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## Oral history interview with Frode Nielsen Dann, 1965 June 11

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## Transcript

### Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Frode Nielsen Dann on June 11, 1965. The interview took place in Pasadena, California, and was conducted by Betty Hoag McGlynn 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 2022 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

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —try us. This is Betty Lochrie Hoag on June 11, 1965 interviewing Frode N. Dann in his home in Pasadena. That name is spelled F-R-O-D-E, Dann is D-A-N-N. And Mr. Dann was not active on the Project, however, he did contribute a picture without remuneration at the beginning in order to encourage the Federal Project, and his wife, who was at the time, Katharine Skeele, which is spelled K-A-T-H-A-R-I-N-E, S-K-double-E-L-E, was on the Project. Mr. Dann has been one of the leading artists of Southern California for many years. And he also is a writer, was an art critic, and he knew almost all the artists who were on the Project and has today kindly offered to tell us things about them which—information is hard to come by, and I really appreciate this interview. Before we start, Mr. Dann, I wonder if you would tell me where you were born and when and about your education.

FRODE DANN: I was born in Denmark.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: And that's in Jelstrup.

FRODE DANN: You know Jelstrup. [They laugh.] Yeah, Jelstrup. It's a little small town in Jutland. I was born on a farm. I should have been plowing and milking cows, not painting.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Ah. Were people in your family artists, or how did you happen to get into it?

FRODE DANN: Yes. No, there were no other—my parents were plain farmer folk, but there were six children, and they're all artists.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: They are?

FRODE DANN: Painters and writers.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Well, isn't that—well, how do you account for that?

FRODE DANN: I don't—I can't account for it. [They laugh.] The neighbors said, They're such nice people, but it's a shame to have all these crazy kids.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: [Laughs.] Felt sorry for your parents? No, really? Do you think it was a chain reaction, did the older ones [cross talk] influence the younger ones?

FRODE DANN: No, I think that it was probably it was a matter of time. My parents, no doubt, had the same desires, but that was just not done in those days. But I knew that my mother wrote a little poetry, and I caught my father trying some drawing. But farming was their business.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yes. Well, isn't that interesting. And you didn't, of course, stay on the farm because you went to school.

FRODE DANN: No, I did not. After I was 14 and my father said, If you want to be a painter, you

have to learn the profession first, so he apprenticed to a master painter. So I learned the craft of house painting.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Was that out at the Danish technical trade school?

FRODE DANN: Well, I was apprenticed to a house painter, and later on, I studied at the Danish technical trade schools.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see. But the house painting came before the—

FRODE DANN: That came before that, from 14 to 18. It's all in this—no, maybe this isn't—this part isn't. But then, after that, I felt the need of a expanded education, and I went to a diverse [ph] college and got a college education and graduated in 1916. And after that, I went to study art at the Royal Academy and also at the University of Copenhagen.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Were you specializing in easel painting and oils and watercolors?

FRODE DANN: No specialization. No. I used any medium that I desired to use. Sometimes I was drawing, sometimes painting [inaudible]. Watercolor was my major medium for many, many years. Until about 20 years ago, and then I began to be more interested in oils again.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What about sculpture?

FRODE DANN: I've done very little of that. That's not worth mentioning.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. All right [laughs]. When did you come to this country?

FRODE DANN: 1926.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: And how did you happen to come to this country?

FRODE DANN: How did I manage?

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Why did you?

FRODE DANN: Why did I? Well, that's a long story. I would say I had some uncles over here, and one of them was very interested in me, and he urged me to come, and so I came. And tried, and liked it and I've stayed here. I've been here for 39 years.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Did you come directly to California?

FRODE DANN: Yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I noticed that your first teaching position was at Chaffey College in Ontario. Were you living there at first or in—

[00:05:07]

FRODE DANN: No, I lived in—I lived in Pasadena, for a while, in Los Angeles. It began about the time I got married. And then I lived in Monrovia, not so far away from—I also—I began with the Otis Art Institute. That was the first. And then Chaffey.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mr. Dann has a very distinguished record of teaching. And you are still teaching at this time, are you not?

FRODE DANN: Yes, I'm still teaching. But the Pasadena School of Art my wife and I started in 1951 and conducted together, I discontinued as a school in 1961. And since then, I've only had my own private classes and no faculty. But for a while there, I had a faculty of eight or 10 of the best artists of the region.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: It certainly seems to me that all of the artists sort of gravitated to this Pomona Pasadena area.

