



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

Oral history interview with Albert Henry King,  
1964 June 10

**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

**BH:** BETTY HOAG

**AK:** ALBERT H. KING

**BH:** Mr. King (. . .He) has a formidable array of achievements. He's an artist as both painter and sculptor, and also works in ceramics and mosaic tile. He is the leading color authority in Los Angeles. Mr. King, before we start talking about the Project period which is what the Archives is interested in, I would like to ask a little about your own life. I know you were born in the 1990 but what is your birthday? Where were you born?

**AK:** Well, I was born just outside of Tumbidge Wells in Kent, England, April 10, in 1900, according to my parents (I, of course, can't remember). I came to the United States in 1911, being brought here by my parents to visit my great-aunt and uncle who had built a house in Lose Angeles around 1870 which, by the way, is still standing.

**BH:** How interesting.

**AK:** My father was a gardener, and California looked like a good place for gardening so we ended up staying.

**BH:** That practically makes you a native.

**AK:** Practically, yes.

**BH:** Where did you study?

**AK:** Well I got through high school by the skin of my teeth. . .

**BH:** Which one where you going to?

**AK:** Lincoln High School. I graduated only because an art teacher by the name of Bertha Heise decided that I should graduate. So, having gone to summer school at Manual Arts, Polytech High, etc., taking art classes, I had enough credits in art alone to graduate.

**BH:** Incidentally, did you know Jack McCallic when you were at Manual Arts or. . .?

**AK:** No, I'm trying to remember the name of the instructor at manual Arts who was a very liberal thinker and painter. I can't think of it at the moment. It was Mrs. Hazel Martin. . .

**BH:** Did you go to art school after that or did you just start practicing?

**AK:** Yes, from after high school they decided that my health wasn't good; I'd done too much work: I was working as a janitor and riding a bicycle from one side of town to the other delivering drugs at night. I guess I had run down my health quite a bit.

**BH:** It's not surprising!

**AK:** So, they got me a job as caretaker at Camp Baldy, and I spent that first year at Camp Baldy where a Chinese cook fed me so well I started to grow after the age of 18 and grew about three and one half inches.

**BH:** Isn't that amazing.

**AK:** I gained weight.

**BH:** Was Camp Baldy a Boys Scout camp?

**AK:** No, Camp Baldy was a tourist resort.

**BH:** (. . .today?) The same as it is today.

**AK:** Well, I haven't been up there for thirty or forty years, so I couldn't tell you right now whether it's the same or not. I'm sure it's not the same.

**BH:** Well, that was like a vacation.

**AK:** Yes, it certainly was. A man by the name of Donald Dickey came to Camp Baldy to the ranger station. He had been commissioned by the Biological Survey to take a census of the Big Horn mountain sheep that were supposed to be on \_\_\_\_\_ Peak. I had gone up just previously on a deer hunting trip with a couple of other people, and I discovered the sheep I had counted them to the best of my ability, so the ranger turned Dicky over to me. The result was that I became a staff artist for the Biological Survey set up. I had previously won, for three consecutive years, the award for "Best Young Naturalist." So this fit right into the situation, and I spent, oh, about a year and a half having a marvelous time.

**BH:** Did you do drawings of the Big Horns?

**AK:** No, drawings of everything else but the Big Horn sheep because I was still working. I acted only as \_\_\_\_\_ guide to take the naturalists [them] up the mountain on this trip. But then when we got back Dicky told me any time I wanted a job I could have one with him. I decided to quit and take him up on it.

**BH:** And where were your headquarters? In Los Angeles?

**AK:** Pasadena. He was taking black and white motion pictures, and colored slides of the flora-\_\_\_\_\_, especially \_\_\_\_\_.

**BH:** Excuse me, what were these used for?

**AK:** He supplied museums all over the world with California specimens of small mammals and birds and bird eggs, etc. Also, at that time there, there were, I should say, a great many species and sub-species of animals and birds that the national museum Biological Survey, etc., did not have records of. So, it was quite an interesting job. But this got me into photography.

**BH:** Oh. That's one of your fields too. You didn't tell me that. What were you doing with photography?

**AK:** Making slides of these birds and nests, and so on, because you had to have a complete record of any specimens. In a great many cases we would try and take photographs. This was the old ah. . . what did they call it? Paget process, which was processed-color, starch-grain, color photography.

**BH:** How long were you with that?

**AK:** Bout a year and a half, I would say, or a little over. I ended up having been given a vacation on Catalina Island at the time that it was being transferred between Banning and Wrigley and I had carte blanche to go any place on the island. . . can't carry fire arms etc.

