



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

Oral history interview with Eugenia Everett,  
1964 Oct. 14

**Contact Information**

Reference Department  
Archives of American Art  
Smithsonian Institution  
Washington, D.C. 20560  
[www.aaa.si.edu/askus](http://www.aaa.si.edu/askus)

# Transcript

## Interview

**EE:** EUGENIA EVERETT

**BH:** BETTY HOAG

**BH:** Mrs. Everett is a sculptor and painter and, from something she said this morning, I suspect a ceramist. She was a sculptor on the Project in Southern California. Mrs. Everett, I would like to ask you before we start, to first give your other name; because I know you're married to Richard Everett.

**EE:** Yes.

**BH:** As a painter, do you however still go by your maiden name?

**EE:** I am not a painter actually.

**BH:** Just a sculptor?

**EE:** I am, yes.

**BH:** You're known as Eugenia Everett?

**EE:** Yes. That is my married name.

**BH:** And before we talked about the Project Period, I would like to ask you a few things about your own life. I'd like to know where you were born and when, if you'd like to tell us, and where you were educated.

**EE:** I was born in Loveland, Colorado, in 1908, and lived there until I was ten. Then we came to California. I lived in San Diego, oh, perhaps, until I was sixteen and then we moved to Los Angeles and was in Los Angeles until we came to Ojai in 1938, I believe.

**BH:** Did you go to school in San Diego?

**EE:** I went to Grammar school and high school in San Diego, and I went to college in Los Angeles.

**BH:** I wondered if perhaps you'd done any work with Donal Hord in San Diego; but of course you would have been too young.

**EE:** I was too young. I didn't know anything about art at that moment; I had no access to art experience of any kind at that time.

**BH:** Did you go to art school in Los Angeles?

**EE:** After I went to college I went to Otis Art Institution.

**BH:** Which college did you attend?

**EE:** I went to Mount St. Mary's College in Los Angeles.

**BH:** I'm not familiar with who was teaching at Otis at the time you were there. Were you taking sculpture?

**EE:** I too sculpture at Otis, yes. And Roger Nobel Burnham was one of the teachers and George Stanley was the other.

**BH:** Were they both Project sculptors?

**EE:** I think they were probably, yes.

**BH:** George Stanley did the sculptures of "Music," "Dance," and "Drama" at the Hollywood Bowl and then work at the Planetarium.

**EE:** Yes, I believe so.

**BH:** Mr. Burnham was an older man?

**EE:** Yes, he was a good deal older; and in his style too.

**BH:** Do you remember anything about him that you can tell us? Whenever anyone does know about someone who has passed away, I try to find out for the record because sometimes they don't have any family left to ask.

**EE:** Oh, I see. Well, I knew him quite well. I worked in his studio. I don't know what I should say for the record, however. He was a sweet little man. He was interested in one phase of art; I don't think he ever really grew out of that phase, particularly.

**BH:** What kind of phase was that?

**EE:** Well, it was purely representational.

**BH:** Did he have Ecole des Beaux Arts training?

**EE:** Probably, probably, yes. Whereas George Stanley was more modern. Although I dislike the idea of saying that the contemporary is superior to what isn't contemporary because I feel that in each period there is great work and it should be recognized as great work even though it belongs to that period. In each period there is a great deal of poor work which isn't really a value simply because it belongs to its period.

**BH:** Nor should we condemn a whole period simply because of some of its poorer work.

**EE:** Yes, yes.

**BH:** You must have been very young when the Project period came along. We will jump back to that. First I want to ask you about afterwards, this would be World War II and after. Someone said that you had been teaching here in Ojai, is that correct?

**EE:** I actually haven't been teaching for many years. After I came to Ojai, my family and other circumstances in my life caused me to drop art completely and I didn't do anything in the art line for a good many years.

**BH:** That was from '38 on?

**EE:** Yes.

**BH:** You're certainly back to it now?

**EE:** Well, no, I'm not wholly back to it at all. I have the feeling that one of the articles that was written about me at the time of the Project (indicates there in the back) was very prophetic. The title of it was, "Gifted Sculptress Prefers Life to Career." Ha ha ha. I feel that I've had life but I haven't had a career. Life has done that to me. I haven't any complaints because I feel that art which doesn't grow out of life has no value anyhow. And I wouldn't give up life for art. But art is a wonderful crowning part of life if you can have it at the time . . . . It is all relative anyhow. Nobody has as much of it as they want . Even if you have only a moment of it, or a short time of it, one thing a completion, it is worthwhile.