FRODE DANN: Yes, they do.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Force of gravity, if you shook Los Angeles, [laughs] you'd find they'd all come over here. I've been perfectly amazed. And it must make for a wonderful community to

live in.

FRODE DANN: Yes, it is

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: So many of you here. Do you remember anything about the first—the picture that you presented to the government at that time? You've probably forgotten it, haven't you?

FRODE DANN: No, I don't remember much about that. They had some watercolor exhibitions and sales. And there were three—three of my watercolors bought for that. There were, I think as I remembered, two were still life, probably one on a landscape, and they were sold—or bought by some philanthropists and given to a hospital.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Was that—

FRODE DANN: For their permanent library. So, when somebody got in there with a bad appendix, if they wanted to have a picture to look at, they could choose one.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Inspire them on their way? Is that the LA General Hospital?

FRODE DANN: No, no. This was in Washington.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, in Washington?

FRODE DANN: Yeah, they were sent East.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see.

FRODE DANN: No, it didn't happen here.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Well, when they did set up this first Federal Project, did you help at all—[Cross talk.]

FRODE DANN: No.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: With Merle Armitage or Millard Sheets—

FRODE DANN: No. This was—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —the people who were doing that?

FRODE DANN: No, I did not.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: You didn't?

FRODE DANN: This was the only connection I had with it. I sent these watercolors for the specially arranged exhibition.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see. Well, let's skip back to your wife. I do not have a record of when and where she was born. Would you like to give me that?

FRODE DANN: I'll read it out of this.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Good. Is it on this sheet?

FRODE DANN: It's on the sheet.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: That's fine.

FRODE DANN: No, it doesn't say right here. She was born in Wellington, Ohio.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Wellington?

FRODE DANN: Wellington, Ohio. But it says something about her education here.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Good.

FRODE DANN: She started at Pomona College, University of Southern California. The Art Student League in New York, [the Grande Chaumiere in Paris -Ed.]. And the Academy of Fine Arts in

Florence, in Italy.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: And she had done all these things before you met her? Before the Project?

FRODE DANN: Yep. Before I met her.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And she was active on the mural part of the Project as well as easel painting, wasn't she?

FRODE DANN: Well, she was like—she applied to get on, and she got on the Project, and she was assigned as a mural job at Torrance High School.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Torrance. Mr. Dann not only has some very nice bibliographies for us that we can microfilm—about himself and his wife—but he has a very nice photograph, including a detail of this Torrance mural. Were you around when it was being painted? Do you remember who her assistants were and what medium she used at all?

FRODE DANN: Well, she was—she did hers in oil, just straight oil. And she did have a couple of other assistants, but I don't remember their names.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And was it applied directly to the wall or was it oil on canvas [inaudible]—

FRODE DANN: No, it was painted in Monrovia. Somebody donated an empty store for the purpose. And she was there for several months, and then it was rolled up and taken down to, the high school and put up on the wall by some of the Project workers. Because at that time my wife was sick. And she couldn't be there.

[00:10:11]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see. Do you remember whether she did any other murals for the—

FRODE DANN: No, this was her only mural.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Did you know her at the time? Were you—

FRODE DANN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, I knew her. I was visiting her every weekend and—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: This was your courting period.

FRODE DANN: —I was sometimes painting on it.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh.

FRODE DANN: I said the only thing that I like about this is that everything I do, I know you'll paint it over again. So that's fine. You go right ahead and do it.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: [Laughs.] Wonderful. Do you remember what the general attitude of the community was to the Project at that time?

FRODE DANN: Oh, I don't know. I don't seem to have any particular reaction in mind. I think probably they thought maybe it was all right these artists should live, of course. [Betty Hoag McGlynn laughs.] They're quite silly though. [They laugh.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Well, certainly no one had any money to buy their painting, at the time —

FRODE DANN: No, no. No, they did not. [Cross talk.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —and they would have starved. [They laugh.] Well, since you were teaching, you didn't need the work.

FRODE DANN: No [inaudible].

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: But it must have been great for the ones who did. [Recorder stops, restarts.] There were some of the people that you knew—may I peek at it?

FRODE DANN: Yeah.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —on it well, that you were going to tell us about?