**BH:** A place for a naturalist isn't it?

**AK:** Yeh, well this was supposed to be my vacation after working for a year, a lot o times all by myself. So, all I had to do was to collect a bat and a mouse on. . .ha ha ha Catalina Island! I ended up going broke and went to work for Boof Brothers, cafeteria. People that have a chain of cafeterias.

**BH:** In Los Angeles?

**AK:** Yes. And, when they closed up, I was offered a job anytime I wanted one for Boof Brothers here in Los Angeles. So, I ended up being receiving clerk and buyer for the chain of restaurants, or cafeterias actually.

**BH:** That's a far cry from being a naturalist.

**AK:** Well, this gave me an opportunity to be in downtown Los Angeles, I worked from 3 in the morning until 2 in the afternoon and then my time was free. (So I. . . Then I. . .)

**BH:** \_\_\_\_\_ down to Main Street?

**AK:** Ha, ha. No, I had already met Mr. Cannon who was running the Cannon School of Art which was on the top floor of the Lyceum Theater Building, which was the original opera house in Los Angeles years ago. There are many grand stories about that building, its connection with City Hall in the old days, tunnels that went underground from City Hall to the Lyceum Theater and on up to the Hoffmann bar, etc. so that it was a backdoor to the City Hall.

**BH:** Isn't that fascinating? I have never. . .

**AK:** Anyway, I got acquainted with a Vance Blackman who was making theater posters, I used to help him out while visiting with Leo Traviso. I have a piece of his lettering pinned up in the other room that I can show you.

---

**BH:** Was he one of the poster artists?

**AK:** Yes. A lettering man especially and probably one of the greatest influences on lettering in the sense of its use in advertising etc., plus lettering a lot of other inscriptions. . . , a very very sensitive person. Around him quite a group of what might be called commercial artists gathered; quite a number of them later on influenced the motion picture industry, from the standpoint of becoming art directors, etc. And also went into fine art, etc.

**BH:** Probably influenced a great many people who were on the Projects.

**AK:** Right. The result was that in those days theater posters were hand-painted. In fact, in the other room I have one that I found in my folks' basement, after they passed away, which is a good example of the type of work that was being done. A group of two hundred to three hundred people who used to make the circuit of Spring, Broadway and Hill Streets to view the theater lobbies much, like they do now on La Cienega for the art shows, because these were literally "art shows", because they were all hand-painted and very suavely-produced. Amazing draftsmen, they were a great stimulus to the local group of young people. Each week they had to turn out an entirely different character of design. The imagination and creativity that went into those were amazing, when you realize that they had to produce thirty or forty of these each week; and every week they had to come up with an entirely different design, color scheme, method of a approach, handling, technique, etc.

**BH:** It was a wonderful education for the artists wasn't it?

**AK:** It was.

**BH:** Speed-reading or speed-writing course.

**AK:** Yes. In a sense it was commercial, but it was produced by people with extremely active minds. They just had to be, and also facile from the standpoint of handling their medium and as draftsmen.

**BH:** . . . and having new ideas?

**AK:** Yes, and ideas.

**BH:** Were these for motion pictures or. . . ?

**AK:** For motion pictures and plays, like The Orpheum and Pantages would have the same situation. An entire new group of posters produced every week, all of them illustrated. Amazing, actually.

**BH:** Did you do any of these?

**AK:** Yes, this Vance Blackman and i finally had eight theatres that we were producing these for. This taught me a lot in regard to the medium, materials, the pressure under which you have to work and produce, and the need for organization, and so on. There was always the pressure of having things done in a given time because we have a dead line and we had to get it out.

**BH:** Well, this was really almost like a school.

**AK:** Yes.

**BH:** . . .with these people working together.

**AK:** In other words, you asked "Where did I study?" This is one place I studied. Now, the other place was the library.

**BH:** The library?

**AK:** I probably wore out more seats of trousers in the library than any other living human being.

**BH:** This was the downtown library?

**AK:** Yes, the downtown library.

**BH:** Was it always an excellent one like it is now?

**AK:** Oh yeh. Always there have been people who were very cooperative. In other words, to be exact, I only once paid ten dollars tuition and this i was bated into doing. Somebody pretended he was going to borrow money. Instead turned out the money was paid for tuition. Anyway through this and work with the Cannon School of Art (I took a studio in their building, the Lyceum Theater Building), I became acquainted with Walter I. Hall, who was head of the so called "Trick Department" at Famous-Players-Laskey Studios. Famous Players-Laskey Studios in

Hollywood.

