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Oral history interview with Judith Baca, 1986 August 5-6

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Transcript

Interview

ARCHIVES OF AMERICAN ART
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH JUDITH BACA
IN VENICE, CALIFORNIA
AUGUST 5 & 6, 1986
INTERVIEWER: AMALIA MESA BAINS

JB: JUDITH BACA
AB: AMALIA MESA BAINS

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[**BEGINNING INTERVIEW]**

AB: Well, Judy, here we go again!

JB: Here we are!

AB: At the beginning of the interview. And I thought one of the most important things to do before we talked about your background and the making of art is to let you take the time to define yourself as an artist now. You're well-known as a muralist. You're well-known in the Chicano art movement as well as the feminist art movement. I would want to give you an opportunity to really say what you see yourself as doing as an artist, sort of a definition time.

JB: At this time?

AB: Umhmm, at this time. Then we can back up and look at some other parts.

JB: Okay. I think perhaps what is relevant at this point is that I'm coming into my fortieth year in September, which is next month. I will be forty. And it is an interesting time, because it's a time of assessment for me, and I've thought a great deal about what these first, I think seventeen years, of art-making have been about. I think I did my first mural in like 1959, so how many years is that? Seventy-nine is ten; eighty-nine would be twenty.

AB: It's like seventeen years.

JB: Seventeen years. I have a number of thoughts about it, and I think perhaps the closest definition I would give my myself is, for lack of a better term, is a muralist, or public artist. And I like to say that I'm an urban artist, because so much of what I try to do is really associated with an urban environment, and it's not . . . I mean, I say "for lack of a better term," because I think that the way that muralism has developed for me in the last seventeen years has been fairly different than you might find with other muralists. I mean, it's taken a different course.

AB: How so? How do you see it differently?

JB: Well, in an interesting way, I think it's been affected and it's been sort of changed and molded by the situations within which I've worked and also by a sort of basic philosophical idea, which has to do with the integration of that public art into the environment that it is set [within--Ed.]. And when I talk about environment I use that term really loosely because I think about the environment including the social situation as well as the physical situation. So that a piece that I do, like *The Great Wall*, which is perhaps the piece I'm most well-known for, is that it's not only about painting within a flood-control channel, which has, you know, acres of water rushing through it at certain times of the year, which would dictate a certain way of, you know, making an application in that area. It has the light hitting it a certain point during the day and is viewed from, you know, perhaps in this case, eighteen feet above ground level. All of those issues, of course affect the designing. But also because of the social situation that is the climate around that particular physical space, that has determined a great deal about how I would address that. And it has set up a model for me, in which I can plug in any environment, essentially. And the work would be profoundly different in each case, but I've addressed a certain set of issues that have to do with who lives there, who is coming there, who passes by there, what their relationships one to each other are in terms of the communities, how people use that place -- how they use that park, for example -- that have determined a solution to a problem that is both social, environmental -- or physical, kind of a physical-environmental -- and artistic. And so it's the interweaving of those aesthetic principles and the environmental issues and social issues that determine the solution to it. So I guess what I would say is that, for a large part, the painting of the mural, or the painting of that, that physical act of putting an artwork on a piece of, on a wall, is one, you know, maybe -- what would be the correct percentage? -- maybe a third of my work.

AB: Okay. And what do you see as the other two-thirds? You used the word, or the definition, an urban artist, a public artist, concerned with the environments both physical and social. What are the other parts of your . . . the other two-thirds?

JB: Design and process.

AB: Design and process.

JB: Well, I think one of the things I've been really looking at for some time with a real conscious -- and perhaps more consciously in the last ten years, and even with a greater focus in the last five -- is the creation of a model, you know, like a design model, that can

plug in any particular social or physical situation. And the other two-thirds of that work has to do with the conceptual end of it, has to do with, let's say, making a design that is like a reverse triangle, in the case of *The Great Wall*. I think I've thought it out more carefully as it applies to that piece and can talk about it and use that as an example better than any other. But if you think of the tip of the triangle being a reverse triangle -- you picture that in your mind -- and you see at the very tip of that triangle the relationship between two people from two vastly different ethnic groups -- right? You see Juan and . . . Russell.

AB: Uh huh.

JB: Russell Jackson and Juan Carillo, or something, right. (Chuckles)

AB: Yes.

JB: Okay, you see those two young people standing facing one another. There exists between them this kind of cultural abyss, historical separation -- in the cases of that particular area, not necessarily terribly big geographic area; they share a certain piece of the geography of Los Angeles. But one in which there's a history of interracial violence and one in which there is a long-time kind of standing division of the blacks and the browns in the San Fernando Valley. So that is the point of the triangle. Then the next level up of that -- in kind of stratas, as if you're at a cross-section of the earth and that fill up this triangle -- you'd see the building of series of relationships that move from the individual to the community, to the municipalities, to the state, and to the federal level, all of which are about the creation of relationships that magnify that relationship.

AB: So what you're talking about is a conceptual framework. So do you see yourself at at times as a conceptual artist? Is that an area you're expanding in, or that you're arriving in? Where do you see yourself in that?

JB: Well, I see myself, you know, I think that . . . I find myself most interested and most enhanced by conversations that have to do -- and connections with artists -- that have to do with conceptual work -- performance, for example. Visual performance work has perhaps the greatest influence on me. I'm most interested in that. It's not that I . . . I mean, I like to look at images of murals, and I'm excited by interesting images, but you could keep me up all night, not looking at slides, but talking to me about a model for the creation of a, for social change in a particular physical situation.

AB: When you look at yourself among other peers now that are doing that kind of work, who do you find yourself working with or sharing the ideas with, relating to, influences?

JB: Well, I would say . . . . There are various peoples for various aspects. And one of them would be, that I find a person who I talk a great deal with, I've talked a great deal with over the last seven years or so, is Suzanne Lacey. And we argue, and we actually understand each other really well. Also Judy Chicago, who I have perhaps bigger disagreements with in the way that she approaches some of her work, but respect enormously.

AB: Differences in the way she orchestrates them or manages them . . .

JB: Yes, I think . . . .

AB: . . . or the intention of the work? What is it that you . . . ?

JB: Not the intention. I think I have no problem with her intention. I think that the orchestration of her work is really different than mine. As Judy says, "I work with the middle class, and you have worked with the lower classes. And so that a lot of the decisions I have made have had to do with the fact that I have people whose immediate need is not for some economic gain. In other words, these are not people who need jobs that I'm working with, but people who need some kind of enhancement spiritually or some kind of . . . . They need to be given a sense of self-esteem, by connecting with other women." So she doesn't pay her workers, for example. And I mean, we can extrapolate on that, I mean, some of the arguments that she and I have are on those issues. But she always seems to be at a place in which she presses a button when we've had our meetings. And I have to say that, you know, Judy was not a person who influenced my work early, because I never met her until *The Great Wall* was, you know, well underway, over half done, and it was at that time that she and I became more connected. And we do have these sort of key meetings, which have really important meetings. Even if, I'd say like once or twice a year, we meet someplace, in

some obscure ridiculous place (chuckles) li ke . . .

AB: The middle of the desert, right?

JB: . . . the middle of the desert in New Mexico, and spend three days in some kind of intense discussion, in which we not only talk but, you know, do like these grueling eighteen-mile hikes or some other kind of physical endurance test.

AB: When I was listening to some of the things that came up when you were defining yourself apart from -- well, not apart from, but in conjunction with -- you mentioned differences in your conceptual framework with other people because of class or . . . .

JB: Well, I was going to add that the third person that I would think I would put in that is yourself. You know, I mean, and you know very well that we have a -- without saying, you know, having to reiterate it, we know very well that both of us have a profound influence on each other, and you very much -- well, Suzanne is perhaps -- Suzanne and Alan Capro have had a great deal of influence on me conceptually, and the kind of weaving of this massive community organizing into the creation of some kind of image, which inherent in its production has some kind of social change .

AB: The process and product.

JB: Right. And then Judy perhaps as an organizer of women, as she has been, to focus on the creation of a product, which in itself is a transformative process. I mean, that's what Suzanne and she also have in common. But Judy perhaps more, that she's more visual product oriented. And Suzanne very often, in conversations when Judy Chicago and I are talking, Suzanne will feel left out because she doesn't make a permanent product. And she fights with us. She goes, "Well, you guys are making . . . you know, you make images, and it's lasting, and my big problem is that I can't make a lasting image."

AB: [When I] make a performance.

JB: Right. And then I think, on the other level -- this is really interesting; as I discuss it, I realize it's true -- that you and I have these discussion which have to do with the spiritual, and have to do with how one becomes a healer or sort of modern-day shaman, and how one uses the art, our own artforms as a way of transforming ourselves and then, in addition, transforming our viewers and, in my case, my participants.

AB: So, in a certain sense, what we talk about has to do with the intention of our work and the effect of the process.

JB: Umhmm.

AB: When we make installations that are temporal, or when we make pieces that aren't lasting in some sense, the process has something to do with how we change ourselves and in turn change other people.

JB: Right. And I'm not sure, you know, like I happen to be a painter. I mean, it's like I don't dance or, you know, I don't sing, but it wouldn't really matter to me, in a certain regard, whether I would do . . . . On one level, it doesn't matter to me whether I paint.

AB: That's interesting, because the thing I was going to ask you about had to do with references to the idea of the historical, that in looking at the social landscape, you talked about the history that comes out of that and the making of it. In most instances, you have painted that on the walls.

JB: Umhmm.

AB: Or worked with other people who painted with you.

JB: Umhmm.

AB: Would there be another way that you would make those historical statements, or are they still necessary to you to do that?

JB: I think that, yes, I think that I may very well find myself, you know, making other forms that are more performance-oriented, that are more temporary, because of the fact that

monumental work on the scale that I'm working at both serves my need and also is really difficult.

AB: It's an obstacle at times.

JB: It's a very big obstacle, because it's like you can't play an instrument unless you have an . . . I mean, you can't be an orchestra director unless you have an orchestra. And that means that you have to pay for all of the instruments, and it's quite a production. You have to have the music hall and you have a . . . . And I'm just talking about in equal, in equitable terms, would be something like I have to have, you know, twenty sets of scaffoldings, and four trucks, and toilets, and food for fifty people, and . . . . It's like a big movie production. So that in itself dictates to me that there won't, that that won't always be the solution. And yet, that kind of grandiose, grandiosity, that kind of scale, has created for me some very important procedures that, in fact, engage more people, in fact, create bigger and bigger ripples, because there's so many people who are drawn into that process because of the scale of it. That it really answered the need of a large-scale project of that sort. I mean, you know, if you're working with over . . . . On *The Great Wall*, we have now, at this point, hired over 250 kids. Okay now, that's just the kids! I mean, we're talking about hiring additional forty to fifty, I'm not sure how many artists who have in some way contributed something, you know, like help paint in a design or have worked under my direction. In addition to that, we're talking about like twenty historians, to say nothing of all the other community resources, and the numbers of agencies involved, and the numbers of councilmen and Army Corps of Engineers, people, workers and people from the Aesthetic Planning Division. It's just like it ripples out. And so the scale has been, it's been very effective, in terms of creating a larger set of attention to the topics, to the subject -- which is really about racism in America. And it's really about how, because of that, because of racism -- and I think it's racism, and I couple that with the American, American idealism. You know, the vision of America, the dream of America.

AB: And also maybe a fabrication of American history, which seems to me is one of the things you began to question with *The Great Wall*.

JB: Umhmm

AB: Is redefining history. Maybe this is a good point to back up, then, and look at some of the elements in your own upbringing that pertain to this notion of the historical and how you find yourself doing this work. Now I know a bit about your background, but I think it would be good just to revamp, starting from Colorado, which was when your family first made the move.

JB: The move to Mexico. I think it's particularly a good year for this, because my mother has just made the trip back to Colorado, and she hasn't been there in many years. And she went for her reunion; I think it's like her 40th reunion, for her high school, in a place called LaJunta, which is about sixty miles out of Denver, and it's a small farming community, in which there was a very large Mexican population, which of course was like completely segregated and lived across the tracks, and they were comprised primarily of railroad workers and migrant workers. And I always wondered -- and, in fact, didn't really find out till I did research for *The Great Wall* -- why Mexicans ended up in such a weird place as Colorado, when they come from these hot climates. And, in fact, I think my grandmother and my grandfather could never get used to the cold there, which is just bitter, bitter cold. And they . . . but the answer is very simple, and I guess it's the one that tells you the story of how Chicanos have moved through the Midwest, and that's that they followed the railroad and work that was available.

AB: That's what happened in Chicago.

JB: Right, that's how they ended up in Chicago. And my family was not very much different. I think after the Revolution, in which . . . . My grandfather was a business owner. He lost most everything during the Revolution because there was sort or this wholesale taking of property from people, whether they were really rich or middle class. I think we would probably qualify as not poor, but certainly not wealthy people.

AB: There's actually a similar phenomenon right now.

JB: Yeah.

AB: It's sort of the middle mercantile class were the ones that were sort of . . .

JB: Wiped out.

AB: . . . appropriated by the Revolution.

JB: So they were appropriated, and they lost everything. And the story is that my grandmother -- it's a wonderful story -- my grandmother was told, instructed by her husband, when he left to go and buy supplies, that she would not take, she could not take the . . . . If the so-called *banditos* came -- which was I don't know which side at that point; either one of them were called *banditos* . . .

AB: [Unclear commentary -- Ed.]

JB: Who knows whether they were federal troops or what. When they came, she was to give them everything. Right? And of course they did come, and when they came, she didn't give them everything. She took a small amount of money and put it into one of those water pitchers -- you know, like those old-fashioned water pitchers that sit in a bowl.

AB: Yeah.

JB: And she dropped the money in there, and that was money that helped them get to the U.S. So shortly after that point, they made the journey into America. And I haven't learned that much about that; I mean, no one spoke of that much, but I suspect it was really difficult.

