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## Oral history interview with Joy Yeck Fincke, 1964 Jan. 9

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## Transcript

### Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Joy Yeck Fincke on January 9, 1964. The interview took place in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and was conducted by Sylvia Loomis 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. 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

SYLVIA LOOMIS: This is an interview by a representative of the Santa Fe office of the Archives of American Art with Mrs. Joy Fincke of Albuquerque, New Mexico on January 9, 1964. Mrs. Fincke was secretary to Mr. Vernon Hunter during the time he was state director of the WPA Art Projects in New Mexico in the 1930s and '40s. And within a short time, she was made his assistant director. As Mr. Hunter has since died and the records for New Mexico were all destroyed, we hope you will be able to fill us in with some of your recollections of those days, Joy. First, a little about yourself. Are you a native-born New Mexican, or did you come here from some other state?

JOY YECK FINCKE: I was born in Walla Walla, Washington. Spent my youth in Pendleton, Oregon, and came to New Mexico about October of 1934.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And after the WPA Project was over, you went into the army as a WAC [Women's Army Corps], didn't you?

JOY YECK FINCKE: That's right.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And were you on the Project all the way through?

JOY YECK FINCKE: No, we moved to Springer in 1939. And so, I resigned from the Project about in September of—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yeah, September of '3—

JOY YECK FINCKE: —1939.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: '39, yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: And then, the work came along in—or the war was started in 1941. In May of 1942, there was a bill signed creating the Woman's Army Corps. Women's Auxiliary Army Corps is what it was first.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: And so, I applied. And after a series of examinations, et cetera, there was a quota of women. A fraction of—from New Mexico, for the first class, which was going to be Officers Training Corps. And so, I, somehow or another, got to be it. And at the last minute, they flew in a dietician from Albuquerque. They made that fraction another whole person.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: So, there were two of us who went from New Mexico to the front officer training class in Des Moines, Iowa.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And then, I know that you wrote a book about your experiences in the army after it was over, which I read with a great deal of interest and enthusiasm. And would you tell us what the name of that was?

JOY YECK FINCKE: It's not—the book isn't really finished. *The Reader's Digest* got—came by the draft I had of about, oh, half of it, I guess, and the outline. And they were so hot to get it, that I let them have a story of what I had—what I had written plus the outline. And they asked—I never should've done it, because I haven't finished the whole thing yet. And I had called it *No Pallid Athenian*, because Pallas Athene was the WAC's insignia. But then, that was a little obscure, so they called it *The Way It Was with the WACs*.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, I remember reading that in the *Reader's Digest*. And—

JOY YECK FINCKE: Someday, I'm going to finish it. [Laughs.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, I hope you do, because it was very interesting and very entertaining. Well, now to get back to the WPA, were you in at the very beginning of the Art Project in New Mexico?

JOY YECK FINCKE: Well, I suppose so. Could I sort of tell you how that happened?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, I'd like to have you.

JOY YECK FINCKE: We—I had gotten the job and—with the FERA, which was the Federal Emergency Release—what? Administration, I guess, because I—oh lord, this is getting involved. Anyway, the first job I had was checking relief claims. And we worked in the senate office or the senate chamber. That was our office. And there were a whole bunch of other gals like me, and I made the magnificent salary of \$14 a week. Isn't that wonderful? About six months after that, I guess, they started the other building, which the WPA moved into. And it's now the Public Health building in Santa Fe right across the street from the capital.

[00:05:02]

And I moved over there along with the rest of the FERA-then-turned-WPA group. And I was in the steno pool along with about 1,500 gals, I guess. And whenever anyone needed a stenographer, they would call one of us. And we would get pretty busy. And one day, the personnel manager came in and said, Would you like to work for this crazy artist? [They laugh.] And I said, Well, I don't know. What's the scoop? And he said, Well, I've tried all these other gals, and either he doesn't like them or they don't like him. And I said, Well, I'll give it a crack. So, I went in and met Vernon Hunter, who was kind of a blondish redhead smallish man. He was very neat always, wore a mustache and had freckles, kind of light blue eyes. And so, he said, Well, let me dictate a letter to you. And I got all set to dictate the letter across the desk from him. And I'll bet you he dictated for about an hour the most wandering kind of letter. And I think it was to either N. C. Wyeth or Henriette Wyeth, one of the two.

