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Oral history interview with Arthur and Jean
Goodwin Ames, 1965 June 9

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Transcript

Interview

**Interview with Arthur Ames and Jean Goodwin Ames
Conducted by Betty Lochrie Hoag
At the Ames' home in Claremont, California
June 9, 1965**

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Arthur Ames and Jean Goodwin Ames on June 9, 1965. The interview was conducted at the Ames' home in Claremont, California by Betty Lochrie Hoag for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

BETTY HOAG: This is Betty Lochrie Hoag on June 9, 1965 interviewing Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Ames in their home in Claremont, California. Mr. and Mrs. Ames were both on the project in San Diego; Mrs. Ames under the name of Jean Goodwin, and they have continued to be a team working together in the art field ever since. We're going to have microfilm material telling about the work that they have done. It covers such an amazingly wide field in painting - oils and watercolor, crayon and pencil, and the graphics, lithographs, and I think etchings, enamels and mosaics, and contemporary design. During the project they were on both the mural and the easel projects that I know of, and perhaps on the lithograph project. Before we start talking about that period I would like to ask you separately a little about your life. Mrs. Ames, would you tell me first if you have a middle name besides Jean Goodwin, another name with Jean?

JEAN AMES: No.

BETTY HOAG: And would you tell us when you were born and where; when - if you care to?

JEAN AMES: I was born in Santa Ana, November 6, 1903.

BETTY HOAG: And where were you educated?

JEAN AMES: I went to high school in Santa Ana; then two years at Pomona College; then graduated from a three-year program at the Art Institute of Chicago. Then came back to California, took my B.E. degree at UCLA, and my M.F.A. at USC.

BETTY HOAG: What does B.E. stand for?

JEAN AMES: Bachelor of Education. It was the only degree that was given at that time in the field of art, and I did teach high school for three years before I got my masters and then...

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible.

JEAN AMES: Yes. First one year at Santa Ana, and then - well, three years at - four in all. And then after I had my master's I taught at Claremont Graduate School and Scripps College from 1940 on till the present day.

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible.

JEAN AMES: Yes, I'm a professor at Claremont Graduate School.

BETTY HOAG: And what do you teach there?

JEAN AMES: I teach design and art education. And I have charge of the master's program, chairman of the M.F.A. and the M.A. programs in the graduate school.

BETTY HOAG: That must be very interesting?

JEAN AMES: Yes, it's very interesting work.

BETTY HOAG: You've also illustrated books and I don't understand whether you.....

JEAN AMES: No, we illustrated together a few of the books put out by the Santa Ana Historical Society on that region. "Shadow of Old Saddle Bags" is one of them; and "Chi-Chi-Nichi-Chi" I believe; it was the story of the early Indians at San Juan Capistrano, the farmers.

BETTY HOAG: And these were illustrated in woodcuts?

JEAN AMES: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible.

JEAN AMES: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: And what was the "Enchanted Garden"?

JEAN AMES: That was a painting.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, it was?

JEAN AMES: It had to be a painting that I exhibited at the Museum.

BETTY HOAG: I've gotten this really mixed up; I have fairy tales inspired by Hudson's "Green Mansions".

JEAN AMES: No, somebody else.

BETTY HOAG: Mr. Ames, I want to ask you too briefly about your life, where were you born?

ARTHUR AMES: I was born in Tamarillo, Illinois, May 1906.

BETTY HOAG: May 19?

ARTHUR AMES: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: And when did you come to California?

ARTHUR AMES: Yes, when I was quite young. And went to school in Ontario, which is right near here.

BETTY HOAG: This is public school?

ARTHUR AMES: Yes. And then I went to the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco.

BETTY HOAG: And when did you have a year under Ray Boynton?

ARTHUR AMES: That was at that time.

BETTY HOAG: He was a teacher?

ARTHUR AMES: Yes he was teaching at the California School at that time.

BETTY HOAG: I read some place that he had gotten you interested in mural work.

ARTHUR AMES: That's true, that's true he did.

BETTY HOAG: Had you done any before you did the project?

ARTHUR AMES: No, but he sort of inspired me to do the work in mosaic and so we were one of the first to do mosaic work in California and it was through his expression we did that.

BETTY HOAG: I didn't even know he taught it at that time.

ARTHUR AMES: He didn't teach it, but he was doing a mosaic at that time.

BETTY HOAG: What was it for? Do you remember?

ARTHUR AMES: Yes, it was for Colonel Scott Wood.

BETTY HOAG: His home, you mean?

ARTHUR AMES: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: And that was....

ARTHUR AMES: I think it was the only mosaic Boynton ever did.

BETTY HOAG: Isn't that interesting?

ARTHUR AMES: Jock Schmier also was a person that was very helpful and inspiring to me and I think he also urged me to do mosaics.

BETTY HOAG: It's surprising.... project.... at Long Beach....

ARTHUR AMES: Well actually we did our first mosaic at Newport before that... Los Angeles.

JEAN AMES: You didn't say anything about our - previous to the San Diego experience we were the orange county supervisors.

ARTHUR AMES: We started to work in the project in Santa Ana.

