber in whose department she had received her Ph.D. in anthropology.

They were not supportive at all. Eventually, when the College of Environmental Design was established, the decorative art department was brought into that group and the name of the department was changed to the Department of Design. The decorative arts department started out first as--.

Riess: Household Arts.

Schnier: How did you find out about this?

Riess: From earlier histories.

Schnier: But Anna Hadwick Gayton came from anthropology, with a specialty in primitive art. She changed the title to the Department of Decorative Arts and brought in a number of very competent teachers some of whom had gotten their degrees in the university's Department of Art and whose capabilities were of a high order, like Lucretia Nelson. Then she also brought in [Winfield Scott] Wellington, because he was very knowledgeable about decorative arts and had a wonderful collection of his own. Besides, he was an architect. I think he helped bring the department over to the College of Environmental Design.

Riess: It sounds like a case of too many women not able to wield enough power.

Schnier: They tried to bring in some men. [Peter] Voulkos was brought in by the Department of Decorative Arts and so was Ross, who became very well known and is still active.

Riess: [Ed] Rossbach, you mean?*

Schnier: Yes, Rossbach. Did you study in that department?

Riess: No, but that's part of my job, to know these names. [laughs]

When you were teaching your sculpture students, were they learning a kind of vocabulary of art and a way of looking at things aesthetically?

Schnier: I don't know whether they began to use it consciously, but in their work I tried to get them to see that their particular compositions were based on certain motifs that were different from other compositions. Some of the compositions might have very strong movement in them. Also, their attention was called to the feature of repeated forms, which strengthened the expression, or using opposing elements, or overlapping shapes in relief to exaggerate or emphasize the depth element.

By the way, I also taught the use of the figure in relief, or relief composition. That, to a great extent, was inspired by my architectural training, because so much of the early architectural sculpture was applied right to the walls in the form of either low relief, as with the Egyptians and Assyrians, or high relief, as you find in Romanesque and Gothic architecture. So I tried to cover all the bases.

Working with Architecture Department and Students

Riess: Was there a lot of give-and-take between you and the architects who were teaching?

Schnier: Oh, we got along fine, it was a very good relationship and the architectural students were required to take the basic course in sculpture and the life modeling course, so I always had a full class.

*Charles Edmund Rossbach, Artist, Mentor, Professor, Writer, an interview in process, Regional Oral History Office.

Schnier: And many of the architectural students displayed in their work a fine grasp of sculpture to such an extent that had they gone on and become sculptors--like Stefan Novak--they could have excelled.

Novak had his M.A. in architecture when he decided to become a sculptor, and he's practicing now. He does work for architects and continues with his architectural work. There are others who have architectural backgrounds who have become well-known, like Charles Perry who did the big open sculpture in the lobby of the Hyatt Regency down by the Embarcadero and the outdoor sculpture in the garden of the Alcoa building. Have you ever seen his work in the Hyatt Regency?

Riess: Yes.

Schnier: That's an impressive piece. He's well-established, has work all over the United States. Many of the architectural students showed great talent and I enjoyed working with them. Others, of course, were bored by it because they were so deeply involved with architecture per se.

Riess: Did you take a role in departmental matters and committees and all of that, or were you peripheral because you were a sculptor?

Schnier: I was, I would say, more peripheral because I steered clear of committee matters except in the College of Architecture. But if I was assigned something I'd try to do it thoroughly. After I moved into the art department I worked hard to strengthen the sculpture section. I was on the building committee for Wurster Hall.

Riess: Oh, that must have been very interesting.

Schnier: Oh, yes. I got along all right, and it showed me how people, when they're on a committee like that, are interested in obtaining all they can for their own department, spacewise. The chairman of our committee was Professor Sanford Elberg. He did a good job in keeping the committee on an even keel and listening to each one so that my painter colleagues from the art department, although they had two representatives on the committee, weren't able to leave sculpture in the lurch.

Riess: But wasn't sculpture in Kroeber Hall rather than in the College of Environmental Design, Wurster Hall?

Schnier: Yes. I am getting ahead of myself. To go back a bit to our move to the art department, Pepper figured that eventually sculpture would be in the art department, so while they were planning the art

Schnier: facilities in Kroeber Hall he decided they should also plan for sculpture. He just pounded that into the heads of the painters and they decided yes, that would be a good idea.

Eventually the dean of the College of Letters and Science put out an invitation to the sculptors to become members of the art department. So we did get rather generous space in Kroeber Hall compared with what we had before, but not as much as we needed to accommodate a first-class sculpture wing of a leading American university.

After Kroeber Hall was finished, the university started planning Wurster Hall. It was then that our new chairman, Walter Horn, came to me and asked what additional space sculpture needed. It was very fortunate that Horn was chairman then as he was level-headed and fair in dealing with members of his department. He was an art historian. At that time the historians and the painters were in the same department.

So I was on the committee for Wurster Hall, and that's how I got the extra space we needed: the space for a bronze casting foundry, a space for wood and stone carving, the outdoor terrace for working out of doors, a room for advanced sculpture design, and a couple of offices.

Riess: Sculpture ended up being taught in both buildings?

Schnier: Yes, as it is now.

Wire-haired Fox Terriers

Riess: What else was happening in your life in the years before the war? Anything else besides the sculpture commissions and studio works, the analysis and the teaching?

Schnier: Well, entertainment, friends, parties. Having a girlfriend, and the like. I didn't take any extensive trips. Oh, I had some dogs, two wire-haired fox terriers that were constantly breeding, and they were a joy to watch. I learned a little about the birth of living organisms through watching these crazy little wire-hairedes, which gave me so much pleasure.

Riess: Were they pedigreed dogs? You were having them bred?

Schnier: No, they were supposed to be pedigreed, but there were no papers on them. I just enjoyed having them give vent to their feelings, this male and the female, and regularly, every six months, the female became pregnant and gave birth to four or five or six puppies. And then I got used to the idea that some would not survive, that Darwin's theory of "survival of the fittest" applies to all living organisms. Some of them, you could see, they couldn't make it, and other times you'd see one was a runt, but if given the chance, if he was helped a little, he would make it and become maybe the most important one of the litter.

Then I learned how to housebreak them. They were all born in my study-living quarters, one big room that was about half as big as this, where I had my couch-bed and my library and study, and I used it as an office, too. [Verdier Studio, on Russian Hill] What I did was get a big cardboard box from the corner Mom and Pop grocery store, and cut a hole in it for the birth chamber where the female would sleep and prepare her nest. I made it so I could take the top off and help her, or watch her and see if anything went wrong. Of course, when the pups were young, she cleaned them entirely. After they began to crawl, I would put torn newspaper in the box to absorb their droppings and urine. Then I'd start moving the papers out foot by foot by foot until I got the pups to the door of my study that led into my studio. Then I would put the papers all the way to the dog-door in the back of the studio that led into a garden. Eventually they'd go out there, and I'd take up all the papers, but leave some remembrances for them out in the garden. This how they were housebroken.

Riess: That's a fine system.

Schnier: I think that other people do that. I think that may be a traditional way to housebreak puppies if you're raising them yourself. But anyhow, I wanted to answer your question about what other things happened to me during that period.

Sculpture

Golden Gate International Exposition of 1939 on Treasure Island

Schnier: Besides teaching, I was keeping up with my sculpture. I did some commissions. I did those eight big sculptures for the World's Fair on Treasure Island during that time.

Riess: You were approached on those commissions?

Schnier: Yes. Since there were a limited number of sculptors in the Bay Area at that time, in certain cases the architects invited particular sculptors. But, since I was anxious to carry out those seven hours a week of analysis that I told you about--I had a full teaching load, but I needed to make more money--I went out and approached some of the architects.

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Schnier: One of the commissions as I explained earlier [p. 92], I got through Edgar Walter.

Riess: Was the work you did for those buildings work that you considered to be of lasting and significant quality?

Schnier: We had to work so fast that this might have had some effect on the works' deep significance. We started a year or so in advance, just to make the working models and then they had to be enlarged. For example, I did one relief that was twenty-six feet high and eighty-one feet long, and I made a quarter size model for that. That was turned over to a professional group of Italian or German modelers who were trained to do this type of work, to do architectural enlargements from small studies. Some of them were on such a scale that a little elevator was installed to take the workers up and down to the different levels of the scaffold.

Riess: And what was the material that it was done in?

Schnier: Clay. These were all done in clay. A mold was then cast over the finished models. Then the molds were put together and the statues cast in the molds. The statues weren't in permanent material, they were just plaster, except the ones that were done for the Court of Pacifica for Timothy Pflueger. They were cast in concrete and are still over on Treasure Island.

Riess: I have noted here that you did "two highly stylized eagles" on the Arch of the Winds.

Schnier: That architect's name was Lewis P. Hobart. He was sort of a society architect. In addition to those two eagles, I did a large bas-relief to act sort of as a cornerstone of a monumental arch of his building. All of my relationship with his office was through his chief designer. I don't think I even saw the architect himself, up until the very end. The chief designer would come to my studio and approve work at the various stages. I made many small maquettes in the beginning and then enlarged them after each maquette was

Schnier: approved, until it was up to half full-scale. Then it was turned over to the enlarging firm. When they notified me that they'd carried my work as far as they could, and it was ready for my finishing touches, I went over there.

Riess: You mean after the casting was done?

Schnier: No, it was still in clay. The half-size scale model had already been cast in plaster and they worked from it, took measurements from it, and the like. So I went over to touch up the full-size version because they could never capture my exact feeling in such large scale just from a small model. While I was there, the architect for the building came in, and that was the first time I met him.

He looked at it, and said, "You'll have to change"--this and this and this. The figures were rather full. There were three female figures, a central figure, and one on each side. The figures on each side were nude, and the central figure, like the figure of Liberty, was draped. He said the two nude females were out of proportion, that I'd have to thin them down. Of course, he was a society architect and he probably was accustomed to the kind of figures you find around the country clubs, thin, svelte-like women, and so on. "Mr. Hobart," I said, "the original maquette, and also the half full-size model, were approved by your chief designer. This enlargement is according to the design he approved. Here is the design, you can compare it to the finished work. At this late date I can't change it."

He said, "I won't have it on my building." I said, "All right." I didn't care if it was on his building or not. I knew I was going to be paid by the Fair Committee anyhow.

Riess: Of course.

Schnier: Eventually the architectural board for the exposition just put it on another building.

Riess: What is the sculptural panel, "Dance of Life"?

Schnier: That was based on an oriental theme. It was a bas-relief on the northern Tower of the East. I was influenced to a great extent by the reliefs at Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom.

You asked me a question just now, "Were these works outstanding examples of your creative capabilities?" No, I wouldn't say so. I enjoyed doing them. They were hard work because they encompassed

- Schnier: so much space. What they paid us wasn't very much, but it was adequate. I was satisfied. Also, it resulted in a great deal of publicity in the newspapers and national magazines. They had a big, highly-competent public relations department, and their material was distributed all over the United States, if not all over the world. So it was a very desirable setup for a sculptor.
- Riess: It sounds like you suddenly had a lot of work that one year.
- Schnier: For several years, because at that time I also did the Benner relief and the big relief on the Berkeley High School building, at the corner of Grove and Allston. That work I think of as having been more of a creative challenge, and I describe it in my autobiography.
- Riess: In other words, you have no question about that being fine art.
- Schnier: The other was fine art, but it was exposition art, I would say. But this one on the high school science auditorium, it was a challenge to compose that space in what I thought of as being an aesthetically successful way.
- Now, just a minute, let's see if I had anything else on the Fair.
- Riess: For the Court of Pacifica, you did two figures of India.
- Schnier: Yes, two figures representing "The Spirit of India." They're still there because they were cast in concrete.
- Riess: How was your work integrated with the next person's work? Was that all the architect's organizing?
- Schnier: No.
- Riess: Did the sculptors get together in any way?
- Schnier: We met in Timothy Pflueger's office. I don't know if anybody brought up the subject of integrating the work. My sculptor colleagues wanted to be left alone, they wanted to be completely independent and free to do exactly what they wanted.

But the work did come out quite well. The various statues all fitted into the place. Now, when I look back, I think that Pflueger decided the statues should be a certain height, maybe twice lifesize, or maybe one-and-a-half lifesize, as far as the ones on the outside were concerned. There were four sculptors, each of whom did a pair of statues for the four different entrances on the outer rim to the fountain area of the Court of Pacifica.

Anne Bremer Library

Schnier: By the way, did we cover the fact that I did that relief for Albert Bender at the Art Institute in the library in the Anne Bremer room? I'm reminded of that because you brought up the question as to how the work of these eight different sculptors--there were nine including Stackpole, and Sotomayor made ten--who worked on this Court of Pacifica, were integrated into the overall plan.

Riess: Sotomayor isn't a sculptor though.

Schnier: No, he was a painter, but he did a big map of the world that was in high relief, that was in blue ceramics. It's still there.

The reason I go back to the Bender commission was apropos the question you brought up regarding integrating a number of artists' works into a large scale architectural setting. A committee of about five recognized artists was selected by the San Francisco Art Institute to plan the use of Bender's funds which he had donated for decorating the Art Institute's library in memory of Anne Bremer, his cousin. It was this committee that selected me and also the other artists to do work in certain areas of the library. They had that prerogative. I was the only sculptor. Stackpole was also selected but he chose to do a painting. We had a meeting of the participating artists. There were eight painters, and myself, and I brought up the subject that shouldn't there be some similarity in scale of the figures, if they used figures, so that they would be integrated?

Nobody listened to that at all. The other artists downed the idea. That's the nature of artists. They want to be free. So you find different scales in the compositions of the different artists. Some of them are big scale, some of them are small, some of them are crowding their space.

Other Sculptors

Riess: Of the other sculptors who were doing work on Treasure Island, one was Malmquist. Who is Malmquist?

Schnier: Olaf Malmquist. Malmquist was a man with a thorough formal education who also received a scholarship to the American Academy at Rome. He made his living by working for ornamental casting houses that did

Schnier: the ornaments for architects, either in cast stone, terra cotta, or occasionally bronze. He sometimes got private commissions on his own, which he then would have this firm cast. Last time I saw him, he had a studio at one of the big casting companies. They call them architectural modelers.

Riess: So you're saying he's not particularly original?

Schnier: I never said that.

Riess: I'm sorry. The implication to me was that he's just sort of a workman sculptor.

Schnier: Yes, because he was doing the models for the casting firm. That's the way he made his living, and actually, when you read the life of Rodin, and the life of a lot of the French sculptors of the late nineteenth century, early twentieth century, you find that they were doing the same thing. Some of them were working for Lalique making the models, and Rodin did a lot of architectural work.

So it wasn't unusual for a person to do that to make a living until he became so well-established that people would come directly to him and give him commissions. He was selected by this architect who I told you about, who I found so lacking in understanding, and he did a beautiful fountain for him in a traditional sort of style. It was a lovely piece. If you remind me next time, I'll get the book and show you. It's illustrated in Neuhaus' book.

Riess: Was it kept, or destroyed?

Schnier: That was cast in stone and somebody bought it.

Riess: Good.

Schnier: He was very competent unless you go in for far-out work. There's a lot of good art that has been done in the traditional style.

Glass Relief Work

"Summer Night"

Riess: Did you have any pieces in the fine arts exhibition at the 1939 Fair?

Schnier: Yes, yes, I did. I have a photograph of it that I can show you without any trouble, it'd take me two seconds to get it.

Riess: All right. [interruption in tape]

Schnier: Elizabeth Moses, a member of Walter Heil's staff at the de Young Museum, came to me and asked me to have something in the Fine Arts Museum at the World's Fair, and so I made this carved glass relief especially for it. For years I didn't know what had happened to it, after my landlord Paul Verdier bought it, when I went to war.

Riess: What's that name?

Schnier: Paul Verdier, who owned the City of Paris department store where Neiman-Marcus is now. He came to my studio when he found out that I was leaving and bought a lot of my sculptures. He bought "Summer Night," the glass carving that had been shown at the World's Fair. I wondered what had happened to it, because he died shortly after. I thought maybe he had given it to his sister, who lived in San Francisco, I think she's still alive, but about three years ago I got a telephone call from a man and woman in Hollister who said that they had a piece of my sculpture in glass, and described it. It was this piece which they had bought from the City of Paris years ago.

They said, "There's no date on it," and they wanted to know if there was any possibility of finding out when I did it and have the date put on it. So they brought it to my studio, and when I saw it I realized how strong my attachment to it was. The upshot of it was that my wife and I finally bought it back, at many times more than what Verdier had paid me. So I have it now, we have it now.

Riess: Where do you have it?

Schnier: Up at the studio. It's in storage now because I want to make a new frame for it with special lighting.

Riess: Was this your first piece of carved glass?

Schnier: No, I had been encouraged by an art designer consultant in glass, who just did nothing but glass--his name was Grattan English--to do some work for one of his clients. He liked to feature glass in everything he designed, whether it was a new bathroom, a new living room or a remodeling job. So I made some designs for bas-reliefs in glass. I didn't just make a drawing, but modeled it and then made a plaster cast from the clay. The craftsman who did the

Schnier: the glass carving followed the drawing, the plaster cast and also the mold, the negative. This mold meant the most to him because the carving was in reverse. He worked from the back side of the thick slab of glass.

"Summer Night" was carved so deep that the ordinary copper wheel engraving method that they use for carving Steuben glass couldn't be used. Instead, blasting the exposed glass areas with abrasives was resorted to. At each step, the portion that was not to be carved or touched by the abrasive was covered with a rubbery masking material.

Riess: Well, it's beautiful.

Schnier: I've promised it to our daughter. She said it's the one thing she wants if I'm going to leave her anything.

Riess: Who was the model for it?

Schnier: By that time I had been drawing from life so much that I could compose without a model.

Riess: And it's called "Summer Night."

Ordinarily a sculpture exhibition would be material in the round, wouldn't it?

Schnier: Not necessarily, you see reliefs too.

Riess: During that period there was much more relief work being done, wasn't there?

Schnier: I was doing so much relief work because of my architectural training. Most of those commissions I mentioned were for relief sculpture.

Steuben Engraved Glass##

Schnier: I wanted to tell you about the glass. Glass as an art medium was already in the wind. In 1940, Steuben had an exhibition at Gump's, and it was a revelation to the people interested in art because here were glass objects with designs by Picasso, by Matisse, by Leger, by Derain, Paulanship, you name it, engraved on them.

Riess: One-of-a-kind pieces?

Schnier: Yes, in most cases one of a kind. But there were editions of some of the artists' designs because the pieces were actually engraved by the Steuben craftsmen. There may have been forty artists; I remember Noguchi was included and also Foujita. So that aroused people's interest in glass.

About the same time I saw some sculpture at Verdier's gallery done in plastic, fiberglass and polyester resin. They had light inside, and were semi-transparent. They had a mysterious quality that fascinated me so much that I wanted to do something like that. Just prior to the war I did become interested in plastics. I had some things cast in a transparent amber-like plastic.

Riess: Did you destroy the original plaster cast for "Summer Night"?

Schnier: Yes, I did. When I went to war I had to dispose of much of my studio belongings.

Riess: You never considered making an edition of "Summer Night" then?

Schnier: No, not at that time.

Riess: When it was completed, did it require your finishing touches?

Schnier: No, in that case the craftsman was remarkably accurate in capturing my design. It was a joy to have a skilled artisan to whom I could entrust the execution of my work. The finished carving is just exactly how I had designed and modeled it. Everything is exact. He was very good at that. Unfortunately I don't think there's anybody around here anymore who can do that kind of work.

Riess: That exhibition at Gump's sounds extremely interesting.

Schnier: Since that time, they've had several exhibitions of Steuben glass, each one more exciting than the last.

Riess: But at Steuben they don't work in that way anymore. They do have a lot of original pieces, but--.

Schnier: They do some of this work. For example, there are container forms in glass that have the engravings on the inside like the trees in a forest. But a lot of their work today is drifting away from decorated glass enhanced by engraved drawings. Now the work is more just glass which is designed with volumes and mass that is more in the nature of three-dimensional sculpture. The drift is very strong in that direction.

Riess: For the exhibition that was at Gump's, Steuben had commissioned artists for original designs, not sculptors, but painters. I don't think they do that any more.

Schnier: No, they don't do that any more because now they have a very competent staff of artists who can also design three-dimensional glass sculpture.

Riess: But if that first exhibition had been a great success, they would have continued to do it.

Schnier: Yes, I have the book of that first exhibition at Gump's and if you want to take it home sometime to look at it, I'll get it for you next time if you'll remind me.

Some of the painters had no understanding of the enrichment of glass by means of their design. Their works were just like a copy of their drawings and sometimes it was just a line drawing. Picasso's was such an engraving, and Matisse's. Of course, they were valuable from the collectors' point of view of having been done by a famous name.

Pflueger, Eloesser, Bender, and "The Gardener"

Riess: Let's talk about Timothy Pflueger. Did you get to know him very well?

Schnier: Yes. Well, "very well" is a hard thing to define. I got to know him professionally and as a friend. In other words we were on first name terms. He didn't like to be called Mr. Pflueger by artists. I'd like to say, first of all, that he had a particular affinity for people in the art world, he just loved to be around them. I remember at the Beaux Arts Ball, which was an annual or semi-annual event in San Francisco put on by the San Francisco Art Association, he usually had a table. He would sign up for a big table at the ball, and stock it with a supply of liquor. If he saw an artist he would call him over immediately to sit down and have a drink with him. He was easy to work with because he was the kind of person who would encourage the artist to do whatever he felt the urge to do.

In fact, if he saw an artist's work that he liked he'd hire him, and there were no restrictions. He was an outstanding architect as far as the inclusion of art in his buildings. He wasn't hesitant

Schnier: to use art. Artists were not a threat to him. I don't know whether he hired the artists just to enrich his buildings or because he liked the artists, and liked to give them some work, liked to have them kept busy.

Riess: Did you know Diego and Frida Rivera?

Schnier: I met them, but I didn't know them as well as some of the other artists did. I'm reading Dr. [Leo] Eloesser's biography right now. He was one who knew them very, very well.

Riess: Did you know Dr. Eloesser?

Schnier: Yes. I met him at art gatherings. But I never went to any of the musicals in his apartment. The musicians met there regularly every week. He took care of a lot of artists free of charge, he wouldn't accept money from them. I went to see him before I took the trip around the world in '32. He gave me a thorough examination and the necessary shots.

I went sailing once with him. He had a sailboat that he berthed in Sausalito. Saturday afternoon, after he'd seen his patients, he would go over to Sausalito, get on the boat, usually with a friend and sail during part of the night. He would anchor off Red Rock Island, go ashore during the morning and cook up a big breakfast/brunch on the lee side. It was a memorable event to sail with him. I wished I'd gotten to know him better because he was an outstanding, unique person.

Riess: Sounds very unusual, yes.

Schnier: And also the book brings back to memory many of the things that I was aware of, or was experiencing at that time.

Riess: Like what do you mean?

Schnier: The people I knew, and even the doctors he speaks of as being his friends. For example, there was the eye doctor, Otto Barkan, who took care of my eyes for a while. He was prominent in San Francisco. Also the artists he knew like Stackpole and the Sotomayors, who were also my friends. And other doctors too: DeWitt Burnham, who was my doctor for a while, and my wife's doctor for a long time.

He went to China and was there for about five years helping the Communists after he withdrew from helping the Nationalists.

Riess: When you went to him originally, did you say, "I am an artist"?

Schnier: No, he knew that. I had met him already. A lot of my friends were being taken care of by him. I just called up the secretary and said, "I want an appointment with Dr. Eloesser," and I got an appointment. He knew who I was when I entered his office.

Riess: You did a work called "The Gardener," in 1935, and it was given by a wealthy patron to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Schnier: That was Bender, yes. I did this large relief carved in Spanish cedar and then gilded. It was exhibited at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in an exhibition of works by California artists. There was an opening reception. Bender was there as usual, and also a woman, Anita Day Hubbard, who was a columnist for the San Francisco Examiner. She was also in public relations and publicity. She did a lot of publicity for one of our congressmen, [Frank R.] Havenner, from San Francisco. She once wrote up one of the shows that Ruth Cravath had at the Paul Elder Gallery where Ruth had included my work. So we had a long talk and she was very enthusiastic about my work.

Bender was standing right there too. She was a very good friend of Bender's by the way, as she was a good friend of almost all of the well-known people in the city. First thing I knew, Bender said, "I'd like to buy that. How much is it?" I told him a ridiculously low price, \$225. In those days a dollar was as much as twenty dollars is today. So he bought the relief, and turning to Grace McCann Morley, the director of the museum, who was standing right alongside of me, said, "I'd like to donate this to my collection in the museum." That's how it came to be in the permanent collection.

After I came back from World War II some years later, I was taken on a tour of the museum by John Humphrey, who was curator then, and I saw it in the basement storage room. Because of a deep sentimental feeling connected with this particular work, I was very unhappy seeing it put away like that. I'll tell you in a minute. It's important, in a way, as far as my personality goes.

The upshot of it was that I went to the director and asked if I could buy it back. He said, "I'll have to talk with the board of trustees." He did talk to the board and finally notified me that they'd be willing to sell it from the Bender Collection because Bender had never set up any specifications as to how his collection was to be handled.

Schnier: So I bought it back, at much more than I was paid for it, and I still have it, and I like it very much.* It shows a man planting a tree like you get from a nursery--

Riess: With a ball on the bottom.

Schnier: Ball. Oh, you've seen the picture?

Riess: No, but I know that's how you get trees from the nursery.

Schnier: Yes. I did it at a time when I'd never had a place with greenery or plants because prior to that, in the Montgomery Block where I had my first studio, there were no gardens. And when I moved down to Hotaling Place right back of Montgomery Street to a big factory loft, there was nothing green, not a single blade of grass.

I recall once a reporter came to get a story about my work and on leaving asked me if I had any wish, anything I wanted in this world because I seemed to be content. I said, "Yes, I long to have a studio some day with at least one tree in it, a genuine living tree." I got a partial fulfillment of that wish when I moved to the Verdier studio up on Russian Hill because there was an atrium where I had my studio, glass covered, and the walls were all covered with Virginia creeper. And there was a little garden in the rear.

Riess: Why do you call it the Verdier studio?

Schnier: Because he owned the whole complex, Paul Verdier. I did that piece, "The Gardener," before I moved up there. Actually I did that at a studio I had across the street from New Joe's restaurant on Broadway. Did you ever go to New Joe's restaurant, where the cooks were in full view? You could sit at the counter and see them cooking the steaks or the veal scalloppine.

Riess: Yes.

*In February, 1986, Mitchell Wolfson, Jr., a prominent collector from Miami, Florida flew out to see my sculpture with the intention of acquiring some of my work, which he had seen in photographs, for his museum, the Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection of Decorative and Propaganda Arts at the Miami-Dade Community College in Miami. When he saw "The Gardener" he said, "I must have that for my museum. How much is it?" I replied, "Twenty-eight thousand dollars." He pulled out his checkbook and bought it after assuring me it would always be available for viewing by the gallery visitors.

Schnier: I had a studio directly across the street, up on the third floor of the building, the one next to the bank that's on the south side of the street. Of course, there was no living foliage around there. That's where I did it.

Eventually I had a complete fulfillment of that dream, or wish, when I bought this place here in Lafayette. That whole hillside you see through the window was absolutely barren--the typical rolling California hills with an occasional oak, but this had no oaks on it--and I planted all those trees that you see. The pines were seedlings and the redwoods I planted a little later. Some of them were in five gallon cans, and a few were larger. They soon caught up with the pine trees which were planted earlier. So before that whole forest over there, there wasn't a tree except volunteer black walnuts and willows down in the creek.

The Commemorative Coin

Riess: How did you get the commission for the half dollar?

Schnier: That was done while I was in that studio across the street from New Joe's, on Broadway in 1936. When the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge was approaching completion, Frank Havenner, our congressman to Washington, presented a bill in Congress to have a commemorative half dollar struck off to celebrate its completion. The job of finding a person to design it he turned over to Anita Day Hubbard, and I was the first person she asked. I was delighted to work for her because she seemed so enthusiastic about my work, and it was a very important commission. I thought designing a coin is not very common because the government keeps a certain coin design in circulation for fifty, sixty, seventy years sometimes.

Riess: Was it a negotiable coin?

Schnier: Oh, sure, it's a fifty-cent piece. I have one in the case here.

Riess: What's happened to all of them? How many were made?

Schnier: They struck off only 100,000. That's a very small issue. And they were all done at the San Francisco mint, which makes it less desirable than if they were struck off at all three mints. Then people would want to buy all three coins to fill out their collection. Be that as it may, it has gone up in value considerably.

Riess: Were they all collected instantly?

Schnier: Pretty much. If they weren't bought by individuals, they were bought by coin dealers who wouldn't buy just ten or twenty. They'd buy two, three, four, or five hundred, because they just kept them in their safes and as the demand for them grew, they'd have them available. In the meantime, the price goes up on these commemoratives, even though their face value remains at fifty cents. You can go in any grocery store and buy fifty cents worth of salami with them today, but San Francisco sold them for a dollar and a half. That was the understanding, that they had the prerogative to sell them for whatever they wanted. The banks took over selling them with no charge, in order to support the celebration. They used the profits to put on the celebration. They doled the money out to different groups to build floats and participate in the parade when the bridge opened.

Riess: How much money did you get for that?

Schnier: I forget, but at that time it was a nice sum.

Riess: And how many did you keep?

Schnier: I wasn't allowed to keep any. I had to buy them.

Riess: How many did you buy?

Schnier: I bought two or three at that time. When I was talking to Thompson about it he said, "If I were in your place, and since I know a lot about stamp collecting, I know how the value of things like that goes up, I'd buy quite a few." So I finally collected all the money I could and I bought a hundred or more of them. Then when I came back from the war and I wanted to buy my own house up on Russian Hill next to the Verdier place--which I couldn't get, it was occupied--I cashed in these coins with a dealer. Added to my war bonds, which I'd saved, I had enough money to put the down payment on the house, and then I took a mortgage on it for the rest.

I think I saved ten or fifteen of them which eventually I gave to friends. I sent one to Paul Verdier, and then I sent one to President Roosevelt--he was a stamp collector. I sent them to different friends of mine, and they were very grateful to receive them. I kept a few, which I have now, for my children: One for my daughter, Rebecca, one for my stepson, Max, one for my son, Claude. There's one in the cabinet here. So that's all I have now.

But a friend of ours, a woman who is a rockhound and who has gotten into the hobby of collecting a few odd things here and there, decided she wanted one of my coins. At a coin exhibition she found

Schnier: a dealer who had one, and she bought it. She paid about \$150 for it several years ago. And my wife's cousin, who just came back from a trip east, phoned me the other day to tell me that he was in a little town in Arkansas, passed by a coin dealer's shop, and this fellow had one of the coins. Evidently he either needed the money or the like because my cousin was able to buy it for \$125. And I told him, "That was a bargain!"

Riess: It's a very beautiful little piece.

Schnier: I especially like the side with the bear, it's sort of uncluttered. But the side with the bridge, the water, the ferry boat and the Berkeley hills is rather detailed.

Master's Degree in Social Institutions

[Interview 6: August 21, 1985]##

Riess: Tell me about this.

Schnier: [looking at his own master's thesis] Some people have actually signed it out of the library! My God! I'll be damned.

Riess: Is that false modesty?

Schnier: No, because I don't think it's--I was trying to get my Master's degree with that woman who was ready to cut my throat. I'll tell you about that. She was an associate professor.

Riess: Here are the names of your thesis committee.

Schnier: Yes, her name wasn't on it.

Riess: I started to read it, but I didn't understand what the thesis was about.

Schnier: In just a few words, it was based on Teggart's theory upon which you might say the whole Department of Sociology was founded. His theory was that there's no such thing as actual progress. Progress is just change. A lot of the things we think of as progress are really not conducive to happiness in civilization. For example, the atomic bomb, the big battleships with eighteen-inch guns, and chemical warfare, and so on. Someone may refer to all this as progress in military armament, but Teggart felt it was just change. That's what life is: That we are probably no more happy now than the primitives were.

Schnier: In reading history you frequently run across this idea that change is progress. Also there are a lot of subjective evaluations in art history, in history in general. I went through a lot of art histories, the writings of as many people as I could get ahold of, or the ones in whom I was interested, and found out that there were a lot of loopholes in their presentations, that it was really a matter of opinion regarding what was progress.

Riess: Teggart founded the department on the strength of that idea?

Schnier: I wouldn't say that Teggart used that as the single foundation stone, but he was originally a historian, and I guess he was fed up with that, or for some reason he felt it was time that the university had a Department of Sociology. But he started it as a department called "Department of Social Institutions," which now is the Department of Sociology. His freshmen lecture was devoted pretty much exclusively to the idea of progress, and he quoted a number of authors who had written on the subject. That's what we studied.

Riess: You wanted an advanced degree?

Schnier: Yes. A higher academic degree.

Riess: A higher academic degree. Why didn't you do it in art?

Schnier: There was a lot of conflict in the art department between the "modernists" and the "traditionalists." The "modernists" were primarily followers of Worth Ryder, their ringleader, and the "traditionalists" were headed by Eugen Neuhaus. There was another historian there when this started and he was on Neuhaus' side. I hesitated to get mixed up with them. I would have been persona non grata because they didn't know on which side I stood. I sort of tended to be a "traditionalist" at that time because my work was all figurative. But then when Walter Horn joined the department I began thinking of working for a master's and a Ph.D. under him--not necessarily in art history, but the theory of art--and I did take some courses with him. Horn was a superior teacher and a valuable addition to the university.

I chose Teggart's department as a result of having lunch one day with a young lady at the Black Sheep restaurant. We sat at a table with a woman she knew who was an associate professor in the social institutions department. Her description of the department offerings was so interesting I decided to get my master's degree there. The Department of Social Institutions was basically synonymous with sociology. Soon after enrolling I had the feeling that the subject was built on a big bowl of jelly, and every author had his or her own opinion.

Riess: But there's no science behind it, you're saying.

Schnier: There's no science, no. Anyhow, I just sat there and listened, I wasn't enthralled by what they were preaching, especially the associate professor through whom I had been introduced to the department, and maybe it became evident, just by body language. Then, when it came to writing a term paper, I could see how rich the material would be to make a psychoanalytic study, and it didn't take me long to find out that she was adamantly opposed to that. [laughing] She wasn't inquisitive, she wasn't like some of the other professors who would encourage the student to, "Go along this path, see what it leads to." To lead the student out, give the student free rein. Maybe something very valuable would come out of it.

Just let me tell you how she was going to cut my throat, so to speak. When it came to applying for the master's degree--that had to be done six months in advance or maybe longer--I went to see her because she was the advisor for the graduate section. I sat in her office waiting while she got through with an earlier student who was also applying for a master's degree. Since space was at a premium, the waiting student sat in the same office with the advisor. I listened to their conversation. This man, who may have been a pet of hers or whom she thought of differently than she thought of me, said he'd like to apply for the master's degree and he wanted to select one of the two choices he had. One was to take a comprehensive examination, the other was to write a thesis. She listened to him when he said he would like to write a thesis, and she said, "All right, you are free to make that choice," and she signed his application. He left.

I then sat down next to her at her desk and explained to her that I would like to select choice B, to write a paper just as the previous student had. She said, "You can't, you've got to take the comprehensive." I said, "Why?" She said, "Well--" and went on a long story. I don't remember the details, but she was trying to make me take the comprehensive, and I knew I would fail because I'd have to go back and study a lot of authors. There was Spencer, there were a whole bunch of authors who the department used as chapters in their Bible in preparation for the study of social institutions.

I didn't have the time or the interest to go through that--I had more interesting reading to do. I was studying Freud, practically everything that was published on psychoanalysis, and all of his own works. I'd gone through every one of his books, and many of them--I'm not going to bother to take time to look up how many times I've

Schnier: read some of them to try to master them. I'm not a fast master of theories that other people present. I've got to digest their theories and ideas. Anyhow, I had more valuable things to do than read all those writings based on a priori judgment for the comprehensive

So I became really anxious at that point because I knew I would never pass the comprehensive, because I don't have a photographic mind. I didn't want to spend the time; it would have taken me about a year to prepare. So I said, "I want to take the B, and I don't see any reason why the gentleman who preceded me was accepted on the B plan and I am not accepted." She began to hedge and haw, and finally she could see she was trapped. I could have brought it up with the administration. And so she signed my thesis application, and that's how I came to write the paper.

Riess: Did you keep your psychoanalysis out of this paper?

Schnier: Oh, yes. I learned that from the first paper I did, "The Cornerstone Ceremony." The man who graded those papers was a teaching assistant, and I was in his section, and I could see how antagonistic he was when the subject was brought up.

They had me pigeon-holed because I'd been giving some talks to various groups. I remember being invited to talk over the radio on a program that was broadcast in the Berkeley area.

Riess: Why the antagonism, briefly?

Schnier: The people didn't understand psychoanalysis. It was a mystical system in their estimation, and also it had a lot of sex in it. A lot of people are frightened by this subject, they have anxiety about it. It brings up thoughts of wickedness, of something against religious beliefs. I find that so many people are still in that category.

Alfred Kroeber, and Schnier's Psychoanalytic Studies

Kroeber and Schnier

Riess: Even in an intellectual community?

Schnier: Oh, you talk about it being a free intellectual community! But you have in every group highly opinionated individuals. I used to talk to them at The Faculty Club. And look at Kroeber, a wonderful scholar,

Schnier: who wanted to get rid of his psychoanalytic library. Part of it is over there on the shelf. He turned it over to me because he was a friend of Thompson's; they were boyhood friends. I had met him in another context, but he knew about my interest and that's how he happened to offer me his library, because he wanted to get rid of it. It was a--

Riess: An embarrassment to him?

Schnier: Yes. I think also it didn't help him at the university. He could have done some remarkable research, but I think he saw the writing on the wall: If you want to play ball in the university you play ball with material that is accepted.

Now remember, this is almost fifty years ago, as far as Kroeber's experience went. Times have changed now. I mentioned how many faculty members were analyzed just in that small group of mine--Pepper and his wife, and I forget how many others.

Riess: But they probably did not talk about it then.

Schnier: No, they didn't, and also it doesn't mean that they were friendly towards it either. They might accept it on the one hand but reject it on the other. They may have ended being more antagonistic because a lot of times the material it brings up is frightening, and if they have a short-term analysis, and depending upon who the analyst is, how competent he is. A lot of people I know have been in analysis, but they don't talk about it.

Riess: Kroeber's own analysis in New York began about 1917.

Schnier: Yes, did you find that date in some record? Or are you just surmising?

Riess: I know it was before he married Theodora.

Schnier: Oh, yes, you're right. (Listen, I'm going to close this door here, there seems to be a draft. Maybe it's this one.) Yes, you're right, because we're talking about 1935 when he gave me his library, and he was lecturing at the Paul Elder Gallery probably early thirties or late twenties. So he had his analysis before 1920, or thereabouts.

Riess: He went into analysis because he thought that he was losing his mind because he had that inner ear disease.

Schnier: Oooh.

Riess: That's part of why he went to New York to have an analysis. He was really upset because he was losing his balance, falling down, and all of that. Did you know that?

Schnier: No. Is that in her book, in the biography? [interruption in tape]

Anthropology students had a Kroeber Anthropology Club. The hall was named after him, Kroeber Hall, while he was still alive. I don't think they very often did that.

