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Oral history interview with Beniamino Bufano, 1965 October 4

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Beniamino Bufano on October 4, 1965. The interview took place at the Union League Club in San Francisco, California, and was conducted by Mary Fuller 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. Additional information from the original transcript that seemed relevant was added in brackets and given an -Ed. attribution. 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 MCCHESENEY: This is Mary McChesney interviewing Beniamino Bufano. The date is October 4, 1965. Let's see. According to the information that I have here, you were born in San Fele, Italy.

BENIAMINO BUFANO: That's right. Yeah.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And you studied at the National Academy of Design in New York.

BENIAMINO BUFANO: That's right.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What year did you come to the United States?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: I was one year old.

MARY MCCHESENEY: You were one—

BENIAMINO BUFANO: 1906 or 1907.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And was that the first school that you went to, the National Academy of Design in New York?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: That's right.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Who were your instructors there?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: [James Earle] Fraser, [Herman Atkins] MacNeil, and [George] Bridgman.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And Bridgman. And then you went to the Art Student League of New York also?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: That's right.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And who was your instructors there?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Bridgman.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Bridgman. Let's see. And according to this, then you came out to San Francisco to work on the Fair in 19—

BENIAMINO BUFANO: 1915.

MARY MCCHESENEY: 1915. And you were to assist the sculptors Paul Manship and James Earle Fraser.

BENIAMINO BUFANO: That's right.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: And what were you doing there? What work did you actually do at the Fair?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: I did the main entrance of the Palace of Fine Arts and the main column at the Rotunda there.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: Yes. Were those done in plaster? What material were you working in?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Plaster of Paris.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: Plaster of Paris?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Yes. Everything were done in plaster.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: That was for the building that was designed by [Bernard] Maybeck?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: That's right.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: And you also worked on the Indian Buffalo nickel with Fraser. Is that true?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: That's right.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: What did you do for that?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: I made the buffalo.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: You designed the buffalo?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: I designed the buffalo.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: And did he do anything at all?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Not that I know of.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: I see. I better play this back—[Recording stops, restarts] According to this, you were at the Art Students League in New York, let's see, 1914 to 1916. And then you won a prize at the Whitney Museum in 1917. What was the prize for, what piece of sculpture?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: It was *What America Has Done for the Immigrant* and *What the Immigrant Did for America*.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: And what material was that in?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Plaster.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: It was in plaster too?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Yeah.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: What size was it? Was it very large?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: About three feet by two feet. They were group of children.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: How many children?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: I took the opposite view that most people took. I tried to explain that the immigrants, in spite of the fact that had their own home when they came here, they had to rent an apartment, that they were not as happy as most people really know.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Where were you living in New York at that time?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: I was living in Washington Square.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: Oh, mm-hmm [affirmative]. I see that you studied both in Paris and in Italy.

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Well, I mean, I didn't study in Paris or Italy. I had studio there.

MARY MCCCHESNEY: Oh, I see. And it also says that you were acquainted with Picasso and Rivera when you were in Paris.

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Rivera? No. Rivera was before my time.

MARY MCCHESNEY: But Picasso, you did know—

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Picasso, I know, yes. As a matter of fact, he has number of my drawings. He has all my bulls. The drawings of bulls that I made.

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

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Yeah.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Was he an art student then? Or you were just working artists as friends?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: No. He had a studio.

MARY MCCHESNEY: I see. And then—

BENIAMINO BUFANO: I just met him casually in one of the cafes.

MARY MCCHESNEY: And after you'd come out to San Francisco in 1915, did you stay on here or did you did you return to New York?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: No, I returned to New York. I was never paid for the work that I did here. And I left San Francisco and went back to New York. I went to Los Angeles first. I stayed in Los Angeles about a month and then my mother called me back to New York.

MARY MCCHESNEY: And then how long did you stay in New York before you returned to California?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Well, I didn't come back until a number of years after that.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Let's see now. This says that you were teaching at the California School of Fine Arts.

[Bufano also taught at the California School of Arts and Crafts in Berkeley, California, 1917-1918 -Ed.]

BENIAMINO BUFANO: That's right. Yeah.

MARY MCCHESNEY: And that was 1921?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Yeah. I imagine around there somewhere.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Because they're not too sure—

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Because I was in China in 1921.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, you were in China in 1921. And that's when you—

BENIAMINO BUFANO: In China in—I went to China in 1919. I was in the Chinese Revolution there. I was shot twice in China.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Did you do any sculpture there when you were in China?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Yes. I did quite a lot of things there. As a matter of fact, a number of things that are at the Metropolitan Museum, I did in China. I did quite a few glazing things, and I made a portrait of Sun Yat-sen and a lot of other work on own which I made there. I was there three years.

[00:05:14]

MARY MCCHESNEY: Were you working in ceramics there, mainly?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Well, not working with ceramic. I was doing sculpture then I glazed them, if that's what you mean.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Well, they were clay though. The body was clay?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Yes.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Did you work in any other materials there?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Yes, I worked in stone and started some things in metal, direct.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Working directly in metal?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Direct in the metal and direct in the stone.

MARY MCCHESNEY: And then when you return to San Francisco, you were at teaching the California School of Fine Art.

BENIAMINO BUFANO: That's right.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Who was the head of the school at that time? Is that Lee Randolph? Is he still—

BENIAMINO BUFANO: No, he didn't—I didn't teach at the school—well, I did teach at the school of—because it was part of the arts and crafts in Berkeley.

[Note: Two separate schools - LF -Ed.]

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, I see.

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Randolph was in charge then and [Spencer] Maky. But the one that I was under with was—just remember his name. His daughter is still there now. Well, it may come to me. As a matter of fact, you could find out because he was the one who still owns the school. I mean, his own family still owns the school of the arts and crafts. [Dr. Frederick Meyers -Ed.]

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, I see.

BENIAMINO BUFANO: The arts and crafts was part of the University of California. And I was dismissed from the University of California, because most of the students used to come into the class and we used to discuss philosophy and various other subjects, politics and things like that. And I was dismissed, and started my own school. And we functioned for about a year, and we went out of funds, because we refuse to accept just hangers-on. We were looking for real talent. And there was so little around, functioned for about a year and then we had to quit.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Where was your school? In Berkeley?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: No.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Or was it over here in the city?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: It was at the Hawaiian building after the Exposition. It was left out during the time of the Exposition.

MARY MCCHESNEY: So, that was here in San Francisco?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Yeah.

MARY MCCHESNEY: How did you first make any contact with the WPA? And wait a minute, you were on the Art Commission too. When was that?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: The Art Commission—I was on the Art Commission of 1945.

MARY MCCHESNEY: So, that's quite a bit later. Now, how did you first make any contact with the WPA or any of the Federal Art Projects?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Well, the WPA, of course, we made contact almost as soon as the WPA actually came in.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Were you on the first—the PWA, like, the one that did Coit Tower?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: No, I was not on the PWA. I was kept out of that, you see. And then came in later. As a matter of fact, the whole group of PWA was started up in my studio, group of painters and sculptors. We—they gathered at my studio and we started the program in the

studio there.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Who were some of those artists?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Well, I don't just remember now their names. I mean, it's so far back. There were about 20 of us. There was Joe Danysh and—who later became in charge of that. And John Stoll and quite a few others, but I don't just recall their names.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Stackpole?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: No, Stackpole wasn't in it.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What was the first project that you began on the Federal Art Project? I was interested in how you went about—you know, they went about setting up the project. Did you work in your own studio? Did they assign you a project?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: No, no, I worked in my own studio and I had a number of people that worked with me. I made those 23 large groups and there's one of them right there, the Penguins.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh, the animals.

BENIAMINO BUFANO: All stones. I made most of those animals that were supposed to have gone to Aquatic Park. And then Fleishhacker, who was the boss of the city during the time, when the project was given to the city, it was about half complete.