**BH:** I don't remember them.

**AK:** The ones that produced Paramount Pictures. And I was requested to come out there and work out there when Mille was trying to finish up the original Ten Commandments

**BH:** What did the Trick Department do for them?

**AK:** Just about everything: produced what can't be produced any other way. Of course today it's called "Technical Effects." Like "the parting of the Red Sea;" or let's say you build the lower story of a building and then the rest of it's carried out in miniature or in painting.

**BH:** You. . .were the miracle boys, as it were?

**AK:** Yes. Since I was acquainted with photography and was also a draftsman, this was just where I fitted in, from their standpoint. So I ended up working day and night for them, plus holding down my own studio because i was curious to know more about what was going on.

**BH:** You were doing easel paintings?

**AK:** Yes, and exhibiting all this time.

**BH:** But not the ceramics yet?

**AK:** Ah. . .yes, I started ceramics in high school.

**BH:** Oh, you did?

**AK:** Yes. In fact, this Miss Heise I mentioned earlier (who passed away here about six years ago) gave me back the first piece I ever made, I have it over here, thanks to her.

**BH:** Wasn't that good of her?

**AK:** Anyway, because I didn't have time to spend any money, after working for little over a year for Famous Players-Laskey, I managed to save enough money so that I could study for at least four years, I felt, and not have to worry so. I took over another studio on Spring Street, right new door to the Lyceum Theater Building. The Art Student League was at that time on main Street. I attended it as well as Cannon School. Around this same time \_\_\_\_\_.

**BH:** I want to get this straight. Did Mr. Wright have the Art Students League at that time?

**AK:** No, this is when he came in, just about this time which, if I remember correctly, was around 1922 or 1923.

**BH:** Then the other school was the Cannon.

**AK:** The Cannon School.

**BH:** Was there a Mr. Cannon?

**AK:** A Mr. Cannon, an Englishman, by the way; he was of the old academic-painting school.

**BH:** Plaster casts?

**AK:** Plaster casts and on. . . life classes of course, as well as plaster casts and painting.

**BH:** But you began attending the League?

**AK:** While I was still in high school I used to go down and visit.

**BH:** I mean when you decided to have your four years of study, you took a new studio and began. . .

**AK:** That's right.

**BH:** . . .attending the Art League, really bull-sessions is what we would call them today, wouldn't we?

**AK:** Yes. Well, to get back to the point: the League lost their place on Main Street and they were going to have to fold up. So I let them use my studio. I gave them my studio to use. From there on out for quite a number of years

(I couldn't tell you just exactly how many) the Art Students' League was my studio. And then McDonald-Wright who had been on Main Street, came with the league to Spring Street -- that was 22 1/2 South Spring.

**BH:** Ah, Mr. Frank Stevens told me a little about this. He said to remind you of something which I though might be interesting for the Archives. He said that there were many discussions about many subjects at the League. . .

**AK:** Yes.

**BH:** On night people got talking about the fact that when walked down the street they thought the buildings passed them and not the dog past the building.

**AK:** Yes.

**BH:** And in order to illustrate the point, whatever your point was, you did very beautiful detailed drawings of the optics of eye. Is that right?

**AK:** Ha, this is probably true although I can't remember this particular incident.

**BH:** I can see that all of your studies in nature really qualified you to be able to do this.

**AK:** So, the League was on Spring Street then, and the Saturday night sessions were probably the greatest training ground from the standpoint of mental activity. As you mentioned Frank L. Stevens: He was out on the road as a salesman, and he was an art patron. He probably wouldn't tell you this, but he used to buy blocks of Hollywood Bowl Tickets for the artists. And everytime he went into another town he would go to the local book store, and if he saw an art book which he though might be interesting he would buy it. He'd come back from one of those trips and supply the library. He's also bring a sack of sugar and a case of coffee or a case of canned milk. So that on the Saturday (or any night session) we'd all have coffee and sugar and not have to worry about it.

**BH:** Isn't that great! He didn't tell me that. I imagine he was also buying paintings too.

**AK:** Yes.

**BH:** He has a great many of them now.

**AK:** Buying paintings and doing everything he possibly could. Of course his closest friend was Jack Wells, which he probably mentioned. Or Macdonald-Wright has mentioned that he was a salesman for the Los Angeles Gas and Electric.

**BH:** He was also an art patron?

**AK:** That's right. Very much so. And he used to have sessions on Sunday morning, breakfast after these Saturday night sessions. A smaller group would gather at Jack Well's on Sunday mornings and carry discussions further.