AB: That would have been in the nineteen . . .

JB: Twenties.

AB: . . . Twenties.

JB: Right, because my mother was the first born here; she was born in 1923.

AB: And the Revolution was around 1910 through the 1920's.

JB: Umhmm.

AB: And large numbers were leaving around 1915, 1916.

JB: Umhmm. And it's interesting. My uncle . . . my uncle Jesus was the oldest, and my uncle Manuel, who was next down, were both born in Chihuahua. And my grandmother, as it comes to be told, in a place called Peral, Chihuahua, which was the birthplace of David Alfaro Siqueiros.

AB: Umhmm. Perhaps!

JB: So people say it was in the drinking water. (laughter) Sort of drinking water.

AB: So you were born in, what, 1946?

JB: Right, I was born in 1946 . . . .

AB: In Denver?

JB: No, I was born here.

AB: No, in LaJunta?

JB: I was born here in Los Angeles.

AB: Oh. So your mother had already made the trip, or were you in the railroad?

JB: Well, what had happened is that my mother, my family, they lived in LaJunta and, as I interviewed my uncles, for the 1940 segment, for *The Great Wall*, some years ago . . . .

AB: Talk about source material. (Chuckles)

JB: The source material is really fascinating source material. They had some of the most

interesting stories because they were, you know, in the Philippines and in the Guadalcanal and Solomon Islands and some of those places, and also were . . .my uncle in a Chicano group -- I mean, a regiment, where they had segregated them.

AB: Umhmm, .

JB: And they talked about how bad LaJunta was. LaJunta was -- and I've heard, you know, I had a very interesting meeting in Texas, in which I met a man who was from the arts council in LaJunta, and he told me, he said, "Oh, your family's from there," and he raised an eyebrow. And I always wondered, you know, I heard all these kind of horror stories of segregated education, my mother saying that she had never been in school with a white person until she was in high school, and then was completely shocked when she discovered that they were sort of ordinary human beings that made mistakes in their spelling and so forth. (both chuckle) And that in grammar school, was taken out of the schools and doused with kerosene, because all Mexicans had lice.

AB: Had lice, yes.

JB: And some of the . . . . My uncle was talking about how they were routinely beaten up going home from school, and, you know, the inevitable service stories, and what happened to them in the service. So my mother really wanted to get out of that place. I think there was a sort of a universal feeling that one should try to escape from LaJunta.

AB: Umhmm.

JB: And they were very . . . . And I asked my uncles at this point, when I was doing this interview, and I said, "And was it better in California?" And my uncle said, "Forth percent." And my mother led the way. My mother was eighteen. It was during the war, or just after the war, coming to the close of the war. And she wanted -- her father had died -- and she wanted to come to California, and it was an unheard-of thing for a young single woman to do this. And, in a sense, she was a kind of pioneer and very daringly rejected her . . . . Above the cries of my grandmother, she came to California.
[BREAK IN TAPING]

JB: . . . [Arrival]

AB: In Los Angeles?

JB: In Los Angeles.

ABA: From LaJunta. Her girlfriend, she was about 18, she got a job.

JB: She worked in . . . . Eventually she ended up working in Goodyear Tire factor. And we lived . . . . And I was born in 1946 in Huntington Park. And I think shortly thereafter we moved into Watts. So, as an infant, I was living in Watts.

AB: And your dad wasn't around at all.

JB: No. No, my father was missing in action. My mother . . . no, my mother was not married to my father. And, in fact, I have a search going on right at this very moment with the Department of Navy who is going to locate for me any day, via their computer, my father . . .

AB: Amazing.

JB: . . . who never knew I was born. So my mother became pregnant here, a soldier who was stationed in Los Angeles, and then, when he was released from the Navy, went back east. And she never told him about my birth. She figured if he was leaving he didn't deserve to know. So my grandmother, and my mother, and my mother's youngest sister, and her mentally retarded sister, and I all lived together in Watts -- near 85th and Central. And, at that time, Watts was a mixed black and brown community, as it is becoming again.

AB: Isn't that interesting how it's sort of returning. In those early years, when you were living basically in an all-female household, was the interest that you developed later in art present yet? I mean, was a certain kind of creativity or making of things encouraged? I mean, how did it, how did the aptitude develop?

JB: I'm not sure about those really early years, except that I do know that my mother

entertained me when I was a small child by doing little portraits of us -- you know, of me and then later my brother when she married -- and that there was a kind of hand-processing of everything. Like my grandmother did very delicate crocheting, in which she would make these amazing doilies, like three-dimensional doilies that would stand up on the tables, and they were carefully ironed, of different flower arrangements, and that she didn't have patterns for them. I mean that they were just made. And that both my mother and my grandmother sewed a great deal, and made all of our clothes. And we were very poor, and we obviously didn't have much, with my mother being the sole supporter of that family. And we had altars in our home, in which there were candles and flower arrangements and the pictures of the santos, and that they were sort of, you know, like precious areas that were set aside and made beautiful, and there were evening prayers. It was a very good Catholic family.

AB: In that sense, then, it wasn't so much the explicit movement toward making art as much as the content, that served you later, or no?

JB: I think it became . . . yes, I think it became . . . I mean, later, it became content for me, I mean, as I began to try to go back and assess and find in my own experience what could be new sources of images that were not based on Western-European artforms. So, in other words, looking at some of those, at some of the things that are recurrent in my household, it became important to source that.

AB: Let's talk about that whole thing of Western-European. When did you actually begin what you would consider training in art? Was it in high school? Did it come later in college? When did you actually start looking at being an artist?

JB: Well, I have to say that in . . . . My mother says -- and I know very well-- my earliest memory of art-making has to do with my first, my entrance into school, in kindergarten, being a child that spoke very little English. And I was just, you know, dramatically shy. I mean, I just, I was in this environment in which it was really against the rules to speak Spanish, and I was really freaked-out, you know. But I *loved* painting. So I was like, you know, they very often would let me paint, you know, instead of doing some of the other lessons, because I didn't speak English well enough. So I had a lot of painting. And I brought the paintings home with great pride, and my mother kept them for years, so I do know that I sort of . . . . That was a place that I actually remember the smell of those materials and the texture of the surfaces and just, you know, kind of having this real visceral love of moving that color around -- which is, I think, you know, I still have that. Not only moving that color around, but moving it around as big as my body, you know, in areas as big as my body and really loving the way that it can -- almost like submerging myself in it. That's what, the scale is really . . . .

AB: Scale, I was just thinking.

JB: The scale is really a central thing for me. You know, it's sort of like the difference between fingerpainting and rolling around in it, you know. [Said with a smile--Ed.]

AB: Yet when you began a formal art training, you weren't originally trained to do murals.

JB: No, when I began formal art training, I sort of . . . I took art in high school, and I always had this interest in art.

AB: Where were you living then? Still in [Los Angeles, Watts]?

JB: No, we moved . . . . my mother married when I was six, to an Italian man who moved us to a so-called better neighborhood. And that neighborhood is quite infamous now for not being a "better neighborhood." (chuckles) That was in the San Fernando Valley, a place called Pacoima, and it's a very large black and brown community. So perhaps it was a step up because it was in the suburbs and, in the Fifties, there was this moved to the suburbs, and everyone thought that that was going to give him a better life than the inner-city life. And we actually ended up moving into a housing area that was designated as the lower-middle-class-income residencies for Lockheed Aircraft workers. And my stepfather worked for Lockheed Aircraft as an upholsterer.

So, again, when I did the research for *The Great Wall*, I discovered that the reason our neighborhood was as it was, and filled with these people who were mostly Mexican people and mostly black people -- black people lived just a few streets down across the tracks --

was because it was designated and designed by the city planners to be an area for workers of the Lockheed Aircraft industry. It was within reach by car, and it was in . . . what their idea was, but actually . . . .

AB: You were already acquainting yourself with social programming in space; I mean, in a way.

JB: Yes.

AB: Urban space. How people are put the . . . .

JB: It was absolutely programmed, written in . . . . You can find it on the books in writing. And I always wondered why across the Laurel Canyon it was all white and, you know, had a whole different look, you know. But it was obviously planned.

AB: That was in high school?

JB: Umhmm.

AB: Did you have . . . ?

JB: I went to a Catholic high school.

AB: Oh, right, yeah. Did you have a sense then that you would continue making art? By then, in other words, was it a formal sense you had: "I am going to be an artist?"

JB: [Thoughtful pause] Yeah. I . . . it was how I was recognized, you know, by my peers. But it was still considered sort of a form of entertainment for everyone. You know, like I would entertain the classroom by doing outrageous drawings on the walls. Like I would get up on the blackboard before the nuns came in, and drew them with their habits flying and naked running across the blackboard, which just, of course, made everybody go berserk.

AB: (chuckles)

JB: So I would draw these little characters of naked screaming nuns running around the blackboard walls, and then I was, you know, punished regularly for that. But it amused everyone; then, you know, I would receive so much kind of reinforcement from my peers that I would endure the punishments of the nuns. (laughs) And then my other pastime was that I would draw for . . . . You know how people carry those blue notebooks around?

AB: Umhmm.

JB: Well, with a proper ballpoint pen, I could create the perfect dream man on the front of your notebook. So I was constantly without my notes and homework, because I was like given somebody else's notebook to put on the . . .

AB: To put a cover on, yeah.

JB: . . . to put a cover on. So I entertained my friends with that. And in a certain way . . . I took a lot of art in junior high school, too. Actually, that was better art classes, because it was public school, and when I went into Catholic school, we had really diminished kinds of availability of art. But I knew at that time, that I had, that I liked it best; I really liked to do that. But I couldn't imagine for myself a career as an artist. I never knew an artist. I never saw one. I had no idea, except for some . . . .

AB: Male or female?

JB: No, I had some faint idea about, you know, people that I, you know, people like van Gogh or something who wore berets and were kind of strange people, but I had never met an artist. The closest I came to it was my uncle [Mundo, Mondo], who was really a very accomplished jazz musician. And my uncles all played music. Although they weren't trained; I don't think any of them really took schooling in music. They read and wrote and played and arranged music. I mean, like everyone did in the family. My mother played the piano by ear. My Uncle Jess played the violin, the organ, and the piano. Somebody played the [string--Ed.] bass because -- who played the bass? -- because I remember putting my ear on the bass and sitting on the floor as a small child.

AB: I was thinking, when you were talking about it right now, that music is, in fact, a real common experience among Chicanos.

JB: Umhmm.

AB: People playing music together and guitars, mostly self-taught.

JB: Umhmm, it was a kind of family gathering thing to do. And then, of course, there was my uncle who was a real virtuoso. I mean, it was like when he went to play the sax, everyone sat down, and got a beer, and really was ready to settle in, to listen to him play this very sort of heartwrenching music. And then my aunts [said aunts, probably meant aunt--Ed.] had a, has a -- and still does -- has a gorgeous voice. So she would sing. And, you know, it was just like part of the daily thing. It was like big family gatherings had that kind of event going on. My uncle Mundo's career actually ended when he, in the tire factory, lost his fingers. So it was like one of these, you know, sort of like a tragic ending to a talent. And he never was really happy doing anything else.

AB: When you talked about not envisioning this career as an artist, because you didn't know what [one did], what did you imagine you would do? In other words, how did you get from not envisioning it to going to school to some degree to be trained as an artist? Or did you go to school for another reason?

JB: Well, I went to college. You know, it was like there was great deal of push to go to *college*. I mean, it wasn't like you went to art school or you went to anything. It was like going to college was . . . .

AB: Whatever college meant.

JB: Whatever college meant. It was like a big deal. I was the first Baca to go to college. And . . . .

AB: We were probably all the first, right. In our families, more or less.

JB: Yeah, maybe, in this, maybe this generation. And it was like a very big deal. I mean, it was like a lot of push through high school for me to get a certain kind of grades, to be able to . . . . Is this still going? [The tape recorder--Ed.] Can't tell. I don't see it moving. You've lost something, or I mean, we've lost something.

AB: Okay. What we need to do is talk a little more about this idea that you went to college because that was expected, and the Chicanos in that age really didn't. And what happened when you got to college? Something changed you.

JB: Well, it was a very interesting time for me, because it was a journey out of my neighborhood. Perhaps the most profound thing was like to make this journey out of the neighborhood into a more upper-middle-class neighborhood to go to school. And my mother's idea for me was -- as it was in high school -- was I was always pressed into taking Spanish and Spanish literature, because her idea was either . . . . The choices I had available to me were that I would become a typist or a secretary, or that I would become a translator. I mean, the low end of the aspiration was typist; the high end of the aspiration was translator -- Spanish translator. (chuckles) And I think in some secret place, she actually hoped I'd become a lawyer, you know.

AB: Yeah.

JB: But those weren't . . . . Those were the choices, and I never really could imagine myself doing either, you know. I mean, I hated typing. I took it. I even took shorthand! You know I can take shorthand? I mean, I suppose I could still take shorthand. And I was a good typist. You know, little nimble-fingers. But when I went to college I thought that what would happen to me was that . . . I mean, I'll tell you what happened to me is I went to this other neighborhood. I think slowly the world opened to me, and it was very tiny little increments, if you can think of it as a big metal door that had been clamped shut for centuries. It was like a tiny, tiny creaking, creaking and creaking until I saw little bits of light -- and possibilities.

AB: What were the *big* influences?

JB: In terms of what opened the world for me?

AB: Umhmm.

JB: [Thoughtful pause.] Umm, I don't know. I can't . . . .

AB: Any people, or ideas, or things that you hadn't been exposed to that made an impact on you?

JB: Philosophy had a very big impact on me. I was actually very interested in biology and the sciences -- the workings of the world. You know, how things worked. And then also how one developed a kind of philosophical strategy about being in the world. It seems like a strange thing, but, I mean, I was completely enamored with philosophy.