But I realized then that here was a man who knew something about art, I'm sure, but he didn't know much about dictating. And I thought, Well, I'll never get this job, but at least I'm going to make this letter sound business-like. And so, I did, thinking that probably I'd get the sack. But it kind of interested me. Years later, he told me that the reason he chose me over all the rest of the gals, who had been quite attractive incidentally, was because I—because I had such practical hands. And so, I stayed on—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Did the letter have anything to do with it?

JOY YECK FINCKE: I imagine the letter had a little to do with—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

JOY YECK FINCKE: But he just didn't know how to dictate. I don't think he ever had the opportunity. And I hadn't met his wife. The first time I ever saw her was the tail end of her skirt, because she whipped through the office into his private his office and left by his other door. And she had come down to look me over. And it wasn't long until we became good friends and still are to this day.

We first had to get all the artists organized and put 'em to work. And I think that was the main reason—as far as I was concerned, the main reason for the Art Project was to feed some hungry people, who were incidentally also artists. And Vernon Hunter was—I call him Father, so if I say Father, that means Vernon. [Laughs.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

JOY YECK FINCKE: His job was to figure out the projects. And he had to do an awful lot of business with potential sponsors to see if they would furnish materials, if they were interested in some kind of art. And mostly, it was a—such a new idea that it took a lot of selling.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: The people in the welfare building, this big building where we all worked, always looked a little askance at me and Father, because we were artists [laughs] and we had not much to do with the mundane world of building roads and houses and whatever else they did.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And how soon after the Project started was this, that you began with him?

JOY YECK FINCKE: He started in October, and I came in November.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: November.

JOY YECK FINCKE: So, it was—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: [Inaudible.]

JOY YECK FINCKE: —very shortly. He hadn't—he hadn't really done anything but get organized in the office—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So, you—

JOY YECK FINCKE: —when I got there.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —must've helped to set these projects up then, I should think.

JOY YECK FINCKE: Well, it was his brain, really. I didn't know much about art. In fact, I knew very little about art. And I did have sense enough to know there was something that I could learn.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, now, just what was the procedure in selecting the artists? Did you have anything to do with that?

JOY YECK FINCKE: Well, they were certified—they applied to the—to the welfare department to be certified as being on relief, as having no other means of support. And this was true of anyone who was on the WPA Project in—on the relief status. They all had to be certified by the welfare department. And then, the welfare department would put them where their talents demanded. And if they said, I'm a painter, I'm a sculptor, whatever, they came to the Art Project.

And in the beginning, we sort of had to make do with a few crummy brushes and some Prang watercolors.

[00:10:10]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: But we gave these to the people, because the point was to make them feel like they were earning their money. So, we'd give them their supplies, and they would go home and paint and keep track of their hours. And then, they would turn in their timesheets and, in turn, would be paid. Then when things got a little better organized, and we found sponsors, we began to plan bigger things.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was there any quota at all for non-relief personnel on the WPA?

JOY YECK FINCKE: Well, I don't remember the—if there was a percentage or not, but there were very few of them. In fact, a project had to demand a specialist. And if we could find no specialist on relief roles, then we were allowed to use somebody like Dorothy Stewart doing the fresco down here on the theater.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: But we had a whale of a lot of talent. [Inaudible.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. There are so many artists in this area—

JOY YECK FINCKE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —[inaudible] New Mexico attracted—

JOY YECK FINCKE: They didn't live here. They came here. [Laughs.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. And did you also recruit some from other states?

JOY YECK FINCKE: I don't think recruit is the word. Sometimes, the Washington office would send them out here. To this day, I don't know why, but maybe it was health, maybe it was the fact that they were over their quota there, and they could use them out here. I don't know why.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, you said something about these teachers that came from New York that—

JOY YECK FINCKE: The teachers were a little later on when we had the—when we started the art centers. And that was not right away. They sent them out because they needed instructors, they felt, and we didn't have them.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But there weren't any others that—any other personnel that you had to go elsewhere—import?

JOY YECK FINCKE: No, not really.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So, it was just a matter of then taking someone who's not on relief and putting them in that particular job.