**BH:** Of the ones that you mentioned, Val Costello and Nick Brigante both were part of the Project later, and of course Val Costello who is gone. I wondered whether you could tell us anything about him? We don't know anything about him only that he was a fine artist. . .

**AK:** Well, he was a very fine artist. By the way, Frank L. Stevens has two or three of his pastels, very marvelous.

**BH:** Beautiful!

**AK:** Little pastels. He was a very poetic, very sensitive man. Like so many artists who end up in fine arts commercial field. This gives artists a really a good training in the craft; but not in the art, of course but in the craft of painting itself.

**BH:** He had done this?

**AK:** Yes. He was in charge of Foster and Kleiser's Art Department for. . .probably twenty-five years. In the old days, when bill-boards were either painted or printed from large wood blocks, all the League's drawing-boards were the wood blocks. They'd carve only one side of soft wood like Poplar or Applewood which makes a marvelous drawing-board. Of course it's rather rough on one side from the wood block carved on it! But the other side is perfectly smooth. These were the drawing-boards that were used at the old Art Students League.

**BH:** I wondered how long he did commercial work. I haven't been able to find out anything about him except from indirect remarks.

**AK:** I first went to the League while I was still in high school. What the League used to do at that time was for everybody to chip-in to pay for the model and the rent. At the end of the month, if there wasn't enough money someone who was holding a job (or had enough money) would make up the difference. Val Costello was that person when I first started going to the League. Later Nick Brigante and Val together were underwriting it until it had to close on Spring Street.

**BH:** Was he a young man too or was he an older person?

**AK:** He was quite old. Val Costello retired after being with Foster-Keiser for I don't know how many years, but I would suspect about 25, or maybe even longer.

**BH:** I think it is quite interesting to learn these things because they certainly influenced the younger artists who were on the Project and . . . their work is the roots of the art we have today in Los Angeles.

**AK:** Yes. Actually there were two schools, so called "Eucalyptus" school of fine art painters and then this group of young aggressive people who were the moderns of that time," actually.

**BH:** Had there been a direct stimulus from Europe by \_\_\_\_\_ Wright?

**AK:** No, this was prior to McDonald-Wright. Take for example these theater posters: in order to have a different kind of theater poster they would try cubism, or anything, else as an approach for their posters. This made them have to study the art movements of the time. This is what I'm getting at in a sense: that -- commercial art stimulated the development of fine art in those days by exerting the pressure on creative people in a visual field. In a sense it became "compulsory education". END OF TAPE NUMBER VII INTERVIEW CONTINUED ON TAPE VIII

**BH:** Our tape was cut off in the middle and we are continuing our discussing. Mr. King, we were talking about the artists who were around the Art League area and about the seminars that they had. You were starting to tell me that they gave the first truly modern art exhibition in Los Angeles about, 1923. There is no catalogue listing from it. The one that was later held in the Hollywood Public Library in October, 1925, said in its the catalogue that it was the "first modern art exhibition." It was not. Would you tell us for the tape about the first one?

**AK:** Well, the first one was held in the Tower Building at First and Hill Streets. It is difficult for me to remember all the people who exhibited. As I remember, there \_\_\_\_\_ Ben Berlin, an artist by the name of Durston. . .

**BH:** Arthur Durston?

**AK:** Arthur Durston, and, oh. . . my memory fails me. I'm sorry. The second one, which was in 1925, as we have just mentioned, was at the Hollywood Public Library.

**BH:** Was it for this one that you did that beautiful polychromed head that I saw in the studio \_\_\_\_\_

**AK:** No, no, that was for one that was considerably later. Probably around 1935, or maybe '32, which was a study for a head that I'd been asked to make by the Ventura Community Church for whom I'd done a 39 x 48 foot mural of "The Twelve Apostles." At that time they wanted me to make a head of Jesus, but I told them I certainly didn't have any idea what it should look like, so I was working on the idea of developing porcelain for my work in sculpture and using glazes. At that time I did not have the medium under any control or the glazes available. So, I mad a plaster head which I then polychromed with a varnish vehicle of oil pigment, to simulate the effect of the glazes, just as a study. It was exhibited in this show at the Los Angeles main Library where a modern show was held sometime later.

**BH:** Well, you were well on your way to doing all kinds of experimental things in ceramics by the time the Project started?

**AK:** Oh yes. I had built the pottery here.

**BH:** Oh you had?

**AK:** Yes, and with a man by the name of Harold Spence. He and I collaborated on the design and building of it. In fact this house was owned by his mother at that time.