And then I became a history minor. I started like taking more and more history classes, and so there was like this opening-up of the world by understanding it in historical terms. It sounded to me like interesting stories. But I felt like . . . I can tell you through those early years of college I felt like I was learning these segmented pieces of history, and segmented pieces of information. And [that, then] it wasn't until I really got to the end of it that everything sort of fell together and said, "This is part of the world. This makes up the world."

But I never could understand the connection between the physical sciences and the art classes. And, of course, I took mroe and more art classes -- not because I was particularly successful at them, because I found it to be . . . I came in totally ill-prepared, into the art classes, because most students who had come in from high school had had much more extensive training than I had gotten, had had some experience in art, or perhaps had a family that knew something about art. I knew nothing about art; I had never seen any art. The closest art that I had ever seen had to do with religious icons. The tattoos . . . .

AB: , the great master paintings.

JB: Yeah. The tattoos I saw on the street. You know, perhaps the kind of aesthetic sensibility with which things were done in our household. [Somewhere in here, dogs begin barking in the no-too-distant background, continuing at least for a while to get increasingly louder--Trans.]

AB: So the whole museum world and . . . ?

JB: It didn't exist.

AB: It didn't exist.

JB: I didn't know it at all; it didn't exist. I was affected a lot by art history. As I started taking those kinds of courses, they had real impact on me. Because there was obviously a whole lot of stuff I hadn't seen - - or done. And then I began to travel at a certain point, and that just sort of kept opening up more and more.

AB: What kind of travel? What places?

JB: I traveled across the United States and through Canada. I got married at nineteen, and I did that with my husband. And *that* was like an opening. And as far as the art went, I . . . I could only get the approval of my family for the art if I could somehow make it a profession. And I always felt like I was . . . I actually felt like I was something of a disappointment because it was, I was going to go, I went . . . "Oh, great! she's gone to college. hat's terrific. and she's doing okay in college, but . . ." -- the second part or it was -- "Oh, no, She's gone into art" -- which is -- "What is she doing in art?" So the only way . . . I sort of negotiated with my mother, and how I did it was I said, "Okay, I'll go into art, but I will become a teacher."

AB: So, being an artist, in of itself, for you, as a woman, was not valued by the people near you.

JB: No. No, it was like . . . . But being a *professora* was good.

AB: What about the men that were around you at that time? Were they peers that you shared art ideas with, or that hadn't happened yet, or . . . ?

JB: No. No, I don't think . . . . It's kind of a blurry time, too. Because I had to work so hard, that it was like . . . I wasn't going just to college. I was working and I was commuting, and there was like . . . . You know, it was a state college; I don't think that I was, you know . . . .

AB: This was at which state college?

JB: Cal State, Northridge. I don't think I was tremendously inspired, as much of . . . .

AB: When did that big inspiration come? When do you see like the next big movement in your development?

JB: Well, I quit college.

AB: Ah hah.

JB: I quit in about my senior year. No, let's see, I was nineteen . . . I was eighteen when I quit; it was my second year in college. The third year. I think I was a junior. I was like eighteen. I was a junior. And I quit. And I went to work, to Lockheed, like my stepfather.

AB: Umhmm.

JB: And there was a production illustration job open, and they would train me. I was tired of being poor, and I was tired of working so hard. And I went into this department in which I was trained in all these sort of drafting skills, and I was putting my work, my art training to practical use. You know, like I drew fairly well. But now it was to do isometric drawings of parts of which I didn't know the name, you know.

AB: Machine.

JB: Yeah. With calipers. And then I got called out on G-jobs, which were really the most exciting, because I found in that department a whole series of people who were kind of captive artists, who had opted out of being artists to find a way to make a living as an artist.

AB: What was a G-job?

JB: Well, G was government, G-job was a government job.

AB: Uh huh.

JB: And that meant you got to go into a back room where you had classified materials to work with. And very often, what that meant was you were doing birthday cards for the boss's children.

AB: (giggles)

JB: And at that point, I developed this really acute interest in watercolor. And that came from a man who, you know, it's like I haven't seen in years and haven't heard from, whose name was Tomas, and Tomas was in his sixties -- or nearly ready to retire -- who used to smoke, chain-smoke, who could hold the longest ash I'd ever seen on his mouth. And Tomas had this great block of color; they were made up of different litmus-paper colors. I've never seen a block like that again. And these little sheets were like fine tissue paper, each of a magnificent color -- ranges of colors that were used. And he would tear off a little piece, and he would drop it in just a dab or water, and then the rich color would just sort of magically dissolve, the paper would dissolve into this rich color. And he made me endlessly prepare watercolor blocks. And then he would teach me - -all the time balancing this giant ash on his mouth . . .

AB: Cripes.

JB: . . . with the smoke -- you know, closing one of his eyes. He would say, "Okay. First you draw the portrait like this. And then you lay in this color." And I would watch him paint. And he was a *wonderful* watercolorist. And so he, for months, you know, like I stood there and prepared the blocks, and, you know, like did the sort of, you know, took the photographs and blew them up, or took them down -- because we'd take photographs of people's family members, and then we'd make a cartoon out of them in some way. I mean, we'd caricaturize them. And then, finally, he let me do one. And I had pretty much by that time assimilated enough so that I could pretty much approximate Tomas.

AB: Umhmm.

JB: It was like, "I could do a good Tomas." [Spoken in low, gruff voice--Ed.] (laughs)

AB: And you didn't even have any ash hanging out of your mouth.

JB: Didn't even have any ash hanging out of my mouth. And then there was this contest that went on in my job, which was. . . it was so boring that people used to do these mad hatter things. The madder you could be the better, you know. It was like we were facing each other on these drafting tables, and we would do all these crazy things. Like you'd get into work early -- and that was, you know, seven o'clock was when you, you know, checked in and the big alarm went off, and you were supposed to be at your job. And before seven o'clock if you could get the funniest cartoon of the day onto the desk of one of your neighbors, which would be to make them into . . . . Like there was girl whose name was Anna, who was another trainee, and I would do like . . . we used to call her Anna-Banana, and then we started making Anna-Banana striptease, and Anna-Banana salads, and Anna-Banana strips, and things like Anna-Banana trips, and, you know, so it became this sort of kind of my . . . my claim to fame in the office was the Anna-Banana series.

AB: It's interesting, it's not dissimilar from your description of you in high school, entertaining.

JB: Yeah, I was entertaining again. And I, but I . . . .

[INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]
JB: You don't know what?

AB: I didn't know that in the first community work, that you had started out with an entire . . . like on this cultural community . . . ?

JB: [Community and] cultural group, yeah.

AB: Yeah, I thought it was just the visual arts, just murals.

JB: No, no. There was no murals at all. I at that point invented them.

AB: What year was that? About nineteen . . . ?

JB: That was nineteen-seventy . . . See, 1970, I guess, '71.

AB: '71.

JB: '70, because I think I painted *Mi Abuelita* [My Grandmother--Ed.] in '70.

AB: Why did you decide to do the murals? You hadn't had any training as a muralist.

JB: Well, a very interesting thing happened. And one again I was in a team of people who were working across the medias. And I was sent, in a ridiculous way -- this was really crazy -- a Spanish surname . . .

AB: Right.

JB: . . . East L.A., and of course this crazy director of this theater, who was this theater director, gave us all this permission. I mean, we did these head massages during our meetings. The whole city was kind of freaking out about this kind of renegade group that they had hired

And, again, it was the political movements that were going on. Here was the moratorium beginning in East L.A., there was like . . . .

AB: The Chicano moratorium?

JB: The Chicano moratorium was happening. It was around the time that Ruben Salazar was killed. Where did they send me? East L.A., right? So I'm right out there, right after all this stuff has happened, and they tell me I'm supposed to go and teach macrame to blind old ladies, and to preschool children, art, and then elementary school children, art classes. And I'm sent to five different recreation centers on the eastside. Well, I wasn't trained to deal with little people or old people. I had had this experience working with teenagers, and I had this affinity with teenagers, looking in a certain way, and I was always kind of a teenager myself.

AB: Umhmm.

JB: And I was also . . . . Once again, the physical environment of those places was such that the kids basically occupied the centers. They occupied those parks. They played dominoes on the exterior, they drank, they did drugs, and those parks were like . . . everybody talked about them. Even some of the directors carried guns. It was like heavy-duty, and I was right in it. Well, it didn't freak me out too much, because it was sort of like being in Pacoima, in Watts, I mean, it was a kind of very similar environment. But clearly, I would have to walk through these -- literally -- step over these boys, who primarily occupied the centers, to go in a teach these elementary school classes. And there were no programming, there was no programming for the kids. So I very fast began to see all the *placques* on the walls, I began to be very interested in the graffiti, was very interested in the tattoos, and I started making friends wit these people, because I . . . . A very . . . I don't think if my schedule would have been different this would have happened.

AB: How do you mean?

JB: I was teaching from ten to twelve, and then from three to five. I had all these hours in between, which I couldn't drive all the way back to the valley where I lived, but I was in East Los Angeles, so I had all these hours to kill in between. So I would hang out in the parks. And very fast I had organized a whole bunch of people, young men who I found out very quickly couldn't go from one park to the next with me. So I got permission -- primarily out of the concept I had developed within the school, of having them work collaboratively, making an image and dropping it out the window, or painting on the interior of the walls in the school -- the possibility of us painting together in the park. They were already painting on the walls. It was a kind of natural step. Now, mind you, I didn't know anything about Los Tres Grandes, the Mexican muralists. I'd never even seen them.

AB: Yeah, I was going to ask you if at that point you had any connection with the sort of retrieval of that mural tradition, since that was part of the Chicano movement, but it was more in formal college settings, I believe, where people studied it.

JB: Umumm. No. Never even seen a bit of his work. It was not taught to us in art history. I was looking at the Greeks and the Romans and, you know, sort of Western-Europeans.

AB: Did you have any conflict at that point over, oh, sort of the individual art-making process and the collective one that you kept finding yourself in, or was your affinity so strong for the collective that you didn't question over . . . ?

JB: No, I started actually with the individual. I mean, I . . . . When people met me, at the parks, how I organized them was to bring in my paintings, at their request. People wanted to see what I was painting at home -- and I was painting at home -- so I would bring in my paintings, and they were interested in them, and then that's how . . . . They would bring in drawings on paper bags and, you know, tattoo designs, and . . . . I started noticing some of these kids were really hot at making this, doing the spray-can stuff.

AB: Right.

JB: And then they would do performances for me and show me how they did these things, and I started to become really good friends with these guys -- the so-called criminals, the element that was considered to be the most feared. And then I was actually told by the department that they didn't want me to . . . . I was starting to draw them.

AB: Yeah, they didn't want to encourage to . . . .

JB: Yeah, we didn't want to encourage them being around. so they were very happy when I proposed that we paint together. And so I became, I did, I just sort of naturally decided: There was writing on the wall, that we would not write on the wall in some way. And I saw there was ap problem between these different parks. I had friends in each of the parks, from being all those hours in each of those places, and I put my people, the people I had met in the different parks, together in one place. The crazy thing about this is that I had no concept that that was impossible, that there were gang boundaries.

AB: But you had grown up a little bit knowing about *barrios* or territories, hadn't you?

JB: Yes. But it was not nearly as developed, as it was on the eastside.

AB: Yeah.

JB: I mean, I know that it was happening, but I guess I never really got -- not in the way I get now. You know what I mean?

AB: Yeah, where you understand turf, really understand it.

JB: I understand the deepness of that. But at that point, I couldn't believe that it was not possible to put them together. And because of the Chicano moratorium, and because of all this talk about *La Raza* [the people--Ed.], Yo Soy Joachin [a poem--Ed.], and all those things . . . .

AB: Had you by that time connected with any of the other Chicano artists who were doing similar works? What people . . . I'm trying to think what people were there.

JB: Well, actually there weren't very many, at that point. I had gone to Mechicano Art Center which was probably the most active. The only two things happening in the eastside then were Goez Gallery and Mechicano Art Center. Now Goez . . . . Mechicano had a mural on the front of it. And Goez had a mural on the front of it; I think they painted both those pieces at that point. They were early murals. But Mechicano's, the one mural that they had out was a supergraphic of just colors, like rainbow 1960s psychedelic colors.

AB: Umhmm.

JB: And I didn't see any other murals. Those were the only murals in the . . . .

AB: And that whole 1960s psychedelic stuff wasn't something that touched on your experience. Because I was thinking back when you said it right now, that you had never mentioned that.

JB: Only in the . . . . You know , the piece that we did in the classroom, had sort of an Alice Through the Looking Glass kind of quality.

AB: But other than that, it hadn't been a . . . .

JB: No. We ended up taking an Alice Through the Looking Glass thing and placing 18 crucifixes over the teachers that were . . . . You know, it became a political piece. I don't know of Lewis Carroll would have . . .

AB: Thought of it that way.

JB: . . . thought of it that way, but . . . .

AB: Well, in this whole aspect of the Mechicano mural and the Goez mural, did you know the people who had done that? Did they . . . . I often wondered whether the muralists were making, oh, connections with each other and exchanging knowledge, or whether just groups sprung up independent of one another.

JB: They sprung up independent of one another. And there were sometimes meetings or discussions, but they were almost all men. They were all men practically, except maybe a girlfriend of one of the men.

AB: Yes. The [famous] . . .

JB: And there was never . . . . And what I remember was that I very fast became known for my knowledge and understanding of graffiti, and was invited by Mechicano at one point to come to an anti-graffiti conference, in which they were going to talk about cleaning up graffiti.