[00:09:59]

Fleishhacker took over and used the facilities. There was—he put a restaurant there. And I indicted Fleishhacker. I had to go to Washington D.C. in order to indict him. I put 11 years on his head. And it was during that time that the—when I got back, I was given the order to put Fleishhacker out of the Aquatic Park, which I did. The government spent over \$100,000 during that time. And Colonel Lowe was in charge, but I was the forward man, you see. In other words, all the blame was put on myself. Rest of them, Colonel Lowe and the rest of the people that came from Washington D.C. to straighten out were in the background. And we discovered that Fleishhacker stole \$1,800,000 on that project. The Aquatic Park was—the pet project of Harry Hopkins. I was supervisor there. And the paintings that were done on the inside, which I was supposed to have done, but I called one of my persons whom I know, Hilaire Hiler. And he—I put him to do the painting instead. And I made the groups—the figures of about 23 figures that—to be there, you see. Right—to be lined right along the beach there. And when the project was given to the city, Fleishhacker was boss of the city, had been boss to the city for 30 years, so to speak. If I remember correctly, Rossi was mayor then.

And when Fleishhacker took over, Harry Hopkins called me. See, Harry Hopkins and I were very close friends. I was one of his boys in New York when he was a social worker. And I was put in charge of the cultural program in Washington, D.C. immediately—just before the war started. And Hopkins was very much upset at what Fleishhacker had done, and I got quite a scolding. So, I told Hopkins, I said, after all—I said, I'm just a little guy here. He's the boss, of the city. He has all the politicians with him. With just a letter from new people in Washington, D.C., I can just put them all out of business. So, he asked me to come to Washington. So, I went to Washington. Hopkins was in the hospital during the time. He was at the Mayhew [ph] Hospital. He was very sick. I went to see him, and we talked for a while, what had happened in San Francisco. And then he said, go and see—I was trying to think of his name. He was put in charge there. But anyway, I went to see him. If I think of the name, we can—I'll tell you after.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Was it Allen?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Huh?

MARY MCCHESENEY: Was it Allen? Joseph Allen?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: No, no. Oh, Allen didn't have anything to do with—Allen became one of the scoundrels of the PWBA with that bitch of his, Dorothy Collins there, because—

MARY MCCHESENEY: But this person was in the head of—was the head of Aquatic Park Project that you mean?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: They didn't have anything to do with the Aquatic Park.

MARY MCCHESENEY: No, no. The person that you were trying to think of.

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Oh, yeah. That's what—that's the—no, I was trying—I was in charge of the Aquatic Park. I mean, I was supervisor. And there we're number of people that were working there, like Hiler who painted the walls on the inside. I was the only sculptor on it during the time doing these groups. And so, let's see. Let's see. We get off the subject.

MARY MCCHESENEY: You're talking about seeing Hopkins in Washington.

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Oh, yeah. Then I went to see Hopkins' right field man, who was working with him. And when he saw me, he says, Are you the only guy that's got the guts to come? What happened to the project? So, finally we talked for about an hour, two hours. And he says, I want you to go back tomorrow and I'm giving you three G-men to go with him in San Francisco. You're in charge, but Colonel Harrington will be actually in charge, but you will be the front man.

[00:15:00]

I mean, you will have to do all the talking and so forth, you see, and straighten up the thing. But you will receive the assistance of Colonel Lowe, who will fully in charge. There was a group of people, about 10 or 12 people, that came in. But I was the only one who was supposed to do the talking and the fight with Fleishhacker and so forth, you see. So, Holger Cahill, who was Harry Hopkins right hand man, who was curator of the Brooklyn Museum, he and I had become very close friends. We went to see—Howard was his first name, this other man. I just almost had his name. [Coughs.] At any rate, he says, I don't want you to go back tomorrow. Let these G-men go with you. They're going by train. You could fly. I'd like to have you stay in New York for a couple of days. I want to give you a party. So, we had the party. And about three days later, I came to San Francisco. And as I said, I was given the key of the city by Washington on the Federal Projects. So, I went and put Fleishhacker out of the Aquatic Park, broke his locks, and opened the palace to the public. This went down for about two weeks.

The government discovered that most of our men were involved with Fleishhacker. Lawson who was the state director, who had become a sort of a scoundrel and moved in with Fleishhacker, he was one of the guys that was connected with labor. That's how he got his job. And it was during that time that Danysh got married to this rich gal Libby Ley [ph]. And they traveled—she traveled along with him. And of course, he neglected quite a bit of his work. And Cahill was very disappointed in him. So, Cahill—I was put in charge in San Francisco for the time being, particularly on the aquatic project. And then, of course, Allen and Dorothy Collins took over. And they, of course, mess the whole project. As you saw, there was a lot of wasted time. They were connected with the Fleishhacker gang. And Lawson who was who was the state administrator and—Bill Moser who was the city administrator—I saw Bill just the other day. As a matter of fact, he can give you a lot of information on this very same thing that I'm talking to you about, if he will give it to you. He probably won't but he'll—so, since the project was so messed up, Colonel Lowe, after about a week of investigating, called me in and he says—he showed me a lot of the names. He says, this person, Bill Mosher is involved and Lawson and so forth.

And he says, You realize this? I said, Hell, I've been telling you that when I was in Washington, D.C., that all of these guys were involved. And they involved—they had involved not only our city people who were working for Washington, D.C., but all of the federal men, you see. There was—there were quite a few. There was one woman who was in charge of the woman department who was so involved that Colonel Lowe said that it's not possible for us—the papers, of course, knew that I was the only one—they didn't know about Colonel Lowe or anybody else. I was put in charge and so naturally, they came to me for information. And Lowe says that we cannot let any of this information out because the project is so involved. The Fleishhackers stole about \$1,800,000 on the Aquatic Park. And there are many other projects that they were involved in and then quite a lot of project over the country. If we let this thing go out, we will probably have to close the WPA.

[00:20:00]

So, Colonel Lowe was asked to go back to Washington. And of course, the newspapers were hot after me, trying to get some information. And I have to sort of stall them off because of what had happened, you see. And I was waiting, of course, for information from Washington, D.C. to see just what—how we were going to proceed. But that information became so involved, because the project—you see, what actually happened, when the federal government had in charge of the WPA, everything went smoothly because they were—the politicians had really nothing to do

throughout the entire country. When all of this element of cheating and destroying project—because as you know, during that time, all of the supposedly—the money gang like the Fleishhackers and the rest of the ones throughout the entire country were against Roosevelt. They called Roosevelt the cripple in the White House. And they tried to do everything that was—to destroy the Project, you see. And naturally, when the federal government released its hold and put it in the hands of the state, then it came into the hands of the cities and so forth. And then the—just the local districts, then the WPA became so corrupt, which received the name a man standing on his chin on the shovel and so forth, you see, which millions and millions—billions of dollars were, well, of course, wasted under that condition. But it was the politicians and the ones who were against the FDR, because FDR, having started these projects, to which, of course, they accuse Roosevelt of being a socialist, which of course, it was true.

Roosevelt did start the socialistic element. I mean, it's all because of these—the tremendous national project, which will put into the hands of the federal government, like building roads, building parks, the Art Project, the Music Project, the Writers Project, and all of the other projects which over \$16 billion was spent on these projects during that time. As a matter of fact, it was the only cultural problem—progress that United States has ever had. I mean, if you read through the history of—the American history, it's the only cultural beginning that the people of the United States came in contact with, which was the WPA, you see. And it was for that reason, that the—most of the capitalism, particularly, and the politicians moved against Roosevelt because of his control that he had, you see. It is only when the federal government released its control that the projects became corrupt. And it was not only the—many of the workers, which did not have anything to do with the art projects but the artists themselves. Many of them became corrupt. For instance, I had a number of people that came in under my direction, where they would go in the five-and-ten-cent store and buy a little tin—a little copper bowl, and they said that they had made that. And of course, we had to employ them. Because it was supposed to have been charitable progress—program, you see.