**BH:** Was he on the Project later?

**AK:** For a very short period of time. But he was a ceramist and not an artist, therefore not eligible for the Project.

**BH:** I also think it is very interesting that you have done a mural before the Project began, because I don't think I've talked to anyone yet who had done any mural work before the Project, which was the great explosion of

mural work in this area.

**AK:** That's right. In fact it was the first large mural painted for a church, or otherwise that had not been painted by someone (let's say) from Italy or from back East, or otherwise; except for the, mission-type of thing, which was in a sense purely decorative, on the whole.

**BH:** Do you think that the fact that you had done this and that it was successfully completed had anything to do with the Project's starting murals?

**AK:** No. I doubt if there was any relationship there except that it was very well-publicized by Arthur Millier, the Art Critic on the "Times." ["The Los Angeles Times"]

**BH:** He served on the first Art Commission in Los Angeles, didn't he?

**AK:** Yes. In fact, the original Art Student's League, to the best of the knowledge I have, was started by a group including the then Art Critic on the "Los Angeles Times" who was Anthony Anderson. He has long since passed away.

**BH:** He is the man who wrote the report about the first art show.

**AK:** That's right.

**BH:** YOU were going on working in all these different mediums. Were you teaching?

**AK:** What happened is that I went back to work for the studios. Yes (to answer your question), I was teaching classes at the Art Students' League at my own studio on days when small groups of people or individuals came in. And I was assistant to McDonald-Wright when he took over the general instruction, if anybody instruction at the Art Students League.

**BH:** He gradually worked up quite a large group of followers.

**AK:** That's right: He had a very, very grand series of classes. Especially his classes in painting on Saturday afternoons, which brought in a number of art teachers. And for the first time the League permitted women to attend the League sessions.

**BH:** Oh really! This was the first time?

**AK:** Yes. Previously no women were allowed in the League.

**BH:** Who were some of the other assistant teachers who were there, do you remember?

**AK:** There were no other assistants until later. At this time McDonald-Wright offered me the chance to go to Santa Monica. I was to just come down there and work he'd give a studio; then we could work close to one another and discuss or argue about what we were doing, and why and wherefore. The mural I just mentioned was painted in the studio that McDonald-Wright let me have in Santa Monica. So, I worked down there with McDonald-Wright, as a resident-student, in one sense. We were both painting, but I'm certain I was learning more from than he was from me, -- on the basis of exchange.

**BH:** But I imagine there was a great deal that you were able to help him with when he received the commission to do the Santa Monica Library murals?

**AK:** Well, I was working with another man by the name of Wright, Walter Wright, on colored motion picture, and of course this fitted right in with my background in motion pictures. So there was a certain amount of mutual exchange. But most of the giving was on his part, I can assure you.

**BH:** Did Morgan Russell come over during this period?

**AK:** Not until later.

**BH:** I see. I wondered whether he had any students while he was in Los Angeles?

**AK:** Oh he did, yes, later. This was some several years later. Well, about three years, probably.

**BH:** You mentioned the fact that Wright brought in guest \_\_\_\_\_. I wondered what kind of people these were. Do you mean for esthetics or for studio classes?

**AK:** You mean the people McDonald-Wright brought in?

**BH:** Yes.

**AK:** Well, let's see, on Saturday nights the League held stags for oh. . .probably fourteen, fifteen, sixteen years. It had been a regular habit for them to gather together. Sometimes they would go out and eat, but later on it became a case where somebody would take care of cooking the meal. It might be an Indian or. . .

**BH:** East Indian?

**AK:** East Indian. Or it might be a Chinese boy, or it might be an Italian boy, so we had all kind of food. And, although it was prohibition era, we somehow found out how to get a gallon or two of wine, anyway. At least somebody who was making his own wine, would bring two or three gallons or it to the meetings.

**BH:** This is really similar to the San Francisco Bohemian club, the way it began in the early years, before they allowed the bourgeois to become members.

**AK:** That's right. So, there invariably would be someone interesting attending. It might be a guest-conductor for the Hollywood Bowl who, being in town, and would just like to get away and having heard about the League Saturday nights, would walk in. He was treated just like anyone else and it would start all kinds of discussions. In fact when Moby Dick, Melville's novel came out, the old deal at the League was that everyone would be sitting around eating -- for the table we used the model-stand, which was quite huge -- , and during the conversation that went along with the meal, if someone made a positive statement everyone would say "There she blows!" In other words, "Get your harpoons ready!" So, the thing was to remember that statement. There were no arguments during the meal; but when it was over the dishes had been taken away, somebody would bring up the statement and bate the person into continuing. Then the people would back away from that person. They'd go around and shake hands with everyone except that person -- offer to, then take the hand back. Then, when he'd start to loose ground and look like he was weakening, people would go over on his side and take up his side of the argument until he got back on his feet again. And then they would one by one leave him sitting out there all alone.