Riess: That's why it surprises me that he would abandon psychoanalysis. He was so well-established, he wasn't threatened by what people thought.

Schnier: I think he figured that his colleagues, international colleagues in the anthropological field, were going in a certain direction; they were talking about culture, the origin of culture. I used to run across that word frequently in articles about the activities of the anthropologists. So he was in a different ball park by then and he was involved with material that he and his colleagues were researching. I'm not surprised.

He was friendly with me. I went to see him about a Ph.D. in the Department of Anthropology because Thompson said, "Why don't you try anthropology?" and I found it fascinating. His book on anthropology is a little classic. You know, the textbook for the students, that famous book he wrote became the Bible of the young anthropologist for many, many years after Boas had been superseded. I went to see him, and he said, "Fine, come take a Ph.D. with us." He introduced me to [Robert H.] Lowie. I was on the faculty by then, and we had lunch at The Faculty Club. I was only an assistant professor, and at that time the ruling was, if you hadn't received tenure you could still apply and work for a Ph.D. at Cal and be accepted. But once you had tenure it wasn't allowed, because of the possibility of conflict of interest on the part of the faculty members.

So Kroeber and I were friendly, he accepted me--although, he wrote me a letter apropos the book I wrote called Sculpture in Modern America which the University of California Press published. He complimented me very much and told me how interesting it was because he knew some of the works by the New York sculptors--he had a broad mind, he knew their work and their style--but he went on to say, "It bothers me to think of you being so involved in something

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY
BERKELEY 4, CALIFORNIA

December 12, 1952

Mr. Jacques Schnier
1637 Taylor Street
San Francisco 11, California

Dear Schnier:

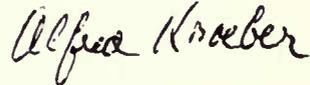
Many thanks for your Bird Symbol as well as your book on modern sculpture. You are right: I had not seen the latter. I have read the text with great interest and very much like your selection of subjects illustrated. You certainly have a feeling for simplicity of design, mass, surface and texture in the work of others akin to your ability to express the same qualities in your own work.

I liked what you said about Paulanship whom I have always admired, but I did not realize that he rated so high. By the way, his big group "Buddies" exhibited at the Metropolitan last winter shows the same clean-cutness he always had, but without the old grace.

You may or may not be interested in one strong residual feeling I had from an evening with your book. It seems a great pity that Jacques Schnier is doing less and less sculpture and more ~~and~~ other things. Dozens of people can teach and do therapy for one that can express form as you can.

With warmest regards.

Sincerely yours,



A. L. Kroeber

ALK:LLD

- Schnier: else when you do such beautiful sculpture." He praised my sculpture, but he was saying, "Why are you getting involved and so excited about psychoanalysis?" He felt there were a lot of people who could do psychoanalysis, but not many who could do art. I don't know about that. In psychoanalysis, as Jones told me--we were talking about different analysts who had fallen by the wayside and had broken, cracked up, like [Sandor] Ferenczi--Jones said, "Yes, many are called, but few are chosen."
- Riess: Apparently when Kroeber was having his analysis, the analyst, who probably was about the same age as he was, enjoyed so much talking to Kroeber about anthropology that Kroeber realized that he was wasting his time, and that it was too much of a peer relationship. He confronted the analyst with this, and the analyst agreed that it was a problem. So the analyst referred him to his son-in-law. So then Kroeber's analysis was done with a man who was younger than he, the son-in-law of the original analyst, but apparently he was able to make the transference, and have a successful analysis.
- Schnier: Do you recall the name?
- Riess: No, I wondered if you knew the name.
- Schnier: Does the name Gravens ring a bell? Gravens was Thompson's analyst, and I wondered if Thompson had recommended Gravens to Kroeber, or if Kroeber found out about him on his own, or whether Thompson was influenced by Kroeber being analyzed. I have it in the literature. I'll look it up.*
- Riess: Okay. Then, when he came back to U.C., after the analysis, he had a practice of his own, and an office, for about three years.
- Schnier: Yes.
- Riess: And then, apparently, he felt that lacking an M.D., "he wouldn't have real control, and that the subject he really controlled was anthropology.**" So I think that Kroeber was saying to you, also, that the subject you "controlled" was sculpture.
- Schnier: Yes. And at that time, of course, there was very little talk about malpractice insurance in a field like that, but then, in later years, after several analysts committed suicide, this matter of malpractice became very serious.

*Kroeber was analyzed by Dr. Smith Ely Jelliffe and later by his son-in-law Dr. Stragnell. Theodora Kroeber, Alfred Kroeber: A Personal Configuration, University of California Press, 1970, p. 102.

**Theodora Kroeber-Quinn, Timeless Woman, Writer and Interpreter of the California Indian World, an oral history conducted 1976-1978, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1982, p. 91.

Schnier: One of the famous cases in this particular area was that of a European analyst who came here and found it difficult to pass the M.D. examination to be licensed, but decided to practice not as an M.D. but as a psychotherapist, or guru. He had a case where a client committed suicide, and it was in the papers, and he was brought to court by the family. Fortunately in his case the M.D.s were all on his side. He was a competent, likeable person, I had met him. So it ended in his favor, he didn't lose his fortune, and he wasn't accused of malpractice.

But there were other cases, and it became very serious, I remember. Siegfried Bernfeld, who was a Ph.D. from Vienna, and a member of the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Association and Institute, was training young psychiatrists to be analysts because he had a very good background and had studied with Anna Freud. He had been the secretary of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society when it was going international. He had a case of a suicide on his hands, and the group, his M.D. colleagues at the institute, went to his support.

Anyhow, I think Kroeber did the wise thing, just like me. As I look back upon it, I have no regrets. It would have been a headache. And also, I don't know to what extent it would have been satisfying, because it's only in the creative aspect that I would find pleasure. It would be a challenge to help the analysands. In situations where they couldn't be helped the challenge remained as to why they couldn't be helped, or why I lacked the ability to help them.

If you just keep on listening and allow them to abreact, release the pressure on their mind, it's going to be helpful. Gradually, if there's something obvious that you can point out about which you're not making too much of a subjective interpretation, you might help them out of a dilemma and get them straightened out and take a path that would be in the direction of reality.

Integrating Art and Psychoanalysis

Schnier: But the thing that was appealing was solving some of these problems. Like in "The Cornerstone Ceremony," which was the first thing I ever wrote in the field of psychoanalysis. As I delved into it I found all of these varied forms of it. It was fascinating, but it all dealt with destroying an object. Well, let's not go into that. You read it.

Riess: It's not an object, it's a person.

Schnier: A person. I should say "an animate object" because later on animals would be destroyed. The great fear--there's a certain word that they use when a certain situation is charged with psychological energy: it's loaded. And that was the building, building a structure. And maybe the structure was the woman's womb, the mother's womb. That's my deduction in the paper.

Be that as it may, that was the fascination. And it comes through an identification with Freud, because all of his papers represented new interpretations of psychological situations. And also he applied it to a different field, like anthropology. His study Totem and Taboo is a masterpiece. But the anthropologists have condemned it because he was trying to interpret what happened thousands of years ago when there's little surviving evidence.

Riess: That's the jelly.

Schnier: But he had so much information from present times to use as a possible support for his interpretation of something that happened where we have no pre-history records. To me it sounds very reasonable. The anthropologists, when it first came out, condemned it, as also Kroeber did in his review of it.

Riess: But you're saying that you think the most valuable contribution of psychoanalysis has been more to history and interpretation of events, rather than the one-to-one relationship to client?

Schnier: No. I was talking about how attractive his writings were for me. It was like a work of art. He finished this one, and then something would suggest another idea. It would even go to anthropology, and also art. Primarily, almost all of his studies were on certain kinds of psychological disturbances. Anomalies, and the like. I don't know if you've ever heard of the Rat-Man paper? His early cases, written before 1900. And his interpretation of dreams.

Riess: Kroeber's letter to you in 1952 concludes: "It seems a great pity that Jacques Schnier is doing less and less sculpture, and more and more other things. Dozens of people can teach and do therapy, for one that can express form as you can."*

Schnier: [laughs] It was a really nice comment of his, in a way, but I think it also indicates how ambivalent he had become, or even more, you might say, positive about his breaking away from psychoanalysis.

*From Interview 7, tape 13a.

Schnier: On the other hand, I felt very happy when my writings were so well received by the professional high moguls in psychoanalysis, by people who were quite exacting about one's interpretations and one's understanding of what Freud was discovering about the idea of the unconscious. If an aspirant started going into mystical theory or subjective interpretations like Jung, they were very critical. These were the people who were on the editorial boards of the professional magazines who were reviewing my writing. And then, on top of that, to have some of my papers selected for reprint in The Yearbook of Psychoanalysis, alongside papers by men who were recognized long-time leaders in the profession, was a strong boost to my confidence. If you knew any of the names, you'd find a lot of them here. And these papers were selected from around the world.

Riess: What year was this?

Schnier: My first paper that was republished appeared originally in the American Imago, July, 1947. It was called "Dragon Lady," and was reprinted in The Yearbook, 1948, Volume IV. That was soon after I came back from the war and shortly after I started presenting papers to the psychoanalytic study group that we organized. [see p. 174] Then the second paper selected first appeared in the American Imago, June, 1952 and was reprinted in The Yearbook of Psychoanalysis, Volume IX, 1953. Shortly after that, with Volume X, they stopped publishing. And then they started a new series called The Annual Survey of Psychoanalysis. That contained brief digests of all the publications on psychoanalysis from all over the world for that year.

Then on top of that, Ernest Jones was so complimentary about my writings. He was also a very strict Freudian. Anything that smacked of mysticism or subjective interpretation was not acceptable to him. He believed in more of a scientific approach, "scientific" in quotation marks because we have never seen the unconscious. Technicians are unable to take a myelogram or X-ray of it. All we know about it is what people say about it, talk about it.

Riess: If you put your "scientific" in quotation marks, then what have you achieved?

Schnier: Oh, I think it's scientific: you can delete the quotation marks! Now, today, with all the research that is done by the psychologists who are willing to go through statistics and the like, of dream analysis, and the different ways they have of using different medicines, for instance, sodium pentothal, so that the person begins to--it's like hypnosis, they uncover material that has been repressed, that's been unconscious. There are so many research projects that are being carried on by psychologists, and psychoanalysts.

Riess: You've talked about having your work republished in the yearbook as if this is the crowning achievement of your life in a way, but you don't mean that, do you?

Schnier: I think that it may be overlooked by someone regarding my work. My psychoanalytic research in the field of art is to me quite important. I have become rather proud of this achievement.

Riess: And do you feel that it's sort of an intellectual balance, that this is the intellectual part of you, and the other part is the right brain creative part of you? Is it that idea, that you're a balanced man?

Schnier: Absolutely not. I believe there is no difference in the unconscious process that leads one individual to make a scientific discovery and another person to create a work of art. I consider both achievements to be definitely creative. The satisfaction I obtained from a psychoanalytic discovery was exactly similar to my pleasure from creating a sculpture composition.

Riess: You're saying that the approach you had to sculpture was as strenuously rigorous as your approach to psychoanalytic theory?

Schnier: Yes, or to put it the other way, because sculpture came first, I wouldn't like to have this overlooked as a side interest. It is part of my creative life. That's why I am making what you interpret as an issue. It is an important phase of my creative achievement.

Riess: Can you make a statement about how essential the psychoanalytic work is to your sculpture today?

Schnier: Yes. I think I know what sculpture means to me, and that has led me to arrive at my own personal theory about the significance of art, in general, for creative people, and the significance of art for culture as a whole. Also, I've come to my own interpretation as to the origin of art, which has been a subject of investigation for hundreds of years, by philosophers and aestheticians, and anthropologists.

I remember talking to Kroeber casually about these new findings. He said, "Oh, art, it comes from the play instinct." I'm not surprised, because even Freud didn't have a clear-cut understanding of the origin of art, but his findings, to me, could help one arrive at an understanding of the origin. The play instinct. Maybe if one studied the play instinct, it may be that that is tied up with the same drive that leads one to actual creativity. But actually, I find animals are playing, I find puppies are playing. You look at documentary films and watch little lion cubs, and bear cubs, the way they play around--.

Riess: Their play is partly practicing the aggressive behavior they need to learn to survive.

Schnier: Be that as it may, it didn't ring a bell with me when Kroeber said, "Art, it comes from the play instinct." There are a couple of writers of the turn of the century who made that the basis of the interpretation of art. There were anthropologists who were writing about the subject.

To get back to your question, psychoanalysis has meant a lot to me, it was very profitable. I think those ten years when I was concentrating on it and attempting to verify some of this material by observations of myself as well as the people I was trying to help, were probably the most important in my life.

Riess: To reiterate, just what are the years?

Schnier: From 1933 to '42. I was with Thompson nine years, and then when I came back from World War II, I worked with a person whom he had trained for a while. He was a young man, younger than I was, the only person available around here except some of the fuddy-duddies out at the analytic society.

Riess: So you mean the ten years of analysis. In other words, not the ten years that you went on to theorize about it for yourself.

Schnier: Oh, no. I'm talking of just laying the foundation. Later was when I gradually came to the conclusion as to what is the significance of the artistic drive. What does the finished work signify? So that went on beyond the actual period of analysis. [end insert]

Publishing Studies##

Riess: I notice that your cornerstone ceremony paper is written from The Faculty Club. That's given as your address. Why is that?

Schnier: I'd come back from the war and that's where I was living in 1946. I had written that paper for my social institutions IA freshman class, in '36 or '37. After I came back, a few of us who had studied with Thompson formed the Psychoanalytic Education Society. We used to meet once a month and various members would either present a book review or an original paper, or we would invite guest speakers. Sometimes we invited psychiatrists or sociology professors

Schnier: or psychologists who presented papers. As one of my first papers to the society, I took "The Cornerstone Ceremony," my social institutions freshman paper, and revised it. I used all that material, and gathered much more supporting evidence, and rewrote it before I presented it.

Riess: It was published in the Psychoanalytic Review in 1947, but it was written in '46, in The Faculty Club.

Schnier: I came back in '46 from the war. I had to find a place to stay because my studio up on Russian Hill was no longer available. Somebody else had moved in there. It wasn't mine, I had rented it from the owner. So I rented a room at The Faculty Club, and that's where I lived for a while, because they had, and they still may have, about ten, fifteen, twenty rooms for bachelor faculty members or widowed faculty members. That answers your question?

Riess: Yes. How long did that group continue?

Schnier: It continued for about fifteen years. It was helpful, we enjoyed it. Of course it inspired me, it stimulated me to continue my research.

Some of those papers I wrote I am very proud of. Later on they were selected internationally to be published in anthologies. And then I am proud of the fact that Jones wrote, in his first volume on Freud which he gave me, that very complimentary inscription in which he complimented me for my scientific research.

Riess: Obviously you did a tremendous amount of research.

Schnier: I was trying to be as scholarly as possible and not make the papers subjective. I was inspired by Freud's writing, how he gave credit to his sources. He was so generous in that way. I felt also this made it more authentic, it supported it. Also, I learned from the university that they stressed this matter of giving your sources whenever you were writing a paper. Especially in a Ph.D. thesis, that would be extremely important because men on the review committee would say, "Where'd you get this information? Where'd you get that?"

Riess: Do you believe that there is such a thing as a mid-life crisis, and do you think that you had one around that time?

Schnier: A mid-life crisis? I know in the case of women there's menopause, and it may affect her emotional life or her sex life. There are theories about men also having a menopause, but I haven't found any sign of it. [chuckles]

Riess: I didn't actually mean to ask anything quite that direct. But lots of people now refer to a man's mid-life crisis as the point when he decides that the career he has been pursuing is not making him happy enough, and the direction of his life is not making him happy enough-- and he goes off and opens a restaurant. Or goes off and--

Schnier: Does something else.

Riess: Yes, does something else.

Schnier: And he's glad to get rid of the job. With university professors some of them like to continue with their research. Kroeber did, and I think Horn did, he wrote that book with Ernest Born on the chapel monastery in Europe.

Now, to answer your question, instead of going on a long cock-and-bull story, I never did. [laughter] Once I resigned myself to giving up psychoanalysis, I had no trouble going back to sculpture and catching up, so to speak. But actually during all that time I did continue with my sculpture to augment my university salary. Then, after the war, I still did a few commissions. For example, the John Galen Howard relief which I was commissioned to do by the architectural alumni association of the university which was installed in The Faculty Club in 1960.

Riess: I see, okay. When you say that you were catching up, that's catching up with your own--

Schnier: Sculpture.

An Early Friendship, Jim Hart

Riess: Did that decision free you to get married?

Schnier: Before we get on the subject of marriage, I would like to take up a couple of things that have come to my mind that might be of some interest, maybe, to you because of your connection with The Bancroft Library. I'd like to tell you about my early acquaintance with Jim Hart.

Riess: Okay. I was just free-associating from Freud to your wife. [laughs]

Schnier: Yes, and I'll talk about her in a minute. I was thinking that eventually she would come up, after World War II when we got married.

Schnier: But I want to tell you how I met Jim Hart. You heard me talk about the Modern Gallery, which was a cooperative on Montgomery Street. It was right in front of Stackpole's studio. When it came my turn to have an exhibition there, as was the case with all the exhibitions, the artist who had the exhibition had to take charge of the gallery while his show was on because we had no funds to pay for a secretary or an attendant.

One day I was in the gallery during my show and a gentleman came in. He was very much interested in what he saw. We got to talking and he introduced himself. His name was James Hart. I didn't know who he was but I could see he was curious, and he was young. I think he was a student at Stanford at the time. We sort of hit it off, and he began inviting me to dinner at his home on California Street.

His parents lived in an apartment house across the street from the Pacific Union Club. It was up on the third or fourth floor. I never met his parents, so evidently they were on trips or maybe he would invite me on evenings when they weren't going to be home so that we'd have a chance to talk. He had a few things he had collected, art works, and we developed a friendship of a tenuous sort.

He was primarily interested in writing and what was called "the little magazines " at that time. When I had done a commission for my future father-in-law, Jim asked me if he could publish a picture of it, an illustration, in his magazine called the Hesperian. Then we lost track of each other. I think maybe he went back east to graduate school, but be that as it may, I didn't see him again until I met him at the university when he joined the faculty. Now I see him occasionally at Mills College functions, because he's a member of their board of trustees.

Riess: Are you also a trustee?

Schnier: No, but my wife is a graduate of Mills and we go to some of their affairs.

World War II

Riess: Well, that's interesting. Tell me about your war years. In your autobiography in the Irving Stone book, There Was Light, you kind of viewed yourself as not wanting to hasten to war because you weren't that interested in killing your fellow man. You didn't have to go into the army, did you?

Schnier: Yes and no. I was single but forty-four years old at the time and probably my number would never have been called up. However, I was strongly influenced by Thompson, who was a very loyal American. He had been a naval officer in World War I and felt that if you lived in a country you were duty-bound to serve it in a time of need. Of course, coming from a, you might say a refugee family, immigrants who fled--didn't exactly flee but my father decided to get out of there, it wasn't the kind of country he wanted to live in--I also had this feeling of wanting to serve. I could have gone into the war industry like a lot of artists did, in the shipyards to weld steel or in the ship lofts where they drew the patterns for cutting the steel for the hulls for the freighters. I could have gone into so many different fields of the war effort, but I decided I'd go into the service.

Getting a Commission

Schnier: I applied for a commission because I had certain necessary qualifications. I remember I passed the physical for the navy for a certain type of commission, but just when they called me up their quota was filled.

The university had a department for placing faculty members in officer's positions. I was informed about an opening in the air corps in camouflage. They especially needed people with engineering and art background. So I went there. I remember it was on Fourth Street, the Air Force Personnel Procurement Office. The captain who had charge of personnel hiring was so happy when I told him my qualifications as an artist and an engineer, and that I had been giving a course on camouflage to some of the architectural students at the university, a graduate seminar, that he couldn't wait to give me an application form. I started to fill it out and he said, "This will be for second lieutenant." I said, "I've been interviewed by the navy, and have been offered a higher rank."

He said, "Oh, you are being considered by another branch of the service?" I said, "Yes." And he took the paper, tore it up, and said, "I'm awfully sorry because you have all the qualifications, but there is a ruling, a government ruling, that one branch cannot compete with another when they are considering a person for a commission." So I lost that, too.

Schnier: But I wanted to get in, so I enlisted in the air force as a buck private in an engineering company assigned to do the engineering, to lay out the field and buildings or whatever engineering was required at Hamilton Air Force base. Nothing to do with the airplanes, though. After I was in that outfit for a few months, they took applications for Officer Candidate School where enlisted men qualified for a commission. This was for the Corps of Engineers at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. I was accepted and upon completion of the course I became a second lieutenant in the United States Air Force.

Just after I got my commission at the big ceremony in the auditorium, I was told to go over to a certain office and pick up my orders to go overseas. Earlier, when I'd been interviewed by the placement officer who asked me what I'd like to do--maybe he thought I ought to stay there and be an instructor at Fort Belvoir-- I told him that I'd been overseas, I'd been in the Orient, and would like to be sent there. That interested him because very few young Americans of the age of the candidates had selected the Orient. Most of the men at the Officer Candidate School were in their early twenties. Some were only high school graduates who'd been drafted, but their IQs were high and they qualified by examination, and were sent to OCS and became officers. Anyhow, he said, "Oh, and you don't mind going overseas?" I said, "No, and I think I've got the qualifications. Maybe I have a little more knowledge than other people who have never been there."

I figured my order read "overseas" because I was supposed to go down to the airfield in Washington and catch a plane that evening. Before going over to pick up my orders I went over to the PX to see if I could get some summer clothing because I figured, "I've got woolens, but I haven't got any clothes for a tropical climate." Just as I was crossing the drill field I heard an announcement on the loudspeaker for Lieutenant Schnier to report at a certain place, that his orders had been changed. When I went there, my orders had been changed to go out to March Field in Riverside, California to become a member of the camouflage school staff.

That happened because before I enlisted in the air force, I was interviewed by an officer who was head of military camouflage on the Pacific Coast. He was out at the San Francisco Presidio. So he knew my interest and engineering background, that I was on the faculty at Cal, and was an artist. In the meantime he had become head of the camouflage school at March Field for the air force. He evidently had kept track of my whereabouts, and asked for me by name. After that, within weeks or months, that ruling was changed and no commanding officer could ask for an addition or replacement by

Schnier: name; the higher ups figured that it could lead to nepotism or conflict of interest. So I had to go there, to March Field, which was about the last thing I wanted to do. While I was there, I put in application after application to get out of the place. There wasn't any challenge there.

Riess: You were applying for an intelligence job?

Schnier: Yes. I applied for intelligence, or combat intelligence, or any branch of the service, just to be transferred! He had me lecture to the officers and also I wrote a book about operational deception which was quite an important device in the army and air force.

He would disapprove each one of my applications because he wanted to keep his officers in order to build up a strong staff. It was rumored he was bucking for general. He was a full colonel at the time. Be that as it may, he was invited to the Staff and Command School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas to lecture to the officers on "operational deception." He asked me to write the lectures for him since that topic was one of my assignments, and to supply the flip charts to illustrate his presentation.

I had a wonderful lecture worked out that I was giving to the officer students about the battle of El Alamein, with all its drama, and how Monty [Field Marshall Montgomery] had set up false oil installations, tanks, weapons carriers, and artillery with which he fooled Rommel. The colonel went to Fort Leavenworth and gave my lectures, and when he came back he seemed to be walking on air. He had received such a great ovation.

China Assignment, and Adventures

Schnier: So I put in another application for engineer intelligence, or something like that because I landed in an engineer officers pool--that means a place where officers who hadn't been assigned yet are placed. In due time I got orders to go to Yale to the language school to study Chinese. That was wonderful. That's one time when my wishes came true.

They trained me in Chinese, but they didn't assign me to the engineers when I was finished because at that time the Signal Corps had put in a request for some officers to be assigned to special units for service in China. These units were of eighteen enlisted men and three officers, which is very unusual--it's top-heavy with officers for a small outfit like that.

Schnier: I was sent to Camp Crowder, Missouri. The outfit I was assigned to was made up mostly of Chinese-Americans whose ancestors came from Canton, so they spoke Cantonese, whereas we were trained in Mandarin. We finally got to China by way of India. In India we went up to Assam where the tea plantations are, and which was the site of the Big Chabua air field from which the American cargo planes took off to fly over "The Hump" to China.

We eventually got to China and had various assignments there, and finally they sent our little outfit, which was to act as a communication outfit between the Chinese armies and the American headquarters, closer to the front, towards the East, towards the ocean. Plans had already been made for the U.S. Marines to land from the sea, and the Chinese armies to come in on the land side. Both forces then would cut the Japanese lines in two, those in the south, in French Indo-China, what's now Vietnam, from those in the north. And cut their line of supplies. The navy, of course, had control of the sea lanes, so that would help the war effort, isolating this big body in the south.

I want to tell you how chance--as I mention in my autobiography--played a part in this instance. We finally got to this outfit, this area, in Kwangsi province, not too far from Canton. The man in charge was a lower-ranking general. Many people in the army who weren't regular--or even if they were regular--were very ambitious to go up the ladder, and he appeared to be no exception. He thought highly of our outfit because we went over there completely equipped. We had complete uniforms, we had the CBI area patch on our shoulders, and we had the machines for sending and taking communications. We also had a group of men well-trained to run a communication center, to take and send coded messages, and to code and decode the messages. So we were somewhat unusual for that particular station. He had men from different outfits and branches of the service, with mixed uniforms, and make-do equipment.

Riess: You were a complete package?

Schnier: Yes. And we were billeted in one place, in a schoolhouse that was in the process of being constructed before the war. It had no doors and windows, but it had a lot of space in there. Dirt floor, a place for setting up a kitchen, and so on and so on.

One day the commanding general for the whole Chinese Combat Command was scheduled to inspect our outfit, to visit the outfit. Our general thought he would make an impression by having him see our small outfit of eighteen men and three officers--I'm repeating that--and maybe have tea with us. So he brought in General McClure [he gets up and gets a picture of him]. This fellow right here.

Riess: Okay. Robert B. McClure.

Schnier: He brought McClure, with his staff, to the schoolhouse. We had some mess tables and we sat down and had tea and had a friendly chat and answered the general's questions and so on. I could see that our own general was feeling elated over this meeting, everything was running so smoothly, and his commanding general was impressed. Then he got up and started to go--I must sidetrack a little and say that the previous day we had a big rainstorm, and outside the schoolhouse was like a great mud puddle. The water had drained, but it was still very muddy and slippery. We had put some planks out there for the men in our outfit to walk across, and also for the visitors. Our general evidently took his finger off his number, and as he was walking across this plank he slipped, and landed flat in the mud in his freshly starched and ironed suntans.

Riess: Terrible! Oh, poor man.

Schnier: The general?

Riess: Yes, unthinkable.

Schnier: The next thing that happened, we got orders sending us out of the outfit. We were persona non grata. When I say we, I mean just our outfit's commanding officer and myself. We were given the boot. The third officer was Chinese, and I guess the general had to keep one of the officers. He was the youngest. So he kept the Chinese, he let him stay, and the enlisted men, although they had witnessed the undignified incident.

Riess: But the other two witnesses had to go.

Schnier: Yes. We were witnesses and we were the scapegoats. So we got orders to go back to the headquarters of the Chinese Combat Command in Kunming. That's where General McClure had his headquarters. This was General [Joseph Warren] Stillwell's old outfit. He had organized this unit but he had been kicked out by General Chiang Kai-shek.

So we went back to Kunming, and here's where the matter of chance paid off. Before we went to this little town, Po Se in Kwangsi, my young commanding officer put me in for a promotion. He was glad to have me in the outfit, I acted as a father figure. But we hadn't heard anything about his recommendation although several months had elapsed. A lid had been placed on promotions in the meantime, but the area command had just lifted the ban. There had been a moratorium.

Schnier: I was wondering why this thing hadn't gone through. I was now by myself in the Chinese Combat Command headquarters because my former commanding officer had been assigned to another outfit. I was on my own. Instead of asking him to look it up, I finally decided to go to the personnel officer on the base and ask him if he knew anything about it.

This personnel officer had formally been a sergeant. He just recently had been promoted to second lieutenant. He was friendly and very obliging in trying to answer my questions when I asked him if he knew anything about my promotion paper. He said, "I've got them all here. They're right here on my desk." There was a stack of papers about fourteen inches high. He said, "I'll look through them." He started turning one after another after another after another and almost down at the very bottom was the recommendation for my promotion. He said, "Gee, I don't know why it's way down here. Look at the date," which turned out to be much earlier than the others. So he took it out and put it on top. In a very short time I was promoted to captain.

That shows you how chance can play a part in history and in the life of an individual. If it hadn't rained the day before, if McClure hadn't scheduled his trip down there at that time, and if my commanding general hadn't taken his mind off where he was going, we would have still been in Po Se, and it probably would have been a long, long time before I'd gotten the promotion.

Riess: Promotion was important?

Schnier: I felt it was important, at my age. So many of the other officers were mere kids. My own commanding officer was in his early twenties and had never been to college. I guess he finished high school. But he was a very, very brainy Jewish boy from the Bronx. He had a sharp mind, and was good in mathematics--very good at anything dealing with numbers and memory.

Riess: You stuck out the war, then? You finished the war in China?

Schnier: Yes, and when the Japanese collapsed I was ordered to Nanking, and that's when things quieted down so I could come home. I got back in 1946.

It was in Nanking where I met Gregg McKee, a young West Point major, who was commandant of the post and my superior officer. Because of his innate love of art (he later became an expert in ancient Chinese ceramics) we developed a friendship that has continued for over forty years. I was touched when the McKees, after the war, asked me to be godfather to their next-to-youngest son Glenn. I owe a votive offering to the rains and mud of Kwangsi that resulted in this Nanking happenstance.

Riess: Was your life ever in danger?

Schnier: Never, or not to a great degree when I was overseas, except from faulty airplane judgment. They had a type of airplane called the C46 which was a very awkward, dangerous plane to fly. I'll tell you one instance: when we landed in China we landed by mistake in the wrong village. The plane had overflowed the mark. So, we had to get out of there. We waited for another plane to fly us back south towards Burma. We finally got on the plane with all our equipment. There was a lot of heavy equipment to take along because of the big machines they used for sending and receiving messages, and the generators for producing electricity for the teletype machines. I don't know the names of them because I didn't have much to do with them. We had enlisted men who were experts in running the machine. But we got all that equipment on this airplane, and as we flew south toward our destination a terrific storm came up, and the plane started fluttering like this--.

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Schnier: I took a Dramamine, and tried to keep a straight face. But then I heard over the intercom the co-pilot saying, "Now men, we're hitting a dangerous storm area, and I want to prepare you. If it gets too serious and we have difficulty in keeping our elevation or continuing with our flight, we will have to dispose of part of our cargo. The first thing that will go out will be the footlockers. Then there'll be the personal equipment of each soldier, all the arms. Then all of the machinery that you have in the cases. Dispose of all of those as the last resort. And I think that hopefully we can keep to the air." Fortunately we flew out of the storm, it became less bouncy, and we eventually landed. I'm telling you the dangers. But the dangers were dangers that could also happen in the United States.

Prior to our arrival in China there was one episode in that area where all the Americans were in danger because of a mounting need for everybody to resist a Japanese invasion. They were coming up from Burma, trying to get into China--that would be a great achievement if they could get across the Burmese border. They were coming up that way, and they had gotten to such a point where the Chinese and the Americans had to make a stand.

So they ordered everybody in the outfit we were being assigned to out, and I suppose also other outfits along the line in different villages, including the cooks and the clerks. Usually the clerks in a military headquarters were young kids who were frail or not aggressive. But they could do the bookkeeping and keep the

Schnier: records. The commanders took all of these men who'd had very little experience with arms, and sent them out to climb a high mountain ridge to set up a line of defense.

That was the only danger I knew of in that area just around the time that we got there. After that happened, and the United States got tough with Chiang Kai-shek, who was holding back his trained Chinese soldiers from fighting the Japanese, there was a military order that made it a court-martial offense for any American military person, enlisted man or officer, caught at the front line with arms. In other words, if he went up to the front line, wanted to get in the fight, he'd be court-martialed. Because it was such an enormous expense sending our people over there, constantly bringing supplies and material and gasoline, and the logistics of flying "The Hump."

Riess: They didn't want any heroics.

Schnier: No, and they had so many Chinese who were thoroughly trained. There were hundreds of thousands of Chinese Stillwell had trained, in India. They were qualified for fighting, if Chiang Kai-shek would have loosened the reins and permitted them on the battlefield. That was why General Stillwell was replaced, because he insisted these completely trained and equipped Chinese units be used to fight the Japanese. However, Chiang Kai-shek was waiting until the American troops won the war for him. Then he would use his trained army to fight the Communists. It was common knowledge. Jack Service has documented this in his book, as Barbara Tuchman also has in that authoritative book of hers on Stillwell.

I received this document for serving in the Chinese Combat Command. [ca. 9" x 14" commendation]

Riess: Isn't this beautiful! This is your commendation: "This is to certify that Captain J. Schnier is commended for outstanding and meritorious service and attention to duty while serving with the Chinese Combat Command in General Headquarters, from May 1945 to October 1945." That's very handsome. That's doing things in style, isn't it?

Schnier: [chuckles] I played a role in this.

Riess: In designing it?

Schnier: Did I tell you about that?

Riess: No, no.

Schnier: This was cooked up at the headquarters in Kunming. General McClure, or somebody else in his outfit, figured it would be nice to give all the Americans in the outfit a commendation. So they had this laid out by a draftsman at the headquarters office. Then they had to figure out this Chinese dragon design. The men weren't competent to do that so they looked through all of the qualification cards--the cards with each man's occupation or specialty. They found the artists' cards, and looked through them, and then they saw my card and figured, "This guy, he's an assistant professor at the University of California, and he's an artist, he ought to be able to do this." I said, "This is out of my field, doing a dragon, but I think I can work it out. A Chinese artist would be the person to do it."

They said, "You take charge of it." So I got a jeep from the carpool and I went into the city, the little town of Kunming, and I looked for a sign painter, or a shop that had decorations in the window indicating the owner did all kinds of Chinese designs. I found a sign painter and showed him this space. He took out some paper. He didn't draw it on this, he took a copy of the space and he drew in the dragon, allowing space for the Chinese characters which a Chinese in the outfit had already done. Then he took another piece of paper to make the final drawing, and when he was satisfied with that he transferred it to the sheet which had been given to me.

Riess: That's very neat.

Schnier: That established me at headquarters! They figured, "If that fellow's so responsible, can carry out an order, can come back and say, 'Mission accomplished,' or words to that effect, we'll send him to India to have it printed." So they wrapped up the design, gave me my orders to fly back to India, to Calcutta, which included an authorization to pick up a jeep at the airport--and jeeps were very, very scarce and very difficult to get because every officer there wanted a jeep to travel around the town or to go sightseeing. I got a jeep. I looked up the printing office in Calcutta. Incidentally, many Indians are quite advanced, they have textile mills and printing establishments and machine shops, although if you go through downtown Calcutta you would think you were back more than a thousand years, that you were in a medieval European city.

I found a printer way up in the hills. He had the printing establishment in the basement of his home, with all modern machinery, with the very latest equipment for graphic printing. I turned the order over to him and he said, "It will take three or four weeks to print the thousands of them," enough to go around for all the military personnel. That did not include the air force, just the ground forces.

Schnier: In the meantime, I had a chance to travel around. I took in some of the sights that I had missed on my first trip to India in 1933. I came back and picked up the many bundles, took them back to Kunming, and then I felt assured that those above wouldn't give me a black mark on my record. About six months after I returned home, they had printed all the names and distributed them. The citations are signed by General McClure and Ho Ying Chin, head of the whole Chinese army.

Marriage to Dorothy Lilienthal

Riess: Okay. Now I am making a radical transition. Did you have a first marriage?*

Schnier: Had I ever been married before?

Riess: Yes.

Schnier: No, I hadn't and many people wonder why. Well, there were--. Shall I go into detail?

Riess: Sure, do.

Schnier: I often thought of it, but in the beginning it was the farthest thing from my mind because art was so overpowering. It was so satisfying. There would always be temporary relationships with some girl friend, but I never thought of getting married until after I was asked to take over Cummings' job at the university to teach clay modeling which eventually turned into sculpture, a full-fledged sculpture section. Then I bought my own home on Russian Hill. It was only after I had a home and an income that I began thinking about it. So marriage was put off for many, many years.

Riess: You feel that it would have interfered with your creative life?

Schnier: I think it would have been a burden trying to support a family. I don't think I could ever have accomplished very much unless married to a woman who was also always working because my income was minimal, and committed. [end insert]

*From Interview 1, tape 2A.

Schnier: But I want to tell you about my marriage.* I don't want you to feel that I'm trying to circumvent that. It all started with Albert Bender introducing his friend Jesse Lilienthal to me, bringing him to my studio. That resulted in Mr. Lilienthal inviting me down for lunch at his home in Hillsborough. He and his wife often had guests for lunch on Sunday.

It wasn't long before Mrs. Lilienthal, while we carried on a conversation at lunch one Sunday, brought up the subject of portraits of her children. At that time it was the thing to do to have either photographs or pastel studies or oil paintings of the children, if one could afford it. They had had famous people like [Edward] Weston and some people from down the Peninsula take pictures of the children, but they hadn't had a bronze bust. She said, "You know, I'd like to have a bronze bust of my son." He was the favorite. There are two daughters and one son; an older daughter, the son in the middle, and then my wife is the youngest. She asked me if I would do it, and I said, "Oh, sure I'd be glad to do it. I do portrait bronzes."

So I began to worry, where could I do it? The boy was young then, seven years old, and he couldn't come to the city. It would be awkward. I figured I could do it down there in the country. I'd bring my modeling stand and do it out of doors so that it wouldn't mess up the carpets indoors. So I sent down a modeling stand, and a rotating platform for him to sit on so I could rotate it, and a bunch of clay, and started doing the portrait of the son.

The family was very close and the children played a lot with each other. I don't know whether that is unusual or not. I said that they were close, but they just happened to be children and had a lot of energy. During each rest period the girls would come around with their bicycles and tease their brother to come on and race around the garden on their bicycles. Sometimes they couldn't wait until the rest period came, so they'd come around and try to coax him to jump off and get on his bicycle. Anyhow, they started tearing around, and I got a chance to look at her [Dorothy]. She was a charming little girl at that time, I guess she was about six years old, with dark eyes like her mother. I never thought anything of that, but later on I realized that she had made a deep impression on me.

Over the years I kept up this friendship with the Lilienthal family, but I didn't see her very often. One day, ten years later, after the Cal-Stanford football game, the Big Game, something happened that laid the ground for a new phase in my life.

*From Interview 6, tape 11B.

Schnier: The family were great football enthusiasts. When the Big Game was at Palo Alto they had an open house buffet lunch. They often invited me and would see that I got transportation down to the game and back. Well, that year, after the Big Game, there was a party at another friend's home, a dinner party, a post-Big Game affair. Upon returning to the Lilienthal home after the game, Mr. Lilienthal asked if I would like to go to the party too.

