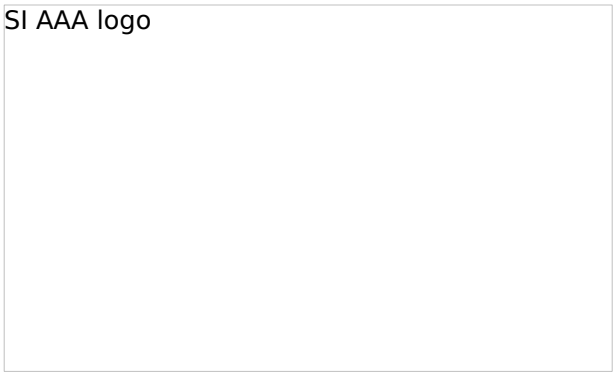

Oral history interview with Lucienne Bloch, 1964 August 11

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Transcript

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Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Lucienne Bloch on August 11, 1964. The interview took place in Mill Valley, California, and was conducted by Mary Fuller McChesney and Robert McChesney for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's New Deal and the Arts project.

The original transcript was edited. In 2021 the Archives created a more verbatim transcript. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: This is Mary Fuller McChesney interviewing Lucienne Bloch, spelled L-U-C-I-E-N-N-E, B-L-O-C-H, who lives at 171 Marguerite Avenue, Mill Valley, California. Present also this afternoon is Robert McChesney. And the date is August 11, 1964. First, I'd like to ask you, Lucienne, where were you born?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: I was born in Geneva, Switzerland. And I was in Switzerland until I was eight.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: What year were you born?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: 1909. Then, it was during the First World War, my father took the whole family across the ocean in one of those armed passenger ships. And we went through the submarine belt to the United States.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And I was in New York then until my 12th year, then we went to Cleveland, Ohio because my father was a director of the Cleveland Institute of Music. We were there four years. And the last year I was there, I skipped high school. My father was very funny that way. He said, I don't see that you're learning anything in high school. Your sister and your brother have not done—they don't seem to have been able to get any good education in high school. You might just as well stay home if you want to and read. So, I decided to do that. But instead, I went to the Cleveland School of Art, which was supposed to be very, very good at that time, and apparently it's very good now. So, I stayed a year. And then I went to Paris with my mother and sister and stayed there for four years. I studied with Antoine Bourdelle, the sculptor.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: How do you spell that?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: B-O-U-R-D-E-L-L-E.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Thank you.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And also, with Andre Lhote, L-H-O-T-E.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Who's a painter?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Who's a painter.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: But I would have liked very much at that time to be apprenticed. I did not feel satisfied with the education I was getting. And I did better work when I was working alone then in the class. But of course, I was so young, I didn't know what I wanted. I noticed that each teacher had his own little pet theory.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yeah.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And just repeated himself, repeated his theory. And then there was not very much else afterwards. So, I figured the best thing was to learn technique, whatever that was.

[Laughs.] In sculpture, it's quite a lot; learning how to carve out a stone, out of wood, and also learning how to make armatures and how to cast in plaster. And that was—there was no place there that—Antoine Bourdelle came once a month to the class and spoke philosophy and recited *Mallarmè* [ph]. Luckily, I knew French so at least I got that part of it, but there were almost only American students in that class and they couldn't—

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: They didn't know what he was talking about.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: They couldn't understand. So, I went to the Beaux-Arts in Paris for the—for three of the four years that I was in Europe—in Paris, I went to the Beaux-Arts. And there, I really learned technique, but I rebelled against them because at that time the Beaux-Arts was pure academic. I studied anatomy and that I was very glad to have, but I found that they didn't dare consider anything more marvelous than the Roman-Greek or Roman sculpture. This was the apex of art.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And it was very bad because it seemed to me at that time, of course, Picasso and these others—Modigliani, were putting out their sculptures of the primitive method, primitive style. And I kept needling the teacher about those arts and archaic Greek. I said, What about archaic Greek? What about Gothic sculpture? And he was unable to answer. He said, there was nothing greater than the antique. This is what they call it, the antique

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Classical arts.

[00:05:17]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. And so, I decided once to carve out of stone. And when I went to the studio where they did the carving, everybody there was horrified because I wanted to cut directly into stone. And they said, But that is never done. You always first make a plastic cast, which you made out of clay.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And then you'll copy and you learn what they call a pratique [ph], which is the—with special devices that look like metal machines. It's all done mechanically.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Or you can copy it directly from the plaster itself?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Directly.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yeah.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And that's what they taught there, they didn't teach direct stone cutting. So, I went ahead, I didn't have to do what they wanted me to do. I was a guest, and I could do what I wanted. I didn't get any prizes in any exams. But they had—they were very nice to foreigners. I never paid a cent at Beaux-Arts.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: You didn't? You were going for free?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Never. Just whatever it was, one franc a week for the model. That's all. It's just free. You were invited as a foreigner. But you could not, of course, win any of the—what they call the books [ph] or the scholarships.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: You applied for entrance to Beaux-Arts?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: And it turned out more or less a fellowship thing.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes, that's what it was.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: I don't know how it is now. But in those days, it was very nice. [Laughs.]

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: It was quite easy to enter, to get a fellowship?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: It seemed very easy to me.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yeah.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: I don't remember having any difficulties.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Because you, of course, you took examinations that sort of thing?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: No?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh, that's fabulous.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Maybe I just stayed there and then if they didn't like what I did, then they would have told me not to go, but they seem to agree with what I did.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Were you studying general art course or were you just confined to sculpture?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Over there, the educational system is very different from what I had had in Cleveland. In Cleveland, it was all put to me on a silver platter. On Mondays design, on Tuesdays perspective in the morning, drawing in the afternoon, on Wednesday, watercolor and so on. Every day was something and there was someone who marked you when you came in so far. You got marks and everything.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yeah.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Not in France. You work there, you came or you didn't come, nobody was there to look after you. You were on your own. And you had to have your own motivation. If you didn't come, it was your own bad luck. Nobody else was looking after you. And it was up to you to find out what you wanted to study, what you wanted to do. They had no history. At least, I took no history of art courses, because I could read them. They didn't tell you to have to go to museum. They didn't tell you, you have to draw, but almost everybody there took drawing in the afternoon. So, I took stone sculpture instead. And I did do some drawing until I found out all they did was draw from plaster casts. And of course, I didn't want to do that.

Then I did pass—I went through all the exams that they did, just for the fun. And that was an experience all by itself. That was—you were enclosed in a little sort of room that had an open top, for up to 12 hours. And you were given—when you were closed in, everybody was closed in 30 or 40 or 50, I forget how many, 50 students. They were locked in and they had their sandwiches and then they were given the subject. And you had to know your mythology, because it might have been—I mean, a simple one would have been Penelope weaving with all her—what are those fellows who go running around and waiting for her to marry one of them.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Suitors, I guess.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Suitors. All her suitors waiting around. And there was another one, it was a very complicated one about some Greek mythology creature, you know, who got a baby up from the top of a tree. I don't know. [They laugh.] And if you didn't know what was going on, you were just—[inaudible] already there, you'd failed. And then the comments of the students during the time they were in there, the singing they did, the swearing they did, oh, this—I don't know. I wouldn't have missed it.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: But this was all written? All written examinations?

[00:10:23]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No, then you had clay, you see. For instance, it was always a bas-relief, and you have to make a bas-relief, which is really a high relief of a mythological subject. And so, they said, such and such a fancy Greek name rescuing such another fancy Greek name from a branch of tree, with the Gods—certain Gods, Furies, or something, looking on. And if you didn't know that form [ph] was a baby, you might have thought it was a girl maybe, then you would have

shown a beautiful buxom girl in the trees. [They laugh.]

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: [Inaudible.]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And you might have had—yes. You might have found yourself having a beautiful sculpture, but the fact that mythologically it was wrong would put you in a very bad spot.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: You did the sculptures right in these little booths then?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And you did the sculpture in these little booths with clay. Everybody had to do a certain size. And all those artists [they laugh], geez!

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: So, then you graduated from the Beaux-Arts and came back to the United States?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: I didn't graduate. Nobody graduated there.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, you didn't graduate there.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: What happened is if they did very good work—those who did very good work were given a very substantial sum to continue their art studies. And the men were always furious when the women won any prizes because they said, The women aren't going to do anything with it. They're going to marry and have babies and they are going to drop the art. [Laughs.]

So, then I went for a year to Germany, and then I went back to the United States. And I was—that's it. I must have been 20 when I came back. And it was right in the heart of the Depression. And I had met, in Europe, a very charming woman by the name of Mrs. Sigmund Stern who came from San Francisco and who wanted me to go with her through parts of Europe as a companion. And I did. And when I came back to New York, she said, You must meet Diego Rivera. He's coming in tomorrow to do some work for the Museum of Modern Art. And she had known him when he painted murals in San Francisco. And so, the day he came, which was in 1931, November, I think, I was invited to this big banquet. And—oh, I do have to say first, talking chronologically, that the very first day that I arrived to the—oh, I forgot to say that, for one year I was in Holland doing sculpture in glass for the Leerdam—Royal Leerdam glassworks. This was my first job.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Was this—it would be very interesting to hear some techniques of that.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. I—still, it's quite extraordinary. I worked there. It was quite a marvelous experience for me because I was working right there in the factory. And at the beginning, I thought I knew everything there was to know, you know. A person whose 18 thinks they know everything. [They laugh.] And I wanted to do a design in glass which would be a beautiful fish with a beautiful curve on his tail. And they were very patient with me. They tried really to do what I wanted them to do, and it wouldn't work. And I had to speak in German to the engineer in charge because he couldn't speak anything but German or Dutch, and I couldn't speak Dutch as well as German. And so, we did have a language difficulty there, so I never really understood what his argument was, until finally, he convinced me by proving it to—by showing me something like 20 glassfish when finally they had made the mold for, I don't know how many thousands of dollars. And every one of them had a crack where the body and the tail met.

[00:15:06]

And then I understood that when you make one part of the statue too thick and one part too thin in glass, even when you use the best kind of glass, the hot parts—these hot—when the cool part has cooled and then the change of temperature cracks the middle of the glass. It is—it taught me a tremendous amount that you cannot—an artist is not absolutely free when he's working in any sort of medium. That the limitations of the material are something that he has to honor and respect.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Did they try blowing into the areas, the large areas so that it would remain [inaudible]?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Well, that's what I had thought they would do.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: But they wanted something heavy. They weren't happy about blown glass. We did—I made a design of a head, a blown head. In fact, that was the very first design that I made there and they had it—it was actually put on the market. The trouble is that it looked too much like one of those figures' heads that you see, that advertise jewelry.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: [Laughs.] You mean a mannequin? [Inaudible.]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes, it had a mannequin look to it. It was very simple. It hardly had any details. It's just a very simple head. I have one down the basement. But it had a mannequin look about it. It was a little too precious, I think. So, outside of using it, I think, in that kind of way, they didn't continue doing it but—yes?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Excuse me. How do you—in working in glass, how do you build up the forms, or do you carve?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Well, I worked in clay. It was cast plaster, and then it was made in an iron mold.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I see, its cast.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: It was cast.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Actually, you don't work directly at all?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No, I would have liked to do that very much. That's the real true feeling for glass. Later on, some of the designs I made were copied by other factories, and then they used the method, which I would have liked to use, by dropping huge globs of very good crystal glass in such a way that they would get their shapes, and they were able to make some very clever shapes which I had designed. And then they use—they pinch, they pinch the details with the hot iron tongs.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I see.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: But I've got some over there, I don't know if you can see. You see the duck?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh, yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: There's a glass duck. And then this pig. I also did, at that time— for the automobiles, you know, the [inaudible] of automobiles. [Laughs.] This was a regular factory—

[Cross talk.]

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Radiator caps?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Radiator caps.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Really?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And the Queen of Holland had one of them, she had the albatross or the angel, I forget which, with the light underneath. And everybody knew it was the Queen as soon as they saw that glass bird flying in the traffic, they knew who it was. I still get royalties from this company.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: No kidding.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Because I was all excited, and the director said, We'll give you a life contract. And I said, All right. And I signed a life contract. I couldn't design for any other factory, and I was told that you never sign a life contract. But in this case, it was a very pleasant thing because it started out in 1929 it was, that I worked, '29 to '30. They started out doing extremely modern things. I had seen things of Archipenko in the exhibits in Germany and I was influenced by those naturally. And all my work was based on extremely simple forms, and I liked Brâncuși. And they accepted all of those. So, the director of this factory said, By the way, before we give you a contract, we have to write to Frank Lloyd Wright, because he was here, and he said don't let any Americans work for you without my okay. And in—at that time, I didn't know who Frank Lloyd Wright was and he says, I'm sure you don't. Nobody in America knows who Frank Lloyd Wright is except for the scandals of his past. So, he told me that this was a man who influenced all of the international—the so-called international style of the Dutch. The Dutch thought of him as a god.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Really?

[00:20:02]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Oh, yes. All these—Von der Mies [Mies van der Rohe] and Berlage, and many of the Dutch architects at that time thought he was the greatest architect alive. So, they told me all about him. And then they wrote to him. And he wrote back, he wants to see photographs. And when he saw the photographs, he said, She may work for you. [They laugh.] So, then— or the day I arrived in America, my brother who lived in New York said, Oh, by the way, your boyfriend there, Frank Lloyd Wright, is lecturing in the New School for Social Research. So, I was just very much excited, and I went there to see, to hear him. And I remember getting up at the end when there were question period and that is the first time in my life I ever spoke up in public. But I felt as though I was very close to his way of thinking. [Robert McChesney laughs.] I said—and my question really was just a comment. It was a comment. I said, Don't you think that if the artists would work more with the architect and with the engineer that the kind of art that would come up would be far more beautiful than to think of the past? And he said that he agreed with me, that it was absolutely true and so on. So, then I went to see him afterwards and I introduced myself and he right away invited me to teach sculpture at Taliesin.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: No kidding.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, wonderful.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yeah. He said, We are starting a new school there and—an architectural school and we would like very much to teach sculpture there. So, I said, Oh, that would be marvelous. He said, We'll come around November—October, November we'll be starting. That was the next year. In the meantime, I met Rivera, and I wanted to be silly and coy. And I said to him, Oh, Mr. Rivera, I would love to grind your paints. Because I knew, of course, you don't grind paints anymore. This is of the past. I thought it would be a nice little thing to say. It would show him that I knew what fresco was. And he looked at me very seriously and he said, Alright, he said, Come tomorrow at eight o'clock in the morning at the Heckscher Building, room 666. I always remember that number. [Mary Fuller McChesney laughs.] Well, I was just flabbergasted. I didn't really believe it, so I came around 10 [a.m.] because first I went to Bloomingdale's to get smock. And as I walked in, I see the assistant of Rivera and says, You're late. They really wanted me. [Laughs.] Of course, I was very happy. And I thought, Well, I'm not a fresco painter and I am not interested in painting as such, but this is always something very important to learn. So, I began to grind paints for Rivera, for his show at the Museum of Modern Art.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: He was painting [ph] a show in New York?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: He—yes. And he had been invited to have a one-man show. This was the first one-man show that the Museum of Modern Art gave. And at that time, the Museum of Modern Art was in the Heckscher Building.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Where was that located?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: On Fifth Avenue near 59th Street, something like that.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Heckscher Building.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Heckscher.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, Heckscher.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: H-E-C-K-E-R.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: I said Hecker. It's H-E-C-K-S-C-H-E-R, something like that. You know, I've always known that so well, I never even thought of spelling it. [They laugh.]

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, I'm sure they have the spelling of it.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. So, that was the very first one-man show at the Museum of Modern Art.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: What year was that?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: 1931.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: '31?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: And Rivera had come up to New York and he was painting—

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes, it was his first trip to New York. And he did four—he did six huge—well, they're not huge now, we're thinking now. There were about five by six square feet, no, five by six feet painting on the metal—on metal lath. And they were done in the fresco technique. They were plastered. They were all prepared for him. And then he had to grind his colors and enlarge his sketches. What he did was take some sketches from paintings he had done in Mexico. One was the Cuban—no, not the Cuban, the cane—sugar cane harvesting [*Sugar Cane*]. And another one was the death of a peon [*Liberation of a Peon*]. And then he did three. And he had the one—a very beautiful one showing one of the leaders of the Russian—of the Mexican Revolution with a white horse.

[00:25:32]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: That's Zapata, isn't it?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Zapata. So, then he also made two more, one he called *Frozen Assets*, which showed—I have—I think it's in the book of Rivera.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yeah, [inaudible] panels [inaudible.]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: *Frozen Assets,* where you see the subways with people sleeping—unemployed, sleeping in them. Well, he really exaggerated because there were one or two people, you know, always sleeping in the subways, but he had made a real drama out of it. Actually, what he would have said now, because he had a mind that works in five dimensions, he would have said, This was a prophecy of what would have happened in England during the Second World War when people were sitting in the subways. [They laugh.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: With the air raids.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Well then, you see these enormous buildings and you see everything is dead and quiet, nothing is moving and these unemployed are sleeping. Then he made another one which showed workman drilling because, at that time, they were just beginning to drill and make—they were making those deep, deep holes for the RCA building of the Rockefeller Center. And he showed them that. He made a few sketches right there, not knowing that a few years later—actually, three years later, he would be painting frescoes in there which would have caused a big scandal—which would cause a big scandal.

Later on, he went to Detroit to do the murals at the art institute, and he invited me to come there and help him. So, I went, and I said, I'm going to stay just two weeks because I'm on my way to Frank Lloyd Wright's to work for him. And Rivera had nothing good to say about Frank Lloyd Wright. And one of the things he said, which proved him wrong, though he spoke so well, and I believed him, and I was quite impressed by it. He said, He—Frank Lloyd Wright believes in decentralizing, he said, but it's just the opposite. Things are going to become more and more centralized. And you have to have a centralization because man is a herd man. And he believes in this centralization. He lives in crowds. He lives—and we have to organize our life within the crowd and not to decentralize. This was wrong, and it was anti-Marxist all together. And I was impressed by that and I figured, Well, that's true. Man is a herd animal, and he does like to get together. But Frank Lloyd Wright has proven that he was right because the city, of course, is decaying in its insides. People want their shops outside. The problem of automobile, which Frank Lloyd Wright, the engineer, really understood, which was on the contrary, television, radio, everything was expanding. They had no television then but that is one of the forces was to—actually to become a little nucleus inside your home. Rather anti-social, you might say. [They laugh.] So, the problem is fascinating. Rivera thought, on the contrary, this building high skyscrapers was a solution. This was Marxism to a tee. So, I went for two weeks and I stayed five months.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: That was in Detroit?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. And during that time, his wife became very ill and was in the hospital

and I helped her. She wanted to have a baby and she couldn't have a baby and she had had terrible miscarriage.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Who was this?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Frida.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh, Frida.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Frida.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Frida Kahlo?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: She'd been in a very bad automobile accident, [inaudible].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes, when she was 16.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:29:59]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: She and I were very good friends. We had a marvelous time together. We—when she went out—or when she left the hospital, she and I did some lithographs together. We read it out of a book. And we did all kinds of crazy mistakes. There was a little studio of arts and crafts right below where the hotel opposite the Detroit art institute and so, we did all sorts of experiments. And she got back into painting. She hadn't painted for quite a long time and then she began to paint again. And well, after a little while, after five months, her—Frida's parents—her mother died, and she was very ill at that time. Diego didn't want her to go alone back to Mexico, so he invited me to go with her to Mexico. So, that's part of the five months that I was there. And when I came back, I helped Rivera a little more, and then I decided, It's time. I want to see Frank Lloyd Wright. And I went there, and it was November and everything was frozen. And I remember—

[Recorder stops, restarts.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: You went to Taliesin and it was so cold, that must have been in Wisconsin then?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes, it is—

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Not the one in Arizona?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes, that's right. They didn't have Arizona yet. This was just the first—the very beginning of the school, architectural school. And I took a bus and I got off at Spring Green and then I walked about a half a mile with my suitcase. And then I saw vaguely in the hills, almost a part of the architect—of a landscape, I could see the roof of the house. And then I climbed up and rang the bell and Frank Lloyd Wright opened the door himself and he had a big bandage over his nose. He said, I hope you don't mind. He said, I've just had a fight with a truck driver. [They laugh.]