That, of course, it was the big sin of the WPA, because the WPA was not a charity program, because the people would feel they didn't receive very much money. But they worked for—the little work that they did do particularly when the project became so corrupt. But they became corrupt because of the politicians when it was taken out of the—when the federal government released its control. That, of course, was the big sin of Washington, D.C. in releasing its control and putting it into the hands of the states, which did everything to destroy the projects. And then it came into the hands of the cities which became worse, so the thing when—from worse to worst, you see. The—in spite of the fact, I think that if we—this is going to take about 100 years before the—much of the fine things that have been were done on the WPA. If you take the Writers Project, for instance, if you go into their libraries and read the guidebooks that they did on animal, birds, and the wildlife, and so forth.

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And then the many of the things that were done by some of the artists who took advantage of doing the best that they possibly could, paintings, frescos, sculpture. And then the theater did a wonderful job in many, many cases. If you remember, they put on that play, *One Third of a Nation*. And so on, many of the things that were done during this particular time, as I say, that when the actual history of the—of what actually happened during the few years that Roosevelt was in charge, when you look—when you travel around the city and you see the wonderful roads that we have, the many parks, the Cow Palace, for instance, was done under the WPA. If you go at—to Camp Ord, officers' club which is one of the finest things in Camp Ord and many other places, in St. Louis, for instance. The—and many, many things that happened throughout the entire country, the Forestry Department, the planting of trees, for instance. And then the coming in of the National Youth Administration, which was under—became under Aubrey Williams during the time. Aubrey Williams and Harry Hopkins were together. As a matter of fact, Aubrey Williams was Harry Hopkins' right hand man. He is the one that did all the dirty work. I mean, the—where Aubrey Williams took a lot of the blame of many of the fine things which were done after the projects were put under the rules of states and then the city and so forth, when it became so corrupt.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What were the other major projects that you were involved with, besides the Aquatic Park animals, which were never completed—

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Well, my project, nobody knew anything about it because Moser bought me \$100,000 worth of stones, granites. And I worked on the project. As a matter of fact, the—not even the WPA knew about it because I worked on it. And I was getting \$60 a month. And by the

time I got that \$60, I used to spend it for tools and things like that. And I made about 25 or 30 large pieces of sculpture and that's one of them there which was destroyed. I had to redo the whole thing. The base was all destroyed. The stainless-steel beak was—so, the head was broken off and I had to replace it with stainless steel.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Where did that happen?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Huh?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Where did that happen?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: It happened Aquatic Park. The army did a lot of the damage.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: That was in Aquatic—

BENIAMINO BUFANO: The what?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: That was in Aquatic Park?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: It was placed there, just temporarily, at Aquatic Park. And then they pushed a truck into it, and the whole thing—the top of the thing—first they stole the steel off, then they broke the head. And then the base was all broken, which I had to redo the whole thing. And then later, when the—I was having trouble with—when Joe Danysh left and Allen took over and Dorothy Collins which moved in with Allen, they got physically involved. And the project actually went to hell. I moved against them. I went to Washington, D.C. I was doing the big wall for the—one of the big schools in San Francisco. What's the name? That scoundrel—the architect who did the 450 Sutter. What's his name? The brother's in charge right now. He also did the telephone building there.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Yeah.

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Huh?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: I know who you're speaking of. He's also—he was a big shot in the art association.

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Yes, he was. As a matter of fact, he had control of the art association. He was under the shrewd politics—Tim Pflueger.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: Pflueger.

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Pflueger was his name, who was one of the guys that—in spite of the fact that he took advantage of it, the WPA was very much against it, you see. And because of indicting Fleishhacker and exposing Fleishhacker, Pflueger took the big panel away. I was nearly finished with a big panel, you see.

[00:30:10]

And when the things were reported to Washington, Cahill came over. Cahill was in charge of all the projects throughout the entire state. He came over to straighten out what had happened. But Pflueger was involved with so many of the politician, Fleishhacker and the whole gang. And because I had indicted Fleishhacker, I put 11 years on his head, and the federal government put another 51 years. But he never served one single day because all of our men were involved. Not only they're involved, they—his people and the city like Lawson who became one of the scoundrels who was being paid by the federal government and was also involved. Bill Mosher who built the Aquatic Park, you see. Bill Mosher was the architect of the Aquatic Park. And during the time, he was the city administrator for the WPA, but was under Lawson. And he had to follow Lawson's program. And so, the project became so involved that Washington got scared and asked me to leave San Francisco. They promised me \$25 a day for the rest of my life if I left San Francisco, because they were scared that Fleishhacker was going to bump me off, you see. And I was just a kid at the time, and I refused. I refused for the simple reason—as a matter of fact, I was called back to Washington, D.C.; why I refused. I stayed with Aubrey Williams. And we had dinner one night, Harry Hopkins, Mrs. Roosevelt, Aubrey Williams. Mrs. Williams who fixed the dinner for us. Margaret Valiant was in charge of the Music Program, the folklore under Aubrey Williams. Aubrey Williams had left the Forestry Department during the time and just in charge of the National Youth Administration, to which I moved in with him later. And we got started talking, and they wanted me to leave San Francisco, because they were scared since

Fleishhacker had involved all our men, and he was the boss of the city. He had been considered sort of a scoundrel. They said, If you live in San Francisco, you're not going to be alive very long. And I refused. I said, You people have involved me in this. I'm hanging on a limb, and I'm going back to San Francisco to finish my work. So, I came back to San Francisco. And the federal government had three bodyguards they sent to protect me. And Stilwell was one who used to brief me every Saturday afternoon. Stilwell and I were very good friends. He spoke Chinese better than the Chinese. I had been in China, and I spoke a little Chinese myself, the Cantonese dialect. He spoke the Pekingese dialect, which is now universal in China, the Pekin—see, China has 18 dialects, three main dialects. the Cantonese, which has nine inflections; the Shanghainese, which has five inflections; and the Pekingese, which have three inflections. That means that the Cantonese could say a word in nine different tones meaning nine different things, and so forth.

And so, Saturday afternoon, Joe Stilwell—as a matter of fact, I inherited one of his trousers when he passed. He was in Carmel. His wife—his family live in Carmel and I had a place in Carmel during the time of when I was at Fort Ord, you see. And so, one Saturday afternoon, I went over to see him. He asked me to come over to—it was at the Presidio during that time. So, we got started talking. And here's one of the things that he says. He says, You know, when you walk along the sidewalk, don't walk too close to the building, but walk right at the end of the—where the street is. So, when you come to the corner, you could see what's happening. That was one of the briefs. Because they're all afraid. And during that time, for nearly two years, none of my friends would walk with me because they were scared.

[00:34:57]

I knew that nothing would happen because the papers had every information that if anything did happen, the axe would fall on Fleishhacker. So, as I tried to tell them that there was no danger, but they were scared. So, one day, in order to straighten things out, Holger Cahill, who was Harry Hopkins' fieldman and who was in charge of all the art projects, came to San Francisco and gave a party at the St. Francis Hotel, in order to straighten things out between me and Fleishhacker. And I was the only one that didn't appear at the party—to the party, you see.

So, that's part of the story of what happened with the WPA. And as I say, in spite of the fact that many of the artists and some of the writers, perhaps, took advantage, and the millions of other people that were on the project who took advantage of the—that's how we actually received the lazy sort of—or the wasteful name that we had where you have—they made posters of a man lying on his chin on the shovel with his hands. But the—when truth is known, when some of the fine things that have been—that were done during the WPA, as I say, with the writers, with the painters, some sculpture and the road building, park buildings, and many of the—like the Cow Palace, for instance. And this thing that I mentioned at the Fort Ord and also at Fort—down at—near San Luis Obispo there, which was Fort—well, at any rate, that's still the—then later, I moved in with Aubrey Williams, who is in charge of the National Youth after we were having this trouble with a WPA, with the people in San Francisco.