It may be that he asked me before we went to the game, because I don't know how I would have come back to their home unless it was a matter of picking up a ride to take me back to San Francisco. But the upshot of it was that I went to the party with the younger sister. And we sat down together at a table, had dinner, and spent the evening just talking. During dinner we talked a lot about one thing and another, and evidently I made an impression on her, my future wife. She felt comfortable with me, I wasn't dangerous, and also it may have overcome her lack of self-confidence. She felt that she was a classical wallflower because whenever she'd go to dances it was a great event if anybody asked her to dance. It was just some sort of inferiority complex. I'm not going to try to analyze that and get off on another tangent, but she concurs with having felt at ease with me.

By that time she was sixteen years old and that led to our seeing more of each other. Eventually I got a car of my own--before that I'd get transportation with somebody else who was going down the Peninsula, or I'd take the train down. After I got a car I began taking her out. We'd go to a Chinese restaurant, or have a drink and take a ride. I don't think we'd go dancing, she was afraid to dance. She was afraid she wasn't graceful enough as she wore a brace because of a back injury.

Then it became sort of serious, but at a distance. One night she had her hand on the transmission gear shift. As I put my hand over hers, she withdrew it immediately, she was so frightened. Later on it got to the point that I thought she was very attractive, and I was falling in love with her. Instead of telling her I would like to marry her, I said, "Someday, I'm going to ask you to marry me." That was very frightening, but it was less frightening than if I'd said, "Will you marry me?" She was eighteen by then and I was forty-two.

I guess I didn't follow up strongly enough because in the meantime somebody else beat my time. He must have been a fast talker. She herself wonders now how she could ever have married him. Later on they were divorced. It was an impossible situation.

Schnier: After the war, we renewed acquaintanceship because her parents had continued their relationship with me. We got along very well. They'd have dinner parties and invite me down to join them. They could see also that I was still single, still eligible. [chuckles] During her marriage and while getting her divorce, Dorothy had analysis in Chicago and in New York, because that's where she and her husband were living, during and after the war. He was in the army, too, and that's how they happened to move about.

To make a long story short, we got married in 1949. She continued with her analysis after that and finally overcame her fear of children. Her first child, my stepson, was quite a traumatic event, great fear. Many women have fear of childbirth. With others, it's just like a dog has puppies, they just love it, notwithstanding all the pain connected with it. But she overcame it, and after we were married six years, she decided that she would like to have children by me. The analysts could see no reason why she shouldn't. So we had two children; my daughter came when I was almost sixty.

Riess: And how old was your wife?

Schnier: Oh, she's still young. I'm eighty-six and she is early sixties now. So there must be almost twenty-five years difference.

Riess: The age difference, was there ever any--?

Schnier: No, not at all. I think with a person who is rigid--well, I'm not even going to discuss the subject because I don't know enough about it. I haven't observed enough about it. [end insert]

V UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

[Interview 7: September 13, 1985]##

Architecture School

Sculpture Classes

"Modeling"

Riess: What I would like to turn to today is your achievements at the University of California, and your influence in the Department of Art. It's interesting to track your progress through the university and at the same time, to look at the development of the world outside in the arts.

You taught from 1936 to 1966. I've gone back through the catalogues to see what classes you were teaching, and who else was teaching, and so on, and in the time allotted today, I'd like to make it our assignment to do as good a job as we can to make a document about teaching sculpture at the University of California. From start to finish, with only a few tangents. [Schnier laughs] Very few tangents.

Schnier: All right. As long as I don't have to sign my name to that. [Riess laughs]

Riess: For instance, you really didn't start in 1936, it looks like you started in 1937. Is that correct?

Schnier: I started in the fall of 1936 because Cummings, my predecessor, had passed away that spring.

- Riess: Ah, after the catalogue was printed. The classes that you were teaching were called "modeling of architectural ornaments " and "advanced modeling from the Life"--and life is capitalized.
- Schnier: Oh yes. Cummings, I guess, worded the name of that course that way.
- Riess: Did you set your own mark on these classes, or were you pretty much doing the obvious?
- Schnier: When I started I picked up where Cummings had left off, but I couldn't see students learning much just by copying the Greek and Roman architectural ornaments. It wasn't maybe a semester before I began to encourage them to use the model as a starting point, and interpret it their own way. They would take a plaster cast of, let's say, a bull's head from one of the Greek friezes, and instead of copying it exactly, they would begin to maybe translate into planes, flat or curved planes.

I noticed that they became much more interested in their work when they had a chance to put some of themselves into it, besides just their ability to photographically copy it. So much so that they would stay much longer in the classroom, instead of sneaking off early.

- Riess: What kind of material were they modeling in?

- Schnier: They started with clay. But I found that the clay took a lot of attention as far as keeping it in condition, to keep it soft--this was a water clay--so I got the department to gradually change over to plasticine which required no attention during the time students were away from class. In the case of the wet clay, the assistant had to go to the modeling room every day and wet the cloths that covered the clay.

When we replaced the clay with plasticine, it gave them something that was a little more permanent, as it never dried out. However that brought up the problem of preventing them from taking it home, because the plasticine was rather expensive. Clay was two cents a pound, plasticine was seventy-five or eighty cents a pound. I realized what was going on in the students because after they'd created their work it became part of them. They wanted it, they wanted to take it home and keep it.

Eventually I taught the students how to make a mold and cast their work in plaster or in cement, which was sort of involved and messy, and really needed more space and more help. But I was trying

Schnier: to solve these problems. I remember as a child when I was doing clay modeling in kindergarten, making little objects, very simple things, just a ball, maybe a little beehive, and at the end of the period the teacher would say, "All right, children, now bring your work in, we'll have to put it back in the bin," and she'd throw it in, destroying it. That was a severe shock to me.

Riess: Yes, of course!

Schnier: I don't care, even if I just mushed the clay, it had the imprint of something of myself in it. I kept observing that in the classroom, and noticing how the students held on to their work. I meet students even today, this is fifty years later, who tell me they have a work from one of those classes in their garage. They're still planning to cast it!

There's a man who lives down the road who is a partner of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill. While he was an architectural student at Cal, he took some sculpture courses with me and enjoyed them very much. I met him again several years ago and he told me he had a work, completed while still a student, in his garage that he was saving to cast. Eventually the sculpture wing was expanded so that we had the students buy their own material, and then they could save their work. But this was a big problem because I'd usually try to cover six compositions a semester, each one dealing with a different aspect of sculpture form. Like in an English course, let's say, six short papers, but each one dealing with a different aspect of writing--composing, rather. After a critique, we would start on a new project, and I could feel it within me, the shock the students suffered of tearing down the figure, to give it up, and to start a new one.

Riess: So did they start with new material each time?

Schnier: No. I would work out something whereby they could save their project for two or three weeks, until they could resign themselves to breaking it down to start a new project. One project that I evolved to help solve this problem, and also to introduce them to a new sculpture form feature, was taking thin rods of wood, oh, about a quarter or three-eighths inch in width, and square, pieces of wood that they could break off at different lengths.

They would then build up a skeleton composition, like a steel building before it's faced and the floors are put in, held together at the joints with lumps of clay. And what they did with that material was amazing to me. It showed me how much creative urge there is in an individual when he or she is encouraged to express himself in sculpture or maybe other art forms. And how much outlet there was as of that moment.

Schnier: A lot of them went on and did other things later on; some became architects. It interested me psychologically, too, because some of them worked in big scale; they would have liked to push everybody out of the room and use the whole space to build an enormous sculpture. Have you ever heard the name [Mark] di Suvero? He was that kind. He was completely oblivious to the needs of the other students in the classroom.

Riess: That would be little later that you had di Suvero in your class.

Schnier: Oh yes, that was about fifteen years later.

Riess: By 1940 you were "Jacques Schnier, Master of Arts." You'd finished your degree.

Schnier: Yes, with Teggart.

Riess: In 1940-41 you renamed your class "Elements of Sculpture."

Schnier: I'll tell you why. In the early phases of my teaching at the university the work was just clay modeling, it wasn't even called sculpture. I shifted over to the title "Elements of Sculpture" because I was dealing with just not copying things, but trying to lay the foundation of an approach to sculpture that was like the approach you have to English in school where you learn grammar, sentence structure and eventually form or composition. I was trying to work out something whereby the student could hold on to it and figure out what this meant. I gave them different problems all along; it wasn't just doing another sculpture and another sculpture. It was solving another sculpture problem, or mastering some more sculpture elements.

"Elements of Sculpture"

Riess: Why don't you say briefly what you mean by sculpture problems or elements. It sounds like a very classical form of teaching.

Schnier: From observing historical sculpture, different periods of sculpture, and also observing what the trend was today, it made me realize that there were different ways of presenting a mass, a volume, in sculpture, which is one of the basic features of sculpture. You could either make it round, convex, or you could present it as the surfaces in a series of planes, either absolutely flat planes, or curved planes, which is associated today with cubism. Or you could

Schnier: present it as a series of concavities, and there are examples of sculpture where the concave element predominates. For example, there is a Hindu demon goddess called Kali, who is a great devourer of human beings. She's portrayed with skeletons and skulls, or wearing a necklace of skulls. There is one version of her where she is almost completely concave, because she hasn't had enough to devour. [chuckles] I'm using that as an example of the concave element, but it functions differently in other contexts.

Then, in addition to that, sculpture can be opened up. We associate Henry Moore with holes, and Barbara Hepworth also with holes in her sculpture. But this is something that has been used in practice in previous cultures. So here was something else to introduce the students to, so that by the time they'd had several courses in sculpture they, hopefully, would have built a vocabulary of sculpture forms. I'm citing just a few examples. I had many others I wanted to introduce to the young students, if they were going on and taking a second semester or so.

Riess: Was there time in their curriculum if they did want to?

Schnier: Eventually we set up the sculpture major.

Riess: In architecture, was there time?

Schnier: The architectural students only had to take two semesters of sculpture. One was "Elements of Sculpture" and the other was "Modeling from Life" which was sculpture with a live model as subject. There wasn't too much time for those students, although many of them were more proficient and had greater ability than others. It's like writing. If you only have a limited amount of practice and introduction to writing, you probably wouldn't do as well--.

Perry, and Decorative Arts Annex##

Riess: Was Warren Perry supportive of what you were doing?

Schnier: How shall I put it? He didn't have a negative point of view, and he almost always tried to help the needs of this little sculpture unit that I was building up. He paid attention to the requests that I made, so I would say that he certainly was supportive. He helped me get new quarters over by the Decorative Arts Annex where the music department is now. He had no objections to my going into the art department if they made a move in that direction although that did not come about until many, many years later.

Riess: What was that Decorative Arts Annex building? Who did you share that with? How much space did you have?

Schnier: I don't know what that building was used for before. It was one of the buildings--I don't know when they put it up, maybe after the earthquake and fire, because the anthropology department, where Kroeber was, was in a somewhat similar building. Oh, I think I know what it was: I think it was a building that housed a lot of plaster casts from the 1915 World's Fair.

But be that as it may, the Department of Decorative Arts was in a shingle building nearby, adjoining it, and they used the ground floor for classes and for laboratories, for studio work. The top floor was storage for Buildings and Grounds. So when Perry, at my request, put in an order to the administration to find room for the sculpture courses, because we were attracting a large enrollment, the university found that space.

This was before the war, so it wasn't on the basis of an influx of students, which came after the war. They remodeled it for the sculpture classes. So that would indicate that Perry definitely was supportive.

Riess: Yes.

Schnier: I made some critical remarks about Perry on one or two occasions, but all in all, he was trying to do the best he could running the department and I am grateful to him.

Riess: Did the decorative arts students take sculpture classes, too?

Schnier: Yes, we were on very good terms with the decorative arts department, and it got to a point where they stipulated one sculpture course, or listed it amongst the electives, which was very helpful. The students enjoyed that type of work, it was down their alley. I don't think the art department, in the beginning, was favorably inclined. Sculpture was considered an intruder, a competitor, because most of the art department was made up of painters. They were never very friendly in the beginning. So I think the students took it on their own accord, as an elective. Many talented art students took the course. They enjoyed it and they went on to take more than they needed, as an elective. Some of them even switched their major to sculpture.

Riess: Did you ever see anything of Bernard Maybeck or Julia Morgan?

Schnier: No, I never met Julia Morgan. But while I was a student in the architectural department, and John Galen Howard had gone away on a year's sabbatical, he set up a program whereby the architectural problems for the graduate students would be given by different leading architects. In that way he avoided having a single architect come in to take over the whole course because there was one member of the faculty who was very ambitious. They didn't play ball together, and he would have been the logical person to take over. As visiting professors, Howard invited Maybeck and Arthur Brown. I can't remember all of the others, but I remember Maybeck in the drafting room because my seat was in the graduate drafting room at that time. He was a short man, fuzzy hair, already highly respected by the students.

I wish I had been more alert at that time so I could have profited more by these wonderful experiences or exposures that I had. But I was young and I missed out on that. I wasn't taking the problem for which he was the patron at that time--I think they called him a patron, or professor.

Riess: Maybeck was a master of architectural ornament, and I wondered whether you had had him come as a guest lecturer in your classes.

Schnier: No, I was not even alert to the possibility of doing that, which would have been very inspiring to the students, and also would have been very helpful to me to have this lengthy exposure to him.

Riess: Did you send your students to see the stuff at the Golden Gate International Exposition?

Schnier: I did not have to send them, they went of their own accord. Also, at that time the large sculptures I did for the Fair put me on the map with a lot of the students, although I never talked about my own work in the class, or showed them pictures of my own work. In fact, I didn't lecture them very much, it was mostly individual instruction. But they soon found out about my work at the Fair from the newspapers because the coverage was extensive.

"Sculptural Design" - Requirements

Riess: By 1942 you had added a class called "Sculptural Design," and that was a class where they could do original work.

Schnier: Yes, that was an elective class, and they worked mostly on their own. I was trying to accommodate the students who wanted more units in sculpture. Sometimes there would be young painting students who didn't want to take any more painting, or had exhausted the faculty, you might say.

Riess: Before they could take your sculptural design class did everybody have to take the "Elements of Sculpture" first?

Schnier: Oh, yes, definitely, because it was very tiring to explain to the students all of the various things that I was trying to cover in a whole year. And to go over it again just for one student well, that's why I set up the requirements. It would be like any other course, chemistry or physics or mathematics.

Riess: That's true, but I think that the teaching of art has changed. I'm trying to track the difference between what required kind of program you had, and the experience of a student during the same period at the San Francisco Art Institute.

Schnier: I have a strong personal feeling about the laissez-faire policy there. I had a feeling one was doing an injustice to the students if they did not try to help them build a foundation on form whether it's in painting or lithography or sculpture. It was the instructor's duty to do that, that's why he was hired. I didn't think it was fair to just let them wander along doing what they wanted like a child in nursery school.

If I had had my own way and had a big faculty and the facilities and the funds, I would have built up an exceptionally fine sculpture department that would have trained a student so that when he got out he would have been able to express himself more fluently in sculpture, and at the same time in a personal manner. It wouldn't have taught them anybody's style, it would have taught them form.

Riess: Was it your idea to get Ray Puccinelli to take over when you were gone to war?

Schnier: Yes. I was very much concerned about getting somebody to continue the courses while I was gone--not to drop them. Of course, we had the funds in the budget, and I looked around and approached a number of sculptors before I spoke to Puccinelli and invited him. One of the people I remember asking was [Olaf] Malmquist. Did I speak to you about him? He did some work at the World's Fair?

Riess: Yes.

Schnier: It was beautiful, conservative work. But he wasn't interested; he made his living working for a big firm that cast architectural ornament, and I don't think he wanted to teach. So finally I spoke to Puccinelli, and he was in need of work. I noticed in his oral history he speaks well of that assignment. When I came back it was a big let down for him. He imagined he was going to stay on for the rest of his life. But he got the teaching job at Mills College after that. Or maybe he was already teaching at Mills and taught at both places at one time.

Riess: You were an associate professor when you came back?

Schnier: No, I became associate professor in 1948. The reason I put it that way--"associate professor of sculptural design"--was I wanted to emphasize the fact that my position in the architectural department was not as a professor of modeling, or architectural modeling, or as professor of architecture, but I was professor of sculpture. Pepper had warned me about the ambitions of the art department. He was chairman of the art department by that time.

Incidentally, I found the letters I wrote to him while I was taking that trip around the world. He had returned them to me; I have them over there.

Riess: Oh, good.

Schnier: He gave me an inkling of what was going on in the art department, and I was trying to avoid a situation where they would petition to set up a sculpture division section in their own department, and then bring in a sculptor from the outside. I think Pepper was concerned about that too. So by having a sculptor on the university faculty already it probably prevented them from making a move in that direction.

Riess: Sounds like you were getting to be a good university politician already!

Schnier: I was learning rapidly through some sad--certain experiences I was having on the campus with different people on the faculty.

Riess: On the architecture faculty?

Schnier: No, I mean I was learning about the art faculty. For example, Pepper wanted me in that department before the war, before we actually moved over. He proposed it to the art faculty--his faculty, where he was chairman--after he'd gotten me to set the groundwork and see [Joel H.] Hildebrand, who was dean of letters and science, and [Monroe E.] Deutsch, who was provost of the university--they all approved it.

Schnier: But the art department was divided. They didn't know what side I would line up with, whether I would line up with Neuhaus, or with Worth Ryder's side. So I was not voted in. That was a good experience because at that time I was only an assistant professor without tenure. If I'd gone in there then they could have used the hatchet.

Faculty in Sculpture

Richard O'Hanlon

Riess: In 1949 you were joined by [Richard] O'Hanlon, who came in as a lecturer.

Schnier: We had an immediate need for somebody to augment the sculpture unit because of the great influx of G.I. Bill students. The classes were crowded; you could barely move around in some of those sculpture classes.

Riess: How did you choose O'Hanlon?

Schnier: I knew O'Hanlon fairly well, he was already established. I knew him from when he had been a student at the art school. He used to bring his work to my studio to show it to me.

Riess: In San Francisco, you mean?

Schnier: Yes. Also, he taught at the California College of Arts and Crafts for a short time. He was in need of work, he was foot-loose. In fact, I think he was anxious to get on the faculty. Although he hadn't come to see me, he knew Pepper very well at that time. Pepper enjoyed associating with artists. Pepper thought well of him, and he was the one who asked me to support O'Hanlon. O'Hanlon had come to see me, but it was Pepper who asked me to support him. Since Pepper had been so supportive of my work in the university, and since I had no objections to O'Hanlon, I took him on. And he turned out to be a good, stable, steady person, a reliable teacher and well-liked by the students. I am sorry that he has passed away.

William Wurster's Changes, Prestini and Reichek

Riess: In 1950 the great William Wurster descended on the campus.

Schnier: The way you say "the great William Wurster," I have a feeling that you know about him.

Riess: Did he rock your boat?

Schnier: Not in the beginning, although I didn't take to him warmly because I knew how ambitious he was in contrast to Perry, who was not ambitious at all. Wurster pulled all the strings possible to get on the faculty. I saw some of the letters.

Riess: He had his own ideas of how to run a department.

Schnier: Oh, he was a dictator!

Riess: I think his whole approach of having practitioners come and do lecture classes was very different.

Schnier: Yes, and of course it meant that there were less tenure positions that way, too. Maybe there were a lot of good points to it, but he was pretty much a dictator, and if you didn't like his system, you were helpless. There was no recourse with Wurster. I wasn't one of his pets. I could sense that. As a matter of fact, while I was writing articles on psychoanalysis, he was holding that against me, and it may be other people spoke to him about it. Maybe Tolman, some of the people in the psychology department said, "Here's Schnier, he's supposed to be a sculptor and he's spending his time writing about psychoanalysis. What the hell does he know about psychoanalysis? We're the psychologists." Tolman, of course, was resistive to analysis. I got to know him through a woman who was working for her Ph.D. She was very friendly with most of the faculty, and had warm relationships, she had a nice personality.

Wurster called me in one day and said he was not going to advance me because I was spending so much time writing instead of doing sculpture. It was like what Kroeber said in that letter. [laughs] Maybe Kroeber sat on one of my promotional committees!

Riess: Was Wurster's idea that you should be having more shows, or something like that?

Schnier: Oh, yes--well, to bring more attention to the department. Any of the architects who were receiving commendations added to the glory of the department, as long as they weren't competing with Wurster.

Schnier: But I cited the case of a number of recognized people who had shifted to other fields for a while, or permanently, and had done very well. I cited the case of a biologist who went to Japan and studied Japanese architecture, and wrote one of, you might say, the little bibles on Japanese home architecture based on his observations.

Riess: So was Wurster impressed with your argument?

Schnier: No, he had made up his mind already. No, we didn't get along at all. I never felt comfortable around him, and I was glad to get out of his department.

Riess: Did he have in mind any other person to fill your place?

Schnier: He had brought in some people to teach basic design in architecture. I thought it was a wonderful idea. Jesse Reichek and James Prestini. The architect students would be introduced to architecture somewhat in the same way I was introducing the sculptors to the grammar of sculpture. They used to make little models stressing tension elements, or compression elements, or arches. I used to see some of the work; I admired it very much. I wished I had had an orientation like that. If I'd had I probably would have stuck to architecture. It was fascinating, what they were doing.

Riess: That was three-dimensional stuff.

Schnier: Yes, three-dimensional. It was a good orientation, logical. Heretofore, a lot of the courses they took were, in my estimation, a waste of time. There was a course called "Introduction to the Orders." The orders meant the four or five orders of Greek architecture.

Riess: Takes about five minutes to get introduced to them, doesn't it?

Schnier: Yes, but they spent the whole semester making drawings and renderings of them, and then creating the shades and shadows with sumi ink, which is a very difficult thing to do, to get an even-graded wash. Some of the students were masters at it, they took to it very readily, but a lot of us just slaved over it. And it had very little to do with designing in the modern idiom. The Doric, the Ionic, the Corinthian--and there was another one besides that.

I don't know whether the basic design class was his doing, or whether he had brought these young people over into the department, and they were trained that way, and had this to offer. I know James Prestini had no architectural orientation, and neither did Reichek.

- Schnier: Reichek is a painter and now Prestini is working as a sculptor, although prior to that time he was turning wood bowls. That's where he made his reputation in New York. They gave him a show at the Museum of Modern Art, or at one of the leading art galleries in New York City.
- Riess: Wurster didn't try to eliminate you by putting another sculptor in?
- Schnier: Oh no, he didn't try that. No, we had our own little unit. By that time, mind you, we had a sculpture major with the A.B. degree.
- Riess: But it was still under architecture.
- Schnier: In architecture, yes.
- Riess: You had only three people on the staff and you had a sculpture major?
- Schnier: Oh, that's quite a bit for a little unit like that. It was sort of insignificant while it was in the College of Architecture; only when we moved over to the art department was it really standing on its own two feet.
- Riess: How many sculpture graduates did you have annually?
- Schnier: In the beginning we had few. But after we got over to the art department--I'm going ahead?
- Riess: I don't want you to get ahead because I'd like to take it systematically.
- Schnier: You're doing a good job of it, by the way.
- Riess: Physically, the fact that you were separated from the architecture building must have helped a lot. Architecture was on one side of the campus, and you were on the other. You weren't encountering Wurster very often, were you?
- Schnier: No, except at the faculty meetings when I ran into him plenty!
- Riess: Did you dress in a smock and beret? Did you look like a sculptor?
- Schnier: When teaching?
- Riess: Yes.

Schnier: No, I wore a coat and necktie. To keep my clothes clean--because that plasticine wasn't like clay: if you'd get it on your clothes you had to send them to the cleaner--I sometimes wore a smock that I could button up in front so that when I brushed up against the modeling stands which would invariably have a lot of plasticine along the edges from years of use, it wouldn't get on my clothes. But frequently I just left my coat on, and wore a necktie. Sometimes, if it was very, very hot, I'd take my coat off.

Riess: But otherwise you were quite formal, basically?

Schnier: Yes, I didn't play the role of an artist, or come to class in exotic clothes like [Harold] Paris did. You've heard of him?

Riess: Yes.

Schnier: He'd come with a beret, and wearing an orange jumpsuit sometimes.

Riess: That means that he was getting his hands in more than you were?

Schnier: In the work?

Riess: Yes.

Schnier: No. No, I could manage to keep away from the table, and use their tools. I had no trouble in actually handling the material if they wanted me to. I wouldn't stand aside and just talk. But if they got nervous as soon as I approached their work, I wouldn't touch it.

Faculty Club Socializing##

Riess: Stephen Pepper mentioned going to the Black Sheep restaurant a lot with his friends, and I wondered what your campus social network was.

Schnier: I used to go to the Black Sheep occasionally. The Black Sheep was still in existence when I joined the faculty because that's where I met Margaret Hodgen, and that's where I found out about social institutions, and that's how I decided to use that as a means of getting a master's degree in 1938. I didn't have anything to do with the art department until after the war, so I had never joined any of that group at the Black Sheep. On the days I had classes, I always had lunch at The Faculty Club.

Riess: Did you have it with architects?

Schnier: Not many of the architects had their lunch there. Very seldom. A lot of them came in the afternoon from their offices for the critique. There weren't too many who were working straight through the whole day.

Riess: Did you work straight through the whole day when you were there?

Schnier: Yes. I arranged my days so I would start at eight and work right straight through to five with an hour for lunch. So I would have my lunch on campus. I tried to sit at different tables to become acquainted with different faculty members. But sometimes a table would consist solely of men from a certain department, and I didn't want to barge in. There were tables where they had mixed faculty members, and I would sit there and meet the historians and the biologists and entomologists, and persons like that.

Riess: That should be one of the great pleasures of teaching at the university.

Schnier: Except later on, after joining the art department, the art faculty had a room reserved for them, a small room like some of the other departments did, and we used to all eat together. It wasn't too informative because a couple of the highly-opinionated people usually controlled the roost as far as conversation went, and the things we discussed.

Riess: Who were the highly-opinionated people?

Schnier: Oh, Ryder was one of them, [Erle] Loran was another. These were the liberals, the avant-garde painters. No other sculptor would be present because they were teaching on the other days of the week.

Riess: Regarding Stefan Novak, you said that he was a student from the-- where did you get Stefan Novak?

Schnier: The architectural department. I met him through his being one of my students, taking required courses in sculpture as an architectural major. He caught my attention because he was so competent, so creative. When I needed an assistant he was available for the job. As a matter of fact, he was assisting in one of the architectural courses. They had set up a course in shop as a requirement for architecture so the students would learn a little about tooling and materials. It was a hands-on course, part of basic design, and he was helping the technician in that course. I was very much impressed

Schnier: by his work and his personality. Later on when we had an opening and he was graduating, I approached him about teaching some courses. Not necessarily as a member of the staff, but teaching some of the courses because we had such a heavy load of students.

I told him in no uncertain terms that I didn't want to sidetrack him from architecture, that he would have to make his own decision as to whether he wanted to go right into architecture, or whether he wanted to teach. He told me he definitely wanted to do sculpture. So he joined us. Later, when we transferred to the art department, Loran and his clique of painters decided they didn't want him.

Riess: What became of him?

Schnier: Since he was only an assistant professor he was let go. I really was burned up about that.

"Dynamics of Artistic Expression"

Riess: That year [1951-52] you took on another class. It sounds like you were really getting your teeth into it. You were now teaching "Dynamics of Artistic Expression."

Schnier: It was a psychoanalytic approach to art. [chuckles] I could see I wasn't a gifted university lecturer. I spent more time on that course than any other course I ever taught because it was a lecture course, and I found lecturing difficult. I was so involved, I was so determined, that it became my chief interest. Later on I called it "The Psychology of Art," and the psychologists took exception to that, that I wasn't a psychologist and I was teaching the psychology of art. It was based on psychoanalysis. It all stemmed from my interest in psychoanalysis.

Riess: So you had to prepare two lectures every week?

Schnier: Yes, and it was a job.

Riess: Was it a popular class?

Schnier: No, it wasn't. I had a pretty good reputation in the architectural department, and the first year it was scheduled the classroom was crowded. And then after I had given a few lectures, some students began to drift away. However, some stayed on right to the end. Even

- Schnier: now I meet a former student who tells me that he learned a lot from that course, that it made a deep impression on him. So it was a matter of the individual student's likes and dislikes.
- Riess: Did you discover that you had confreres in other departments who were doing psychoanalytic interpretation of literature? Were there isolated incidents of people like you in the early fifties who were psychoanalytically oriented?
- Schnier: No, but there were a number of students and faculty members who were in analysis.
- Riess: In English literature there weren't people who were doing Freudian interpretations?
- Schnier: There may have been some, but they were hiding it. Later on I ran across articles in some of the psychoanalytic literature by faculty members in history, in anthropology, in law--[Albert] Ehrenzweig was in law. In the meantime a number of faculty members were being analyzed. If they were reading at all, it was almost unavoidable for them to become exposed to new psychology--I would call it that. Some of them didn't develop an antagonism to it; they became involved and enamoured of it and wanted to apply it to their own specialty.
- But I never ran across anybody with whom I could collaborate. In the meantime I was appointed by the psychology department to sit on some Ph.D. candidate's committees, graduate students who were doing work that they thought was related to perception. So there must have been a feeling among some of the people in the psychology department, "Oh, maybe he's got something to offer."
- Riess: Would Tolman actually have been able to put a stop to your teaching that subject?
- Schnier: Oh, I guess he could have, if--if he had wanted to, and if he had been that type of person. Loran, in the art department, was antagonistic, and as a matter of fact he wanted me to drop that course as one condition of coming over to the art department. He told this to [Lincoln] Constance, who was dean of the College of Letters and Science. I showed Constance my credentials. Also I used to get a lot of requests for reprints, in a field where people write and publish. I don't think that's anything very unusual. They knew they could get the reprints free, and they were building up their library, if that was their specialty. But nevertheless that made me feel that I had some standing in the field. The fact that my writings were published in the leading periodicals gave me some credibility.



Reception at University Art Gallery, Berkeley, 1964. Jacques Schnier, center, and Don Haskins, left.

Riess: So you didn't have to have any showdowns about any of this?

Schnier: I as much as told Loran the course would have to go with me to the department. I put my foot down when Loran said that I'd have to drop the course.

Full Professorship, 1953

Riess: In 1953, you had gotten your full professorship.

Schnier: And that was a job.

Riess: Tell me.

Schnier: Before Perry left the architecture department, no, he just stepped down as chairman because he stayed on after Wurster came, he had put me in for a promotion, although I hadn't been a full six years as an associate professor which is the usual term for an average person. The promotion hadn't been approved, I guess, because it was only three years. When Wurster came in he didn't renew the request, and he got a letter from the committee on Budget and Promotions, or whatever it is, saying, how come? The prior dean had put me in. "Why aren't you putting him in for promotion?" So he had to put me in. [laughs]

I don't remember whether I got it right away the first time, or the second time. I was associate professor for five years. I thought there's somebody up above watching the welfare of the faculty members because Wurster wasn't going to lift a finger to help my advance. The letter of recommendation he wrote was very cursory. I don't remember whether they give the faculty member a copy of the letter, or not. I don't know how I saw it. But eventually it came about because somebody was watching from above, not in heaven but on the promotion committee!

Riess: You wrote a book in 1948. That was essential to your promotion?

Schnier: Yes and no. I did that because I was getting to like to write. The first article I wrote that A.A. Brill suggested I send to the Psychoanalytic Review, where it was accepted, made me feel I would like to write more.

Schnier: But yes, the matter of "publish or perish" may have played a part. There weren't many sculpture commissions available at that time and although I could have continued with my studio work, there were very few places to exhibit. There were few art galleries in San Francisco. So that's another reason I wrote the book. It was a good exercise and undertaking.

Riess: We can talk more about that later.

You renamed your lecture class "Psychology of Artistic Expression." The description is "Mental mechanisms in artistic creativity. Theory of the unconscious. Primary processes. Symbolism. Sublimation." I should think this would have really blown the roof off! [laughs]

Schnier: That's what it dealt with. I was going to explain all those things. They weren't very hard to explain in everyday language.

Riess: Weren't they being taught in the psychology department?

Schnier: The faculty was ambivalent about psychoanalytic theory. That's why some of their students took my course. They probably knew what these words meant, but I dealt specifically with their application to art.

By the way, the course in the psychology department dealing with personality, the psychology of personality, was one of the most popular courses on the campus. The number of students who were going in for a psychology major was astronomical, comparable with what it used to be for English.

Art Department

Sculpture Joins the Curriculum

Riess: So you moved into the art department in 1957. Horn was chairman.

Schnier: Yes. Horn was chairman at that time, but he was an art historian. Shortly after I got in Loran became chairman. Horn had fulfilled his six years.

Riess: Who was Tom Hardy?

- Schnier: He was a sculptor temporarily on the faculty to fill in because of the heavy load. He was another man who the painters, mostly Loran, didn't approve of, so he had to go.
- Riess: Who would they have approved of? Who would have been the approved people?
- Schnier: They approved of the New Yorkers who were far out and currently in the limelight. After we got into the art department and there was an opening for an additional faculty member or two, they had a long string of New York sculptors who Loran was acquainted with. On every sabbatical he used to go to New York to meet with the leading New York satellites like Jackson Pollock, and Hans Hofmann. He was a great Hofmann admirer.
- Riess: Who would have been the equivalent in sculpture?
- Schnier: Judging from the visiting professors who came out for one semester, there was Lassow, David Slivak and for a permanent position Wilfred Zogbaum was voted in. They were in the limelight and highly publicized. That's the kind of people he wanted, instead of also considering their ability as teachers.
- Riess: In 1958 who would have been the equivalent of the abstract expressionists in art? Who would they have been in sculpture?
- Schnier: Spaventi was one. He was offered a position but turned it down. Another sculptor was David Smith, and of course he would have added luster to the department.
- Riess: Did they try to get Henry Moore to come?
- Schnier: I had tried to get Henry Moore to come before I moved to the art department, when I was going to go on sabbatical. But he wrote me and said he was just in the midst of arranging a big exhibition in Italy, and tied up, and he couldn't break away.
- Riess: How about Claire Falkenstein?
- Schnier: No one proposed her when I was in the art department.
- Riess: How about Robert Howard?
- Schnier: I would have accepted Bob because I respected him as an artist and an outstanding teacher. The latter qualification was based on his record at the San Francisco Art Institute. But I don't think

Schnier: the painters would have approved him. On the other hand they would have proposed di Suvero. As a matter of fact, after I left they invited him to come as a visiting professor.

Riess: di Suvero and David Smith do huge things. Is it that they like the huge scale of these? Or what is it?

Schnier: I can't answer that for them.

Riess: Sculpture was called "Group D." When you had this group major, did that--

Schnier: There was history, painting, and graphics.

Riess: Graphics?

Schnier: Printmaking.

Riess: Yes. Were you the chairman of your group? Did you have a sort of sub-chairman organization?

Schnier: No, that was another thing. They never did get around to that, and it was unfortunate because before going into the art department the three of us, or the fourth if we had four people on the sculpture faculty, we tried to work together. I would act as a--

Riess: Coordinator, or a--

Schnier: Coordinator, yes, since I was the senior member. I appointed Novak one year to be the coordinator because he was excellent at that. Dick O'Hanlon, that was his short suit. If Dick wanted a hammer on the budget he'd say, "a hammer." He didn't state the weight of the hammer, he didn't state the make of the hammer, whether it was a carpenter's hammer or a plumber's. Later on he got so he would look up the catalogue and get all that information. He had a feeling that somebody could read his mind. I liked the fellow. He was kind, and he very seldom said anything destructive about a colleague.

Now, to get back to your question. [laughs] I got off on another tangent. No, once we were in the art department there was nobody to coordinate the sculptors.

One time I said to the group--we'd occasionally have a meeting-- "Can't we coordinate the subjects that we're teaching so that if we teach the first course of elements of sculpture, then in the second semester, if the student changes instructors, that instructor

Schnier: will know what the student had already covered so that he can build on it?" They wouldn't listen to it at all. It was as if I was criticizing, and they just ignored me.

Riess: Raymond Rocklin?

Schnier: No, he wasn't permanent there, he was visiting. He was a fair-haired boy the painters loved because he originally was a painter.

What the deuce was the fellow's name? I think he had a full professor rating, or an associate professor. He was very strongly opinionated. I remember he just ignored the suggestion. To answer your question, there was absolutely no organization whatsoever. No coordination.

Riess: Sidney Gordin arrived in 1959.

Schnier: Yes. He was one of the sculptors brought out from New York. He had gone to Cooper Union, and had a piece that was in the permanent collection of the Whitney Museum, and was much publicized. It's still publicized; every now and then you'll see it reproduced in a book about sculpture or in an art magazine. Now he's turned to a sort of painting, low reliefs, like Louise Nevelson, with wood that's painted. I think that's his latest work.

Riess: Who in the department was doing welded metal sculpture, constructions?

Schnier: If you are thinking of pre-art department years, Stefan Novak was teaching that because we wanted to expand our offerings, and we got some welding equipment. That's how di Suvero was attracted to the course. He was welding huge things in the room where Novak was teaching and he usually had the torch most of the time. [laughter] We only had one or two torches.

Riess: What was the space that you were then in?

Schnier: We were still in the Decorative Arts Annex, on the top floor. In the beginning, we had the front third. Then we gradually encroached on the middle section, which was filled with furniture until Buildings and Grounds moved that stuff out and crowded some of it in the back, and gradually we encroached until we got the whole top floor, enough for three teaching studios.

There was a justifiable need for all the expansion because the student enrollment was increasing incredibly. The students were attracted to the sculpture courses. After we moved into the art department, sculpture had more adequate space. Even before Kroeber

Schnier: Hall, the new home of the Department of Art, was completed, we were represented on that building's planning committee. I had assigned Stefan Novak to represent us on account of his architectural training. He did a highly commendable job of presenting our equipment and space needs and laying out the sculpture studios.

Artistic Personalities

Riess: Was Harold Paris a very big drawing card?

Schnier: He hadn't arrived as yet.

Riess: He came in 1960.

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Riess: It was [James] McCray who was chairman then.

Schnier: But Paris didn't come until 1962.

He drew a lot of students who were uncertain of themselves. Judging from all the comments I've heard from students who were there in those days, they invariably talk about Paris as a showman with his beret and his jumpsuit uniform. So I think that eventually the students, those who were at all observing or able to judge human nature, saw through this person.

Riess: Was he a person with whom you would have been able to talk about sculpture?

Schnier: I could talk to him, but I don't think he would be listening to what I said! He had his own ideas and I don't know if it would have been a very lengthy conversation.

Riess: Did his work have meaning?

Schnier: I couldn't understand it. I was never moved by it at all. I think he was a mountebank, he was a showman. He pulled the wool over the eyes of a lot of people; even the mature members of the faculty.

Riess: Seems like that's a lot of what art is about these days.

Schnier: Oh, especially New York art. I just got my copy of Art News and I looked at it and thought, "I don't want to go to New York." I no longer have any idea of having a New York dealer represent my work. I would not willingly go even if I were invited, unless there were exceptionally attractive features to the offer.

Riess: The cult of the personality, or something?

Schnier: Yes, that's what it is today. There's a great striving to be different, to attract attention, to stop the traffic.

Riess: There was also some of that artistic exhibitionism in Berkeley, don't you think?

Schnier: Yes, there was a little of that. Every now and then it springs up, but I don't think it was as apparent as it is in New York now, or has been for some time.

Riess: You're saying that that's what you were trying to avoid, people who came to teach sculpture as personalities.