JEAN AMES: And we worked there for, oh, a year and a half at least before we went to Santa Ana and did two fairly large mosaics in the courtyard at Newport Harbor Union High School, and had several people working under us at that time.

BETTY HOAG: I see. That was before 1936?

JEAN AMES: Yes, it was.

BETTY HOAG: And you had done the Fremont School before 1936 even?

JEAN AMES: No, no, that was about 1937 I would imagine - the Fremont School we didn't do, we designed it only; and then it was carried out by other people.

BETTY HOAG: That was two panels. I have read both that it was oil on gesso, and tempers on gesso but if you didn't complete it you only designed it, you probably wouldn't know anyway.

ARTHUR AMES: Which was the Fremont School?

JEAN AMES: Oh, the Fremont School! Arthur you did that; that's the one at Anaheim. Oh well, that antedated even these others.

ARTHUR AMES: I did that, yes.

JEAN AMES: That was done on the Public Works of Art program.

BETTY HOAG: There is no place where there is a historical, chronological record. Why don't you start at the beginning and tell me?

ARTHUR AMES: Well, I'm not sure that I remember just when those things were done. I think Jean has a clearer idea than I do, but I believe that was the first - no, I did one work in Los Angeles for a Los Angeles school, I've forgotten which school it was, but it was...

BETTY HOAG: Alexander Hamilton?

ARTHUR AMES: I believe so. It was an oil painting, a rather large one mural-like. And then after that I think it was the Fremont School maybe...

JEAN AMES: And the library...

ARTHUR AMES: And the Anaheim Public Library I did one.

BETTY HOAG: Two really, wasn't it?

JEAN AMES: No, just the one.

BETTY HOAG: And my notes, coming from heaven knows where say that it was done under Louis Dance.

ARTHUR AMES: Louis Dance, that's right.

BETTY HOAG: Was he in charge of the project?

ARTHUR AMES: No, but he was on the board.

JEAN AMES: The works Progress Administration had on its board Merle Armitage and Louis Dance and Jake Zeitman, as I remember.

ARTHUR AMES: Yes that's right.

BETTY HOAG: He would be a good person to talk to.

JEAN AMES: Oh, of course he would be excellent. And that was the very first project, as you remember, before the Federal Art Project was conceived, and replaced, replaced the former.

BETTY HOAG: That was way back in 1933? It was conceived...

JEAN AMES: Yes it was.

BETTY HOAG: And got going in 1934?

ARTHUR AMES: Yes. But then the mosaic...

JEAN AMES: Was done under the Federal Art Project.

ARTHUR AMES: Was done under the Federal Art Project, and I believe it was the first mosaic that was done.

BETTY HOAG: And that's at Newport?

ARTHUR AMES: And that's at Newport High School.

BETTY HOAG: Now I want to get this straight. Mr. Ames, you did the first thing on the work at Anaheim?

ARTHUR AMES: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: Both the school and the library?

ARTHUR AMES: Yes.

JEAN AMES: That's right.

BETTY HOAG: And Mrs. Ames, you were not on either?

JEAN AMES: I wasn't on, no.

ARTHUR AMES: She came into the project when we started the mosaic, and she did one; and I did one.

BETTY HOAG: And that was the Fisherwood.

ARTHUR AMES: Yes.

JEAN AMES: That's right, those were about seven by nine, I believe. And we had several people working with us.

BETTY HOAG: Just for the record I'll read this into the record: Newport Harbor Union High School. Newport Beach, California...

ARTHUR AMES: Right.

BETTY HOAG: On the east wall of the patio.

ARTHUR AMES: That's right.

BETTY HOAG: And I have diversified information again - I have panels of unglazed colored body tile and unmet tile. Would that mean the same thing?

ARTHUR AMES: That's right.

JEAN AMES: Well, they were all mat because we used - at that time it was almost impossible to get the Byzantine mosaic that is used in Italy, and we used native material. We got floor tile that was commonly used in bathrooms...

BETTY HOAG: From Gidey McBean?

JEAN AMES: Yes, from Gidey McBean actually we did go there and get some, and then we also found that we could get it from tile dealers, they had scrap heaps that they would let us have, most all of it was just given to us because it was odds and ends left over from jobs. They did a great deal of floor tiles in those days, floor tiling, you know, of this mat, body tile, it was vitreous tile, and you could cut it with tile nippers the same as one can

cut the Byzantine glass material, which we have used of course in recent times since it is more easy to import it.

BETTY HOAG: Does it come in more beautiful colors?

JEAN AMES: Oh yes, I think there's nothing comparable to the Italian glass mosaic material but really we got a surprising amount of variety by just looking around for it, very soft colors on the whole, and if you would see these - I'll show you reproductions of them - there's a great variety of color in them even so.

BETTY HOAG: I'll get down to see them.

JEAN AMES: But we have reproductions I can show you, which do ...

BETTY HOAG: Good.

ARTHUR AMES: At that time I believe all the mosaics that were done in California were either done by imported workers, the type who came to this country or else the works were done in Italy and shipped over here.

BETTY HOAG: I understand part of the Federal art project requirement was if possible to use all native material.