That was Frank Lloyd Wright. He had an argument and he got punched. He probably punched him and the truck driver punched him back. So, he introduced me to his wife—his young wife and then he went by wherever he was going and she talked to me. And she began to ask me a few questions and I said, You know, I wanted to come and stay right away but this is only a visit. I will come later. But I do have some things I want to do in New York. I want to do some work in lithograph. So, she said that—gee, that bird. It's making too much noise. You know, I better take him out.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Want to?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yeah.

[Recorder stops, restarts.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Now that the bird's gone, you were saying that you were talking

with Frank Lloyd Wright's wife?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. I said, I can stay just a few days, but I have to go home to New York because of the lithographs that I want to do. And she became very hurt, and she said, You are just coming to look us over. You do not trust us. And I said, I do, I do but I just promised that I would come in November, but I really didn't realize that I had these other jobs that I wanted to do. So, she called a young boy there and she said, Don't take Ms. Bloch's suitcase into the students' headquarters. Take it in the tourist section. [They laugh.] Dig, dig. [They laugh.] And well, I felt all along there was a sort of—everybody had to be in adoration before the master. And I had just had a little too much of that. I didn't want any of that. I—

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I suppose you had a little of that with Diego too?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No, not so much. No, but I mean, he was an outstanding man. And he—I was probably quite influenced by what he said, and I had been under the influence of my own father. He was a composer, Ernest Bloch. And I felt suddenly, I'm just going from one big shot to another [they laugh] and it's about time I went on my own and try to develop my own thoughts. And also, the same young student who was 18, I wish I remember his name, James—I've never heard from him anymore. And I've often wondered what became of him—Burnham, Burnham, Burnham [ph]—who came from Chicago and was going to study with master.

[00:35:05]

And he didn't seem too impressed by the master. He said, Look, you know, we have no discipline here at all. We are supposed to do everything from an inner urge. We are told, Start school, and nothing else is taught to us. We make plans but instead of trying to work within a certain time limit, it's now too late to dig any foundations because the ground is frozen over. And so, now we have the whole winter, and we have to wait until soft spring. They also did their own cook—their own vegetables, they did everything themselves, because Frank Lloyd Wright believed that you have to understand the soil, you have to plant things, you have to know about life to be an artist.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: You mean each student did his own cooking?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: They cook together. And they worked it out among themselves, what they were to cook, what was going to be the budget for the day, and so forth. And they also planted. They worked almost more in the fields than they did in the blueprint—room where they made their plans. I think it's a wonderful idea.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I do too, yeah.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And I think it's great. It sounds idealistic and all that but somehow or other that architectural school was built up. It became something.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: It may have taken a year or two more than some efficient well-planned—autocratically planned thing. I don't know how much of it was truly from within the students and how much of it was Frank Lloyd Wright.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Basically, was Wright doing this practically by himself or did he have help? Were there other instructors?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Nope, no other instructors. That's why I didn't know exactly where I came in. I was to do sculpture, of course, I started right away. And that same day, I picked up a piece of stone and I made a stone carving which I left on the piano.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: You decide to stayed and you didn't go back to New York?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No, I did—just in two days, I carved out the stone. This was my way of telling them I really—I wanted to come back. I wasn't too sure what because this was the Depression and there were no jobs available. So, this was a wonderful situation. I still often wonder what I should have done. I don't know. If I had to do it over again, I don't know. I might have—I would like to be able to do it over again, then I would have stayed just to see. But fate would have it the other way [Robert McChesney laughs].

Another thing, when I was in Europe, I didn't know—my parents were all musically inclined. And so, they didn't know what to do about a young girl who was interested in art. And they went to

certain friends of theirs who were not also related to the art world and they were the ones who suggested Bourdelle and Andre Lhote. But once I discussed it with Rivera, What should I have done? Should I have gone to the Beaux-Arts? I studied a lot of technique and I studied a lot about anatomy and all this. Or should I have gone to the Bauhaus? And he said, You should have gone to the Bauhaus. So, as it is, I really had perhaps a more exciting experience than the Bauhaus when I went to Leerdam, because I worked right there with this factory that was doing work that was industrial art. And it really was the next best thing.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yeah.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: I don't regret that. That's one thing I don't regret. And I don't regret having worked with Rivera because, of course, then I learned fully the technique of painting frescoes. So—and Rivera was a marvelous teacher. He didn't teach, but he gave you tremendous jobs. And he absolutely followed his philosophy, which was that there was no superiority of a man over woman. Actually, he used to say women were superior to men. He said, If you just—if there weren't women in the world, he said, Men would just live in caves. They wouldn't be interested in wearing clean clothes and having a neat house. He said, They wouldn't care where they live. They would be doing beautiful artwork, but they would be in caves. [Robert McChesney laughs.]

[00:40:10]

So, we—I remember the very first day I went to work for him in Detroit, he had a sketch of a nude which was to represent the white race. And he had had four sketches, the white race, the Yellow race, the Black race, and the Indian race. And they were small, one inch to a foot, or one inch to three feet in size. Maybe it was one inch to four feet. And he said, Will you enlarge this, please? And that's all he said. So, here I was wondering how to do it. And then the assistant showed me. And he had a large sheet of paper, tremendous. And I did the drawing and enlarged it. And it gave me such confidence because I was given a big assignment, no questions asked.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And he was laughing [ph] always, everything. But he never wanted anybody to paint on the wall, that he did himself.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: He did all of that?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: All of that.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: He had no assistants that worked.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No. And I understand that now. The only time he had assistants who actually painted was when he was working at the Rockefeller Center. And among his assistants was Ben Shahn and Lou Block. And two or three others who did color grinding and stuff like that. And he had Lou Block and Ben Shahn actually paint on the wall because he had to do—at that time, he was painting the diseases of the capitalist world, you know, all the venereal diseases and so on, and they had books. And so, they were copying very faithfully all of the [inaudible] and whatever you call it.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh, yeah.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: So, he had them—with the books and they were painting. That is the only time I ever saw anyone paint, except when he used to ask me to do all the lettering at the New Workers School when he was painting there, I did all the lettering for him, but that was all.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: On the Detroit murals then you just did the designs? Enlarging, you didn't—

LUCIENNE BLOCH: I just did enlarging and I also did some color grinding. There's always a lot of color grinding to be done and all the tracing but what I did mainly, I cooked for him. [They laugh.] He was on a diet. He couldn't have any salt, and then his wife was sick so I stayed with them at their apartment in the hotel. And I didn't know very much about cooking. So, I remember one time I cook what my mother used to cook which was boiled beef with cabbage and then you serve it with horseradish sauce. So, I did that as much as I remembered and when we sat down to eat, Frida tasted it and she made a terrible face and she said, It's not fit for a dog. [They laugh.] She was always frank.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: With no salt?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Of course, no salt. [They laugh.] It's not fit for our dog, so.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Was there any trouble on the Detroit mural?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. Oh, yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Can you tell us something about that?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: It was at the time of the Lindbergh's kidnapping. You know, the baby was kidnapped?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: You remember? [Laughs.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Yes, I do.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And one of the little panels he made was the power of medicine of the modern world, because he had—his whole subject was Detroit. And Detroit is famous for cars and also pharmaceuticals and drugs, and of course, food, harvests, and things like that. So, he had one panel which was to deal with medicine, and he showed a baby which really was the Lindbergh baby because he was in the news. And also, I suppose Rivera could have said—there are million things that he symbolized all kinds of things, horrible things that could happen in the United States. Anyway, he showed the baby—very innocent baby, looks very much like Lindbergh with three doctors, a Catholic doctor, a Protestant doctor, and a Jewish doctor.

[00:45:03]

And one of the doctors, I think the Protestant doctor, was really Dr. Valentiner, a portrait—a very good portrait of Dr. Valentiner, the director of the museum—Detroit museum. And in front of the baby, there's a pretty nurse, and I mean, a very pretty nurse who is giving the baby a shot. Then below are the cows, the sheep, and horses from where they use the vaccines. And actually, immediately some of the Catholics of the town found it a travesty on the Holy Family, because here you have the three wise men and the baby with his blonde halo-like hair and the manger animals in front.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh, yes.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And of course, it was but it wasn't a travesty. It is a beautiful—to me, a beautiful Holy Family of today's life, of today's times, with all modern, scientific improvements.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: So, did he intentionally have this—did he have this in mind?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Oh, entirely, completely.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And he just laughed. He was just so delighted when they suddenly discovered that.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Particularly when they squawked, he [inaudible]—[They laugh.]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No, he was delighted with the idea. And already—he always—he had an extraordinary way of squeezing ideas out. This board—

[Recording stops, restarts.]

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh, he did. That's—

LUCIENNE BLOCH: On glass, you know—painted on glass then [inaudible].

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh, it's a monoprint?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. And he also made that little watercolor mix.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh, the view from your window here?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yeah, it balances [ph] at night.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: We were just telling you about the Holy Family mural in Detroit.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yeah.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: And you said there was some difficulty when the Catholics—

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: —recognized Diego's intentions. What happened then?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yeah. Well, Henry Ford was a very stubborn man. And in this case, his stubbornness was a benefit to the—

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: He's the one who would actually hire Rivera to come up.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: He had, through his son, Edsel, but he was the lord and master, and nobody was going to tell him how to run the show. And it made no difference how many parades there were of people who were furious—

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Protesting?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: —and protesting. He said, I am not going to take this out. It's staying as it is. And it stayed. And of course, now people love it. They don't—they never mentioned that anymore.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Where's this mural located?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: It's in the courtyard of the—court garden or the garden court of the Detroit art institute which is on Woodward Avenue.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Is that a private art institute?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: It belongs to the City of Detroit.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: But Henry Ford paid—

LUCIENNE BLOCH: He financed it.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: —he financed it, I see.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: It's a very beautiful place. Unfortunately, it was in a style that didn't fit a modern mural. And so, Rivera found some very clever ways of relating his subject to this Renaissance-style architecture. Everywhere—once in a while, he has a mural sketch, mural scene that is done like a sculpture, you know, fake sculpture only in monochrome to tie in a little bit. The way they used to do it in the old times. I remember when he did the one of the—he also showed the airplanes because at that time, Henry Ford had started the Trimotor Ford plane.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And so, he shows it in one of his murals and that's one of the most beautiful sections, I think. Below that, he shows little—his little, tiny panels that he had to fill, and he filled them with little symbols such as a bird flying and taking a seed from a sunflower and the sunflower is the same pattern as the sunflower motors.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: There's a relationship between the sunflower and the motor of the trimotor plane. And around that time, Raymond Hood came over to Detroit to talk over with Rivera the

possibility of his painting a mural for Rockefeller Center. And I was there when Raymond Hood came and discussed it.

[00:50:19]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Who was he, the architect?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: He was the architect for Rockefeller Center.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And he said, The Rockefeller are interested in having you paint a mural. And there's only one thing—I remember Rivera showing me the letter. It said, It has to be only in black and white and—because all the other artists, that would be two other artists, are doing this in black and white. On one side will be Sert—Josep Sert will paint one side and Brangwyn, the English painter, will paint the other side. And you will paint the middle part, which is exposed towards the fountain, the Rockefeller Center fountain.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: In other words, Rivera would have these other two painters on each side?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: On both sides, yes, but they wouldn't—he wouldn't see them because they run down the entire way of elevators.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh, I see.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: You can't—on the other hand, he has two sides to do. And [to be in (ph)] style, the whole thing—the columns were black, and the floor was gray and then the rest are some cream-colored, or I think I forget that columns were gray. They were cream colored, and the floor was black, and it was all in a very monochrome color. So, Rivera said he wanted to put a little color, they had to allow him a little bit of color. And so, they condescended to let him have a little bit of color in the center section. So, his subject was a very interesting one, a man at the crossroad of life, looking with hope but incertitude at the future. Right down his alley. [They laugh.]

And the Rockefellers knew that too. They liked his work very much. They were very friendly with him. Mrs. Rockefeller was very friendly. In fact, she had hoped that he would paint in her dining room of her house in New York a copy of the mural he had painted in Mexico which show all of the millionaires sitting around drinking champagne and looking at their, what're they called, long strings of stocks?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Ticker tape.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Ticker tape. She thought that would be—and that shows humor. [They laugh.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: It does.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: A terrific sense of humor. That would have been something to do that. But he—at that time, he was really hoping that the Communist Party would take him back in their bosom. He was—he had been kicked out, because he was Trotsky—how do you say—

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Trotskyite?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: He wasn't—yes, he was a Trotskyite.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, he was inclined—[Cross talk.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: He was sympathetic to Trotsky.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes, he was sympathetic. He hated Stalin. And later on, when he painted Stalin in the mural at the New Workers School, he painted him with bloodshot eyes and red nose, [laughs] looking like some horrible villain from the worst movie. So, he—I remember he said, Now, that's a very good subject, and we were talking about it. And I happen to mention a wonderful story that I had spoken with my father about, the possibility of doing a wonderful scenario that my father would make music for which would be called Prometheus. And I had some great ideas about that, and my father was very, very thrilled with the idea. He had been working—he had been given—my father had, a movie script by Romain Rolland and a German

movie director wanted him to do the music for this Romain Rolland script. And father read It, and it was called *Mélusine,* and it had nothing to do with today. It had something to do with the nymph of music and dance or some such thing. And it was bland, very bland and very, and—I think, whatever the name is.

[00:55:10]

So, then I remember, my father said, Oh, this is terrible. We can't do that in these days when things are boiling over. We should do something which deals with humanity today and so forth. And so, I thought Prometheus, and he liked it very much. And I was telling Rivera about our idea which was you would see, of course, a man getting fire and then making a mess of it and burning himself. And then you would see the horrors of what science has done. The burning of cities, the fights, the terrible bombs coming down from the sky. And then you would see the whole world in destruction. And this was 1932, no, 1929, that this was discussed. And then I'll see—and then you would have a view of all this destruction steaming. All the skyscrapers folded over and the bones of the ships and the bones of the skyscrapers, all of that just in rubbish. And you go far away from the world until you realized that the earth was only a tiny little dot in the universe. And then you'd start going down again and you'd go down and go down, and then the world would be, again, getting larger and larger. And by the time you went back to it, everything had cooled and was beginning to have life coming again. And you would come very close, and you'd see the microcosm, and everything is going on as if nothing had happened. [Robert & Mary McChesney laugh.] Everything is building up again. This would be the end. A very optimistic end. So, Father thought the music one could write for that would be something. So, I was telling this to Rivera and Rivera was nodding. [Mary Fuller McChesney laughs.] Sort of half concentrating. And two days later, he had a sketch, and he had put the ideas in. [Robert McChesney laughs.] I mean, you've got to take your hat off to the man. I mean, he solved everything he could.

So, he had man at the crossroad of life-controlling the machinery. On the left-hand side, which side—I don't know which side was—yeah, left-hand side, as seen by the worker, was the positive side and the negative side was on his right. And then you saw on the negative side fascism and war and destruction. And on the other side, all the hopes of man. And he had a microscope and a telescope, and the telescope represented the height of a building. And there was an ellipse running right through the whole mural, which was what you saw through the microcosm and through the macrocosm. In other words, what you saw through the telescope, what you saw through the microscope. Which was the—on one side is the worlds, the stars, and on the other side, all the little, tiny things that make up the atom. And on the side that was negative, he had all the diseases of man, in the microcosm. And he also had the dead planet, the moon, the sun in eclipse, and just plain black, darkness. And on the other side, he had all the nebulas and the stars, giving light, and so forth. And right in the heart of one of those stars, he had put something which nobody ever saw, even the sharp-eyed newspaperman, he had a hammer and sickle. [They laugh.] And the star was slightly on the reddish side. [They laugh.] And of course, we knew—or his assistants knew about it. We thought this one we won't tell anybody about. [Mary Fuller McChesney laughs.]

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: No one ever discovered it?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No one ever discovered it, and then they chopped it up. Of course, we have the photographs but—

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Was this the one that was done in New York?