Schnier: Yes. It didn't appeal to me at all. I didn't see the place it had in a university. On the other hand, **Novak**, who Paris replaced, was loved by the students because he was a good teacher and he encouraged them to do their own thing.

Riess: You didn't have a big staff in sculpture then?

Schnier: Eventually we had to hire a lot of temporary instructors.

Riess: In 1961 you got Julius Schmidt and Wilfred Zogbaum.

Schnier: Zogbaum was the man the painters voted in. He was one of those they brought in from New York.

Riess: Was he able to teach a class like "Elements of Sculpture"?

Schnier: He was the one who rejected the idea of our coming to any understanding of what the course was to consist, the setting up of some program-- I didn't care what it was, as long as it would help the student so that the next instructor the student was exposed to would know what the student had already studied and could help him build on that. This would have been helpful to a student taking the advanced semester of a two semester course.

Riess: What happened to classes like "Elements of Sculpture"?

Schnier: Each professor just taught it the way he wanted. Each one had an entirely different approach. For example, I remember one of our instructors who was on the faculty while I was there--I remember the classroom in which he taught, which was also the classroom which I used, was so covered with plaster and in such a mess that the custodians of the building would no longer go into the room to clean it up!

Riess: How did the students decide with whom they were going to take a class?

Schnier: They would have to do it on their own. There was no system of progressing from one course to the next that was an advanced course and for which the first was a requirement.

Riess: Did they look at a teacher's work and decide?

Schnier: I guess that was it, or they'd hear about him, or meet him, and then decide to take his class. And of course there were practical considerations like fitting a course into one's schedule.

Riess: Did your classes continue to be popular because of the kind of work you were doing?

Schnier: I never had enormous classes except during the veterans G.I. Bill days. I taught on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday morning, and a lot of students didn't like to take a Saturday morning class. I tried to play it low key and not be theatrical, or try to attract a lot of students, or make it easy for them, and so on. However, I never lacked for students, especially the architectural students. I enjoyed working with them very much.

Bronze Casting

Riess: Were you doing work in acrylics? Were you teaching that?

Schnier: No, my work in acrylic came long after I'd retired from the university. I was teaching mostly bronze casting. We had set up facilities for that. Even before we got the permanent foundry in Wurster Hall, we were using makeshift equipment in back of Kroeber Hall. We had an outdoor area there that was suitable for the rough-and-tumble work bronze casting entailed. We made our own furnaces.

Riess: When did you set that up?

Schnier: That must have been after Julius Schmidt came.

Riess: About 1962?

Schnier: No. It was actually before he came instead of after. As Stephen De Staebler correctly says, I had started the first course in bronze casting on the campus in the form of a graduate seminar in the fall of 1960.* I assigned each student a phase of bronze casting. One student, the molding of the subject, another the moldmaking, then the type of wax to be put in the mold, the investment, which they'd use to invest the wax, and the burn out of the wax from the investment, then the actual casting in bronze, and finally, the patination.

I remember De Staebler, who was assigned burn out and casting, finally got someone over in the mechanical engineering department who was teaching metallurgy, and who had a foundry set-up there, to agree to casting our students' work. But before that we had to burn out the wax patterns from the molds to make the negative cavity into which the bronze was poured. [Peter] Voulkos, who had a big kiln where he was firing his students' ceramics and his own work, agreed to having the invested waxes burned out in his kiln. That's when he became interested in bronze casting.

Riess: Was Voulkos' kiln on campus?

Schnier: Yes, it was across the street from Kroeber Hall in what had once been the Phi Gamma Delta house, which the university had taken over for the decorative arts department.

Riess: Where the art museum is now?

Schnier: Yes, that's right.

Riess: That's a very interesting idea, learning something like that in a seminar.

Schnier: Well, we had no facilities as yet. Absolutely nothing. And I started this course on the basis of a conference I'd attended in the spring of 1960 at the University of Kansas, a bronze casting conference. I was just bowled over by the whole process, it was so dramatic for me to see it actually done.

*Thomas Albright, Art in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945-1980, University of California Press, 1985, p. 143.

Riess: Prior to this had you been having any of your works cast in bronze?

Schnier: Yes, first at foundries on Long Island, and later in southern California. I'd had a number of things cast in bronze, but I'd never done any of the work myself. I'd never been trained, I had no knowledge of how it was done.

Riess: It sounds like this was a very significant moment both for the department and for you.

Schnier: Oh, yes. Later on I encouraged Elden Teft, who started this conference--he was the professor of sculpture at the University of Kansas--to continue. So every two years he had a conference there. Gradually it expanded from just bronze casting to casting in general, all the metals, aluminum, iron, bronze and then to all sculpture materials, and eventually we oriented the conferences to all phases of sculpture. I say "we" because in the meantime he organized an advisory committee to which he appointed me. Later on I became chairman of that committee.

We expanded until it became an all encompassing sculpture conference, and eventually the International Sculpture Conference. We'd invite sculptors from different countries to come to the conference to lecture, put on demonstrations, or conduct workshops.

That 1960 conference was the first conference I attended. After I came home I was so filled with enthusiasm for bronze casting that I set up that graduate seminar. De Staebler was one of the students in the course. He had been my assistant previously in the undergraduate sculpture courses where we did projects in plasticine and other material. Since then I've kept in contact with him, and I've observed with much interest the different stages of his development.

Riess: Did the results of the graduate seminar inspire you to get back into your own work then?

Schnier: Into bronze casting? Yes, because we could do it right there on campus. Eventually, when I was on the planning committee for Wurster Hall, the new College of Environmental Design building, I took care of the expanding equipment and space needs of sculpture. The university offered to give us additional space in that building because we came into the art department at a late date, after its footage had been pretty well allocated in Kroeber Hall.

Schnier: As a member of the committee for the environmental design building, I proposed a foundry for the students. This foundry consisted of two furnaces with crucibles with a combined capacity of 300 pounds of molten bronze. That was a good move.

Then we had pretty much the whole basic gamut of sculpture techniques available to students. Welding, and wood carving or stone carving, and bronze casting. Some of the students were doing a little work in plastics, but not in acrylic. None of them had done any of that. That I did on my own later.

Riess: The idea of ceramic sculpture came in with Voulkos?

Schnier: Yes. The sculpture students who were interested in ceramic sculpture could go over to the design department where Voulkos was. His kiln was now in the same building, in the environmental design building. His ceramics set-up was right next to ours, so the students could shift back and forth. Later on, when design was dissolved he became a member of the art department.

Riess: What was Harold Paris's medium?

Schnier: He was doing bronze casting, too. He had been doing a little bronze casting before he came to the university.

Riess: Was he involved in your seminar in any way?

Schnier: No, my first graduate seminar in bronze casting was before he came.

Riess: Was Harold Paris teaching bronze casting?

Schnier: Yes, because he had taught a course before at Tulane University. He had some knowledge of it. He'd picked it up on the way. But actually his major experience was as a printmaker.

The man who had considerable experience in metal casting and stimulated us to go ahead and make our own furnaces was Julius Schmidt. He was a highly competent man and his work was fantastic. He also had the gift of improvising machinery from junk yard parts. He was really the big spark plug for casting metal even though my seminar that we have been speaking about came prior to his joining the faculty. That was just one seminar. But when he joined the faculty, he built an iron melting cupola, in addition to his casting in bronze. He brought his own bronze furnace with him and made additional ones while he was on campus.

Riess: I thought that what De Staebler said about you is that you did the first bronze casting. Now you've just mentioned two other people, Paris and Schmidt.

Schnier: I have explained already that these two men came later, Schmidt first and Paris second. I presented the very first course in bronze casting. We learned a lot from that first semester. A lot of this was trial and error. Just trial and error.

There's been a lot of publicity in the newspaper and in the records and in Albright's book about Paris's role in this early bronze casting period, when they had the Garbanzo foundry that Voukos and Don Haskins were operating down at an iron works in Berkeley.

Actually what happened was they were casting Paris's work. He didn't cast it. However, he used to pour small pieces in our back yard behind the art department with the help of Julius Schmidt in Schmidt's own furnace.

Riess: What year was the first bronze casting seminar held?

Schnier: It was in the fall of 1960. The first bronze casting conference at the University of Kansas was that spring, 1960. I returned with so much enthusiasm that I immediately scheduled it as the subject of my graduate seminar.

VI CATCHING UP AND REVIEWING

[Interview 8: September 27, 1985]##

The Art Business

Acceptance, Self and Otherwise

Schnier: Today is a great day for me. I've always been a slow starter, all my life.* For example, in learning how to write and getting married when I was well along in years; having my last child when I was approaching sixty. And in my sculpture work, it took a long time to get established. I mean as far as making it self-supporting, which is an ideal of most artists, although there are others who completely ignored that problem.

The commission that was approved this afternoon is for \$70,000; it's a big piece. Of course, a great deal of that goes for overhead and to my fabricator. But also I've been asked to work out another sculpture design for a new building in Concord, that's the second thing. And the third thing, the "Lichroma" statue, the acrylic sculpture, being acquired--all happening at once. It makes me feel I'm catching up!

And I have so many new ideas now. I'm just hoping I don't get cancer or have a heart attack or an embolism, or something like that, because all these events are so stimulating and inspiring. It builds up my enthusiasm; it's exciting.

*After completing the interview, Schnier and the interviewer, reviewing the session, went over the subject of this "summing up" volunteered by Mr. Schnier. He added, "I only wish my father and mother were alive to have enjoyed their child's success."

Schnier: I think this idea that creative people reach a peak, or that mankind in general reaches a peak and then begins to taper off as they approach old age, may apply to us physically, but mentally, unless one develops Alzheimer's disease, or becomes senile, the idea doesn't hold up. Those are physical problems, but I think the mental part of the human being can continue to be alert and bright, providing these physical factors don't intervene.

Riess: When many people retire and the mental work is over, soon their life is over.

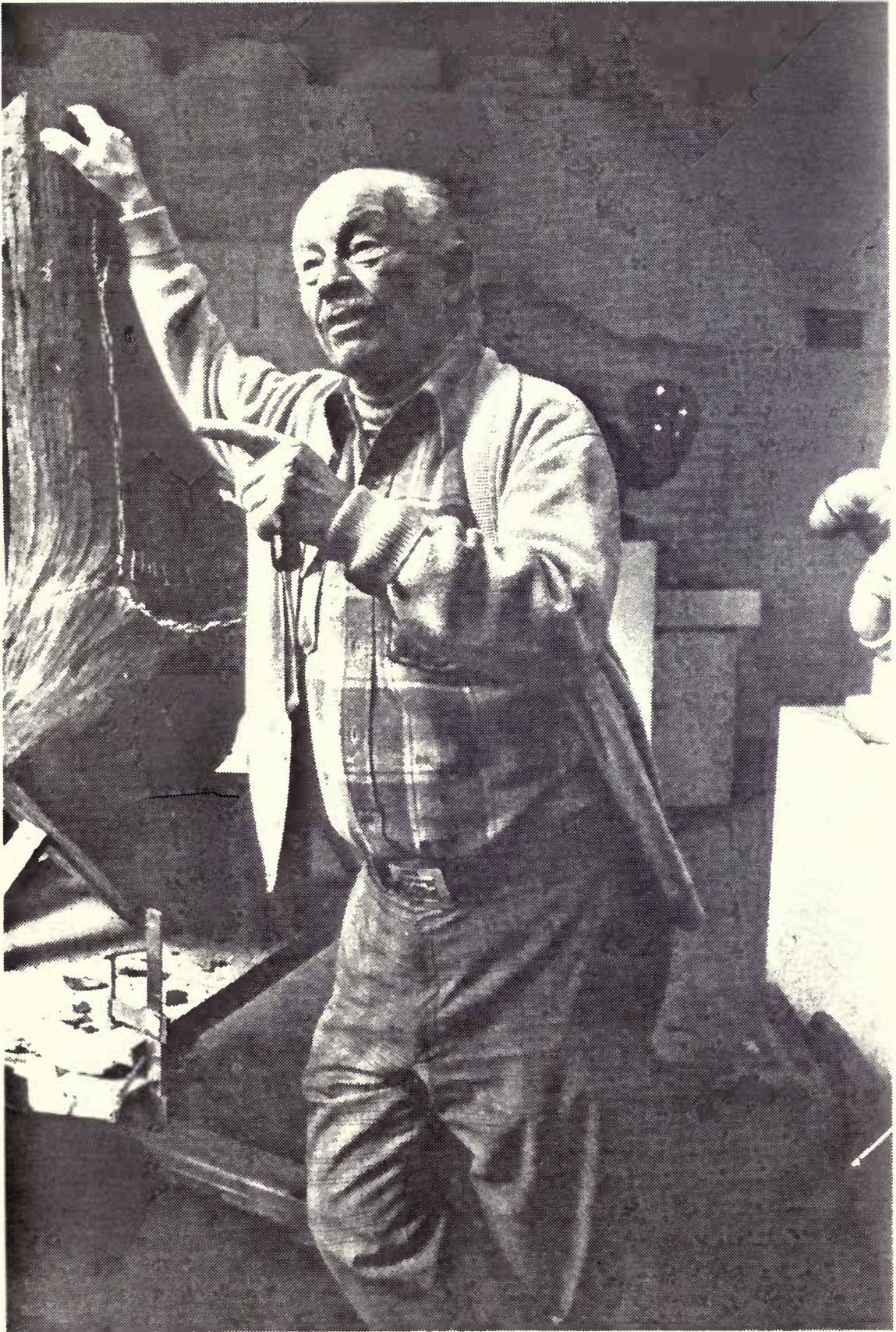
Schnier: I've been surprised--maybe I've talked to you about this before--in reading announcements in the faculty bulletin of members who had just become emeriti and one month to a year after they retired, they passed away. It set me to wondering, why should a person upon release from a routine schedule into a position of being able to do exactly what he wanted to, pass away just after he retired?

In contrast to businessmen, university professors seem to love their work. Of course, not all of them. Some of them are glad to leave the university. But I've noticed a number of them who have found ways and means to continue with their research and their teaching and remain in their offices on the campus. Kroeber was an example of that, and others who you read about. [Joel Henry] Hildebrand up until his hundredth birthday, still had his office in the chemistry department, and still had a number of research projects that he was working on. Remarkable.

Riess: Do you have any regrets or hindsight about your being a late starter?

Schnier: I've often hoped that it would eventually catch up with me, and it's gratifying. I feel it in my blood that it's eventually happened. One of the things that sort of slowed down my speed was that chunk of years that I took out and devoted to extensive psychoanalytic study. Ten, fifteen years. That may have something to do with being a "late starter," too.

Generally speaking I feel that it was part of my own personality, when I think of how late it was before I got married. But this lateness also was tied up with my financial condition, about supporting a wife. I was devoting so much of my time and income to my art work and psychoanalytic training that I had little time to think about the problem of supporting a wife and family, although I did eventually buy a house on Russian Hill. I had a nice house up there that I bought before I got married.



Jacques Schnier, 1980

photograph by Joffré Clarke

Schnier: Maybe that was one of the things that stimulated me or inspired me to get married, having a home of my own. Whatever the explanation, I like it the way it is now. I'm satisfied!

Riess: I thought so. [laughs]

Schnier: Yes, I'm satisfied. I've never been burning with a desire to get established in New York and be one of the big shots, the well-known names, like [Isamu] Noguchi, or George Rickey, or people like that who are in the big league. I'm quite satisfied with being here and having it happen more slowly.

Riess: Then what is the definition of success for you as a sculptor?

Schnier: I think it first starts with being satisfied with the compositions that I do, being satisfied with the final outcome of each project. When I look at them and feel: This is good. I'm pleased. This is successful. It gives me emotional satisfaction. Then I become quiet. I think that comes from my Buddhist interest. I never like to be agitated, be overambitious, be subjected to all the vices that the wise men for centuries have admonished us against, but to conquer within ourselves. And this comes very high in my goals.

Riess: How important is national critical recognition?

Schnier: It gives me considerable pleasure to have my work receive it, but I am not overcome by a craving for it. I do not stay awake at night dreaming about it.

Thomas Albright made complimentary remarks about my work which were published in a national art periodical, so I was a little surprised that in his book he didn't single me out with some of the other artists.

Riess: You mean because he didn't show an example of your work?

Schnier: Yes, for example in that show that they had at the Oakland Museum. He did go to some length in listing my resumé, and influence, in the back of the book. But then I think about it and I say, "He's a writer, he had his own taste, he came up with the 'beat generation,' he was interested in this. He was exposed to funk art, and the revival of expressionistic art, and the work of [Clyfford] Still. Those people were more exciting to him than I was."

Schnier: And so I've tried to come to grips with that feeling within myself, and to realize that this is one man's opinion. He has a right to his own opinion. It's not as if I were a scientist and he was criticizing my scientific discoveries, and I could prove that he was wrong. I can't prove that he was wrong in not having included me in his book.

I don't know if you've read his reviews of my last three shows. I have some reprints, and you can take them along.

Riess: I'd like that, yes, please.

Schnier: Especially the show I had in 1977. This is the one [review] here. He speaks about my work being a "breakthrough," and that's a very strong expression on the part of a critic. Breakthrough means that you've brought out something new, you invented something new, you created something new. And I was happy that he recognized this breakthrough, which was something I was already aware of even before the work was exhibited.

Riess: Good.

Schnier: So anyhow, I want to get back to this matter of my feeling towards the critical reviews. We're talking only of the westerners, like [Alfred] Frankenstein's reviews, and Albright. Almost all of these people have given me positive reviews, with very seldom any negative criticism. That was the case from the very start.

When I had my first show in Los Angeles I got a good review. In fact, I had the feeling this critic was going overboard! I had a feeling that he was being subsidized by the gallery, he was so complimentary! This was when I had been working only for four or five years. I'll find that review sometime so you'll have a chance to compare them.

I sometimes feel that my work is as original and as aesthetically successful as some of the easterners who are recognized, but I also feel it probably never will be recognized in the major museums and in the major writings about contemporary American sculpture. That is because most of the activity is centered in the East because of the dealers and gallery saturation there. That's where the action is right now although it's tending to drift out West, too, as Albright's book is probably being recognized in New York. I think some of the New York critics have written about it.

Schnier: I just don't allow that thought to burn me. I'm happy working and will let history take care of itself. Maybe some Ph.D., twenty years from now, fifty years from now, will look in the Archives of American Art and find this stuff and say, "Hey, this guy's interesting. I'm going to write him up as my Ph.D. subject and have my book published." Maybe. But I don't bank on it. That's totally unpredictable and too far in the future.

Riess: Who is the gentleman who's been commissioning your recent work?

Schnier: Peter Bedford. A wonderful person. He's like a modern de Medici as far as his love of art goes. He doesn't just talk about it, he lives it. He said to me today before you came, "Jacques, have you been to Storm King?" [to Riess] Have you heard of that sculpture collection up the Hudson? It's a big collection of modern outdoor sculpture.

Riess: Yes.

Schnier: He said, "Oh, it's just fantastic." I told him, "No, I haven't seen it, but I've seen the book, and I know most of the pieces that are in the collection." He said, "It is just wonderful." He was filled with enthusiasm. He said, "Do you have a piece there?" and I said, "No." He said, "You should have a piece there. Would you like to donate a piece?" I said, "That's one thing that I don't do. I don't donate to museums or public collections because the work may end up in the basement or storeroom."

He said, "I'm going to see if we can't do something about that." That would be wonderful. But if it doesn't happen, it's not going to cause me any loss of sleep.

Riess: He should start an outdoor sculpture garden here in the Bay Area.

Schnier: Oh, he spoke about that, an outdoor sculpture garden. I mentioned the fact that UCLA has the start of a beautiful one in the Murphy Sculpture Garden. He [Murphy] was a former chancellor at the university, and very much interested in sculpture. He started that garden while he was still at the university before he went over to the Los Angeles Times as one of their directors, or leaders.

Riess: You have never submitted any of your pieces to juried shows on the East Coast?

Schnier: Yes, I have. The first work I ever submitted to an eastern show was to the Chicago Art Institute for their 1930 Exhibition of American Painting and Sculpture. My piece was selected along with

Schnier: a lot of the leading New York sculptors' work. So I was included in that show with one of my very important pieces, which later, when I had a show here in the West in 1932, was reproduced on the cover of the leading New York American art magazine Art Digest, which is now called Art News.

That was the first time. The second time I submitted a work was to the Third International Sculpture Exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The museum had received a grant from an estate for that very purpose--to put on an international sculpture show. My work "Jonah Feeding the Whale" was accepted and exhibited along with leading American and international sculptures of the time, 1949.

So, I was accepted by those shows, and if I had continued submitting works I might have become known in New York. In the beginning I aspired to having a New York dealer, but as the years went by and I noticed what happened to my colleagues who were showing there--I found out that some of them were dropping out either because of lack of recognition or because it was a big job to send sculpture East--I gradually lost all interest in the idea.

You send it on consignment, and you have no knowledge how it's going to be displayed. You probably have to take out insurance yourself; some of the dealers wouldn't take it out. Then there's a big expense connected with the crating and the shipping and other items. By the time they sell something and you get your maybe sixty percent, or maybe only fifty percent, which is probably the case in some dealers' galleries--well, it isn't worth it from the point of view of it being a financial success. From a point of view of becoming known however, it could be very helpful.

But I'm doing well. I'm so happy. I am gradually conquering that, you know, "taming the chaos." I would like to become better known, I think that's human nature. If you have an invention, or you have a book that you think is really fine, you'd like to have it recognized. Especially when I see some of the stuff, it's so far out. I don't think it's sound sculptural expression.

Riess: What do you mean that you're gradually conquering it? You're taming the need to--.

Schnier: That is, the overambitiousness of being recognized in New York, appearing on the front page of the New York Times, or something like that--I'm exaggerating there.

Museums and Recognition

Riess: When you have something that you think is innovative and that you would like to have recognized, the obvious way to get it recognized is to donate it to a major museum.

Schnier: No, I don't agree with you, Mrs. Riess. When a thing is donated to a museum you can announce or list the fact that it's in their collection. But you don't know how long it will be there. They may de-acquisition it, sell it, because a new director comes in and he's trying to raise money, or make more storage space, and he decides to dispose of certain pieces which, in his opinion, are not important to the collection.

It's a rare museum that accepts something with strings attached so that it can't be sold for a hundred years. Now that's number one. Number two, Albert Bender donated a number of my things to the San Francisco Museum of Art. One of the sculptures that I had a sentimental attachment to, was a piece called "The Gardener." [see p. 159] After many years it was no longer shown, it was in the storage room. So, unless a person was acquainted with the relief, they would never have known about it. Now, I want to show you this piece because I brought it out.

[gathers up photos of work] I put these in chronological order. Yes, here's the piece right here. Then I want to get this magazine that has the article. Oh, here it is. See, this is the piece. It's a relief carved in Spanish cedar laid up with gold leaf. They had an article about it in the California Monthly for March 1937--that's shortly after I joined the university. They reproduced it here and this is the card that was published by the museum when it was still in their collection. For years they sold it as a card, an embossed impression in heavy gold paper. It was taken from the actual relief, but the thing they made as a card was a very good suggestion of what it looked like. It sold out, they no longer have any of these cards left. Occasionally I meet someone who tells me he bought it forty-fifty years ago, framed it, and still has it hung on a wall. It was very popular. Anyhow, so what good did it do having it in the basement?

I have a bronze in the Palace of the Legion of Honor collection, and I don't know if it's ever exhibited. The client who acquired it and donated it to the museum has passed away. I know they still own it because they published a book about three or four years ago listing their collection and it was included. But I don't know if anybody except the curator has ever seen that piece. So what good does it do? That is why I eventually bought back "The Gardener" from the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Riess: But "The Gardener" gave you a lot of exposure, didn't it?

Schnier: For many years. When Dr. Grace McCann Morley left the museum, they brought in a new director--several directors in between--and the thing was never displayed. I don't know if George Culler, who was the director when I bought it back, ever saw the work down there in the museum basement.

I did give something to the Smithsonian Institution's Numismatic Collection because the director of that department was interested in collecting sculptors' original models of medals or coins. She wanted the model of the United States half dollar that I had been commissioned to do for the opening of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge in 1936. So that is in the collection in Washington, D.C. Once they had an exhibition of the sculptors' original models for commemorative coins, and she sent me pictures of the display. So it was at one time displayed, but they have so much material there that it will probably never be displayed again. However, for anybody interested in, or researching, commemorative coins wanting to write something about the subject, there is this large library of that material.

Dealers and Commissions

Riess: Did any of your San Francisco or Los Angeles dealers have connections with the East Coast so that they were showing pictures of your work in the East?

Schnier: No, but I think there are dealers now, a couple of dealers in San Francisco who have good connections, but I don't think it would be worth my while to send my sculpture there. It is such an involved undertaking.

Riess: That's what the dealer would do, cultivate the East Coast clients, or don't they?

Schnier: Actually, now, talking about East Coast clients, when I showed at the Willis Gallery in San Francisco, when he was showing modern art in addition to his primitive art, I would say that between sixty-five and seventy-five, if not eighty percent of the collectors who acquired my work from his gallery were not from the West. They were from other parts of the United States. So even in San Francisco the well-known galleries--there are three or four of them that are well-known amongst people who are collectors of modern art--they have a very wide national clientele.

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Schnier: I would say that Stephen Wirtz, and John Berggruen, and possibly Fuller Goldeen, have a wide national clientele. Gump's does too. I would say Gump's has because they get a lot of traffic in there. When I showed at Gump's in the 1930s and '40s, I sensed that, although it didn't have the reputation for its art gallery that it does now. Their art gallery, at that time, was connected with a picture framing gallery which brought in the lion's share of the business.

Riess: Yes, I remember.

Schnier: But those galleries I just mentioned, and Peter Bedford's The Montgomery Gallery in San Francisco, which is featuring nineteenth century art and conservative twentieth century art, probably are building up a national clientele.

Riess: You said that much of the money that you get for a piece goes to your staff and for the materials.

Schnier: I said my fabricator, but now, more recently, to the bronze foundry.

Riess: How about giving me a little breakdown of how that works. You sell things from your own home sometimes?

Schnier: Yes, from my own studio or home. I sell directly. People who know about me and are interested in my art sometimes get it directly from me. I have no exclusive with any dealer. If it's a friend or a member of the family, I frequently discount the work. One of my collectors is my wife's cousin, who probably has more of my work in his collection than anyone else.

Riess: Who is that?

Schnier: His name is Frank Fries, Jr.

Bette and Bernard Kaplan also have collected my work, both representational and abstract. Other collectors who have been attracted to my sculpture are Joy and Morrison Belmont, Florence and Leo Helzel and Nessa Loewenthal-Selk.

But be that as it may, the point is I certainly try to show my friendship by discounting the work. But not as much as a dealer's commission. The dealer, in most of the galleries I've been associated with, takes forty percent. They would like to get fifty percent, but if a person is well-known they're satisfied with less. And they deserve that. So I'm not fighting the dealer.

Riess: So when you sell something at home what happens to that forty percent?

Schnier: I don't think of that as being separate. The list price of the work is what I think it is worth, to me. I would like to get that much. But if the dealer's going to work hard to sell it, I'm willing to share with him a part of what I think his work is worth because he relieves me of the need to give up my time when people come to my studio to talk about buying.

Also, it is an effort. I'm not a born salesman. It's not as if I enjoy selling. Some people really love it and they're good at it, but I'm not.

Riess: If your gallery has a piece like the red one that you have out there and they're selling it for \$30,000, and then there's another red one here at home, and Peter Bedford comes and he wants to buy it, how much does friend Peter Bedford have to pay?

Schnier: I would give him a varying discount depending on the circumstances because he is a very special client.

I want to make a point with you. This is right along with your question. I have a contract on my desk from my dealer, which I haven't signed yet. He has a clause in it that the dealer is at liberty to discount his commission to museum people, to collectors, to special individuals, he can discount it up to twenty percent. As a matter of fact, if he wants to make the sale he could sell it to you, and only make ten percent. I still would get sixty percent. The dealer does all that work and the advertising and the like, and he's constantly displaying my work, better than a museum. The Victor Fischer Gallery in Oakland has one of my big acrylic pieces right at the entrance, where it's well lighted.

Riess: The dealer has no contract with you that covers your pieces he's not handling? The pieces that you haven't given him?

Schnier: Many dealers like to work it that way, that they're the exclusive dealer, but I've made it clear to him I would never sign a contract like that. If I were a young man, a young artist just starting out, it might be very attractive to have him act as my exclusive agent because he would be exposing my work, building up an interest in it, and he deserves something in return. But I don't need that now, I'm well-known.

Production Costs

Schnier: You've asked another question I'd like to answer, about the fabricator. Depending upon the work, sixty or seventy percent of the full contract may go into the fabrication. It's just like a building. When an architect designs a building, the major part of the cost of the building goes into the materials and to the contractors. The architect may get ten to twenty percent of the overall cost, although I think many architects today charge on the basis of so much per square foot. I've heard of that approach, but in the olden days it used to be on the basis of a percentage of the total cost.

Anyhow, hopefully, in the matter of a big commission, I would be getting a return for all the years that I've spent arriving at this point, the hours that I've spent. I don't aspire to a doctor's fee! I set my goal more modestly. [laughs] If I can get what a young lawyer gets, or a skilled mechanic--you know what the prices are at the auto shops now?

Riess: About \$45 an hour, or \$50.

Schnier: Some of the service stations charge \$55. That's what I pay here in Lafayette. My fabricator charges \$45 an hour. So when I try to figure out what would be a reasonable return, it starts in that area.

Riess: That's interesting. So do you have any sense of the number of hours that go into a piece?

Schnier: Oh, yes.

Riess: You keep a record, like a lawyer does, of your conference time and your working time?

Schnier: I try to, yes. Now, for example, in working out the preliminary proposal for the Rockville sculpture, I kept track of my hours, and I charge a fixed fee of \$55 an hour for that. It came to about three thousand dollars for making the proposal studies. I had to go through a great number of preliminary designs to arrive at the correct placement of the simple elements of the composition so when it's viewed from different angles there will be a harmonious interrelationship between them, a play of angles and angular spaces.

Riess: Do you have further hours and hours of work on it?

Schnier: Oh, yes. So far, I have been talking about the maquette. Now I must make the big working model to turn over to my fabricator. I've gotten an estimate already from him. We've worked together for so many years, he's well-informed about the nature of my work and is able to give me an estimate. Now I'll do the working model, take that down to him, and as the work progresses I will continuously supervise it to be sure that it's being enlarged properly.

Riess: Do they go through more than one enlargement?

Schnier: No. They will go directly from my working model, which in this case is one-fourth full size, because the elements are very simple. The important thing is to get the right angles of intersection of these elements. Then when the steel is all finished, I have to inspect that very carefully before it's sandblasted in preparation for the priming coats of zinc chromate. And then will come the final coat of weather resisting acrylic-urethane.

I also have to design the base, the shape of the base, the dimensions, the points of bearing of the sculpture, and the amount of loads on the bearing points. This information will be turned over to the engineer in Rockville, the company's engineer, who will do the engineering for the foundation, figure out the placement of reinforcing rods and how deep to make it depending upon the soil conditions. Then there are the footings--there'll have to be anchor points where the statue will be welded to the foundation, so in case there's a hurricane like the one building up on the East Coast now, the statue will be secure. And I'll make it a point that the foundation will be adequate to withstand the maximum anticipated hurricane force, wind load. They will get a contractor to build the foundation and then have it all ready for installation whenever the sculpture is delivered to Rockville.

So there are a lot of hours taken away from the studio, from other work which is in the planning stage. Does that give you a picture of what's involved as far as commissioned sculpture is concerned?

Riess: Yes, it does.

Public Sculpture, Competitions

Riess: I think, since we're discussing public sculpture, it's interesting to just stay in this vein a bit. What are your other experiences with public sculptures, and how much involvement did you maintain, or how much control?

Schnier: I did a piece for Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco. It is a memorial to Elizabeth Fine, whose husband Rabbi-Emeritus Alvin Fine gave the funds to the temple for that purpose. That was a very satisfying and rewarding experience because, in the first place, the committee, after visiting a number of Bay Area sculptors' studios and examining their works, selected me for the commission. Secondly, they accepted a studio work I had already completed as appropriate for the memorial, and thirdly, they were a delightful group of women to deal with.

Riess: How do you define public sculpture?

Schnier: Something that can be viewed by the public in a public space. It could be either in a public park, or in a public museum; it could be in front of a building, an office building, any building that is accessible to the public. It could be in a school, it could be in the foyer of a church where there's considerable traffic.

Riess: It doesn't have to be related to the architecture, though?

Schnier: No, but it should be harmonious with its surroundings. You asked me in a letter how I've gotten some of these commissions. Regarding the commission for the Fine memorial, I received a call from the chairman of the committee that had been set up at Temple Emanu-El. She wanted to talk to me about whether I would be interested in competing. It wasn't exactly a competition, but they were interested in seeing my work in order to make a choice from amongst a number of Bay Area artists. I don't know how many sculptors they visited but they did come to see me.

Riess: Was this in the sixties?

Schnier: When did it happen? This was in 1974. I was pleased by the way this was managed because instead of the committee of about nine members all coming at one time, they came individually or in groups of two or three. So they weren't influenced by a group leader. My experience has been that usually in a committee there are one or two people who are very verbal and can express themselves convincingly and forcefully, so that the others eventually defer to their recommendation. The upshot of the committee's review was they selected one of my acrylic sculptures. It is in the foyer of the temple leading into the sanctuary.

I like whenever possible to have people acquire a sculpture that is already finished because I've had a few occasions when they were not one hundred percent happy with the result of a work commissioned from a sketch because it wasn't exactly like they dreamt it was going to be.

Discussion of Work

Reliefs and Sculpture in the Round, 1928-

Benner and Swift

Schnier: [turns to papers and pictures] I want to show you another piece; it's an early commission, 1939, for the Benner family. They asked me, when they first phoned, would I entertain the idea of their coming to see my work on the basis that they were interviewing several artists in the Bay Area? I said, "Oh, sure, that's fine." So they came, and then here again, my work was selected over the other artists.

Riess: In that case did you have a finished piece for them?

Schnier: No, I didn't. They wanted a relief and they showed me where they wanted it to go. It was a home that Wurster had just finished for them. They told me they loved the out-of-doors. I could see from their garden how they loved it. They had a big grove of redwood trees and a little stream going through their property. So I did this relief.

I mention that, the fact that I got it in a similar way to the Fine piece. While we're on this subject, I would like to show you a picture of the relief I did as a commission for Mr. and Mrs. Henry Swift, on Tunnel Road about 1930. [see p. 91]

Riess: What's this all about?

Schnier: This is more primitive than the others, as you can see, more crude. Recently when I looked at this I thought, that's the same concept, the same basic design I used in the Benner relief. Here is the principal figure, except that she's nude and it's a rustic scene, very quiet. And here, in the Benner relief, instead of the male figure, I have a male deer. Instead of rabbits, there are squirrels playing around in the trees. I think unconsciously the same thoughts must have been mulling around in my head.

Riess: Who is this male figure?

Schnier: Who do you think! [laughs] It's just male. It's a male symbol.

Riess: But he looks so repressed, and she looks so delighted with herself.

Schnier: Yes. [laughs]

Riess: He's wearing a coat and tie and she's totally naked.

Schnier: I think at that time I was not very versatile in working out expression. I remember struggling primarily with the composition. The diagonal through there, this diagonal up in here, a vertical element here. I think this sort of stems from a classical type of composition you find in post-Renaissance and later painters. You know, some of the paintings of--I think there's one called "Olympia" [by Manet].

Riess: Yes.

Schnier: Maybe Delacroix or Courbet or Goya, maybe some of them. I'm not too well-acquainted with the historical painters. But I just mention that in passing.

Riess: This seems the most token male figure--he's only male insofar as he's wearing a tie. [laughs]

Schnier: [laughs] Yes. There is probably a certain something behind that, his expression there, as you say, a token male. But the point beyond that was my struggling with the composition to make everything sort of fit in there, the rhythm of the trees done in the art deco style which was prevalent at that time, the ground cover of the little flowers.

Riess: Oh, it's just wonderful. I really only question you because you do think in symbolic terms.

Schnier: I didn't at that time.

Riess: You didn't?

Schnier: It was foreign to me then. This was done in 1930.

Riess: Okay. And then this [the Benner relief], is 1939. And it's much more sophisticated.

Schnier: Yes. I was trying to make my work richer and richer, and more refined. Right after I did "The Gardener" Bender commissioned me to do this one for the library of the Art Institute in San Francisco.

Riess: Oh, I'm happy to see this. You've mentioned it before. This [Anne Bremer Memorial Panel, 3½ ft. x 6 ft., gilded carved wood relief] was done in 1936. [see p. 152]

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Riess: Why does it have the two Jewish stars on it?

Schnier: I just added them as decorative elements. Of course, Anne Bremer was Jewish, as was Bender. He used to call himself "Mickey Bender," but he was an Irish Jew and made a point of it. I enjoyed doing that piece. I owned Siamese cats at that time, and here they are playing in the garden. I tried to make it a pastoral scene.

Riess: Did you use human models for any of these figures?

Schnier: No, by that time I had been drawing so much from human models, I had built up quite a vocabulary. I could compose without resorting to a model.

This is the same theme as that gardener relief that Bender had acquired for the San Francisco Museum of Art.

Riess: The man is planting a tree, yes. Thinking of your book about sculpture, would you call this work realistic, or what do you call this?

Schnier: Representational, meaning that it represents some object in the outer world. Different people use different words to refer to the use of recognizable subject matter. Some of them use "representational," some of them use "realistic," some of them use "objective subject matter." But I would say definitely this was not in the category of abstract art.

Riess: You made a distinction in your book between "storytelling representational, with realistic treatment," and "stylized expressionism in representation." Which would you say this is?

Schnier: This would be more stylized, design-oriented, creative-oriented, because those storytelling statues are frequently not composed aesthetically. Let's say, for example, if it's a painting of Washington crossing the Delaware, the artist may make it so realistic that there isn't much of the feeling of the stress and strife that he and his men were experiencing crossing the Delaware River in the middle of winter, and so on, and so on. The artist may try to paint all the hairs in the soldier's mustache, and so on. There is work like that, just plain storytelling, but you don't feel it's a work of art.

Riess: You have arranged these pictures of your work chronologically?

Schnier: Yes. Could I quickly go through them?

Riess: I think we should, yes.

Schnier: This is one of my earliest wood carving reliefs, called "The Family." That probably goes back to 1928. I was very happy when a San Francisco couple acquired it at my exhibition at the James Willis Gallery in 1977.

Riess: Where is that now?

Schnier: It belongs to Jeffrey and Naomi Caspe.

"The Stream" and "The Kiss"

Schnier: I also did some work in the round. This was one of my early, very well-received sculptures. It won the first sculpture prize at the second juried show of the San Francisco Art Association that I entered [1928]. Actually it was the fiftieth annual exhibition of the San Francisco Art Association. It was well-received and was published, as I mentioned, in the leading American art magazine at the time, on the cover.

Riess: And the name of this is "The Stream"?

Schnier: "The Stream," yes. It was acquired at one of my first one-man shows at the Courvoisier Gallery [1932]. I don't know where it is now, but since I value it so highly I'm thinking of running an ad in the national art magazines to see if I can find out who owns it.

Riess: Just so that you know where it is? Not to reacquire it?