JOY YECK FINCKE: This was pretty rare. I don't want you to get the idea that this happened all the time. Mostly, we made use of the talents that were available.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. Well, now, who actually made the choice of the artists? Who went over their work to find out whether they were qualified?

JOY YECK FINCKE: Well, Father Hunter did. [Laughs.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: Mostly, they'd bring in some of their work, usually—if they were—had been artists for quite a while, they would bring in examples of their work. And he would tell them to go ahead and do some more of that or whatever he might want them to do. But if they were only—if they only had a desire to be artistic and had been given us as artists, then, for a while, we let them do little watercolors until we started the Portfolio of Spanish Colonial Design, which was part of the Index of American Design project. And that used many artists, both the real talented ones and the not so talented. And the way that worked is that E. Boyd—she was E. Boyd Hall then—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: —went out and did the master drawings of the retablos, of the *santos*, of the bultos, of altar rails, whatever she felt was part of the Spanish Colonial Design picture. She would make the master drawings. Then, I think Louie Ewing did some of the wood blocks. They made wood blocks of the outlines. And then, we would have another master copy made and maybe 10 plates of the blocks, light blocks, and the watercolors. We would send those to someone and say, you know, Copy this exactly. And sometimes, they weren't so good. Sometimes, they were pretty good. There were 200 portfolios made in—of the Spanish Colonial Design. And—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How many plates were there in it? Do you know?

JOY YECK FINCKE: 50?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: About 50. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: Fifty. I think fifty. And then, we used—we used somebody to set the type. It was illuminated manuscript type. This took—this took quite a while. And it also was a way to utilize the artists who couldn't do anything else.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:15:06]

JOY YECK FINCKE: We had Eugenie Shonnard, who was a great sculptress, did some things for us. She did a fountain down at the children's hospital in Socorro—or in Hot Springs. And we did some murals in post offices and in tax-supported buildings. We did—well I think another big project was this—the little theater down here in Albuquerque. That was a WPA project from the beginning.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm.

JOY YECK FINCKE: In other words, the city of Albuquerque supplied the money for the materials. And the WPA supplied the masons and the carpenters and so on to build the building. And then, it was turned over, I guess you might say, to the Art Project. And I think the NYA did the furniture, but we did the colcha embroidery, if there was any overstuffed furniture that was covered with colcha. They did huge colcha designs, which were put on the stage curtain. Then the fresco outside was done by Dorothy Stewart and a number of helpers. Eddie Delgado was our tinsmith, which is an old Spanish art. And the light fixtures were done by him. There were quite—well, I guess that was the whole—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. The whole thing from—

JOY YECK FINCKE: —WPA Project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —beginning to end. And that was sponsored by the city?

JOY YECK FINCKE: The city of Albuquerque put up the money for it—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

JOY YECK FINCKE: —I believe.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, now, to go back just a minute to—about the selection of the artists. Did Vernon Hunter go to various localities throughout the state to select the artists needed to—

JOY YECK FINCKE: Oh, indeed, he did. Yes. Uh—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you know how many—how many offices he had to have in order to do this?

JOY YECK FINCKE: Well, he only had one office, and that was in Santa Fe. But he would be given notice that there was an artist maybe in Melrose, let us say. So, he—it would be up to him to travel down there, interview the artist, and see what—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, I see.

JOY YECK FINCKE: —they needed. And then, we would send them the materials. And they would—he traveled a great deal. Not right in the beginning, because that was the organizational period, but he traveled quite a lot later on. And he would pick up the pictures that they had done, take them more supplies. And the ones that could—most of them lived around Santa Fe. They would come in there. And then, he discovered—I really think he discovered Patrociño Barela, who was a wood carver in Taos, a mystic sort of guy. He used cedar and carved mystical figures that he explained. Nobody else could. And that caught on real fast, and he got a one-man show at the Museum of Modern Art.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, I remember that.