[01:00:05]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: That's the one that was destroyed.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: At the Rockefeller Center?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yeah, I've jumped telling you about the subject matter for the one in Rockefeller Center.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: We're talking about that.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yeah.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: You went then from Detroit to Taliesin with Frank Lloyd Wright, then you went back to Rockefeller Center?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Then I went back to New York, yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: And then you worked for Diego again—

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. [Cross talk.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: —on the Rockefeller Center mural?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. That's right.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: I feel like we got order in now. [Lucienne Bloch laughs.] How long were you in Taliesin? Was that about a year or a period of time?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No, three days.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, you only stayed three days. Oh, I thought you had stayed longer.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: I stayed three days and I said, I've got to go back, and then I made lithographs. I went back to New York and I did what I said I will do. And you what's funny, the day that I left Detroit, that I said goodbye to Frida and to Diego, and I went to New York to work on the lithographs, on that day, unbeknown to myself or to him, my husband came from Flint, Michigan where he was an automobile worker to work for Rivera.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, he did?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And then Rivera didn't want him. He didn't want anybody. He said, I had—he had enough assistants. But he insisted on just—he said, I don't want any pay. I just want to watch. And Frida said, Let the pobrecito watch. [They laugh.] And he watched and pretty soon he got involved in doing work. And finally, he was asked to go with one of the assistants to New York to start setting up the Rockefeller Center basic work for the fresco. So, he and Neindorf, the other assistant, came over to visit me, to borrow some money from me because Rivera didn't pay enough. [They laugh.] And also, to make me an official photographer. That was the way they got around. They said, Would you like to be the official photographer for Rivera? And I said, Oh, of course, I would. So, I took all the photographs which later on were the only things that were ever—that ever existed from the Rockefeller Center mural, because it was forbidden to take photos in there except the ones I took. And it was through those photos that Rivera, later on, copied the mural and did it over again in Teatro Nacional in Mexico City.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: He didn't even get the cartoons? Didn't he take the cartoons?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No, he never had any cartoons.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh, he didn't?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Was it directly on the wall?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Directly on the wall.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh, I see.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: What he did—he had to make a few sketches. Now, here's the part that really was very bad. He made sketches which we have—I mean, we have photos of the sketches that he made that were okayed by Raymond Hood. And Raymond Hood okayed them without looking at them. And so, Rivera signed his contract and I'm looking at his contract. That's what happened, the way they arranged things. They trusted each other. So, Rivera, when he saw the wall, painted the way he always did, he changed a tremendous amount of things and he painted directly. He didn't paint directly, he first made his line drawings. First, he made them in charcoal. Then he—when he was pleased with the charcoal thing, then he took some red fresco paint, and sort of Indian red, and he outlined it the way he wanted to have it, which was also different from what he had in charcoal.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yeah.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Then as we painted—as he painted every day, one little area of about 25 square feet which he had to—

[END OF TRACK AAA_bloch64_824_m.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: This is side two of the taped interview with Lucienne Bloch. We were just talking about the Rockefeller Center mural and you were saying about how Diego did not make cartoons, but he made these drawings.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: One—

LUCIENNE BLOCH: He drew right on the wall.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And then he decided today's work will be so much, and then he would make a little direction of where we had to plaster, and that section was plastered. And, of course, as we plastered the section, we covered it entirely. So, before we covered it, we traced it, with tracing paper, a large sheet of tracing paper, and these tracings were perforated.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Then when the plastering was all finished, which took between six to eight hours to do because he had such enormous areas and they had to be polished, very, very hard and very fine, then we'd call him and tell him the wall is ready. By then he had slept six hours or seven hours and he took another three hours before he arrived, and the wall then was getting a little dry. And he told me the reason he always waited so long before he actually came down to paint was to give himself pressure. He worked better under pressure, and if he had a lot of time, he could do things that could be a little too slick.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh, I see.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: That's what he said [laughs].

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Very interesting, yeah.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And I can understand him because he was so skillful that when he had to do a thing over again, the next time he did it he always did it too slick. He had to have a battle with himself.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Did you—did you yourself apply the grounds? The ground, the plaster ground?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Well, I did on my own fresco work very often later, but I was not allowed to touch it. You see, I was only a private.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh, so would—

LUCIENNE BLOCH: I wasn't a corporal or sergeant. [Laughs.] This was a status job. The one who plastered was a big shot.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well then when you speak of we, there were professional plasterers?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No, there were assistants who had been there a long time.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh, I see.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: For instance, when we were in Mexico—in New York, and when we first did the work for Rivera at the modern museum, he had one of his plasterers directly from Mexico, Ramón Alva was his name. And Ramón did all the plastering and taught another man called Wight, W-I-G-H-T. And Mr. Wight then did the plastering in Detroit.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Was that Clifford Wight?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Clifford Wight.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: The man who worked on the Coit Tower.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And then Clifford was the—he was the chief assistant then when Ramón Alva went back to Mexico. Then he taught Sanchez Flores, who was also Mexican, but who was a Ford automobile worker who was interested in working with Rivera and he dropped his job as a—I think Henry Ford even encouraged him to drop his work in the factory and work for Rivera and be a—so, Mexican, so that Rivera could have someone he could talk to.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And Sanchez Flores helped and also Arthur Niendorf. Arthur Niendorf came from Texas and he had a very strong southern accent, and Diego used to always say, Art, and he spoke very good French too, this young man. He said, Art, you will just—people will just love you in France. The women would just go mad over you because of your accent. He had an accent, he spoke French, he had that southern American accent—[Mary Fuller McChesney laughs.]—which is quite delightful. So, then Arthur Niendorf went to do the work for Rivera in Rockefeller Center and my husband, Stephen Dimitroff—he was not my husband, I didn't know him yet—went to help him. So, we went to the building which was in construction at Rockefeller Center—RCA building, that's the big one, 72-story building. And I took photographs of everything from the very beginning, the channel irons, the way they built up the metal lath. All the details, the plastering. Everything was done scientifically. The water was analyzed to see whether we should use the ordinary water for our colors.

[00:05:03]

We decided to use distilled water, we had to buy gallons and gallons of distilled water. And we were going to do the most beautiful job that was ever done in fresco and that it would last longer than the building itself. And we worked on it with great enthusiasm, and we made it so that if ever they wanted to change it and move it, there was a possibility of removing the fresco in different chunks.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: In panels.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Unfortunately, the mural was destroyed without anybody realizing that—they could have asked us, and we could've saved that mural, in that manner. We could've worked it very well besides, of course, the way they do now, you know, you glue the cloth on the mural and then you chop the mural in back and you roll it.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And then you can reapply it either on canvas or—

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I see, yeah.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: That's the way they're moving frescoes all over Italy now, in places that are, you know, just falling apart.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Disintegrating, yeah, mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: It could've been saved. Well, so, we worked, we got the wall all ready, it took about a month to get it ready and by then Rivera was through with the Detroit job. By that time, he was getting a lot of other offers for murals. The Chicago World's Fair 1933 had asked him to do a mural for them. Minnesota wanted him to do a mural. I was doing lots of research for him about Indians and Indian wars and all that in Minnesota. For all these murals he was going to do. So, things looked very bright for him, and he immediately began to make drawings of the subject on the wall. And the building was closed to the public, but newspapermen who had passes could go in and two or three other people could.

I remember that before he started painting, he gave quite a few lectures. One at the New School

for Social Research. One for the New York— Columbia University, I think, he gave a lecture. And he spoke only in Spanish, or he spoke in French. So, when he spoke in French, I used to do the translating for him, and this was very exciting. [Laughs.] But I always remember one time—he knew then that Stephen and I were very good friends and lovers walking around arm in arm. So, one day I had to translate, and it was at Columbia, and my mind wasn't on my work and I suddenly didn't remember what he had said. So, he shook his finger at me, and he said, Too much love, too much love. [They laugh.] And everybody around, they didn't know what it was all about. [They laugh.]

That was the end of me. [Laughs.] So, later on, when he was lecturing at town hall, he decided to lecture from Spanish. He would speak in Spanish and someone who knew Spanish would speak and translate in English. And a man—actually his name was Field, and he had started a new cult called the Fieldites. I never heard of it afterward ever. But it was sort of off shot, a splinter of a splinter of a splinter of the Communist Party. And this man that translated, and at one point Rivera was expressing himself very dramatically about art. He was saying, you know, art was no highfalutin thing, you know, it was something of the people and of the soil. And he said—oh no, he was translating from the French because I knew French, and I knew what he was saying. But this man Field was translating instead of me, and he said, "*L'art est comme le jambon*." Which was to be translated, "Art is like ham." And this man, who didn't know Rivera really very well, hesitated and he said, "Is like food." And the whole audience yelled, "Ham!" [They laugh.]

[00:10:03]

And then they booed him down. [They laugh.] Because he wasn't translating correctly.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Didn't Diego speak English, at all?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Very little.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Very little.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Very little. Later on, he had to learn more, when he worked here at the San Francisco fair, he must've by then, he had seen so many tourists coming to—oh, that was many years later. You know, seven years later, eight years later. Six years later.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: '39.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Six years later. He already had picked up English very well. But in those days, this was his very first time, first years when he was in America.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: How many assistants were there working on the Rockefeller Center mural?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: There were six, I think. There was a Japanese called Hideo Noda, wonderful man. Later on, he went back to Japan and he was killed, assassinated because he was also a leftist.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And at that time, you know, they were building up their war machine.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yeah.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Then because—oh, Rivera was so—he was so moved by then Ben Shahn's paintings, he said Ben Shahn was the greatest American painter. At that time, Ben Shaan was exhibiting his Sacco Vanzetti, yes, his Sacco Vanzetti—

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yeah, I think—

LUCIENNE BLOCH: —series in a hotel, in a hotel lobby, if I remember correctly. How it happened I don't know but I remember very clearly seeing it in the lobby of a hotel. Or maybe it was a theater, I don't know, but that's where they were. And the passion, it was called *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti*, and that's when Rivera asked—either asked him or it was Ben Shahn who asked whether he could work for Rivera. I don't remember exactly which way it went. And we used to work every day for Rivera, including Sundays. Never a day of rest. And of course, we were just so enthusiastic about it that we didn't mind. But Ben Shahn got a little tired of it, he said, You know, I want to go out to my place in Truro and have a little vacation. And he said, No,

it's the July 4th weekend. And we were then working at the New Workers school. He said, Let's all just protest. [They laugh.]

So, we wrote a manifesto [laughs] that we thought it was time that the workers of the Rivera gang should have a three-day vacation and we were going to take it. Now, we wouldn't have dared do it alone, but with Ben Shahn inviting us over to Truro for those three days, we went ahead and—[Robert McChesney laughs]—sent him the manifesto and sent it through his wife, Frida. Of course, Frida was delighted. She said, You've got to take a vacation.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Did he?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: So, we did. We all did, for three days. Yep.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Did Rivera go up with you?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No, he didn't.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Some other time we took him to Jones Beach, and it was one of those crowded Sundays and, oh, we were really sorry for him. He suffered. He suffered in the heat and he was so angry we crawled back, three hours to crawl back from Jones Beach to Manhattan.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Were you working on the Rockefeller Center mural when all the trouble broke?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: How did that happen? What were the series of events that caused that?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Oh, do you know, I have all the clippings.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, [then just run through (ph)] it quickly.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Oh yes, all right. [Mary Fuller McChesney laughs.] Things were going very well. He was already quite far done; he'd painted quite a bit of the mural. But there was one place where he had made a slight change. Instead of showing Lenin with a hat on, he took the hat off and showed his bald pate [laughs], and this probably is what made him look more like Lenin, I don't know. Until then, nobody saw it, but it was on the drawings right on the wall for three—for two months. Right on the wall, everybody could see it. And one day—oh, the union, we had trouble with the union.

[00:15:01]

Because the whole building, of course, was union controlled, and the union said, You can't plaster, you people, you're not union, you don't have a union card. We said, But this is a special kind of plastering, you wouldn't know about it. This is a unique type of plastering. And they said, We don't care what kind of plaster it is, you've got to have a union man on the job. Finally, a compromise was made that there would be a man who would just watch. So, there was this man, he was all—he was the only one who is dressed like a plasterer, he was all in white. Nice face, Italian, with a white hat, and I thought he looked so nice next to the white wall that I said, I want to take a photograph of you next to the wall.

And I took a photograph of him and the funny thing is that the photograph happened to be just—I'm sure I did it on purpose, I don't recall now, but I must've had that in mind; you see Lenin in back in the whole drawing, the panel, and this man was standing there with a little smile on his face. And then the whole thing all white, the white costume, the white hat, and the white wall, and that was that. And he watched, and sometimes he helped us, and he stood around. He was paid union wages for just standing around. But he plastered a little bit too. And so, when Rivera finished painting that particular section which showed Lenin, it was a small panel, and it showed Lenin holding hands with a soldier, a worker, a couple of lovers, and a mother and child. The lovers were myself and my husband, from the back [laughs].

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, here you are, down here in this section, mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yeah. I wore my hair back and I had a little wool ribbon that held my hair

together, and he put in the little ribbon too, I remember. So, when we were—when this was all done and we were going about our business plastering, working, we work to sometimes 48 hours without stopping.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, my God.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Rivera wasn't aware of that and, of course, we didn't care. So, we would be plastering—I always stood around, I had to be there all the time. I'd watch them plaster, and I'd wash the brushes and I'd grind color and mix the plaster too. And then when Niendorf and Dimitroff were through, they waited until Rivera thought the wall was good. So, we had to call him up and we knew he took two hours before he came. Then we went to the cafeteria on Sixth Avenue, and we had some coffee, and we were very sleepy by then, it was morning, generally dawn. Very beautiful in New York.

Then Rivera would arrive at about eight in the morning and he would look at the wall and he would ask us to do something for him. We would then bring up the pallet. Then next assistants arrived, and we were ready to go home, but just then he would suddenly say in a very naïve—he just didn't understand we'd been up all night. He would say—he would call my boyfriend Dimi, Dimi, would you get me a photograph of the moon. I want a photograph of the moon that shows where possibly—something happened where there was a scraping of the moon by some object, whatever that was. So, Dimi would say, Fine, I'll go, and I'll get it. I know where to go. And he would go to the Natural History Museum and then he would fall asleep on the table while waiting for them to develop a—[Mary McChesney laughs]—14, 11 by 14 photo, then he would run back, rush back to subway to Rockefeller Center and bring the photo and then stand around and watch Rivera for another hour or two. Well then, before you knew it, it was time to plaster again. [Mary Fuller McChesney laughs.] We didn't know whether it was day or night. So, one day, a man came who was a reporter for *the World-Telegram* in New York City. I can't remember his name right now, I always know his name so well because he's the one who started it all. Later on, he went to Hollywood and he began to do music for Hollywood. Joseph Lilly, I think was his name. Joseph Lilly, L-I-L-L-Y. And he wrote a big headline in *the World-Telegram* which said, "Rivera Paints Lenin and Rockefeller Foots Bill."

[00:20:12]

[They laugh.] And that, that was something. People who hadn't seen that, hadn't realized that this had been there all this time, began to make a terrible fuss. The Rivera's knew it—the Rockefellers knew it all along because on the third day that Rivera had painted, he had come to the upper right-hand section of the wall which showed a demonstration in Moscow which Mrs. Rockefeller had bought, she'd bought the notebooks of that particular demonstration that Rivera had painted, and she thought this was one of the most beautiful things he'd ever done. And she used to watch him paint and she said when he finished painting that, she said, This is the most beautiful thing you've ever done.

And all you saw instead of black—everything was black and white as he was supposed to do, there was all these red flags, you know. So, they knew what was going on and they expected it from him, they knew he was a bad boy. I mean, he was a rascal, and he was going to do everything he could to paint the situations as he saw them. They knew, Mrs. Rockefeller knew that he was a gigantic historical creature and that this was much higher, much greater than his ideas or his personality, that actually, there was something there that was up-to-date. So, she was not against his painting the way he wanted. But the renting agents became worried. This was 1933 and—

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: The rental agents?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: The renting agents for the Rockefeller Center building.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yeah, mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: The Empire State building which had been finished in '29, the last 15 or 20 floors were not occupied, they were empty. They hadn't even been finished, because there were no renters. This was the Depression.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And the same was true—

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Sorry.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I thought I'd bring you some refreshments.

[Recorder stops, restarts].

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: We were just discussing the beginning of the difficulty with the Rockefeller Center mural and the problem about renting the—

LUCIENNE BLOCH: The renting agents were very much concerned. They were afraid that they wouldn't be able to rent the building if people had to walk through the lobby and see a revolutionary mural on the wall. And they tried a compromise. The compromise was, Rivera said, I'm willing to take off, on the one side, on the side of the Fascism, a group of women he had painted who are playing cards and drinking champagne while right next to them is an unemployed demonstration. He said, Instead of putting these women sitting down and playing cards, I will remove that entire panel and put the great leaders of American history. Lincoln and Washington, and so forth. Jefferson. The rental agents said, No, you're gonna have to take out Lenin.

So, he had already been accused so much of being an opportunist. The Communists were saying, He's such an opportunist that he even paints with brushes. I mean only a person who is interested in the capitalist movement and who doesn't want to improve things such as Duco with spray guns, that's revolutionary. But to use brushes, why that's just—that's the way they spoke. There was an article in *the New Masses* where Siqueiros accuses Rivera of opportunism.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I thought it was Siqueiros who [inaudible].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: So, they argued that—imagine using fresco which is an old manner of painting when all these new modern automobile paints that you can use. So, Rivera wanted them to know that he was not an opportunist, that he was sincerely for the revolution. And he had a terrible choice there, what to do. Should he take off Lenin? If he does, he'll have all the jealous artists down his neck, and he'll have all the Communists proving themselves right that he was an opportunist.

[00:25:04]

And he decided to hold his position. Well, the most interesting of all, and that is something that I don't think even Bert Wolfe wrote in the book. He might have. This, to me, was the crucial point of the whole thing. They had a discussion with Troyanovsky, who was a Communist at that time and he was trying, in 1933, to allow the Soviets to get back into talking power with the United States, to be recognized by the United States. And they did not want to rub the lion the wrong way. And they were afraid that Rivera was doing more danger to their cause by painting all this revolutionary stuff and they hated him for it. They had a meeting and Frida Rivera was there, and when she told me that, I was very naïve at that time, I thought anybody who is on the left, they just loved each other. And all they were fighting were the people on the right. And it occurred to—it didn't occur to me that there could be any little fights among themselves, that they could be bickering, and almost—later on I found out the fights were worse even than the Communists against capitalists. [They laugh.] They did all sorts of things to each other. They threw stink bombs at each other's buildings. Oh, they had terrible fractional fights. So, Frida said—she swore, I said, No, you're kidding. She said, I swear, Troyanovsky said that they considered the Rivera idea or the Lenin idea completely false and that they had washed their hands of all responsibility. That the Soviets had nothing to do with Rivera, that Rivera was a wild, crazy, undisciplined person and that they did not want anything to do with him. And as far as they were concerned, they could break that whole mural down. That it was of no help to the Soviet Union.

And so, there was Rivera, and he didn't know what to do. He decided, I'll hold on, I'll fight, I will show them that I'm not an opportunist. And so, we were prepared, and we assistants were—I was photographing the murals, I had my [light kit (ph)] in such a way that the detectives who had begun to slowly enter the building and stand all around as though they were going to battle an army. While they were there watching, I stood back, I knew exactly how far back I was going and I knew the focus of my machine, and I sat back until I was touching the end of the scaffold, and I took pictures of the mural. And I got good light because we always used brilliant lights when we plastered so we could see how rough the wall was.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: So, there was Steve Dimitroff, and he was monkey-shining with the lights, you know. We were talking all the time and here I was taking one picture after another.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, this—

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Then, all of a sudden—yes.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: The works of this that are published, I've seen it published in color.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: In art books. Was that photograph there?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No. The one you saw is a copy that Rivera made.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Made in Mexico.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: From photographs that he did Mexico.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I see.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Then he had finished it. But in this particular photograph, you don't see the finished product. It was stopped there and the day after we were kicked out. There we were, we were just three assistants. I think there was Hideo Noda, Stephen Dimitroff, and myself, and they called Rivera down from the scaffold and we stood watching and we saw them talking inside. Five or six, there might've been 10 men in there and they went out after they talked with him for about an hour. He had a little cabin because of course all the workmen were all around. So, there was a little cabin with a lock. It belonged to him, he had his own private phone, and that's where we did sketches and that's where we sat down and rested and that's where we left all our brushes and paints and ground the color.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:30:08]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: They left the little cabin, and Rivera called us. He said, Stop work. We have to leave. So, we went down, and immediately my husband and another man—who I think was Lou Block, I forget which—who came by then—began to call the papers. And they started with *the New York Times* and started to tell them immediately what had happened. And when they started calling *the Herald Tribune*, just as they were halfway through, the line was cut. The telephone line was cut.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: In the workshop?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. And no way of starting anymore calls. Well, I rushed to a place which made my enlargements. At that time, I was so busy with the mural, I couldn't do my developing. So, I had the Fine Grain Laboratories in New York do my developing. I gave them the film, they developed it, and they made prints. And three or four hours later, we were at the newspapers, and we gave them the prints. We didn't give them prints of the entire mural, but just of the crucial spots, showing Lenin. And we went to all the newspapers, and the thing was out the next day, a big front page. It was just a riot. [They laugh.]