Schnier: Well maybe, if I could, yes. I certainly would be willing to consider that because it's a unique piece.

Riess: You value it because it's seminal for you?

Schnier: Yes, it's important.

Riess: This is an interesting sort of philosophical issue you're raising here.

Schnier: Yes. Well, I wanted to show that to you. Now, this "Woman Doing Up Her Hair" carved in teak was done about the same time, and it has some of the same elements in it as "The Stream." I was beginning

Schnier: to twist the figure, to explore form a little more. It was shown recently [1979-80] in a traveling exhibition organized by Rutgers University, called "Vanguard American Sculpture." It was illustrated in the very sumptuous catalogue they published. Evidently it was seen by somebody at one of the museum stops, who was taken by it and acquired it through my dealer. I wanted him to be represented in the deal and to share in its sale.

Riess: How did it get into the Rutgers show?

Schnier: My work was recommended to one of the organizers of the show from Rutgers who traveled around the country assembling the exhibition. He spoke to James Willis of the Willis Gallery. One of the stops on its itinerary was the Oakland Art Museum (Oakland Museum).

Riess: This is 24 inches high. What kind of wood?

Schnier: That's teakwood.

Riess: And when was that done?

Schnier: That was done in 1929, about the same time as "The Stream," when I was still in the Montgomery Block.

I recently found this drawing that I made for a proposed relief which was my next studio project. I thought you'd be interested to see the type of subject matter I was involved with. It still goes back to planting a tree! I was obsessed with the idea of having a garden, of having one tree, as I told you.

Riess: And you've gotten the man undressed. That's good!

Schnier: Yes. Well, she probably would have objected to his being dressed! [laughs] Like in the case of the relief where he had his necktie on. [laughs] I wasn't thinking about that at the time.

Now, this is one, "Boy with Bird," a statue carved in walnut, I did about the same time. I was interested in birds and I think also it may have had something to do with the fact that Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Pepper had lost their son about that time in an explosion in an apartment house. They came to see me and asked if I would do the tombstone for his grave in Sleepy Hollow cemetery in Concord, Massachusetts. They told me that he'd had a great love of birds, and had raised pigeons. The composition I did shows him holding a bird with another above. So that stems from that period.

Then I did this one in relief, again a man and a woman. You can see how my interests ran at that time! Constantly!

Riess: What are you saying? You mean your interests were running to men and women?

Schnier: Yes. I was young, the hormones were flowing. I don't think there's any other explanation. Very natural.

Riess: Yes.

Schnier: And not very hidden!

Then I began doing some stone carving.

Riess: Ah, Georgia marble, yes.

You wrote in your book that when the material is hard, it's harder to express the idea because you're struggling so much with the material.

Schnier: Yes and no. The important point is that you adapt your design to the material. This was unlike the case of a lot of the sculptors who went to Italy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. They congregated in Rome and Florence, made their models in soft clay, which they then turned over to stone carvers at Carrara. The finished work often looked like wedding cake sculpture, made in sugar. But when you work in the stone yourself, or have had some carving experience, you adapt the design, the shape and the scale of the forms, to this hard material.

In 1931 I got a commission from my future father-in-law to do a relief for his study. He had a little one-room house, which was called "The Hut," on their property where he wrote. He was a published author. He gave me the commission sight unseen. I asked him, "Do you want to see the sketch? Do you have a choice of subject matter?" He said, "No, do anything you want." So I did a wood relief, "Two Dancers," and it was set inside the door of his cottage. As the years went by and I got to know him better, and he had seen this other relief, "Native Dancers" which was a studio piece, at one point he asked me if I would consider trading his relief for this one with his paying extra to make up the difference in price between the two. I agreed, so he then owned this piece and he returned the other.

After he passed away in 1952, his son's wife asked me if I would sell her the earlier relief so she could give it as a birthday present to her husband, who was by then my brother-in-law. So he owns it now. It's back in the family.

Schnier: Then, before I did that, or maybe about that time, I did this composition in bronze. You saw the pictures of it or the model I had around here in the library. That won a gold medal.

Riess: What is it called?

Schnier: "Two Dancers." That won the [Adele Hyde Morrison] gold medal at the 1936 Oakland Art Museum Annual Painting and Sculpture Exhibition. I'm having an edition of it cast now at the foundry because it has received a lot of attention lately. People have been interested in acquiring this work.

Riess: That's interesting. People are interested in acquiring new editions of old work.

Schnier: They aren't interested in the matter of an edition, they're interested in the work, they want to own it. In the sculpture, or dealer setup--dealer-artist, or dealer-museum setup, an edition of twelve is considered to be an edition of twelve originals. It's not as if you made an edition of thirty or forty. Then they'd be considered just multiples, like commercially reproduced works. That's where sculpture editions are different from etching editions. An etcher could easily have an edition of fifty. But that's different, they run them off on the press. Anyhow, I'm not having nine of these cast at present, that's quite an investment. I'm just having a few more cast.

Riess: This is the piece that you were saying originally was \$700 and is now \$4,000.

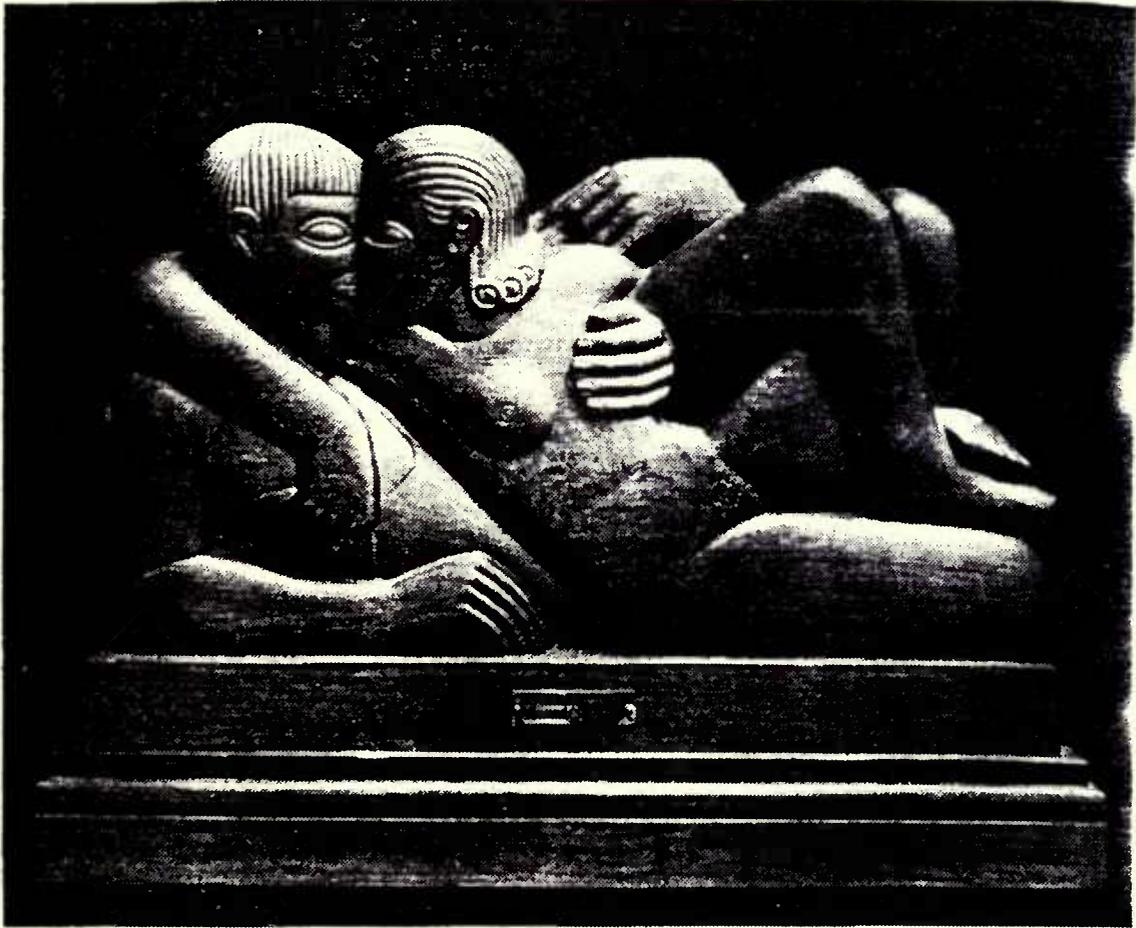
Schnier: Yes. Now here's another piece I did in marble. That was eventually acquired by the Mills College Art Club, and donated to the Mills College Art Gallery. It represents the first piece of my sculpture that ever went into a public collection. They still own it.

Riess: "First prize, garden sculpture competition, 1929. 'Lady Acrobat.'"

Schnier: Then, about the same time, I did this, which I still own. ["The Kiss"]

Riess: This is so beautiful. This is in the round, now, but it has a relief quality.

Schnier: It's compressed, yes. I would refer to it as being more in high relief.



THE KISS (Teakwood) Jacques Schnier

Schnier: I've been approached by a couple of people who are art consultants, or art dealers, who are trying to acquire a collection of artists' works in small editions because they have prospective clients. They want to negotiate with me to cast it in bronze and are prepared to underwrite the casting, and promote the sales, like having a book published. I have not made a commitment yet, but I just wanted to tell you in passing about that.

Riess: Tell me a little about that. It would be full size?

Schnier: Oh, the mold would be taken right from this original wood carving. Incidentally, I did make a study for that, a small piece, on a small scale, in teakwood and it was acquired shortly after I completed it by a woman collector from Seattle. But what we're talking about now is a small edition of this particular piece, at this size.

Riess: Well, I would like one.

Schnier: That makes me happy to have you say that.

Portraits, Berkeley High School Relief, and "The Caress"

Schnier: I was trying to make a living all along. I didn't have any teaching job at that time, let me remind you, but I used to get commissions to do portraits and the like. About this time I did the sculpture for the Golden Gate International Exposition on Treasure Island, and I've got pictures of them. Right after the Fair opened, I was commissioned by an architectural firm to do a sculpture relief for the Berkeley High School auditorium. This is the picture of the completed composition.

Riess: Yes. This is on the Grove Street side. "You shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free."

Schnier: Oh, the architect provided that quote.

Riess: Oh, this is [Henry] Gutterson?

Schnier: Yes.

Schnier: This is the original sketch that I made for it.

Riess: The conquest of the dragon.

Schnier: Yes, the "St. George and the Dragon" theme.

Riess: A big theme with you.

Schnier: Which appears later in my work.

Now this is a large photograph of it. It was done in 1939. I had finished the Fair sculptures in 1938; I had to finish them before the Fair opened, naturally. They had gotten a lot of publicity, and the architects for the Berkely High School knew my work, so they asked me to do this wall.

Riess: Now, back to the theme. You've got Gutterson's words about Truth and Freedom and your theme of St. George and the dragon. Did you work with Gutterson on the theme?

Schnier: No. He showed me a drawing of what one of the draftsmen had proposed, and I followed that theme for a while, and then I showed my sketch to him. I said, "This looks awfully cluttered," because the draftsman had put everything but the kitchen sink in that space. It didn't result in a clear, coordinated design. So then I worked out my own design. In my autobiography I explained how I tried to tie in the top horizontal and the vertical stem with this theme.* I was very satisfied with the design.

About this time I did a portrait of a champion Siamese cat. It's pretty stylized and sort of static. I was influenced a lot by the Egyptian cat, Bubastis. The San Francisco Museum of Art owns one of the castings in its Bender collection.

Riess: What is it? What material?

Schnier: That was in terra cotta. That was done at the time when you couldn't get bronze because of the war.

Riess: "Pak Kwai Mau."

Schnier: "Pak kwai mau," I found out later when I studied Chinese, means in Cantonese "white devil cat."

*"The space allotted the composition was a thirty-two-foot-high T-shaped area. Composition-wise the problem was to unite the top horizontal space with the vertical stem. For subject matter I chose a mounted St. George battling the dragon. Then, by means of the rearing horse placed part in the vertical stem and part in the top horizontal area, and augmented with strong directional lines, the two areas were tied together." [Stone, p. 100]

Riess: "Fired by California Faience Company." What's this all about?

Schnier: That was a pottery plant in Berkeley. Bragdon was the owner; he was a delightful person to deal with. A wonderful craftsman. Very friendly.

Now, this is a photograph of a studio piece, "The Caress," which I still own. That was done when I was courting my future wife. I also did her portrait at that time.

Riess: It says "started in 1941, finished in '42."

Schnier: Yes, that was just after I had finished that big relief for the Berkeley High School and the World's Fair sculptures. She married someone else in 1942, and it wasn't until after the war, while she was divorcing her husband, that we revived our friendship, and eventually got married in 1949.

Riess: And what did you say to me once about the little ship going through here?

Schnier: The ship trying to make the treacherous passage through the narrow cliffs. [chuckles]

Riess: The treacherous passage of love?

Schnier: [laughs] I don't know what it means. You know, I steer clear of trying to interpret my own work and also trying to interpret anybody else's work, because I think that's their own private affair. If I react to a work of art, I want to enjoy it not analyze it!

Now, for example, that painting on the wall, a gouache, I never attempted to interpret it because it would be only my interpretation. Instead, I enjoy it as a work of art.

Riess: Who is that by?

Schnier: By Mallette Dean, a fine painter. He was a book illustrator later on.

Riess: Your things are very sensuous.

Schnier: The hormones were flowing. [laughs] I was a young man at that time, I couldn't help it.



The Kiss (*Tipelo*) Jacques Schnier

Riess: I don't know whether I'm saying that they're erotic, or what it is, but there's such a sense of closeness, the men and women are always mutually enveloping each other.

Schnier: This was probably a wish fulfillment. [laughter] That's probably what it was.

"Jonah Feeding the Whale" and "Taming the Chaos"

Schnier: After the war, before I made the break with representational subject matter in my sculpture compositions, I did a few figurative pieces, and some portrait commissions. Then I did this figure of "Jonah Feeding the Whale" which you've probably seen out in the garden. That composition has been well-received. An edition of the small model was cast in bronze and several of them have been acquired.

Riess: What does this mean, "cast stone"? How do you cast stone?

Schnier: I made the mold from the clay model and then turned it over to a casting company. They take stone, crush it until it's small fragments, but not a powder, mix it with cement and color depending upon the effect the artist wants. They cast it like concrete, and then polish it so that the grain of the stone comes out. It's simulated granite or marble.

If you've ever been to the [San Francisco] Academy of Sciences in Golden Gate Park, in the courtyard, there are two big whales that Robert Howard did. Those whales were made by the same company that cast my "Jonah Feeding the Whale."

Riess: And the large version you have out in the garden?

Schnier: That's bronze.

I don't use cast stone anymore. I have arrived at a point where I can afford to cast my sculptures in bronze instead of concrete. This photograph is of a bronze casting of "Jonah" in the garden of my brother-in-law, Jesse W. Lilienthal, down the Peninsula. He has designed and built one of the most magnificent privately-owned Japanese gardens in the Bay Area. The same people who want to underwrite the bronze casting of "The Kiss" want to reproduce this large "Jonah Feeding the Whale."

Riess: Why do you think people yearn for "The Kiss," in particular, and for "Jonah Feeding the Whale"? What do you think it is that attracts people to them?

Schnier: To "The Kiss"? Oh, there's something personal, something universal in that. In addition, it's the composition that conveys the theme.

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Schnier: I think it's also the composition in "Jonah Feeding the Whale" that appeals to people. I sold the one you saw in here to the group from the East who want to cast an edition. I'm going to find out more about what exactly their proposition is, but in the meantime I'm having my foundry make several more castings in the edition. I took it down to the foundry yesterday.

Now this is a sculpture relief commission I did in 1948 for an architect who was designing the Hawaii Room in Washington, D.C., in what is called the Congressional Club. In it I tried to emphasize the bounties of the Islands as I experienced them, the lush vegetation, the fishing, hibiscus and the philodendrons. The big fields of pineapple, and Diamond Head.

We're talking about post-World War II. Right after I came back, before I did that commission, I had a commission from Raymond Loewy who was refurbishing the [S.S.] Lurline, The Matson Line steamship which was being put back into passenger service. It had been a troopship during the war. Loewy, a famous industrial designer, was appointed to oversee the entire interior. He hired many artists to enrich and decorate the liner. I had a commission to do a statue for the lounge going into the bar. I used an Hawaiian theme, and called it "Native Fisherman." [1948] It was polychromed.

Riess: This is owned by the Oakland Art Museum.

Schnier: Then I cast an edition of three on my own, in bronze. The Oakland Art Museum purchased one in memory of Mrs. Helen Steltzner, who was the first president of the Oakland Museum's Women's Guild.

Riess: There are a lot of outdoor sculptures at the Oakland Museum, by Fletcher Benton and Ruth Asawa, for instance. How were they selected, do you know?

Schnier: No, I don't know.

Riess: Now, that piece--.

Schnier: That's "Taming the Chaos."

Riess: There's nothing about that on the tape. When did you do that?

Schnier: It was right after I did the whale, "Jonah Feeding the Whale." It was stimulated by a desire to explore, to enrich, to expand my compositional repertoire. Heretofore, if you notice, my sculpture in the round--they were still sort of traditional, compact, closed compositions with a low center of gravity. Except that one, "The Stream." And yet that ties up, in a way, with traditional sculpture.

In this one, "Taming the Chaos," I inverted the pyramid of classical Egyptian sculpture, and I opened up the composition quite a bit. Also I tried to bring about a marriage of form and content. My content is, you might say, the storytelling aspect of the man trying to tame the serpent, and the form is the compositional design aspect.

Riess: By this time you had been in analysis long enough so that you didn't do things accidentally.

Schnier: Yes, I didn't want anything to hamper my creative work, my search for new sculptural forms. So I didn't try to let that influence impinge on my bringing up unconscious ideas, or free associating. I didn't try to interpret the meaning of any thoughts or directions my mind took. But first, I must tell you, I was already filled with dragon lore. That was because of my World War II experience in China.

Riess: You're saying that essentially this was an exercise in kind of opening up your design capability?

Schnier: Yes, and an exercise in creating a new composition.

Riess: It's not that you had a burning desire to express how man is struggling constantly with the inner--.

Schnier: No. That may have been dormant but I don't think it was conscious. I prefer that these features come up from the unconscious spontaneously. I feel this is desirable. For me it was very important not to allow that to hamper my involvement with composition. In the final analysis, no matter how universal the idea is that's being expressed and wrapped up with the content of the story, the real problem is creating the vehicle for it, the composition.

Schnier: It's like a writer. It doesn't matter how full of emotion or how important the idea he's expressing is, compared to his style. That's what makes him. That's what makes a Hemingway or a Faulkner, or mention anybody you think highly of. It's his style, his ability to express himself, his sentence structure, his paragraph structure, the continuity between the various elements, or the discontinuity that abruptly changes from one thing to another that adds interest to the story.

Riess: Yes, that's interesting. In those compositions like "The Kiss" and "The Caress," it's not the content that people are responding to?

Schnier: Oh, I think so, due to identification. But before that, the thing that draws them in is probably the compositional aspect of it, the way it's presented. This is the thing that I'm obsessed with now, the compositional aspect, because I know that in the final analysis, even if my work is abstract, the content will be tied up with the compositional aspect.

Riess: This base ["Taming the Chaos"] looks like those bronze abstracts in your studio.

Schnier: That's the influence of my exposure to Chinese art. Those are stylized clouds. Instead of making them round, they're cubical in form.

Riess: Then, when you went on and did the cubical bronzes--?

Schnier: They may have been tied up some way or other, yes.

Riess: Are they close in time?

Schnier: No. The cubic compositions came later. Here I was consciously trying to create a little contrast between the circilinear aspect of the composition, of the writhing serpent, and the cloudlike form from which it is rising. I could have very well used the typical Chinese version of clouds where they're rounded. Maybe you've seen them in paintings and the like? But somehow or other I chose to use this stylization.

It's possible if I were to do that again I might use the rounded clouds and forget about them being obviously influenced by the Orient. It would be no sin to do that!

Riess: How much are you troubled by hindsight in general?

Schnier: Not too much.

Riess: That always interests me as a real question for artists.

Schnier: No, I try to make my work equal to my capability at the time I've created it. I've almost consciously set that up as a goal. In my early work, I just made them almost childlike; I said, "I'm not competent enough to make them like Praxiteles and Michelangelo. I'm going to do it to the height of my present capability." If you look at some of my early work you'll find they're very primitive, because that's all I could do. And I'm satisfied with them being an expression of my sculpture ability at the time.

Riess: But in that one that we just looked at, you're thinking, well, you might have done--.

Schnier: I said if I would do it again I might change it, but I am satisfied the way it is.

More Portraits

Schnier: And then, I did a lot of portraits, because people were interested in portraits.

Riess: I take it these are San Francisco people.

Schnier: Yes, this was a woman psychologist.

Riess: Who?

Schnier: I only know her name before she was married. Her name was Pearl Brettnal. She was connected with the psychology department, where she was a teaching assistant at one time, but then she finally got her Ph.D. and she went East and was on the faculty some place there. Maybe a full professor now. I lost track of her.

Riess: Was she in San Francisco, or in Berkeley, or where?

Schnier: In Berkeley.

And this one is of Dorothy, my future wife. I asked to do her, so I could see her more often! This was when she was quite young. In fact, her mother wouldn't allow her to come to the studio without

Schnier: her old governess chaperoning! So she too would come along. I put a chair for her to sit on in one corner and sometimes put a screen around her so she wouldn't disturb me while I worked--.

That is another portrait done at the same time. Her name was Mrs. Hill.

Riess: Yes. Who is Mrs. Harry Hill?

Schnier: She was a woman who wanted her portrait done.

Now this fellow I know a little more about. This is post-war. A Chinese gentleman, Mr. Harry Mew, commissioned me to do his son. I enjoyed that very much. That was one of the first portraits I did after the war. It is in bronze and mounted on a granite base.

Riess: Did you do these full size?

Schnier: Oh, yes. In fact, I did them a little oversize so that it would compensate for the shrinkage in the bronze. There's always a little shrinkage.

And then this was done as a commission I received from another woman who was one of my first patronesses. Her name was Rose Pauson. She was an artist in her own right, and she commissioned me to do her niece, whose name was Jean Haber--she became a doctor and married. She's Dr. Jean Haber Green now.

Riess: I like that, yes. Very nice.

Schnier: And then I did this of Mrs. Walter.

Riess: With the amazing hair.

Schnier: Oh, yes. And that's just the way her hair was. She looked very, not matriarchal, but--?

Riess: Patrician?

Schnier: Yes, patrician. How would you define it?

Riess: Like aristocratic.

Schnier: Yes, she did, she looked that way. She might not have agreed with that adjective, but she did impress me that way, and I enjoyed very much doing her head.



JEAN HABER GREEN, M.D. (Bronze) Jacques Schmier

Schnier: Oh, by the way, this was a head I did of Albert Bender before the war. Later on Dorothy and I gave a bronze casting of it to the Bender Room of the Mills College Library.

Riess: He's wearing various medals in this.

Schnier: No, that's a button there, I think. It looks like a medal, but he always wore a little flower in his lapel.

And this is the husband of that patrician woman, Mr. Walter.

Riess: "Colonel H.D. Walter."

Schnier: Herbert D. Walter.

Riess: Is that the same family as Edgar Walter, the artist?

Schnier: I am not sure. There were a number of Walters, in addition to the D.N.E. Walters, the carpet and furnishing people.

Neil Armstrong - "Aurora"

Schnier: In 1972 I received a commission from the California College of Arts and Crafts to do an award for Neil Armstrong, the first man on the moon. As part of their centennial celebration the college gave awards to three people. In addition to Neil Armstrong, one went posthumously to Frank Lloyd Wright, and the other to alumna Marjorie Benedict. When I was approached I asked what they wanted. They said they wanted a sculpture carved in acrylic but "You do what you want; these are the funds we have available for it." I thought of something that had a lift to it, as if preparing to fly, and I worked out this composition. This is a photograph of Neil Armstrong receiving the sculpture at the banquet they had at the Mirabeau Restaurant in the Kaiser Center, Oakland.

At that banquet I asked Armstrong, "What are you going to do with this, Mr. Armstrong?" I knew that he was a professor at Ohio University in aeronautical engineering and I thought he would locate it there. He said, "I'll give it to the museum that's being built in my hometown. That's where all the awards and the collection of memorabilia connected with the landing on the moon will be placed."

Schnier: In 1977, my wife, our daughter, Rebecca, and I were driving through Ohio to Cincinnati. Dorothy was reading the AAA Tour Book when she was reminded of this, and sure enough, at Wapakoneta there was a listing of the Neil Armstrong Air and Space Museum. So we turned off the highway and went there. It's right beside the freeway, easy to see from it. We asked the attendant if he knew where this particular sculpture was, that was awarded by C.C.A.C.

He said, "All the awards are in the large back room." But then he stopped and said, "What does it look like?" I said, "It was in carved Lucite." He said, "Oh, that used to be right out here at the entrance." He showed me the locked case that visitors walk passed when they enter the museum. And he added, "It's been there all these years, but a month or so ago we got a moon rock, and we decided to put it in that case and moved the sculpture to the room where all the other awards are."

Riess: Please tell me about the international sculpture shows. Oakland had the twelfth--.

Schnier: Those were conferences sponsored by the International Sculpture Center of Washington, D.C. Actually, in the beginning the most important part of the International Sculpture Center was the staging of the biannual sculpture conferences. They became very important affairs attended by hundreds of sculptors. I was very much involved in them as I was a member of the center's advisory board and for twelve years served as its chairman.

Riess: But what was the whole thing?

Schnier: I'll tell you what I'll do. I was asked by the executive director, David Furchgott, of the International Sculpture Center to write a brief article on its history on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the center. It has just been published in their magazine, International Sculpture. I'll make a note to give you a copy of that. [appended]

The Creative Process

[Interview 9: October 21, 1985]##

Sculpture in Modern America

Schnier: I ran across an excerpt from Ansel Adams's autobiography that I would like to include here. I feel strongly about this point, which is not recognized by a lot of colleagues, I know, especially those who are going in for funk art and pop art, far out art, or happenings. It deals with a concept that whether an artist thinks of it consciously or unconsciously, there is always an audience in the back of his mind, somebody he is talking to, somebody he's sharing his work with and who he hopes will react to it.

Ansel Adams states, "I believe that the artist and his art are only a part of the total human experience. The viewer in the world at large is the essential other part."*

I think that when an artist appreciates this, consciously or unconsciously, his work has an organizational quality that makes it easy to apprehend, and that makes it something that the viewer can react to and appreciate and enjoy in a vicarious way. He gets pleasure too, but probably much diluted from what the artist got in creating it. In other words, he "gets the message," if you want to use that crude expression.

Riess: So you're saying that it really works for artists to wish to communicate and to have a "message."

Schnier: I'll retract that last phrase. I think the word "message" sounds like the artist is proselytizing, that he is trying to win over somebody. I think it's something else. It's like a person telling an individual his or her experiences without any idea if the person is going to side with him or not, just relating his experience. And if it's put in an interesting manner, the unbiased audience, the receiver, the spectator, finds it interesting to listen to.

*A New York Graphic Society Book, Ansel Adams, An Autobiography. Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1985, p. 137.

- Riess: Yes. In your book you say that, "The sculptor has no voluntary control over the primary creative act."*
- Schnier: Did I say that?
- Riess: Yes. Do you believe this anymore?
- Schnier: Oh, yes, considering the term "primary creative act" to mean the impulse to create. Say, by the way, this is probably an answer to the question you're putting. Ansel Adams goes along and makes this statement: "For me, a work of art does not call for comprehension, only for reaction at the level of art itself."** Another thing he states is, "It is not essential to know how the artist thinks or how he believes he relates to his profession or his society."** In other words, it's not important for an artist to explain what he is saying. I don't think that answers your question.
- Riess: No.
- Schnier: No. Oh, I think it's important for the artist to direct and control what he is doing. It may be unconscious, but you wouldn't necessarily get art unless there's some thought given to how the thing is being presented and unless there is aesthetic form.
- Riess: I think that what you were getting at in your book was that the creative act is initially impelled from within, it's unconscious, and then the work begins at shaping it.
- Schnier: Yes, your interpretation of this phase of the creative act is correct. At the time I wrote Sculpture in Modern America I was a Fellow of the National Sculpture Society, a very conservative, reactionary group of sculptors in New York. I say reactionary because they seemed to have been opposed to abstract art, and were afraid of it in a way. The leading figure in that society was Paulanship. Previous to ever becoming affiliated with the National Sculpture Society, I had studied Paulanship's work because there were ample publications available on his sculpture alone. There was something about his style that appealed to me, the decorative quality that went back to the archaic Greeks. I happened to be exposed to this feature of sculpture enriched by decorative treatment because of my exposure to oriental sculpture when my studio was in Chinatown.

*Schnier, op. cit, p. 61

**Ansel Adams, op. cit., p. 137.

Schnier: When I wrote that book, I gave him a great deal of credit for his influence on American art. And he did influence many of the members of the National Sculpture Society. He was a powerful figure at that time, one of the most successful sculptors during his era, following Daniel Chester French, and so I gave him a big hand. Later on I changed my viewpoint and realized that he was just one factor in the development of contemporary American art, that really the important figures for the art of today were men like [Jacques] Lipschitz, and I'd say David Smith, Tony Smith, Gaston Lachaise, and Rosatti, amongst others. But now I have changed my opinion again, and I have gone back to thinking that, considering the time I wrote that book, it was a reasonable point of view. I haven't discarded Paulanship. I haven't said that I want to change my viewpoint completely, but I now realize he's still a recognized sculptor of some repute and some good creative ability. And he was moving away from the traditional sculpture approach of the late nineteenth century.

Riess: So you don't feel as negative about the book now as you did in 1968?

Schnier: No, I don't.

Riess: That's interesting. How was it received?

Schnier: It was received lukewarmly, I would say. No, I should change that. I remember reading a review that was written by a professor of art at either Smith College or Wellesley, and it was a very complimentary review. He was a history of art professor evidently. A very complimentary review. There were good reviews in the publications that review new books. I received these review clippings from the University Press.

But the artists, many of the artists, didn't warm up to it. And I think that was because I had not emphasized enough modern abstract art. There was only one section on it called "Exploration in Art," in which I presented abstract art and the work of Noguchi and Robert Howard and Adeline Kent and the like.

I know one thing. The University Press notified me that the copyright for the book had been purchased by another publishing house and that there was a second printing of it. Not a new edition because I was never contacted by them.

Riess: Well, that's good.

- Schnier: When I look back upon it, I'm happy with it. And people who have read the book thoroughly have commented very favorably on it, people who didn't have a preconceived idea of what modern art should be or what a book on modern art should cover.
- Riess: Thinking of the book, I noticed that Albright referred to your "Taming the Chaos" as "resembling Paul Manship's academic creations."
- Schnier: Yes. I wrote Albright and told him that I don't remember anything in Paul Manship's work--I'm pretty well acquainted with his oeuvre--that looked anything like that. My patterning and decoration did not come from archaic Greek--I'm talking about "Taming the Chaos"--it came from my exposure to oriental art. I mentioned that once before.

The Drive to Create

- Riess: Another question that's quite incidental, but from my understanding of Bauhaus teaching: was there anything in the Bauhaus approach to teaching sculpture that you believed in or that you used in your approach to teaching at the university? My understanding is that there's no copying, there's no theory, you don't give the students anything but just a hunk of material.
- Schnier: I must admit, offhand, that I have very little knowledge of the philosophy of the Bauhaus. I knew of its existence, but I hadn't made an effort to study anything about their approach to art. It was in the air, so that even if I didn't know about their principles of teaching, or their approach to art and creativity, I absorbed it by osmosis from observing what was going on and what my artist colleagues were doing.

My basic approach to teaching art was that people had within themselves ideas they wanted to express. I concentrated on trying to help them structure those ideas in the form of their sculpture. So I encouraged them and helped them with aesthetic problems of presentation, like an English professor would help somebody who was writing a novel or a short story or a narrative, to structure the idea into a satisfactory literary work.

That was my main effort, and I always tried to keep in mind what they were trying to do; to help them but not expose them to anything that would influence them in just one direction. In fact, for a long time I didn't expose them to recognized works of art

- Schnier: because I didn't know how they would react to them. Now, if I were to relive my teaching days, I would do more of that so that they would know what is going on in the field of art. In later years, in graduate seminars, I did a lot of that, but not with the young beginning students who were being exposed to art perhaps for the first time.
- Riess: Does the creative urge exist in everyone? Every undergraduate?
- Schnier: I was just amazed how much there was in almost all those students. Some of them were very inhibited and needed to be encouraged but others were so ready to get in and express themselves, I found it inspiring and stimulating to just observe them. I sometimes kept their work around to look at and to enjoy it myself.
- Riess: Was there talk in your department about various schools or approaches to art?
- Schnier: Well, there were seven faculty members in our sculpture unit. I didn't know what the others were teaching, each one was going his own way. There was no unified approach to setting up even a basis for the students. I told you about that last time. It was very unfortunate.
- Riess: There was not a sort of ferment of ideas among all of these sculptors either?
- Schnier: No, because some of them had no interest in sharing ideas, so there was no participating in a fermentation. [chuckles] With some of them, I had no respect for their ideas.
- Riess: In your book you quote, within a quote, Nietzsche's description of the creative act. It's an extremely orgasmic sort of thing.
- Schnier: Do you have that there? [interruption in tape]

[reading] "Something which profoundly convulses and upsets one becomes suddenly visible and audible with indescribable certainty and accuracy... A thought flashed up like lightning, it comes with necessity, without faltering... There is an ecstasy so great that the immense strain of it is sometimes relaxed by a flood of tears, during which one's steps now involuntarily rush and anon involuntarily lag. There is a feeling one is utterly out of hand, with the very distinct consciousness of an endless number of fine thrills and titillations descending to one's very toes."* So on and so on and so on.

*Schnier, op. cit., p. 62.

Schnier: That sort of sets the stage, except with me. I can only talk factually about myself. It is never as ecstatic and profoundly convulsive as Nietzsche described it. [laughter] It's more of a calmness and a feeling of pleasure, though when I think about it-- I've mentioned this before to other people who have asked me this same question--when I've finally found a solution to a composition that's satisfying, I clap my hands and dance, dance around the studio. It's so gratifying, it makes me so happy, that I've got to do this.

But it's not a matter of "something which profoundly convulses and upsets" me. But I can imagine with Nietzsche it would apply. Didn't he become psychopathic towards the end?

Riess: I don't know.

Schnier: It could have been with Nietzsche, and Van Gogh, maybe. But no, I've never experienced anything that violent. It's always very pleasurable and happy. Happy because it's released this uncertainty of trying to find the design vehicle for getting over something, and usually the something is unconscious. I only know I'm trying to find an organization, a quality where the thing has life to it-- that's one way I can express it. By life I mean it has the quality of life, which means it's organized. There's an organic quality to it. It has a pulsating quality. In other words, there's a rhythm to it that you associate with something that's living, breathing, whether it's an animal, a butterfly, a bird, or a human being.

I think that the human being experiences these things because of his own body: the heartbeat, the balance, and the kinetic quality when you know you're in a good, comfortable position. For example, if you're working down low, trying to do some work with a hammer and nail, or a screwdriver, and you're not at a comfortable angle, you know it. But when you're in a good position, you know it too.

Anyhow, this is what I mean when I say I am looking for the "solution" to this particular composition that I'm working on. And when I get it, it's so gratifying, it's sort of a release because I have been struggling so long to get it. It varies, of course, from one project to another, depending upon whether the general preconceived idea of the composition is a vertical one, or horizontal, or whether it's asymmetric, whether it's unbalanced, and so on.

Riess: With your background in psychoanalysis, does the creative act continue to be an interest of yours? Did you continue to develop it in a kind of theoretical way, or once you started doing sculpture again, did you stop thinking about why you were doing it?

Schnier: Once I gave up the idea of being a psychoanalyst, I continued my interests in applying psychoanalysis to art creativity. In the meantime I have arrived at a satisfactory answer to serve my own purpose. It ties up with what I just said regarding the living quality of art expression. That's the whole crux of the matter, the criteria of a work of art, that it has this organizational quality to it. Without it, it isn't a work of art.

For example, dreams are characterized by content which might become the basis of a work of art, but by itself a dream is not a work of art; it jumps around from one element to another. The very essence of a dream in most cases is its disorganization, and the difficulty for the dreamer and his audience is following this.

With a generally recognized work of art, it's just the opposite. It's organized just as a successful literary work is in the flow from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph. These features are all part of an attempt to establish a living quality in the art work. I have an idea what this means to me. It is an attempt to create a living entity, or a substitute for a living entity, that in fantasy has been destroyed.* I believe that in human beings there is a great deal of destructiveness. As we become more and more "civilized"--and that's in quotes--we have a need to make amends for the unconscious destructive urges which lurk in the deep recesses of the mind. These urges can readily be seen in children by the way they destroy things. It's part and parcel of the human animal and you've got to accept it. That's why in "Taming the Chaos" I have to explain to some people that it is not a double entity, the destructive animal world and the human being--that it's really a single entity. It is man's ego, his consciousness, his civilized being, grappling with his animal being. He's struggling to control it, not to annihilate it. He's not

*See Schnier "Restitution Aspects of the Creative Process": American Imago, Vol. 14-No. 3, 1957, pp. 211-223.

Schnier: destroying the chaos, he's intent on taming it. If you destroy these impulses, even the destructive ones like they do in a lobotomy, the human being may become a vegetable, no longer a person or social being. I think we have got to accept the existence of these destructive urges, and learn to control them. On the other hand, our erotic urges should not be suppressed. That's why people became interested in psychoanalysis because it discovered the neurotic implications resulting from repressed erotic urges.

I've gone into a long story about the matter of creativity. I think that's enough.

Riess: It's interesting. I wanted to ask you whether you have had an interest in left brain, right brain research.

Schnier: No, I know nothing about it.

Work from the Sixties

Cast Bronzes

Riess: You sent me the Leonardo reprint and I was struck by how much influence of Jewish ritual objects I saw in your cast bronze work from the sixties.

Schnier: I've never consciously associated any of this work with Jewish ritual objects. I've been to the Judah Magnes Museum many times, and when I lived in San Francisco I used to go to the Jewish Community Center where they had exhibitions of these things. They interested me from a historical point of view but not because of their design. But the significance of something like the mezuzah has interested me.

Riess: Several of these look like them!

Schnier: Oh, now this one. I take back what I just said. This is one that has reminded me of some aspect of Judaism. I call it "House of the Four Tablets" from the tablets of Moses. When I started to make this enrichment, I did it with a little tool directly in the material. I thought to myself, This looks like Hebrew. But when you look at it closely you can't make out any Hebrew letters in it.

Riess: It does look like that letter, "Chai."