JOY YECK FINCKE: And then, another—Father Hunter did a lot of things that were wonderful for the artists. For instance, Patrociño Barela lived in a little secluded house out of Taos. And one day, Father went up there and—to see him and Pat said—[inaudible]—Pat said, Oh, I'm so glad you came. Perhaps you can tell me what this man—he said, A man wrote and said he wanted my autograph, and you didn't come in time for me to find out what an autograph was, so I just sent him one of my carvings.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

JOY YECK FINCKE: And, of course, these carvings now are really worth a lot. And then, how—then there was an article in *Time* magazine about Pat Barela. And then Hollywood got on it, and

they decided they would make this spectacular thing about this secluded wood carver. And we had a terrible time keeping him from that, because Pat was the kind of guy that if he—if you gave him a drink of wine, well, he wasn't worth a darn as a wood carver, you see, for a while.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: And he might've traded anything he had for a jug of vino. So, we really had to protect him. He was awfully childlike. Not stupid, but—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No.

JOY YECK FINCKE: —just naïve and childlike.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I understand that Vernon Hunter also discovered Pedro Cervantez down in Clovis.

JOY YECK FINCKE: Yes. Yes. They—he knew him before, and incidentally painted a wonderful picture of Pedro Cervantez, who had a very dark complexion and very red lips. And he painted him eating an ice cream cone of raspberry color.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

[00:20:14]

JOY YECK FINCKE: It was a wonderful—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: What happened to that—

JOY YECK FINCKE: —picture.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —painting? Do you know?

JOY YECK FINCKE: I expect Virginia still has it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

JOY YECK FINCKE: I don't really know.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, now, I understand that he also had a supervisory staff. And were these supervisors located in different parts of the state?

JOY YECK FINCKE: Well, this was, again, a matter of need. Um. When we needed a supervisor, like at the art centers—is that what you mean?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yeah, or wherever, I mean, that—where there were local problems that could be handled by a supervisor, so that the—

JOY YECK FINCKE: If there was a town, like Albuquerque, for instance, where there were quite a few artists located, rather than having Mr. Hunter have to come down here all the time he picked Roland Dickey, who was here for a while, to be his intermediary.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. Well, I wondered if he did that in other areas too, where there's—where there were supervisors actually stationed there.

JOY YECK FINCKE: No.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. So, they all worked out of the Santa Fe office, except for Roland Dickey.

JOY YECK FINCKE: Well, Roland did—I don't know if I can make this very clear or not, but when we had an art center in Roswell, for instance, then there were art classes and various artists kind of—kind of appeared. And Roland became the supervisor in addition to his duties of running the art center.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

JOY YECK FINCKE: In Las Vegas, there were several artists. And when we had the art center over there, then this could be sort of a sub-office of the Art Project.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. Well, that was what I was getting at, is there were sort of sub-offices.

JOY YECK FINCKE: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: But that wasn't until these galleries or museums were set up.

JOY YECK FINCKE: It's thirty years ago. It's a [laughs] little hard to remember.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes, I can imagine so. Well, where were these art galleries besides—

JOY YECK FINCKE: Well—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —the one is Roswell.

JOY YECK FINCKE: —the main one was in Roswell. Then, we had one in Gallup. And this was a fascinating procedure because of all the Navajo Indians over there. But that was a successful gallery. And we had one in Las Vegas and then one in a little town of Melrose. This one in Melrose was sort of a corner of some kind of a lodge—Masonic lodge, I believe. And it was run by a local lady named Martha Kennedy. Martha Kennedy also painted after a fashion.

But it stimulated interest in art. Wherever these people were, it stimulated interest in it. And from its beginning to provide beans for the hungry ones, it went on to make people conscious of art and want to have something on their walls beside the ship on the rolling sea.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

JOY YECK FINCKE: And the Maxfield Parrish stuff.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: As I remember, the—there was an embroidery class at Melrose. Is that right?

JOY YECK FINCKE: Colcha embroidery, yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Were there a group of Spanish women—

JOY YECK FINCKE: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —who did this embroidery [inaudible]—

JOY YECK FINCKE: They revived the art of colcha embroidery.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Was that where they did these colchas for the theater and—

JOY YECK FINCKE: Some of it was done there. It was kind of a cooperative project. Wherever there were groups of women who could do colcha embroidery and were on relief, why, they would do one of these designs. I think there were maybe eight of these great big designs that were done in colcha and then appliquéd on to the stage curtain.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes.

JOY YECK FINCKE: It breaks my heart to see they're no longer there. But I guess in this length of time, they've gone the way of all colcha.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: You mean at the theater—

JOY YECK FINCKE: Theater.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —in Albuquerque?