At that time—oh, on the same day, one hour or two hours after this thing had happened, there was already a picket line forming outside the Rockefeller Center. For the first time since 1927 or something. Even before the Russian revolution, for the first time they had a united front. The socialists, the Communists of all flavors, and even weirdest groups of people, all got together. And they had this demonstration. Because it came before they could get any okay from the Soviet Union, you see. So, the Communist Party spontaneously went down to picket.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: To support Diego.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: To support Diego. Because this was not Diego. They kept saying fast [ph], it has nothing to do with Rivera. This has to do with the freedom of artists, of art. Artists should be given freedom. Later on, they had to stop demonstrating because the Soviet Union did not want them to annoy the important people of America. Because they wanted to be recognized.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yes.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: That's the story. After that, Rivera took the money that—he was paid. He was paid in full. Actually, there was a lawyer who said we could have made a terrific—Rivera could have sued the Rockefellers. Not the Rockefellers themselves, but the Rockefeller group that was connected and responsible for the Rockefeller Center.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: The incorporation.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Because they had cut down our telephone lines, which were private lines. But Rivera said he'd prefer not to spend money on lawyer's fees and all that. Actually, he didn't want that much publicity. He wanted to paint again, so he said, Go around and look at all the different liberal schools and things, and find out where there's a nice wall we can use. So, my husband and I—he wasn't my husband yet—went down to the Rand School, which was a socialist school. There was a very nice place with a library, and we made beautiful architectural drawings, renderings of the wall. And Rivera said, This is very good. That's a good wall. And the building is a good building. He was ready to work on it. But the Rand School people said, We will have to check your drawing, because we don't want you to paint anything that we don't agree. [They laugh.] There wasn't any difference.

Of course, the Communists wouldn't have him paint in their place. No, he was poison, so he couldn't paint there. The Trotskyites said, We would be very happy if you would paint in our place, but we have one single little room in a fire trap, and there's no room. Just enough for 10 people to sit down in. We can't have you do any—he did, he made a panel for them. The only place, which had really good place, was called the New Workers School.

[00:35:13]

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: New Workers School.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: New Workers School. And it was a splinter group from the Communist Party that had broken away from the Communist Party in 1929, when the majority were fighting Stalin. Stalin said, The revolution's around the corner. We have to have red unions. You can't do anything with the American Federation of Labor. It's a capitalist organization. We have to have our own unions. And the fight was really about that. And they broke away. And they formed this, which was called the Communist Party, and then in parentheses: Opposition. Another name for it was the Lovestone group.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh, yes.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Lovestone had been the head of the Communist Party. Many people accused him of being really a United States agent. Well, if he was, he was a pretty good Communist. He was a very brilliant speaker, and he was—everything he ever said came out true, of all the things he accused the Communists of. I mean, you can take your hat off to the United States government if they have agents as smart as he was. [Laughs.]

Anyway, in that building, Rivera painted. And because it was a fire trap, he decided to make the panels moveable so they could be taken out and moved somewhere else. And all those panels were done. They were about eight feet square. Very nice, large size panels. And I took lots of photographs of all these people—Ben Shahn, the whole gang—working on the panels, getting them ready, and setting them up on the wall. And we worked just as hard there as anywhere else. And Rivera painted the history of the United States from the labor point of view. He had 21 panels, and he worked from May or June until December.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: What year was this?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: 1933. Now, then the school had to vacate the premises, and they moved to 33rd Street. Then they folded. The organization just didn't survive all the different changes. And they broke up, and because they had been the most powerful group within the labor movement, this particular group—they believed in working for the interest of the labor unions rather than just fight [ph] theory, I mean, talk theory. The union, International Ladies Garment Workers Union, accepted them for themselves to put in their new, very beautiful summer camp, called Unity House in Pennsylvania. And just back in May we were asked, my husband and I, were asked to come there and to repair them.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: This last year?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Just this year, 1964. We had just come back from Europe, and we had met

these people of the so-called Lovestone group. We hadn't seen them in years, in 26, 27 years. And we had told them that we were still doing frescoes, and so one of the members, the old members, who was now the head of the Knit Goods Workers Union said, You must come over and repair them, and the Union Local 155 Knit Goods workers will pay your trip. They paid our trip, paid our hotel fair.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: You all went back.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: We went back and repaired the murals. They hadn't put them all up, because some of them were so powerfully violent that even the labor union didn't want to put them in. For instance, Rivera had made Gompers look like a really flabby villain. And he had—some of the things were very sad and they weren't for a camp. There was one of them—he showed the Hitler panel. Of course, everything was happening that year, 1933.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yeah.

[00:40:17]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Hitler had taken power. And Rivera painted all of that. And he painted it, and everything he painted then was crucial, and absolutely as it was. He had Mussolini with the pope blessing him, in back of him. And because there are so many Italian Catholics belonging to the International that they couldn't put that one up. Actually, when we hear of the story of the play—you know that play, where the pope is accused of not having opened up and spoken against the horrors of fascism—

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: *Persecution of Judas*.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: It shows—yes. So, all of this was painted with a great deal of gusto. Then, in the meantime, I remember when he painted towards the more modern times, one day we read in the paper that there was a farmers' strike in 1933. Farmers were dumping the milk into the rivers, because they weren't getting the price for the milk. And it seemed so tragic that there was such a lack of relationship there, that in the middle of the Depression, when babies were going without milk, fathers were throwing milk down into ditches.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, that sort of went along with everything else though. In California, of course, there were great sacks of fruit being creosoted [ph] and burned.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. And this was happening. And so, Rivera would have a newspaper, and he would have the photographs showing the things happen. And he would hold the photographs and he would paint the mural. He would change his sketches from day to day. Then it was the time of the NRA [National Recovery Administration]. At that time, most of the left groups said that the NRA was a fascist forum. It was grown to be a fascist organization. And so, there was a very funny slogan. You saw workers holding banners which showed a blue eagle. You remember the symbol of the blue eagle? And it said, "Strike! Strike! Or the blue eagle will wear a brown shirt." And it showed a blue eagle with a brown shirt. Well, this was completely wrong. It didn't work out that way. It was an absolutely wrong theory. And that panel was not hung up. It was never put up.

So, they have about five panels now at the Unity House, which are crated and haven't been opened. Which are ready for anyone who wants to buy them at a good price. And they're going to give the money to the International Relief Association. And we had to write a long dissertation on that, telling them how to make sure not to open them until they were sure people were ready to look at them. Because through the transporting, the frescoes have weakened considerably. And some of them have little air pockets, and if they're jarred, they could crack. So, we suggested not to open them until they were sure they had some people who were willing and able to buy them. And we send them the photographs of those, so that they would be able to show buyers. I think they would be a wonderful thing to have, because they are—even though relatively [ph] politically, they're wrong. They're still paintings of a certain era—historical era.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, even the mistakes are important.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. Very important.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: That's too bad it can't be kept together though, the whole thing.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Well, actually, they didn't have much room. They had room for 17 panels—16

panels. It looks pretty—very well there, and they're taking good care of them. We can be very thankful. When we were through repairing them, we wrote the International a letter, in which we gave them a great deal of credit for having taken care of these paintings. We said, It's to the credit of the International to have realized the cultural importance of these historical works of art. And that they should always be careful. And then we told them what to do, not to have them get destroyed—not to lean ladders against them and such things.

[00:45:13]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: How much damage was actually done? How much repair work did you have to do?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Very little. It had been repaired already once before, and Ralph Mayer—you know, who wrote the book *The Medium of the Artist*. You know, Ralph Mayer.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh yes. Of course.

[Cross talk.]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: He was on WPA. He had been a chemist. He was a chemist on the WPA.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Artist Handbook.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. Artist Handbook. He never did understand fresco too well, and once I had a terrible fight with him. Because he said—now we're talking about farther on, when the WPA was on in 1936.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, we should get into that. I wanted to ask you, was there much damage done to these panels around the outside—

LUCIENNE BLOCH: The edges.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: —the metal surrounds them? That's where the main damage is?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. It's always around the corner, because they can't help when they pick them up or put them down to put them first on one corner. And, you know, they're heavy. They're about 250 pounds, maybe 300 pounds, and it hits the corner.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: And it's sharp.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And it's sharp. So, they had repaired them, but they had not repaired them correctly. And luckily some of them had been painted over with watercolor. And when we washed them, the watercolor came right off. Then someone else had come along and had put casein. And the casein has a very dull—it's not shiny like—or, I should say, it's not translucent like fresco. It has an opaque feeling.

And so those, there was nothing we could do about them unless we chopped them all up again, and we didn't want to do that. But they're in very good condition now. They were really—even then, when we came. We didn't know whether we would have two weeks work on them or one day. But we worked two days on them. Of course, we worked the whole day. And since the time when they had been repaired, they had now this extraordinary paint, the plastic paint—you know, Liquitex and stuff like that—which absorbs beautifully in plaster. You can put it on like watercolor technique, but then it's absolutely permanent. You can't wash it off. And unless—

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: You put this on the dry plaster?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. You could put it on dry plaster. We used both techniques. Wherever there was a big crack, we put real lime plaster. They had put plaster of Paris, and plaster of Paris is not the same thing as a fresco plaster.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: No.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And so—it's the opposite. It's the enemy of fresco. So, wherever we had to fill, we filled with lime and sand, the regular stuff that Rivera had used. And then we used fresco colors. And then all the other places, which had been washed off where there was white plaster showing—those we did with Liquitex, or one of the plastic paints. Very, very good to work.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: And this was in May of this year, May 1964?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: This series of panels, that was for the Workers School?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: New Workers School.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: New Workers School.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: If you say Workers School then you're talking about the Communists.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, this is the New Workers School.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And that would be anthemic [ph].

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Was that the last job that you were an assistant to Diego on?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: That's right.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: On that point, you didn't help him with the job when he visited the New School for Social Research?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Never did anything. That's Orozco.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: This is the one you're thinking of.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh, that's Orozco.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Orozco did the New School for Social Research.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I was confused there.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Rivera did the one at the New Workers School. Then he made one panel for the Trotskyites. I don't know what happened to that one. I've been also asked once or twice to repair the murals—the frescoes at the Modern Museum, the ones that he did the very first time. The six—

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: For the one-man show there.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. And now, much to my surprise, when my husband and I had to give a fresco class in Redlands this year, someone brought in a very beautiful reproduction of these very same panels in color. And underneath it said: Philadelphia Museum of Art. So, we think they must be now at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. They're not at the Modern Museum anymore.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: They may be in the Museum of Art in San Francisco.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: No. These were in New York.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: These were in New York. I see.

[00:50:05]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: They must have transferred them to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. But the last time I saw them, I had to repair them. That was in 1939 or 1940. The museum wrote to me —or called me up and asked me to repair them. And after '40, my husband and I left for Flint, Michigan. I don't know then what happened to them.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: After Diego had finished the panels at the New Workers School, then he went back to Mexico?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Was that the last time you saw him?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: That was the last time I saw him. He was going through some very strange times. After the Rockefeller Center business, I think he had hoped that the Communists would open their arms out to him and forgive all his sins and take him back in the fold. But he found out that he didn't get too many thanks. And that he wasn't made a hero as much as he should have been made. He was very bitter. He had always been so jolly and good-hearted, and then he became very bitter.

And one day I was in his apartment with his wife, Frida, and he was in a grumbly mood. And he grabbed hold of one of his most beautiful paintings, an oil painting of cactus with the arms—hands outstretched. She wanted to go back to Mexico, and he said, No. One mustn't go back to those places. We should stay in the industrial areas and fight. And fight. And he was also very bitter, because all these beautiful commissions he was going to have after the Rockefeller Center thing, they were all stopped.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: They all fell through.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Chicago stopped, didn't want it anymore. Minnesota didn't want theirs anymore. And he had no more jobs. And that, of course, made him very, very angry, very bitter. He really didn't want to go back to picturesque Mexico. I think he liked it in America with all the industrial machines, and all that. And he looked at this painting and he said, This is of no use. And he took a knife. And I rushed at him and told him to stop. And Frida said, Stop it or he'll stab you. So I stopped, and he took that and he slashed right in front of me. He slashed that painting. And I was so mad, and so sad. And then he walked out—I don't know how far he walked—and I think he threw it in the East River. But that's the only time I ever saw him really in a rage.

The next day, he was painting. It was a Sunday, and the New Workers School was having a lecture about a situation in the automobile industry, or something like that. And there was a man there, who had posed at one time for Rivera. He was an old Lithuanian shoemaker, and he was a member of the Shoemakers' Union. He had a beautiful long walrus mustache, and he had very tanned skin. And Rivera showed him, in one of the little panels of the New Workers School, holding back fascism, something like that. Actually, on the other side he had another little panel, and there you saw a young worker, holding back also the fascist arm with the swastika on the arm and a dagger. And you see this powerful hand of the worker, pushing back the hand of fascism. And in back is a big, red flag.

And the boy who posed for that was a new assistant of Rivera's, who later on became one of the rather well-known younger artists in America. His name is Seymour Vogel. V-O-G-E-L. And I noticed in the latest *Art in America* magazine that he was chosen one of the new talents.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh, really?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Already, way back in '53 he was voted one of the promising artists. But there he is, and you see a portrait of him. And I wonder where that panel is. I actually think he'd love to have it. Or maybe he wouldn't. [They laugh.]

[00:55:08]

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I love these titles they give. New talent, young artist, and so forth.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yeah, new, new, new talent. Of course, he's now about our age, so not very young anymore. No, he was younger than we were. Oh, he made a wonderful drawing. He used to have no money, of course, and he had no place to live. So, he used to sleep right at the New Workers School on the scaffold. And I have a beautiful photograph of him. He made a drawing of a rat. Apparently, there were rats there. He wasn't allowed to sleep there. It was a loft, you see. It was not a residential section. But he had a cot, and when everybody was gone, he would put up his cot. And, of course, we were still working on the wall till late at night. And you see him, and he's got a ruler and he's shooting with the ruler at this beautiful drawing of a rat that he made. You see him lying there, half naked on a cot. [Mary Fuller McChesney laughs.] I should send it to him now and say, "Do you remember those bohemian times?" [They laugh.]

So anyway, the next day when that Lithuanian man, shoemaker, was seated there, Rivera was painting. He painted right through the lectures and everything. And this man, he sat down to look at what he was doing, and this man turned to him and said, You know, Diego, I like your paintings very much, but I like your landscapes better. He said, You know when a tired person, a person who's been working all day and who's had to battle the capitalist system all day long. When he goes home, he doesn't want to see this kind of painting, where there's battling and

struggle. He wants something that will make him escape for a little while. And he said, I remember especially a painting you had of cactus, which I loved so much. And Rivera knew that I was right next time him. And he just never looked at me, but his face just turned red.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: That was the one he had slashed.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: That was the one he had slashed. The coincidence, you know.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: You found usually a very real [ph] person to work with though?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Oh, remarkable, remarkable person. He had a sense of humor, and he was very simple too. He loved to eat. He used to say, Would you get me an ice cream cone? You know, we're in the middle of painting Stalin with red, bloodshot eyes, you know. [Mary Fuller McChesney laughs.] And there he was licking an ice cream cone while he was painting Stalin. And, you know, it's a pity now. There's a photograph I could have taken. Wouldn't that have made a marvelous photo?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yeah, it would have been very nice—

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And there's one I missed. I just missed that one. And he loved his wife in those days. And she was just marvelous. She was a wonderful, wonderful woman. But I don't know. I haven't read the book now. I don't know all the horrible things that happened afterwards. I can't understand it. He, who hated the Communists so. And she hated them too. She wouldn't belong to any organizations. She thought they were poison. She just laughed at them. And then all of a sudden found out that she had—just to try to win him back, she had joined the Communist Party. I can't believe it. I still can't believe it.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Did you know Emmy Lou Packard at that time at all?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No, because I never went to California until '48.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Because she was in Mexico. She studied with Diego down there.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: And was quite a good friend of Frida's too.

LUCINNE BLOCH: Yes. Uh-huh [affirmative]. Well, I've seen her, of course, I've known her since. I've spoken to her a few times when she used to be at the fair, you know, selling her lithographs, her linoleum cuts [ph]. But I haven't known her to a point where we could exchange notes. But you know then, that's the funny thing. That has nothing to do with *Art in America*. When Frida Rivera died, a man brought to my husband a magazine from confidential. It was *Confidential* magazine.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Like scandal sheets [ph]?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. And said, Look at this. And he said, I don't think you better show your wife. Well, of course, Steve knows me, and he showed me. It was a description drip of blood by drip of blood of the funeral of Frida. And it was absolutely gruesome. It described Rivera carrying her body and the blood was dripping down his arms, and putting it into the fire, you know, to burn it. And it wouldn't burn fast enough. And even to the noise that it made. I mean, just ghastly. And also, all the scandals that were going on. They wanted to drape a flag over her coffin, and it was a Communist flag. There were arguments. Somebody said it should be half Mexican, half—I mean, that kind of business. It was said in a typical confidential journal manner.

[01:00:46]

And I was so horrified, because I loved her so. And to think that this had been written about her. Then my sister had found, among her papers, a letter that Frida had written me in New York years before, when she was—she and I were going around very happily. And it was a letter, which suddenly reminded me that Frida was not a simple, sentimental young girl. But that she herself was a real devil. That she loved nothing more than to buy tons of candy and go to a movie and see *Frankenstein*, or any of the gruesome films. She loved anything where there was blood dripping and gruesome details and murders. She loved it. And she made no bones about it. She just loved it.

So, I remember that from her letter, because her letter was full of horrible things. She was

saying, you know, just like a naughty child will say bad words. The whole letter was just filthy. I suddenly realized, and I said, Oh, if Frida could only be in heaven—or hell, I don't care which—and look down and read this *Confidential* magazine, she would have loved it. [They laugh.] This was [inaudible], this was a monument to her. She would have said, "Oh, what a gorgeous, gruesome article this is." [Mary Fuller McChesney laughs.] And that's true.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: She never worked with Diego on this mural, did she?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: She never did.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Did she come around much when you were working?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: She was there very often. And she used to bring him chicken. Oh, she was the most wonderful housewife for him. She would have a basket that she would bring him something that he would like. And she would come there. She was always interested in seeing that he had everything as he wanted.