**BH:** Either one, either the art of the life?

**EE:** Either one, yes indeed. I was just taking a seminar in psychology and the gestalt (I don't think I pronounce it correctly because I don't speak German) theory is that you have an excitement and a crisis and it is complete, and then you go on. I was thinking how life, the creative, that is, if you analyze the difference between something that is creative and something that is routine, the creative thing in life is the thing that you can complete; that is why you make a stone carving, complete it, and you feel satisfied. If you wash dishes, you are doing something creative in one sense, but you hate to wash dishes right away again, and therefore you don't have the same sense of completion that you do in stone carving. But it is the fact that washing dishes is so different.

**BH:** Well, it is like the difference between a spiral and a circle: dishwashing goes around and the creative things spiral upward.

**EE:** And you do have a sense of having finished something. And you go on from that to something else, if it has been satisfactory. It is satisfactory and you don't have to mourn for the fact that it is gone. I think many people do go back and live in the past and think, "Well, I'm nobody now. I was somebody back there.." To me . . . I think that is wrong. It is fun to bring it up and talk about it, but it's not too important.

**BH:** Today is always pouring out blessings if we look for them. Expression is always needed.

**EE:** Even if it is not bringing you a name, or bringing you money, or anything of that kind, it still has its value because life is the important thing. I'm afraid I'm talking too much.

**BH:** No, you are certainly not. I know that you did a lot of sculptures on the Project. And on your walls here I see paintings . . . .

**EE:** These are not my paintings, they are my husband's sister's.

**BH:** Oh, I saw the Everett.

**EE:** I have done a little painting, but very little.

**EE:** Then you would not classify yourself as a painter?

**EE:** I wouldn't classify myself as a painter at all, no.

**BH:** When I spoke to you, didn't you mention a pottery fair?

**EE:** Well, I am doing pottery now. I didn't at that time. At the time I went to Otis it was different from what it is now. You could go and take anything you wanted to take. There were no credits, no degrees, and they didn't require anything at all. You get out of it what you wanted and, in general, most everybody took some sculpture and some painting. But I was so involved in sculpture and so interested in it that I wouldn't take anything else. I didn't take drawing or painting or anything else. Later I more or less regretted it in a certain way because I thought that I should have had that training in that. And I have had fun at times in my life when I couldn't really work, opening up another field by taking a little painting. I started the pottery actually at a time when I didn't feel I could do sculpture. I have enjoyed the pottery quite a bit.

**BH:** Are you doing it to a great extent, I mean commercially? Enough to be selling and that kind of thing?

**EE:** Well, fairly recently I figured that I would perhaps get into doing it somewhat commercially. But I find that I'm very slow, that I take too much time over each pot, I like to experiment, and I don't follow the experiment along each line. I think I'd pretty well starve if I tried to do it commercially!

**BH:** You'd never be remembered for your own glazing?

**EE:** Well, you could teach it. And that is why I've done quite a little teaching and I find that it has given me a great deal of satisfaction because my feeling about art is that the result . . . what you have made, isn't too important. But what it does to you is very important. And therefore if you . . . in teaching you are dealing with people and what it does to them, what it can open up to them. So I really enjoy teaching. I find that experimentation is wonderful for that because each person wants to find his own way. If you just get a little start, even if you can do a smattering of this and a smattering of that, you can be successful as far as your teaching goes because you can start people on different lines. Whereas, for your self, if you are really going to make a field out of it, you have to narrow the field down and do one thing. Because you haven't time to do everything well.

**BH:** Yes. Teaching, you just give them the technical background and a little.

**EE:** Particularly working with young people I found that one thing would appeal to one group and another thing to another group. Then, besides, they would decide that they were tired of what they were doing and want to have a fresh viewpoint. So, a great deal of experimentation went into it. But I don't feel it was wasted. It was wasted as far as making me a successful sculptress.