FRODE DANN: Oh, yes. There was—Arthur Durston was a very fine painter, an Englishman. And he died in 1938. He was not on the local Project, but he was on the Treasury Project and sent easel paintings to Washington. One painting a month it was.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

FRODE DANN: And he did some very fine painting in those days.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Do you happen to know what his education had been in England? And his art education, did he ever tell you or—

FRODE DANN: No, I could not tell. I presumed that he had a lot of that before he came to the United States. He was a naturalized citizen, came over here. And I don't know—it was before the First World War. And he joined the army and became a naturalized citizen on that occasion.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Someone said that he was not well, and they felt that he died of being able to eat after a period of almost starvation.

FRODE DANN: He had—yes. He had a very hard time because he was—he did not have any particular skills outside of his painting. And he worked at house painting, but he was not a very good house painter. So, he got the scrubber jobs, if he could get a job.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

FRODE DANN: And he lived over here in Mount Washington while I had my studio here in Pasadena. He'd come over once a week. That was a regular routine. On a certain day, and I would take him out for dinner. You know, a good meal. And one day, he said that he felt like he'd like to do some painting, but he didn't have any paint or any canvas. So, I found some scraps of paint, and I gave him a piece of canvas. And he went home and painted a figure painting. A highway with a young couple and a child trying to hitchhike somewhere. It was a beautiful painting. And that was sent to the Annual at the museum and took a prize, a \$100 prize. And he was rich.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Aw. [They laugh.] Did he take you out to dinner, Mr. Dann?

FRODE DANN: [Inaudible] little human interest story.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, it certainly is. I'm glad you remembered. The poor fellow, I guess he did not marry—

FRODE DANN: He—no. His health was undoubtedly undermined by starvation throughout the years. There's no doubt about it. He got stomach ulcers, and felt terrible and in order to not feel so terrible he drank some whiskey, and that made it worse.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, isn't that sad.

FRODE DANN: So eventually, he was operated on at the county hospital, and he was quite well, and we thought everything was fine, and then all of a sudden, 1938, one night he died in his sleep.

[00:15:07]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: For goodness sake. Joan Ankrum told me that he used to send newspapers back to his family in England when he'd had notice of an art show—

FRODE DANN: Yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —and would get letters back from them saying they enjoyed the—to read all about Los Angeles, and never a mention of his paintings. Apparently, they had never sympathized with this thing. And yet, when he died, because of the rules in England, all his property had to go back there and his paintings—[inaudible]—

FRODE DANN: Yeah, that was a tragedy—was that with his paintings—he was—it was put in the

hands of the public administrator. And the family had appointed what they call a solicitor, a lawyer, a British lawyer, to care of it. And they had asked me, because they had heard so much about me—they wrote me and asked if I would look into it.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah.

FRODE DANN: Which I did. I had a talk with the lawyer. And I said to the lawyer, We have about 50 paintings—the best paintings of Durston's here, and I want to organize a museum exhibition here, but I can't do it before I come back. I have to go to Europe now. And when I come back, I will do that. That's fine, that's fine. So, when I came back, that lawyer had sold most of them to somebody who had been snooping for \$10 apiece.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, what a crime.

FRODE DANN: I just balled him out and said, I could have gotten \$300 apiece. And I wanted to send to his family. His mother needs the money. [Imitating lawyer] "Well, I didn't know. I didn't know. There was a man who came with good money. So, I took the money."

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh! And the paintings haven't been found. You don't know who it was? Or where they might be.

FRODE DANN: I—oh, yes, I know who it was.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, you do?

FRODE DANN: Yes, it was one who was collecting and looking around where he could get a bargain.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, what a shame.

FRODE DANN: And I wanted one of these paintings back. I had some of the others left. And I said to this man—I went out to see him after he had bought these, about a dozen of the very best ones. And he said, Well—after we were talking awhile, he said, What's the purpose of your visit? I said, My purpose for a visit is to ask you to sell me back one of these paintings for exactly what you have paid for them, so that I can sell it for \$300 and send the money to Durston's mother.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh.

FRODE DANN: He got red in his face and said, I will do no such thing. So, you don't know me. I'm a businessman. I'm the troubleshooter on my firm. And I say no.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, gosh. He couldn't care less about that aspect.

FRODE DANN: I still have some of Durston's paintings there. But they are not the most important things [inaudible].