Aubrey Williams called me, and I was put in charge of the National Youth Administration with Aubrey. I used his office when I was in Washington, D.C., went back and forth almost every week. And we created project of school children. The maximum age was 16 with—and I had these projects in California and throughout the entire country. And I did—during that time, I did quite a bit of traveling. So—and we did many things that were put up in schools. As a matter of fact, many of them were not put up in spite of the fact that we made designs for these things. As a matter of fact, I still have some of the drawings that the kids had made, you see, hundreds of 'em, because of the of the politicians who tried to destroy the project by refusing these projects to go up in schools, public buildings, and so forth. In other words, everything that was done under the WPA had to be done with projects that had to do with people, like parks, museums, schools, federal buildings, city buildings, and so forth, you see. And in spite of the fact that we made thousands of designs to go up in schools, or in federal buildings or in parks and so forth, that's how I made my Sun Yat-sen, for instance, and the Statue of Pasteur which is on your side of the—at San Rafael, you see.

MARY MCCHESENEY: San Rafael High School.

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Which was partly destroyed, you see. It was never unveiled. And then many other things which would happen that didn't happen because of the scandalous programs that both the states and the city fathers had against FDR and Harry Hopkins.

MARY MCCHESNEY: What was the story of the St. Francis statue? Did you—it has in note here that you designed many of them. You did the St. Francis on horseback?

[00:40:04]

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Yes, but that—

MARY MCCHESNEY: How did that all start?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: You see, I created this project of St. Francis. We were to do the St. Francis on Twin Peaks. It used to be 180 feet in height. It used to be in stainless steel and in copper. And of course, this project moved on and when Danysh left and Allen took over which practically destroyed—got in—was involved with Lawson, so to speak. He had to leave a little later. He was also involved with Dorothy Collins, you see, who was his secretary. And so, the—let's see. I lost my—

MARY MCCHESNEY: About the St. Francis, I was curious about how that went—

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Yes, in the St. Francis. So, I made many studies of the St. Francis.

MARY MCCHESNEY: This was to be the one that was 180—or to be 180 feet—

BENIAMINO BUFANO: 180 feet, and that's the—if you read the stories during that time, Westbrook Pegler attacked me. That was 11 pages on the front page of the—as a matter of fact, more articles were written regarding my attack with Westbrook Pegler. And Washington said, If you were to put all these articles face to face, they would cross the whole continent of the country. There was so much. [Mary McChesney laughs.] And then I went to— I went back to— what's his name? He was—oh, that wonderful guy, Heywood Broun, you see, came to my defense with Westbrook Pegler, you see. But apparently, because of the opposition of the scoundrels of the various cities, there were only two articles of Heywood Broun that were written. So, I went to see Heywood Broun. And when Pegler saw that—when I was—because they lived not very far from each other, he asked me to go and see him. So, I did, I went to see him. And he says—you know, he says, You're not mad of what I said? I said, That's your business. It was my business to do what I did. And if what you did, if you accused me— he says—you know, he says, I did it just to give you publicity. I said, That's a hell of a way to give a guy publicity. [Mary McChesney laughs]. You see.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Well, actually, he attacked the sculpture on the aesthetic grounds. But did he—

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Did what?

MARY MCCHESNEY: He said that he didn't like the design. Wasn't that true? Of the sculpture?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Oh, yes. He said, I could do a better thing than—not being a sculptor, I could do a far better thing than Benny Bufano did of the St. Francis. So, he made a horrible thing. Then the Press Club took over. The Press Club, of course—the guy that got the received the thing was Caleb, who just died recently. His son has taken over the column, you see. He had sent his sketch, you see, that Pegler had done, you see. It was the most horrible thing you ever saw in your life. It was really nothing. It was so confused. And he brought that thing up at the Press Club, you see. And then the Press Club said—he says, Why don't you send Pegler some material and ask him to do— so I did, and they took photographs and things. As a matter of fact, if you go at *the Chronicle* and you get the morgue, you'll see some photographs that—ff you ask, what's the name—

MARY MCCHESNEY: You mean, Pegler actually did the sculpture?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Yes, he did a piece of sculpture. And they have photographs at *the Chronicle* there. It was really a horrible thing. He called it—what did he call it? Some famous gag, some woman that was involved. I don't just remember. I mean, it's so far back. And—

MARY MCCHESNEY: Were there political reasons for his attack on you, you think?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Yes. He was against Roosevelt and against Mrs. Roosevelt. He attacked me because [cross talk] being that I was doing this big thing and it became an international—as a matter of fact, wasn't it Roger Fry? It's in my book. He said it was the biggest art controversy of the 20th century. He called it. Fry became—he used to come and watch me work when I did

the St. Francis, when I was working on that St. Francis, on the granite one, which is now in front of the Longshoremen.

[00:45:06]

And so, that's part of the story of the St. Francis. Of course, the St. Francis never happened. It never happened because they—because Fleishhacker was against it. He was the boss of the city during that time. And then finally, Fleishhacker was moved out of the way. It was moved that I do the St. Francis. And some of the material was made—was already purchased and it was in the hands of Tom Brooke [ph]. And it was during the war—of course, when the war came on, you see, after the government started talking about statues, pulling the statues down and putting the bronze and whatever other materials the statues were made of that had metal in it to make bullets for guns and things like that. I hid my St. Francis, I hid my Bach statue which I had made, which is now in the Philadelphia Museum, and many of the other things which I had. And there was about \$10,000 of copper in the big head, which I was to start of the St. Francis. And during the war, Brooks, who was also against the Roosevelt administration, he was the city administrator, and sold the materials without, you know, letting me know and things like that because it's during the war. He said, Well, after the war is over, then that thing with project will go up, which never happened. He had sold all the materials, you see, which went for bullets. And so, the St. Francis was never done. I made many, many models of the St. Francis. Some of the models are in Washington. And I also made a statue of Roosevelt. One of them is about 15 feet high, which is in Vallejo. And then I have a small study which I made from him right back of that penguin, and a number of other things, you see. And I became very close with Roosevelt and Aubrey Williams. And we work with the National Youth Administration and the Forestry Administration, you see.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Were those art projects you were setting up for the National Youth Administration?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Yes, I was in charge of the project with the National Youth Administration. We get 4 million youth on the project. And Margaret Valiant was one of the—one who got charge of the music, folklores. And Alan Lomax also, who—we went about making records. We made over 4,000 records of the Bill Hillies [ph] and all over the country, see, which you can—anyone can subscribe to them in Washington, D.C. if you just send the prices of some of these records. The price of what costs them, you could get copies of these records that we made of the national youth.

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: In the Library of Congress?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: I beg you a pardon?

ROBERT MCCHESENEY: In the library—

BENIAMINO BUFANO: In the Library of Congress, all of these. As a matter of fact, last time I saw Alan, it was in London last year. He was working on a project in London and I stayed with him. I spend a couple of weeks with him. And he's also written several books. As a matter of fact, he's become quite famous now, you know. He's written many of the things that Pete Seeger sings connected with Alan Lomax. Alan Lomax—of course, his father started before him, you see, and then he took over later. He was on the same project with—when I was with Aubrey Williams during the time. There was Margaret Valiant and Aubrey Williams and a man by the name of Burns [ph] in Los Angeles and quite a few other—Helen Gahagan, we were on the same project during that time. Helen Gahagan was connected with the Actors Workshop, you see, who gave—they gave many of the—of their—played many of their shows in Carmel. They had an open-air theater there. Helen was living in Carmel during the time, you see. And—

[00:50:00]

MARY MCCHESENEY: What was the story about that sculpture of yours that was stolen in Carmel?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Oh, yes, the Bach statue.

MARY MCCHESENEY: How did that ever happened?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Yes, the Bach statue, you see, it was during the war, we had declared war—the day that we declared war. And the Carmel—the Bach festival wrote to Harry Hopkins if it was possible for me to—for the federal government to loan the Bach statue for the Bach festival.