**BH:** Were you teaching in the schools here?

**EE:** Well, I taught in a private school, Happy Valley. BH; Here in Ojai?

**EE:** Here in Ojai, yes.

**BH:** Ojai has quite a few private schools, doesn't it?

**EE:** Oh, yes, it does.

**BH:** You're always mentioning another one. This is not on the record or anything but is this partly because of the country in this area is so wonderful for children?

**EE:** It is partly that, and it is partly because of . . . it has a certain amount of cultural background. The people who settled here in the beginning loved it for its beauty and they have tried very hard to maintain it as a cultural

center.

**BH:** Are there many artists here?

**EE:** Well, we have a few artists. Of course, the Music Festival is one thing that makes Ojai outstanding.

**BH:** We've never come out to it but I read about it every year.

**EE:** Well, a great many people do come and find it quite worthwhile.

**BH:** I think we probably should get on with the Project. In one of my notes I find something I've written which I don't know if it is true or not. That you were on the General Committee that was formed in December of 1933 to begin the Federal Arts Projects in Los Angeles. I doubt if you were because you were too young.

**EE:** I wasn't on any special committee. I may have been one of the artists in an early group but I wasn't part of that committee, no.

**BH:** This was the group that was headed by Marie Armitage and many of the artists donated their time and some contributed a piece of sculpture or a painting, so the public would know and become interested in what was done on the Project.

**EE:** No, I wasn't on that.

**BH:** I thought it must be a mistake because usually younger people at the time were not included. The first thing that I have recorded for you is a head done in black Belgian marble in 1934. It was reproduced in what was called, "The Frontiers of American Art" and it was probably the head of the Indian Girl which was shown at the Los Angeles County Museum in 1934.

**EE:** Well, there is a mistake there. That the Indian Girl was done in ebony. I did do one in Belgian Black marble, but it wasn't the Indian Girl. The Indian Girl was done before the Belgian Black marble one. I don't know whether I could . . . I could get some dates, perhaps find out dates in newspaper articles. But otherwise I wouldn't remember for sure, other than that I'm sure "The Indian Girl" was in ebony and was first.

**BH:** How large a piece was it?

**EE:** It was a perhaps slightly under life-sized head, "The Indian Girl". The Belgian marble was much larger, over life-sized. BH; I noticed another one that you had in that Los Angeles County Art Museum exhibition was a figure in sandstone. So you were working in three different mediums?

**EE:** Well, for the Project I did things in wood, several kinds of wood, and probably several kinds of stone. Then I did a few things that were modeled and cast. I even did one experiment in stainless steel, a combination of stainless steel and ebony. I have pictures of these things, or at least some of them. Actually I don't even have the pictures of all the things I did.

**BH:** Oh, don't you?

**EE:** No.

**BH:** I may have some of the pictures of some among material that the other artists have loaned me.

**EE:** Oh, that would be fascinating. I can remember two or three pieces that I did and I wonder what they look like. I haven't the slightest idea, really, other than my own feeling about them. H": Well, a lot of the photographs, you know, have some in with no identification. I had a box of them and I was going to bring with me and ask Miss Heron if she could identify them.

**EE:** Well, there weren't too many people doing carving at that time. So, it would be . . . .

**BH:** I've had trouble reaching her. I had an appointment with her at first and then I had to break it and I couldn't reach her again.

**EE:** I met her the other night for the first time in years. She was joining the potters guild and . . . that 's where it was.

**BH:** Maybe I can see her when I come back. Anyway, next time I come up I'm going to bring that box and perhaps you can help identify some of them. Some may be yours.

**EE:** Yes, it is possible. They might be ones that I don't have.

**BH:** I believe your carved ebony head had a stainless steel base?

**EE:** No. I did have one thing done in stainless steel and ebony but it was a figure.

**BH:** A whole figure?

**EE:** Yes.

**BH:** Sculpture is not my field. I don't talk the language very well but I was just wondering. Wasn't it about this time that Archipenko started teaching at Stamford?

**EE:** I don't remember. I remember that there was somebody working in stainless steel in San Francisco. I think his name was Benny Bufano (I'm not sure of that name) was working in San Francisco. BH; That is his name and he was on the Project there.