JEAN AMES: I don't think they said anything about that but it was almost impossible to get the Italian material.

ARTHUR AMES: We didn't know anything about it, any source.

JEAN AMES: No, Maxine Albro did mosaic before we did in San Francisco on the front of the San Francisco - it was called the Normal School, I believe, at that time - State Teachers College in San Francisco. It's very beautiful, and made of marble, and we had seen that in process. And the Bruton girls had also done one I believe on the same project, didn't they?

ARTHUR AMES: Yes, it was done at the University of California.

JEAN AMES: How about the one they did at the mother house at the Zoo? Was that done before we did ours? I thought so.

ARTHUR AMES: About the same time.

JEAN AMES: And it was also done on tile; all these were tile.

BETTY HOAG: Incidentally, the people in Northern California area wrote and asked me to try and find one of the Brutons, that she was down here in Ojai, and I've asked everybody in Ojai....

JEAN AMES: That's Esther, that's not Helen, and her name is Gilman and I have her address.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, I would love to have it.

JEAN AMES: I'll give it to you. She did a good deal of work on the project.

BETTY HOAG: Yes, in San Francisco.

JEAN AMES: But this one mosaic in marble is really a magnificent thing; I don't know whether it's in existence any more, they tore down the building, didn't they. I think so. I do have photographs of it; it's very beautiful. And they had Italian workmen who had had experience in setting mosaic. We learned a great deal about setting, the making of mosaic, and setting from these workmen. We went up there....

ARTHUR AMES: Yes, I think that the people in San Francisco were fortunate in that they did have the workmen, Italian workmen that had come over at the time that the one at Stanford was done; and even some of the mosaic tesserae were still around from that job.

BETTY HOAG: I wonder if they gave them to the project?

JEAN AMES: I don't know any specific mosaic that was made from these remnants of tile that were left over. We just heard vague rumors about them being stored and being for sale. Mr. Robert King, you know knew a great deal about that first mosaic project; in fact, he did a great deal to help us get started in mosaic. We made some samples under his direction because he had done a research job, at any rate; whether he had done any actual setting or not he certainly had a great fund of technical knowledge. I remember we spent almost one whole night setting small samples before we did this Baker job because we set the work as well as made it ourselves, and the method that he showed us to use in setting was really not a traditional one, but one he felt would be safer for us to handle, and I suppose it was, but it was certainly a cumbersome and a long process and one that we discarded because in recent mosaics we've done we can put them up exactly as the Italians do, it's a rather

soft bed and it's easy setting; he made us do it on a hard bed and it was really a process.

BETTY HOAG: You, of course, have seen that book that he wrote at the time?

JEAN AMES: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: I was in the public library downtown... microfilm... and I was very happy about it because there are very few in existence... and... told me very interestingly when the University of Mexico got ready to do a show they wrote our library... the City gave them one... all those lovely...

JEAN AMES: You don't say? I always... technician... you know.

BETTY HOAG: I've been over there about three times.

JEAN AMES: And how he happened to know so much about mosaics I don't know because I don't know any mosaic that he actually - I suppose he did help on that Long Beach one, he probably did.

BETTY HOAG: He was in charge of all ...

JEAN AMES: He must have been in charge of that. But even before that we worked with him and I don't know where he got his information but he was always good at all techniques.

BETTY HOAG: I think he just learned it the hard way because...

JEAN AMES: We had a man who had experience in Italy...

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible. Is this Bowen?

JEAN AMES: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: How do you pronounce that? Alois, or.... Alois Bowen?

JEAN AMES: No, that's not the man. Who is the man who helped us, that had had experience in North Africa Arthur? Vohe.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, Bob Vohe.

JEAN AMES: Bob Vohe, yes. And he'd had experience working, setting mosaics in North Africa, some extensive experience.

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible.

JEAN AMES: At any rate we got it up.

BETTY HOAG: Now you had five people helping you on this Newport...

JEAN AMES: I think there were three helpers... yes, I guess there were five altogether.

BETTY HOAG: Yes. And is this the one where you said Mr. Partridge also came down to visit you while you were working on it?

ARTHUR AMES: No, Mr. Partridge came into the project later on.

BETTY HOAG: The WPA?

ARTHUR AMES: Yes, when we were in San Diego, I believe. Isn't that right?

JEAN AMES: Yes. He would come by and see us though, Arthur, in Santa Ana when we were working on this, but he didn't seem to be supervisor of what we were doing, for some reason or another.

BETTY HOAG: Was Mr. Wright in charge at that time? Or Feitalson? Or Rivera?

ARTHUR AMES: Yes, Mr. Wright was in charge, and Mr. Feitelson was also involved in it.

JEAN AMES: And Joe Danysh used to come down too.

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible.

JEAN AMES: Oh, he's the one we're talking about, you know, that was recently at the Oakland School ... Louis

Dance.

BETTY HOAG: Were you both working on the easel project at the same time or was that later?

JEAN AMES: We didn't work on the easel project.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, didn't you?

ARTHUR AMES: No, we were always mural artists right from the very start.