Hopkins called me. I was in San Francisco during that time. He told me the story. I went to Washington, and I brought the Bach statute to Carmel, you see. Harry Hopkins was going to unveil it. And so, I went to Carmel. I placed it in the park there. I dug a hole in the park so to put the thing, temporarily, and put a vertical column on the inside so as to put the—because the statues was in stainless steel and the head was in granite, you see. The statue was supposed to be watched every 15 minutes by the police. It was very apparent, and we discovered a little later, that the police were involved in this thing. So, again, people who are against Roosevelt, and also against Bach because they accused me of having a Jewish nose on Bach, on the Bach statue and so forth. And so, I put the statue up there. And the following day, as a matter of fact, the Bach festival sang that evening before that statue was to be unveiled. They sang in front of the statue. At eight o'clock in the morning, somebody woke me up. John Cunningham, I was staying with him in Carmel. He woke me up and says, I just heard the news that they stole the statue of Bach. Well, I said, Stole the statue of Bach, how could they steal it? It's 14-feet and had a granite head. He said, It's true. I go there, and sure enough, what happened. As I say, the policemen actually involved.

As a matter of fact, one of the federal—FBI man, I think, was involved, you see, with the police at any rate. Well, as I was going to see the statue, this FBI man stops me. He calls me over. I go to him. I said, what—he said, What is your name? I said, Who are you? He says, I'm an FBI man. I says, How do I know that you're an FBI man? I says, Why did you pick me? I came over to see about my Bach statue. So, he says, Come in. He says, I want your name. and if you've got—I said, I'm not going to give you a name because I don't—I have no trust in you. I said, If you want to take me, if you're a real FBI, I'll come in your car and you can take me to your office. I want to be sure. He got scared. And I said, If you want to know my name, write to Washington, D.C., at the White House. Call Harry Hopkins. He'll tell you my name. He got scared, you see. Well, he says, You know—he says, I am supposed to— but I said, Why don't you pick just me? There are a lot of other people that are walking along. I was just going out to see the story that I'd heard about the Bach statue. He knew that they have stolen the Bach statue. So finally, I go over and I see they had intended to take the whole statue, but they didn't have enough time, 15 minutes. So, what they did, they pulled the statue down and pulled the head off. They just had enough time to do away with the head. And they left. Later, I discovered that most of the people at Fort Ord, officials, were involved in the stealing of the—of doing what they did, because they were—they were all against the FBI and the story. As a matter of fact—what's his name, who wrote a poem on that thing—[Robinson] Jeffers.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh, he did?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: About how that thing was stolen.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Was it ever relocated?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: No. Then all kinds of stories were said about it, that they had taken the thing, tied up big stone and sunk it into the Pacific Ocean. And another said that they—a number of people have gathered, that it was Fort Ord and they had it in the middle of one of the staff buildings. Hundreds of stories that came out of that thing, you see. And finally, I made a new head of the thing.

[00:55:01]

Of course, the statue was abandoned. After they stolen the head, the WPA was out of it. It was just waste of materials. So, I took it and made a new head. And while I was working on this new head, the FBI followed me to Los Angeles. I did—I made the head in blue granite, see? They came over and they questioned me, and it was the same old story. I scared the hell out of them because I was connected with Washington, D.C. And finally, the—I was accused of stealing my own statue, and destroying my own statue, which of course—

MARY MCCHESENEY: By the FBI?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Well, not—the FBI was partly connected, I think, with the police because they were involved in that thing, you see. When the federal government discovered that the Fort Ord was involved, you see, of course, the police and the whole—and then as I—so, I made this new statue, of course, since it was—WPA said okay. Well, that statue no longer exists. So, I—naturally, I made the new head, and it's now at the at the Philadelphia Museum which is coming—I'm bringing it over. We were going to show it at the United Nation because Stevenson had prepared for me to have a show at the United Nations.

MARY MCCHESENEY: In the New York building?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: In the New York building there. And then, of course, you know what happened. So, the other day, I called Phil Stevenson and he had left any word for them. And they said, Yes, that he talked about it but there was no—because I have about 50 pieces in New York, you see, which what the Guggenheim and they just found storage at the Guggenheim warehouse, or right next to the Guggenheim warehouse, you see. And—so, I don't know whether we're still going to have the show there. I'm waiting to hear from U Thant. I saw U Thant when he was here. Well, I don't have the—because I gave him—I offered him that head, you see. And now, it has to go through the 117 nations to see whether they're going to put it up in San Francisco or New York, you see. [Clears throat.]

MARY MCCHESENEY: It will be put up in one place or the other, though?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Yeah.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Either here or in New York.

BENIAMINO BUFANO: So—

MARY MCCHESENEY: Did you do any sculptures for the Fort Ord building? The Enlisted Men's Club?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Fort Ord? No.

MARY MCCHESENEY: You didn't?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: No.

MARY MCCHESENEY: What were the other main jobs that you've done at WPA?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Many things that were done on the WPA on the Fort Ord building.

MARY MCCHESENEY: But not by you.

BENIAMINO BUFANO: As a matter of fact, it was all the—no, I didn't do anything.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Yeah.

BENIAMINO BUFANO: I mean, I was in charge then, and I was put in charge to—oh, we had dinner at Aubrey Williams—this was just before the war happened. And General Marshall was there. Mrs. Roosevelt was there. And we got started talking. He says, you know—he says, You're an artist. He says, We've got a lot of people in the camps who really have no business shouldering a gun. He says, Why don't you go to various camps and try to locate the talent and pull them off the fighting program, so that they can—painters could decorate their walls, that writers could write plays and things like that and so forth. And that's what I did. And one of the places—one of the first places that I was in is in Fort Ord—not Fort Ord but Fort—down at San Luis Obispo there. I had met the two-star general there, General Christian. And we became fairly good friends. So, he was the first camp that I went to.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Was that Roberts down there?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Fort Roberts.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Yeah.

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Fort Roberts. So, one morning, I went with my secretary to see him. So, I went to—I stopped at the gate there and asked one of the boys. I said, I would like to see the general. They looked at me as if I was crazy. Said, Nobody sees the general. So, they talked it among themselves. And finally I said, I want to see the general. Call the general. Finally, after 15 minutes of haggling with the guys in front of the gates says, Who do we say— I said, Just tell him the man who made the cat. Then I knew I was crazy, you see, because he had received—the general received one of my cats, that they—he gave a talk at the club. And I made their mascot and then we made small studies of the cat. And each time one comes to speak at the club is offered one of these cats, you see. So, the general had received the cat.

[01:00:06]

And there was more haggling amongst them. Finally, they called the general and says, You know, there's a man down here says—wants to see you. The man who made the cat. Send him right up! I could hear his voice, you see. And finally, you should have seen these guys, you know, all the bowing. And then finally, I got to see the general, and we got started talking. He says, you know—he said, Let's give a party. It was on a Friday. He said, My daughter is here, and I'd like to go—let's have a party. So finally I said, Fine. So, he picks up the phone and he calls up his lieutenants, captains for about 10 minutes. Nobody answers. It struck me so funny. So, I—you know, I started to laugh. I said, General, how did you become to be a general? He said, Why do you ask? Well, I said, You're so gentle. I said, Here you picked up the phone, you call your captains and your lieutenants, nobody answers. Supposing that something happened, war came along, what would happen? And like a sheep, he says, Hey, you know, this is Friday night. [They laugh.]

So, the following morning, he says—I stayed with him that night. The following morning, he said, Let's go down and take a look and see what could happen. Let's see if we can look at some talents to decorate the—so, we go down, and this guy was dressed up in—not in his uniform. He didn't have—you know, open shirt. And so, I said, All right, General, let's get off. Let's go in. He says, They won't let me in. I said, You're the general. Why? He said, You see that sign up there, without a necktie, you couldn't get in. He says, I don't have a necktie. [Laughs.] Well, I said, I don't have a hat. No necktie myself. Oh, he says, You're different. So, that was part of the story of the old general. Later, I discovered that he was the grandson of Andrew Jackson. And then I said, Now, I can understand. Excuse me just a minute.