JOY YECK FINCKE: Yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

JOY YECK FINCKE: They have just a plain old velvet one now. The tinwork is still there, and the fresco is still bright and shiny.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh, what would you say were some of the major problems that Vernon and you had to face in this work?



JOY YECK FINCKE: Oh. Well, I think one problem was trying to convince somebody that they weren't really as artistic as they thought they were or that their stuff wasn't as good as they thought it was. Or making sure that they put in their time. It's awfully hard to regulate a creative person—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: —to punch a time clock.

[00:25:07]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Of course.

JOY YECK FINCKE: And if they were established artists, this was very foreign to their whole scheme. And they had to put in a certain number of hours in order to get paid. This was a Project problem. Another Project problem was when they would storm in and demand special kind of materials when the budget wouldn't allow that special brand, perhaps, or it was too expensive.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh, you said before that, at the beginning, you supplied them with materials.

JOY YECK FINCKE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Was that pretty general throughout the Project? Or did maybe the sponsors provide materials for them?

JOY YECK FINCKE: Whenever we could get a sponsor for a particular project or for a group of paintings, then they would supply the materials—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: —or reimburse us for the materials that had been used.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

JOY YECK FINCKE: If it's a big project like a mural then the artist comes in with his design, his little sketch, and we show that to the sponsor. And if the sponsor okays it, then it goes to—went to Washington for their approval. And then it came back. It was pretty of the same old bureaucratic red tape that we have in any government office. And if the—if Washington approved it and if the sponsor approved it and provided the funds for the material, then we would send the artist to that town, let us say, to go—to do the mural.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: Sometimes, a sponsor didn't know what they wanted. And they knew what they liked, but they didn't know a thing about art. [Laughs.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: And so, they wouldn't—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Wouldn't like the sketches.

JOY YECK FINCKE: —like the sketch. The artist would have to do it over. Several projects were dropped on account of that.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh. Would you, by any chance, remember what the wages were at that time?

JOY YECK FINCKE: Oh.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: How much they got paid?

JOY YECK FINCKE: Oh, I surely don't. I remember that the most I ever made when I became Vernon Hunter's assistant was \$25 a week. And that was a magnificent salary. It really was.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, I—

JOY YECK FINCKE: I—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —thought it was about that range—

JOY YECK FINCKE: —just—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —but I—

JOY YECK FINCKE: —I just don't know. Of course, these people—I think there were maybe different salaries. I just can't remember.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, there would be, of course, for the artists—

JOY YECK FINCKE: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —creative artists—

JOY YECK FINCKE: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —versus the helpers.

JOY YECK FINCKE: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And that sort of thing. But I wondered if you just had a general idea of the scale.

JOY YECK FINCKE: I just don't have the vaguest idea. [Laughs.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, that at least gives a clue to it. Well, now, what do you think were some of the major accomplishments, aside from those that you've mentioned?

JOY YECK FINCKE: Oh me. Well, the—I guess the major accomplishment was the Index of American Design. Even though I have mentioned it before, I think that that probably was one of the best things that came out of it. There was another thing that I thought—that I think is probably equally as important. You know, what—in the beginning of the New Mexico days or—well, when it was first settled by anything aside from the Indians, the priests couldn't bring their Catholic figures when they came. They didn't have room to bring them. And so, they would tell the natives what San Jose looked like and what the Guadeloupe looked like. And from crude ideas, they began carving these figures or drawing them. And these—that was so long ago that they became collector's items. And about the time the Project started, people had been buying up those *santos* from various little churches and moradas in New Mexico. So, one of the things that Father and I did was to have an artist go around and make copies of all these old *santos* before they got gone.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: And the person that he chose to do that was a little boy from Colmor, New Mexico. And his name was Juan Sánchez [ph]. Juan had an affliction in his spine. And he was not able to bend. He rode in his—one of his family drove him around. And they had fixed up a kind of leaning board in the car. And if he—when he got out of the car, he walked on crutches. But he was quite an able craftsman, and he did some marvelous examples of these old *santos*.

[00:30:15]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Copies of them. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: Copies of them, uh-huh [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, now this Index of American Design, and now that Portfolio of Spanish Colonial Arts was part of that project.