AB: Deja vu! They're still trying to clean up graffiti. (laughs)

JB: Right. And I actually had this position -- which I thought it was an artform -- and they really just laughed me out of the room. And I remember at that point saying, "I'm going to paint . . . I've organized a group of kids from these different gangs, and I'm going to paint together with them." And I remember being told that that was a foolish point of view. So I mean, that was like the seat of Chicano art, and it was like my idea was too radical for them. And that it was like children's art, not really considered serious, and also this graffiti thing

was like I was encouraging graffiti in a certain way. And that was a lot of the opinion everywhere at that point, you know, to work with these kids in the community, even though they basically . . . . You couldn't have put anything up on the eastside without their permission and without their support. People were of the mind that it was a, you know, you were in a way sort of supporting a negative element. And I didn't have . . . there wasn't a lot of other things to look at. It actually, it was almost like spontaneous combustion, because almost all at the same time, there were this move to the street by the artists. And a lot of it had to do with people initially making very huge political slogans, you know.

AB: Taking to the walls in a certain way.

JB: Yeah. "I'd rather live a hundred years as a lion, and one year as a . . . " whatever. I remember that painting on the wall down the street from one of my pieces, and somebody then doing a lion's head, or something, you know. But more after the first year, after that first summer, more things started to happen. My sense was that I was pretty much out there by myself -- particularly organizing kids, in the way I was doing it.

AB: From that point of having this sense of being alone, organizing kids, working [in] the mural, what was the path to a more colleagular, having peers -- you know, other artists that worked like you? Was there . . . ?

JB: I got a call from Chicago before I connected with my own people.

AB: Interesting.

JB: From Mark Rogovin in the Chicago Mural Group, who had gotten press clippings from someone in L.A., because there was very splashy in the press at that point.

AB: And this was considerably before *The Great Wall* even began.

JB: Oh yeah. Really early seventies. It was like "Gang Members Put Down Knives for Brushes." And the sensational thing was that there was this young woman organizing. And I was very young, and kind of looked like a hippie at that point, and long Joan Baez hair, and working with these boys, you know, who were just a few years younger than me. (chuckles) And so here I was with this giant group of gang boys who I negotiated treaties with, and who essentially had to place guards around the walls where we were painting. Like in Hollenbeck Park we had to have lookouts, so that we wouldn't get shot up by the neighborhood there, who might be pissed off that I had brought somebody from a different territory in. And essentially there was a kind of real pact between the thirteen . . . . There were twenty of us. A number of those people were related to me. I mean, I brought my family out there. (Both chuckle)

AB: Right. We're notable for the bringing our families .

JB: Yeah. And I had a hard time with getting girls in the project. At that time. boys were the only ones parents would allow. And interesting, my very first mural, I went to the Casa Maravilla, which was a gang rehabilitation center, and some guy there -- I can't remember who it was -- but he gave me 20 slots for the Neighborhood Youth Corp. And so my students, my kids, were paid the very first time out. So I pretty much was the first person in the city of Los Angeles to use Neighborhood Youth Corp money, which was being shipped into the laderas in large amounts because of the fact that they didn't want to have nay more riots. So this money was quite abundant, and most of the kids would be getting the money by just going to the park and picking up the check. It was sort of buy-off money. So why did they want to come and work with me? They had to work for the money there, right?

AB: When did you do *Mi Abuelita*?

JB: That was the year. You know, I think it was in '70 or '71, I can't remember. I think everything is listed as being in '70 but I never remember exactly. I think it's . . . I don't know, 1970, or '71? It was in the summer. And I did Mi Abuelita and I did the piece across from Estrada Courts, at [Castall] Recreation Center. And I did three smaller panels then. And also *Mi Abuelita*, all in one summer. So we painted *Mi Abuelita* in like two weeks.

AB: When you began those murals, how did the young people participate in the development of the content? I mean, everybody has an abuelita, grandmother.

JB: Umhmm.

AB: I mean, generally speaking, that's a fairly established kind of cultural content for us. Did they buy into that because of that, or simply because they wanted to work with you?

JB: That was the idea. I mean, they bought into it because . . . . Why did they come on the mural crew? They came on the mural crew because these were their parks. They were basically in charge of them -- as they saw it. Right? And we were going from one place to another in which they were in charge. Right? And they had made this connection to me. Right? They were people that considered themselves my friends. You know, they were . . . . I had asked them, "Hey, do you want to paint with me? And I can get you a job." And i had met with them and talked to them and, yeah, they were into it, and they decided that *Mi Abuelita* was the image. They decided that what we needed for this, where the [Farrio es Ninos] occurred in Hollenbeck Park, this outdoor band shell . . . . That actually was the first band shell to ever be painted in Los Angeles, with a mural. That band shell is where the children dance in the [Farrio], so the idea of having in her arms, outstretched arms. these children dancing seemed like a perfect thing for an abuelita to be doing.

AB: Yes.

JB: And there were two other people who were in my family, and we happened to have pictures of my grandmother. so it became my grandmother's image. And we projected it up at night. And that was a pretty . . . that's an incredible, that's a whole other story: of how we got up at night and the PCP [_____--Ed.] guy, who came up with a gun in his jacket, and all.

AB: (laughs)

JB: I mean, there was this one . . . . All the boys were supposed to show up, and of course they didn't show up; I think they got drunk instead or something. And finally they did show up late, but this young girl named Rachael [Apalloca] and I went there. And we drove up the van and put this opaque projector on top of the van, in front of the band shell -- and it's very dark out there, and very out in the middle of nowhere, with this lake, and, you know, two young women in Hollenbeck Park at night is a, you know, nobody does that.

AB: Right. Phenomenal!

JB: Yeah. And we started to put the image up, and some man came up with an overcoat -- it was midsummer, right?

AB: First sign.

JB: Yeah, first sign, and it was not a good sign. He said, "You guys could get shot out here." And I said, "Oh, really?" Then, "If you think maybe you could help us move this thing?" So he came up on the thing and he took off his jacket to help me move the scaffolding, and in his jacket I could feel the weight of this pistol. And I think he was on some kind of drugs or something, but we enlisted his support. And very often that was the case. I mean, there was like potentially difficult situations in which I enlisted the support of the person. I think being a woman helped, you know.

AB: Yeah. You were saying that, in the midst of doing this, that the first contacts or associations you had were with the muralists, some of the muralists in Chicago. when did it begin happening in L.A., where you started connecting, say with people like Willy Herron, or any of the other people who were doing murals in that period of time?

[Interruption in taping? Probably not, but there is a lot of noise for a while, probably from bumping the microphone. Is JB working on a project? Some of their words are thus obscured--Trans.]

AB: The kind of mural associations you have among Chicanos, were they primarily with men? Were they formal or sort of informal?

JB: Oh, they were always with men. And they were informal. But in that, in the period after *Mi Abuelita*, I mean, like the following summer, a year later, and two years later, there was like this phenomenon going on, which you can really go from place to place, from site to site in the East L.A. area, and you could see people in the street. You talked or you'd have a question, and you'd get in the car, or you'd send . . . . You of a brush, or you'd run out of

some paint, and you'd send somebody to another [mural] place, mural for it]. There was literally that much work going on. It was like a phenomenon.

AB: Who were the major muralists that you . . . ?

JB: Associated with?

AB: . . . associated with, yeah.

JB: Well, at that time -- this is really funny -- a person who perhaps hasn't become a major muralist. I mean, he never really was considered to be a really serious artist, but who was one of those naive primitives who was an excellent community organizer, was a man named Manuel Cruz, and Manuel was my friend, and he actually worked on my projects with me. He became someone who worked on the site. I'm thinking of like 1973 and '74, in the Mountain Second Street mural, in which I began the first really big-scale works. After *Mi Abuelita*, I went to . . . . There was a phenomenon, after there was a lot of press and stuff; I got calls from . I got calls from places like Wabash Recreation Center, and I was at that point hired by the city. The city had begun . . . . After *Mi Abuelita*, the Department of Recreation and Parks' general manger came to see me, and he was so amazed. He'd followed the press. I mean, it was like, you know, this sensational press that I talked about, "Gang Members Put Down Knives for Brushes," and so forth. And he came to see me, and he almost didn't even get to the site because the kids stopped him before he came. They thought he was a narc. And because [we, they] had lookouts everywhere. and he came to see me and he asked me, "How do we bottle what you're doing here? these are the same kids who were destroying the recreation centers. How do we make this thing work in a broader scale?" And I said to him, "You know, one thing you could really do to help is that you can make it possible for me not to have to teach all my other classes." Is that working? [the tape recorder--Ed.]

AB: Yeah.

JB: "Not to teach all my other classes and, in addition to that work which I'm being paid, do this whole second job." And so he actually . . . at at that point, I became freed up from my responsibilities -- teaching responsibilities at all these other recreation centers. And he gave me the responsibility of being the Director of Eastside Murals. And there was a woman there . . . . He put me under the tutelage of a woman named Rachael Martinez, who was the head of the East Area Office of Department of Recreation and Parks. And she was really interesting. She had a . . . she was very afraid of what I was doing -- organizing the different communities -- and basically the calls would come into her office, in which I would be requested by gang members to go to their neighborhood. And the next place that I went to was White Fence, which is a very big neighborhood . . .

AB: Right.

JB: . . . and was really at war with the community I had worked in before. In other words, I had worked in [Barrio Nuevos], so why wasn't I working in White Fence, [since, says] the White Fence gang, "Can we have the mural lady over here?" And they called the mayor's office and so forth, and then I got sent over there. And she set up a system where I could go in at any time I wanted, night or day, and simply fill out a journal. And that's how I managed to keep my employment for the Department of Recreation and Parks. It was a real major breakthrough at that point. And it was at that time, when I was the head of East L.A. murals . . . . I became head of East L.A. murals for the Department of Recreation and Parks -- I had their support to work full time on productions of murals; I was working in the Wabash Recreation Center on the Medusa Head and organizing White Fence gang -- that I began to talk to other muralists more. And this was probably by this time 1972, 1973. And the other muralists who were working at that time were people like Manuel Cruz, as I said, the director of Mechicano Art Center, who was Leonard Castallanos.

JB: Yes.

JB: Another person was . . . I think Carlos Almaraz began right around that time. He was later coming to this production. He was doing . . . .

AB: Was that close to the time of Los Four [of which Almaraz was a member --Ed.], the [exhibits]?

JB: Los Four was happening. But he was really an artist coming from the gallery situation

and not coming out of the [lat-er-o]. He was not coming out of the neighborhoods. He was a person who was more allied with the art, you know, art world, or university basically, university art world. And so Los Four was, I think, probably doing their exhibition around that time.
[INTERRUPTION]

AB: . . . his [--Ed.] interest in organizing? Or not?

JB: No, he related . . . . When I met Carlos [Almaraz--Ed.], he was beginning to get interested. And I had had a, you know, I think a number of years -- two or three years -- under my belt, of working with people in the neighborhood, and he was discovering the whole concept of working in community . And he went to work at All Nations, and he was working with Third Street Gang. I was not, I was working with, at that time, White Fence. And he was thinking about how he could incorporate graffiti into the images.

AB: Had you met any of the people who were working, say like the Mujeres Muralistas [woman muralists--Ed.] in San Francisco? Or any of those people?

JB: No. I had not met the Mujeres Muralistas then. I did meet them shortly thereafter. I think . . . . Didn't they begin around 1974 or so?

AB: '74.

JB: Yeah.

AB: '73, they were . . . .

JB: Yeah, they were . . . . That was . . . the length of time doesn't, you know, seem historically long, but in terms of the action and things that were happening in the movement, it was aeons of time, from the beginning. Because there was so much activity in those very early years, that when they started to work it was almost like, here are these people who are coming from San Francisco who are going to be doing this work, and we were the experts at that point, and it was like they were at step one and we were trying to figure out step twenty-three. And when Carlos started to work, there was also a lot of meetings that were going on, and there were real attempts to organize us, within the communities. And at that point, I have to say Carlos Almaraz was like one of the most adamant Marxist theorists. And he used to come into meetings with his little, you know, cellophane bag full of cashews, because he was like not a drinker. You know, he'd been through Alcoholics Anonymous and already been through his drinking phase, and he was Mr. Right On. I always feared that I wasn't really Marxist enough and that I hadn't really done all the readings I was supposed to do on Marxism. I had read the Manifestos Los Tres Grandes by that time, you know; I mean I had learned the muralist manifestos. In Mexico, I had begun to do some kind of selective readings. And there was a Marxist study group going on in Venice that I would attend -- intermittently. But my work was such that I would work from three o'clock in the afternoon till two o'clock in the morning. So, I mean, I'd go after the kids got out of school, and I would be at the neighborhood, in the neighborhood, until really late at night. And I didn't have time to do any . . . . I had no social life or anything. I was just like working out there. I'd be driving out to the eastside and sleeping most of the day, and then starting my drive out to the eastside after somewhere around noon or so. Picking up supplies and checking in an so forth -- to the recreation centers. It was a very odd period; I mean, in terms of timing and life. But . . . .

AB: Did you feel yourself connected to the other kinds of political changes that were going on among Chicanos, like the farmworker struggle . . . ?

JB: Well, not . . . .

AB: . . . or the ethnic studies development on college campuses?

JB: Uhuh. No, I have to say that a lot of my life is really schizophrenic. I mean, there were, it seemed to me -- and maybe it's something about my personality, more than about the history of the time -- but there was an intense involvement, and nothing else existed. But the drama of that situation was such, Amalia, that it was not anything I can tell you about. When I was at Wabash, one of my boys was killed who was working on the mural. And there was no money to bury him within the family. So the issue became, how do you get this kid buried? I mean, like what's going on here with this family? I mean, they've had a 17-year-old

son murdered, and who was the primarily designer -- I mean, he was one of the primary designers. And I'm working with his two younger brothers. So I was like completely swept up into this family drama, and to the . . . . the loss of someone young is really . . . it's one of the . . . it's so tragic to go through the family, go with the family, go through the family, I mean, go through this with the family. And I was involved in that intense way with family members.