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Ms. Ankrum had some that he had given her mother, and Mr. Feitelson has at least one—

FRODE DANN: Yeah.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —that I saw, that was very nice. He—

FRODE DANN: Yeah. Well, I managed to send home—before I left for Europe, I sent a number of them to the family.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: You did. Oh, good.

FRODE DANN: And I selected those that I thought that they could understand, and would understand, not the one—the big famous one where he has a nude lying there next to a skeleton.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I never heard of that.

FRODE DANN: You know, they would not appreciate that.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: No. Is that in existence where it can be seen?

FRODE DANN: No.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: No?

FRODE DANN: [Inaudible.] [They laugh.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Well, I'm not trying to find out who it is. I'm just hope—I want to say for the record here that I hope some time—[Cross talk.]

FRODE DANN: [Inaudible] if I can remember, his name was Tyrell. He was in the lumber business. Tyrell.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: With a *J*?

FRODE DANN: T-Y-R-E-L-L.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: T-Y. Oh. Oh, maybe sometime it would be interesting for one of the museums [cross talk] to put on a retrospective.

FRODE DANN: I have noticed—I did not go there, but I saw that some of these Durston paintings were up at auction from this collection.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, really?

FRODE DANN: Yeah. But I did not have time to go there. Otherwise, I would like to know what happened to them.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Was that recently?

FRODE DANN: No, that was several years ago. Maybe 10 years ago.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I think it'd be nice if sometime our Los Angeles museum put on a respective show someone like that, you know?

FRODE DANN: The Los Angeles museum has one.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: They do? I didn't know that.

[00:19:58]

FRODE DANN: It was a clown painting. One of his major works. It was first exhibited at what was called the—I don't remember if it was the California Art Foundation or just art foundation. There was some wealthy man who ran that for a number of years, and he got a big prize. And then it was—subsequently, I think, purchased to become a part of that foundation's property. But I remember distinctly that I was asked to take it out to Los Angeles County museum so that they would have it on indefinite loan. So there it should be.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, when I go down next time, I'll have to ask about it.

FRODE DANN: I think it was called *The Clown*. It was a big clown painting. It was one of the major jobs of that period.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: His work was quite abstract, wasn't it? [Inaudible.]

FRODE DANN: No, I would not say—he was sort of—he tried his hand at non-objective and completely abstract, but it was not his style. No, I would say we would call it a sort of an Expressionistic, it was not—it always had subject matter and it always was recognizable. But it was rather simplified, very bold and strong.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, that's certainly interesting.

FRODE DANN: And there were so many of these paintings now, in Washington, in offices—in the government offices. He must have been on the Project for a couple of years. And he sent a painting once a month.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Probably 40 or 50 of them around someplace.

FRODE DANN: Somewhere or other.



BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I understand that the Smithsonian is trying to find such things now.

FRODE DANN: Yeah. Well—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I hope they do.

FRODE DANN: —it should be possible to find those because there were certainly many of them unless somebody—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Well, you would be surprised, now, your friend, Mr. Hansen [ph], did a very nice one, which is in our city hall and upstairs in the attic getting dust. I saw it there.

FRODE DANN: In Los Angeles City Hall?

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah. The subject matter was apparently a little bit ticklish at the time. It was two peasant women gardening sitting on a bench, and they were wearing kerchiefs, so you might think that it was a Red expression of some kind. And I suppose that's why it got put away.

FRODE DANN: See, I can't even remember I ever heard of that thing.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: There's a child and there's a red flowerpot. It's about the size of this nice portrait that you have. A very interesting picture.

FRODE DANN: Yes, they can surely get lost. Mr. Hansen has one in Pasadena, at the museum, and you rarely see that on display for some reason or another.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Well, it's too bad that we don't. Because he's good—

FRODE DANN: Well, [inaudible] space for the Pop art.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: [Laughs.] Right. Did he come originally from Sweden? Do you know?

FRODE DANN: Ejnar Hansen? No, he came from Denmark.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, like you? He's Danish, like you.

FRODE DANN: Yes, he's a countryman of mine.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Well, then you tell me how I pronounce his first name too. I always stutter.

FRODE DANN: Eyenar [ph].

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: E-J-N-A-R.