JOY YECK FINCKE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And you mentioned before that E. Boyd had done—

JOY YECK FINCKE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —a similar thing in going around and making drawings—

JOY YECK FINCKE: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —of reproduction drawing and in color—

JOY YECK FINCKE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —of these items too.

JOY YECK FINCKE: Well, see how important that is?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. [Inaudible.]

JOY YECK FINCKE: Because so many of those are gone now—[Cross talk.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

JOY YECK FINCKE: —or they painted over it with—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: —house paint.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

JOY YECK FINCKE: And these were fine old colors that were nice and soft and [inaudible]—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, now, it was my understanding that this Portfolio preceded the Index of American Design. But I understand from what you say that it was part of it. Is that right?

JOY YECK FINCKE: It's the same.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: It's the same?

JOY YECK FINCKE: The—it was called the Index of American Design nationally.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

JOY YECK FINCKE: Each state has its own little type of designs, like Pennsylvania and their Dutch designs and so on. New Mexico's designs are different from any other that I know of. We called ours the Spanish Colonial Art Portfolio. And it was part—it was New Mexico's contribution to the Index of American Design.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, the reason that I had accepted this was because the work of Index of American Design that I was familiar with before I came out here were these very photographic renditions of objects. And this portfolio of, while they were linear drawings, which had then been —

JOY YECK FINCKE: Colored.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —colored. I mean—or they had been made into wood cuts—

JOY YECK FINCKE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —and then colored.

JOY YECK FINCKE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: See, so they weren't—they were sort of pictures of these—

JOY YECK FINCKE: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —but not a photographic rendition.

JOY YECK FINCKE: Well, that's—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And that is what threw off me, you see, as to—

JOY YECK FINCKE: Oh. That just happened to be the way New Mexico did it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

JOY YECK FINCKE: Pennsylvania, for instance, I think theirs are printed or silk-screened, I'm not sure what the—what the—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: The ones that I had seen were all of these photographic renditions.

JOY YECK FINCKE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I mean, this book that was published on it. But it may be that there were—there were these other aspects of the Index of American Design.

JOY YECK FINCKE: Well, some states did only photos of them.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, I see. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: You see?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And then, some did these renderings.

JOY YECK FINCKE: Right. It depended on—it would depend on what kind of artistic talent was available.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: And we happened to have a [inaudible] that couldn't probably snap the shutter of a—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Are these—are these—

JOY YECK FINCKE: —camera.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —the ones I'm speaking of, they just did one, you see. And then, those were—

JOY YECK FINCKE: Oh.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —reproduced in this book. Now, in this portfolio, you see—

JOY YECK FINCKE: Ours are all originals.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —they were originals, but they all were on wood blocks.

JOY YECK FINCKE: Yeah. Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Wood block prints—

JOY YECK FINCKE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —of the drawing that E. Boyd did.

JOY YECK FINCKE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: So, they were a little bit different in character.

JOY YECK FINCKE: That's right.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: And I guess that was why I wasn't—

JOY YECK FINCKE: Yeah, well, it's one in the same.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —understand that they were the same type of thing.

JOY YECK FINCKE: This—I remember Holger Cahill came out from Washington and got very excited about the things that we were doing on the Index.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, there's been—another question that has come up is about the Indians that were on the Project. And I wonder if you remember anything about them and the work that they did.

JOY YECK FINCKE: My memory could really be failing me, but I don't believe that we had Indians on the Project—New Mexico Indians on the Project, because they were wards of the government.

They were supported by the government. The aim of the Art Project was to support the people who needed it.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: We did have one Indian from Cheyenne, Paul Flying Eagle Goodbear, who was on our Project, but he was going to school down here at this university.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: So, he wouldn't have been a New Mexico Indian, you see.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: I see.

JOY YECK FINCKE: He was a person who needed the relief.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh, yes. Well, I'll see if I can get that—

JOY YECK FINCKE: I don't [inaudible]—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —straightened out, but I would think if—you in an administrative capacity would've known if they had been certified and if they were wards of the government that couldn't be certified.

JOY YECK FINCKE: There could've been—after I left, I think there were—I think I heard that José Rey Toledo was on the Project, but this was after I left, I believe. And if he were, there could've been some extenuating circumstance that led him to be certified.

[00:35:05]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How would you say that the public in general reacted to the projects?