**BH:** Ha ha \_\_\_

**AK:** So, no matter what the subject was (which might be anything). Any positive statement which was made by anyone would be the possible topic for the evening. These sessions would last until two and three o'clock in the morning sometimes.

**BH:** I heard that that famous character, Sadakichi Hartman, was one of the guests one time.

**AK:** Yeh. Oh, another one of the exhibitors was Gjura Stojana.

**BH:** Was he an artist?

**AK:** An artist who went to the South Seas and nearly lived the same type of life that Gauguin had lived, and at the same time. He was quite a character around Los Angeles. He used to cut his. . .bangs right across the front, exactly like the Beatles today. He was the original Beatle. Ha ha.

**BH:** Was he a very good artist?

**AK:** Yes, he was. He was a competent artist and quite sensitive, and as a character possibly even more color than his paintings.

**BH:** Was he on the Project?

**AK:** No, I lost track of him long before the Project showed up.

**BH:** Well, this brings us up close to the time of the Project.

**AK:** Yes, around this time there was a lot of activity. The Younger Painters Group started from a group of younger people who were at the League and included quite a number of people who later on became active in the Federal Arts Project, like Jime Redmond, Ben Berlin, . . .

**BH:** Fletcher Martin?

**AK:** Yes, Fletcher Martin, Biberman. . .

**BH:** Edward?

**AK:** Yeh. . .ah. . .Fred Sexton. They were all very different! No two of them painted in a similar style by any

means. Quite a few of them were very influenced by McDonald-Wright and his Synchronist approach.

**BH:** Boris Deutsch?

**AK:** Yes, Boris Deutsch. Oh, wait a minute: I don't think he was.

**BH:** He was sort of a "loner."

**AK:** Yes, he wasn't a member of the Younger Painters.

**BH:** Did they call them the "Young Painters"?

**AK:** Yes.

**BH:** And did they meet in a different place?

**AK:** Yes, and exhibited as a separate group. I think there are a number of reviews in my scrapbook on the younger painters.

**BH:** I hadn't realized there was another division at that time. Then, actually at the time the Project started you could say that there were three distinct groups, the Eucalyptus: people, the Younger Painters and the Art League.

**AK:** Yes. Then, of course, the California Art Club had been quite active. Most of those artists were classified in the Eucalyptus School at that time. **BH:** And not too many of them were on the Project?

**AK:** No, not so many of them. But, then came the depression. At that time McDonald-Wright was very active in \_\_\_\_\_ Monica with the Theater Guild, and he wanted me to help out with set-designing and lighting, stage-lighting and so one.

**BH:** Did you?

**AK:** Ah. . .yes. With the result that this gave employment to some of the art students, two in particular -- (well, maybe I shouldn't call them students, although an artist is a student until he dies as far as I know): James Redmond and Carl Winters, especially.

**BH:** Is Carl Winters still around?

**AK:** Carl Winters died, and his paintings are now at the University of Texas. He had a niece who married a professor at the University of Texas, and after he passed away they came here and picked up his paintings and took them back down to the University of Texas.

**BH:** It's good to know where they are. I presume that he painted in the Synchronist style.

**AK:** Not so much Synchronist style as it might be called a variation of it, in a sense. But he was very interested in metaphysics and all these paintings are very mystical and symbolic and so on and very meticulously painted. **BH:** I suppose Mr. Wright was also interested in metaphysics at this time? The statue you did of his head would indicate that. When was it made? That was done when I had the studio next to his in Santa Monica\_\_ around 1927, I would say.

**BH:** This is for the tape since they can't see what I saw. It is a colossal head of Wright. What is it, about three feet high?

**AK:** Oh, it's a little more than three feet. It's almost four feet.

**BH:** It is a very serene and classical thing. He is in meditation. And his ear lobes are extended in the the Zen tradition.

**AK:** Yes, they are what known as the immortal ears ----- "In Chinese Oriental lore if your ear lobes start to grow after you are sixty, you will live another sixty years. And, so, if you make them long enough, you'll be immortal. Ha ha ha. Or if you're immortal they must be really long!