FRODE DANN: Yeah, Ejnar.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I was disappointed that I wasn't—that I can't talk to him. I hope that—

FRODE DANN: Yeah. But he has been sick a couple of years or more. And he doesn't recognize me anymore. He doesn't even recognize his wife.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, he certainly wouldn't remember about the Project.

FRODE DANN: No.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Let's see, there was someone else you were going to tell me about?

FRODE DANN: Well, there was another Danish painter, Jack Wiboltt.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: W-E-I—

FRODE DANN: Nope.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: No, W-I-B—

FRODE DANN: I-B-O-L-T.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I don't know anything about him.

FRODE DANN: No, very few people do. And—but he was on the Project for quite some time. I don't know how long, maybe just a year or maybe less, I don't know. I can't remember that. But I've seen several paintings that he'd done. He was a sort of a young genius when he left Denmark. He was already recognized in Denmark when he left the country. He was 19 years old. And He had made his mark with some remarkable paintings. And so even years later, 10 years later, 20 years later, when I was in Denmark, they would ask—people who knew about [inaudible] What happened to that painter Wiboltt?

[00:25:21]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Isn't that interesting, that his recognition would come so early.

FRODE DANN: But he had a, also, very hard time making ends meet, and he was not careful about living either. So, he died, oh, some 15 years ago, when he was about 50.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: That was probably about 1950?

FRODE DANN: About 1950, he died. He must have been—must have been 55 then. He was 55. He was a little younger than I am.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: What type of painter? What kind of painting [inaudible]—

FRODE DANN: His painting was definitely toward the modern. He was very abstract. He was strongly influenced by the modern French. You know, Picasso, Matisse—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: And The Blue Rider?

FRODE DANN: And The Blue Rider, yes. The German expressionists, he was an influenced and excited about too. He had a style definitely his own. But he was not very well received.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I wonder why?

FRODE DANN: Well, he was too advanced for his time.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, I see.

FRODE DANN: They just could not take it [in and see it (ph)]. Now, he would have been easy—easier now. But at that time, it was very difficult.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Well, you know, there's been so much talk about Mr. Wright's synchronism—

FRODE DANN: Yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —which certainly was in the spirit of the times with experimentation in new forms. I would think that he would have been receptive and sympathetic to a person. [Inaudible.]

FRODE DANN: He was, and there were several others helping Mr. Wright on the Project at that time. And that was one of the reasons, I suppose, that it was easy for him to get on, because—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That's probably why—

FRODE DANN: —because they recognized that there was a powerful personality.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see.

FRODE DANN: But then, he did not—I think he had some difficulty because he was very erratic. And would work nights and sleep days. And drink a lot, if he could get the booze.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

FRODE DANN: He would drink—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Afford it. [They laugh.]

FRODE DANN: Definitely an alcoholic, if he could get a chance.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah.

FRODE DANN: And so sometimes he would. He would be so long on his job and they became impatient about it. And finally, when they got—it was assigned to a school, and the school didn't want it.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Didn't want the mural?

FRODE DANN: They didn't want the painting. It wasn't a mural. It was an easel painting.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Why didn't—oh, it was again too avant-garde for them?

FRODE DANN: Yeah, it was. It was too advanced. They were just suspicious of these people without faces. They had heads but no faces.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: [Laughs.] Well, I didn't understand then quite how it worked. I didn't know they commissioned paintings—

FRODE DANN: They did. A certain number of them did easel paintings and were allocated to various schools.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see. Well, what happened to his paintings?

FRODE DANN: One of them I know definitely came back to him, essentially, to be redone a little bit. [Cross talk.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Put on eyes and a nose—

FRODE DANN: And they never asked for it back, and they never did get it back. He had, I think—it was left there in his estate. Where it is now, I don't know.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Well, what did happen to his estate? Where would his paintings [inaudible]—[Cross talk.]

FRODE DANN: There was not much an estate.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh. Drunk it up, huh?

FRODE DANN: There were some paintings and then some sketches. And there were some that some of the friends very much appreciated. So, they were sort of distributed.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah. He reminds me of another modern who was, I believe, born here and certainly trained here. And that was Ben Berlin. He must have been much the same type of person because drinking was Berlin's problem. And he also was ahead of his time, I understand. I haven't seen any of his things, but several people have told me about that.