And then on the *Medusa Head*, there was another boy named Jorge, who I was introduced to in the neighborhood by some of the other boys who'd call me out because he had painted on the garage door of his, in the alley of his neighborhood. And he was, he used to make great graffiti. But he just sort of spontaneously transformed the graffiti into images. Now, there were other precedents to look at, now. There were some -- not a great deal of murals, but there were a number of murals. And Jorge, who was a young, high school-aged kid, had begun to do these murals. So I met him and I enlisted him in doing the *Wabash* mural. And I brought with me some of the boys from Evergreen gang. And then I was still doing my cross-neighborhood stuff. I would like, the kids who'd work with me before -- Fernando was with me, and Fernando was a very key person. Fernando Satserro, who had worked with me in Evergreen Gang, began to come, came with me to different sites. And he was getting older now, so he would help me with the younger kids. When I went to the new neighborhood, when I went to like, you know, to Wabash, there was, you know, like them meeting somebody from Evergreen who they weren't necessarily friendly with, was part of that, that whole thing that I was trying to do.

AB: In that period of time when you were primarily working with young people, and developing the images that they defined as being important to them, did you then organize in the creation of the images and the designing the way you do now in The Great Wall? I mean, was that the beginning of it?

JB: It was the beginning of it, but it was really not nearly as sophisticated. Because everything . . . . Because there was no money. In the *Wabash* mural, I held the first community meeting, and it was an amazing . . . a meeting I'll never forget, really. The one that sticks out in my memory. In which the boys who had worked with me -- Jorge and some of the other boys from White Fence -- young Jackie Fernandez, who had called the mayor's office, whose . . . actually, his older brother was killed -- Jerry. And his younger brother, Julio, finally in the end was put in prison for eight years for trying to avenge the death of his older brother. And Julio was really my surrogate son. I mean, he came and stayed weekends with me. And he was 14 and just a really wonderful kid, who at his brother's funeral had talked to me about never making his mother suffer in this way again. And it was not two years later before he had been pressured by his peers to go after the guy who had killed his brother. So he did do time. I heard from him after he got out of jail. After seven, he had served seven years. He's a Jesus person right now, so . . . .

AB: Yeah.

JB: But he was . . . . Those boys who were working with me at that point, who were really involved in this process with me . . . I was involved in their lives and I was involved in incorporating them into the process. And how I did it was we held these community meetings, in which we invited people -- it turned out to be the parents of some of the kids who came to these meetings, and some of the people who owned the little businesses around there -- to ask them for some money for paint. And we came in with a design and presented it. And I had met with the boys endlessly about what they wanted to put up on the wall. And it was a really interesting experience, because the people were completely negative. I kept finding this problem with the police and the community. The boys and the neighborhood gangs were so despised that any attempt to organize them, in a certain way, tainted me as well. And they didn't want to hear anything of it. I showed them the piece. Most of the group was fine. The guy who owned the Green Burrito, who was across the street from the Wabash Recreation Center, had said he thought it was a great idea and that he would give me something like $50 for paint. I was kind of . . . at that point, $50 for paint was a great . . . I was elated, you know. And from the back of the room, I heard this voice say, "You shouldn't do anything. Don't give them that money. They don't deserve anything. These are the kids who are writing all over the walls and ruining everything in this neighborhood. They're taking, and they're putting . . . . Giving Mexicans a bad name." And this woman who stood up and started talking was infuriating the gang kids -- the boys who were with me -- and I was getting very worried that she would, you know, like go too far. And finally, one of the . . . Arturo, who was one of the kids who was like a fairly strong leader within the neighborhood, jumped up, and he said, "You shut up, Mom." And just like it blew

me away, because what was going on was basically, it was the parents of these kids who were so angry at them that had been rebellious and that had not been good sort of traditional Mexican boys.

AB: Oh, boy.

JB: But that's how we organized. We caucused. We thought about what we would do. We talked about it. I drew a lot of their ideas. I found the best people who could draw from the neighborhood to help me. Primarily those kids were involved in making placas, or the graffiti on the walls. And we developed an image. And then we presented the image in a community meeting, and we solicited the support of the community. There was no money to support my activities other than my salary, at that point. The Department of Recreation and Parks had now paid me to go and do this work, but there was no support in terms of supplies. And the boys, at that point, after the first summer, were volunteers. And I had brought a volunteer with me. That was a time that Christina Schlesinger was working with me, and Christina Schlesinger actually became one of the co-founders of S.P.A.R.C. [Social and Public Arts Resource Center--Ed.] and she was a volunteer.

AB: I was going to ask you that next. Was that about the same period of time? Was it a little past that when S.P.A.R.C. was first formed?

JB: No, it was later than that, actually. This was like 1972 and '73. And I was attending these meetings, in which there were these attempts for Chicanos to organize themselves. And it was interesting, because there were serious discussions that went on there as well. Because there were discussions about how -- particularly those people who were schooled in the arts. Now the wide breadth of the Chicanos who appeared at those meetings: people who had never made an art piece in their life, to people who had degrees in art, to neighborhood organizers who used art to organize the neighborhood but who were not painters. And the discussion ranged from developing a new visual language that didn't use Western-European precedents in image-making to who was more right-on in Marxist kind of philosophy. And all of us, you know, fairly unilaterally, consider ourselves "cultural workers."

AB: Cultural workers. I remember that term.

JB: Right. And . . . as I didn't , , , we never signed our early works either.

AB: Well, as I recall, the definition was almost in opposition to the traditional Western notion of a private individual artist.

JB: That's exactly right.

AB: It was collective; it was in some ways didactic, it was . . . .

JB: Very didactic. It was more about how, what was to be admired at that point was not only a good artwork, but a work that was truly indigenous. People were vying for what was most indigenous, what was really most community-based . . . .

AB: By indigenous, you mean the imagery itself, during that period of time?

JB: It was coming from a place that was using, as a resource, ourselves. Not, you know . . . .

AB: Were the kids being exposed to, and were you being exposed to, some of the indigenous images from Mexico, at that time?

JB: No. Still not.

AB: Still not.

JB: I think . . . at least I'm not -- maybe I speak for myself -- I think some of the other people who perhaps are more schooled in it, you know. But not many, really. I mean, we were all . . . we worked in a vacuum. There was not enough information. Who could afford an expensive art book? There was no such thing as slides. We're talking about . . . we used to joke about, "Well, let's have a Chicano . . . " We'd go have a Chicano lunch, and, you know what Chicano lunch Was: We'd split a beer. We had no . . . we had no money. And it was around that time, too, in 1973, that I think one of the people more . . . . One of the people I was more closely associated with, someone like Cat Felix, who began to paint across the street from where I had done my first mural, in Estrada Courts. And when he started, he called me up. And the

reason that he contacted me was because he was put on to me by the neighborhood boys. So some of our contacts came from the community. It wasn't like colleague to colleague. It was more like, "Hey, you know, like go talk to Judy Baca, you know, she knows where to get paint. She got us paint before." And so when I met Gato [cat--Ed.], he was wanting to organize Estrada Courts into, do the housing project. And I helped him at that point, talked to the mayor's office, gave him contacts, and actually smoothed the way for him to get the materials and equipment he needed to do Estrada Courts. And actually at one point I designed a mural to do in Estrada Courts. And actually started it! And never completed it. I can't remember exactly why I didn't complete it. There was some kind of shortage in scaffolding, or something that happened at that point. He was basically providing paint and scaffolding, and artists were coming in to do these walls.

AB: From the point that you are describing now, where . . .

JB: That's about 1973, I guess.

AB: . . . yeah, where you're working collectively with groups of youth, and it's very much this notion of the work serving to in some way depict the experience. How did you get from that point to the more formal organizing of groups of kids, the kids, like on *The Great Wall*? How many years did it take you?

JB: Or people in general, right?

AB: Yeah.

JB: I refined the process. I don't think at any point along the way I thought of myself as being in a situation in which I wasn't being given an education.

AB: Umhmm.

JB: From Evergreen Park, in which I had some very profound experiences around the issues of how neighborhoods worked, and how these young people occupied spaces, and how . . . . In fact, that park -- I mean, I advocated at that point for the demise of that park and for the building of a new park -- and which actually eventually happened at Evergreen Park. Because a rat jumped out in one of my classrooms (chuckles) and tried to bite, and one of these, and then the kids . . . . And then 60 first graders chased the goddamn rat all over the place. You know, I mean, it's like . . . . And then I started to realize that this, that the acreage per usage of person was so disproportionate in that part of the city. The Hispanics were using the parks far more than any other community, and that there was less square footage allotted per capita, in that area than other part of the city. And so I actually ended up going before the Department of Recreation and Parks, and the Rec and Parks Commission, saying, "You have to rebuild this community center. You've got a problem: a building built in 1925 that's never been updated." That was all part of my work. And it was also the same . . . .

AB: So you didn't make any distinctions at that point between making art and making social change, determining needs of communities that ?

JB: No, I was . . . . No, I never did. Not at that point. And I also had a confusion about what I should be doing, that I very often felt that maybe the thing I should be doing is political organizing.

AB: As opposed to . . . ?

JB: That it would be more useful. Right, right. And at a certain point -- I think a few years later, actually -- people talked to me about running for city council. And in each case I had to decide. As the years passed, I was offered other jobs that were the peripheral skills that I developed to do the work I was doing -- like being an educator, like, you know, being a politician, being an educator, being an administrator of arts. I was offered jobs in those areas. And each time I came to a point at which I had to decide, "No, I'm really an artist, and that's really what I want to do. And I have, yes, I have these other skills which I have developed to work in the public arena, but it's not the basis of what I wanted to do."

AB: What other major influences around the forming of S.P.A.R.C. really affected you? It's a woman's organization in some people's eyes, besides being, you know, cross-cultural.

JB: Umhmm.

AB: Was that a period of time in which your associations with the woman's movement were stronger than they were . . . ?

JB: I was living a kind of schizophrenic life around that time, [of, with] *Mi Abuelita* . . . . In the chronology, it was *Mi Abuelita*, and then Wabash Recreation Center, then *Medusa Head*. and the next image was the, the series was the Mountain Second Street Mural, which I tried a large-scale 400-foot-long piece, with a large number of people -- that was a predecessor, I think, of The Great Wall -- with some 65 people involved in that process. And that was on the Little Sisters of [Poor Com Lewison] Home wall. I was working in the eastside, and by that time, was living in Venice. And I had this dual life, in which in Venice I had come to a place in which I had left my husband, from the San Fernando Valley, I stopped being a housewife,. I never really was a housewife, as you would say.

AB: [Yep.]

JB: But I stopped being married. I had moved to Venice, because it was a sort of freer atmosphere, and I moved smack-dab into a building of, the landlord of which, was a feminist, who invited me promptly to a C.R. meeting.

AB: Consciousness, right?

JB: Yeah, consciousness-raising. So I began to, for the first time in my life, meet other professional women. Women who were doctors, and lawyers, and biologists, and chemists, and I had never met anybody like that. I was like completely amazed at the possibility of what was available for women. And the images somehow, either subconsciously, had become feminist images. I mean, I was starting to be known for making images in the neighborhood that were the counterpoint to the adelitas, with the shoulder straps down and the breasts exposed, with the straps of bullets across them, which is what the men were making -- which was a sexist kind of image of a Mexican woman, making some kind of deference to her as a revolutionary. So the *Medusa Head*, in contrast, was an image of a, you know, kind of, almost a goddess image, of a woman whose hair turns to snakes and flowers. It comes from [Herajerone] image.

AB: In the period of time of the consciousness-raising groups, what people began to affect your work? What associations with other women artists?

JB: Well, I was . . . I had this problem at this point in which I was sort of divided because I had this life in the east side, which began after three o'clock, and then I had a life in Venice, which was associated with other feminists, and it was the early formation of a place called "Woman's Space," in the west side. And Judy Chicago was involved in that, and the woman's . . . . That was really the predecessor to the Woman's Building. And the Feminist Studio Workshop was happening at Cal Arts. And Christina who was, had become a volunteer, who signed up, just in one of my projects, as I was trying to organize the [Vettas] community. She was in the Feminist Studio Workshop, under Judy Chicago, and enlisted me in her projects in certain ways, as I enlisted her in mine in the eastside. So I did things with her; I helped her in some of her photodocumentation projects. And I began to get a feminist education, through my C.F. group and through these other women. But I always felt like I was a visitor, in a certain way, because there were not that many Latin women, or . . .

AB: Yeah, Third World women.

JB: . . . Third World women, at all. And so I would go and listen, and I really felt like, "They have some things to offer me." Because in my other world -- in the eastside and in the area of Latin Culture, and Chicano culture -- I was really an oddity. I wasn't the girlfriend of one of the men, and I was an artist in myself, and I was not either treated seriously by the men, or considered as a peer. So I wasn't getting the support from them, or anything. So I found what I lacked there within the feminist movement, other women who were willing to be interested and treat me fair, treat me in an equal way.

AB: Is that why when you developed -- or when S.P.A.R.C. was developed -- that the name, the Social Public Art Resource Center was taken, so that it didn't necessarily . . . . In other words, there was the development of Galeria de la Raza or, you know, the Royal Chicano Air Force, the RCAF, in which they were definitely Chicano or Latino organizations, you when you founded S.P.A.R.C., it didn't really have . . . ?

[BREAK IN TAPING AUGUST 6, 1986]

AB: Okay, let's see. We were just talking about how . . . . Well, I was asking a question about how the name of S.P.A.R.C. developed.