And she was a real homebody. She was very neat. She used to be horrified in Detroit. Would walk down the street and she would see these backyards of various working people. And she would say, I have never seen such filth in my life. And I would say, What about Mexico? She'd say, What about Mexico? She'd say, Mexicans are much cleaner than this. And she'd say, People who earn a little money, the first thing they do is clean up. But this, she said, These are people who are going to factories. They don't make gardens, except the Europeans. It was mostly the southerners who had just moved in, and who had left the place. And she would keep the place—the house was always very neat.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Was she painting herself then?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Well, she wasn't painting. And Diego was very much disturbed. He wanted her to paint. He knew that she was bored. She was bored. She wasn't going to many parties, because Rivera refused most of the parties. He worked so late. But once in a while, they were invited out. One time, Henry Ford invited them to a party. They were all seated at a dining room table. I stayed home.

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MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: This is Mary Fuller McChesney, interviewing Lucienne Bloch, and this is tape two. The date is August 11, 1964. Present also this afternoon is Robert McChesney. Lucienne, you were just telling a story about Diego and Frida and the party.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. This was a party where—which was given by Henry Ford in Detroit. And I think the director, Dr. Valentiner, the director of the Detroit Art Institute was there, and his wife, and Edsel Ford and his wife. And there was a lull in the conversation, and all of a sudden, [inaudible] Frida turned to Henry Ford and said, Mr. Ford, are you Jewish? [They laugh].

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: [Inaudible.]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Everybody roared. [They laugh.] She wasn't aware that it was one time, you know? And it was a little bit of problems involved there.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: She was being very anti-Semitic about [inaudible]. [Laughs.]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. And she just asked like that, naively. I don't think she was so naïve. There was a pause there, you know, they were just stumped, and they all laughed. It never was answered. [They laugh.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: We should probably get on to your commission with the government art projects. How did that take place and when was that?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: The next—oh, after we left Rivera, or Rivera left us, rather—he had finished the murals at the New Workers School, we went on a lecture tour. We had made all these photographs of the Rivera murals, and we went and lectured all about Rockefeller Center.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And we lectured—we were really—it was an excuse to go on a trip to visit Stephen Dimitroff's parents. He wanted his parents to meet me. And it was December 1933. We

got a lecture engagement at Milwaukee, and a lecture engagement at Taliesin, at Frank Lloyd Wright's school. And a few more, all over the Middle West. When we talked at Frank Lloyd Wright's we had a real battle, because Frank Lloyd Wright said he was against murals, completely against murals. That murals were made for people—for architects who had made flaws in their designs and had to have ways and means of hiding their flaws. [Robert McChesney laughs.] And then his wife also took Rivera to—how do you say?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Task.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: To task. She said, Why does he want to paint these horrible machines when there's such beautiful things to paint in Mexico? All these picturesque people. And I remember snarling back at her. I was quite a leftist at that time, naturally. Everybody was, you know. And I said, You mean those poor kids who are half blind because they haven't had the right medical attention, and are starving and poverty-stricken and don't wear clothes because—not because they don't want to wear clothes, not because it's picturesque—but because they don't have the money to buy clothes? And, oh, it was a real hot evening. [They laugh.]

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yeah, it sounds like it.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: So, we went to—we did a lecture also in Flint, at the art institute there, which was a little art institute where my husband had first studied art, and on the way back to New York, we didn't know what we were going to do. We didn't have a place to live, but we had a feeling New York was the place to be, and we wanted to do what Rivera had done. We wanted to paint houses—buildings. We wanted to paint murals, and we were going to look around for places to paint buildings. On the way back, though, we stopped in Dartmouth to see Orozco, because he was working then at Hanover, New Hampshire, where—in the very—in the college, right in the college. And we saw him paint, and that was very interesting, because we noticed that his fresco technique was totally different from Rivera's. He mixed the colors right in with the lime, so that they were very pasty. They were like casein, rather than a fresco. Not transparent at all. And he stopped any old place. So, I have a photograph that shows a wheat field, and the wheat field is cut in half, vertically—I mean, horizontally, it's cut in half. And the next day, he painted again, and you can't match, because the colors fade about one-quarter overnight. And especially when you mix with lime, they fade even more.

[00:05:25]

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: They dry, yeah.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: So, he had painted to fit what he had painted the day before, and the next day, that part was one-quarter lighter. I've got photographs showing that. It was interesting. Later on, I used that technique—not the technique, but that—cutting any old place as a very good technique for fresco—in my own work. I learned a lot from that—what was done in a sort of accidental manner. But there he painted something which is fantastic, that allowed him such freedom. It was American academic—it was a bitter criticism of the American academic world, and it was biting. And actually, I think it was even the Rockefellers themselves who financed this. Now, that, I don't know. I should find out before I say that, but I think it was Nelson Rockefeller who had financed Orozco's murals there. He shows—I suppose you've seen—you know of them? The Dartmouth murals?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I know of them, but they're—

LUCIENNE BLOCH: They're extraordinary.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I can't picture them.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Remarkable. He shows dead people with their graduation gowns on. You know those black graduation gowns? Skulls—people with skulls, and their—and you see a woman who's a skull, I mean, whose a bone—a skeleton. And they are giving birth to a skeletonic [ph] child, and putting him in little glass containers. [They laugh.]

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I don't think I've seen it.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: That's his little painting of schools in America.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: I've seen a photograph of it, and I thought it was some big machinery, mainly.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: There is machinery, but there's everything.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: I guess you can't see enough of it [inaudible]. [Cross talk.]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Oh, it's a huge thing. It's powerful. And then he shows the schoolteacher—the New England schoolteacher, looking absolutely sexless. And, of course, he should live now, but at that time, I think many places they wouldn't even allow married schoolteachers. Anyway, she's bland as can be. She has a sort of pale, blue dress, and flat-chested, and a sour looking face, and she's got all these little children around her, and all the children look alike, all of them. Oh, it's—and then you see in one place—you see Christ chopping down his own cross and looking real mad. That was his concept of—

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I remember that.

[Cross talk.]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: [Inaudible.]

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: [Inaudible] reproduced quite often.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Had you met him before?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: I had. I had met Orozco before because I had had an exhibit at what was called the Delphic Studio. Of my lithographs, which I had done, and of my glass sculpture, at a place which was—a gallery which was owned by the woman who wrote the book on Orozco, who was—

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh, yes.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: I forget her name right now. I've got the book. I've got the Orozco book. She had this gallery, and she invited me to have an exhibit, and it was in the same—it was in a hotel, and in the same hotel lived Orozco as her guest, with his family. And the children of Orozco were running around and knocked down one of the stands on which one of my statues was [laughs], and it broke. The statue broke, so I was quite—I knew them quite intimately. [They laugh.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: This was in New York City?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. I always tell people my first one-man show was during the bank holiday.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Was broken up by Orozco's children. [They laugh.]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: It was also during the bank holiday, so you can imagine what a success it was. Actually, as time went by, I look back on it as a great success, because I did sell two things, but the check bounced because—[They laugh.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: The banks closed.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: The banks closed.

[They laugh.][Cross talk.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Pardon me.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Oh, no, that's—

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, I was going to ask you about the—seeing him again.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. Oh, yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Have you spoke with him in—

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes, and I took a photograph of him while he was painting.

[00:10:04]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Were he and Rivera friends?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Well, one of the most interesting books about the Mexican revolution—I mean, painters' revolution—is the book of Jean Charlot. I call him Jean Charlot because that's his French name. Jean Charlot, which was just out in 1963, which is called, I think, *Revolution Among the Artists*. I've got it right down here in the shelf. I can show it to you later. It's just out, and it's— it gives you the real—and I know—I'm sure it's the true story of all the beginnings of the arts renaissance in Mexico. And he—I think he's very modest, actually. I had known that before, that he was the one who really brought fresco to Mexico.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Charlot.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Charlot. But Rivera—he describes the way in which Rivera tried to make something very special out of it. So, Rivera had decided that the Mexican fresco painters had a secret, and that he had found—looking through the codicils [ph], or something like that—what the secret was, and the secret was to put a maguey leaf, you know, one of those heavy maguey cactus succulents, into the water in which you later on use for the fresco, and Jean Charlot said the newspapers took that up as a real wonderful thing. [Robert McChesney laughs.] And they wrote about it, and he said he could hardly stand the stench of the maguey leaf rotting in that piece of water. And later on, very gently, will move the maguey leaves, and we painted in the good old Italian style. [They laugh.]

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I remember Charlot's work. He showed at Stendahl's in Los Angeles years ago.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Oh, yes?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Or Stendahl actually was sponsoring him, I think.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: [Inaudible] very small easel paintings, and always these very broad-faced children.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: And even his adults were always—faces wider than it was high—everyone.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes, yes. That was his gimmick. [Laughs.]

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Did he ever do any murals? Charlot?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes, oh yes. He did some murals at the same time when Orozco and Siqueiros and Rivera were doing them. And he was the one who first started with the fresco. And they were using, at that time—the others were using encaustic, and then they changed from encaustic to fresco. They found out it was a much better technique, and they had all these plasterers who were doing the frescos in the pulquerías, who were there to give them the real technical advice on lime [ph]. And through trial and error, they finally—Rivera, I think, has the technique that's best, wonderful, wonderful technique. Unfortunately, to talk about technique of fresco, we continued to paint fresco as much as we could, and that also takes the story right on from the question you asked—what we did afterwards. When we came back to New York, Stephen and I asked—we went to a place called Madison House, which was a settlement house in the Lower East Side, which was in the heart of the slummy section. And it had a nice building with a proscenium arch, which had room where one could paint a mural. And we asked the—one of the board members there, whom we knew—who we knew?

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Whom we knew.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Whom we knew, yes. About the possibility of painting it. And he said, Certainly. We'd be very happy. And they said, Well, we can't pay. And we said, We don't care. We'll do it for nothing, and the only thing we want is the food. We'd like to eat. There's a kitchen here and you let the kids eat there, and if we could also eat lunch there, that would save us food money, anyway. And they said, Fine. And also, we said, You will have to pay for our expenses, for material. And that wasn't very high. So, they were willing. And so, it was 1934 in spring. We made our sketches, and we were very careful to have them sign a name and okay our sketches, because we didn't want to do anything wrong, and it was, of course, it was—there was propaganda in it. There was a story. It was a typical Rivera thing.

[00:15:00]

We showed the slums and clotheslines. Actually, we loved them very much, they were picturesque. And we showed people looking out of the windows, and kids playing in the streets, and then on the other side, we showed how it could be. We didn't show, exactly, the new houses. We showed the same old houses, but we showed a man who is talking to a street corner speaker, who is talking about the fact that they should do something about their slum condition. And down below, you see the little children of the settlement house, making little houses out of bricks, you see. The idea is they will build the future. Very, very clever. [They laugh.] [Cross talk.]

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: [Inaudible.]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And up on top—right over, you see the things, the conditions as they are, the milk [ph] pouring down, the soup kitchens, and then right in the middle, we had a dollar—a coin, 25 cent piece, or something, which said, "In God we trust." And then, on both sides, you see graphs, stock graphs. And the funny thing is, I copied faithfully the stock graphs, and they were going down, you see. So, I show them going down, and later on, we showed the sketch to Lovestone, and Lovestone said, Well, if you want to make a point, you want to make the stocks going up, and then you want to show that people are having—are starving. But I couldn't understand that. I said, But the stocks are going down. [They laugh.]

So, I didn't change it. I said, No, the stocks are going down and there is poverty, and so forth and so on. He thought that I should do something much more crass, you see.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: He wanted to show you the wealthy making all the profits.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes, yes. [Laughs.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: How large was this mural? Or fresco?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Oh, it was 330 square feet. It looked larger, because it was around the proscenium arch. And then we used—oh, we did like Rivera did, we took models right from the streets, and we had made lots of sketches of the children. And this was to be a project that my husband and I would do together, and we would paint together. Now, we paint totally differently. He was much more modern, so to speak. He has a very flowing line, and he's a caricaturist [ph] too. He draws in a very—well, I called it, at that time, sloppy. And I was—I had Beaux-Art training, anatomy, and all that. I was much—my control over my drawings was slick, actually. So, between the two of us, there was quite a difficulty. And we did it, though. [They laugh.]

But, well, later on, we had a very fine write-up. I can't remember the name—one of the very good—oh, it was a beautiful write-up, by one of the men who writes about art, in which he—he was very nice to us. He wrote very well. He said it was full of gusto. He said, It's true that they are the students of Rivera, but nevertheless, the mural is full of life and gusto. It was nice.

Then, we said we wanted more walls, but we couldn't continue to survive, you know, on that. And I don't know how we made—we didn't make any money. I don't know what happened. We sort of got along, but it was very, very slim, and certainly not from what Rivera had paid us, because Rivera hadn't paid us very much. So, we were beginning to wonder that—then, we heard that there were people who said we should do—there should be something the government does, the way they did in Mexico. There should be an art program. There's so many artists who are unemployed, who are very good artists, and if they could be given a chance to work and decorate the buildings of—government buildings, that would be wonderful. So, we thought that was a wonderful idea, too, and at that time, there was a new organization formed called Artist Union. And the Artist Union—we were, of course, having been with the Lovestone group people, we knew a Communist. We could smell him a mile away. And we realized that they were—this was an organization that was going to be taken over by the Communists, and we should do something about it. So, we went in the Union with the idea of trying our best to keep it broad, so that artists from every walk of life could join and have something to say in it. And we were absolutely, just crying in the wilderness, because it was already hook, line, and sinker, a part of the Communist—

[00:20:07]

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Conspiracy.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: —organization. Conspiracy. [Mary Fuller McChesney laughs.] Yes. But the idea was good, and as long as we could stay in it without wasting our time, we did. So, one of the things that was spectacular—of course, I don't know how much of this has been written—has been told by other artists, but I was in the delegation—how I got on the delegation, I don't know.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: This was back in New York?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: In New York, with Stieglitz. In fact, I have a photograph. I have more than that—photograph, Stieglitz, Hugo Gellet, Bryson, who married Ben Shahn later. He was—oh, he was a very famous—of the older generation American artists. Oh, I can't think of his name. My husband would remember him. There was Gorky, Arshile Gorky was on this delegation. Stuart Davis was on. There was a whole gang, we were, I think, 12, and we went to see the mayor to demand—[laughs]

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: There were some Reds in that group, wasn't there?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Well, Stieglitz was not Red. Hugo, yeah. Hugo, sure. [Cross talk.]

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: [Inaudible] illustrated all this—

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yeah. They tried to make it not too Red, you see. That's one of the techniques. That's why they picked me, for instance, because they could never see that I was a member of the Communist Party, knowing that I was—I had been in the Lovestone group, but—at least, I worked there.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Well, they were the Communist Party opposition. [Laughs.]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Opposition. But, I'll tell you, they hated each other's' guts more than they hated the capitalists. The first day we started painting at the Lovestone group, which was on the third floor of this firetrap, you know what they did? They threw a stink bomb in the hallway. And that stink bomb, in summer I tell you, it smelled for three months. It was nauseating.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: This was at the Rivera [inaudible]—at the—

[Cross talk.]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes, New.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: New Workers School.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yeah. And of course, Rivera took advantage of that, too. He—one of his panels—which was a superb thing—happened the day after the big, tremendous, united front for peace against war and fascism. That's why it wasn't called *Peace*—it was called *Against War and Fascism*. And this was an enormous rally, and the socialists came in there, and the Lovestoneites, and the Trotskyites and the Mustyites, and the Fieldites and all the other -ites, including, well, every possible shade. And not to mention all the FBI agents.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yes.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And they all got into this enormous hall for this huge protest against war and fascism, and in the middle of that, someone said something, and—it was Bertram Wolfe, who got up and said, That's not right. He was talking to a Communist, and he was saying, You are saying the wrong thing. This is absolutely wrong. And one person who was seated next to him, hit him in the nose, and he had a black eye. And another one got hurt. It was a real fight, see, against war and fascism. [Mary Fuller McChesney laughs.] When Rivera heard that, he said, Oh, this is superb! This is marvelous! And he had one more panel that he hadn't done anything on, so he drew immediately, that same afternoon, he made a sketch. He was really a genius for that. You see a big, fat policeman—Irish policeman, with a machine gun, and he is aiming at a whole bunch of these intellectuals. Reds, you know, arguing among themselves. You see Max Eastman with a book of Lennon, [Mary McChesney laughs] and you see it's a red book, and he's pointing with a big finger at something, you know—quotation from Lennon, and another guy's—you can see right away, he's a Trotskyite, he has black hair and heavy glasses. All the Trotskyites wore black hair and heavy glasses, and he is saying, However, [laughs] as a matter of fact. [They laugh.]

And then you see Bertram Wolfe getting hit on the nose, and you see his eyes all puffed, and then you see the police quietly watching them, you know, with a machine gun. All ready, any

minute, all they do just press the trigger. And they're not aware of that, they're just arguing over the little—like, the religious people over the Bible, you know. And then, of course, in the background, you see this crowd, this mass of workers, waiting for a leader.

[00:25:08]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: You were talking about the delegation that went to the mayor from the Artist Union.?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Oh, yes. So, we went to ask Mayor LaGuardia. And this delegation first started with a huge demonstration. And the posters were absolutely marvelous. I remember, actually, Gorky, working on them. And all the good artists—there was Stuart Davis, and all that, everybody made posters. One of the posters—I mean, some of them were silly, because everybody was having such fun making the posters. One of them showed the Venus de Milo looking starved, and her breasts were drooping, you know. [They laugh.] And something about starvation, you know? "Art cannot live on starvation." You see this poor Venus de Milo all starved. And then there was a beautiful one, where you see Mayor LaGuardia talking, and his mouth is wide open, and it says, "Talk is cheap. Living is not." You know, gorgeous colors.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Was this—this was the Artist Union demonstration.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Did this come out of the Art Project itself?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: This was something else.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Well, wait, actually I think it was already a delegation that had started to form, and I know that it was Biddle who had been one of those who had done some of the most important groundwork for it. And then it—we began to hear about it, and we heard that the College Art Association—it started through the College Art Association in New York, because Mrs. Audrey McMahon, who was the head of the College Art Association, and who also had a book. I think Philip McMahon was her husband, and he published a book on art—a magazine on art. And there—she was made the director of the New York state Project. So, we—it started right there at the College Art Association office. That was the headquarters.

And everybody was told that this was going to happen, and we were very much interested, and someone at the—oh, I know what—how we were earning money. It suddenly occurs to me. We were making posters for the trade unions. Through the Lovestone group, we made posters. Now, I'll always remember some of the luscious posters we made. One of them was for a strike in Patterson, a silk strike, and all these young people were picketing, and there was this enormous sign which I enjoyed making very much: "We protest the murder of our fellow workers in the south." And "murder" I had painted in red, and I had made the letters drip. And Things like that. And then May Day, the May Day demonstrations. They always had very big demonstrations during the Depression. We made posters, and we were paid for them by the unions, and we had Huey Long, and he said, "Every Man a King" and Huey Long is sitting on a toilet. [They laugh.]