Well, they were some of the few artists who fulfilled the public's image of an artist at the time then, weren't they? Because I think the Project—one thing so many artists have said to me was that they felt the Project had been good for them because the public realized that they weren't all eccentrics and extreme. That they

FRODE DANN: Yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —were people, and they had a chance to find that out.

[00:30:05]

FRODE DANN: Well, then, I know Hansen, for instance, did one mural for a post office in Nevada.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I didn't know that.

FRODE DANN: Yes, he had just one job allocated to him. And he did, I think—probably wasn't

very much appreciated up there because it was this illustrative type of painting. He was—Ejnar Hansen was not a mural painter, not in any sense of the word. So, his mural, in my opinion, was just a blown-up illustration of some early settlers, or gold diggers, or whatever it was. Something that was pertinent to the locality.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah. Of course, that's what most of those Treasury Department murals were.

FRODE DANN: Another was Fletcher Martin, but you probably do get him from somewhere else because he lived in Woodstock. And he's a famous—very famous painter in the East.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yes.

FRODE DANN: So, you would not even have to cover him, but he was here at the time.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah.

FRODE DANN: And he did a beautiful big mural down in San Pedro.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, since he is there, I'm sure that whoever has that area back East—

FRODE DANN: Oh, sure. Oh, yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —has got him. Just of interest, possibly to you, I was in Santa Barbara last week—[Cross talk.]

FRODE DANN: He was a good friend of mine—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Was he?

FRODE DANN: —in those days.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I talked to a woman there, Jean Abel, who was one of his first teachers here. Pasadena College, where he came after World War II, and she got him what she thinks was his first art scholarship. And it was sort of nice to get that on the tape, you know.

There was another person I wanted to ask you about. And I have an awful feeling I've forgotten his name. He was a sculptor, and he did the lovely Florence Nightingale sculpture out here on Mission Road. And I believe—I thought you might remember because I believe he also was Danish. I know that he was well known in Europe before he came here. And he was quite an elderly man, as I understand it, at that time.

FRODE DANN: Did he live here in Pasadena or in Los Angeles?

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Probably at El Monte. Mr. McGarren [ph] told me about him. Oh, dear.

FRODE DANN: I can't think of a sculptor. [Inaudible.]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Gordon Egstrom [ph]? Gordon—

FRODE DANN: Eckstrom [ph]?

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Eckstrom [ph].

FRODE DANN: Well, then he's Swedish.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: That's Swedish?

FRODE DANN: Yeah. Could be Danish, but that's a Swedish name.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh [laughs].

FRODE DANN: Could be born in Denmark. Sometimes that happens.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I just wondered if you knew him. Apparently, you didn't.

FRODE DANN: No, I don't know.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: It was like the case of this Jack Wiboltt, that he had been well received there, so I thought you might. Getting back to your wife again, I wanted to ask you about this interest in Indians. Did she ever live in the southwest?

FRODE DANN: She lived there among the Indians in Taos. You know, from time to time, she would go out there and spend the summers. Many times. I have this statement about her.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Good.

FRODE DANN: [Inaudible.] Why she painted Indians. I think [inaudible] very clear.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, this is grand. Well, then we won't—we won't read it off since we'll have it on microfilm, if we can borrow it.

FRODE DANN: Do you want to take it with you?

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I would like to very much, and film it [inaudible]. [Cross talk.]

FRODE DANN: This is the only one I have. My archive was [they laugh] depleted.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I promise you that I will be very careful and get it right back to you. Because that would be interesting to know. You were writing for the *Pasadena Star-News* about the time of the Project, weren't you?

FRODE DANN: No. Oh no, that came much later.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Later? Oh.

FRODE DANN: Much later.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I wondered if you've been one of the art critics that—

FRODE DANN: I started in 1956 at the—at the *Star-News*. I've have been on and off. Because then I traveled and somebody else had to do it. And not on now.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. There's such a long line—a long list of the places you've exhibited, and awards which is in all of the periodical indexes and things like that, I won't get on the tape because any research student can just go down and look it up for himself.

FRODE DANN: [Well, I think most of the things that are interesting would be listed in these two things we made out for publicity. -Ed.]

[00:35:04]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: How did Mrs. Dann happens to stop being on the Project? Because you got married? Was that the end of it for her?

FRODE DANN: No, because she got sick.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, she didn't come back after?