BETTY HOAG: Well I have in an old Los Angeles Museum catalogue for 1934 WPAP art school of yours and one of yours and one of Mr. Ames.

ARTHUR AMES: Well, we were painting easel pictures but not on the project.

BETTY HOAG: I see. This just

ARTHUR AMES: An exhibition...

BETTY HOAG: Probably and art association show.

ARTHUR AMES: I think so.

BETTY HOAG: And also the lithographs?

JEAN AMES: No.

ARTHUR AMES: And that also ... the lithographs...?

JEAN AMES: No.

ARTHUR AMES: No, the lithographs were done on the project, and we did only a few.

JEAN AMES: They wanted us to do some, they wanted all their artists to do some so we took a little time to do that while we were working on the mosaic, but we didn't... Arthur didn't give much time to it.

BETTY HOAG: I see. After you did the Newport Harbor Union High School did you start the San Diego ... I'm getting mixed up? Newport Harbor was on the WPA.

JEAN AMES: The Federal art project.

BETTY HOAG: And also ... San Diego?

JEAN AMES: Yes. We went down to San Diego and organized that; we had a group of people working under us. There were three quite large panels....

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible.

JEAN AMES: No, it was for the County Supervisor's chamber. In the courthouse, and there were three panels about - what do you think they were, Arthur? About nine by eighteen?

ARTHUR AMES: Something like that.

JEAN AMES: Eighteen high. And they were on three subjects: one was on agriculture, one was on recreation, and one was on reclamation. - conservation, I mean ... that was the one on recreation.

BETTY HOAG: Well, were these tiles?

JEAN AMES: No, these were egg tempera, paint tempera.

BETTY HOAG: Do you know that they can't find them down there. I went down from one office to another when I was in San Diego, they stored them away...

JEAN AMES: Well, this is ridiculous, because they're there, and they're mounted on the wall, they couldn't possibly be taken down, and recently a friend of ours looked them up and they're in the County Supervisor's chamber. They're still there; at least they were very recently.

BETTY HOAG: Good.

JEAN AMES: There is another room on the city side, it's an identical room, it does have three murals the same size, but they were done by San Diego artists. And that probably confused them with that. That was also done on the --- I don't believe that was Federal art project --- I think that was an entirely separate thing, wasn't it? We had intended to do that but somehow political turn of events prevented it and it was done under another auspices.

ARTHUR AMES: Doesn't San Diego have a new civic center, Jean?

JEAN AMES: I really don't know; I didn't think so.

BETTY HOAG: The one they have I think was done under the project old one-armed.

ARTHUR AMES: Yes.

JEAN AMES: Well, that's where ours is and I believe it's on the third floor. It's not always open but you can always find somebody certainly to let you in.

BETTY HOAG: I didn't know what room to ask ...

JEAN AMES: Yes. Well if you had asked for the County Supervisor's chamber I'm sure you wouldn't find it.

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible.

JEAN AMES: We had erected scaffolding and that did that, painted right on the walls, of course.

BETTY HOAG: Alois Bowen? Inaudible.

JEAN AMES: Was as assistant.

BETTY HOAG: Do you remember any of the other people who were on ?

JEAN AMES: Arthur do you remember the names of any other people?

ARTHUR AMES: Shackler, was that her name?

JEAN AMES: Oh yes, Mrs. Shackler.

BETTY HOAG: Well, let's see, do you remember any of the other ones who were ...?

JEAN AMES: No, I can't tell you the names of the other people. Al Bonner was our chief assistant and he worked all the way through on it. Some of the others worked part of the time. Mrs. Shackler also worked all the way through. It took quite a bit of training to get a person to paint with the same kind of stroke that we use so that we would have a uniform quality, and not many of us could sit on that scaffolding at one time because it was only about nine feet wide, as you know; and so we couldn't have too many assistants working at one time. And they worked different hours, I suppose; I've forgotten. Arthur and I worked all the time on it.

BETTY HOAG: Well they probably hadn't had any training or experience in mural work. I should think that would be one of the different things on the project.

ARTHUR AMES: It was, and it was unusual to do an egg tempera painting that large.

BETTY HOAG: And where had you both learned to use egg tempera?

JEAN AMES: Well, Arthur had had experience in it, we both...

ARTHUR AMES: Actually, we read about it. I became very much interested in different techniques and I suppose it was really Ray Boynton because he painted in egg tempera, but I don't know if I first saw him do an egg tempera painting, or, or I don't know that he did one while I was a student of his; but afterwards, after I left he did egg tempera painting, I became very much interested in the technique, did a great amount of research, even got books from England because there's a Tempera Society in England and I guess...

JEAN AMES: Max Doerner's book

ARTHUR AMES: Yes, Max Doerner's book.

JEAN AMES: D- O- E- R- N- E- R.

ARTHUR AMES: That's right.

JEAN AMES: He bought out a book on the painter's techniques at that time, and he described it. I think the papers from England helped us more than any other. And we used a type of egg tempera with, I believe, varnish in it, didn't we?

ARTHUR AMES; Yes, that's right.

JEAN AMES: Which was a little harder.

BETTY HOAG: Did it give more of a glaze, or make it firmer?