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MARY MCCHESENEY: Were any of your St. Francis sculptures ever actually placed in San Francisco?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: No. The—some of the studies that I made for it, which is—the one that's now at the Longshoremen.

MARY MCCHESENEY: That was a study?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: That was one of the studies that I made, about 18 feet. That's the granite one, then I made these two here and a number of others, which are now in New York. And there's one of the—at Stanford University. I've been accused of making about 125 St. Francis. That's not—I made quite—and I made a lot of drawings and things like that. But I made about six or seven studies, and this one, which is for Alcatraz Island—I mean, study for Alcatraz Island, that parabola, the stainless-steel parabola. It's one of the—and I made quite a few drawings and things like that, which are in my book. And then I gave it to the city and the church, the St. Francis Church in San Francisco. Originally, it was to be placed in—at the Civic Center, but there was a lot of haggling of the politicians, again, Fleishhacker was still—was the boss of the city until he passed down, until he was indicted, as a matter of fact. And he lost the bank, and his brother lost his bank. And he declared himself bankrupt. And so, the St. Francis has never went to the—it was to be placed between the Opera House and the Veterans Memorial there. And finally, I gave it to the city. The City of Paris [department store -Ed.] was interested in putting it in the park there in front of the St. Francis Hotel, also. Paul Verdier was then one of the commissioners when I was on the commission, you see. And—but he never got past it because there was so many people against it. Fleishhacker was, of course, against it because I had indicted him, naturally.

And so—then I gave it to the—I got acquainted with this priest who came in to see me, Wagner. Very nice guy, who then lost his job. He was transferred on the other—in Oakland. We got tired of talking about the St. Francis. And there was some woman who was involved in the thing, who had a lot of money and who had been maltreated by some of the members of the Peter and Paul Church. So, she moved over with the St. Francis Church. And she says, Oh, if you can get the St. Francis, let's put him on the steps. So, finally, I decided to give it to the city. Was to be placed on the steps. But I refused to put it exactly on the steps, partly on the sidewalk, so that it would still remain to the city. But the church was the custodian, and they can have it there as long as they wanted the statue there. Then, of course, again, the Italian neighborhood, which is just a gang of—who have the mentality of bootblacks. They are the—perhaps more Italians in San Francisco than any other nationality. And none of them have actually done anything, you see. Then they have this group of women. What do they call themselves? Well, I suppose who, you know, deal with culture and things like that.

So, one day they came over to see me. We would have put it on Telegraph Hill and says, Would you follow our direction if we took the St. Francis? I says, It all depends on what your directions are. If you've got good directions, maybe we could work together. And that was the end of the St. Francis. So, I gave it—as I said, then I gave it to the to the church. And I put it on the—say, the feet of the St. Francis are on the—on the sidewalk, at the last step.

[00:05:02]

And then, of course, the same gang, the farewell committee of Italian women, the group of ignorant ignoramus. Together with their men. They breed like rats, you know. And so, finally, they moved against, after several years that it was on the steps. Let's see, it was 1950 or 1955. I went to Paris—gave it to the city, went to Paris. They financed my trip to Paris. It was in st—had been in storage for 29 years. I was 16 years old when I first made it.

And then during the war, there were all sorts of messages that the Germans had taken it and brought it to Germany. And then when the Fascist in Italy took—moved in with the Germans, that the Italians had brought it up to Assisi. Of course, I could get no information at all in Paris where—but I know it was moved three times in Paris, to save the statue. So, finally, I went to Paris, located where the statue was. It was already crated. But part of it hadn't been polished, so I polished the face, you see. And I brought it to San Francisco and was put up to the church. I was in Europe during the time. When it was put up, I wasn't at the dedication. So, it was there for several years. And then, of course, these same women, the Italian—the old ladies, the Italian gang, it didn't look like St. Francis. They said, St. Francis was a poor man. I reminded them that it was the—he was the son of the richest man and in Assisi because his father was an Italian Jew. Of course, then they—the Catholics are after me because I brought up the story that Francis was under 4-feet tall and he was an Italian Jew and—so, they accused me of not having patches. St. Francis was poor. So, I said, I'm a sculptor, not a tailor. [Mary McChesney laughs].

So, finally there was this haggle of taking it off. First, I was against. Was going to force them to leave it there because I had given it to them, and they had given me the word. And I had letters, you see. And then a few of the—they wanted to send it up to a place where or someplace under a—there was sort of a monastery which I—of course, I refused. And finally, I—my letters proved that it was—that I had given it to the city and partly because it was on the city property. The feet were on the same property. And after a fight, I finally took over the statue. And then Reno had sent a whole delegation. The day that we were taking the statue out, they wanted to take it up to Reno, you see. And finally, I said, Yeah, it's okay, as far as I'm concerned. But I—it has to come back at a certain time. As you know, of course they wanted to keep it there. Then Oakland put a bid into the thing, you see. So, I sent it to Oakland through some friends of mine, you see. And then the city wanted to buy it. So, I was—so I had a meeting with the mayor there. I refused to sell it to them. I said, All right, I'll lend it to you for a time. But they wanted to put it in one of the plazas there with a fountain around, you see.

And since I refused to actually let them have it, to sell it to them, then it went in front of this hamburger stand. It was there for a little while. And then finally, I was offered \$50,000 by Daphne, the undertaker's that have a place right in front of the new Mint, you know, on Market Street and—I forgot the name of the other street. At any rate, they have this big place there. They offered me \$50,000 if I put it in there, which I refused. I said Francis—it's bad enough that I put him up among the living, then among the dead, you see. Then, of course, the Longshoremen [Union -Ed.], because I was doing—I was making—doing this hand for the Longshoremen, you see. We talked about for three or four years.

[00:10:00]

And finally, I got tired of talking about it, so I started that thing. I started this hand. And when I was finished, I asked them to come to see it. I had already given them the St. Francis. Well, they said, we have to St. Francis, what's the use of having the hand. Putting me 26,000 bucks in the hole.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh, really [laughs]?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Which, of course, I could have easily sued them because I had insurance from one of their own magazines. That we had started to talk about it. Some of them wanted—what's his name, in England? Well, at any rate, finally I was—after I'd given them the St. Francis, the hand—I was left with the hand, you see. I didn't do anything about it. I just gave them the St. Francis and put it up there and made a little park out of it. And so, that's the story of the St.

Francis.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Did you do anything, any sculptures for the Fair at Treasure Island?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: No, I was supposed to have done. As a matter of fact, my statue of Peace was supposed to be on the Fairgrounds.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh, that was originally—

BENIAMINO BUFANO: I had been given two things there. And then, of course, you know, they got started telling me how to do it and what to do. So, I accepted the commission. I was already given—I think it was \$1,000 or \$2,000. And I decided to do it in stainless steel, in the actual material. I was given to large statues. One was the day and light—light and darkness. One of the statues is supposed to be dark and the other light, I made my statue of Peace, you see. And then when I was about true [ph]—at first, I had a lot of trouble with them. They says, Why do you want to do it different than the others? Everything is being done in plaster. Why do you want to do it— I said, I'm not charging any more than doing it in plaster. And I'm giving you a permanent thing there, so the thing could come back to me after you people get through with the exposition instead of destroying it, which they did with all the other things, you see. After all this haggling, I went to work. I had—you know, I'd already signed a contract with them. And so, I didn't say anything until I was finished. Then when I was finished, I asked him to come to see it. They came over to see it. They liked it, with the exception that they wanted me to change the nose, which I—I said that the nose didn't need any changing. And so, they—

MARY MCCHESENEY: You have troubles with noses.

BENIAMINO BUFANO: The what?

MARY MCCHESENEY: You have some troubles with noses, apparently. [Laughs.]