JOY YECK FINCKE: I think they were pretty indifferent. You know, when a thing is happening to you, it doesn't have near the excitement and importance that it might have later on. And I think later on, these people have appreciated the art they have much more than they did at the time. And that isn't a—I shouldn't say that as a sweeping statement for all, because I know—I keep coming back to the theater down here, Albuquerque was very proud, and still is, of their theater group.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: The murals that Gisella Loeffler did at the children's hospital in Hot Springs, and Eugenie Shonnard's fountain, they've been very much appreciated.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: I think that so many of the paintings went to tax-supported institutions, schools and state buildings, et cetera. And I think that they've gotten so used to seeing these paintings that it becomes, like, part of the wall.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

JOY YECK FINCKE: I know in some of the buildings in Santa Fe, the same painting has been there for a long while in the capital. And I doubt if anybody could really tell you what it was.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, maybe now. But at the time, don't you think that they were impressed by the fact that art—what had become of—

JOY YECK FINCKE: It was a whole new thing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But it put it on their level. I mean, so that they—

JOY YECK FINCKE: Well, it did that. Yeah. Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Rather than being something that is just restricted to very wealthy people or to museums. That it brought it into the [inaudible] institutions, schools, and places where they—where they came and could see them.

JOY YECK FINCKE: Well, I thought you meant the reaction of the sponsor himself. But the public, I'm sure—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: No, I meant the public

JOY YECK FINCKE: Oh, well, I'm sure—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: —the public appreciated this. Mr. Hunter did a mural in the county courthouse down in Fort Sumner.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

JOY YECK FINCKE: I think it's a courthouse. And Fort Sumner is very proud of that.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: When did he do that?

JOY YECK FINCKE: He did this—he did this before—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, before.

JOY YECK FINCKE: —he was on the Project. Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, what was the prevailing spirit among the people on the Project themselves—themselves? How did they seem to feel about it?

JOY YECK FINCKE: Except for those who thought maybe they weren't getting their just acclaim, I think most of them were very happy to be on it. And it certainly gave many of them a start in New Mexico. Quite a few artists who had their beginnings in the Art Project are now doing rather well for themselves. And if the Art Project hadn't been there, perhaps they would've gone into digging ditches. And they might be darn good ditch diggers now.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: But they couldn't paint a stroke. The *esprit de corps* in the whole WAP building was something that I haven't encountered since. These people weren't—well, you don't call them—I guess they weren't—they weren't on relief, 'cause they didn't have to be certified. They were supervisors and stenographers and accountants and architects and so on, who happened to need the job and got the job. But I think the spirit and the feeling among those people and the friendships that were made then have been more lasting than any I've ever known.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: And some of the very well-known people in this state had their start as WPA architects or—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Can you—

JOY YECK FINCKE: —so on.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —could you recall the names of some of them that you think got their start with WPA?

JOY YECK FINCKE: Well, Willard Krueger, who is a builder in Santa Fe, certainly got his start with the WPA.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Right.

JOY YECK FINCKE: He was an architect.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: That's practically all of the state buildings—

JOY YECK FINCKE: State buildings.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —now. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: Gordon Herkenhoff was the—on one of the projects. A project engineer, I guess he was. Louis Rubinstein [ph]. There are any number of—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What about the artists?

JOY YECK FINCKE: Well, I—let's see. Who got their start? I think most of them, I can think of. Eliseo Rodriguez got his start. He worked with Louie Ewing on the first silk-screen projects. And then, later on in tile—laying tile. And then, he worked for quite a while for Welton? Weltons [ph] had a shop. They built furniture and so on.

[00:40:12]

In other words, he used his—some of the craft—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, yes. I remember.

JOY YECK FINCKE: —that he learned.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: The Southwestern crafts.

JOY YECK FINCKE: Southwestern—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: —arts and crafts and painting furniture and so on. Eddie Delgado was a tinsmith, and he had been doing tinsmith work for a long while. But he got many more commissions after he—his work was used on Art Project stuff. Pat Barela is still carving, so far as I know. And certainly, he would've been a complete unknown had he not been discovered by the Art Project. Chuck Barrows was a painter of sorts, but he certainly learned a lot with us.