JEAN AMES: It has sort of a silky look, it's very nice, and it becomes very hard in time. We had done some previous work before in panels for our own satisfaction sometimes before we did the mural. Making the canvas was quite a problem because it had to be a chalk ground, one can't work on an oil ground, one has to use a lean material.

BETTY HOAG: You prepared it yourself?

ARTHUR AMES: Yes. Yes.

JEAN AMES: We prepared...

ARTHUR AMES: For gesso,

BETTY HOAG: Gesso is a ...

ARTHUR AMES: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible.

JEAN AMES: They do. Gesso simply means whitening in glue. It's the traditional material for undercoating.

ARTHUR AMES: Inaudible.

BETTY HOAG: ... Do you remember anything about the dedication ... or things that happened ... while you were working on them that would be of interest.

JEAN AMES: What interest do you mean? Technical interest?

BETTY HOAG: Of any interest.

JEAN AMES: Well, I thought one of the most unusual things that happened was the preparation of the canvas itself because we didn't know how to tackle such a big thing, and it shrinks very much as it dries, so we put this - we got a special kind of duck and did a very careful job of coating it and we had to tack it down on a big floor, we worked in a pavilion, an old warehouse pavilion, had lots of room, and we tacked it down on the edge and then as it shrunk we had to go around about every twenty minutes and change the tacks, it would shrink down, down, down, down, and it was quite a job. And then when we got all through and we were about to put it up. And Mr. Wright got the idea that we should put it up with a lead ground; he knew that way the way they always put up the oil canvases, so he insisted on having an expert come down to do this for us. And so he came down and put the oil on and we went over to see it after he had put it up, and the oil came right through. So it all had to be taken off and destroyed. And we started all over again. And the next time we used a finer material; we used heavy muslin, didn't we? I remember that, and then we put it up ourselves with....

ARTHUR AMES: Damar varnish and white lead, and no oil.

BETTY HOAG: And that worked?

JEAN AMES: That worked perfectly.

BETTY HOAG: How long did it go on shrinking? A matter of days, or...?

JEAN AMES: Oh, it shrinks as you put the gesso on. No, it's a matter of hours, I would say.

ARTHUR AMES: Till it's dry.

JEAN AMES: But putting it up on the wall also was a problem because it weighed a great deal and we had to start at the top and work down.

BETTY HOAG: And you had your artists.

JEAN AMES: Yes.

ARTHUR AMES: It was quite a technical feat.

JEAN AMES: And we did it ourselves without any expert help the second time. That was the only thing of any great consequences that I think that happened.

BETTY HOAG: Did you do any tapestry designs on the project?

JEAN AMES: No, No, tapestry has been a recent activity of ours in the last five years. We did designs for a painted mural of the history of aviation.

BETTY HOAG: That I don't know about.

JEAN AMES: No, in Long Beach, the Jon Lindbergh Junior High School. It's in the library. It's quite a large mural and I believe Helen Lundeborg worked on that, didn't she, Arthur? - the painting of it? I know Dorr Bothwell did. But we made the sketches; they enlarged them and did the work. And we did this...

ARTHUR AMES: On weekends.

JEAN AMES: In our spare time.

ARTHUR AMES: We were very busy. I never worked so hard in my life.

BETTY HOAG: Really?

JEAN AMES: Nights are the very time we worked on this.

BETTY HOAG: Getting back to the Los Angeles Museum catalogue, which I seem to keep doing, - this is 1939 - there was something shown that I have under tapestry design "The Founders of American Democracy and Betsy Ross". Do you remember what that was?

JEAN AMES: Never heard of it.

ARTHUR AMES: Now wait a minute, Jean.

BETTY HOAG: This is design for a tapestry. Maybe it wasn't...

JEAN AMES: OH! Yes! Oh yes, I know what it is. There were a group of people in San Diego who were rather skillful weavers and Mr. Field felt that they should be put to work on tapestries of significance, and asked us to design some tapestries, and I did do one of Betsy Ross. But why it wasn't used I don't know. They didn't use it, and I'm not sure that they did any tapestries.

BETTY HOAG: Well, yes, they did.

JEAN AMES: Did they?

BETTY HOAG: And I went to see that woman down there, I had difficulty getting her when I was there last year she's on my list and I think it would be very fascinating to find out what...

JEAN AMES: It's possible they never even caught up with the designs they had to do I have no idea. I have not thought of that from that day to this.

BETTY HOAG: Maybe I'll find out something more and I'll tell you ... I thought it was interesting... it's just fairly recently that we've had the Aubusson tapestries in France to open up again interest in America.

JEAN AMES: No, they have never closed down in Aubusson.

BETTY HOAG: Oh.

JEAN AMES: No. The thing that happened in France was that Lucrat was asked to go down there by the Minister of Culture of France just before the war broke out to see if he could bring the tapestry industry up to date and do modern designs because they'd been doing upholstery and slippers and covers and whatnot, rugs, but the great weaving technique is being wasted, so he stayed there during the war, learned a great deal about it and was able to adapt the tapestry technique to the modern design, and interested Picasso and Dufy and many of the artists who began making designs for tapestry at that time. And then they had a big show after the war. First at the Louvre, then came the Metropolitan Museum. And then just recently, I would say in the last ten years a few Americans have been interested in making designs and have sent them to Aubusson, just as the Coventry

one was done about that time, was the beginning of other countries interest in designing and taking it to Aubusson and having it done. But their looms are very – large enough and they have the technicians.