BENIAMINO BUFANO: So finally, they accept it all right. So, finally they send me a letter. They're coming over to get the statue piece. I said, If you're coming over to get the statute piece, be sure that you have the rest of the money with you when you come over. So, the second letter came. It says, If you don't let us have it, we'll sue you. I said, If anybody is going to do any suing, I'm going to do the suing. I said, I'm not refusing you the thing. I made an agreement with you that I was to do this. And after you got through, I was to take it. I did it in stainless steel. It cost me a good deal of more—10 times more than the money that I got from my materials and working it. And finally, I said, If you're going to sue me, go ahead. I said, I'm the guy that really is going to do the suing. I never heard from them. So, it never went to the exposition.

MARY MCCHESENEY: So, it never went to the fair? Is this—

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Then when—what's his name? Who was in charge of the program there. He wanted to show it there with a number of other things. As a matter of fact, a couple of my other things were shown, like the penguins were shown. And the bear with cubs [*Bear Nursing Cubs*], which are now at Aquatic Park—no, at 15th and Valencia Street in one of the projects. And they're just loaned to the city, they're supposed to go to Washington, D.C. I already had conversations with Kennedy about bringing them over. Now, this guy that's in the White House, who I consider a butcher, I won't even have anything to do with him. So, I just forgot all about it, you see, until some change comes about Washington, D.C.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Where is the sculpture, the *Peace* sculpture? Was that one at the airport now?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: The *Peace*, yes. I got \$1 for that. I gave it to the city and—but it was never unveiled because we had agreed that—Eisenhower was supposed to come. The president of, or rather the minister of—the Premier of France—of Japan had already promised to come.

[00:15:03]

And the Premier of England was supposed to come and France, United States, Japan, at the unveiling. That's the agreement that I had with *the Chronicle*. Because when the statute *Peace* was in danger, I was in Los Angeles, giving a talk to some woman's club there in Los Angeles. At two o'clock in the morning, telephone call comes. I answer the phone, it's *the Chronicle*, says, there warehouse—as a matter of fact, the warehouse had warned me before, says that we're going to move, and we'll have to find a place for the statue, because it's been in storage for 19

years. And so, finally, this *Chronicle* reporter said—it was Abe Malikoff [ph]. He said, you know—he says, You're going to lose it and that sweet girl had offered to pay the—I owed about 900 bucks, you see, storage. I had paid, I don't know, for eight, nine years. And I had to accumulate it. And the warehouseman told me, he says, Don't worry. He says, When you get the money— so this time they had to move because the freeway went, you know—they put the freeway there, you see. So, they said, You're going to lose it. They said, Why don't you come to San Francisco? I said, A lot of nonsense. I said, That statue weighs 20 tons. Who's going to move it from the place where it is? If they're going to move it—it's not going to be so quick to move it. I'm going to be there when they move it, you see. And finally, they got—so I hung up on them, you see. Finally, eight o'clock in the morning, one of the men from *the Chronicle* was there to pick me up. You know, after I stopped the conversation I said, You know, things like this have happened before. It's possible that they can moved that thing. You know, with facilities that we have, you see. So, I got started—I lost some of my sleep that night. At eight o'clock in the morning, *the Chronicle* was there to pick me up and says, Come to San Francisco. We'll give it to the city. All right. I go to *the Chronicle* and—they—we decided to, you know, to give it to the city. We were to put it in— on that—the [inaudible] Mall, with that big thing and I was going to do a big mosaic in back, you see. [Orpheum Theater -Ed.] So, finally, I went back and says—they give me the fare and said, You go back to Los Angeles. So, finally I said to myself, I'll go to Los Angeles tomorrow, since I have something to do in the studio.

They discovered that I didn't go to Los Angeles, so they came to the studio. And sure enough, there was Whitney and Dave Moore whom I—where I have my mosaic. Came over and said—you know, he says, Let's take the statue. We'll put it up in the—we'll make a—we'll build a thing right around it and we charge 25¢ and we'll give you some of the proceeds to you. *The Chronicle* had heard that Dave Moore and Whitney was in my studio. So, they came to the studio and got started talking. He says, They're private individuals. He says, Don't give it to them. He says, Let's give it to the city. So, finally when they left, they locked me in the studio, you see. I had the key right in the studio, took the key lock me in the studio because he says—he said, You know how these news reporters, they break the window to get in the studio to get the story. So, they locked me in the studio and they brought a box of oranges, four or five loaves of bread, you see, [Mary McChesney laughs] until I decided to go to Los Angeles. So, the following morning I went to Los Angeles. And then I—after I came back, after a couple of days, everything was quieted down. We would put it up in front of the Orpheum wall. It was set, you see. Because I'd given it to them, you see. They'd made sure that I wouldn't be able to sue them, so they gave me one dollar. They said All right. You sold it to us for one dollar. It belongs to the city. Then this agreement was—the four ministers was to come at the unveiling. So, we put the statue up. All of a sudden, the last week, nothing had happened. I had received a word the premier of Japan who was coming over. This was about 10 days before the unveiling. It was to be unveiled on the 18th of April.

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So, then I got into a hassle with *the Chronicle*. They were going to unveil it. I said, All right. If people are not coming, we're not going to unveil that. Well, we got the date set, the 18th. All right. I said, You people promised that these people would come. We wrote letters to them. They were going to come. Now you're going to just unveil it. The thing was never unveiled. You see, I refused to go to the unveiling. They never unveil it. It's still there. So, that's the story of the *Peace* statue.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Do you think it would be a good—

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Now, they got a garage there. I don't know what they're going to do. Two weeks ago, I understood that they were going to move it. That thing weighs about 100 tons now, because it's filled with cement on the inside. Whether they're going to move it or not, I don't know. I'm going to see *the Chronicle* about it because they were responsible for this. But you see, I cannot sue them because I gave it to them for one dollar. Oh, of course. I mean, if I want to make a fuss, I could make a fuss loud enough to force them to do something about it. Maybe, I will. Maybe I still will.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Do you think it would be a good idea for the government of United States to sponsor the arts, again, where they did during the WPA?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: That's what Kennedy had started.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BENIAMINO BUFANO: If you recall, I think that was about three or four months after he came in. He didn't exactly mention, you know, I mean, in full tone. But he did suggest that something of the Roosevelt element was going to be started, you see. But because of his low number that he got, you know, because he was elected on a very small margin, you see. Apparently, he got scared. But what he prepared to do, he was waiting to see for the—his second term. That's when he was going to start, you see. Well, the guy never got the chance. As a matter of fact, when I was in Rome, I corresponded in four different languages, papers. And everybody thought that—well, as Warren, if you recall in the papers, before this committee was involved, Warren and—

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh, the investigating committee.

BENIAMINO BUFANO: —investigating committee, you see, which they were Southerners, you see. Of course, after his death and—Warren did say that the assassination of Kennedy was not one man. They were all involved, it was the South that was all involved. The whole story sort of fits together. When I was in—last summer when I was in Europe, I was in Rome most of the time. I'm doing a large figure in Rome and then—and also Israel. I was supposed to be there now. And so, nobody believed, you know, the story of what was happening. And then, of course, this committee was created. But I was surprised to see that Warren did not declare himself as a one man, you know, on the opposite side. Because what he had said before was just the opposite of what—although the report—of course, I haven't read the report. I wouldn't read it, so they gave me a million bucks because—I mean, it's so big. That thing could have just a few pages would have been sufficient, you see. Two volumes were written on the thing now, you see.

Of course, Europe believes that even Johnson was involved in this thing. And nobody who followed the program when Kennedy was alive, you know, Johnson—when Johnson appointed—when Kennedy appointed Johnson, Kennedy did not expect Johnson to accept. As a matter of fact, he said it in his letter, you see. And then if you have also watched the papers, that Johnson had a very bad public relations job done against him, you know, that he was—that he used to go around distributing pens, you know. These lousy pens that they write for a day or so and then you got to throw them away, [Mary McChesney laughs.] you know. As you see, in spite of the fact that it was with Roosevelt, I mean, you see what he's doing, become the butcher of the United States, what we're doing in Vietnam. We spent \$6 billion in Vietnam, you see, where we have absolutely no business there, you see.