**BH:** That isn't porcelain?

**AK:** No, that's merely plaster.

**BH:** Have you had anything cast from it?

**AK:** No. I intend someday to make it in terra cotta, not in porcelain but in terra cotta. It was exhibited at \_\_\_\_\_ in the "Painters and Sculptors of California Show" and won first award; I've forgotten what year that was.

**BH:** That was the Los Angeles County Art Museum?

**AK:** yes, that's right. BH; Mr. Wright has no copy of this?

**AK:** No.

**BH:** It's surprising that he hasn't talked you into doing it. It's a very beautiful statue, very lovely, and very disturbing.

**AK:** Disturbing in its style, maybe. Ha ha. When the depression came, of course, no one had any money. And, as I understand it, in order to get money into circulation the first Public Works of Art Project was started with the idea that artists never hang on to their money: they always put it back into circulation in a hurry. So volunteers were requested to supervise and organize this Public Works of Art Project, which you probably have information on at the present time I probably don't need to cover this. However do you have the names of Merle Armitage.

**BH:** Yes, he's been interviewed. Mrs. King was telling me about the first time that you particularly were aware of the Project. I don't know if you remember about it, but you were both, you and Mrs. King, at the Los Angeles County Museum and you ran into Mr. Danysh.

**AK:** Yeh, well I previously had been asked if I would like to work on this original project and I had worked on it trying to produce the porcelain figure; I showed you the photographs of her.

**BH:** This was the nude girl?

**AK:** Yes. Then that particular Project eventually folded up. In the national show the material collected went over so well in Washington, DC that Congress appropriated more money to start an art project under the WPA.

**BH:** This had nothing to do with the Treasury?

**AK:** No.

**BH:** It was just a WPA project?

**AK:** That's right.

**BH:** And you had nothing to do with the Treasury? Department commissions?

**AK:** No, the other was in relationship to the immediate effort to get money into circulation. Mr. Danysh was the Regional Supervisor for the 11 Western States, and Nelson Partridge was the State Director for Southern California, and McDonald-Wright was for a period of time the Local Supervisor.

**BH:** Incidentally, before we go on, I have not been able to find the address for either Mr. Danysh or Mr. Partridge from anyone. Do you happen to know where they are?

**AK:** I ran into Mr. Danysh in San Francisco. Probably the Oakland School of Arts and Crafts can give it to you. He was living in an apartment at that time, in Oakland, and he was working on promoting publicity for the Oakland School of Arts and Crafts.

**BH:** Thank you very much. Do you know about Mr. Partridge?

**AK:** The last I heard from Mr. Partridge he was in Santa Barbara.

**BH:** Thank you. I hope to get up there next week. Then what happened?

**AK:** So then Mrs. King (Louisa Etcheverry at the time) and I were out to the museum. We'd gone to see the Chinese exhibition there, I had already, of course, started the potter here and we were beginning to produce. I was on my way to porcelain; at that time we weren't making porcelain but were very close to it. And we were sitting out in Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ Partridge's office for the Federal Art Project was in the museum at \_\_\_ time, and we were sitting out in front of the museum that day when Mr. Danysh and Mr. Wright were leaving.. They wanted to know whether I would consider the idea of the feasibility of putting a mosaic on the whole front of the museum.

**BH:** May I ask why the idea of mosaics at all this hadn't been done anywhere else around here \_\_\_

**AK:** This was primarily McDonald-Wright's idea, in my estimation. I don't know who first got the bright idea but it was an excellent idea for southern California. Of course Wright from his studies of Oriental and Persian knew

about the art of mosaics, and the thing was that our climate is very similar. Also it satisfied the need they had to employ so many people at the same time. This way they could be employed. These people weren't necessarily competent as designers, but they could be employed by this way. . .

**BH:** They could carry out designs?

**AK:** Yes, they could carry them out. They were good craftsmen and sensitive people, and the thing was, how could you employ a large number of people? So a large project was desirable, rather than a lot of little easel paintings, or otherwise, if possible. Also, the thing that pleased me with the idea is that any major effort today has to be a cooperative effort; and to get artists to cooperate is one of the most difficult of things. If it could be done by the artists, why can't other people do the same?

**BH:** It's amazing.

**AK:** I said, "Well, I would try and find out." So, Louisa and I came home to the parlor here, and proceeded to decide what could be used. We did a little research, and then we started out to make a two-by-two foot mosaic, keeping track of every moment of our time. Her brother, Robert Etcheverry helped work on it. And all the cost estimating for every one of the mosaics was based on that two-by-two foot square. It came out accurate although we were armatures at the time and perfectly ignorant, except for what we had learned from our own research \_\_\_\_

**BH:** Ideal "guinea-pigs?"

**AK:** yes.

**BH:** Isn't that interesting!

**AK:** And by keeping track of the exact amount of time and the cost and materials we were able to estimate the Long Beach and some (How many mosaics did we finally put up?) forty-odd mosaic murals throughout Southern California. LK: (wife) Long Beach is the largest.