Well, I think a lot of these people were encouraged to continue painting: D. Paul Jones, Lloyd Moylan, Hal West, Joe Bakos, Teresa Bakos, Gene Kloss, Regina Cooke, Howard Schleeter, Odon Hullenkremmer, Helmuth Naumer, Jim Morris, Wyatt Davis, J. R. Willis, Brooks Willis. There are any number of them who were painters before. But who, I think, got a shot in the arm—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

JOY YECK FINCKE: —and were able to continue painting. This was the point. They were able to continue painting, and they didn't have to break it off and go into some other kind of job.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So, it might've diverted them—

JOY YECK FINCKE: Yeah.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —so they never would've gotten back to it. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Well, what were some of these activities that you told about that the WPA workers would put on? Some—

JOY YECK FINCKE: Oh, in the building.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes.

JOY YECK FINCKE: This—unless somebody has lived through a depression, of course, it's awfully hard to explain to them. But there are so many Spanish families in Santa Fe who were on relief, and yet, the relief didn't give them anything except the bare essentials. And this group of workers in the WPA building got together. Oh, this went on for three years, that I know of. We would have old dances and so on. And the money we made from the dances—[coughs] excuse me—we would buy candy and sack it up and take it out to the children at Christmastime, Thanksgiving baskets. The—that, again, is part of the *esprit de corps* that was so great.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, I'd say that there was a very good spirit then among the workers themselves, at least in that way.

JOY YECK FINCKE: It really was.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, are there any other particular incidents, or anything that you remember about the Project that you'd like to tell us about?

JOY YECK FINCKE: No, I mainly remember Vernon Hunter.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: Whenever he sat talking on the telephone, or in a conference, he was always designing.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

JOY YECK FINCKE: He always designed, maybe a piece of furniture. He loved to design furniture. Or design for colcha, some kind of doodle. I wish I had saved them, because they would be fascinating to look at. He came to my house one time and found a crème de menthe bottle, and he got some paint and painted Ferdinand the Bull on it, just to have something to do while everyone was sitting around talking [inaudible].

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: I don't think Vernon Hunter was the easiest man in the world to work with, and I'm sure to be around for a long time. But he was a genius of a sorts, and I always figured that a genius was entitled to quite a few foibles. And since I'm the stolid, practical type, I could help him. And I learned from him. I learned a lot. I didn't learn to paint unfortunately, but I learned a lot. And later on, when I got married, Virginia and Vernon had the reception at their house.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh, is that right?

JOY YECK FINCKE: So, we've stayed friends over the years. It's been a wonderful relationship. And it was a terrible day when he died.

[00:45:05]

When he died, I'd heard about it through Elinor Bedell [ph]. And she called me, and she said, Are you going to Roswell? And I said, What for? And she said, Well, didn't you know Vernon died? And I said, No, I didn't know. And I knew immediately that I had to go. I didn't think of anything but that I had to go. So I drove to Roswell, and I went up to the door, and Virginia said, Thank God. And I walked in. I just had to go there, you know?

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JOY YECK FINCKE: It was something that—she might have not needed me at all, but she did. [Laughs.]

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Yes. Well, being this close as you worked on during that—

JOY YECK FINCKE: Over all these years, yes.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —those particularly exciting days and difficult days of the WPA, I can see that quite a bond could be established. And he couldn't have accomplished all the things that he did if he hadn't had expert help.

JOY YECK FINCKE: Well, me or somebody else. He could've, but it made it easier for him, I'm sure.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well, we're very grateful to you for these comments and recollections. And I see you have quite a bit of material in your scrapbooks that we may prevail upon you to let us microfilm or—

JOY YECK FINCKE: You're welcome to them any time.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —to use in some way, because this is more thorough an account, I think, of what happened during those days than anything I've gotten so far.

JOY YECK FINCKE: Well, I wish I remembered more with my mind than with my emotions—

SYLVIA LOOMIS: Oh.

JOY YECK FINCKE: —because this could help you [laughs]—



SYLVIA LOOMIS: Well—

JOY YECK FINCKE: —a great deal.

SYLVIA LOOMIS: —it could—this was an emotional time, too. And I think that these are also important aspects of it, rather than just the facts and the figures of what went on during that period, which was an important one in the whole art field in America. I'm very grateful to you for this—for the time and for all of your help.

JOY YECK FINCKE: My pleasure.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]