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He's having [come in (ph)]—who committed [ph], you see. And then this other scoundrel, Chiang Kai-shek, you see. \$29 billion we've given to his—I knew Kai-shek when I was 14 years old when I was—lived in China. I was stranded in China. I lived on the docks for nearly nine months, just for my rice. And then I wrote an article, how I got acquainted with Sun Yat-sen. I wrote an article against the missionaries there, you see. Because I had become—you know, the missionaries, they tell you the story that they work amongst the coolies, that's a lot of baloney. Because they have these schools in Canton. Now, the Canton Christian College, in Peking, the Peking Christian College and Shanghai, the Shanghai Christian College and all over the—and they charge \$400 a month and go. What Chinaman can pay \$400? There were two or three of the missionaries who had abandoned these people and were doing work among the coolies, you see. So, I got acquainted with one of them and we started to talk.

So, I wrote this article, "Does Anybody Care?" And in Canton, there was *the Canton Christian Times* that was published by a man by the name of Lee [ph]. And I wrote this article, which was against the missionaries. So, I went over to Lee [ph] and I showed him the article. He looked at it and says, I couldn't publish this article. They would burn my paper. We talked for a half hour. Finally, he says—you know, he says, Maybe we could publish this if you sign your name. I was like, Yes. All right, sign it 10 times. So what? And finally, it appeared in *the Canton Christian Times*. It was on a—I went to see Lee [ph] on a—I think it was either Monday or Tuesday. I don't just remember correctly. And the thing appeared the following day. And Sun Yat-sen got a hold of the article and called Lee [ph] at the paper. And Lee [ph]—Sun Yat-sen says, Who is this person that wrote this? He said, He's just a kid. He says, Why don't you—I'm having a party here Saturday night. I would like to have him come up. So, Lee [ph] located me.

So, on a Saturday, I go up and I meet Sun Yat-sen and Madam Sun Yat-sen. And, you know, Madam Sun Yat-sen was brought up by the missionaries, and she was against what I had written. She gave me a talk on the missionaries and so forth. And Sun Yat-sen says, Don't bother. She'll get used to that. So, finally—it was immediately after the Chinese and the English revolution, you see. [Traffic horns honking.] And the Chinese had won Canton, to take over. Because the

English were in control, as you know, and been in control in Hong Kong, and they controlled the customhouse there. So, the Chinese boats stopped—one day it cost them \$1,000 a day, and 10 percent of everything that's on the ship that's going to Canton. So, when it came to Canton, which is 100 miles down the river of Canton, the English also controlled the custom house. And that was the fight between the Chinese and the English, to take over the Canton custom house for the Chinese o, they didn't have to pay the 10 percent in Hong Kong, \$1,000 dollars a day when the boats rested there because they had to go through to Hong Kong in order to get to Canton, you see. Because that's where the mouth of the river started.

And so, then Sun Yat-sen, having won the revolution, writes a letter to the English that on Friday, we're going to take over the Chinese custom house. The English made no response at all. On Friday, they planted all their boats or rather on a Thursday, they warned the—warned Sun Yat-sen that if you take over, we'll bombard you. Well, the Chinese had—were depleted of funds because of the fight. They had one warship which was 25 miles away from the Canton, the place called Whampoa, you see, which they wanted to create as a port. So, there was nothing that the Chinese could do. He says, All right. He says, If they got—parade with the—with their gunboats out the Shamian [ph]—Shamian [ph] was a small island with two bridges that connected Canton. And they—the Whampoa was surrounded by water, you see. And this little island, which was about three quarters of a mile where all the diplomatic, Japan, United States, England, and South Germany and so forth, you see, were housed. And so, they decided not to do—they couldn't do anything about it, you see, because of the depleted funds.

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So finally, we had a bazar. Sun Yat-sen decided to have a bazar to raise enough money to create the port at Whampoa, you see. And when I went to see him, Madam Sun Yat-sen say, You're an artist. Why don't you live with us and you can make a portrait of Sun Yat-sen. And many of the artists are going to give us things and we're going to have this bazar. So, I made three portraits of Sun Yat-sen. One of them is—which I gave to the Rice Bowl here some 10 years ago, when they had the Rice Bowl. It was sold for \$1,000 to raise money for the Rice Bowl. And the ones that bought it were the four companies. And still, if you go in their office, you'll see one of the heads that I made of Sun Yat-sen. And the other one is—one is in Stanford Museum. And so, we had this bazar. After six weeks, we raised \$600,000 in gold, American dollar. And it took them five years to create their own port at Whampoa. So, that's the story of the—of my Chinese experience.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Which sculpture you're doing for Israel now?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: I'm doing some things for the university and I'm also doing a statue of Peace there. I offered my services. As a matter of fact, I was supposed to have been finished at their 10th anniversary, it goes back to year 1955.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And one you're doing with Rome? What was that?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: The one I'm doing in Rome, I'm doing for the Olivetti's there, you know, the ones that make the typewriters.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh, typewriters. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Which is— I've already started. And I'm supposed to be there now, you see. And I'm going to cast it in Haifa in Israel.

MARY MCCHESENEY: In what?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Either in Israel or—I'm going to cast it. I'm going to cast it—

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh, I see. They'll be cast in bronze.

BENIAMINO BUFANO: And so, now I don't know what I'll—I want to do it in Israel. There's a good foundry there. I also know they have a good foundry in Rome in—just outside of Rome, at the quarries there, at the Pietrasanta where they have—where the quarries—where the Greeks quarried there. And all the marble that you get is part of these huge mountains there. That mountain is still intact. It's been quarried for 3000 years.

MARY MCCHESENEY: And they have bronze—

BENIAMINO BUFANO: They have a wonderful bronze foundry there. I was there. I spent about two months there last summer. Weekends I use to go up there, because I did some small studies in sculpture. And so, let's see. What were we talking about?

MARY MCCHESENEY: Oh, I was going to ask you. What is the subject of the sculpture you're doing for the Olivettis in Rome?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: Oh, yeah.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Is it a St. Francis?

BENIAMINO BUFANO: No, it's—well, it's not exactly a St. Francis statue that I'm making to the husband of Mrs. Olivetti. She was here. She came in to see me about four or five years ago and got started talking. So, when I got back to Rome, I renewed my acquaintance with her. She was living in Rome, not very far from where I was living. And so, first I went to see her at Ivrea, just outside of Milan. I went to see her. And when I got there, I discovered that she was in Rome, you see. The family—I went to see the factory. I was showed all over the [inaudible]. They have about 18,000 workers there, you see. And when she was here, she was very close to another very close friend of mine who told me the story about the Olivettis and what they do there. So, I went to Ivrea to visit the factory, talked to a lot of the workmen there. Every single workman has a car, which was given to them. It's a sort of cooperative, the Olivettis started. And I became very much interested of what he was doing there and what the—sort of the socialistic form of government which they had there, where they share the profits and things like that. And they own this whole town of Ivrea. In other words, the whole town of Ivrea has taken up by this huge group of buildings where they make the typewriters and so forth. They make everything themselves at foundries, and they don't have to go outside to do anything. Everything is done right in these factories and have about 18,000 of these workers.

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And now, they have little parks there where they take care of the children of the women who work in that place. And as I say, each one has a car, which is bought to them at cost price by the Olivettis. So, I went back to Rome and I went to see Mrs. Olivetti. We became close friends. We got started talking and finally said, Let's do a sort of a memory study of my husband. So, I said, Okay. And that's what I'm doing for them right now. So—as I say, I'm supposed to be there now, but I got a letter from her that she was having trouble. She wasn't very well. If I would—could postpone the thing. So, I'll be leaving for Rome after the Christmas holiday.

MARY MCCHESENEY: Well, certainly, thank you very much for giving us the time for the interview this morning, Mr. Bufano.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]