- Schnier: You're right and I consciously was aware that people would assume that this was meant to be Hebrew. I had fun doing it, I enjoyed it. It looked too plain without anything, and I wanted to enrich the whole thing.
- Riess: We cannot assume, from looking at it that it is the Tower of Babel, or--.
- Schnier: No, nothing related to it. By the way, I'm not a Jewish advocate. I'm not well-versed in Jewish folklore and Jewish art because of my parents' lack of interest in the subject. So, I've never gone deeply into them. But I still feel I'm a Jew because I was born into the caste system. There is this difference, and I enjoy what they're doing at the Judah Magnes Museum, and the Jewish Community Museum in San Francisco, especially if it's related to modern things. But I'm not driven in that direction. Occasionally something will come up in my work that suggests a Jewish connotation. Now, for example, here is a sketch for a piece of sculpture that I did. I call it "The Sound of the Shofar." [1964]
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- Schnier: When I finished that, and I was looking for a title, or maybe as I was working on it, that small element in the upper right hand section reminded me of the shofar.
- Riess: The horn.
- Schnier: Yes. The half cylinders reminded me of the Torah. See these two handles?
- Riess: Yes.
- Schnier: Although they're not completely cylindrical. So there is, in that piece, a conscious association with a Jewish ritualistic figure or object.
- Riess: And did you actually do the piece?
- Schnier: Yes, I did it, it's finished, it's in bronze. One casting belongs to the University of California.

In 1963 I received a fellowship in the Institute for the Creative Arts. At the end I wanted to show my appreciation to Clark Kerr, who founded the institute, by donating one of the sculptures that I did during the fellowship, to the university. The last I heard, it was over in University Hall.

Riess: The title of another sculpture, "The Citadel," also evokes a religious something.

Schnier: Yes, it has a religious connotation. Another one was named, "The Eternal Sanctuary," and those are places--and I don't know whether this is part of the Jewish ritual, but I know it's part of the Christian ritual of having a sanctuary--where something important is placed, like the eyebrow of Christ, or a section of the bone of a Saint, or--.

Riess: Well, those are reliquaries.

Schnier: Yes, well, I thought of them as being--because of my limited knowledge I thought of a sanctuary as a place where something very valuable, from a religious point of view, was kept. And the reason they were sanctuaries is because there were openings for depositing the relic. That's when I started opening up my sculpture. I was trying to get holes through it instead of making it monolithic like the Egyptians did. That's part of modern art. Henry Moore used it a lot, but as you look back over the history of art, you find there were other artists using openings, maybe a thousand, two thousand years ago.

Let's see now, I'll show you a photograph of the one that I have reference to specifically. See, this ["The City"] was one of the first abstract pieces I did. It was monolithic, cut from a solid block of alabaster, except that I opened it through here and put it on legs. And this one, ["The Holy Citadel, No. 2"] was a conscious study of these openings. There were openings from one direction, but in this one ["Eternal Sanctuary, No. 1"] I definitely had openings from four sides.

Now this one ["Cubical Variations within Rectangular Column"] was done about the same time, 1961, but the only opening was this leg-like form. I was using two elements to support it, and that goes back in a way to the human figure. So you might say I haven't departed completely from realism.

Then in this ["Sanctum Sanctorum"] there are three layers of openings.

This one ["The Fortress"] doesn't have any openings in it, but it has this cantilevered effect.

So that's why I started using these religious terms, like "The Eternal Sanctuary" and "Sanctum Sanctorum"--which is the same thing. "Sanctum Sanctorum," doesn't that refer to a holy place?

Riess: Yes. Was this religious imagery of interest to the people who were following your work at the time?

Schnier: I think that those pieces were a little ahead of the time, in a way. I never exhibited them extensively, but I'm just beginning to consider going back and making proper presentations of these early periods of my art, starting first with the representational work. I'm having a number of these works cast in bronze, enough for a separate exhibition. Then I'll have these bronzes that we're talking about now, the abstract ones, presented.

Use of Polystyrene

Riess: How did you become aware of the polystyrene plastic vaporization process?

Schnier: The use of foam plastic, polystyrene, was in the air at that time; colleagues were using it and so were a number of leading foundries. I found out more about it at the conferences I attended at the University of Kansas, the sculpture conferences. Just briefly I would like to explain what that meant.

Instead of making a large complicated wooden pattern for a certain type of sand-mold casting--talking about a big corporation like General Motors--instead of doing that, they would take a piece of styrofoam and make their pattern out of it. Then they would hollow it out, pack it in a sand mold and cast it. The molten metal vaporized the pattern and filled the space it formerly occupied. This method saved them an enormous amount of money, labor and time.

So sculptors got wind of this, some say they actually discovered the technique. That's enough to answer that question; I won't go into detail here.

Riess: Every time you did something new like this, did you introduce the techniques to your students?

Schnier: Oh, yes. It was an ideal educational method because they could work out something in styrofoam, which is so easy to handle, so light, especially for the younger students. Instead of having a big piece of stone or wood or a heavy mass of clay, they could work out their composition in styrofoam. Then they could pack it in the sand. By that time we had a foundry at the university and we could

Schnier: cast it in aluminum or bronze, usually in aluminum because it was cheaper for them, and it was easier to finish after it came out of the sand. So the students went home with a finished object.

Riess: Were they always solid forms?

Schnier: In many cases they were solid because we hadn't perfected the hollow technique. They would make their styrofoam sculptures so they were suitable for casting. In my own work when I used foam vaporization, I wanted big massive shapes, but I didn't want them solid. I used a core of sand, like they use in a foundry, where they compress sand with a binder to hold it together, a binder which was so strong that you could file the shape, or change it, and get whatever configuration you wanted. Then I would cover that with a very thin layer of styrofoam and pack the whole thing in the sand with a suitable inlet for the bronze. When the molten bronze was poured in, the styrofoam vaporized because it's only two percent solid and ninety-eight percent air. The two percent would vaporize also and, in the form of gas, would go into the sand.

Riess: Neat.

Schnier: So I got hollow castings that way, but that would have been difficult for the students although a few of the more advanced ones worked that way.

Riess: And so you were using the studio on campus for your own castings?

Schnier: Actually I had my own furnace there. I designed it and had it built. It was my own. I used it outside, back of Kroeber Hall.

Riess: And who else could use it?

Schnier: I used it for my students' work. I didn't use the one that we built originally for the students because it was a crude affair and not always available. I had this for myself, my own use, and for my students' use.

Riess: Did that make for controversy, that you had your special place?

Schnier: No, not at all. It was a beautiful furnace. My student assistant, who later became a well-known sculptor, built it under my guidance. I gave him the drawings and specifications. He was an exacting workman.

Riess: And who was that?

Schnier: His name is Victor Royer. He has given up sculpture now and gone into another field since I last saw him.

Acrylic

Riess: So that was about 1963, and then it was at the very end of the 1960s that you discovered acrylic for your sculpture.

Schnier: Yes, after I retired [1966] I became interested in acrylic. It actually came about this way: In 1936, when acrylic was invented, there were two firms manufacturing it, Rohm and Haas, and DuPont. Rohm and Haas was promoting the use of acrylic and had a big sculpture competition. They invited artists to send in designs suitable for acrylic. They sent the applicant samples of "Plexiglass," their name for acrylic. DuPont calls the same material "Lucite."

Riess: For casting or for carving?

Schnier: For carving. At that time there was very little information available outside of these two big corporations as to how it was cast.

I was fascinated by the beauty of these little samples they sent me. In fact, I had them on my drafting table in my studio for many years. I would like to have entered the competition, but the pieces were so small and the information for working the material so meager, that I passed it up.

I gave up the idea of working in transparent plastic until a few years later when a firm was established in my neighborhood that cast in a plastic something like polyester. It was a room temperature vulcanizing process, or polymerizing process. I had some pieces cast at that place and I was fascinated by it, but it wasn't good for clear casting, only for colored casting. Then the war came along, and I gave up the idea entirely. But I always had this idea in the back of my mind of using a clear, highly refractive material which I'd seen originally in crystal forms in Chinatown--the little carved animals.

Riess: Had there been anyone working with that material in the forties?

Schnier: Oh, yes, but for different purposes, for bathroom fixtures, and--.

Riess: Not in sculpture.

Schnier: No, not in sculpture except for a few isolated instances. Some sculptors were taking stock pieces and cutting them, then cementing them together and making constructions. But not casting or carving in solid masses.

Schnier: Then one day I was talking to Bruce Beasley who in the sixties was casting in acrylic, and he showed me a sculpture he had cast in the material. He'd cast it in two sections, and bonded them together. I looked at it and couldn't find the seam. I was just amazed that it was possible to get bigger sections suitable for larger sculpture by bonding the smaller sections. So that is what started me, what revived my interest in the use of acrylic for sculpture.

I didn't want to cast because that was very involved. I wanted to carve. So I bought the thickest sections available, which were four to four-and-a-half inches, slabs of Lucite or Plexiglass, and I learned how to bond them. I learned to such a degree of perfection that I was considered the only person who could do this and get a bubble-free joint, at that time. Now there are others who can do it without any problem.

When a manufacturer was approached by a research firm to find somebody who could make some windows out of acrylic, eight feet in diameter and eight inches thick, through which they could photograph some atomic reaction, the manufacturer referred these research people to me as being the only one in the West who could bond this material and get it bubble free. I said no, I wouldn't do it. I didn't want to spend two or three years of my life involved in this, even if it ran into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. Besides, I didn't feel I was expert enough to do things that big.

Riess: Well, you couldn't have done something like that in your studio.

Schnier: Oh, no, I would have had to go out and negotiate with a big contracting firm. Actually, there was a firm in the Midwest called Cadillac Plastic that did things like this for prototype lenses for big telescopes. And there was also Bruce Beasley who had an interest in a southern California company that did similar work. I recommended both of these firms to the research people.

But anyhow, I want to get back to the subject of acrylic. Once I was able to bond big pieces together that got me going, and for ten years I did nothing but sculpture in acrylic. And those, by the way, were very well received. Of all of my sculpture, they were received the most enthusiastically, to judge by the number of pieces that people acquired.

Riess: Why is that?

Schnier: Oh, because it's so beautiful. It is for the same reason that I was attracted to the material that these people are also attracted to it. It's the brilliance of the material, the "fire"--that expression comes from the diamond profession--that attracts people.

Riess: Albright calls your acrylics "baroque."

Schnier: Because there's a richness to them; the light pattern is quite rich, but not flamboyant, and I guess that's a quality he associated with baroque art. I think of his use of that term as being complimentary although I don't like baroque art per se. [chuckles]

Riess: Albright refers to Robert Howard as another sculptor experimenting with plastics, in the early fifties.

Schnier: He was one of the early experimenters to apply knowledge of plastics to sculpture. The first things he did stemmed from his mixing sawdust with a plastic to get a hard, permanent plastic material.

Riess: Sounds hideous.

Schnier: But they were interesting forms. The texture wasn't so exciting. He did a lot of kinetic things at that time with his mixture. Bob was a very innovative and creative person. He did some important works.

Riess: The whales at the Academy of Sciences, those kinds of shapes that I know him for, are they early or late?

Schnier: The history of that statue is this: He was commissioned, like a lot of other sculptors in the Bay Area, to do sculpture for the World's Fair of 1939. One of his commissions was for a fountain for the San Francisco Building. He was a very good friend of the architect. For that fountain he decided to do something that was permanent. It was such a beautiful and finished work that it was decided to save it. That was amongst the few things that were in permanent material during the Fair, like two of my statues in the Court of Pacifica that Pfleuger designed.

Now, to get back to "The Whales." It was cast in a mixture of black granite aggregate and black colored hydrolic cement which was polished to look like black marble, or granite. But it's a cast piece and it's a very handsome work. I'm glad that they saved it. There are not too many interesting outdoor sculptures in the park. Most of them are historical things like the statue for Thomas Starr King, or the baseball player. Okay.

Riess: But "The Whale" is not typical Howard?

Schnier: No, I think it is typical Howard. It is a good design. He worked out a nice design.

Riess: Later on he went into abstraction.

Schnier: Well, yes, but he probably did some abstract things prior to that time. He was more amenable to that because he had greater exposure. He was trained in Paris after World War I and he used to work in New York. He traveled back and forth so he had the advantage of greater exposure than other West Coast sculptors.

Polymer Industrial Forms

Riess: Then, in the late seventies, you were doing the tubes.

Schnier: Yes, that's right, late seventies and early eighties. I was using these polymer industrial forms. I had seen some little objects using elbow pipe joints and thought I could expand, using larger modules, to work out some sculpture.

Riess: Could you explain this photograph, taken in 1978? What are you doing here? It looks like a piece of PVC pipe.

Schnier: I was at my studio and a photographer came in and took the picture. What I was doing was shaping the pipe elbow a little, sanding it a little so it could fit into an adjoining elbow, because they have a positive or a negative on either end.

Riess: This was a maquette for a much larger version?

Schnier: Yes. I made them small first and then would make them large. Like the one outside in the garden, just that same idea; they're fitted together that way.

Riess: And in the larger version did you cast the stuff yourself?

Schnier: Nothing is cast. I bought these modules--

Riess: You bought all the elements.

Schnier: Yes, at a manufacturing place. I was always searching for the proper element because they come in all different kinds of angles. Even for a right angle, there are many different manufactured designs--they're all different. I was looking for a certain kind and I spent a lot of time searching until I found what I wanted.

JACQUES SCHNIER



11—MCGRAW-HILL

SELECTED SCULPTURES 1969-1979

San Francisco Art Commission AWARD OF HONOR EXHIBITION
Capricorn Asunder Gallery 165 Grove St., San Francisco, CA 94102
Sept. 26-Oct. 26 1979



photo by: JAK, Centro Carlo Tames

19—DIANE OF EPHEBUS

SELECTED SCULPTURES 1969-1979

SCULPTURE IN CRYSTAL ACRYLIC

For many years my studio was on the edge of San Francisco's Chinatown and its influence on my sculpture was deep and lasting. In those times there were antique shops along Grant Avenue where Chinese art of museum quality could be purchased. There were ancient Han bronzes, polychromed Ming wood carvings, clay Tang grave figurines, delicately glazed Sung pots, and art objects in many other materials. Among these were large carvings in semi-precious stones: in jade, rose quartz, carnelian and rock crystal. Of all these works, those in rock crystal held the strongest appeal for me. Their brilliant fire-like reflections, dazzling highlights and water clear transparency effected me in an hypnotic way and resulted in an irresistible obsession to work in this material.

Using stone carving chisels and heavy mallet I tried to shape large chunks of rock crystal, collected in the desert, into sculpture compositions. But, because of crystal quartz's extreme hardness, it was resistive to my tools. A subsequent trip to the jade and quartz carving center of China in Suzhou convinced me of the technological difficulties involved in making sculpture in anything harder than marble or granite.

For awhile my obsession with sculpture in a transparent material was resolved by working in glass. These works were all in relief, carved in 1" thick slabs of plate glass, by controlled blasting of the surface using abrasive grits and compressed air. My most ambitious work, *Summer Night*, was exhibited in the Fine Arts Palace of the San Francisco World's Fair in 1939. But bas-reliefs, even in thick glass, were not acceptable substitute for the three-dimensional sculptures I visualized in transparent material.

In 1968, my interest in transparent sculpture was revived by learning the technique of bonding thick slabs of clear acrylic into large blocks for carving. By using my marble carving tools, followed by finer and finer grades of abrasives, and finally buffing with optical polishing compounds, I could shape the blocks into glass-like sculpture compositions. Later, I expanded the process to include any available power tool or machinery that was useful in accomplishing my purpose.

Although it was the characteristic transparency of acrylic that originally attracted me to it, I found through experience that the light phenomenon of brilliance was a more important factor. Whereas transparency of a material relates to the ease with which light travels through it, brilliance relates to its refraction and the way light is reflected back from it. Amid a myriad of objects in a visual experience, anything that glistens, gleams, or flashes becomes highly conspicuous because of its contrast with non-shining objects or surfaces and thus stimulates responses in the eye. And these light effects occur in acrylic sculpture when the configurations are such as to cause light to bounce from the internal and external surfaces, as from a mirror, back to the viewer.

Jacques Schnier.



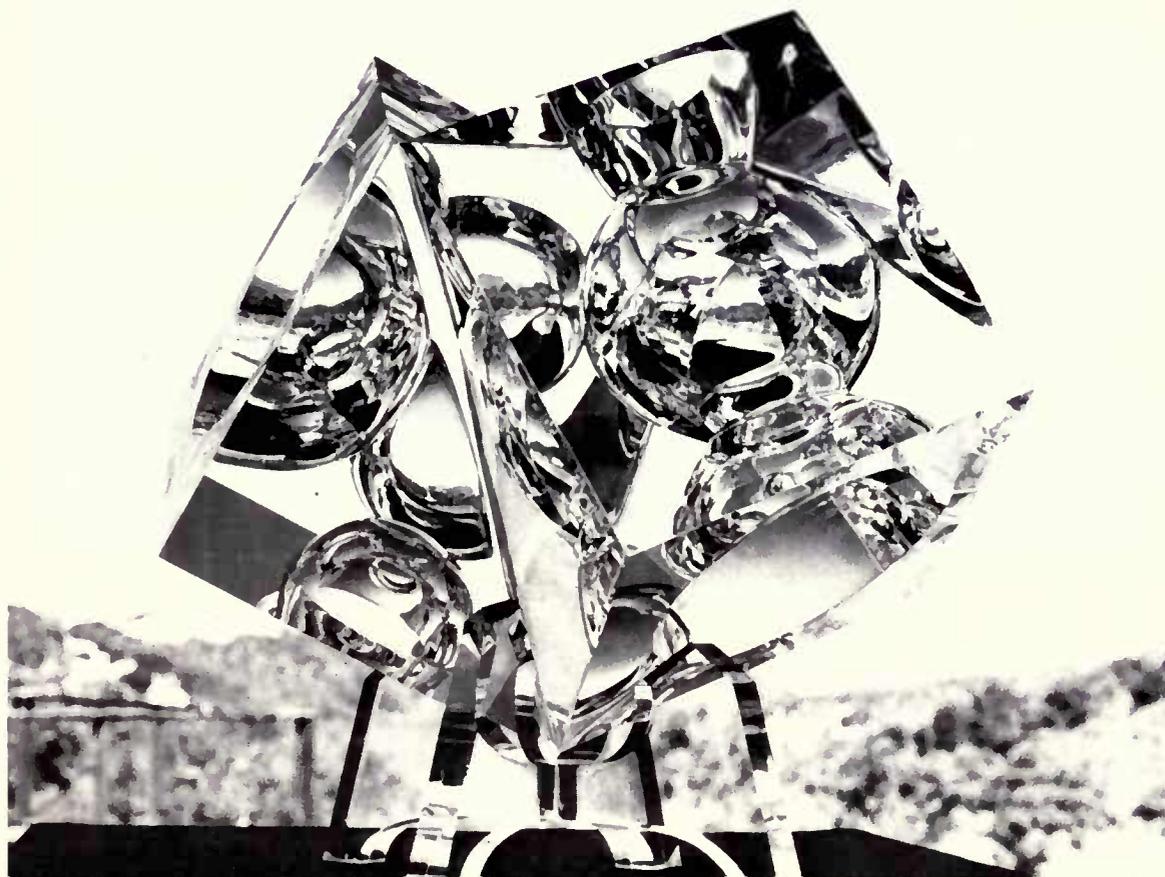
1—LICHROMA

LIST OF WORKS

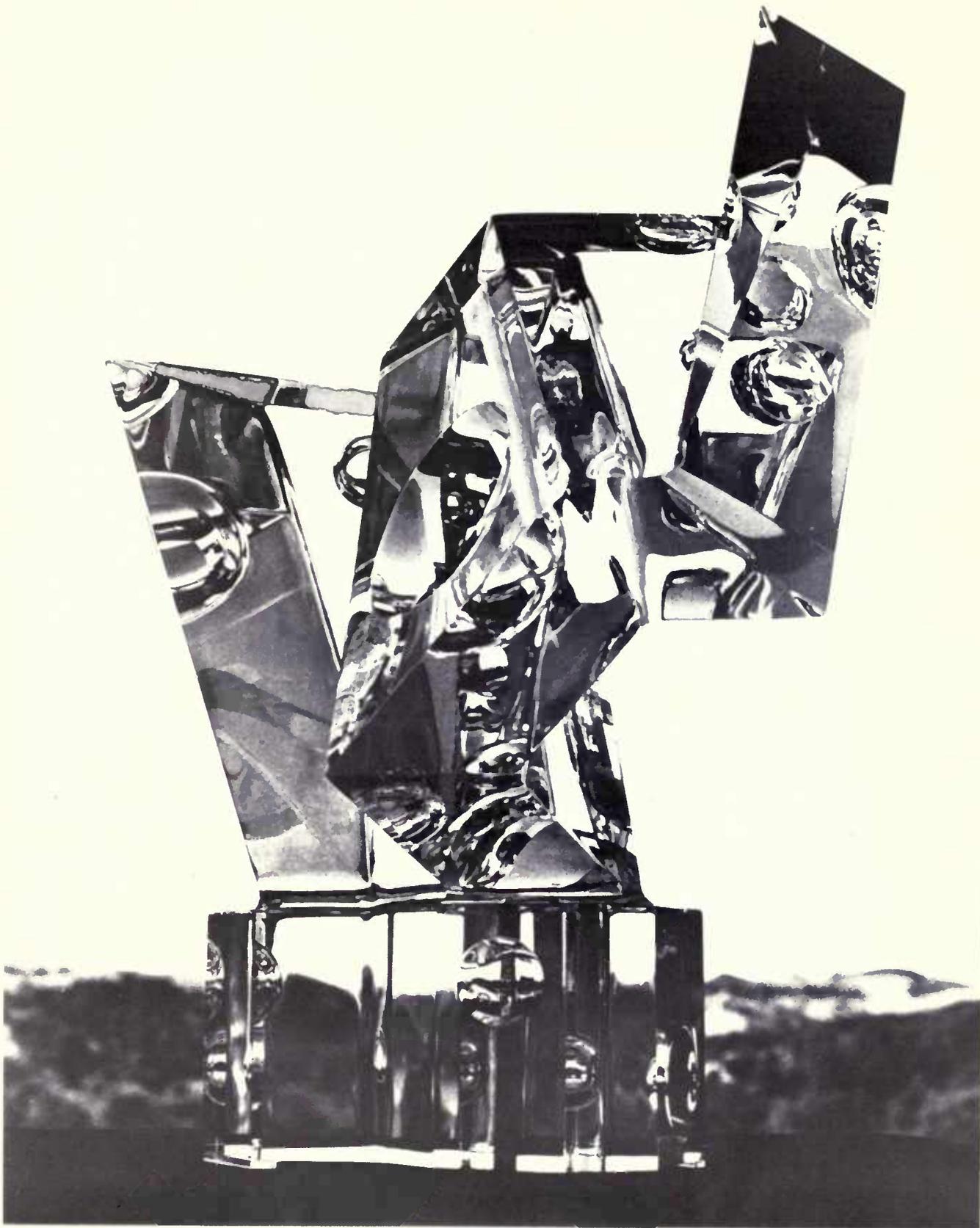
1. LICHROMA, 1979.
20 ½" high x 11 ½" x 13 ¼". 2/edition 6
2. LICHROMA, maquette, 1979
10" high x 7" x 5 ¾". 4/edition 10
3. ZANGAWANG, 1978.
10-1/8" high x 20 ½" x 12 ¼".
4. ZANGAWANG, maquette, 1977.
5 ½" high x 10 ¼"
5. LOVE OF TWO CUBES II, 1977
20 ½" high x 25 ½" x 15 ½". 1/edition 3
6. LOVE OF TWO CUBES I, 1977
16 ½" high x 16 ½" x 10-1/8"
7. LOVE OF TWO CUBES, maquette, 1977
4" high x 4 ¼" x 2-5/8"
8. NIKE VICTORIA II, 1977
16" high x 23" x 14 ½"
9. NIKE VICTORIA I, 1976
15 ½" high x 14 ½" x 10". 2/edition 6
10. NIKE VICTORIA, maquette, 1976
7 ½" high x 8"
11. MOON GAZER II, 1976
24" high x 26"
12. MOON GAZER I, 1976
10 ½" high x 11"
13. LIGHTREX II, 1975
21" high x 13 ¾" x 11"
14. SCINTILLAR II, 1975
21" high x 15" x 17 ½"
15. ENDORA, 1975
14" high x 5 ½"
16. CRYSTOLOS, 1974.
24" high x 16 ½"
17. SHIMMELAR, 1973.
27" high x 17" x 15"
18. AURORA, 1973
26" high x 17" x 15"
19. DIANE OF EPHEBUS, 1972.
32 ½" high x 20"
20. CONCAVULUS, 1972.
20 ½" high x 10 ¼" x 9 ¼".
21. LIGHT SANCTUARY, 1970.
20 ½" high x 15" x 13 ½"
22. YUBELO, 1970.
20 ½" x 13" x 8". *Lent by Mrs. Dorothy Schnier*
23. YUBELO, maquette, 1969
13 ½" x 6 ½" x 3 ¾". *Lent by Miss Rebecca Schnier.*
24. LOVE OF TWO CUBES, 1979.
9 ¾" high x 10 ¼" x 6 ¼"

All sculptures are crystal acrylic and are on loan from the James Willis Gallery, San Francisco unless otherwise noted.

Display cases by Plexiframes, S.F.











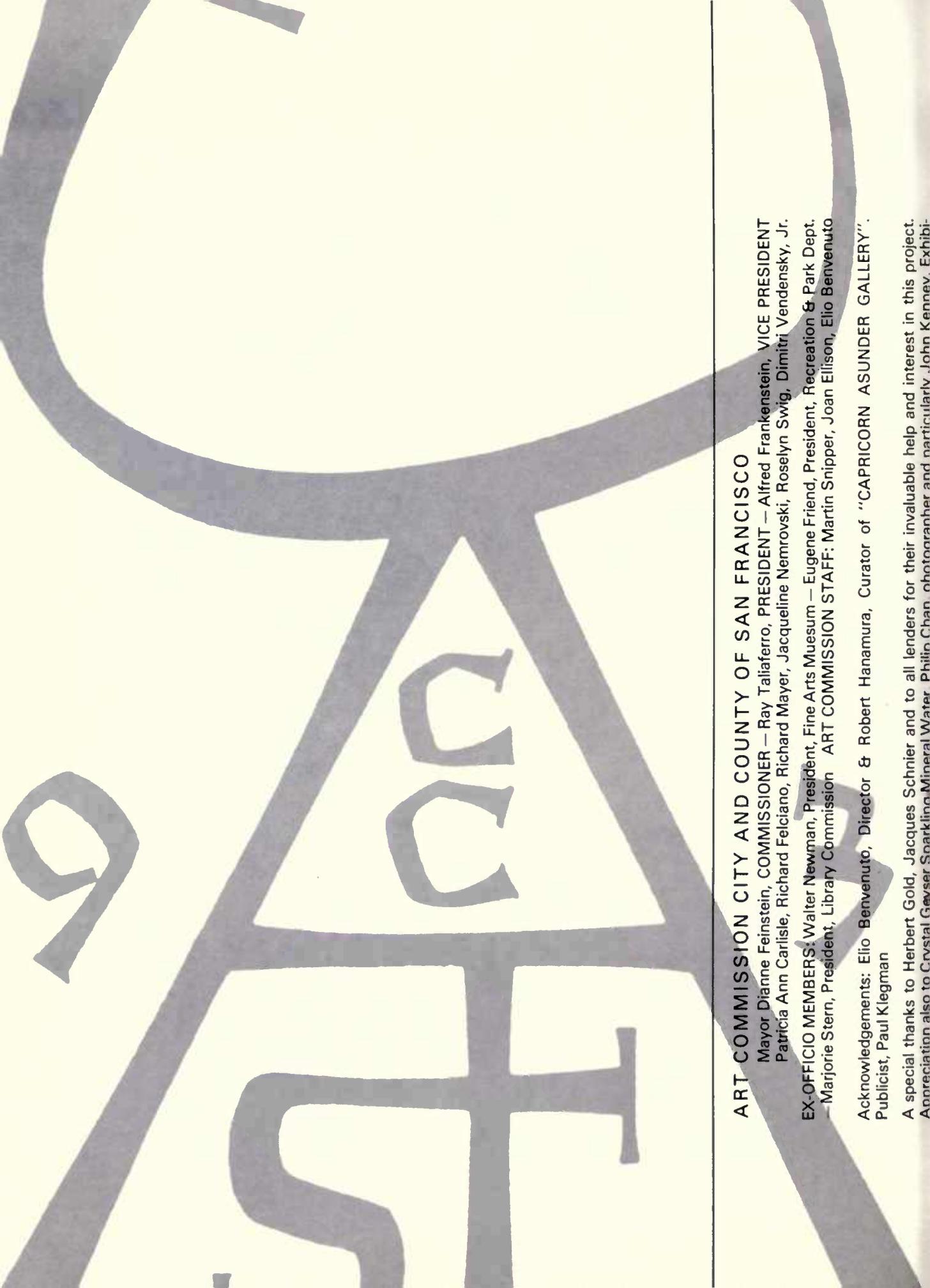
Jacques Schnier was born in Rumania but from the age of 5 years has lived in the United States. After graduating from Stanford University he practiced civil engineering successfully for a number of years before finding his main attraction in art. This was first satisfied by a training in architecture at the University of California in Berkeley and finally by creating sculpture. In his early studio years he carved directly in wood and marble, and completed a number of architectural commissions: nine monumental sculptures for the San Francisco World Fair, 1939-40; bas-relief on the Science Auditorium, Berkeley High School; gilded wood relief in Ann Bremer Memorial Library, San Francisco Art Institute. He designed the United States half-dollar commemorating the opening of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, 1936. Later works in carved crystal acrylic are in Temple Emanu-El, San Francisco; Clorox Corporation Building, Oakland; San Francisco Museum of Art; and many private collections.

Awards include First Prize and Gold Medal for sculpture, Oakland Art Museum, 1936, 1948; First Sculpture Prize, San Francisco Art Association, 1928; Fellowship, Institute for the Creative Arts, University of California, 1963. In 1970 he received the University of California's "Berkeley Citation" for distinguished achievement. *There was Light*, the autobiography of 39 distinguished University of California Alumni, edited by Irving Stone, 1970, includes his own life story.





19—DIANE OF EPHEBUS



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Appreciation also to Crystal Gevser Sporkling, Mineral Water, Philip Chan, photographer and particularly John Kennev. Exhibi-

Riess: Did you take that as far as you wanted to?

Schnier: Yes, I spent quite a number of years exploring that possibility and it was a good experience for me.

##

Riess: Regarding your modular tube compositions, I'm going to say something that you're going to hate. It's very provocative, but why couldn't a plumber make what you made?

Schnier: I'll tell you why. He could, but there is something about them that isn't as easy as it would appear, from your statement.

I would make a small model with these joints--I first started with eight or twelve joints, then went up to twenty. That's the most I ever used. I would twist one joint and when I turned one, it turned the whole composition. The movement was transmitted right through. I would work on those not for days, but for weeks. As I revolved the composition on a turntable, I would find a weak spot in it. I was striving for perfection. So I continued twisting the joints until there was an interesting relationship of the voids to the positive forms.

I found out I could make compositions, but sometimes these voids would be so great they detracted--they didn't satisfy my aesthetic sensibility. That was the hard thing about them. It definitely was not easy. I found that I could turn them around, get an interesting composition from one angle, the angle at which I was viewing it, but then when I turned it further, it didn't hang together.

I would spend weeks working on one composition before I would go up in scale and make a larger one. I made many versions of that. I have the small one at the studio. It's about this big. Then I made one this big, and then about that big--.

Riess: For the tape recorder, the small one's about six inches, the next one's about--.

Schnier: Twelve. Then twenty-four, ending up almost four feet. Like this one outside.

Riess: And what is the name of that piece?

Schnier: That's called "Galaxion." ["Galaxion, IV"] It struck me as a euphonius word that also fit the composition. Well, this is probably another explanation of it: There was a lot of activity in

Schnier: space exploration at that time. That was after Neil Armstrong landed on the moon. A number of satellites were being sent up and the word "galaxy" was used in a lot of articles about new star groups. I think that's where the word "Galaxion" came from.

Riess: Have you included a picture of this period of your work in this group of things you've given me?

Schnier: I have some extra copies of this announcement that the Civic Arts Gallery [Walnut Creek] sent out when they had the exhibition of my work ["Sculpture since 1960," Nov. 10-Dec. 30, 1983]. But I have better photographs than this and some extra copies that would be available if you felt they are of any value. Or otherwise I could get a photograph.

[looking at announcement] The Civic Arts Gallery sent that out as a flyer, but they also published a small brochure that goes into more detail. There is a nice article in there by Carl Worth.

Cuboids

Riess: What is the difference between what you've achieved here in 1983 and what you did twenty years earlier [1967] with the cuboids?

Schnier: They definitely led into them.

Riess: Let's give that a name for the tape recorder.

Schnier: That's called "Triologue" because there are three cubes that are in conjunction, sort of communicating. This actually led to the cuboids, because with the cuboids I've also departed from the horizontal and the vertical format. This was one of the early pieces I did. I did it in polyester resin and fiberglass.

Riess: But you didn't continue in that vein. After that 1967 piece "Triologue," you were doing your acrylics.

Schnier: I did the acrylics and the polymers, yes, but I hadn't given up the idea of interlocking geometric volumes. So when I started working in steel I just picked up where I left off in 1967, using these cuboids that are interlocked, intersecting, like this.

Riess: Yes, yes. With much tougher, stronger--.

Schnier: Material, yes.

Riess: The whole form is much tougher, I mean, to me.

Schnier: I like to hear you say that. I enjoyed this form very much, and I'm planning to do "Triologue" in stainless steel. Not with the rounded edges, with the stronger, sharper edges.

Riess: You were starting to say that stainless steel was the next attractive material.

Schnier: Yes, and that was tied up with my interest in acrylics because it was shiny and had reflective surfaces, brilliant surfaces, like a mirror. In addition it is permanent, it is durable, it doesn't rust. It needs no protective coating. It doesn't oxidize like bronze does, even if it's not coated or patined. So that's why I selected stainless steel. It had been in the back of my mind for about ten years. I was going to do it someday, but I hadn't gotten around to it.

Riess: Did it mean new technology?

Schnier: Yes, I learned a lot from observing my fabricator's craftsmen in developing my working models into stainless steel. For example, I learned that stainless steel doesn't distribute the heat as rapidly as ordinary steel. If it's thin it begins to warp so you have to adjust the thickness to the process of welding the material. The first few that were made were warping and it created a problem, but we learned from those. With the big ones now, we have no trouble at all.

Riess: Albright calls that work "romantic." Why does he call it romantic?

Schnier: Oh, I don't know why he called it that. He said, "Prestini is the classicist," didn't he?

Riess: Yes.

Schnier: And I'm the romantic? Maybe for Albright, classical is very sharp and architectural-like. I think those are terms of his own choosing. They're a part of his vocabulary. There's no doubt a difference between Prestini's work and my work.

Riess: But you respect Prestini's work more than, for instance, this simple composition by Noguchi?

Schnier: Oh, no, I respect both. Some of Noguchi's compositions are far more aesthetically pleasing to me than others.

Riess: [looking through her papers] Oh, yes, this. So what has Noguchi achieved here? ["Red Cube"]

Schnier: Oh, that's an interesting concept. Aside from balancing his cube on a point, another interesting thing about this, although the cube had been used by others, Noguchi has opened it, he's penetrated it, added another element of interest to it. I think that's nicely done, and it's so daringly balanced on its point.

I told you that he's opening a museum of his own sculpture in Brooklyn? He's putting all his resources now in his own living museum. And that's a nice thing because then a person who's interested in Noguchi's work knows where to go to see it.

Institute for the Creative Arts

Riess: Would you say something more about your fellowship in the Institute for Creative Arts?

Schnier: It was started by Clark Kerr in 1963. He evidently had funds, had an endowment or whatnot, to organize it, and he had the vision to start an Institute for the Creative Arts. The first year it was established announcements appeared in the faculty bulletin. I applied and documented my application with past achievements and outlined what I wanted to do. I received a fellowship that enabled me to absent myself from teaching for the whole year with the same salary that I was getting from the university. It allowed me to devote myself exclusively to doing creative art. There were additional funds for materials.

That's the year [1963-64] I did a lot of those bronzes that appear in the article called "The Cubic Element in my Sculpture."* That was a great thing that Clark Kerr did. I don't know how many awards there were that first year in our department. All the other university campuses had candidates for the awards and they received fellowships too. This continued for a number of years, and most of the people in our department finally received fellowships. I don't know if the institute is still in existence.

Riess: Was the feeling that the arts didn't receive much money?

*Leonardo, Vol. 2, pp. 135-145, Pergamon Press, 1969.

Schnier: Yes, I think that may be why Clark Kerr gave it to the arts. He saw all the large grants going to science, the social sciences and to the so-called classics: anthropology and the classics department, history and the like. Maybe sociology, social welfare, psychology. So this was a wonderful thing for him to have done.

Riess: You did get sabbaticals, also?

Schnier: Yes, every seven years we'd get a sabbatical, or if we wanted to we could take a sabbatical on half salary every three years. Now, this isn't cut and dried. You had to apply for it and justify your reason for requesting it. So there were sabbaticals, and frequently I would take a trip part of the time to refresh my mind, go to museums and galleries in the East, or go to Europe, the Middle East, or the United Kingdom. And it was all very good.

Art Magazines

Riess: Would you tell me about Leonardo, this magazine that you published in twice?*

Schnier: In science, there are publications that cater to the new findings of scientists and have a rich storehouse of material from which to draw. There is nothing comparable for the arts, and art can be inventive, just like science. In fact, they have something in common. So here was an opportunity for artists to speak for themselves, instead of waiting for somebody to review their work. Actually the reviewer is just expressing his taste, whether he likes chocolate ice cream, or whether he prefers raspberry sherbert!

Riess: Did this publisher solicit the articles?

Schnier: He encouraged artists to send them in, and he stated that there would be so many illustrations included and one would be in color. What more could a person who was interested in having his viewpoints published ask for? So I submitted this paper, and the only thing he took exception to was the title.

Riess: He called it, "The Cubic Element in my Sculpture." You were saying that you had titled it, "Ode to the Cube."

*From Interview 9, tape 18B.

Schnier: Yes. He said, "Make it more personal, and the title should express what it's all about, like 'The Cubic Element in my Sculpture.'"

Riess: What was the name of the publisher, or editor?

Schnier: His name was Frank J. Malina. He was an artist, too, that's why he went into this particular field of publishing "An International Journal of the Contemporary Artist."

Riess: Was it just sculpture?

Schnier: No, it encompassed all the visual arts: Painting and sculpture and kinetic art, happenings, and those sites where they take a tractor or a bulldozer and pile up ground and make a big gouge in the earth, earth works, site sculpture. Anything related to the visual arts.

Riess: Do you know how long it has been published?

Schnier: This issue is 1969. I guess it started about '67. See, this is Volume Two. His office was in Paris. It was international, it had articles from all over the world. He'd have them translated, or if they were presented in English, he had a French summary at the end of each article. It was as scholarly a presentation as most magazines devoted to the sciences.

Riess: And now where would you go if you were interested in what is new in sculpture? What magazines would you read?

Schnier: I subscribe to Art News and Art in America, and to International Sculpture which is published by the International Sculpture Center in Washington. I've looked at other art magazines and wondered if it's worthwhile cluttering up my library with them. There's nothing much that I find of value. The magazines I have retained have some valuable articles on the latest developments in sculpture. But International Sculpture is devoted exclusively to the subject.