BETTY HOAG: They must be tremendous... In that new, very modern museum in Le Harve...

JEAN AMES: We didn't see that.

BETTY HOAG: In that museum the man who is the director of the museum ... it's a full three stories ... it goes down to the basement... weaving ... all in grays, black and white ... (inaudible) And then Buffy McGarren did one, was asked to do one.

JEAN AMES: Well, in America there probably have from time to time been artists in their studios doing small ones but they don't have the equipment for large tapestries and I suppose it's just been a sporadic thing that has happened in our scenen but not in a big one like you see in France.

BETTY HOAG: Well, I should know this because you... I didn't see it but ...

JEAN AMES: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: Where do you have them done? Or do you...?

JEAN AMES: Aubusson.

BETTY HOAG: Do you send your...?

JEAN AMES: Yes. Millard Sheets had some done first, that's how we became acquainted with this particular steelier in Aubusson, and correspond with them, and having seen the way Millard had designed them and made the large drawings and they did such beautiful work that I made some first for my designs, and then Arthur and I designed the big ones for the Claremont Theater, they're twenty-two feet high, and one of them is twelve feet wide; two of them are seven feet wide. We went over last summer and inspected them in process. We also made one for – a design, which was done at the same time – for the California Federal Building and Loan, a new building on Wilshire Boulevard...

BETTY HOAG: ...

JEAN AMES: Yes, in the same building; it's in the lobby.

BETTY HOAG: I've never gotten down to see that... inquire... sculpture... Federal art period.

JEAN AMES: Yes, I imagine it could have been carried further but why it wasn't I have no idea.

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible.

JEAN AMES: Yes, probably.

BETTY HOAG: I remember her name day... everyone... local weaver.

JEAN AMES: On a small loom your activities are pretty limited.

BETTY HOAG: I do have the name of the lithographs ... I think you did it at this time for the project. I'll read it into the record. It's ... deer. Do you remember either of you... Sometime I really think the government should start tracking down all these pieces that were...

JEAN AMES: We just made a few so I don't really remember...

BETTY HOAG: Of course, you didn't do any enamels.

JEAN AMES: No. Enameling was almost unknown in this country at that time. It really developed during the war years. Karl Drerup who came from Germany – wasn't it? However he developed enameling in this country not from work that he had – or experience that he had had in Europe at all but because of the necessity, being an actual craftsman I think that he simply – this is what I have heard – people who have interviewed him, I believe Oppi Unanct, for instance, did have an interview with him; and he did develop this single handedly and he did some rather interesting innovations in the technique because of this. And also Kenneth Vhay and Edward Winters had studied abroad those two men did initial work in the field in this country and both of them wrote books on the subject, but when we went into it no book had been written; there was one quaint one from England but it was nothing that we could use it for very well because it didn't seem to fit the modern process. But there was a company, which had made enamels and had done enameling for watch faces and jewelry, and

knowing Mr. Thompson who had manufactured the enamel for those purposes helped us more than any other single factor.

BETTY HOAG: That wouldn't have been one of the things... various art centers Southern California didn't have any Art Centers... projects... stay-at-home craftsman really...

JEAN AMES: I think that being able to work in crafts as we did – the craft of mosaic certainly, led to other activities that were similar because Arthur and I became very interested in ceramics after that. We did a rather huge mural in ceramic tile... one in the Guaranty Building in the lounge in Fresno. It was one about eighty feet long, about thirteen feet high, I believe. And we did several mosaics in different places, one of them is in the Pomono Loa, it's a fairly recent one.

BETTY HOAG: Do you know...?

JEAN AMES: No.

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible.

JEAN AMES: The Pomona Loa?

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible.

JEAN AMES: No. Pomono Loa, Millard Sheets was in charge of designing it.

BETTY HOAG: ... One of the things I wanted to ask you about why... American art...

JEAN AMES: That was done in the Home Loan and Saving... not on Sunset, on Wilshire. And Arthur did an enamel in the same building, enamel tile. But we've had a long history since the Federal art project days working in different mediums for mural decoration. But interest in it was started in that time.

BETTY HOAG: That leads to the last question I usually ask is ... benefit...

JEAN AMES: What do you think, Arthur?

ARTHUR AMES: Well, I think it made it possible, certainly for me, to do work in an area that might not have been possible otherwise. It made it possible for me to develop as an artist at that time, which was certainly very critical. During the depression certainly it was very difficult to be an artist.

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible.

ARTHUR AMES: Right. It's so different than it is now. There's such a great demand, a very broad demand for artwork, all forms of it.

BETTY HOAG: Do you feel that there was much influence on painters... at that time... people who work in different ways...?

ARTHUR AMES: It might have been, but I think that was only temporary.

BETTY HOAG: I have experienced ... artist... mural painting... WPA... So far as I know nothing was done... after the project...