And, you know, things like that. And then, we made one called *The Bed of Capitalist Peace*. That was for one of the organizations. And this was taken directly from [inaudible]. And you saw this very oh, Lana Turner style. At that time, it was Jean Harlow. Jean Harlow dressed as Peace, lying on a gun, and stuff like that. [Robert McChesney laughs.] So, we had a good time. So, that's how we made a little money to live on. And then, as we were working on these posters, there was—a lot of the people who were in that school—a lot of the people who were working in the socialist party, too, were working—were hired as social workers for the home relief, because home relief was there. There were hundreds and hundreds and thousands of people who could not live anymore and who were on home relief. That was a charitable organization, very big. Go away. Bee.

[Cross talk.][They laugh.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: This delegation that you were on, that went to see Mayor LaGuardia —

LUCIENNE BLOCH: This, I think, was a delegation that—really now I should—I have the *Art*

Fronts, they had a magazine that was published called *Art Front*. And a lot of this was put in, and I should find out. I don't remember whether there was already a WPA. I only remember when I got on the WPA. There must have been a WPA art organization already, or it might have been the Treasury Department that had already organized that phase of it.

[00:30:25]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Because there were a lot of artists who were there. I mean, Hugo Gellert was on the Project. Even though he was making sketches for the New Yorker, he was on the Project. And they got on the Project only one week. And this social worker at the New Workers School said to me, You know I work on home relief. I'm one of the social workers on home relief. And what do you think went through? We get orders, every once in a while, they would need helpers. They need people, skilled people, for certain jobs that had to do with the WPA. And she said, They're asking for a fresco painter who's a woman. And who else is a fresco painter who's a woman and who lives in New York City but you? This is their way of calling you on the WPA Project. I didn't ask for it.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, I see.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: They called me. So, I said, Well, what do I do? What do I do? I was all excited. And they said, You have to first get on home relief. And I said, But I have $60 in the bank. And they said, Oh, that doesn't make any difference. You just get on home relief, and you tell them you haven't any money and all that. So on. Well, I didn't like to do that. So, I dressed in my best clothes. And the idea of going on home relief made me sick. And my husband was—he wasn't yet my husband—was horrified. He said, I wouldn't do a thing like that. Either I become an artist on my own merit, or I don't. They won't have me, And I said, But look, this is a chance for a job. I was weak. I wasn't—

I wanted a job, and I wanted to paint. I didn't want to do just posters. So, I went there, and when it was my turn to—and there were long lines. And when it was my turn, I said—I had filled in all the thing. I had put down that I had $60 in the bank. And she looked—the woman looked at me and said, But you have $60 in the bank. And I answered very uppishly, By the time I get on home relief it will all be gone. [Mary Fuller McChesney laughs.]

And she said, Okay, okay. And she accepted me, just like that. And I was on home relief about 30 seconds. From then on, I went right to the office of the WPA. I had been told to do that. And I said, I am the person that I hear has been—they want to have me do some murals and fresco. And they said, Yes, and you go to such and such an office and they will assign you. And I went to the office of Mrs. McMahon, and I saw Burgoyne Diller. He was the head of the Mural Department. He does all sorts of abstracts now. And he told me, Yes, there's a mural to be done at the House of Detention for Women in New York City.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh, that's why they wanted a woman, wasn't it?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. And that's on Sixth Avenue and 10th Street. And he said, You go there, and you ask for Miss Collins. She's the supervisor, and she will tell you all about it. So, I went there and saw this beautiful building. At that time it was a beautiful building. It was new, and it had beautiful bars. They were—the bars were aluminum. And as you walked into the lobby you saw these beautiful bars in sort of semicircle, and you pressed a button, and one of the matrons came out to ask what you wanted. Or she'd talk through the bars. So, I said, I want to see Miss Collins. And I was ushered into the superintendent's office. And she went upstairs to the 12th floor, which was a recreation area for the prison, and showed me brick walls and said, It's on one of those brick walls. We would love to have a mural because all we have for decoration in the—in the jail, in the prison, are travel posters. And there were all these travel posters, [Mary Fuller McChesney laughs.] "Visit Italy", "See Sorrento", and so forth and so on. Actually, it was better to have travel posters than nothing, you know, but still.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: At least a little color.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: It was a little bit on the sarcastic side for many of the ladies. And so she said, We'd like to see the sketch when you're ready. And I said, What do you think would be a good idea? Have you any particular ideas? She said, No. We don't want anything moralistic because it wouldn't go over at all. She said, We want something that'll brighten the walls, and we want something that is gay and so forth.

[00:35:23]

So, I went home, and of course I remembered very well that Rivera said, "You don't just paint decorations. We are not wall painters or wallpaper painters. We have to give a message," and so on. So, and it has to be appropriate to the building. And those were the bible, those were the 10 commandments of the mural painter. It has to fit with the architecture, and it has to be appropriate to the building, morally as well as physically, and so forth.

So right away I remembered having made a lithograph in Detroit of a Negro playground. [Inaudible] I had seen, and it was so delightful, all these kids running, sliding down the slide. And back with the old-fashioned Detroit houses. So, I brought this lithograph to Miss Collins, and she said, That's very lovely. She said, Let's give it to the psychiatrist. And when the girls come in for problems, she will find out from the inmates what they think of it. So, I left it there, and a week later I got the verdict. The girls all loved it, but the Negro girls objected because there were only Negro [inaudible] playground.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And they didn't like that. And I said, Very well. It's very easy. I'll do it over again naturally for the mural, and I will show integrated playground. And not only that, I will show the women, the mothers, seated around and watching children, because I had been told that there was no—nobody in that House of Detention that you could call average. They all had their own little independent problems. There was—there was no average girl. And therefore, I thought, Well, there's one thing that's average. They're all women. And the main role of women are bringing children into the world. And therefore, I will show children and women and mothers. That's the important moral I'll have.

So, I painted it, and I had four assistants. And we did all our sketches right in the jail because we got free lunches. And we ate what the girls ate. And, actually, we had very tough—we used to have what I think was the liver that the lions at the zoo didn't want to eat. [Mary Fuller McChesney laughs.] It was tough. We had really tough liver, but there was—there were two or three women there, they were colored women who had been arrested not for prostitute, which was the main—most of them were prostitutes. But the—those girls, the ones who worked in the kitchen, were dope addicts mainly. And they made pies that were out of this world. I've never tasted pies like the pies at the House of Detention. Anyway, this has nothing to do with art. But you'll find I go off on a tangent something awful.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: It's very interesting, though. Who were your four assistants on this mural? They were WPA people too?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: They were WPA people. One of them was Nan Lurie, L-U-R-I-E. Another one was Ida Abelman, A-B-E-L-M-A-N. She has done some marvelous things. She's done beautiful lithographs. And now she also has a family. And, of course, now they're grown up. She lives in Sag Harbor, and she has gotten into a lot of very beautiful enamel work.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And I hope she goes back to lithographs because she did some great ones. And they are, they're in—the Project has her collection. I think some of them are at the museum—the Metropolitan Museum. They're all about New York because her father had come as a Jewish immigrant. And one of her best lithographs is called *My Father Reminisces*. It's a—it's a beautiful, beautiful work. She did things with subways and elevators. And she had lived all her life in New York, and she really felt it. She felt the whole—the old New York, which is now slowly disappearing. So, she was one of my assistants. [Cross talk.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Who were the other two?

[00:40:11]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And then I had one girl. I can't think of her name. She always used to carry the *Herald Tribune*. She was a Republican. How she got on—she wore new dresses every day—I never understood. I could never understand. But she looked like a million dollars. And she did absolutely nothing.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: But she was one of your assistants?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: She was one of my assistants. And I couldn't, you know, kick her off, actually. And, actually, we were highly amused by her. And there she was a Republican on a WPA project. [They laugh.] And that just wasn't heard of. And then there was, oh, there was Claire Mahl, M-A-H-L. And what's funny is like, one day I was in a museum in San Francisco, and all of a sudden, I see this woman come to me, and she says, You're Lucienne Bloch. And I had just arrived in San Francisco, I knew nobody. And I looked at her, and I said, How do you know my name? And she said, I'm Claire Mahl. I was on your project 25, 20-whatever years ago it was. I was astounded.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Is she still in San Francisco?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: She lives in Tiburon. Last I heard of her, she lived in Tiburon, and she still does quite active work in art.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Is her name still Mahl?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. She was married, and then just lately she was divorced. And it sort of shook her up quite a bit.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: What was the size of this mural that you did at the House of Detention?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: It was 125 square feet [laughs]. I'm glad I know it so fast I can tell you. It was a small mural. And I integrated—not only integrated the Negroes and the white kids, but I also integrated the walls of the—of the prison, which were brick, and I followed the brick right into the mural.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And it was very jolly. It was a very jolly thing. And it actually was very well written up by the papers. They were all delighted with it. And we really worked hard at it. And I did all my plastering.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, you did the plastering yourself?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: I had to do all my plastering. Couldn't have any men. It wasn't—men weren't allowed. Actually, they wanted to protect the men. [They laugh.] My husband did go in in the beginning, and he did help the first—actually, he wasn't yet my husband. I have to keep saying that all the time. Because that's a funny story. He was working in a factory at the time. And we felt that, if he should marry me, then I would lose my—I wouldn't be able to be on the WPA anymore.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: That's right.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: That's right.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Your relief status.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. And also, he had a car. It was an old 1927 car that a friend of his, Arthur Neindorf had gone to Paris, and when he went to Paris after having worked for Rivera, he said to Steve, You go and keep on paying the payments on the car and it's yours. So that's how it went. So later on, on another project for the WPA, his mother thought that it was time that we got married. And so, we felt we had to get married, absolutely had to get married. So, we said, We can do it. We'll do it on the QT. And we won't even get married in New York state. We'll get married on the way to Michigan. And this was to be a big affair. And how—what to do, we were going to be away three days. And the assistants were working beautifully. They were working fast. And we told them, We want to have one day off. And if we can do all of this today, you're free for the next day. And they were all very happy. Then we had one assistant at that time on the other project. This was the George Washington High School mural.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: In San Francisco?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: In New York.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, in New York still. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: All of that's taking in New York. So, this assistant wanted to go very much. We were very, very friendly with him. Right now, he is the art director for *Life* magazine. At that

time, he was my assistant. And he got up at five in the morning, this was not done by other WPA projects. But on my project, it had to be done that way. And he would plaster for me until nine o'clock. Six to nine , and he had done his job.

He could have stayed on, you know, and dwiddled [ph] his fingers and done some drawing, maybe. But instead, he went to the university, and he did four years in three. Took courses there. And—

[00:45:17]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: What's his name?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: His name—his name is Bernard Quint. At that time, three hours of tough plastering I considered good enough for a day's work. And he did grind colors once in a while. But anyway, we left early. We stopped to get a license at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. And then we went on, and we got married in Flint, Michigan. And there was a man there who wanted to sell the photographs he took. He was an engineer for AC Spark Plug there. He took some marvelous photos with a Leica.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: [Inaudible.]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Of the entire Greek Orthodox—Eastern Orthodox Church ceremony. You know, we walked around the four corners of the earth, and we had crowns on our heads. Took all these photos, and he wanted to sell them to *Life*. And we said, Don't you dare do that! We have to continue to appear as though we are just—

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Good friends.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: —good friends. [Mary Fuller McChesney laughs.] Well, we were married, you see. Well, later on I wanted—I wanted—oh, before that I had wanted Steve on the project to help me plaster for this George Washington High School. So, I asked the project, I said, Mr. Dimitroff, of course you know was one of the chief assistants of Rivera during the Rockefeller Center business. And I would need him on the project. I can't use anyone else but someone who knows the technique because I don't want to waste any time. So, they said, Well, but isn't Mr. Dimitroff living in your apartment? I said, Oh, yes, but we're not married. [They laugh.] And they said, Oh, well, that's different. [They laugh.] So, he was put on a project, purely technically speaking.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yeah.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: See, he didn't—he got on the project with his head up. He was not a home relief recipient.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: A home relief project, mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And he worked the same amount of time that was needed for the work he needed to do. And then he signed—he wrote a letter of resignation. And he said he hoped that the project would be able to continue without him. And he was out again, you see. He resigned of his own true full accord. Anyway.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: We should get back to the House of Detention mural. How long were you working on that?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. Yeah. Thank you for yanking me off the branch. [Mary Fuller McChesney laughs.] We were on the House of Detention mural nine months.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Nine months. It was a long one.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. Because we had first to make the sketches, and I had the students—the assistants go and sketch all kinds of details that had to do with New York. Gas stations—gas tanks and old brown houses, you know, the sandstone houses. And then, because I was plastering and also painting, I couldn't do very large chunks. And we worked, of course, five days a work. We didn't word Saturdays or Sundays. So, it was—it might have been a little less than nine months. One of the funny things that happened was when we were working on the—up there and the inmates were coming and watching, they were fascinated, one of them suddenly looked at us, and she said, Gee, you sure must have painted the wrong kinds of pictures to be in here. [They laugh.] They thought we were inmates. [They laugh.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: That's a wonderful story [laughs].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: It was so funny that I sent it to *the New Yorker*, but somehow the way I told the story, they didn't—they didn't print it.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: That's wonderful.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: When we were through, they were—towards the end we had tremendous success. The inmates would come and say, Oh, I'm so glad I'm back here. I came back just to see the mural. [They laugh.] There were many. They kept being arrested over and over again. So, they'd come and say, How are you now? I haven't seen you for a long time. They'd tell us. And they were very happy with it. They loved it. And they were so sharp. They had seen my husband just one day that he came there to give advice on how to prepare the wall.

And he was there one day—not even a day, he was there one hour. And about three or four months later, I was painting him, and he was holding up a child who later on was this, and putting him—putting him on the slide, so the child would go down the slide. And they immediately said, That was the man who came. They said, Isn't that the man who came four months ago and looked at the wall?

[00:50:33]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Yeah. That's amazing.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Amazing. You can understand, though.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: What was the next WPA project that you went on to?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Then the next one was the George Washington High School.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Where is it located in New York?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: That's located in Audubon Avenue and 190th Street.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: That's way uptown.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: It's way uptown. It's a very beautiful building. It's done in Colonial style, and it overlooks a cliff, and it overlooks the Harlem River. You get there with 190th Street/Broadway subway. And first I saw the wall, and it had long—it had five—it had four long, narrow panels.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Horizontal panels?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Horizontal panels, very long horizontal panels. And then one small panel over the door. And it was in the music room. And therefore, I figured, in true thinking of my 10 commandments of a mural painter, it has to fit the room. It has to correspond to the subject of the room. And it has to give something more than decoration to the students. And I have all the sketches that I made, including the ones that I rejected. And rather fascinating, they show the development of thought.

First, I thought of music, naturally. And I decided there would be four different kinds of music, or five different kinds of music: marching music, dancing music, singing music, instrumental music, you know, that kind of thing. And I made sketches like that. And it wasn't any good. I didn't like it at all. It was too much motion, and yet it wasn't—it was too much of a picture, not a mural decoration. And slowly, another development came, and that was to do historical. To show the history of music. But to show the history of music in visual terms, which meant, for instance, for primitive music I would show the primitive instruments, and I would also show the primitive art, which to me resembles the music.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Then there would be Oriental music. And Oriental music would have the Oriental instruments, and we'd have the Oriental art approach. Then there would be the medieval music and the same idea, and modern music. It was very hard to paint classical music. I showed Baroque designs, architectural designs. And the harpsichord and an oboe, and stuff like that. And then the little panel over the door would be music in the high school, singing. It would be the high school children themselves singing together in unison. So, also, because they were long, narrow horizontal panels, I thought it'd be interesting, what is—its time-space, because you

can't see it all at once, so it's not music, which also comes by time. And so, I thought—I went to the library, music library, of New York City, and I looked up all their books on physics, music physics. And there were sound waves. That was about the only thing they could visual—they could put visually besides instruments. So, when we were—I was thinking of the lines, and I thought of the lines of sound waves, I decided to pattern my entire mural on sound wave designs. And it is. It interweaves with sound wave patterns. And the instruments also look like sound waves very much, you know.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: The guitar and the sitar and a lot of these old instruments and new instruments all have the curves of the sound waves.

[00:55:08]

And it turned out very, very satisfying to me. I was—I was very pleased with it. And I have been able to get jobs, very many jobs, from showing the photographs of these. It was done in—I had never before painted in a modern way, that I mean in sort of cubistic technique where I used geometrical lines, and I interwove the sound waves, the instruments, the figures, and also reminiscent with the art of that period. For instance, I had in one, in the primitive panel, you see black hands clapping, and then you see the dancers. And the dancers are not done realistically. They're done like a Negro sculpture. And the rhythm, there's a rhythm, Black rhythm, running right through. Then in the modern panel, I have the jazz. And instead of—I have Black hands, but I have white gloves. And I repeat that pattern, but with the white gloves clapping and so forth and so on. For instance, I have in the Oriental, I made a little too much of the Bali [ph] dancers. But I did things that I had experienced myself.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And, so, the Bali [ph] dancers are there and gongs, and it's a sort of travelogue. You go from Japan across the water, and the reeds. And the reeds become the instruments, into China. And then from China you go off into India. And then India, you have Indian miniatures, Persian miniatures. And then you go into the abstract Turkish, Muslim, and the shofar, the Jewish horn, and so forth. And then for the abstract I used Oriental rug. They're the Turkish rugs. Because to me, when I hear Turkish music, I see the rugs. I immediately feel them.

So, when we had finished making the drawings and had done the drawings, they had been okayed by Burgoyne Diller and by Ms. McMahon. They had to be okayed by the arts teacher at the school, whose name is also Miss Collins. She accepted them. She said, But, you know, I'm not the only one. You have to see the principal too, and the principal has to look them over. And the principal was a Tammany appointee, and he was famous for always being drunk. He's dead now, so we can talk about him. I won't even give you his name. And he was drunk then. His face was all flushed, and he said, Oh, you're an artist. Well, well, well. What have you got to show? And I showed him the sketches, which were quite modern. And he said, Fine, fine, fine. And he signed his name to them. [Mary Fuller McChesney laughs.] Well, then there was—there were two other people that had to be seen. The head of the art department of the school—no, the administrator for schools of the city of New York, that had to pass. It got through. It passed through, fantastic.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: You got to do everything.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yeah. And that's when I wanted to work during the summer because there was nobody there. We could work all day long. No classes.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yeah.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And that's why I wanted Steve on the project. I had a very good reason there. We did fast work. We worked beautifully. Another assistant we had on that project—I didn't have any more of the old assistants. I had new ones. I had Bernard Quint, and I had a Mexican who later on invented this plastic paint and did a lot of plastic paints for Orozco.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, Gutierrez?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Gutierrez, Jose Gutierrez was on my project.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: I'll be darned.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yeah. And, oh, there were two or three others. Unfortunately, I have their names somewhere, but I can't remember too well. Anyway, when we were working, I had them all going around making sketches of instruments in museums. I had one woman, I can't remember her name, but she had done a lot of work for the Index of Design.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And she did beautiful drawings, absolutely beautiful drawings. And I have them here. I love them very much. Beautifully done. Going into the museums all over the country—all over the boroughs of Manhattan and Brooklyn.