FRODE DANN: She did—she came back for a touch-up—touching up after they had put it up. There were smears and [inaudible]. But otherwise, it was practically finished. But there were certain things that she was not satisfied with. And I'm not even sure that she was on the Project when she did that. She probably had done that on her own.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And did she do any work on the lithography project?

FRODE DANN: Lithography?

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So many of the artists who are on easel too, also did lith.

FRODE DANN: Oh, she has done a little, but it was practically nothing. But she did—she painted in watercolor. She was a member for many years of the California Watercolor Society. And I was too.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I always like to ask the artists before we finish our interview what they think the value to the history of American art really was of the Project, either pro or con. How do you feel about it?

FRODE DANN: What do I feel about it?

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Personally, how do you feel about it?

FRODE DANN: Well, personally, I feel that it was a wonderful thing.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

FRODE DANN: And I don't doubt that in the least that it shouldn't be continued in some form or other. It's possible that not a very large percentage of what happened would be—would go down in history as great art.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

FRODE DANN: But it certainly gave an encouragement towards the artist and some of those, I know, had a terrible struggle, got a tremendous lift.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

FRODE DANN: For instance, Arthur Durston became an entirely different person. He did some of his finest work after that.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

FRODE DANN: Because he had something to eat.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What about the influence of the artists on each other? Because it sounds like it was a very eclectic group here, even at that time, in Los Angeles. Many types who were seeing each other's work and being near each other working. Do you think—

FRODE DANN: No—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: —it did a lot educationally, or not?

FRODE DANN: I don't think so. The—most of the mature artists that I knew in that period were very individualistic and didn't influence one another. They could argue about things.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: What about the younger man? Do you think they were a big influence on the younger ones who were under them on the Project?

FRODE DANN: No. Some of them, of course. Those who were teaching, for instance, and they will have an influence—an early influencing on some of the next generations, but that quickly wore off.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

FRODE DANN: We've seen such—you probably knew, Henry Lee McFee's at Scripps. He was, in the '30s, a very well-known trainer, into the '40s.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I didn't know he was—

FRODE DANN: Yes. He came from the East, and he was teaching at Scripps College, and he became a tremendous influence on this—on the West Coast. I can mention perhaps half a dozen young painters who were strongly influenced by Henry Lee McFee. But they had developed since then, out of that, into something else, that they could have gotten from somebody else, they had to have their start somewhere.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

FRODE DANN: But he was such a strong personality. I don't think it was really his personality that was so strong, because he was a very mild-mannered man, and I didn't feel that he was. But I suppose the fact that he was so well-known all over the United States, that his paintings were reproduced in all the magazines. And the whole country knew who Henry Lee McFee was. That

made an impression on the younger people, who would say, I want to go on and study with that man. So, he taught them what he thought was good painting. Now, I don't think he was a good teacher. I think he was a bad teacher because he made them all paint like McFee.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah, I think that's bad too.

FRODE DANN: That is not good teaching.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah, I agree with you.

FRODE DANN: But in spite of that, there's such people as, now, Robert Frame, Bentley Sharpe [ph], and Roger Kuntz. There's a whole flock of them. They're all shaking Henry Lee McFee off. But he gave them a good start.

[00:40:14]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, Mr. Wright, of course, had had his school, or at least he taught the Art Students League here before the Project, but there were a lot of people who were under him directly at that time.

FRODE DANN: Oh, MacDonald-Wright?

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah. It seems to me there's a strong oriental feeling about—[Cross talk.]

FRODE DANN: He was teaching in the '30s. He had his own private classes. [Inaudible.] Later on, he was the collector and teaching at UCLA.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yes.

FRODE DANN: Have you been to see him?

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yes, I have been there two or three times, because he was the director. And he, you know, remembers so much about it. But I just—it seems to me that I can see a strong overture of oriental influence in a lot of the men in the area that certainly would go back to him, I would think.

FRODE DANN: He was a strong influence, also, on people.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Just as a person, he would be. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

FRODE DANN: Pardon?

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Just as a person, he would be. He's so—

FRODE DANN: As a person, he would be, yes. They also—some of them tried to emulate his synchronism approach. There was a man—Nick Brigante. You must see him too, Nick Brigante.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I have seen him. [Cross talk.] I've taped him. And Jerry Murray [ph] was another one—

FRODE DANN: He has also worked himself away from that. But there for years you could st—see the strong influence.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Yeah. Incidentally, he's a lovely person.