ARTHUR AMES: It's hard to say, I think.

BETTY HOAG: With people seeing them or with artists... working large...

ARTHUR AMES: I really think it was something else that caused that. That interest in working on a large scale... I think it really mainly what was done in New York. Abstract Expressionism caused the interest in working on a larger scale.

BETTY HOAG: ... two ways?

ARTHUR AMES: No, I think they discovered something that made it possible for other people to work on a larger scale, it opened the door for other artists. I don't think it was a ... thing, I think it was...

BETTY HOAG: Inaudible.

ARTHUR AMES: Yes, but it's surprising how many large paintings are used in public buildings today.

BETTY HOAG: Mrs. Ames, what do you feel about...?

JEAN AMES: Well, it started great activity in America. I think possibly for the first time they ever became aware of the many, many artists that could develop, could take hold of a whole cultural expression. Suddenly the artist was in focus and he hadn't been before, and he always arrived at tremendous adversity towards professional art. Well this made him feel that he had a place in our culture and there was a need for him. And the very fact that public buildings for the first time were extensively decorated I think gave everyone a feel that the artist was a part of society; that he wasn't somebody away off here, a kind of a peculiar sprout that didn't belong, that a rich man now and then would give a commission to, but a person who could very well be heard and should be at the scene, I mean.

BETTY HOAG: Be proud of being an artist.

JEAN AMES: Yes. And I do think that although modern architecture has taken a turn since the time of the Federal art project that perhaps denied the use of decoration I think we have seen it's increasing in our present day turning again toward rather interesting decoration. It never has died out. I think there's always been since the project an interest, a rather lively interest in art of all kinds, that of decorating our buildings and that of using them on the walls more freely and encouraging the young artist, you know, to live and work in his field and not be a strange offshoot of society. I think it's been a very significant thing. The thing that people decried was the overemphasis of subject material, and there was I think a definite reaction against that. The Expressionist movement, I think, is one pretty strong example, but that is actual...

BETTY HOAG: Well, there was another subject matter which I think must have been very wonderful, it was at this time really that native subject matter... to what was happening in our country. I think your work... is a wonderful example... your fisher man and woman, they aren't European fisher man and women, they are people who are right in San Diego in that area. That must have been really surprising...?

ARTHUR AMES: It also gave us an opportunity to explore certain techniques that we might not have otherwise, such as fresco, mosaic, tempera painting. And, you know, I'm head of the Design Department accent that aspects of painting and designing, that is, it is for public buildings. So that experience was very valuable to me.

BETTY HOAG: We really didn't finish with your life before we got onto the project. I'm sorry - I just realized we cut it off because I didn't know that you were...

JEAN AMES: He's been there for ten years, eleven now.

BETTY HOAG: The think I want to ask you when you were talking about the technique in the material, did you ever have any dictation on what you could use?

ARTHUR AMES: No.

BETTY HOAG: And did they provide, the government provide those things, or did you go buy what you wanted, or did you...?

ARTHUR AMES: Yes, we were able to purchase whatever we needed.

BETTY HOAG: And what about subject matter?

ARTHUR AMES: It was pretty free.

BETTY HOAG: I think that is a wonderful thing. Other artists have told me this too. And I think it's really surprising that it was.

ARTHUR AMES: I think in every case we chose the subject for our work. Maybe the work we did in Long Beach, the Lindbergh School was dictated by the theme - aviation, and that was natural, I guess.

BEETY HOAG: Excuse me, I'll change the tape.

END OF TAPE
TAPE 2 - JUNE 1ST 1965

JEAN AMES: I really don't believe I understand you.

BETTY HOAG: (Miss Hoag you are not at all audible on this tape, perhaps you will be kind enough to fill in your sections yourself)

JEAN AMES: Oh that, no we were at liberty to use subjects that we thought would be appropriate and naturally

they had to be appropriate for the clients or they wouldn't have been accepted by the people for whom they were being made. The Lindbergh High School, Junior High school of course was an obvious subject you had to do something with his activities and we chose the history of aviation.

BETTY HOAG:

JEAN AMES: Yes, it was, it was very curious how much like our sketches the final result was, it didn't seem to depart one bit. Now if we had carried it through ourselves, we'd generally improve on our first sketch and change it quite a bit, a little over simplified because our sketches were say, 8 inches high and they had to be enlarged to something like 7 or 8 feet high and I think in redrawing it one could have made had they more liberty to put more drawing into it than they finally showed but he seemed to be reluctant to change it and although they did make good designs, I had a little feeling there they were oversimplified.

BETTY HOAG:

JEAN AMES: It certainly had good designers working on it because...

BETTY HOAG:

JEAN AMES: Not at that time, she had a former wife.

BETTY HOAG:

ARTHUR AMES: I think she lives at that wonderful little city on the seacoast. She teaches at the California School of Fine Arts or the San Francisco Art Institute now doesn't she.

JEAN AMES: I think so.

BETTY HOAG: ...Anything our government could learn in case they try such a thing again?