[01:00:00]

[Child yelling in background.] She—then, we were almost through. We'd finished drawing, we'd done all the drawing on the wall. We were ready to start painting. And it was in September, when the principal comes around, and he says, You can't work here [inaudible]. Haven't you finished yet? And we said, Well, we said, It takes a little while. He said, You boondogglers. He began to call us all kinds of names. It was fashionable in those days to look down on the WPA as a bunch of boondogglers. He said, You can't work—school starts, and you'll have to close. And I said, But we're just ready to start now. And he said, I'm very sorry. I will not have you work while the classes are on. I need every classroom. So, I said, Actually, it would be very interesting for the students to see me. There wouldn't be anybody. We'll do all the plastering before school starts, early in the morning, and then you could have your classes, and they could see how the work progresses. And it would be interesting not only from the art point of view but also from the music point of view. No, nothing doing. So, we had to tell the WPA. And they said, Well, there's nothing to do. We can't antagonize the principal. You will have to wait until next summer. So we had the entire eight months where we did other work.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: We were put on other projects. I started sketches for another mural. And then, when May came along—I had taken photographs all along, naturally. When May came along, I was absolutely excited about starting again. [Pause.] I was all excited about starting again. And I went over to visit the school. I walked into the music room, and I knew it was the music room. I'd been there all summer. I look on the wall. No mural. Everything was all plastered over. I began to shake. [Robert McChesney laughs.] I was just blowing—I was exploding. I asked somebody. I said, This is the music room, isn't it? And she said, Yes, it's the music room. I said, This is the place where there used to be a drawing there on the wall. Yes. What happened? Oh, it was plastered over. I was ready to go and see the principal and really start a real fight. I was so mad.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I don't blame you.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: But I cooled down, and I called up Burgoyne Diller at the project. And I said, Will you please tell me—will you tell me what to do? I went and I looked and there it was. It was gone. It was no more there. And he said, Well, have you got any proof that you did something there? I said, I have photographs. He took—I could hear the sigh of relief. [Mary Fuller McChesney laughs.]

He said, Well, in that case, don't say a word to the principal. Wait an hour, and I'm coming with Mrs. Audrey McMahon and a lawyer, and we will see what has happened. Don't say anything. And he did.

In an hour he arrived, and they went to see the principal. And I stayed out of it. And they told me—they told him that I had photographs, and that I had proof that we had worked there, that he had destroyed government property, and that he would have to pay for it out of his own money, because he had done something there that was very, very delicate. The next day we not only were given the go signal to go on, but we were told we could go on and work including through school, the school time. And we did. We worked—we worked all through summer. We replastered. We had to take down everything because—

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: They took all that plaster off again.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And start all over again.

[END OF TRACK AAA_bloch64_826_m.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: This is side two of tape two of the interview with Lucienne Bloch. We were just talking about the mural in George Washington High School in New York City and the difficultly that you had when you came back after the summer, all prepared to go to work and found your drawing plastered over.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: And you were saying that Burgoyne Diller and—

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And Audrey McMahon and a lawyer came up and spoke with the principal. And in no time, we were back at work again. And this time, we were so happy that we actually were able to continue to paint all through the winter. And we finished, it was about 350 square feet. And here is a very interesting story, after it was finished, they fixed it up nicely, they repainted the rest of the building—of the room. And I took some colored photographs. It was just the beginning of the Kodachrome.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And I—it was 1937, I think, '37, '38. And they just begun Kodachrome. So, I took photographs. I didn't have any meter but some of the photographs I took came out very well, and that's all I had. And I gave, sometimes, lectures on fresco. [Child yelling and talking in the background.] I showed the sketches as well as the finished—and the whole—and how the mural was developed in the end of the—the finished product.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: But from 1938, I never saw the mural again, until this year. Because I never went back to New York except for—to see publishers about book illustrations which I was doing. And I never had the time to go uptown. Also, I was afraid to go up there. I was afraid because they were talking of the terrible roughness—rough necks, you know, in these high schools, that it could have been all scratched up. And some people have told me, Oh, you can be sure it's all scratched up and it's ruined, and they may have painted over it. So, I was afraid to go there. I was afraid to find it all covered up. But finally, the day that we had free, after we had painted the mural—we had repaired the murals at Unity House this May.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: My husband and I took the pilgrimage up to 119th Street and we to see the mural. So, we went up first to see the art teacher and she was a new art teacher naturally, and she said, Oh, you are the artist. I am so happy to meet you. She said, I have often wondered that—whether there was anyone who had ever done it because we've never, never, heard of you again. She said, We love it very much and we take the classes down to show them how a mural is painted. And we discuss the Cubism in it and so forth. We don't know how the fresco technique is made but we know there are very few frescos in New York. And so, we find it a great privilege. She was remarkable. And then she called one of the handsome colored [ph] boys there. She said, Would you please take Ms. Bloch down to see the mural? She may have forgotten where it was. And he took me down there and there was a music teacher, and she also just was so delighted. And she said, You see, we still have it. It is in very good condition. And it was in perfect condition. It had not faded. Of course, fresco doesn't fade. It might have been a little dark from the New York dirt.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And I hope to go back someday and give it a good, careful cleaning. But it had to be done very carefully, just to make sure that I did a real good fresco work underneath. But it was in fine—not a scratch on it. When I think of the murals in Mexico, that were sort of terribly scratched and destroyed.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Here at Coit Tower too. They had to be repaired just recently.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No, really? I didn't know that.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: They were very much vandalized.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Oh.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Was the mural at the House of Detention still in place when you

went back?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Well, we went there, and we knew that the superintendent had died, and that there was a new person. And it was one of the chief matrons and she remembered me. And we—she said, Well— she said, I don't know. Do you really want to see it? I said, All right. Tell me what happened. And she said, Two years ago, we had a fire. And she said, The whole place was blackened. The top wall was all black. And she said, We haven't known what to do about it. The soot is all over the mural and we don't know what to do. And I said, Well, let's see it. I said, This is a perfect example. Now, we're going to be able to see what happens to a fresco when there's a fire, because we were always ready to say that frescos are great and that they can withstand anything.

[00:05:40]

And Ralph Mayer who had written the handbook of art—art craft, had lectured one time, for all the WPA people, and he had lectured—he had said, "Fresco is no good for New York because of the chemicals in the air which eats into the lime." And he gave off a lot of chemical phrases and he said, "For instance, there is a mural that was painted only two years ago on WPA at the House of Detention for Women. It was completely obliterated." Well, I had seen it just the day before and it was in perfect condition. So, I got up and I was very, very angry. And I said, I'm very sorry, Mr. Mayer but you're a liar and I hate to tell you that in front of everybody. But this must not—this must be nipped in the bud. I said, Any of you—and I turned to the artist then, I said, —who want to come down now and go, I will invite you to the House of Detention to see this mural. It's in perfect condition.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: [Laughs.] Later on, I met him again in a totally different way and I asked him if he remembered that, and he said he didn't remember it. [Mary Fuller McChesney laughs.]

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: He didn't.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: He said he didn't remember that I had spoken up. Well, I remembered it very well because I was still supposed to be Ms. Bloch. And the day after I had spoken, I gave birth to a boy who was walking around here out back—the boy—the father of this child. And that was just quite a funny story because I had been able to manage in such a way—I was always carrying big portfolios, nobody knew I was pregnant. [Robert McChesney laughs.] And finally, I got to this hospital and I got my little notice that I was supposed to write—oh, I had taken a leave of absence for two weeks and I had guessed the time correctly. At that time, it was the first time they gave a leave of absence. You didn't get paid but you could have a two-week vacation, and so I'd taken a vacation and I had written to the timekeeper. I had filled in the timekeeper's thing and I had put down what I had done that week, and I had put down that the subject was George Ernest Dimitroff. And where was it located? Broad Street Hospital. How long did it take to do the job? Nine months. And I wrote this all out, [they laugh] and I mailed it to the WPA. Well, they immediately understood, you see, when they saw that, and I got—I wondered. I said, Now, I'm kicked out. Now, they're going to throw me out. I know they're throwing me out. But instead, I got the most beautiful bunch of flowers from the WPA Art Project. Mrs. McMahon, and on the contrary, Burgoyne Diller said, What do you mean? You go—you keep on. Imagine, "Nursing mother on a scaffold." What a publicity. [They laugh.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: When you saw this mural again last year, how was the smoke condition?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: So, the smoke condition wasn't—was quite bad, and it was very funny. The inmates were dancing around in there, in the recreation room and they watched us. And the superintendent and my husband and myself were standing in front of the wall and we, all three, did exactly the same thing. We spat on our finger and we started rubbing, and you could remove the soot. So, I suggested that they take some very mild Irish soap [child screaming] and they, very gently with a sponge, wash off the soot. [Child screaming intermittently for remainder of recording.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Did it work?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: It worked. Unfortunately, I did not see—I just heard that it was all right, but I did not go to see it. I hadn't—the last time I went, the House of Detention was under such terrible criticism by the newspapers. It was overcrowded, and it was no more the modern building it was

20 years—27 years before, or 30 years before.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:10:11]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And there was a tremendous amount of pressure that they should take those women out of there and start a new House of Detention. So, when I went there, I asked the policemen, I said, I painted the mural up there and I want to see it. Can I speak to the superintendent? And he said, The superintendent is not here right now, and you would have—anyway, to get permission from downtown, the Department of Correction. And I hadn't time. So, I haven't been to see how it looks and I want to because I had no color photographs of the House of Detention job.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: After the George Washington High School mural, did you do any others?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: I didn't. I went—I did a few more sketches for a subway. We were going to paint—I was going to do tile mosaics in the subway. This would have been marvelous. The subways really could do with a—

[Cross talk]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: [Laughs.] [Inaudible] something.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And so, I had a very nice sketch. I worked very hard on the sketch and to me, the sketch is the most difficult. Once a sketch is okayed, it's a joy to paint. But until the time when you have your idea and the idea is a good one and it's not just a silly decoration but it's a—it's got some meat to it, you know. That's the hardest. And so, I had the sketches all ready and then they said the project wouldn't go on. Then we decided to move. My husband, at that time, was not working as an artist. Then I had the baby and they still—they didn't want me to stop. At that time, there were two or three other girls who had babies and they would come to sign up, you know, with their babies in their arms. [They laugh.]

So—but I had done most of the House of Detention, not the House of Detention—the George Washington High School mural was done while I was pregnant. And I always remember one of the artists came to see the job and he was so happy. He was a huge Russian and he picked me up and he threw me up in the air. And so, I had to tell him the secret, the deadly secret, [Mary McChesney laughs] and he was so amused. And then I remembered seeing Hugo Gellert the day I picked up my last paycheck, which was a day also before I had the baby. And I picked up the check and he—I saw him, he said, Hello, Ms. Bloch. How are you? And I said, I'm fine. How are you? And that was that. And then two weeks later, I went back to get my next pay. That was the first time I had kept—left the baby alone. I went—not alone, but I went out of the house—that was three weeks later, and I came by and there he was again. He said, Hello, Ms. Bloch. How are you? And then I told him I just had a baby; he didn't want to believe it. [Mary Fuller McChesney laughs.] That's because I carried this big portfolio, you see.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Earlier, you mentioned something about a delegation, this man Hugo Gellert?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: How do you spell his last name?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: G-E-L-L-E-R-T.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: And you and Stieglitz went to—from the Artist's Union to see Mayor LaGuardia. What was the purpose of that delegation?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Well, it's all written up in this magazine. It was to either continue the WPA Project or to start the WPA Project.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, I see.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: I do—I think it was to start them. It was to start the WPA projects, to start a program for a cultural center in New York City. That's what it really was.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: It was to start a cultural center.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Who are some of the other artists in the—on the New York projects that—who were your close friends?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Oh, gee. There's so many.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: You mentioned Gorky. Were you a good friend of his?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Arshile Gorky, yes. We used to sit after hours and go to a cafeteria, Waldorf Cafeteria and sit down and have coffee, and he had some marvelously interesting things to tell us about his times in Paris. And he'd give us a very wonderful story of how Picasso, when he wanted to start a painting, he would write or he would enumerate in some way, all of the things pertaining to the subject that he wanted to do.

[00:15:01]

So, for instance, if he wanted to paint a circus. The first thing that would come to his mind would be flags, colorful flags, clowns, balloons, merry-go-rounds, and so forth. And he would—oh, fair, that's a fair I'm thinking of, not a circus. He would write these things down and then he would use all of these and super impose them and tie them up together and either create with color and with lines, the various things—[Child screaming.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: You were on a project in New York for a period of three years, or three or four years?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: From 1936, I think, to 1939. Three years.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Three years?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: How would you sum your impressions of the WPA Project?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: I liked the WPA Project very much. I found myself useful and when you're in a Depression time and nobody wants you, if suddenly, you hear somebody wants you, it's a wonderful feeling. [Robert McChesney laughs.] And they wanted me for the kind of work I had been trained to do. And it was wonderful to go into an office and see paintings and drawings and lithographs that some of the people had done on the Project, instead of going to these offices which were barren. Here was art that artist had done and people loved them, the office people were happy to have them on their walls. It was wonderful to go in a school and see these paintings. In the Bellevue Hospital, there were murals done. There were some of course not quite as good as others. I've seen certain jobs done in Tamalpais High School which are miserable. They're gloomy, they're dirty, they—something ought to be done about them. They're passé. What they should do is—I don't know whether they can—some of them are really poor, and either they should clean them, so at least whatever that is can be seen or they—most of them are done on canvass, you see.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And there should be—well, maybe they should be left right on the wall because no one should ever destroy any works of art. Actually, they represent a history—a period of a certain time. You see, their influence of the earlier mural paintings of—[Child talking.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: [Laughs.] What kind of an influence did the WPA period have on your career as an artist? Do you think it changed anything?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: It gave me confidence. I learned how to talk to people. I found out, for instance, from going with—the opportunity of having a sketch and going to the—to a man who doesn't know beans about art and being able to win him over to accept the mural. I went to see Mr. MacCormick who was the head of the Department of Correction for—Austin MacCormick. He was the head of the Department of Correction for the state of New York. He had to be—get his okay, and he was even—he was supposed to pay for the materials. The WPA only paid the artists, but the materials had to be paid by the building. And so, I went there, and I had to talk to him. And of course, for me, it was wonderful because he was a great man. He said, I think this is

a wonderful project. He said, And I'm very happy and I will pay for it. I said, We need materials. I said, We need $50. That's all we need. We really need $25 but I was so afraid that I had it miscalculated, so I doubled. I said, $50 is what I need. And he said, I'll give you a check right now. And he gave us a check. And it just really—out of his own pocket, he said, If I have to go through the city, it's going to take to take too long. And we only used $25 of that and then we sent him back the rest. [Robert McChesney laughs.] And, he was just wide open, I mean, ready for this situation. I remember Ben Shahn had a lot of trouble with his. He was also doing a jail. He was doing a prison at Wards. Wards is an island, and he did some very beautiful things there, finally.

[00:20:05]

It's very beautiful. I haven't seen it anywhere, a photograph, except I think in one book from him. Or was it a WPA job? But it showed—he did a very good—and he did in fresco. You see, now, all these people did frescoes during WPA times, those who had work in fresco. One or two of them were not strict enough in the technique and they were cracked, because they did not follow it. The murals that we did, that Steve plastered and that I painted on, they haven't got a crack on them because we were absolutely sticklers for perfection. We refuse to wait, or to—we insisted on having a whole month for the preparation of the wall. But at Bellevue, this other boy, David Margolis, who was also, later, an assistant of Rivera's and who is not an artist anymore now, he's manufacturing artifacts.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: But his brother is Margo, Boris Margo.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: I know that name.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes, that's his brother. But he, himself, dropped out of a fine arts school. He painted it and they were forming it to do it fast. So, he plastered only two or three coats and he plastered them one after the other, and his cracked. And of course, when—as soon as they crack, people said, Fresco's no good.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Do you think it might be a good idea for the government to sponsor some kind of program for the arts again?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. And they should not do it on the basis of poverty. It should be done on the quality of the artist's work and those who have experience in technique and who have done murals before, [inaudible] when it comes to mural jobs. I also did work for the Treasury Department.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, you did?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: What did you do for them?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: That was from Michigan. [Child screaming.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: That was after the WPA?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: It was after the WPA. I was in Michigan and the Treasury Department had announced a competition for a mural at the—in the post office, this was a post office era.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: This was for Bloomsbury [ph] or someplace like that, in Michigan, near Cranbrook. It's very close to Flint. And I said, Oh, this is wonderful. I had—by that time, I had two children and I said, I can go, it's easy. I can go there and come back, you know, at home. So, my mother-in-law was living with us, so she could take—babysit for the children. And so, I made a very nice sketch, I liked it, which was the fauna and flora of Michigan. And this was to be done in fresco. I mailed it in and waited, I didn't get the winning thing. It was a very well-known Michigan artist who won the competition, and I felt very bad about it, and all of a sudden, I got a letter saying, You're a runner-up in this. And would you be interested in painting a mural at Fort Thomas, Kentucky? And so, I accepted, and because I noticed that they were doing mostly historical work in those post offices, and that possibly, I might have missed out because I had done this flora and fauna of Michigan, I used a historical subject which was Fort—General

Thomas and General Sheridan, because [child screaming] they had met in that specific area and the Battle of Chickamauga in back. And it was 1942 when they were recruiting in Fort Thomas, of course Thomas—Fort Thomas was named after General Thomas—

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: —so, that was all tied up. They had—they were recruiting the soldiers for the Second World War.

[Unidentified speaker, inaudible.]. Put salt on it. [Unidentified speaker, side conversation]. Put salt on the lettuce, that's wonderful. So.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: So, you went down to Kentucky and—

[Cross talk.]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: I went to Kentucky and it's really a corny mural. I'm sorry. I don't like it anymore, I'm ashamed of it. The heads were too big. I was influenced by Rivera. I have to go through this other marvelous mural where I was not at all influenced by Rivera. I made these colossal figures, monumental figures, that were bad, very bad, a lack of understanding of scale.