I have not been a person to collect books to any great extent except when it came to analytic writings. All the books in back of those paperbacks [looking at bookshelf] are on analysis--everything of any value to me that was published up until 1958. I was very selective about which ones I would add to my library. I did a thorough job of reading book reviews and soliciting other's opinions. As to my acquiring art books especially on sculpture, I have been even more selective than with the analytic literature. I'm going to be a little more open-minded in the future. I've run across some

Schnier: beautiful books recently I want to add to my collection, like Storm King, Sculpture Garden. I just ordered it. My curiosity about this whole subject was aroused when Peter Bedford spoke to me the other day. He had just come back from New York and had been up to visit Storm King and he was so excited about it [see p. 224] He brought up the subject of a sculpture garden out here. That set me to thinking it's a good idea. I'm going to investigate it and get all this material together and look into this matter of a sculpture garden. It's a big undertaking.

Riess: I thought Oakland was trying to do that.

Schnier: There is a start down there but I'm not thinking of a sculpture garden like that. I think of one like we saw in Japan at Gōra, near Hakone, called the Hakone Open-Air Sculpture Museum. It's in a beautiful setting, way up in the mountains, and all of the sculpture is modern and international. I was just amazed when I saw the things the Japanese are collecting. Previously I thought of them as being pretty conservative and tied up with the past, but they are progressive. They want the latest thing in their architecture, and in their art. [end insert] Anyhow, I'm going to start building up my library.

Retrospection

Riess: Okay. Now, what would you like best to be remembered for?

Schnier: Oh, boy!

Riess: You can tell I'm winding up.

Schnier: I think first of things connected with being a family man, and having a happy and full life. But also of doing some sculpture that is worthy to exist, to continue being available for people to look at. I still think of doing something of that nature, out-of-doors, permanent maybe, a few pieces so that they will be available--whereas if there's a piece in a museum it would be in the basement most of the time.

Riess: Your impetus for bringing out a new edition of your earlier work, is it because you feel so positive about that and you wish to make it available?

Schnier: Yes, make it available now that there's a revived interest in my early work, but I wouldn't use that necessarily as an answer to your question.

Schnier: I think of something permanent, out-of-doors sculpture or indoors, but in a permanent place because I have seen where with the passage of time and the changing of administrations there's a change of attitude towards certain things that happen to have a temporary place, that are not fastened down permanently. An architect designs buildings that are fairly permanent, but nowadays you never know how long it will be before the wrecker's ball begins tearing the building apart. And that could happen to sculpture.

One of the beautiful things about stainless steel is that it's pretty hard to melt! We know from historical records of great statues having been torn down and melted for cannons. There are a number of instances of this happening.

My foundry man was telling me last week, "You know, Michelangelo did only one bronze statue. It was of a pope, and when a new pope was elected his statue was torn down and melted."

But apropos this matter of what I would like to be remembered by, and this matter of now starting to do some big, outdoor sculptures, I am fortunate in having come across an art collector like Peter Bedford. The reason I think it's fortunate is that he was not introduced to my art by an art consultant or an architect, or a friend. He saw the work and he was attracted to it and decided he wanted a representative example of my sculpture for one of his buildings.

Riess: Didn't you say he just saw a piece of your sculpture as he was walking along Happy Valley Road?

Schnier: Yes, he saw it in front of my house. This has been a very happy experience, an accident you might say, a matter of chance that he lived nearby so he'd see my work.

Riess: And where are the pieces you did for him located?

Schnier: The first piece, in the photograph there, that's a big stainless steel sculpture at 1 Corporate Center, in Concord. And the second piece I'm doing, the model of which I showed you at the studio, which has just been finished by my fabricator, is for Rockville, Maryland, for another Bedford development.

##

Schnier: The third one is for a new building that his firm is putting up in Concord. A larger building than 1 Corporate Center, it's going to be called 2 Corporate Center because it's on the same piece of property.

Riess: You went to Alaska recently. Are you doing some pieces in Alaska?

Schnier: I have been interested in doing some work there because they have a large percentage-for-art program both in the municipality of Anchorage and also in the state of Alaska, but I went there primarily for my stepson's wedding in Juneau. I'm not doing anything there now.

Riess: How about other things out of the state?

Schnier: No, these are the main things that I'm doing. And in the meantime, many of my acrylic sculptures have been acquired, so I have fewer and fewer of them left.

Riess: Do you think that we're at a fitting end, then, for the interviews?

Schnier: Yes, but let me think again about this matter of how I would like to be remembered.

Riess: You can write something when you get the transcript back. That's a very hard question.

Schnier: Yes. I've read answers to that question made by other people and I thought they were very, very clever and short, to the point. [laughter] So I'll have to give a little thought to that.

Riess: A little Zen twist.

Schnier: Actually, because of my interest in the Buddhist point of view I am constantly trying to remind myself that it's really not important, all those things of being remembered. More important is now, and here, that one comes to grips with oneself and is at a stage of quiescence. That there is no longer striving, craving, lustfulness, greediness, destructiveness, that it's all pretty quiet. If you have any exposure to Buddhism, maybe you know what I mean. In other words, I don't feel it's necessary to be remembered. But I haven't mastered this completely, otherwise I wouldn't be going through this oral history. [laughter] However, I did not initiate it.

About eight to ten years ago I was approached by your Regional Oral History Office to be interviewed for your program but I lacked the enthusiasm to participate at that time. More recently it was my family, I think my son, Claude, who started this whole thing. And my wife and my daughter, Rebecca, took it up. In the back of my mind maybe I thought, "Oh, that's nice, it will be a permanent record."

Riess: Well, did you suffer in the doing of this?

Schnier: No, it was sort of interesting! I have a feeling that I didn't do it well, that there are important things that I never brought out, and I'm not sure what they are. But I think I could have made it more valuable for the family, and the like, to remember a lot of things--maybe a lot of things that I just didn't feel I wanted to discuss.

But it's been interesting because also it's made me collect this stuff, get it in a tangible form for the family. Maybe that has had something to do with my having the bronzes reproduced although that started with the agent group from the East, these art people who want to underwrite the casting of a number of my sculptures in a larger edition than I've ever had before. Instead of six, it would be twelve. They wouldn't want to do it for under twelve because it wouldn't be worth their while financially. And I think that may have started me off on that, too.*

It's been valuable to me in that, getting this stuff together. Going through the records, too. I worry sometimes about the chore the family will have straightening everything out when I'm gone. It bothers me and I try to think of helping them so that everything will be in order. Making lists of where the stuff can be found in the least possible time. Even I have trouble finding the records myself sometimes, and that bothers me a lot.

And the studio, with all that equipment. What are they going to do with it? Where are they going to store it? I could have nightmares about it.

Riess: Yes, I know. Everyone has some form of that. Yours is a more physically overwhelming form of it.

*In February, 1986, one of the partners of the bronze casting underwriting group, John P. Axelrod of Boston, flew out to see my sculptures. He had been shown photographs of my work by one of my agents, Roger Anderson, of San Francisco. Mr. Axelrod on this visit was only interested in my figurative work of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. Before he left, he acquired twelve of these sculptures. Three months later, he returned and purchased seven more. This time all of the sculptures but one were abstract compositions.

Schnier: Oh, yes. And every now and then I stop and try to help my wife with a certain little problem that I know she may be confronted with later on. I'm glad to know that she's curious because I'm worried about her getting along. But I think she's going to manage, especially with my stepson Max Gruenberg, my son Claude and my daughter Rebecca. They're so helpful.

Also, one of the nice things about this has been meeting you. You've been a character, and it's been very enjoyable talking to a person like you. It's been so comfortable. It's easy, you make a good interviewer. Except when you begin to question my point of view, my course of action, my judgment of people. You know what I mean. [laughing] But, yes, you're a very comfortable and easy person to work with.

Riess: Well, thank you.

Transcribers: Janet Harris, Elizabeth Eshleman, Michele Anderson
Final Typist: Keiko Sugimoto

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BORN: Constanza, Rumania. 25 December, 1898.

EDUCATION: BA. 1920 Stanford University (Civil Engineering); MA. 1940 University of California (Sociology). Studied Architecture University of California 1924-26, also studied at the California School of Fine Arts.

Instructor of Sculpture, California College of Arts & Crafts, 1935-36.

APPOINTMENTS & POSITIONS: Professor of Sculpture, University of California, Berkeley, 1936-1966
 founded Sculpture Section & A.B., M.A. degrees, 1956
 Chairman of the Board of Advisors, International Sculpture Center, University of Kansas, 1964-1976.
 Member of Advisory Board, International Sculpture Symposium, University of Oregon, 1973-1974.

AWARDS & HONORS: Second Sculpture Prize, San Francisco Art Association, 1927

First Sculpture Award, San Francisco Art Association, 1928

First Sculpture Prize, Seattle Fine Arts Society, 1928

First Sculpture Prize, Seattle Art Society, 1929

First Prize, Garden Sculpture Competition, San Francisco, 1929

Sculpture Award, Los Angeles Museum, 1934

Adele Hyde Morrison Gold Medal for Sculpture, Oakland Art Gallery Annual Painting & Sculpture Exhibition, 1936

Bronze Medal, Fifth Annual Sculpture Exhibition, Oakland Museum, 1940

Honorable Mention, Sixth Annual Sculpture Exhibition Oakland Museum, 1941

AWARDS & HONORS (continued)

- First Prize, Garden Sculpture, Marin Art & Garden Show, 1947
 Honorable Mention for Sculpture, Oakland Art Gallery, 1949
 First Prize & Adele Hyde Morrison Gold Medal for Sculpture
 Oakland Art Museum Annual Painting & Sculpture Exhibition 1948
 Guest of Honor for 1949. By vote of visiting artists to Oakland
 Art Museum Annual Painting & Sculpture Exhibition.
 Sculpture Award of Merit, San Francisco Art Festival, 1958
 Honorable Mention for Sculpture, Oakland Art Museum, 1958
 Fellowship, Institute for the Creative Arts, University
 of California, for year 1963-'64.
 "The Berkeley Citation", University of California, Berkeley
 1970
 Second Award, Sculpture Competition, San Francisco Downtown
 Community College, 1976
 San Francisco Art Commission Award of Honor, Artist
 of the Year, 1979

SCULPTURE in MUSEUMS & PUBLIC COLLECTIONS:

- California Palace of the Legion of Honor
 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
 California Historical Society, San Francisco
 Chase National Bank Numismatic Collection, New York
 Hebrew University, Jerusalem
 Honolulu Academy of Art
 Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
 Crocker Art Gallery, Sacramento
 Mills College, Oakland
 Stanford University Museum
 Santa Barbara Museum of Art
 Judah L. Magnes Museum
 Temple Emanu-El, San Francisco
 Oakland Art Museum
 San Francisco General Hospital

SCULPTURE in MUSEUMS & PUBLIC COLLECTIONS (continued)
Neil Armstrong Air & Space Museum, Wapakoneta, Ohio
University of California, Berkeley

ONE-MAN EXHIBITIONS:

- Beaux Arts Gallery, San Francisco, 1928
- Braxton Gallery, Hollywood, 1929
- Seattle Art Institute, 1928, 1929
- Courvoisier Gallery, San Francisco, 1932
- University of California, Berkeley, Architecture Dept. 1933
- Oakland Museum of Art, 1936
- Haggin Memorial Gallery, Stockton, 1937, 1941
- Sacramento Junior College, 1938
- San Francisco Jewish Community Center, 1938
- Dominican College, San Rafael, 1946
- Crocker Art Gallery, Sacramento, 1947
- Rotunda Gallery, San Francisco, 1948
- Oakland Art Museum, 1949
- Raymond & Raymond Gallery, San Francisco, 1950
- Stanford University Museum, 1962
- Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1963
- Crocker Art Gallery, Sacramento, 1963
- North Ryder Gallery, University of California, Berkeley, 1965
- Temple Emanu-El, San Francisco, 1968
- Valley Art Gallery Walnut Creek, 1969
- Judah L. Magnes Museum, Berkeley, 1971
- Woodhall, Orinda, California, 1974
- James Willis Gallery, San Francisco, 1975, 1977, 1980
- San Francisco Art Commission Gallery (Award of Honor) 1979
- Gallaudet College, Washington, D.C. 1981
- Civic Arts Gallery, Walnut Creek, 1983

EXHIBITED:

- San Francisco Art Association Annual Exhibit, 1927, 1928, 1929,
1930, 1931, 1935, 1948
- Seattle Fine Arts Institute, 1927, 1928
- Los Angeles Museum, 1931, 1934, 1937
- Chicago Art Institute, 1930, 1931.
- California Pacific International Exposition, San Diego, 1935
- Oakland Art Gallery 1936,
- Portland Art Museum, 1937
- Western Association of Art Museum Directors, Circulating
Show, 1938, 1939
- Golden Gate International Exposition, Treasure Island 1939-40
- California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco, 1939
- American Sculpture Exhibition, Pomona, 1941
- Exhibition of American Sculpture, San Francisco Mus. of Art, 1941
- "500 Years of Children's Portraits", Crocker Art Gallery,
Sacramento, 1941
- Rotunda Gallery, San Francisco, 1946, 1948
- San Francisco Art Association Members Exhibition,
de Young Museum 1947
- ~~San Francisco Art Association Exhibition~~ 1948
- Sculptor's Drawings; International Exhibition of Drawings,
Museum of Art, Dallas, Texas, 1949
- Garden Sculpture Exhibition of the Garden Club of America,
San Francisco, 1949
- Third International Exhibition of Sculpture, Philadelphia
Museum of Art 1949
- Outdoor Sculpture Exhibition, National Sculpture Society, N.Y. 1950
- "6000 Years of Art in Clay" - Los Angeles County Fair,
Pomona, 1952
- "Bay Area Sculptors" Exhibition, San Francisco Museum
of Art, 1953
- Northwest Institute of Sculpture, Henry Gallery,
University of Washington, 1957
- Eric Locke Gallery, San Francisco, 1958, 1959
- California Sculpture Exhibit, Oakland Museum of Art 1958

EXHIBITED: (continued)

- California College of Arts & Crafts, 1959
 Third Pacific Coast Travelling Sculpture Exhibition:
 Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1959
 Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego, 1959
 Portland Art Museum, 1960
 Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, 1960
 de Young Museum, San Francisco, 1960
 Richmond Art Center, 1961
 Harbor Gallery, Oakland, 1962
 University of California Art Gallery, Berkeley, 1964
 Hollis Gallery, San Francisco, 1965
 Institute for the Creative Arts, University of California
 Travelling Exhibition, 1969-'70
 James Willis Gallery, San Francisco, 1975, 1977, 1980
 Gallaudet College, Washington DC, 1980
 Walnut Creek Civic Arts Gallery, "Spaces", 1979
 International Sculpture Conference, Oakland, 1982
 Walnut Creek Civic Arts Gallery, "The Planar Dimension", 1983
 Walnut Creek Civic Arts Gallery, "Going Public", 1985
 Victor Fischer Gallery, "Sculpture in the Park",
 Walnut Creek, 1985

PUBLIC COMMISSIONS:

- United States Commemorative Half-Dollar, for opening
 of San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, 1936
 Anne Bremer Memorial Library, (gilded bas-relief)
 San Francisco Art Institute, 1936
 Helm Building, Fresno, California, 1936
 Nine monumental statues & reliefs for Golden
 Gate International Exposition, Treasure Island
 California, 1939-'40
 Testimonial Sculpture for Thomas J. Watson, 1940
 President International Business Machine Corp

PUBLIC COMMISSIONS: (continued)

Berkeley High School, Science Auditorium, Berkeley, California, 1940

"S.S. Lurline", Matson Steamship Lines, 1948

Congressional Club, Washington, D.C., 1949

John Galen Howard, Architect, Memorial, Men's Faculty Club, University of California, Berkeley, 1960

California College of Arts & Crafts "Centennial Award" for Niel Armstrong, 1972

Clorox Corporation, Oakland, California, 1975

Herbert H. Lehman Medal, Jewish Hall of Fame

Series, Judah L. Magnes Museum, Berkeley, 1974

Elizabeth S. Fine Memorial Sculpture, Temple Emanuel, San Francisco, 1975

San Francisco Medical Center, sponsored by San Francisco Art Commission, 1975

Stainless Steel sculpture for One Corporate Center, Bedford Properties, Concord, California, 1984

Outdoor sculpture, Rockville, Maryland, for Bedford Properties, 1985.

PUBLICATIONS: see Jacques Schnier, List of Publications.

L I S T O F P U B L I C A T I O N S

JACQUES SCHNIER
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"A Trip to the Caves of Yun Kang, China". Bulletin of the San Francisco Art Association, 1933.

"Expressionism in Sculpture", Bulletin of the San Francisco Art Association, Vol. 2, #4, September 1935.

"The Jews in Art", Emanu-El and Jewish Journal, Dec. 20, 1935.

"The Jew as Scapegoat", Emanu-El and Jewish Journal, (San Francisco), April 3, 1936, pp. 3-4.

"Freud Charts Path to Human Freedom", Emanu-El and Jewish Journal, (San Francisco), June 5, 19, 1936.

"Libido in Art", Peninsular, (San Francisco), July, 1936, pp. 12, 26-27.

"Albert M. Bender Collection at San Francisco Museum of Art", Emanu-El and Jewish Journal, September 1937, p. 9, 10.

"Sculptured Tomb Tiles of the Han Dynasty". Bulletin San Francisco Art Association, Vol. 13, #4, April 1947.

"The Cornerstone Ceremony", (a study of building rites and rituals). Psychoanalytic Review, Vol. 34, No. 3, pp. 357-369, July 1947.

"The Cornerstone Ceremony". Reprinted in Psychoanalysis in America, Murray H. Sherman, editor. Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, Springfield, Ill., 1966.

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"Dragon Lady". Reprinted in Yearbook for Psychoanalysis, Vol. IV, 1948, pp. 312-329.

Sculpture in Modern America. University of California Press, 224 pp., 139 plates, Berkeley, California, 1948.

"The Blazing Sun", (study of Van Gogh's emotional life and its relation to his art). American Imago, July 1950, Part 2, pp. 143-162.

"The Blazing Sun". Reprinted in Neurotica, New York No. 8, Spring 1951, pp. 53-66.

"The Creative Mind". University of California Monthly, Vol. LXI, No. 7, 1951, pp. 8-9, 28.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS, 1933 -

- "Dynamics of Art Expression". College Art Journal, Vol. X, Part 4, 1951, pp. 377-384.
- "The Symbolic Bird in Medieval and Renaissance Art". American Imago, Vol. 9, #2, 1952, pp. 89-126.
- "Matisse from a Psychoanalytic Point of View". College Art Journal, Vol. 12, #2, 1953, pp. 110-117.
- "Art Symbolism and the Unconscious", Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. Xii, No. 1, September 1953, pp. 67-75.
- "Psychoanalysis of the Artist". Samiksa, Journal of the Indian Psychoanalytic Society, Calcutta, Vol. 8, #3, 1954, pp. 174-190.
- "The Symbolic Bird in Medieval and Renaissance Art", reprinted in The Yearbook for Psychoanalysis, Vol. IX, 1953, pp. 292-313.
- "The Morphology of a Symbol: The Octopus of the Minoans and Mycenaeans", (paper presented before the American School for Classical Studies, Athens, Greece; March 1, 1955). American Imago, April, 1956. Vol. 13, #1, pp. 1-31.
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- "Restitution Aspects of the Creative Process", American Imago, Vol. 14, #3, pp. 211-223, 1957.
- "Function and Origin of Form", Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism. Vol. XVI, #1, pp. 66-75, 1957.
- "The Tibetan Lamist Ritual: Chod", International Journal of Psychoanalysis, Vol. 38, #6, pp. 402-407, 1957.
- "Creative Intention", Proceedings of the 4th International Congress on Aesthetics, Athens, Greece, pps. 298-302, 1960.
- "Patination of Bronze Sculpture", Proceedings of the Second National Sculpture Casting Conference, University of Kansas, pp. 64-69, 1962.
- "Ceramic Shell Molding for Sculpture Casting", Proceedings of the Third National Sculpture Casting Conference, University of Kansas, pp. 1-6, 1964.
- "Reinforced Polyester Plastic and Acrylic Color for Sculpture" Proceedings of the Fifth National Sculpture Conference, University of Kansas, pp. 43-48, 1968.

Jacques Schnier

- 3 -

"Reflections and Transparency in Carved Acrylic Sculpture", Proceedings of the Sixth National Sculpture Conference, University of Kansas, pp. 7-12, 1970.

"Fire, Flash and Brilliance in Crystal Acrylic Sculpture", Proceedings of the Eighth National/International Sculpture Conference, University of Kansas, pp. 95-102, 1974.

"Jacques Schnier" (autobiography), There Was Light, (autobiographies of 39 distinguished alumni of the University of California), edited by Irving Stone, Doubleday, N.Y. publishers, pps. 91-106, 1970.

"The Cubic Element in My Sculpture," Leonardo, Vol. 2, pp. 135-145. Pergamon Press 1969.

"Transparency & Reflection as Entities in Sculpture Carved in Acrylic Resin," Leonardo, Vol. 5, pp. 111-117, Pergamon Press, 1972.

TRANSPARENCY AND REFLECTION AS ENTITIES IN SCULPTURE OF CARVED ACRYLIC RESIN*

Jacques Schnier**

Abstract—*Inspired by Oriental carvings in transparent rock crystal, the author attempted to carve this form of quartz but without success because of its hardness. The availability of clear polymethyl methacrylate (an acrylic synthetic resin), slabs of which can be bonded to make large blocks, led him to use this material for transparent sculpture beginning in 1968.*

Although the main property that originally attracted him to this acrylic resin is its optical clarity, he finds it alone is of limited aesthetic significance. When the eye is attracted to a shape in clear acrylic resin, this is to a great extent due to the object's brilliance. This brilliance is present only when light is reflected from the object's internal and external surfaces, as from mirrors, to the observer. He concludes that reflection and transparency should be added as separate entities to the generally accepted concepts of sculptural form.

I. INTRODUCTION

For many years before World War II, my studio was on the edge of San Francisco Chinatown. The influence of this Oriental setting was deep and lasting. Frequently, I browsed through the antique shops where Oriental art of museum quality was to be found. These shops have gradually disappeared with the closing of their stock source (from mainland China). They offered ancient Han bronzes, polychromed Ming wood carvings, clay Tang grave figurines, delicately glazed Sung pots and art objects in many other materials. Among these were various carvings in semi-precious stone—in jade, rose quartz, carnelian and rock crystal. None of these carvings was of great antiquity but their translucent and transparent characteristics took strong hold of me.

The carvings in rock crystal held for me the strongest appeal. The brilliant fire-like reflections, dazzling highlights and, above all, the pure water-clear transparency of this material fascinated me and prompted my attempts to carve it. On trips to the desert, I collected large chunks of rock crystal

with the hope of shaping and polishing them. But I soon found that because of the hardness of quartz (No. 7 on a scale where alabaster ranks No. 1 and marble No. 3) my stone cutting equipment was inadequate. A friend offered me a lapidary cutting wheel that operated by a foot treadle. However, merely slicing a piece of quartz on a cutting wheel is one thing, shaping it to a sculpture and bringing it to a mirror polish is another matter.

Notwithstanding all this, I was incurably 'hooked' and became obsessed with the idea of sculpture in a clear transparent medium. Working in glass gratified my interest for a short time. These works were all in relief and were made by carving $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. and 1-in. slabs of plate glass, using the blasting technique, i.e., fine abrasive and compressed air. Control of edge, line, depth and modeling were achieved by means of rubber masking compounds and by varying sizes of nozzles and abrasive grits. The resulting configuration was somewhat like very large scale engraved Orrefers or Steuben glass, except the modeling was many times deeper. My most ambitious piece, *Summer Night*, was shown in the Fine Arts Palace of the San Francisco World's Fair in 1939. But bas-reliefs, even in thick glass, were no substitutes for the three-dimensional sculpture I visualized in a transparent material.

By 1937, the commercial polymerization of chemical monomers into transparent glasslike

* Based on a paper presented at the Sixth National Sculpture Conference, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, U.S.A., 23-25 April 1970.

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solids had been achieved. Among these were *polymethyl methacrylate* (one of the most common of the acrylic resins); manufactured in the U.S.A. under the trade names 'Lucite' by DuPont (Wilmington, Del., U.S.A.) and 'Plexiglas' by Rohm and Haas (Philadelphia, Pa., U.S.A.). Rohm and Haas, sensing its aesthetic possibilities, instituted a sculpture competition in 1937. The transparency and brilliance of the Plexiglas sample they distributed made such a strong impression on me that I immediately had visions of sculptures in this dazzling material. They would be of a large scale for this kind of material. However, for the sculptor without the elaborate equipment required for controlling the heat generated by the polymerization of the monomer during casting [1], the available sizes of pre-cast stock effectively precluded works with emphasis on volume.

Also available at this time was a phenolic casting resin (Gemstone, now no longer produced) that could easily be polymerized by heat from incandescent lights. I cast some works in this material but found that for transparency and brilliancy it could not compare with Plexiglas. The outbreak of World War II brought a temporary halt to my involvement with transparent sculpture.

II. PLEXIGLAS FOR SCULPTURE

In 1968, my interest in transparency was revived upon learning that massive sections of clear Plexiglas for carving purposes can be built up by bonding precast slabs with a special adhesive. Bubble-free bonds so made cannot be detected by the eye when viewed at right angles to the surface. On edge, the bonds are inconspicuous or almost invisible and several slabs or blocks bonded together and polished produce, at a short distance, what appears to be a homogeneous, monolithic mass (Fig. 1). Sculptures made of this material, preceding mine, were reported on in *Leonardo* [2, 3].

The homogeneous appearance of blocks formed from sheets of Plexiglas appropriately cemented together can be understood by noting what happens when sheets of glass are placed one upon another. If plates of clear glass 0.1 mm thick are stacked, the pile becomes increasingly opaque as more plates are added. This is due to the decrease in light transmission that results from the cumulative internal reflection loss at each air-glass boundary. In a pile of 100 such plates, the reflection loss is so great that the pile becomes almost completely opaque. But if the plates are cemented together with material having the same refractive index as glass, the reflective loss is greatly reduced and the pile becomes essentially transparent [4]. The same result is obtained when Plexiglas plates are cemented together with an appropriate adhesive.

For sculptors who design exclusively by eye and feeling, and this is probably the most effective way to design creatively, knowledge of the *refractive index* and *critical angle* of a transparent medium may not be of much importance. However, the



Fig. 1. 'Moon Song', carved Plexiglas, height 21 in., 1969. (Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Leo Helzel, Oakland, California., U.S.A.)

characteristics to which these terms refer positively affect the results of designs in transparent materials. Refraction is described as the bending of a light wave as it passes obliquely from one transparent medium to another. This bending or change of direction results from the different speed of the light ray in each medium. The refractive index of a transparent material is obtained by dividing the speed of light in vacuum by its speed in the medium concerned. The refractive index for cast polymethyl methacrylate is 1.49 to 1.51.

Light emerging into air from a transparent material (e.g. Plexiglas) is refracted away from a line perpendicular to the surface. At the same time, a partial internal reflection loss of light occurs. When transmitted light hits the farther plastic-air boundary at the material's critical angle (see below), the emerging rays are tangent to the boundary and again some partial internal reflection loss occurs. But when transmitted light strikes the final boundary at an angle less than the critical angle, total internal reflection of light occurs, transparency halts at this boundary and, providing this boundary is polished, a reflecting mirror effect is produced that accounts for the dramatic brilliance of certain configurations in transparent materials (Fig. 2).

The angle at which a light ray in a transparent medium is bent at the air medium boundary to become tangent to the boundary is called the *critical angle*. Where the refractive index of a material is around 1.5 (as it is in the case of Plexiglas), the critical angle is 42°. Light striking the air-

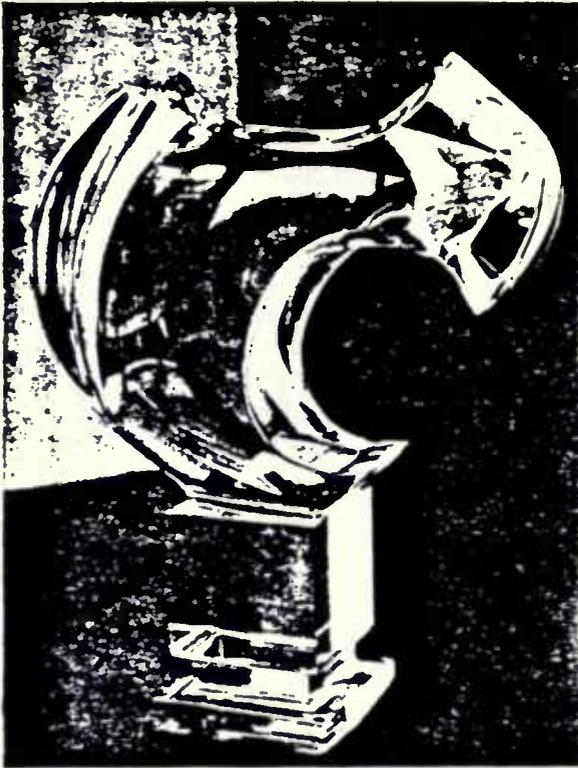


Fig. 2. 'Moon Cradle', carved Plexiglas, height 6½ in., 1969.

Plexiglas boundary at any angle less than 42° will be completely reflected internally and create the mirror effect. It is doubtful that any sculptor working with acrylic resins will ever lay out mechanically a design according to the critical angle. However, there is one designer in transparent material whose work is governed strictly by refractive index and critical angle; he is the diamond cutter. Later, I shall return to diamond design to illustrate a point of aesthetic importance for sculpture in Plexiglas.

In addition to Plexiglas, I have carved in Acrylite (American Cyanamid Co., Wallingford, Conn.), Swedcast (Swedlow Co., Garden Grove, Calif.) and Shinkolite (Mitsubishi Plastic Co., Tokyo). As far as I can observe, the clear acrylic resin slabs manufactured by all these companies give equally satisfactory results.

III. BONDING AND CARVING IN PLEXIGLAS

The bonding process I referred to earlier is accomplished with a two-component thermosetting adhesive called 'P.S. 30' (Cadillac Plastic and Chemical Co., 15111 Second Ave., Detroit, Mich. 48203, U.S.A.). It is a water-clear syrup consisting of methyl methacrylate polymer and methyl methacrylate monomer. To this is added a small amount of catalyst to adjust the rate of polymerization to a suitable level. This catalyst, the main constituent of which is benzoyl peroxide, is used in the ratio of one part to 19 parts 'P.S. 30'.

The important points for joining two surfaces with 'P.S. 30' is that they be positioned properly and that bubbles remaining in the joint can eventually be made to travel to an edge where they can escape. When necessary, this can be accomplished by the use of pressure but it should not exceed one lb/in² of surface. Some thickness to the bond is desirable and, therefore, excessive pressure on a joint is to be avoided, as this tends to squeeze out too much of the bonding agent. The use of 'P.S. 30' can be thought of as a method of fusing two pieces of Plexiglas together much the same way that welding fuses two pieces of steel together.

If two surfaces to be bonded are not flat, air bubbles will be trapped in the interface. Offhand, it would appear that no such problem arises where two smooth 'as cast' faces of a slab or sheet are brought together. But this is not always the case. Even smooth and highly polished 'as cast' faces may not be absolutely flat because of slight bulges or concavities in the molds. Rarely are heavy slabs of cast Plexiglas of uniform thickness. The main distributor's specified thickness tolerances are +0.058 in. to -0.152 in. for 2-in. stock, and +0.142 in. to -0.268 in. for 4-in. stock.

The stress condition of the surfaces is as important as surface fit for good clear bonding. Original smooth 'as cast' surfaces are almost always stress free. If such surfaces have required no machining, they can be bonded after light abrading with No. 500 or No. 600 grit aluminum oxide to produce a bonding tooth. But where a surface has been machined, sawed or power abraded, stress-relieving preparation is essential to avoid stress cracks or crazes appearing in the joint.

Stress cracks result from disturbance of molecular orientation from an equilibrium state, which is caused by heat produced by tool friction, followed by too rapid cooling. Internal cracks found in some carvings in rock crystal, which originated in the crystalline structure of this mineral, usually do not detract from the object's overall aesthetic effect. But stress cracks and crazing in Plexiglas reduce the homogeneity of the piece and detract considerably from what otherwise would be a flawless work. Like most polymers, Plexiglas is non-crystalline.

There are two methods for relieving surface stress. In the first method, the Plexiglas is processed in an annealing oven. Annealing is carried out in two stages. First, the material is slowly heated in an oven to a temperature where the material is soft enough to allow the molecules to reorient and, hence, to relieve strains and, second, it is subjected to a scheduled slow cooling such that when cold, it retains no more than a small predetermined strain. An annealing oven is like a glorified kitchen oven provided with a blower to circulate the hot air, plus a more complicated temperature control. The temperature and time required depend upon the thickness of the material [6].

Where no annealing oven is available, there is another method for relieving stresses that requires less time but more physical effort. In this method,



Fig. 3. 'Double Horned Kite', carved Plexiglas, height 17 in., 1971. Collection of Elise S. and Walter A. Haas, San Francisco, California, U.S.A.)

stresses are eliminated by grinding away the surfaces in which they are found. Shallow saw marks can be removed by scraping with a hard steel or 'Carboloy' scraper, honed to a straight edge. Rougher surfaces are abraded with No. 50 or No. 80 grit abrasive sheet, manipulated in such a way as not to produce heat that would restress the material. In this way, it is possible to abrade down to the very bottom of the stressed portions and eliminate them. I say 'bottom of' because the presence of these stressed portions frequently results in minute cracks or fissures at right angles to the surface. Following this, successively finer grades of grit are applied ending with No. 600. Using this method, I have obtained remarkably clear stress-free bonds in pieces of up to 26-in. height without the use of annealing ovens (Fig. 3). Bonds of this type that I have tested out-of-doors have shown no stress cracks after several years of exposure to sun, rain, heat and cold.

For the preliminary blocking out of the built-up Plexiglas mass, I use a set of marble chisels. In fact, were it not for the differences in final finish, a sculpture in Plexiglas could be completed with only the tools used for carving marble. Unlike marble, however, Plexiglas chips, leaving rough concave-conchoidal fractures. So, in blocking out, I allow for these low spots by avoiding over-carving. Close shaping is done with extra sharp chisels held at flat angles. In this way, a close approximation of the desired finished mass is obtained. From here on,

each step of the remaining process is aimed solely at achieving the highly reflective and mirror smooth surface.

To smooth out chisel marks sufficiently for abrading I use carbide rotary burrs operated by an air-die grinder at 20,000 to 25,000 rev/min. For small air tools, a 3-h.p. double-stage compressor delivering 12 to 14 ft³/min provides sufficient power. For large tools or more than one air line, a 5-h.p. or larger compressor is essential. Initial abrading is done with spiral or drum-wound abrasive bands of No. 35 to No. 150 grit, rotating at 2000 to 3000 rev/min. Higher speeds generate too much heat that, in turn, stresses the surface of the Plexiglas. Power abrading is followed by manual abrading with a series of progressively finer grit sheets ending with No. 600 grit. Buffing with three or four different buffing compounds, ranging from black emery to white or red rouge, results in an almost scratch-free surface. A separate buff is reserved for each compound. Surface speed of buffs is controlled so as not to cause heating of the material that invariably causes minute stress cracks. The end of all this effort is the final polishing. For this, I use Lustrox, Plastic Grade (Tizon Chemical Co., Flemington, N.Y., U.S.A.), a polishing agent made of sub-micron-size zircon crystals, which is also used for polishing contact lens. This eliminates any buff smudges left from the last buffing stage and, in turn, imparts a dazzling mirror polish to the surface.

IV. REFLECTION AND TRANSPARENCY

I wish to return to my main topic: the optical properties of Plexiglas and their relation to transparent sculpture. Its excellent transparency, coupled with a number of other properties, make it one of the best, if not the best, of all transparent plastics for sculpture. It has a good resistance to weathering, high impact strength as compared with glass, resistance to discoloration under ultra-violet light, low weight (specific gravity is one half that of glass) and the ability to pipe light inside its boundaries. Although its impact resistance is considerably lower than that of polycarbonate, its transparency factor is higher—92% as compared with 90%. Also its cost as compared with the latter is many times less.

If one makes a sculpture in Plexiglas, exploiting only its transparency (e.g., using shapes with parallel faces), one can see right through it and one is not invited to focus on the forms of the sculpture. When one's attention is drawn to a clear acrylic resin object, it is to a great extent due to its brilliance. The brilliance is present only when light is reflected from parts of the object's external or internal surfaces, as from mirrors. (Fig. 4) [2]. The diamond designer is guided almost solely by this phenomenon of reflected light in his efforts to obtain the greatest brilliance from his gem. So important is this feature in cutting diamonds that elaborate calculations have been made to ascertain the angles at which facets should be cut to develop maximum brilliance. Spears, who is one of the few writers to report on



Fig. 4. 'Crystals in Shell', carved Plexiglas, height 8 in., 1969. (Collection of Colonel and Mrs. Milton Heilfron, San Francisco, California, U.S.A.)

reflection and transparency in sculpture, states, '... the sculptor, like the diamond cutter, has to study the relationship of his planes in terms of the internal reflections and multiple refractions of light that will occur in his piece, a task which requires long experience' [7] (cf. also [2, 3]).

In view of this, it is easy to understand why the word brilliance is so common in diamond terminology. The most popular diamond design is called *brilliant cut*. There is also a *full brilliant cut* and even an American *double brilliant cut*. The man who cuts the last facets of the brilliant cut is called a *brillianteer* and his phase of finishing a diamond is called *brillianting*. A skilled brillianteer can judge the all-important facet angles by eye alone. I do not mean to imply that the optical problems of a Plexiglas sculpture and of a diamond are identical. Rather, it is to point out that in considering the concept of form with reference to composing sculpture in Plexiglas, reflection as well as transparency should be classified as independent entities.

Glass also has smoothness, transparency, an ability to reflect light and a contradictory appearance of solidified liquidity. Writers about glass frequently emphasize its brilliance and the clear lightholding and light reflecting properties of its clear surfaces [8]. The refractive index of crystal glass (due to the high percentage of lead) is often greater than that of diamond (2.4) and can reach

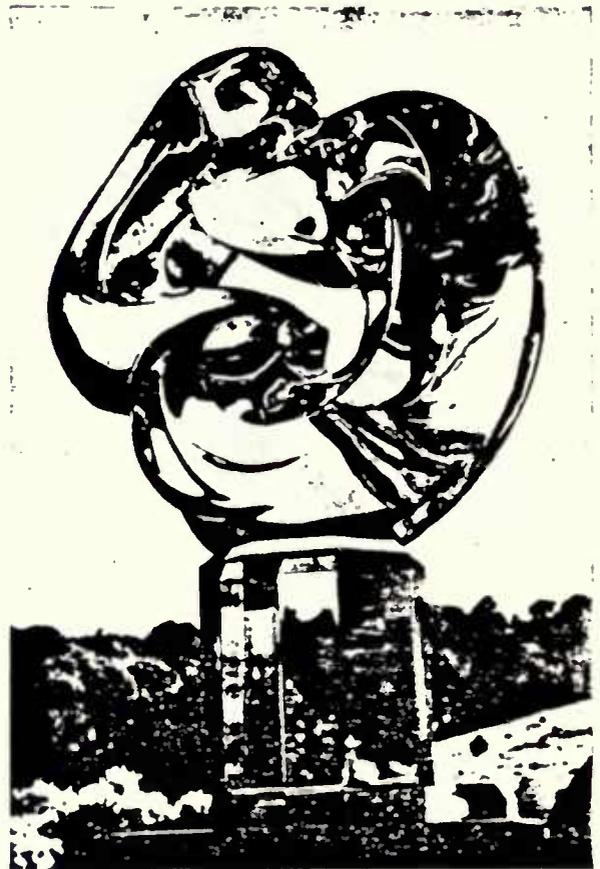


Fig. 5. 'Yubelo No. 2', carved Plexiglas, height 20½ in., 1970.