JEAN AMES: There was no doubt that it effected our whole generation; it gave us an opportunity to be artists, just as it did for the musicians. Lee Patterson who was head of the music in New York City felt the same way about he music project. And in talking to him he said the musicians who became the leading modern composers of the modern movement of music in America, were really brought up on the Federal art program and wouldn't have been musicians, they couldn't have afforded to and those formative years it was very critical and beneficial thing that happened to them and I certainly feel that way about it.

BETTY HOAG:

JEAN AMES: It might not have made any difference to the flow and general development of art in the country, but one can't say. And change we know we change the lives of the people in our generation considerably and possibly it is an endless change.

BETTY HOAG:

ARTHUR AMES: Oh I see, I think that's an interesting point, a very interesting point. I feel and I think Jane would share this, that we learned so very much, Mr. Wright and especially Lorser Feitelson, I think I learned more from Lorser than any teacher I might have had, and he's been a wonderful friend since that time but he certainly is a profound student let's say of Renaissance painting and he taught us so very much.

BETTY HOAG;

ARTHUR AMES: Well it certainly was. When he came to visit us we not only talked about our own work, but art in general. This was a great experience.

JEAN AMES: I think he's influenced artists all over the country, Phil Guston studied with him too and he felt that he gave him his first encouragement and Lorser has always spoken about him and how much he felt the poet artist in this young man. I knew he had an influence on him and Rubi Kadish too. Both of them are interesting New York school artists now but they were young California because we all started out. This is one of the most intangible ways of measuring influence and it is an endless chain, one generation does effects the next one because they usually teach the next one in some way. In the main I think for instance, we talked about before - I talked about for, was the program subject matter against which many artists rebelled. I know that Phil Guston talked about too, that subject matter came so dominant the problem of the language of art and the emotional expression which occupied him in recent years, were not as prominent as he felt they might have been, the possible subject matter had tended to drown the abstract language and that probably was the one thing you might say that subject matter had to be right and appealing, sometimes we feel that the work didn't always last. It depended on who did them of course, but some of them possibly they're quite inferior in design while the

subject matter's very good.

BETTY HOAG:

JEAN AMES: It's a discipline of a kind even though we had a reaction against; possibly we would have not had the reaction had we not had the other either.

BETTY HOAG: We're talking about the Newport Harbor murals...
(Muffled mumbling of three people looking at pictures)

ARTHUR AMES: Did you want to say anything about our experience of working in the supervisory chamber?

JEAN AMES: Oh yes, the supervisors had their meeting, this is crazy because it took (inaudible) quite a large area to be covered so we had a scaffold up at each of the three openings and during that time the supervisors held their meetings so we learned so much about... and every now and then they would turn around and make a crack about the work and in the conservation mural there was a bullfrog, he's not in that first sketch but was in the final one and they called him the political bullfrog. But we learned a great deal about how much and how little the supervisors work knew about certain functions of accounting and how... So we learned more about government than had we taken a course in it.

BETTY HOAG: It would be interesting to know how much they learned about mural painting.

ARTHUR AMES: And I wonder why they changed it, now that I look back on it.

BETTY HOAG:

JEAN AMES: Yes, now that's the bar, we didn't really change it, that's the way it was, but...

BETTY HOAG:

JEAN AMES: Yes, but we felt after we were down in San Diego, we had made these sketches in Santa Anna, what we knew about San Diego and when we went down there we felt other material probably was more important... in San Diego of what we had done, those hills in the sketch were made from real hills in the Aroya which was close to ... And we felt the larger farms at that time were more important than the ... orchard that we used in this first sketch which probably was more typical of Orange County than it was in San Diego.

BETTY HOAG:

JEAN AMES: One usually goes through several phases... for such a project.

ARTHUR AMES: Isn't it true though that Wright did influence the final works in that he wanted a more rhythmic, static and the pattern was more...

JEAN AMES: We did that because he was interested in possibly the patterns... he had that concept, ... we did try to work for him. I think we changed the last and possibly the least.

BETTY HOAG:

ARTHUR AMES: Yes, there is a strong, big ... across. And also they're a little more naturalistic.

JEAN AMES: We used live models for all of those...

BETTY HOAG: Were they people on the project? Do you remember any of them?

JEAN AMES: I remember them because this man helped us on the project and I can't remember his name.

BETTY HOAG:

ARTHUR AMES: It does, it does.

JEAN AMES: They were college girls, girls from the college, where the young people - they weren't...

ARTHUR AMES: Well wasn't this someone on the project?

JEAN AMES: Yes he helped us paint and I can't remember his name. Yes, he was very handsome, he didn't help us all the way through on the painting but during the latter half of it.

BETTY HOAG:

JEAN AMES: This was a drawing of that girl; we made large drawings in charcoal before we painted them.

BETTY HOAG:

JEAN AMES: No, Mr. Wright and Mr. Danish.

ARTHUR AMES: And the supervisors.

JEAN AMES: I think Mr. Cahill came out.

BETTY HOAG:

JEAN AMES: Yes it was. I'll show you.

BETTY HOAG; End of interview. Elsen is the dog that is stepping on the drawings and photographs, which the Ames have loaned to us to be microfilmed.

END OF INTERVIEW

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