JB: Actually, it was the invention of Christina -- Christina Schlesinger -- who is Arthur Schlesinger's [Arthur Meier Schlesinger, Jr., historian and educator--Ed.] daughter. And Christina, at the time that we started thinking about this concept of art for everybody, it became . . . . You know, I had been doing it now for a number of years, and I was organizing the community, you know, thinking about art that was available to all people, that it was a voice basically for the voiceless. That was an art that was naming a particular physical site and giving -- not naming a site in the sense that I mean the architecture was not an indication of who lived there, but by making a mural on the walls, it was a way of -- and in that mural using a kind of cultural information or historical information -- it was a way of sort of claiming territory, in a more sophisticated way, for the people who lived, or naming the site, making a demarcation of a site. And Christina wrote her father about the work we were doing. It was a really, it was a totally engaging work because, when I had finished Wabash Recreation Center, I was, you know, I had been called in by the White Fence Gang, I was like completely engaged in the lives of the people who were working with me, and when one of the boys was killed I was devastated. And I couldn't handle the amount of violence. I mean I remember in one of my reports saying there were 23 stabbings this week. The violence, the level of violence, was very high. So it was very draining work. And we wrote to Arthur Schlesinger -- or Christina did -- and we told him what we were doing, and he sent us in response the works of George Biddle and the WPA. What was that book? Art for the Millions, and something about shovels and . . . I can't remember. We started to read all this stuff. And I remember in particular, "It wasn't the . . . " -- a statement in which it said, "It wasn't the fifteenth century that created Michelangelo." No, "It wasn't Michelangelo that created the fifteenth century, but the fifteenth century that created Michelangelo." And it seemed to us that we were in the middle of a time, that had a kind of, that was a renaissance. That it was a, that art was coming back to very sort of basics, that it was becoming a populace kind of activity, that it was no longer an activity only for rich people. And so Christina was a feminist, and she was my partner, and I found more in common with her than I did with some of the other chicanas, because most of the other Chicanas were only there through the vehicle of a man -- and either a boyfriend or their husband or their brother -- and who were not women who seriously had studied art. So I was a very rare circumstance. I was a very rare person: I have a degree in art.

AB: Umhmm. It's interesting because in the northern California, especially in the San Francisco area, that was really quite the norm. Most of the women had degrees in art and most of them were women artists.

JB: Umhmm. Well, it's interesting in Los Angeles that didn't happen.

AB: turn down. [Speaking of tape recorder--Ed.]

[Interruption in taping, accompanied at least for a while by microphone-bumping noises--Ed.]

AB: In that early development of S.P.A.R.C., that you were talking about, with Christina, some of the other people, what was your intention at that point that S.P.A.R.C. would do, and did it form immediately in an organization, or did it start out as just a series of activities? How did it work?

JB: Well, actually, it didn't . . . . S.P.A.R.C. wasn't the first organization that was formed. When my boss, who was am an named [Cy Grieben, Grieber], who was well-known for his kind of innovative under . . . . He used to call . . . . He was famous for his concept of the urban wilderness, in which he wanted to formulate parks in the urban areas, that were like wilderness preserves. And he was a very interesting, dynamic person. In the Department of Recreation and Parks he became a general manager. He had been in the Peace Corps,, he had worked for the Kennedy administration, and he was an innovator. And he, because of him, I was able to like take off with the murals. And he gave me . . . he was the one that freed me up to do murals only. And it was at that point, that with that freedom, I was able to become a director of eastside murals and from that point I had done a number of murals sort of responding to the requests of the community, after my work at the, in Hollenbeck Park of *Mi Abuelita*, Wabash Recreation Center, and in 1973, I got the first real monies and

funding, through Model Cities money, to make the Second Street Mural, which was the piece of 400 feet of the history of Chicanos, on Mountain Second Street, the neighborhood, which was primarily an Asian and Chicano neighborhood, in which many of the Asians had been sent to camps during World War II. And at that point, what happened was that, while I was doing that piece, I began to understand the political power of the piece I was doing and was solicited to develop the city-wide mural project, which was the first major monies on a regular basis for the funding of public murals in the city of Los Angeles. And I say I began to understand the power of the work I was doing, because I sort of, I developed my concept of imagined power and real power. And it had to do with a councilman and an assemblyman, who were running at that point for public office. And at that point I was becoming well-known for my connection within the neighborhoods, my communities. But I had no idea that had any political power, that people would perceive it as political power. and what occurred was that at one point one day -- I think it was Allen [Torres, Thordax]. Or was it Assemblyman ? Torres was running for assemblyman. And they came to see me - on the wall, while I was painting. And I was like kind of, you know, "So you're a candidate?" "Yes." and "So what do you want?" "Well, you know. I'm interested in your support." And I said, "You mean you want me to get people to vote for you?" I said to his guy. (chuckles) He said, "Well, yeah! Yeah." I said, "Boy, everybody on this wall is a felon! I don't know . . . . You know, we don't vote!"

AB: And the rest are on dyna . (laughs)

JB: Right.

AB: Who's going to vote ?

JB: But it was a difference between . . . . It was like that whole thing of imagined power to have the connections within the communities, the networking ability, that people [begin, are going] to see it as a political force. And also to give people information that was changing the apathy, or the feeling of loss of self-esteem, was transforming itself at that time, and it was happening on a wide level. It was not just the work I was doing, but by the virtue of the other work that was going on, and other Chicano muralists, and by the virtue of the whole movement . . . .

AB: Yeah, the whole larger Chicano movement.

JB: Yes. People were beginning to come to a place of talking about brown being beautiful, and of coming to a place where they actually were combating the apathy and the loss of self-esteem through people like the, things like the Casa de Carnalismo, which was an organization out of which the Brown Berets came; whole housing projects that were being organized, in which youth were being involved in *La Raza* movements. And at that point, it's right at that key point, in 1973, I was solicited by Cy Grieben and by two members of the city council to write a program that would take what I had been doing on the eastside and formalize it for funding, after the Model Cities money. And my concept at that point was to form a Chilean mural brigade, and to do it like a Chilean mural brigade, and to get to hire a group of . . . .

AB: How did you know about the Chileans?

JB: At that point, I began to really learn everything I could find about the Mexicans . . . .

AB: Had you gone to Mexico yet?

JB: No. No, I still hadn't gone to Mexico. But someone -- I think it was through Chicago, the Chicago muralists, that I began to get images of the Mexican muralists. And someone brought me a book of Siquieros, and I began to like research and study -- everything I could get my hands on, on Los Tres Grandes, and I had learned about the Chileans, who had formed these brigades of painters, who stood on a line, each with a different color bucket, and within a matter of twenty minutes could put up an image that was a powerful image, politically. And that it, that . . . One person would go through and make the symbols, another person would go through and do the lettering, that they very quickly could get something up. And of course the Chileans were, that mural brigade was wiped out during the coup. I don't remember what year the coup was. Do you? The ?

AB: No.

JB: It was somewhere in that period, so it was like this stuff was all happening at the same

time. So I had my lesson in public politics and it was because of the lesson in public politics that the nonprofit began. But first I went through a fairly arduous series of experiences (chuckles) in the organization of the first public mural program for the city of Los Angeles. And I wrote, at my little drafting table in my studio, the concept of this brigade, and brought it before the city council, [as, because] I had been requested by Cy Grieben, who said, "Can you bottle this? Can you make it, can you make a model that will go city-wide?" And I brought an East L.A. mural brigade, and I got shot down before the first committee, which was the Rec and Parks committee. And these committees were made up by different councilmen, who had different districts.

AB: Right.

JB: And he said to me, Grieben said to me, you know, like, "There wasn't anybody from East L.A. on the committee, they didn't care." You know, "What are you doing for us?" And I came back and I had a discussion with a field deputy of Councilman Russell, who now is the president of the city council here in L.A. She was the first woman on the city council; in fact, the only woman on the city council at that point. And her deputy said to me, "Judy, you think too small." I was devastated, of course. I was really, and I was like . . . . These things were personal insults when they didn't go, right? So it just sort of rang in my ears, "The thinking too small." and I rewrote the whole thing, giving each person on the city council -- all fifteen districts -- murals, and hiring people within their districts for the production of these pieces, and proposed that they would be done with children, and senior citizens, and youth groups. And in each case there would be a professional artist, or an artist of some ability hired by our program, and that person then would enlist the support of the community people. Basically using what I had done as a model for . . . .

AB: And replicating it.

JB: And replicating it city-wide.

AB: The development of that was one of the substances from which S.P.A.R.C. was founded?

JB: Well, S.P.A.R.C. was actually founded directly out of the city-wide mural project, because about the second year . . . . we had done forty murals the first year -- and we were funded for about $150,000, which meant that we bought a whole set of scaffolding, and we had trucks, and we had everything we needed, right? And after the second, after the first year, forty murals, it was clear that people were getting more and more articulate in these communities, and sometimes those statements were very outspoken. So some of the city member received complaints from the constituency about some of them, or . . . .

AB: The content of the murals?

JB: The content of the murals became stronger and stronger. There were pieces on immigration, there were pieces on drug abuse, there were pieces on police brutality, there were pieces on nature, and there were pieces on history. I mean, it was just a whole variety of different types. Children's pieces that were maps of their local area. It was like wonderful stuff, I mean, an amazing variety of stuff. Well, after the second, after the first forty murals, it became clear that, it started to become clearer and clearer to me that it was going to be difficult to sustain this program with full support, and I think it was in year two that our first attack came, in which our funding, that it was an attempt to withdraw our funding. And a letter campaign began, city-wide, from the communities, in a huge outpouring of letters. they went to the mayor's office, they went to the city council members, to stop them from defunding the program. And in in fact, the mayor called me himself at one point, and said, "Judy, turn off the letters now. We got . . . " And so every year, this campaign and the effort to save the program was more than I could really bear. And I had formed an advisory committee of people who were interested in the city-wide mural project, and there were people there like Zubin Mehta, who had become a fan of the work, the murals that I had been doing. He came one night in a limousine and his wife had called me before and said, "Will you take him on a tour?" And I took Zubin Mehta on a tour of the murals of East Los Angeles and Los Angeles. And there were a couple of lawyers on the board, and they became like the protectors of these works that had been done, and they said, at one point, the two lawyers said, "We can incorporate you in a nonprofit organization, so you can raise money outside of the city." and I said, "Well, that's an interesting concept. I mean, does it mean that we'd have more freedom?" They said, "Yes, we think you'd have more freedom." Because we were basically kind of step-children of the city. And that's how S.P.A.R.C. was

formed -- by the friends of the city-wide mural project. And in nineteen -- it wasn't until -- we were formed in 1974 -- and in 1977, we moved into housing that we shared with the city-wide mural project.

AB: In the .

JB: In the old Venice jail, which was a 1929 historical building, which we're still in now, in 1986.

AB: Somewhere in that early formation of S.P.A.R.C., you also went to Mexico, didn't you?

JB: Yes, it was right about that time . . . . In 1974, I was the director of the city-wide mural project. That time was a very difficult time for me because while I . . . . I had created this model, and I had sort of risen to my level of incompetency, proper Peter Principle. (both chuckle) I was administrating forty murals per year, going to community meetings in communities as diverse as Korea Town to Thailand -- you know, the Thai community -- and really understanding the ethnic diversity of Los Angeles. It was just an education that . . .

AB: Great.

JB: . . . that no one could ever replicate for me. I was at a community meeting every single night. I met with nuns to semi-Mafiosos. And the diversity of these communities, and the way the dialogues occurred, and the way the meetings were conducted, and the way artists were received was an experience that I really cherish.

And it was exhausting and draining and nearly killed me. By 1977, I was ill -- fairly seriously ill. I had been organizing communities and painting with people and helping them. I had done so much painting that I had acrylic poisoning. And I was like getting a little crazier and crazier. And also at that point i was having . . . the doctor had recommended that I have a hysterectomy. I had a fairly large tumor. So my body was like falling apart, and psychologically I had not been able to do my own work at all. Three years long, I had been struggling with the City of Los Angeles to make them responsive to this program, and they had been doing crazy things, like saying, "Okay, now. You have to have . . . . Every kid you hire has to have a tuberculosis test."

AB: (laughs) I was going to say, is it the tuberculin test? Jeez.

JB: So, you know, suddenly I was hiring over a thousand people in the communities per year, and I was [trying] to figure out how to get them to a location of tuberculosis tests, conducted by the city. And there was . . . of course, they didn't have any transportation or money. And the payments were like taking six to eight weeks, and it's very hard to explain to a kid in the gang, he's going to work today, he's not going to get paid for eight weeks. So it was becoming just an untenable position. I was stuck between the city and the community. And at both ends I was despised -- the community, because they saw me as being part of the city; the city, because they saw me being a community person and a radical. So I had this like really difficult place to be. And it really took a toll on me. And as I said, I got ill. And in 1977, around the time that I got ill -- I got ill in the beginning of the year, and I went through surgery, and shortly thereafter, I decided . . . . I got notice of a mural workshop in Mexico, and I left and went to Mexico for six weeks. along with a number of other Chicano artists from the southwest, primarily from Texas and New Mexico and Denver.

AB: Who was there?

JB: Salvador from the Galeria.

AB: Yeah, Garcia, yeah.

JB: Garcia. A man named Manuel [Reyas, Rejas], or something like that, from Denver. He was working with Corky Gonzales.

AB: Oh, right.

JB: He was quite an interesting painter. Other muralists, a guy from Austin, Raoul . . . . What was Raoul's last name? He came to speak at our center recently.

AB: But did you see Rodrigues [--Ed.] and [Ellen] ?

JB: No, I was the only woman in the workshop. There were 25 Mexicans from Mexico, and about eight Chicanos, six or eight Chicanos, and I was the only woman. And it took place in Puerta Vaca, at David 's.

AB: [Polyforma]?

JB: Yeah, were he build the [Polyform]. And Luis [Avenar] was in charge of the workshop that time. (yawns) I now. That's not exactly accurate, because I remember I made a trip in 1975, with Christina, to see the murals. Before . . . right after the . . . .

AB: The [Ree-van] murals. Did you see ?