**EE:** Yes. I think that that's where we got the idea, and thought possibly it would be interesting to do something in that line. Well, at that time I was very young and very sure of myself and very sure of the fact that you shouldn't make a model in one material and then make a piece in another material. I had to make a model because I felt that the sculpture grew out of the material and if you make a model in clay and then all of your inspiration would go into the clay. Then it would be like clay rather than like the carving and . . . So I talked them into letting me make a model (actually it was model for a monument), and I talked him into doing it in the material itself, or something at least similar in material.

**BH:** Oh, this was the stainless steel?

**EE:** Yes. It was a figure about 2 feet high . . . rather a large thing, which it was intended to be. But it was never done.

**BH:** Was it going to be one of the Project monuments?

**EE:** Yes, I believe it was. It was submitted as a suggestion for one, but it wasn't carried through.

**BH:** What was it for? do you remember the spot or anything about it?

**EE:** Well, I can't be sure of where it was to go. But I know it was dedicated to "Peace" about three years before World War II. Ha, ha, ha.

**BH:** Wasn't very well timed!

**EE:** Maybe that's one reason it never went through.

**BH:** I hope to read something about it.

**EE:** I have photographs.

**BH:** There were many really exciting things that were planned and never got built. EE; Oh yes. There must have been.

**BH:** One of them was a reflecting pool of black glass brick (brand new at the time). It would have had the effect of walking on water. It was never done either. Your philosophy of material stems directly from Frank Lloyd Wright, doesn't it?

**EE:** Well, it might be, but I think it stems from . . . I don't think it stems from him. But I mean the idea is similar. In other words, if you . . . each person makes his own contact with life, his own discovery of truth. If it is truth why it would be the same for both him and me. Although I'm not as young as I was, and I'm not as sure of myself now. Back when I raised my own children and when I created my first works of art, I was very direct and very sure of myself. I'm raising my grandchild now, and I'm not nearly as sure of myself!

**BH:** I was wondering how you feel about two other statues that you did, and I want to tell you something about them because they were in cast stone which you must have felt was not being true to yourself. They must have been very well liked because two of them were put in two different schools -- the "Wynken, Blinken, and Nod" pieces, both in kindergarten rooms. One was at a Willington school and the other one in a West Los Angeles school, the Brockton Avenue School. They were 28 inches high and of cast stone. I want you to know I went down yesterday to the Brockton Avenue School and the people there were very nice to me. I contacted all the old teachers and everyone went through the place but no one could find the "Wynken, Blinkin, and Nod." Isn't that strange?

**EE:** I wouldn't know what happened to them either. They were in . . . . In a way I'm glad they have disappeared. I do have a photograph of them but I feel that they had the least of me. And it was partly because of the fact that the subject matter was somewhat sentimental and given. And it was done for a kindergarten and I feel that it didn't have as much quality as my other work.

**BH:** The three Little children in wooden shoes?

**EE:** Yes, yes. So, it wouldn't hurt my feelings if they had thrown them out.

**BH:** I hope it hasn't. I'd like to see it when I get down to Willington.

**EE:** Well, that is one of the things I have a photograph of but I usually hide it.

**BH:** Tell me, it was another cast stone that one of my records says you have something to do with and credit for it and I wondered if you did the whole thing and that was in Lafayette Park, the statue of Lafayette, of poured concrete.

**EE:** I had nothing what-so-ever to do with it. Nothing. I don't know where my name would be connected with it.

**BH:** I have numerable catalogues which I go through hunting for things and records and some of it is wrong. On that I understand that you and Gordon Edmunton helped him and it doesn't sound like Gordon Edmunton would have been helping Bruster anyway because he was older and well-established sculptor in his own right and Bruster was a younger man.

**EE:** I really don't know how the mistake was made because I had nothing to do with it.

**BH:** Nothing to do with Lafayette, nothing to do with the little thing that Henry Lion did called "Water?"

**EE:** No.

**BH:** Well then, we get back to . . . Let's leave the heads which are things that I know you did. Do you remember any other things?

**EE:** I remember about a great many things that I have photographs of. I probably have photographs of a dozen or fourteen things and then I can remember a few, that is on the first . . . . The Project, as I remember it, was in two separate sections, and the first one, I don't think I have photographs of the things I did for the first one. There were two sandstone pieces, and maybe two ebony pieces, and at least two wood pieces that were done at first. I don't have photographs of them. I have photographs of those done on the second one.