[00:25:24]

And that's one thing I learned by cruel experience. And I would say that that's the value of that mural, is that it shows a mural that is done without any understanding of scale, because it was a small post office, a small lobby, and you see these two gigantic creatures [child screaming, inaudible] over a map.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: How large is the mural?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: The mural is not very large. I think it's about 150 square feet. And it's well-done, it was done in casein. I had to use a casein technique, unfortunately. I don't know why. At that time, that's all I had—they allowed you to do. They didn't allow fresco, it was too messy. I was there about a month. I did it very fast.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: You had no assistants?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No assistants.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And it was terribly hot, [they laugh] and I was very lonely. And because all of these comments from these Southerners, who were walking in and saying, What nerve. Showing the Civil War with Sheridan and General Thomas. Do you realize you're in the South? And I said, Oh, I'm just only a few feet away in the South, and gave them other reasons. Actually, I had a very saying there. I don't know who had said it, some great person had said it, "Concerning the Secord World War as being related to the Civil War in many ways." They showed it parallel and that was my idea, was to show this parallel of the Civil War and the Secord World War which was for the freedom of—without the racial business, that kind of stuff. But—

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: [Inaudible] southerners [inaudible].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: You know, Jews, at that time. Yeah. [Laughs.]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Was that—

LUCIENNE BLOCH: So, we went back and saw it about a year ago. My husband and I went to see the head of the Art Department in Kentucky, University of Kentucky, Mr. Richard Freeman. And we went through Fort Thomas and we went to the post office also trembling, wondering whether the Southerners had allowed this thing to stay on the wall and there it was, and it was in very good condition.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Ah, that's great.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: It really wasn't as bad as I had imagined it, the lack of—I mean, it was definitely Rivera influenced.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Was that the last government sponsored art project you were on?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. It was the last. I think the government project is terrific. I think they've got to go on with them. They had—some of the greatest artists have been matured on the Project. I'm thinking of some of the—well, you know yourself. I mean, there's a lot of very good artists who did murals on the Project and who continued from then on with a maturity and a sense of being able to handle the medium, and to grow from there. You know, sometimes, you have to get this out of your system, this development, from just little, tiny sketches that' are neither here nor there to good, solid work.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Thanks very much for giving us time for the interview.

[Recorder stops, restarts.]

This is Mary Fuller McChesney continuing the interview with Lucienne Bloch. And the date now is August 31, 1964. Present also this morning is Robert McChesney. You were telling us, Lucienne, about a demonstration that occurred on the project in New York.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. This was probably around 1937 [ph] and the WPA projects were continuously under fire from certain political groups who did not want them to continue, who called the projects boondoggling and so forth. And we were threatened continuously with the end of our jobs, and we would—there were lots of artists who made a point of trying to publicize the fact that it was important to have the projects, not just for the fact that they needed the jobs, but especially for the culture of the United States. And we would go on these demonstration binges with posters. And one time, Mrs. McMahon, who was the head of the New York projects, was to go to Washington to demand the continuation of the art projects.

[00:30:23]

And we went down to wish her luck and to also make very powerful requests of her, and we came down to the office of the Project which was right in the middle of downtown New York. They allowed us to go up to the offices, but Mrs. McMahon had already left, and we were about 219 artists, actually, we were 219 artists, and we were asked to leave since she wasn't there. And we said we did not want to leave until we knew that our demands were met. I went there especially to make photographs because I thought it would be a very exciting protest. But as it was, there was nothing very exciting at first that happened, because she wasn't there and we stayed until five, and then the police came and said, You have to leave. It's an office building, and we had to vacate the premises. One of the artists was a cheerleader, I suppose, said, How many of you—any of you who want to leave now, you may. The others are going to sit down and wait, and nobody left. And I always remember, there was one very old woman who was one of the very good artists on the projects and I can't remember her name right now, but she didn't leave, and they went to her and they said, Don't you want to leave? Something may happen. And she said, No, I won't leave. It was quite dramatic because actually, nobody would've stopped them from leaving at all.

We all stayed there, and I took photos, but I didn't have a tripod and it was dark, but I remember I kept that photo for a long time because it showed everybody sitting so still. That [inaudible], there was no disorder at all. We were just waiting. And the fact that I took a half a minute exposure and that still there was no to very little movement and only my camera was shaking. It was proof that we were very peaceful. Just the same, the police came and said if we didn't leave right away, they would have to pick us up and take us to prison. We all stayed there, linked arms and they yanked us up, slowly peeled us off, you'd say, [they laugh] and we all went in those Black Mariahs [ph], whatever they call them, to be arrested. When we arrived there, course they had really did a few rough—they beat up a few of the artists. They picked the leaders and there was a little blood around. We got to the office—or the police station and there we had to give our names. So, the leaders of the group said, Don't give your real names, but give a name that is not yours. And somehow, spontaneously, every artist gave an artist's name, so there was someone called Picasso and someone else called Michelangelo and Buonaroti and Raphael Sanzio, and stuff like that. And the poor policemen were completely confused. And one of them suddenly said, Gee, those damn foreigners. [They laugh.] They just didn't know that these were artists from far and near. Well, when they were all through and we were all put in a big room, we sang songs and so forth. I was worried because I remembered—I was sure that I had to go to some other affair in the evening. I was, I think, invited to somebody's house for dinner and I couldn't tell them that I was in jail.

[00:35:02]

Pretty soon, they let us go because we're just too many and they said, Come back tomorrow for the trial, to be booked. So, everybody came back to the courthouse and in the courthouse, there were about 500 other artists and interested people, I suppose. And among them were some bearded models. Actually, in those days, none of the artists were bearded. But when the policemen, during this cross-section, had to point out who were the artists they had arrested, they invariably picked the bearded men because that was their idea of an artist. And of course, the place was—we were just laughing our heads off, and the policemen would say—would be asked, Who among this audience was in this demonstration? And they would pick out the bearded models who were bewildered, they hadn't been there at all. And finally, I think the whole thing had to be dropped. But it was very, very amusing.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: What year was this? Do you remember?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: 1937. Early 1937. I've got the clippings. I just have to dig them out somewhere. And I'm sure many of the artists in New York remember that very well.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Did anything ever come as far as the—

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Oh, yes. Well, that's of course what happened. That was the reason for all of this. It was the way in which they could have it in the newspaper and it would make enough of a stink, [laughs] let's put it that way, that it would come to the—well, it's—people would read about it and would write and say there are good things being done on WPA Project by the artists and they are not boondoggling. They have good results. It's good for culture, and it's good for the United States to have artists encouraged. And it certainly did [pause] make a very good result because then the projects remained. They really remained. And I think they remained until the war. I finally left. We left to go to—we had a baby and we had to go to a place where we wouldn't be distracted by exhibits and all of the wonderful things happening in New York. It was just too much. I couldn't take care of a child and be an artist too. So, we went to Michigan where there was nothing, and that was just before the war, 1940. But then I did work, I don't remember if I told you that, with the project—Federal Art Project, the PWA, Public Works of Art Project.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: In Michigan?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: In Michigan.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: I think you told us about that.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: There was a competition for post offices on the Federal Project. And this was a competition for Michigan artists, and I made a sketch and sent it, and mine was a runner-up. And I thought—I was sorry because I wanted this project. It was right near home and I could take care of my children and I could also paint, but someone else was picked for the project. But then I received a letter saying there is a post office in Fort Thomas, Kentucky and would you be interested in working on that one. And so, I said I would and I went down there in 1942, and they were recruiting. It was Fort Thomas, Kentucky. They were recruiting soldiers, right at that little town, for the war. So, my project, I made a sort of combined design which showed Thomas, General Thomas who was one of the great generals in the Civil War, discussing war plans with Sheridan from the Battle of Chickamauga.

[00:40:00]

And I showed Chickamauga in the distance and I showed Thomas and Sheridan in front, rather big—much too big. And then, on the other side of the mural, in the distance, you see Fort Thomas as it is today—as it was in 1942 with the soldiers recruiting for the war. And it was—I wouldn't—I'm not interested in that job at all now. I'm sort of embarrassed that I did it, because everything was out of scale. It was a very small panel, and I made the figures much too big, and I apologize. [Mary Fuller McChesney laughs.] But they still have it and they still like it. We went to see it two years ago on our way down to visit a friend in Kentucky. And we expected it to be, you know, all covered over. And they were very—they said, We like it very much. Of course, they joked when I was painting it. They said, How dare you—this is the South, how dare you show these Northern generals on a Southern wall. [They laugh.] But they were very good natured in that place. So, they enjoyed—they liked my mural. But I think it's very bad. And I think the one that was not accepted was a much better mural.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: What was the design of that?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: That was for Birmingham, Michigan, and it showed the flora and the fauna of Michigan. And it was done in a sort of flat, very gay, green design with all the flora and the fauna, done in a sort of natural history manner.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: That was your last government sponsored project.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: That's right, yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Did you go out to do any murals for private concerns after this?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes, I continued steadily. I did a job for Erich Mendelsohn, the architect, for Grand Rapids, Michigan, Temple Emanuel. And that was about 1,000 square feet. Then, I did some murals for hospitals here in Marin County, a children's ward. And the San Francisco Conservatory of Music has one of my murals. IBM down in San Jose has an enormous 17,000 square foot so-called mosaic, in which one chunk of mosaic is two feet by one foot in length. I didn't pick those up though. I did a design on paper and then they just put it up. That was for John Bolles, the architect. And then there were many others.

The latest were for the San Francisco National Bank, in San Francisco. Two banks, the main bank and one of the branches. I mean, the branch. I'm hoping they'll have more branches. [They laugh.] That's in fresco. Then, another fresco, hat I think is my best work for the Calgary Presbyterian Church on Fillmore and Jackson, which show the four Reformation leaders of the 16th Century: Luther, Calvin, Knox, and Zwingli. And I think that's—that's one of the best [inaudible].

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: When did you do that?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: I did that a year ago. And then, let's see, just lately what have I done? Oh, yes, the Greek Orthodox Church. That's almost a life project. I do a little bit every year. The Greek Orthodox in Oakland. I'm doing most of the mosaics there, except the ones in the narthex. I don't do those.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: The ones in the what?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Narthex. That's the lobby of the church.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, mm-hmm [affirmative]. How do you spell that?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: N-A-R-T-H-E-X

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Narthex.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Then, I just finished, last week, the floor of the sanctuary and the narthex for the Greek Orthodox Church in Belmont. And it's called Cosmati. That's the name of the technique.

[00:45:09]

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: How is that different from mosaic?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Well, it's tile. It's unglazed tile, and it has no particular subject. It's just a design. And I would never have dared do that kind of a design if I hadn't seen them myself last winter when I went to Europe and to the Byzantine churches and studied the art there. They're mostly circular patterns and they use odd shapes of mosaics. And this was our big job was to find unglazed tile because now, they only make unglazed tile square and rectangular. So, many of them had to be cut in triangular forms. And we had quite a job digging out the old tiles in the basements of wholesale houses, which are now utterly—they're not using them at all. They're there for filler. [Laughs.] So, we saved everything we could of these old tiles. Many of them—the only ones that are still being used are by the navy for some of their shower rooms, so to say, on the battleships. But those are hexagonally shaped. So, I've used some of them in my church murals, from the ridiculous to the sublime. [They laugh.] That's about all. I've done a lot of book illustration work on the side and—for children's books.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you do any book illustration while you were on the WPA?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No, I didn't.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Okay. Did you have any contact at all in New York with the other projects, like the Writers' Project?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No, I didn't. I was in contact with some of the artists who have been on the Project, and I still am in contact with some of them. One of them, one of my very dear friends, Ida Abelman, who has does some of the—I think some of the finest prints on the Project. And she told me that, much to her delight, some of these prints have found their way to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. And a friend of hers, who was one of the first people on the Art Project—who was on Writers' Project, Rosenberg. He's now—

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Harold?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Harold Rosenberg.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: He was one of the critics for the *Art Front.*

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. A lot of their training was with the radical movement. And Harold Rosenberg is a brilliant man. He was even then. He was a young man then. He was just brilliant. And he was the one who dug them out. [Laughs.] He told her he was looking through the prints at the Metropolitan and he found her prints there. But we often wonder, now what happened to all the sketches and—all the sketches for those murals were all were given, naturally, to the WPA, what happened to them? There was a museum exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art, which was impressionable, great impression—it gave a great impression to the people. Beautifully exhibited. And one of my murals, the George Washington High School mural, had been made into a beautiful little model with peepholes, so that through the little peepholes you could see the project mural in realistic setting, which gave, of course, the best idea of a mural. And I've often thought that that is the way to see a mural, is to see a model. Because a photograph absolutely gives no idea. When we were in Europe this winter, we were astounded by murals in relationship to architecture and how some things which had always appeared to us as being tremendous were very small and lost in the architectural setting.

[00:50:00]

And others, like the one of Benozzo Gozzoli, which is at the Medici Chapel in Florence, which was beautifully reproduced in *Life* magazine some years ago. Which—I had bought two *Life* magazines so I could spread the whole thing out to show the great mural. When we finally saw the original, we were so shocked and disappointed to find out that it was in a tiny room. It was like wallpaper around the four corners of a little, little room in Florence. And we said, I want to see the Benozzo Gozzoli frescoes, and they looked at us with astonishment because nobody knows that they are at the Medici Chapel. And so, we had to get the keys. They gave us the keys and they said, take a look and then close the door when you leave. And we went upstairs to the second or third floor and found the place and opened the door. And these monumental frescoes were in a tiny room, which made us realize that the artists in those days were having the same problem that the artists have today. They wanted to paint murals and they were given sometimes very poor areas to do it in. And, same thing. [They laugh.] But they did it. And they did it to a degree that was ridiculous because it was not the sort of mural to be in a small room. It was out of scale completely. Sometimes a scale is good, and we can learn so much if we had those little models. Mrs. Erich Mendelsohn [inaudible], she lives in San Francisco. But she has a great, great idea which I would like to spread right now through this project you have, which is to have a museum of architecture.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, that is a good idea.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Isn't that a wonderful idea? And in the museum of architecture—and there is—the nearest to it is the Palais de Chaillot in Paris. That is the nearest, where they have made reproductions of old Romanesque fresco murals. And they have given an idea of how they look because they have made an absolute replica of the shape and form of the chapels, and then a very beautiful reproduction of the Romanesque frescoes, which in many ways remind me of Picasso, and Matisse, and Rousseau [ph], people like that. Remarkable. And then they have plaster castes, very faithfully reproduced, of some of the great cathedrals of France. So, they have Chartres, the great parts of Chartres. And the great parts of these other great places.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: In full size?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: In full size. Gigantic. It's breathtaking. And when you have very little time and you can't go to all these little churches which are very—oh, they're spread all over France, you

can go to the Palais de Chaillot and you can see them right there. But I think for the architectural point of view, there is just no museum. Wouldn't that be a project for the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco? That would be the size of it. And I remember in 1951, '52—do you remember when we had the art festival, San Francisco art festival?

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: There at the Palace?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: At the palace.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Then, they had invited the architects to also have an exhibit. And Campbell &Wong had a full house. They had put in a house. One of their famous just—nothing more than the roof, you know.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Oh, the A-frame.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes, the A-frame houses. And you could go inside, you could see how it was done. And then there was another artist—architect, Kirby [ph]. What was his—no, his name was Kirby [ph], yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: His wife was a painter. Glo Kirby [ph]?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. Glo [ph], yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: I can't remember his first name.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Isn't that awful?

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Walter? No.

[00:54:58]

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Anyway, Kirby [ph] had a very beautiful replica of the design he had made of the building, which was then the California Teachers Association building, and I had painted the mural in there, fresco mural. And so, my job at the art festival that year was to recopy that fresco as a demonstration and people would watch me work during those five days of the art festival. So, this was a very wonderful—one of the most beautiful festivals of art that ever happened, because they also had theatre, music, dance, and architecture—the whole works. That's why I wish the art festival—the Palace of Fine Arts here would rebuild the whole thing, that huge, tremendous thing. And they could have the museum of architecture right there.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: That's a very good idea, I think.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: It is. Then, we could have all kinds of little models, you see, like peepholes. And you could—you would get, then, an idea of some of the mural jobs that were done and how they're related to the architecture, and how much they were a part of the architecture.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: On the jobs that you did with the WPA, was there a very close association between you and the architect?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No. Which was really what Frank Lloyd Wright used to sneer at about mural painters, that they were there to cover up the mistakes of the architects. You see, a job like the House of Detention for Women was the barest of necessity. It was done completely, just the walls. The same with the schools. The schools were barren. And they would have these empty spaces. And so, there were places where it was not a crime to paint a mural. It really helped—I don't think one should paint murals unless one is going to improve on the building. If one is going to paint a mural and it's going to be a shocker, a horrible thing, that would spoil the beauty of pure lines, the windows, the structure, then it's wrong.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Well, you didn't work on any new buildings either then, did you? They were buildings that were already completed.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: They were all buildings that were already done and not very good condition. The House of Detention was in very good condition then. And it's so solid that I don't think—they're trying to take it down, but I think it would cost too much to take it down.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: In San Francisco, the Coit Tower, the WPA project, of course, was the—

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. That was new.

MARY MCCHENEY: —combination of the architect and the artist because it was new. I was wondering, did anything like this happen in New York when you were there? Were there any new buildings?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: The only new building was the airport in Newark, New Jersey where Arshile Gorky was making designs. His work, of course, was very bold and very avant-garde. And I don't remember whether he was actually finally allowed to continue. I don't think he was. He had done these sketches. And somebody's got the sketches. I don't know who.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: I've seen photographs of the mural.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: But I don't know if it was ever completed, or they were from the sketches or what.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes, yes. Well, in that book on the Federal Art Projects, the reproduction they have of one of my—of the job I did at George Washington High School was the sketch—was the full-sized cartoon of the—one of the details. It was not the original sketch itself. I mean, the original mural.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: So, I don't know. But that would be interesting to find out.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: That was the only new building—

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Then Ben Shahn did work for the Wards Island. That was the men's House of Detention. And that one is still there. That is a beautiful job. But I think he had trouble too.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: That was also a new building?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: No, that was an old building.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Old building.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: There were very few new buildings. It was the Depression. There were no new schools. There were some schools that had been built in 1929 that were new, those were considered new. But I don't recall any.

[01:00:10]

So, imagine what will happen when, finally, the United States government realizes the importance of art and buildings, and designs the buildings to go with the art, or designs the art to go with the buildings. At least with an understanding that they are one and the same thing.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: It's certainly something to look forward to.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes, that's right. I hope that we will see it in our lifetime. And there are so many of the artists who started in the Art Project who had just come out of school at that time, and who were able to work directly in this monumental manner, and who were helped by it, who continued to work—who continued to do good work. That's—that is great training, wonderful training.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: You're rather exceptional, though, as far as continuing your fresco work is concerned.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes. I'm trying to think of—you know the one painter who made the mural project in the post office down by the ferry building?

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Anton Refregier?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yes, Refregier.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: I think he has continued to do lots of work.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: I think so, from what I've heard.

LUCIENNE BLOCH: And well, there were a few very good artists in Chicago, too, who continued. Millman and Varvak [ph], though I think they both died. I'm trying to think of some of the others. Well, there have been very few in California. Except Emmy Lou Packard. She's done some pretty good work in mosaics.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LUCIENNE BLOCH: Yeah. Well, I can't think of anything else right now.

MARY FULLER MCCHESNEY: That's about it?

LUCIENNE BLOCH: That's about it. [Laughs.]

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]