FRODE DANN: Yes, wonderful.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Certainly, fond of him. And Jerry Murray [ph] is another one who was one of his students who still—work I saw showed a lot of it. Did Mr. Hansen teach at all?

FRODE DANN: Yes.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I didn't know.

FRODE DANN: We had him here for nine years. Teaching all the time for nine years here. And he was teaching at Otis Art Institute.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I see. Someday someone should do a real study of the schools in this area. It would be interesting.

FRODE DANN: A what?

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: A study of the schools and the teachers in this Los Angeles area. It's never been done as far as I know. And recently, it's gotten confusing with the changing of names and—[laughs]. Well, Mr. Dann, can you remember anything else that you could tell us that would throw any light—more light on this period?

FRODE DANN: No, not from the Project days. I don't remember anything else.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Let's see. You remembered a lot.

FRODE DANN: We talked about these people.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Well, it's been—certainly have appreciated your telling me about them. And I've enjoyed talking to you.

FRODE DANN: Well, I didn't feel I had very much to contribute, but they might find a few things in these things.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: I think [inaudible] a great deal. Thank you again.

[Recorder stops, restarts.]

This is an addenda to our tape.

FRODE DANN: Well, it started in a very haphazard way. Somebody gave a party for soldiers in Los Angeles, in a large house. I don't know just how it was organized and who was invited, but there were a number of soldiers. And they got the idea they'd have some artists come there and entertain the soldiers. Draw cartoons or funny papers for them, and some of the funny paper artists came and entertained them greatly. But there were also some drawing serious portraits.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

FRODE DANN: And I noticed that those who drew the serious portraits were the real popular ones. They were more interested in that they were than they were in a Mickey Mouse, that dog, whatever his name is.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Pluto. [Laughs.]

FRODE DANN: So that kind of gave me the idea that we should make an organization that could send people out to draw in the USO. And we did that for two or three years. I had about 20 people. I was a clearing house, and I would send them out—

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, for heaven's sake.

FRODE DANN: —there two or three times a week. We'd go as far as to San Pedro or Santa Monica. And it developed—after a while, it became so popular that we were also asked to go to the hospitals. They flew us up to that army hospital up North. I can't remember the name of it now. They sent a special plane.

[00:45:00]

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Oh, for heaven's sake.

FRODE DANN: And we spent two days there. They, of course, gave us lodging, and they fed us, and we went from bed to bed and drew the soldiers.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: What a wonderful thing to do. And you said that you had mailing tubes for them, so they [inaudible]—

FRODE DANN: Yes, they had—they had mailing tubes for them. Even developed so that for a while, they were talking about sending us to Europe. After the armistice, there were some soldiers over there. But that never came about.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: That would have been fun.



FRODE DANN: But it was an interesting experience. And I enjoyed it thoroughly. And we would be two or three or four, depending on how big the party would be. We would talk it over with the USO director about how many we should send out. So, if it were a big ball, we might be four. And you would think that that we would have hard competition with the dancing, but we did not. [Betty Hoag McGlynn laughs.] They would stand in line to get there. [Inaudible] last about three, four years, I believe. When the war was over, it was discontinued.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Mr. Dann is going to let us microfilm a photograph showing some of the artists doing these pictures in the USO, and one of them is his wife, and one is he. And the other two artists are who? The names of the other two artists? One of them you didn't remember.

FRODE DANN: Mr. Maggi, M-A-G-G-I. He's an Italian. Cecil Maggi. And this is Edward Gerard [ph], G-E-A-R-A-R-A-D. How is it spelled?

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Does that look right? I always have to do that too.

FRODE DANN: That's right.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Good. Thank you. And do you know whether those two, Maggi and Gerard [ph], had been on the Project or not? Or would you know? [Cross talk.]

FRODE DANN: No, they were not. To my knowledge, no. Maggi was teaching in a trade school and has been teaching all these years. And well, Mr. Gerard [ph] was working in the war industry in one of the airplane factories as a designer, and then subsequently moved to New York, and he died over there several years ago. Maybe 10 or 15 years ago.

BETTY HOAG MCGLYNN: Well, thank you for coming back and telling me about it. I think that's interesting. Ties in since the war was the end of the Project, really [laughs].

[END OF TRACK AAA\_dann65\_8492\_m.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]