**BH:** What were those smaller wooden pieces made for?

**EE:** I really don't know. They told me at the time, I was on non-relief and they told me that they wanted to keep the caliber of the work up. Therefore, they wanted someone whom they chose rather than just taking people who really desperately needed it. I needed it, but I didn't need it that badly.

**BH:** This was the federal works of art project? when I talked to Donal Hord in San Diego, who did so many things in metal, he said that they had asked particular people for work for traveling shows to be taken into the hinterlands.

**EE:** Well, I imagine that's what they used them for. They didn't tell me at the time and I really didn't care at the time. They said, "Oh, this is wonderful." They let me do whatever I wanted to at that time. Of course, there isn't anything more wonderful than giving a very young and very eager person the right to make anything he wants to make, to express himself.

**BH:** No! You don't know what's happened to them, of course?

**EE:** I haven't the slightest idea. One time I was interested enough to try to find out. When I was down in Los Angeles, I happened to be at the Museum and I thought I'll go in and see if they know. But of course, they looked at me with a blank expression as if that was such a long time ago nobody would know. I mean, I know there were some things that they had said they gave to the Museum, but the Museum didn't seem to have the slightest idea where they were. I thought, "they are to be dug up in the future."

**BH:** They were supposed to be given to tax-supported institutions.

**EE:** Yes, schools or something. Well they kept no record of it.

**BH:** I talked to Leon Smalter's wife the other day. I'd been trying to get down and see him.

**EE:** Are you sure that's not Leon Saulter?

**BH:** That's what I meant to say. He is here in Ojai and he had a little experience. His wife said that they located one of his in someone's garden some place.

**EE:** Private!

**BH:** Private. And how it ever got there they don't know.

**EE:** It just wasn't valued anymore, I suppose. I imagine that's happened to a great many things.

**BH:** It sounds like rather a large garden by the way she . . . Well then, on the second part of the Project, do you remember anything that you did?

**EE:** Yes, but it is rather difficult to list them. Most of the things that I did were comparatively small carvings which were simply what I wanted to do at the time that I felt it was expressive. Some of them were figures and some of them heads.

**BH:** Were you working at home or were you required to go into the Center:

**EE:** No, no. You weren't required to come in. You could do it at home. Part of the things I did at home and part of them I did in the studio of my husband's family who were artists. Perhaps it would be interesting to tell a side story about the first time when I was working at home. They tell me that material was somewhat difficult to get when you're carving because not many people were carving. I was told, "They are tearing down the old Court House and you could get a good sized piece of red sandstone. Why don't you get a piece of it?" So I did. I just lived in an ordinary house with a little back yard and I had two young children at the time. I got a truck driver and four men to get this piece of sandstone and they drove up to the front yard although I wanted it in the back yard because that's where I was going to work. They worked the piece off the truck and they had such a dreadful time with it that they finally deserted. They said, "Here it is; you can have it. We can't set it up in the back yard." The next day I went down the street to a man who was a tombstone maker, a stone-cutter, and one man came and moved it around to the back yard for me and set it up! It was all a matter of knowing how. I learned how to move a stone around: You simply put it on two pieces of pipe and roll it along until the back piece of pipe rolls off. Then you pick it up and put that on the front, and you roll it along. Ha, ha, ha.

**BH:** Ha, ha, ha.

**EE:** You learn the hard way! That was also a time when my little . . . that was one of the first things I did and my little girl was only, oh, less than one year old at that time. And it was the first time she was ever sick; and it happened to be, instead of a cold, whooping cough. When I woke up the next morning I said to Rich, "I think I had a nightmare last night. Jane has the whooping cough and I have a great big piece of sandstone on my front porch."

**BH:** Ha, ha, ha.

**EE:** Of course it didn't turn out to be a nightmare afterwards. I always aid my children cut their teeth on a carver's mallet. I did more actually during the period when my children were little than I did later.

**BH:** You had to organize your time then. What did you cut from that particular piece?

**EE:** It was a "Mother and Child," but it is one that I don't have a picture of and I would love to see it because I can't remember too much about it. It was one of the things that was given to the museum, one of the things I thought maybe I'd see if it went down in the dust of the back corridor. I hoped they'd say, "Oh, you can have it back." But they didn't even know it existed.