JB: I traveled all over Mexico to look at the murals. I spent months in Mexico, in 1975.

AB: So that you had already integrated a lot of that.

JB: But not formally studying until '77, when I really went to the workshop and learned about composition, and it changed dramatically. It shows very specifically on *The Great Wall*, which began in 1976. There's pre-1977 . . . .

AB: You began *The Great Wall* . . . ?

JB: There's pre-1977 and post-1977.

AB: What do you think are the most significant things that have happened sort of post-'77, in the imagery on the wall -- I mean, other than the content?

JB: Well, in 1977, I learned about the, Siqueiros' concept of the musical ratio -- of harmonious musical ratio of composition -- and his division of space -- which is on a ratio basically of three to five. And how you can make an underlying structure for a mural in which any directional line that falls through a form will hit a point that is in a mathematical ratio one to another, and that if you look at these points as they fall on a rectangle, say, a golden rectangle . . . .

AB: The golden . . . umhmm.

JB: But he doesn't use golden section ratio. It's a skew.

AB: His is different.

JB: His is different. It's more asymmetric, more dynamic.

AB: Uh huh.

JB: And these points which fall on the edges of your rectangle have a relationship one to each other, that comes into a ratio, which can be likened to musical time. And you can change them -- as I have done on *The Great Wall*, now, over the . . . .

AB: You know, we were talking about . . .

JB: The ratio.

AB: . . . the ratio. The ratio thing. And that's the form of it.

JB: Right. Well, that musical time is a way of like creating a rhythm within the piece. And it was an amazing experience for me to see how when lines, directional lines, went through forms -- how forms, if moved to fit within the ratio, to hit the points. Like in other words, if an arm flies out, it goes to the point. Suddenly there's this like visual kind of connection between the forms, and it fits like, clicks like pieces of a puzzle, right into place. And I have been speeding up that time, as I come to the present, making the time faster, you know -- as opposed to four-four time to, you know, one-sixteen or something.

AB: The mural project, *The Great* . . . ?

JB: I've been using three-five, five-eight.

AB:*The Great Wall* project has been going since 1977, so that's at least -- what? -- nine years?

JB: Umhmm.

AB: What was your first intention for it to be? Did you ever expect it to last this long?

JB: Hmmm.

AB: What did you think it was going to be?

JB: I think what I thought was that when the Army Corps of Engineers talked to me about the site -- I was the director of the city-wide mural project, that's still in 1974. And one of the reasons S.P.A.R.C. was formed, really, was to be a conduit for nonprofit, for private money that was raised to go to *The Great Wall*. I thought that it would be a one-time experience, and that it afforded me the opportunity to take a public site [an, and] experiment in an isolated environment. I liked the idea it was thirteen and a half feet below ground level and that we were an isolated group. And that as a group we would be in a position to relate one to each other. And in every other site I'd been on, we were accessible to the public, and people would come in droves and relate to us. And this way I could take the team, really have them, force them in intense interaction with each other. (yawns) Because they'd be below ground level. So I thought -- being naive at that point (chuckles), and also with this sort of great faith in humanity -- that we would be able to work with different artists, who represented each different ethnic group. And that these artists would work with kids -- again, using the models I had used from city-wide mural, from my own work to city-wide mural project -- to bringing them all to one location. I had seen them do this work . . . .

AB: So this was part of the development of your understanding of . . .

JB: Right. What I was doing there. The conceptual . . .

AB: . . . what you were doing. I mean, conceptually.

JB: The thing that of course excites me the most, is most interesting to me. It's like [to how] to play with these little models. And what I thought was that . . . . Okay, I did it by myself, then I had other people do it. Then, the problem was that all these little people did it, in all these different neighborhoods, and there was no relationship between the neighborhoods.

AB: So this is your chance to link them all together.

JB: Right. It's something that was more approximating a world view.

AB: But you made a decision in the middle of *The Great Wall*, or at least some point in *The Great Wall*, to retain yourself as the artistic both designer, over the whole of it.

JB: The death of the illusion.

AB: Umhmm.

JB: the death of the cultural worker.

AB: And the rise of what?

JB: And the rise of the individual acknowledging leadership abilities and understandings that surpassed [her crew members, worker members]. So what happened was I brought the different artists together: the first crew [were., of] native American artists, Charlie Brown, I think two Chicanos, Isabel Castro, Judith Hernandez, myself, Ulysses Jenkins -- who is now a video artist, actually is doing performance work. I can't remember who else. Charlie Brown, Gary Nagada, Nakasaki, no -- Takamura. All of us came together, each of whom got a 100-foot section. Now I was the worker, the drone. I got the money, raised the money, got the permits, organized the kids, hired all the kids -- and over 300 kids interviewed for those positions. I brought 80 kids onto the site. And essentially, I was going to make eight teams, each of them doing their own 100-foot section alongside of us. Same thing we did before, but now alongside of each other. And all we had to do was paint about a particular chronology of work and see how it related to the people to the left and the right of us. It didn't work. It didn't work because the only money I could get was from the Juvenile Justice system to pay those kids, and those kids then had to [be] bussed in at least once, and they

required much more than we were able to give them -- in terms of attention and understanding and focus. To work with the interrelationship between gang groups and ethnic groups. I selected them to be a diverse group, and I balanced gang groups and all that kind of stuff. But I expected a level of competency from my colleagues that just didn't exist.

AB: Because being a good artist didn't mean they could organize kids . . . ?

JB: It mean absolutely, very often, the reverse. That there were very few people who had the ability to be a painter and at the same time watch ten other little hands, and support those kids whatever crises they were going through *and* also make an interesting artwork and finish it.

AB: So you had to change the model. How many years did it take before you felt the model was working the way you wanted, in terms of organizing the kids and . . . .

JB: Just now?

AB: Just now.

JB: The last summer, '83, I think was the best one we

ever did. I think . . . . And I also have a whole set of things I'm going to change the next time out. It's changed each time, and it's gotten better. And every . . . . And I think the way it's changed is that, one, in 1976, primary dollars that came for the support of *The Great Wall* [were, for] federal monies. In 1986, the primary dollars that came for *The Great Wall* are corporate and individual contributors. And are people who are supporting the particular segments of the mural, that they're connected to. The Jewish Community Council supports the Jews in the 1940s section. The McCarthy era was supported by the Hollywood community, you know, the Hollywood Ten list. So those things became the way . . . . It shifted dramatically. And the second part of it is that there's been an increasing focus on developing the model, the conceptual model. Increasing focus on meeting the problems and solving the problems that occur on the wall.

AB: The logistical and technical problems?

JB: And social problems.

AB: Social problems.

JB: Which are astounding.

AB: Of the kids themselves with each other?

JB: And the people who work with the kids. (chuckles)

AB: The staff.

JB: Staff. Everybody. And the historians. The academics. How do you get the information from the academics to the people in such a way that it's translatable? (chuckles) I mean, somebody will stand up there and talk to these kids about the Walter-McLaren Act. "Who cares? What the hell is a Walter-McLaren Act?" You know. But, if somebody comes and says, "Listen, the Walter-McLaren Act meant that I was deported because I was a subversive," and, alongside of them, an Asian stands and says, "That's when I got my citizenship. The first time in the history of America that Asians could own land. And vote. In the 1950s.

AB: It's amazing, isn't it? The kids who've worked on the wall for a long time are going to have a tremendous wealth of the historical knowledge that very few other young people will have.

JB: Umhmm.

AB: Be interesting to see what use they put it to, past working on the project with you, if you could follow some of them and see . . . .

JB: What they use, what they've learned. It's changed them .

AB: More than that, it's changed them . . . . [JB and AB talking at same time--Ed.]

JB: It's amazing, because I get a lot of feedback, and I'm always sort of surprised, [don't think] I really get how much it has an impact, how much it changes people.

AB: Well, I know that *The Great Wall*, in that mural project, is only part of what's taken up a lot of your energy in S.P.A.R.C. in the last few years. What do you see S.P.A.R.C. as being at this point?

JB: Before I answer that, I want to just say one thing about *The Great Wall*. *The Great Wall* now has in place counseling services, shelters for battered kids, incest awareness and incest-support . . .

AB: [whispers] Amazing!

JB: . . . has battered and runaway [shelters--Ed.] -- because we have high runaways -- we have hotlines for suicide prevention, we have . . . . I mean, we have all this network of people who will help us with these issues, which are the issues that occur every day on the mural. It has historians and oral historians, who translate what it means to them personally, what experience it was for them in their own lives. The academics and the oral historians together do the presenting. We spend one full day a week in the classroom. We work on the inter . . . the focus of our differences in our culture, our cultural differences. So that there are people now who come to the site who are presenters and facilitators of theater games, many of which I've devised, but many of which also come from people like the Twelfth Night Repertory Company who has supporters and help us. We have had students who have gone off special projects in which they done, run video crews for documentation, documenting the pieces, and also two young girls who have exceptional talent who wrote and directed a play, which supplemented the information on *The Great Wall*. So, in other words, what I've had to do is focus increasingly on the support services that will accomplish the goals of the interrelationship between the different cultures, which is the focus of *The Great Wall*. The focus of *The Great Wall* is to put . . . you know, the kind of naive focus was to put alongside of each other the stories of different ethnic groups and the history of each of those ethnic groups, in the Thirties or Forties, or whatever. Now, the focus is -- and as we got increasingly better at relating one to each other, like across ethnic boundaries, we have also gotten better at relating visually across the boundaries of Chicano history, black history, Jewish history, you know, Asian history. It's all one piece now, because now we understand in a better way the connection. And *The Great Wall* really then is just the tip of the iceberg. It's just really one part; the image is one part of the whole concept. And the most interesting concept, even, aside from how to orchestrate that application of paint, which is really about . . . . It's like structured; I mean, I've got the whole application down to a completely structured system, to make it work as an artwork. It's got increasingly better as a public artwork. The imaging is better. In addition to that, we've gotten increasingly better at dealing with our team-building and our interracial relationships.

AB: Umhmm.

JB: And, from there, how the interracial relationships is presented to the world. The kids ran tours for the Olympics, in which they spoke about their histories and took foreign visitors through *The Great Wall*. And I guess to go on with your next question, which has to do with how I see S.P.A.R.C. now, is that S.P.A.R.C. has, I think, from its initiation, from its initial inception, it's been an organization that has been responsive to missing links, responsible to nonexistent educational materials, and really has been a vacuum-filler. We need motivational and educational materials to show people what's going to happen to them in this process. They weren't there; we made them. We made films, we made filmstrips, we made slide collections. We need to support emerging artists of variant ethnic groups. I mean, when you go to hire artists on *The Great Wall* and you see how few native Americans [you can], have paintings skills.

AB: Yeah.

JB: Or who have a developed form, or have developed image, or have developed vision. Then you know that they really have to be supported at the emerging level. S.P.A.R.C. supports emerging artists in exhibitions. So we need to do education for muralists, so that there's no formal education right now. There's no formal education offered anywhere in the United States in muralism. So we have wrote for the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education.

AB: So you started the Mural training Institute programs like two years ago?

JB: Yes, two years, and I'm in my third year now. I will be writing a [masters, master's] program, the first masters program in the United States, on muralism. So that you could come there and get a masters in muralism through signing up through one of the five cooperating universities and art schools.

AB: I know that the mural form, and obviously the social organizing that goes with it, and the history of it, both as a Chicana and as a woman, has taken up a lot of your adult art life. Is there a time when you envision doing other kinds of artwork, that is, say, less collective and more individual?

JB: Yes. I think, like *The Great Wall*, I created this momentum that just kind of went on its own. I set a wheel in motion, and my foot got caught under it [pause] Wait, rewinding itself. It's rewinding itself. [speaking of the tape recorder--Ed.]

[INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

AB: We were talking about the interests you have or the changes that have occurred that have brought you to a place, maybe, of wanting to do a more individual kind of work, or work that isn't so collective. How do you see that . . . ?

JB: Well, I just think it's just sort of a matter of economics, you know, like spiritual economics. Not money, but economics in the sense that I have been putting out enormous amounts for a long period, without really finding the space and time to rejuvenate or put back in on some meditative level. And the best way to say that is that I've been on a soapbox so long I don't know what I would whisper in someone's ear.

AB: Yeah.

JB: And I'm really anxious to know that. I really . . . . It's not that I don't love this collective work and [that--Ed] I don't see that as really a piece of my life's work. I'm getting better and better at it. I understand it better and better. But that, primarily of the stuff that I've become increasingly interested in, which I think has something to do with like . . . . You know, I was actually brought to this by the collective work, that the looking into some kind of collective consciousness -- the thing I keep seeing happening over and over again -- in which we all know stuff, information from each other, that we don't even know we know, and suddenly it's apparent. Or why all of us . . . you know, this sort of synergistic energy happens, and we just sort of, all of us across the country, a number of us, will work simultaneously on the same idea or the same issue. And I think what I need to know mroe about is, as I get closer to my Indian self . . .

AB: Umhmm.

JB: . . . making some very meditative, contemplative, almost religious stuff. And I think it's an individual, quiet process, the meditation. And that that work . . . if I could do whatever I wanted -- that work, coupled with my collective work, would make my life whole. And I find it really difficult, because I always balance having to support myself with a whole set of work that is not perhaps my major interest, like my teaching and so forth at a university and my work, administrative work, with S.P.A.R.C. And then my real work, the collective, not necessarily . . . I mean, I think I've worked out my collective work and collaborative work to such a where it's really not collaborative as you would think of it, which is that there are more than one primary designer. One only has to look at *The Great Wall* and see the names change, who have worked with me, and see the continuity of the piece, irregardless of who was there. The process that I have developed can work with any number of people, and my eye and my hand has now become what I rely on for drawing those images together and developing a cohesiveness and stylistic approach. I'm not even sure that that style and approach is not dictated by *The Great Wall*.