3.9. But because of its hardness and size limitations (about 20 in.) due to annealing factors, it is not an ideal transparent medium for sculpture [7].

Whereas the impact strength of Plexiglas is greater than that of glass, it ranks below glass in hardness. Scratch resistance is related directly to hardness; on a hardness scale glass has the value 5.5 whereas Plexiglas has only 2.5. Research has been conducted for developing methods to increase the hardness of acrylic resins. Although successful processes have been developed for application to flat sheets, no practical process has been developed for hardening irregular surfaces. Nevertheless, through proper care, the maintenance of the optical clarity of acrylic resins can be achieved.

V. DISCUSSION OF MY ACRYLIC SCULPTURES AND CONCLUSIONS

As regards my sculptures, in 'Moon Song' (Fig. 1) I adhered closely to the shape of the original circular block and developed a composition featuring an asymmetrically flattened sphere with overall convex surfaces. This basic shape was relieved by an eccentrically placed hole, ringed with a single concave depression. This sculpture approaches the epitome of simplicity.

In contrast to this purist approach, in 'Yubelo, No. 2' (Fig. 5) I made use of an equal interplay of

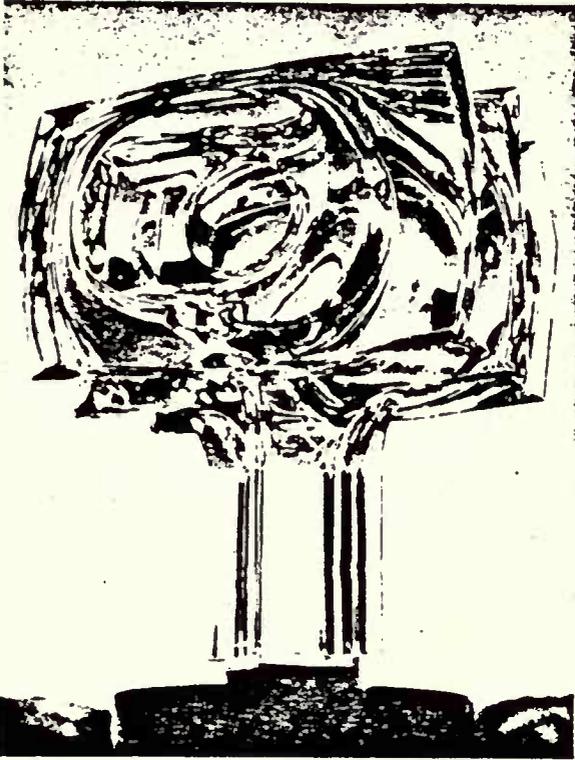


Fig. 6. 'Light Sanctuary No. 2', carved Plexiglas, height 22 in., 1971.

related concave and convex surfaces. This established strong illusion of movement throughout the piece and, in addition, resulted in a highly varied configuration. The simple geometric aspect of the original circular volume was further departed from by cutting an opening through it in such a manner as to produce a sideways twist. The shape of this opening echoed the rhythm of the concave masses and eliminated any suggestion of symmetry.

From my experience in developing 'Yubelo, No. 2', I gained considerable additional knowledge of form as it relates to reflection and refraction. I found that concave elements, either external or internal, are highly light reflective and produce a fire-like brilliance. By applying this knowledge, I found it possible to control reflections, thus making it possible to compose, so to speak, in 'light-brilliance' balanced with transparency. I also found that maquettes made in opaque material, such as clay, wood, plaster or Styrofoam (Dow Chemical Co., Midland, Mich., U.S.A.), are of limited use in studies for sculpture in Plexiglas. They are useful for studying the overall composition but, obviously, no information is provided by opaque materials on transparency and light reflection. Therefore, in order to study the brilliance of compositions for acrylic resins, I now make preliminary models directly in the material.

In 'Light Sanctuary' (Fig. 6), except for a few ribbonlike flat planes, the composition is limited exclusively to concave elements, from the external configurations to the large hollow sphere carved

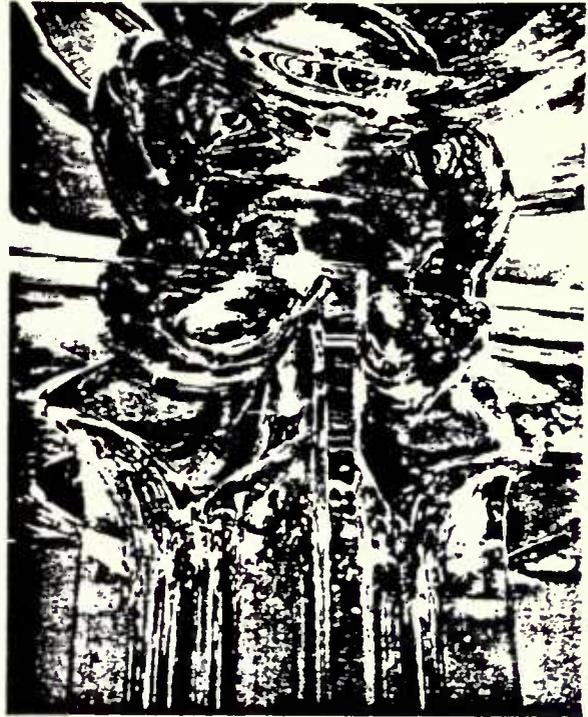


Fig. 7. 'Light Sanctuary', detail (cf. Fig. 6).

into the interior of the mass. As a result of this configuration, the shapes catch the light, bounce it around inside and send it back broken into patterns of brilliant reflections (Fig. 7).

To date, my largest Plexiglas sculpture is 'Fly Away Jill, No. 2' (Fig. 8, reproduced on color plate), which is 16 in. deep (four 4-in. slabs bonded together). The composition is a thick twisted (actually carved) block. The purpose of the twist is to produce warped concave-convex reflecting surfaces. To further aid the production of sparkling reflections, a series of concave depressions have been carved in the flat faces. Perching the twisted block on one of its corners aids in minimizing its tie with gravity. I find myself attracted to single-point support more and more in my recent sculptures.

The conclusions I have reached as a result of my work with Plexiglas are the following:

1. In transparent sculpture, reflection and transparency should be considered as separate entities.
2. The light-holding and light-reflecting properties of Plexiglas and the purity and brilliance of its polished surfaces equal those in glass and recall those of gems.
3. Plexiglas has the advantage that it can be either carved or cast.
4. Its light weight and resistance to shattering make it superior to glass, but its low hardness relative to glass means that it must be protected from abrasion, scratching, denting, etc.
5. Large pieces of Plexiglas, approaching those of stone or metal, can be fabricated. The only serious

limitation of size for the sculptor is imposed by unsupported horizontal elements. To avoid the possibility of slight sagging of such cantilevered sections, a ratio of 10 horizontal to one vertical dimension should not be exceeded.

Plexiglas and other clear acrylic resins are frequently described as being crystal-clear. But there are few crystals that can compare with them for optical clarity. For myself, acrylic resins are the most elegant medium with which I have worked.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

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3. M. Pan, Sculpture: Cylindres en Plexiglas, *Leonardo* 3, 327 (1970).
4. F. J. Terence Maloney, *Glass in the Modern World* (New York: Doubleday, 1968) p. 35.
5. Catalog of the Cadillac Plastic and Chemical Co., Detroit, Mich., U.S.A., 1971.
6. *Design and Fabrication in Plexiglas* (New York: Rohm and Haas, 1967).
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La transparence et la réflexion de la lumière comme entités dans la sculpture de résine acrylique

Résumé—Ayant été inspiré par des sculptures orientales en cristal de roche transparent, l'auteur tenta de ciseler cette sorte de quartz, mais sans succès en raison de son exceptionnelle dureté. La disponibilité de polyméthacrylate de méthyle (une résine acrylique synthétique) limpide, dont des plaques peuvent être assemblées de manière à constituer de grands blocs, l'amena à partir de 1968 à utiliser ce matériau pour faire des sculptures transparentes.

Bien que la principale propriété qui l'attirât à l'origine dans cette résine acrylique fût sa clarté

optique, il trouve qu'elle n'a en soi que peu de signification esthétique. Quand l'oeil est attiré par une forme en résine acrylique transparente, c'est en grande partie dû au brillant de l'objet. Cet éclat n'existe que lorsque la lumière est réfléchié par les surfaces internes et externes de l'objet, comme par des miroirs, et renvoyée au spectateur. L'auteur conclut que la réflexion de la lumière et la transparence devraient s'ajouter en tant qu'entités indépendantes aux autres concepts traditionnels désignant la forme sculpturale.

Excitement and History From a Sculptor

By Thomas Albright

Fifty-year retrospectives are uncommon events in any area, and the present exhibition of Jacques Schnier's sculpture at the James Willis gallery, 109 Geary street, would be newsworthy for that reason alone.

Like a fulfilled life, a rewarding artistic career has all the elements that make a good story: continuity, surprise, drama. True, a retrospective pretty well eliminates suspense, but to make up for it, Schnier's exhibition delineates the excitement of a critical "breakthrough," and comes to a brilliant climax.

The first 40 years represented in the Schnier retrospective also contain a great deal of history. Beginning with the 1927 carved wood relief, "The Family," which looks like an Art Deco stylization of Gauguin, Schnier's work is like a catalog of the major influences that swept through American sculpture in the first 50 years of the 20th century—although frequently they entered Schnier's own sculpture long after losing currency almost everywhere else. His 1958 "Taming the Chaos," for example, with its heavily muscled bronze figure forcing open the jaws of an alligator, resembles nothing so much as Paul Manship's academic creations.

Schnier was a student of Ralph Stackpole, and an adept practitioner of Art Deco sculpture in his own right. For the most part, Schnier's early interests were more "progressive" and abstract. One finds allusions to Lipchitz, David Hare and Duchamp-Villon.

One of Schnier's most persistent, and consistent, bodies of bronze and wood sculpture seems to take its source in the "volume constructions" of the De Stijl sculptor, Vantongerloo, although Schnier's pieces alternate between interlocking structures of purely abstract cubes, and more open forms in which the cubes are given "windows" or are otherwise modified to assume a tone of sometimes Klee-like, sometimes Escherian fantasy.

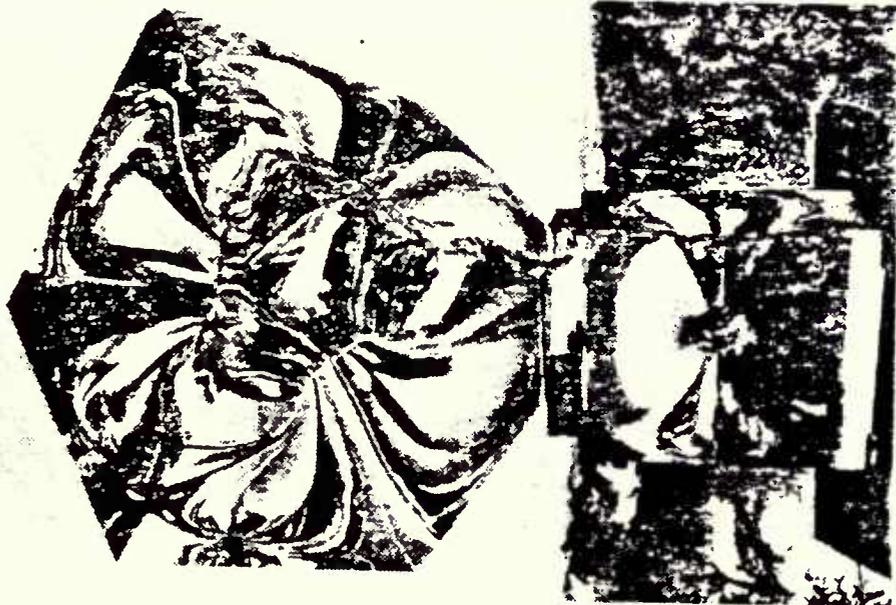
In short, Schnier spent most of the first 40 years of his career as a highly proficient, occasionally even forceful camp follower of various abstract styles as

straiten could not be more literally dazzling as one finds it here — was the advent of a new material, transparent crystal acrylic plastic. It enabled him not merely to transform his style, but to effect a change in the entire subject of his art, from forms and their relationships to light.

Indeed, in terms of form alone, the crystalline plastic sculpture with which Schnier has been exclusively preoccupied in recent years, is as academic as anything that anyone has ever done: mostly, blocks carved into diamonds or die shapes, and other relatively simple variations on the cube.

But these volumes are now mere vehicles, scaffolds upon which to hang the rippling, glittering, sometimes virtually explosive play of light. Indeed, Schnier's finest pieces are those in which the forms are most liquescent — cubes whose planes open at their centers into vertiginous whirlpools of light, or contain hemispherical hollows in which the larger forms are reflected, distorted, break up and seem almost literally to dissolve.

These are elegant works, not unlike large jewels, with an old-world refinement that puts them at a certain remove from current sculptural preoccupations; yet the brilliance with which they maintain an illusion of constantly ebbing and flowing motion, with which they seem to objectivize energies and dematerialize matter, makes them far from irrelevant in the arena of contemporary sculptural achievements.



Jacques Schnier's carved crystal acrylic sculpture, called "Lichroma" and done last year, is at the James Willis Gallery

they were successfully absorbed into the Modernist academy.

Schnier's gigantic breakthrough—and its demon-

Painting and sculpture that celebrate form for form's sake

ART

Lines, Cubes And the Root Of the Abstract

**THE PLANAR DIMENSION:
GEOMETRIC ABSTRACTION
BY BAY AREA ARTISTS**
Walnut Creek Civic Arts Gallery
Through May 22

W BY THOMAS ALBRIGHT

With the exception of the bitter warfare between representational and abstract art, perhaps no other issue has so divided artists in the 20th century as the opposition between geometric and organic form.

At bottom, they are, of course, united, as anyone who has a nodding acquaintance with organic chemistry — or, from the other side, quantum physics, with its insight that the observation is inseparable from the observer — well knows.

Still, these represent two fundamentally contrasting philosophic and esthetic visions. Organic abstraction usually grows more or less — well, organically, out of painting or sculpture that centers on the human figure, and retains intimate connections to it.

The practitioner of geometric abstraction is more likely to be preoccupied with the world outside himself, less with his subjective responses to specific things and more with "objective," impersonal ideals, with his role in society and in the cosmos. Behind the geometric abstractionist there often lies an artist who once concentrated on landscape — Mondrian, for example, whose abstraction grew out of a tree.

Of course, often there lies nothing but the dead hand of formula — of the designer or the art historical anthropologist who contents himself with minute variations on what's already been done.

The organic — which is to say the expressionistic, the impulse that places man at the center of the universe — has always dominated painting and sculpture in the Bay Area, and it has held a virtual monopoly on the image of Bay Area art presented to other parts of the world: Abstract Expression, Figurative Painting, Funk Art. Perhaps the chief



'Four Cuboids on Three Points' by Jacques Schnier, 1982

virtue of "The Planar Dimension" is that it sheds some light, or at least some publicity, on a strain of expression which, although — or perhaps because — it has commanded more than its due of attention elsewhere, has, at least until recently, constituted a largely overlooked subcurrent here.

Organized by Civic Arts director Carl Worth, with co-curators Guy John Cavalli and Suzaan Boettger, the exhibition is more of a conversation opener than a last word. An early geometric painting by James McCray, for example, or a painting by Ed Corbett from the early '40s, when he was practicing Mondrianesque abstraction, might have contributed an illuminating historical perspective; inclusion of work by Ron Davis and Tony DeLap, done well after each had left the Bay Area for Southern California, simply contributes to confusion.

Above all, the show cries out for a catalog, or at least some extended curatorial statements that might have addressed some of the questions that it raises. Are there differences between the geometric abstraction of Bay Area artists and artists elsewhere? Why does the show concentrate almost exclusively on what, in critic-speak, is called "relational" abstraction — sculpture that works largely by addition, and painting by subdivision, to create forms that exploit the tensions and harmonies of part to part and parts to whole — as distinct from the reductive geometries of Minimalist sculpture and color field painting? Why are the conclusions these artists have reached so much less radical than those to which geometric abstraction has led such artists as Robert Irwin and Larry Bell in Southern California?

And why has a current which historically has led a subterranean, if not exactly subversive, existence in the art of the Bay Area, rushed to the surface in recent years to become the source of the most ubiquitous and benumbing of clichés?

These and other "issues" are implicit in the sheer existence of such a show, as well as in its choices. But except for the latter, which a split-level installation delineates in too dramatic a way to ignore, such general questions have been more or less side-stepped. The principal intention seems to have been simply to make a good visual impression.

The show does make a strong case for half a dozen of its 20-plus artists, most of whom are

represented by a couple of works, generally a recent example and a somewhat older one. The most unexpected among this half-dozen, at least for me, is Sid Gordin.

Gordin has made his mark as a distinctive but scarcely exceptional sculptor, displaying a solid grasp of the formal vocabularies of Cubism and Constructivism, and a whimsical sensibility that sometimes unleashes itself in playfully acrobatic pieces of a more organic and figurative kind. He is represented with a couple of wood constructions of the kind normally associated with his name, including a black "shadow box" in which brightly painted elements of pure geometry engage in meticulously calibrated dialogues with miniature architectures, balancing arbitrariness and logic in a way that suggests an Art Deco Cornell.

The big — or little — surprises, though, are two small wire constructions from the mid '50s that Cavalli found gathering dust in Gordin's attic. Lithe, graceful, delicate and indestructibly logical, they combine slender straight lines, arcs and clusters of five, comb-like "teeth" which, from certain vantage points, crisscross to form intricate, *moire* grids, and from others bunch up to suggest foreshortened solid planes. Whimsy here crosses over into a dimension closer to the magical.

James Prestini's two pieces — one, two solid bricks of gleaming nickel-plated aluminum stacked to form a simple cross; the other, a similar structure of open rectangular "frames" — answer one another like a voice and its echo. They epitomize structural clarity and logic, yet their sleekly sensuous surfaces offset coldness, and their reflecting properties seem designed to reach out and gather all of the surrounding world into themselves, and the model they set forth of rationalism and right relations.

Jacques Schnier's heroic outdoor piece, "Four Cuboids on Three Points," is as rigorous in its forms, but its syntax is more fluid, dance-like in the rhythms of its thrusts and counterthrusts, balances and elevations. Something remains in it of the fantastic and the mythic found in Schnier's 1968 aggregation of stacked and cantilevered cubes, "Holy Citadel." If Prestini is the principal classicist among the sculptors — they also include Brian Wall, Fletcher Benton and David Bottini — Schnier is the strongest Romantic.

86 San Francisco Chronicle ☆ Thurs., December 15, 1983

ART

THOMAS ALBRIGHT

Linking Schnier's Past to His Present

Jacques Schnier has not exhibited his sculpture frequently, and when he has, it has tended to be in one-man shows that take the long view. His last show, in 1977 at the James Willis Gallery, was a 50-year-retrospective.

A current survey at the Civic Arts Gallery in Walnut Creek spans a mere 36 years, but that is only because Schnier, now 85, has opted to take 1947, rather than 1927, as its starting point and to emphasize his work of the past decade — which, in fact, includes two surprising new phases since he last exhibited in the city six years ago.

That show followed by only a year or two Schnier's move from traditional materials to crystal acrylic plastic as his principal medium, and it therefore emphasized his dramatic break with his own past, or at least that was what one noticed most about the show. The current exhibition, on the other hand, emphasizes some of the constants in Schnier's sculpture that link his new work to the old.

Thus, one of the first things one sees is an alcove in which a sculpture from 1979 in twisting and turning tubes of polymer covered with sleekly polished lacquer — one of the two new directions in which Schnier has moved since he last showed — appears next to a 1947 bronze figure of Jonah and the whale.

The two sculptures could not be more different in style; yet the rhythms of the figurative piece, with its Art Deco stylizations — the tautly bending figure and the fish shape that nearly doubles back up-

on itself — echoes almost exactly those of the flexible polymer elbow joints that Schnier has pieced together in a dynamic continuum of forms that open and close, clench and fluidly unfold.

And the structure of interlocking steel cuboids standing on their corners — Schnier's other major new sculptural style — is the stack of bronze cubes of the nearby "Citadel" done in 1958, launched into the kind of dance-like motion ("on points" is the way Schnier refers to them in his titles) of these more organic forms.

There are, of course, a number of steps between Jonah and the Whale and a new sculpture such as "Four Cuboids on Three Points," and for the most part they fall into relatively well defined "periods."

Schnier's earliest abstract works, for example, beginning in 1958, were based on cubic forms; between 1964 and 1968 he worked in bronze, in a gestural, calligraphic style that seems to have been influenced by abstract expressionism; the work in carved acrylic followed, between 1969 and 1978; and then the industrial polymer (1978-80) and the current cuboid series.

But, at least in the context of this show, the correspondences and continuities seem as significant as the changes and apparent breaks.

One sees Schnier trying to bring movement to his constructions of cubes 20 years ago, sometimes stacking them into structures that are wildly cantilevered. The cubes that form these structures are sometimes fitted with little "windows" or "gunports" that



Jacques Schnier: What you see is never all you get

underline a resemblance to fantastic fortresses or castles and, in general, it also has remained true of Schnier's sculpture that what you see is never all you get, but is rather a metaphor; not referring, necessarily, to anything specific, but to the possibility that cubes can dance or that industrial tubing can perform gymnastics. Schnier's vocabulary frequently may be Minimalist, but his sensibility is Romantic.

The sculpture in acrylic plastic, its severity of form countered by a play of reflected and entrapped light that by contrast seems almost Baroque, comes off here as Schnier's perhaps most "atypical" work, if typical, for him, means a consistent sense of mass and volume, and location of form in space, all of which dissolve here in a dazzle of reflections and refractions.

One wonders which of these various styles of sculpture will ultimately be associated most strongly with Schnier's name. Perhaps he will be remembered most of all as an artist who has maintained an exemplary equation of consistency and curiosity, continually moving off along unexpected paths, and surprising us all over again by showing the way these new directions all are an intimate part of the internal logic of his expression.

Oakland Tribune, February 1, 1984

Jacques Schnier still hooked on sculpture at 85

By *Toula Bogdanos*
Special to *The Tribune*

LAFAYETTE — "I get so much satisfaction out of a beautiful composition that sometimes I feel like dancing around it and singing," said sculptor Jacques Schnier, a longtime local resident.

He practically beams when he looks at the sculptures gracing his home. And at 85, he has the tranquil look of a man who's accomplished whatever he set out to do for most of his life.

A drive past Walnut Creek's City Hall will enlighten those unfamiliar with Schnier's art. His "four cuboids on these points, sculptured stainless steel rectangles seemingly floating in a delicate balance," graces the building. Last month, the Walnut Creek Civic Arts Gallery held an exhibition celebrating the last 25 years of Schnier's career as a sculptor.

For his parents, who immigrated to San Francisco from Rumania, diligence was necessary for survival, and independence of thought was a requirement which made survival worthwhile. If he inherited anything at birth, said Schnier, it was those two traits. But, he credits chance with his discovery of sculpture.

Dissatisfied as a civil engineer, Schnier had been impressed by the artist Paul Gauguin's decision to forego profit in order to gratify his passion for art. Gauguin's biography offered a tempting precedent to Schnier who left engineering to enroll in UC Berkeley's architecture department in 1924.

After an art course booked him on sculpture,



By *Angela Pancrazio*, *The Tribune*

Sculptor Jacques Schnier never runs out of ideas.

Schnier lost interest in all other subjects. In 1926, he abruptly withdrew from the university to become a sculptor. He rented a Montgomery Street studio where the Transamerica pyramid now stands.

Schnier made the career switch easily. "I was so engrossed in sculpture because it filled such a

See **SCHNIER**, Page 7

THE TRIBUNE, Oakland, California

Schnier

Continued from Page 1

need for self-expression which engineering didn't supply," he said. He depended on his engineering savings, never fearing failure.

"That didn't even enter the picture. The joy, the mental . . . satisfaction," said Schnier, struggling for the perfect word to describe his pleasure, "was so great that economics were in the background. In a few years, and without much formal training since there were no art schools here for sculptors, I became accepted. I won prizes, commissions, exhibitions."

At first, like most young artists, Schnier was influenced by the older, more established artists he met — Stackpole, Van Sloan, Piazzoni, Dixon. "Gradually, however, I developed my own idiom, until I began to read art reviews saying 'this looks like a Schnier,'" he said. In 1929, Schnier met Albert Bender, the Bay Area's leading art patron, who was perhaps the biggest influence in Schnier's career.

"The West is just overcoming its frontier image now. At that time, Easterners never bought western art, and even westerners didn't support art to any great extent," said Schnier.

Bender bought and donated Schnier's work to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. He acquainted lesser patrons with Schnier's sculpture, helped him win a place on the UC Berkeley faculty in 1936 and introduced Schnier to his future father-in-law.

Bender had brought a Mr. Lilienthal to visit Schnier's studio now on Hotaling Place. Lilienthal immediately bought some work, and he commissioned Schnier to do a portrait of his son. Schnier got to know the Lilienthal daughters as well on his frequent visits.

Bender died during World War II while Schnier served as an Air Force officer in Southern China. In 1949, the sculptor married Doris Lilienthal.

"I was fortunate to marry when I was already established," said Schnier. "Otherwise I might have turned a different direction and become a hack to keep the wolf away from the door. I had my daughter at the age of 60."

The Schniers moved to Lafayette when they tired of lugging babies and groceries up Russian Hill and three flights of stairs to reach their home. One summer they rented a Lafayette house from a professor on sabbatical.

"It was so delightful, we thought this was the garden of Eden," said Schnier. "When I first lived in the artists' quarter, I thought I'd never move away because I was with kindred souls who spoke the same language. Artists were my first audience."

But, said Schnier, he discovered an artist doesn't need to live in a city with an active art scene.

While he continued teaching, setting up bachelor's and master's degree programs in sculpture at UC Berkeley, Schnier devoted all his free time to exploring his art. Early in his career, he had stopped casting in plaster, preferring instead the immediacy and sensuousness of carving in wood. "In wood, even the grain has aesthetic quality. Plaster was so deadly, so bland," said Schnier.

In 1958 he broke from figurative art and began to concentrate on form. His materials were cast bronze, copper, constructed polymer tubing and carved acrylic. Acrylic lends itself to faceting, what jewelers do to a diamond to give the illusion of fire bursting from the stone.

"I get the most satisfaction with acrylic because of its brilliance. I am fascinated, almost hypnotized," said Schnier, who said he's the only artist carving lucite.

Sometimes the material influences his sculpture. Two huge roots from a black walnut tree sit in his studio. "The natural flow of rhythm in that wood sort of dictates a composition," said Schnier.

Also, Schnier is doing larger sculptures in stainless steel because he wants to create outdoor art that can stand up to weather and vandalism.

On his dining room table, there is a model of his latest project, three polished stainless steel blocks standing like a futuristic Stonehenge in a fountain which may someday appear in the East-bay.

Inspiration has never been a problem for Schnier, who retired from UC Berkeley in 1966. "Ideas just come like a hot spring that's bubbling up," he said. As soon as he finishes a project, he clears his desk, sweeps the floor and gets ready for his next venture.

"I've been lucky, because of the patronage and my teaching. I am able to continue doing what I want to do. I don't have to compromise."

NOTEWORTHIES

Jacques Schnier: A Portrait of the Artist In His Studio



"New composition... that's the drive that keeps the pot boiling, the drive to create."

The fire is hot for the wry-humored sculptor, who at 85 shows no signs of slowing down. ("You don't look 85." "Ah, too bad, I was hoping I did.") "As soon as I finish one work, I have three or four new ideas," says this energetic, charming man who, everyday, faithfully drives four minutes up to his studio—a converted barn—from his Japanese-Western home in Lafayette.

"Time means nothing to me," he smiles. "I find it hard to leave my work. My wife calls every day to ask when I'm coming home."

A sculptor. A teacher of dreams. An engineer. Jacques Schnier has lived several successful careers. Each has been a vital part of his development as an enormously talented sculptor. He is possibly one of Contra Costa's best kept secrets.

Until now. Among his numerous honors and awards, his most rewarding was the recent unveiling of the massive cuboid sculpture gracing the pool in front of One Corporate Plaza, a Bedford Development project in Concord. Peter Bedford, a neighbor, noticed Schnier's sculptures in his yard while taking an evening walk. He asked Schnier if he would create a similar piece for his new project.

"I was thrilled when I saw the blueprints," Schnier says. "It looked as if the setting had been designed with this statue in mind—the angularity, the outline of the pool was in perfect

keeping with the cuboid form." His works have been displayed also at the Civic Art Gallery in Walnut Creek, and a smaller version of the Concord sculpture is on exhibit in front of City Hall. The work of Jacques Schnier, exhibited in museums and collections all over the country, has come home.

From a Jewish family of "modest circumstances" in Constanta, Rumania, Schnier traveled the rigors of academia, beginning as an engineering graduate from Stanford University, to become one of U.C. Berkeley's most distinguished alumni and instructors. He's one of 39 illustrious faculty featured in Irving Stone's *There Was Light*, published on the occasion of the University centennial.

Beginning his career as an engineer in Hawaii, Schnier soon grew dissatisfied with the field and enrolled in U.C. Berkeley's architectural department with plans to enter city planning. It wasn't long before the sculpture course had monopolized all his attention and with no formal training available, he set up a studio in San Francisco to train himself.

Obviously, he had the "right stuff." A year later, two of his sculptures took first place at the Seattle Art Institute exhibition of 1928.

Schnier received several major commissions over the years. Nine of his works were exhibited at the 1939 World's Fair. He created a low relief sculpture of the U.S. silver half dollar for the opening of the Bay Bridge in 1936. His works are on display also at the Berkeley High School Science Auditorium, San Francisco General Hospital, Clorox Corporation's ex-

ecutive offices, Stanford Art Museum and Santa Barbara Art Museum.

Schnier made a major mark on U.C. Berkeley, after becoming an instructor of the clay modeling class in 1936. He quickly transformed the class into a "respectable" sculpture course, then organized a group major leading to the A.B. degree in sculpture. In 1956, he organized the curriculum for the M.A. degree in sculpture. A constantly probing mind took the sculptor into the exploration of dreams and psychoanalysis of art, a field in which he obtained a M.A. degree in 1940. His renown as an instructor and writer in the field of psychoanalytic research of art equals his distinction as a sculptor.

To be an artist, he smiles coyly, he gave up the "life of Riley." In exchange, however, he gained satisfaction. "Art provides an opportunity to realize your dreams," the instructor of dreams says, "and your imaginative trends in thinking. That's what people refer to as 'self-expression.' Even abstract things that look divorced from human emotions carry a lot of guts, a lot that's not obvious on the surface. It's the opportunity to give vent to these feelings that motivates me."

Life of Riley or not, Jacques and his wife, the former Dorothy Lilienthal, live very comfortably and have raised two children who are succeeding in their own right. His daughter, who received her master's degree from Columbia University recently, is working for an architect in New York. His son, a graduate of U.C. Berkeley, is involved in administrative work.

Cautioning the photographer to "make sure all my wrinkles show—I worked hard for them," he unveils some of his current pieces in his large, airy studio. A collection of impressive creations mostly in wood and stainless steel, his favorites—for obvious reasons—are two magnificent pieces in lucite, graceful, translucent pieces, brilliant in the light.

"Lucite is dull until the very final stage when I use an optical grade slurry, the same that's used for polishing lenses," Schnier says. "Working with the slurry is arriving at the 'moment of truth'. Like the bullfighter. At that stage, all of a sudden, all one's effort, physical and mental, is rewarded. Suddenly, the brilliance, the fire comes out."

For Schnier, the fire is burning bright. Excited that developers in Contra Costa are being encouraged to include art in their projects, he comments, "Every cultural period has monuments which are its signposts." And, of course, the renowned sculptor hopes to play a significant role.

The 25th Anniversary of the International Sculpture Center

Jacques Schnier
Former Chairman, Board of Advisors

1985 marks the 25th Anniversary of the International Sculpture Center. This is a fitting occasion to reflect on its origins and its vicissitudes during the intervening years. The Center had its inception in what was planned as a one time bronze casting conference by Professor Elden Tefft at the University of Kansas. Traditionally, bronze is as closely related to sculpture as canvas is to painting. But few American-trained sculptors had observed the full process of investing, wax burn-out, and the melting and the pouring of molten bronze. Fewer still had cast their own work and even fewer were those who built their own furnaces.

Lawrence, Kansas, the site of the Conference, is away from a main travel hub. But, the well-published affair drew enough attendees to crowd the lecture rooms and demonstration areas. Most were young impecunious sculptors traveling in jalopies or old pick-up trucks and bunking nightly in sleeping bags. Others were newly appointed instructors and even professors anxious to broaden their teaching skills.

As Professor of Sculpture and founder of the sculpture section at the University of California, Berkeley, I was present at this auspicious initial event. Everywhere audiences seemed google-eyed with excitement at what they saw and heard. At melting and casting demonstrations, they pushed and crowded for front line positions. The clicking of cameras was like a cacophony of crickets. During pouring of the molten bronze, the atmosphere was hypnotic, like at a sacred rite.

When possible, lectures, panel discussions, and demonstrations were tape recorded. Later these were transcribed and published as The Proceedings, a policy that was followed for each preceding conference. These permanent records probably constitute one of the most historically informative compilation of sculptors' declarations and dissertations, published in the 20th Century.

So enthusiastic was the response to the first Conference that Tefft was encouraged to schedule a second one. The Second conference led to the Third and that led to the Fourth. By this time the need for a central agency to assist Tefft in planning future conferences was clearly apparent. The appointment of division chairmen, in different parts of the country, to act as an advisory board for funneling suggestions and proposals to Lawrence, helped this cause. The makeup of this first Advisory Board was: Jules Struppeck of Tulane University, Central Division; Wolfgang Behl, Hartford Art School, Eastern Division; Jan Zack, University of Oregon, North Western Division; Senor Herman Gonzalez, Costa Rica, Central American Division; Victor Timmerman, University of Ghent, European Division; N. Veloso Albuero, University of the Phillipines, Far East Division; and Jacques Schnier, University of California, Western Division. The custom of having a renowned art world figure address the conference banquet was inaugurated at the Second Conference. Seymour Lipton was the speaker for that occasion.

Gradually the term "bronze casting" was permanently dropped from the Conference title. Although the designation "National" continued to be used, the drift towards an international identity was confirmed at the Fourth Conference by the large number of foreign attendees. One discussion panel alone was made up of six foreign participants.

Initially the main purpose of the loose organization that later became the International Sculpture Center was solely the planning and administration of the biannual sculpture conference. But already its growing activity, providing information and publications to sculptors, placed it in the role of public advocate for sculpture. The Conference programs became more broadly sculpture oriented with such subjects as creative invention, environmental implications, new technologies and computer design receiving recognition. More nationally recognized sculptors became involved and their participation increased. Among those presenting papers or participating in panel discussions were Richard Stankiewicz, Isamu Noguchi, William King, Jan Zach, Wolfgang Behl, Helen Escobeda, Jason Seley, Bruce Beasley, Julius Schmidt, Frank Gallo, Jacques Schnier, and Beverly Pepper. Polemicist Jack Burnham and art critics John Canady and Harold Rosenberg were among invited speakers.

The first scheduling of a conference away from the University of Kansas occurred in 1976 with the selection of New Orleans at the suggestion of Lin Emery. Through her dedicated services, many cultural and civic agencies became involved as hosts and financial supporters. The main theme, Sculpture in Public Places, was the subject to which many renowned sculptors addressed their thoughts. Participating in the four-day program were Ted Bieler of Canada, Mathias Goeritz of Mexico, Isamu Noguchi, Kosso Eloul, Helen Escobeda, Dimitri Hadzi, Clement Meadmore, Tony Rosenthal, and George Sugarman. Hilton Kramer and Irving Sandler presented art critics' views on monumental sculpture.

On the occasion of the New Orleans Conference, which coincided with the Nation's Centennial, special honor awards were given to the distinguished sculptors Seymour Lipton and Isamu Noguchi.

The response to the 10th Sculpture Conference, held for the first time outside the United States in Toronto, was overwhelming. The organizers expected 800 people but a cut-off accommodation capacity of 2,000, was reached a month before opening day. Hundreds of advance registration checks were returned. The panels and lectures were given by the largest ever assembly of luminaries from the world of sculpture. Guest speakers came from Europe, Asia, South and Central America. They included internationally known sculptors, critics architects, planners, professors and curators. Honorary degrees were conferred by York University on George Rickey and Bill Reid.

The growing financial responsibilities and planning requirements of the Center necessitated a reorganization and a separation from its affiliation with the University of Kansas. This change was made possible through the generous patronage of J. Seward Johnson, a sculptor and active supporter of services in the interest of sculpture. As new President of the Center he guided it through its transition and hired a full time administrative staff to operate a new headquarters office in Washington, D.C. David M. Furchgott, an arts management consultant, was appointed Executive Director and Elden Tefft, after 20 years of steadfast and dedicated service to sculptors worldwide, retired as Director Emeritus.

The 11th International Sculpture conference was held in Washington D.C. The program featured 175 distinguished sculptors and art professionals from around the world. One of the Conference's objectives was to bring sculpture to the attention of

Federal Government executives, the international community and the broader public. To assist in this phase, 88 works of contemporary sculpture were sited in indoor and outdoor exhibitions around the Capitol. Abram Lerner, Director of the Hirshorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, likened the conference to an earlier landmark event of international art in the United States: The New York Armory Show of 1913.

The San Francisco/Oakland area was the site of the 12th International Sculpture conference in 1982. There was extensive sculptor participation in both scheduled events and in exhibitions of their works. Among the many exhibitions were works from overseas including a special display of Czechoslovakian glass sculpture in the Oakland Museum and a one-person show of aluminum sculpture in the Kaiser complex by the Japanese sculptor Kyube Kiyomizu. A group show at Mills College featured work from France, Switzerland, Sweden, Israel, The Republic of South Africa, New Zealand, Brazil, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Greece and Poland.

Since moving to its Washington headquarters the Center has definitely fulfilled what earlier seemed only a promise. It is now recognized worldwide as a leading advocate for sculptors and their work. It offers a large range of services not available elsewhere. It published a bimonthly journal, International Sculpture, replete with news of recent developments here and abroad. It respects the sculpture of the past, it is dedicated to the sculpture of the present and it welcomes the sculpture of the future.

Speaking at a conference, Robert Murray stated, "I must admit that I'm still somewhat awestruck at the remarkable interest sculpture enjoys and has enjoyed since early or mid '60s. We not only have fresh ideas in sculpture but we also have a whole new patronage and on the most democratic lines." It is not mere speculation to claim that the Center has played a strong contributory role in this changing sculpture scene during the last 25 years.



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June 1987

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