**BH:** I have a daughter Jane also and she works for the Museum. I will go through Jane and see if I can find it for you. She certainly should be able to help. You know they are moving. Everything is coming out of hiding. It would be a good time to ask her. It was rose color?

**EE:** Well, it was red sandstone. That particular piece came off the old Court House. In other words, it was used sandstone.

**BH:** I'll write that down. It is historically important too, then.

**EE:** I'm probably talking more than necessary.

**BH:** No, you certainly aren't. We appreciate it. I've been looking at things in your scrap book and I've come up with some miscellaneous questions that I wanted to ask you, one being about a head of an Indian. You started to



answer my question about whether it was a particular Indian that you had done, for that head, or the idea of a Southwest Indian. What was it you were going to tell me?

**EE:** Almost all my work has inner significance rather than an outer significance. Actually I was trying to express an idea, or a feeling, or a state-of-being, rather than anything to do with Indians. She just happened to be an Indian. I had seen a picture (I believe it was Eisenstein's "Thunder Over Mexico") and I had been rather moved by it, since it was a sociological problem involved. All the actors were just Mexican peasants. There was one particular spot when the girl came out of prison and she turned her head and I thought, "There is a sculpture!" It was three months later that I carved the head. The interesting thing was that my father went to see the picture after I had carved the head. And when he came back -- I didn't tell him -- I just said I had done this girl's picture and I asked him if my carving looked like her. He said, "There was one place where it did. It was when she came out of prison and turned her head."

**BH:** Oh, isn't that . . . ?

**EE:** I thought that was marvelous indication that one can communicate to another person something as real as that. I mean that you could even . . . . It wasn't necessarily the girl, but it was her feeling at a particular moment . . . that he could have caught that.

**BH:** Did you ever send her a photograph of it?

**EE:** Oh no. I didn't know who she was or anything and . . . . Of course, as I say, I really had no idea. Always the work is a combination of your own and the thing that you see, especially when you do it that way and make no attempt whatsoever to copy, no attempt to make a portrait.

**BH:** No, but as an actress, she probably also is conscious of trying to put over a certain feeling in her acting.

**EE:** Yes, yes. Although I think this was supposed to have been done with just peasants rather than actors.

**BH:** She probably went right back to the fields. Speaking of titles of pictures, I would love to have you tell about how you named the sculpture which Arthur Miller filmed, "Veaghne>" Would you mind doing it? I think it is very interesting.

**EE:** Well, it was simply that I had had a dream, and in the dream that was my name. I saw the spelling I knew how it was spelled. I actually knew more about how it was spelled than how it was pronounced, although I pronounced it "Va-on" and figured it was correct. It seemed to be a different period and a different place than where I lived, and therefore in a different language. I think it might have been medieval French or something of that kind. I really don't know.

**BH:** Do you think it was a reincarnation of your spirit, is that it?

**EE:** Well, who knows? It was very interesting to have had that dream and had that name. So, I used it.

**BH:** Some of the things we are going to have microfilmed are of your recent work. You were saying that you had been experimenting with both sand-casting and the lost wax process, and that you preferred the sand-casting.

**EE:** No. I prefer the lost-wax process. I think you have more control over it. I think that the . . . . What I was doing with the sand was simply making a quick design and pouring the bronze into it. And it could be very successful for the contemporary type of thing which is a happy accident. But I personally prefer something that has more . . . . I have more control over. I can put more of myself into it.

**BH:** Well, is this bronze piece (that I thought looked a little like a welded thing) done in lost wax?

**EE:** Yes.

**BH:** Speaking of materials again, there was one you did for the Project (and I'm hoping that one of these newspapers will tell where it was put and what happened to it) of three figures in which you used mahogany and Tennessee marble. Is that right?

**EE:** Yes. Marble, copper, and Tennessee marble. Mahogany was the base and then there was copper and Tennessee pink marble.

**BH:** And it had these three figures representing work and cooperation . . . ?

**EE:** Cooperation.

**BH:** There is your husband coming in and I didn't mean to keep you so long this morning. I so much appreciated

talking to you and I hope that if you do think of any other things that would interest the Archives, you will let me know. [END OF INTERVIEW]