AB: That's what I was going to ask you. If you . . . I know you've had the interest in the goddess series in more sort of spiritual images. Would they look the same? Would they look different?

JB: I think they'll look different because they are not on the scale *The Great Wall* is in. They don't have the monumentality. To be seen from seventy feet away, to have this kind of heroic quality . . . .

AB: Or when you're going off the freeway. (laughs)

JB: And you know, they have this sort of heroic quality of representing the history of peoples's, people whose history has never been represented. I think they have a different function, and therefore they will have some kind of different quality. And I think that it's not . . . this is not a break in what I'm doing. This is not a diversion or a tangent. It's . . . I mean, if you look at . . . . You know, one thing that strikes me, as we do this interview, is the kind of relentlessness of my little mind, of how it sort of always follows in a sequence, trying the next step and the next step. I don't seem to leap off anywhere. I think all this work I have been doing is about healing, and it's about developing some kind of loving approach to the world, in which I can use my skills -- as I said, I'm not a dancer or singer; I make images -- to heal a social environment and a physical environment. And *this*, now is just another approach to the same kind of healing. But it's perhaps a little quieter, and it's healing myself. I think that I'm not . . . I haven't changed. I mean, I've changed .. you know, I've gotten better, but I've always been interested in this kind of, in some kind of healing. And now I'm looking to do some work more healing on myself.

AB: What do you think the healing stuff comes from?

JB: I think it comes pretty clearly from my grandmother.

AB: [from your] grandmother?

JB: Yes. I feel as I get older more understanding and connected to her, because she was very spiritual and very involved in healing processes, which were ritualistic, that didn't come really out of, you know, medicinal practices in a conventional sense, or was, you know, what other people would think of like, you know . . . . You know, she'd use the *hierbas*, and know which of these would help, which of these would work to make you feel better. But she would also use a little magic, you know. She'd make a little amulet and that would hang over your, around your neck, to keep away any evil spirit that might be after you.

AB: .

JB: I never really questioned what was inside of them, because I [wasn't sure] I wanted to know, you know. (chuckles) But she combined sort of ancient Indian, I think, folklore and Catholicism, so she prayed and made things that would heal you. And I think . . . it seems to me a real easy connection for me to make things that would heal me.

And I'm, you know, a lot of that . . . . I've written like this little play, a script for a play, that would go with one of my murals that move. I'm interested in seeing those murals sort of move around in space.

AB: And that's the one . . . ?

AB: We've been talking, Judy, about some of the newer pieces that you've working on, and going back to that original definition in the interview about yourself in regards to conceptual performance art. What are some of the pieces that you see yourself doing, sort of coming down the line?

JB: This is an interesting year, because it's kind of a culmination of a great deal of work that I've been working on for a long period of time.

And one of the pieces of work I'm finishing is the mural training program, which I've done for the Department of Education, and that has taken the process of *The Great Wall* and looked at it as a model for education. I mean, one of the things that has become of real interest to the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education is the aspect of *The Great Wall* in which you can teach anybody any content through the imaging process, and that it's learned in a way, by the transformation of its scale, that it can never be learned any other way. So, in other words, it doesn't matter whether you're learning about defense strategies, or whether you're learning about history of a particular, of the Chumash Indians, or whether you're learning about a particular set of sociological events, literally any subject matter can be submitted to this process that I've developed on *The Great Wall* and turned into a series of images. So that it's been interesting work for me, because it's really playing around with that model. And I worked . . . . Now this year, I'm going to be writing about that model. And I

think that'll help me kind of come to the, kind of doing a wrap-up of how this model has gotten elaborated and stretched and, actually, I think it's become fairly complete. And probably will give me another analysis, and which will change it again before we go into production in '87.

I also will be working on the continuation of *The Great Wall*, and I've changed the process, as I've said, again. And what I'm doing this time is trying, I've been trying desperately to buy more and more lead time to the production, which means that I've been able to directly see that the length of time I have in preparation is the equation to the quality of the work.

AB: Umhmm.

JB: So, while I can find funders who will fund my nine weeks with the kids, to get someone to fund me for a year in advance of the production -- for design time and careful research and for the historians and all of that work -- has been difficult. I now have design money which I think will get me at least through six months. And what I really would like to do is to design two segments at once, so that there would be not the division between decade by decade, which is how the mural is set up now -- Thirties, Forties, Fifties -- but to design the Sixties and Seventies at once. So that's another piece of the work that I'm doing.

So I'm playing . . . I'n working with aa model, and I'm also working with the image-making.

I'm completing two pieces on the homeless, which has been sponsored by the CVC [--Ed.] and Las [Vonitas, Fonigas], the Corporate Volunteer Corp in the Skid Row area. And that's been an interesting education: using my process to image the content, to brainstorm, to do the group techniques, the dream workshops, all the techniques I've used in the groups to develop images in content. We're just completing two pieces which are called *The Street Speaks*, and they are about homelessness in Los Angeles, and they are made specifically for the homeless audience, which does [not now] get immediate food, shelter, and medical care. And the trick in that piece is really how to make that piece work without it becoming kind of a didactic little . [plane? obscures part of words--Ed.] And so we can reverse prospective in Los Angeles, making so that whoever looked at this map would see it as a peculiar map of L.A. because Skid Row would be the center of it. And all the other maps in Los Angeles make Skid Row turn into a pasture. So that, you know, if you're an Iranian, and you get ahold one of these maps, you think you might have a picnic at, on Sixth and Gladys Street, and you would find yourself in deep trouble (laughter), because there's so many transients there that you'd be in big problem, I mean, have a big problem. The second one of these panels is *The Rights of the Homeless*. So I'm just coming . . . I think within the next few weeks that piece will be finished up.

And I've been working, a number of assistants. A young assistant who's come from Mexico, La Reina, who I think will probably be a longer term apprentice, who has come from Mexico to live in the area to work with me.

In addition to that, I'm looking at two other pieces, which I'm formulating right now. One is on the birth of rock'n'roll, for RKO. And it's kind of a birth of rock'n'roll from a Latin perspective. And once again, it's a studio work, as more and more of my work has been; studio works that are installed on site, and meant to go exteriorly. And this is as the homeless pieces. And the reason that I like that and why I'm pushing more and more for that is because it isn't as physically gruelling for me. And working in the studio I can control the environment and the light and I can work through any kinds of weather, and I think they have a higher quality. The birth of rock'n'roll piece is going to look at thing like, you know, people like Richie Valens and Freddie Fender, and all the other folks who make up the Latin contribution. I think probably we'll even take us back to some of the Tex-Mex music . . . .

AB: Yeah, the early [N'Arte Teney] music.

JB: Yes. And then . . So I"m anxious to start that research. I have the commission; we're just finishing the signing of contracts.

In addition, I'm working on . . . I have a kind of a crazy concept for the downtown public library, which this year burned down. And Atlantic Richfield as been talking to me about the possibility of designing a facade for that building for the next two years while it's under reservation -- I mean, renovation. [correcting herself--Ed.] And that facade will be . . . [something crashes--Ed.] Excuse me.

[INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

JB: And the facade of the central library, I'm playing around with a different model than I've ever tried before, which is to, again, do the community participatory process, but first paint a kind of burnt books images, in which I take the side of the library off and, like, just move, remove one of the walls and see into the racks of the burnt books. Which has, you know, there are sort of overtones for me, and it could be, I think, a very powerful image. It's three stories. So it would a big interior view of the burnt library. And then actually, as people make contributions to the renovation of the library, I would be changing the mural -- and actually not myself, but I think at that point, assistants could do it. We would reproduce the books that I have painted in the mural into large-scale -- now, some of them there'll be four-or five-foot-high books -- and cut them out of wood, and paint them in color, so that the original mural would be in sepia tones or burnt tones, and then as people make contributions we would put their names on the books and put them, screw them back into the mural, so that the mural would slowly, like a puzzle, have new pieces added and transform itself into a colored mural. Now it's a kind of, you know, it's still really early formulation, but it is again moving, playing around with this thing that I've been interested [in--Ed.] for the last four or five years and haven to been able to find the money and time to do, which is to make these murals [have] changing faces in some way. To have them be less static.

AB: A little bit like the kinesthetic models that you were doing with the goddess pieces, where panels turned.

JB: Right, right. That's really what I want to be doing. And of course, the peace murals that I was working on were similar in the sense that they were moving panels that traveled with the city, and with the, you know, city of 5,000 people in tenets, and this being the kind of core, a giant 100 [-foot--Ed.] diameter circle of canvas murals, each 10 feet by 30 feet, about how the world would have to come to peace: in a spiritual transformation, and the material transformation, toward balance -- and balance in the Hopi sense of the balance of the male and female, .

AB: Umhmm.

JB: So all of those projects are kind of, you know, pending, and I've had perhaps this year one of the most interesting experiences of my life, which is the building of my studio, which was designed by Frank Gehry and Paul Lubowicki, who is his assistant. And Frank laid out a very kind of interesting, fast view, after a number of discussions with me, about what he thought my studio might look like in [Lewis canals], And Paul has carried it out, and we are coming into finish on that. So, for the first time, I will have a space that is really designed for muralism. And I've always had to try to fix . . . .

AB: (laughter) Maybe a prototype for other muralists trying to build a house.

JB: It really is an interesting space, because it really . . . I guess the most I could about it is that it's scaffolding and walls and, you know, kind of that structure of scaffolding and walls is the predominant theme in the piece -- in the house. I think of it as a big artwork, actually. And it's a wonderful space. I'll be moving in within the next couple weeks, and I expect that that will have an impact on my work. That's where I will be doing the RKO piece *The Birth of Rock'N'Roll*, and possibly parts of the Atlantic Richfield piece.

AB: At this point in your work, if you had to pick ten adjectives for your work and yourself and what you want, what would they be?

JB: Luscious color, that's one. Adjectives of what I want the physical work to look like?

AB: Umhmm. Or what you feel about yourself as an artist and your work.

JB: Umm, I guess I think of the, I'd really like to be able to make a rich surface filled with as much color as possible. Permanence. I'm thinking of more permanence of the works I do. And I'm thinking of responsive. I don't know if these are adjectives.

AB: , [something in Spanish?--Ed.]

JB: I'm thinking of the works as being more responsive -- themselves physically responsive, as opposed to, you know, responsive in the . . . .

AB: Socially, historically, that content.

JB: Yeah. I'm thinking of myself as more . . . almost religious, in a certain way. I mean, not in the sense that we think about God, but in the sense of this is a fairly serious time in American history and, given that I feel powerless in any other way, you know, I feel like I need to shake my beads [at them].

AB: catch the [roads, roses] .

JB: Yeah. Religious. As always, scale. And scale as an adjective almost. And what happens when scale is transformed, which is a continuing fascination. Umm, I guess another kind of preoccupation for me is the movement of my viewer. How they move past, how they move through, what sort of relationship to the pieces. A kind of more and more . . . . And it's integration to architecture. It doesn't feel like I've gotten at personally the stuff I'm talking about. Quiet. Meditative. Slower. Less.

AB: Well, thank you for the interview, Judy. It's very enjoyable.

JB: Thank you, Amalia, once again. This is a continuing interview over a lot of [years].

AB: (laughs) Yes. We're only at barely midpoint.

JB: (chuckles)

NAMES MENTIONED IN JUDITH BACA INTERVIEW:

Suzanne Lacey

Judy Chicago

Alan Capro

Amalia Bains

Uncle Jesus

Uncle Manuel

David Alfaro Siqueiros
Pacoima

van Gogh

Uncle [Mundo, Mondo]

Tomas

Anna _____

Mi Abuelita [my grandmother--Ed.]

Ruben Salazar

Pacoima

Los Tres Grandes

La Raza [The People--Ed.]

Yo Soy Joachin [a poem--Ed.]

Michicano Art Center

Goez Gallery

Lewis Carroll

Mark Rogovin

Chicago Mural Group

Joan Baez

Casa Maravilla

laderas

Estrada Courts

[Castall] Recreation Center

Rachael [Apalloca]

Willy Herron

Manuel Cruz

Mountain Second Street

Wabash Recreation Center

Rachael Martinez

White Fence

Barrio Nuevos

Medusa Head

Leonard Castellanos

Los Four
Carlos Almaraz

Mujeres Muralistas [woman muralists--Ed.]

Medusa Head

Wabash mural

Jorge _____

Fernando [Satserro]

Jackie Fernandez

Julio Fernandez

Christina Schlesinger

S.P.A.R.C. -- Social and Public Arts Resource Center

Cat Felix

Estrada Courts

Gato [cat] __

Mi Abuelita

Woman's Space

Christina Schlesinger

Judy Chicago

Woman's Building

Feminist Studio Workshop

Cal Arts

Vettas community

Galeria de la Raza

Royal Chicano Air Force (RCAF)

Christina Schlesinger

Arthur Schlesinger

Wabash Recreation Center

Cy [Grieben, Grieber]

Hollenbeck Park

Wabash Recreation Center

Second Street mural

Mountain Second Street

Allen [Torres, Thordax]

Assemblyman _____

Casa de Carnalismo [brotherhood--Ed.]

La Raza

Siquieros

Los Tres Grandes

Councilman russell

Zubin Mehta

Salvador _____

Gleria

Garcia ____

Salvador

Manuel [Reyas, Rejas]

Corky Gonzales

Rodrigues _____

[Ellen] ____

Puerta Vaca

David ___ _____'s

Polyform

Luis [Avenar]

The Great Wall
Charlie Brown

Isabel Castro

Judithe Hernandez

Ulysses Jenkins

Mural Training Institute
The Street Speaks

The rights of the Homeless

La Reina

Richie Valens

Freddie Fender

[N'Arte Teney]

Atlantic Richfield

Frank Gehry

Paul Lubowicki

[END OF INTERVIEW]