**BH:** The largest in the whole country, isn't it?

**AK:** Well, if you sort of stretch a point, say that it is the "largest mosaic unbroken by openings." Others are broken by window openings or otherwise. Then if you put "texturized mosaic" in front you are safe to say it is the largest> BH; What does "texturized mosaic" mean?

**AK:** Well, in order to enable all the people to be able to work together, some standard approach had to be worked out, so we discovered this method. The three of us working on it found that one us would cut the tiles smaller, others larger, and so on. When person worked on a small area or a localized area, that would look altogether different from the rest of the areas \_\_\_\_ It would look like a patch work quilt. In other words, no two people work exactly alike. So, the idea was to work out some practical way so that if there were a number of people working, the result would hold together as a cohesive whole.

**AK:** The only solution I could see to this was similar to what the Persians had used except they had used whole tile, then scattered those through to give unity. But, we also tried tile to work out patterns that would symbolize the material. Here are some examples, for instance, in the back of this book. Here is the piece and how to cut it, to reorganize it into this texture: this we use for what we called Persian brocaded silk texture patterns. This one was the texture pattern that was used for lace; and this is the small tile which was cut into these shapes and then reassembled. So this group of artists (who were later going to put this mosaic together) at first were given the job of working out these patterns using their ingenuity.

**BH:** Did you design the patterns?

**AK:** Yes. And then stencils were made of these. This took an amazing amount of ingenuity and creative ability to do this, because there were hundreds of these patterns. Now, this was used for "sky" because it has no one-directional quality to it. Yet that's all produced by cutting square tile once.

**BH:** Oh no!

**AK:** Into those two pieces and then rearranging them. This is the creative part.

**BH:** As we know, you were in charge of all the tiles that were done here. At the end of the project, Mr. King you made a book to tell the process, step by step, that you used. Your \_\_\_\_ was used on all of the art projects in Southern California using tile. It gives the patterns. It's one of the most fascinating books I've ever seen. There were very few editions of it printed. How many were there?

**AK:** Two hundred and fifty, I believe which were actually hand-colored by the some of the workers on the Index of American Design. So, these plates are hand-colored. The ones in the back are silk-screened by the Project.

**BH:** As far as we know there are only two in existence now. Mr. King has one and the Los Angeles Public Library has one which we will photograph. However, people have taken may of the colored pages out of it. And this book is something that certainly should be published again for people who want to learn about mosaics. It's already been used in some very interesting places which you told me about.

**AK:** The University of Mexico, when they started to put up their mosaic, had some knowledge of the fact that there was such a book published. Inquiring around the libraries of the United States they found that the Los Angeles, having I think originally four copies, still had two left; so they were loaned one of these two copies. The people at the University of Mexico used it as a criteria for their approach to putting up a large mosaic wall.

**BH:** In interviewing different people I've discovered many wonderful things that came out of the Art Project, and I think this book can take it's place as one of the important ones. I hope you do do something about getting it published for use by other people.

**AK:** Yes, except for one the fact: today most mosaics are put up with mastic rather than with cement. This mosaic project occurred after the earthquake of 1931 or '32 here in Los Angeles; the whole ceramic industry producing tile was int he dog house at that time because most of the tile had fallen having been improperly applied. So, we got a great deal of cooperation from Gladding-McBean Mosaic Tile Company, etc., because we were running a series of tests on our mosaics. They were put up in compliance with all the regulations and dictates of the Tile Manufacturers Institute and all the research that had been done in the East by two or three colleges, and so on, in cooperation with the tile industry. SO work the artists\_\_\_ did on the Federal Art Project not only gave employment to the artist, but it also put the tile business back on it's feet in Southern California. To day, of course, practically all your buildings and apartment houses on are covered with the same tile. The mosaic project could be said to be responsible for a lot of the popularity of tile today. The artists really did a very, very through job; they were very conscientious.

**BH:** We have had many quakes, small quakes, and of course airplane shakage since then, \_\_\_\_ they all seem to be in tact. I haven't heard of any of them falling off, a compliment to you and all the workers.

**AK:** "To all the workers" is right, because they worked on that Long Beach mosaic when it was free\_\_\_ cold and windy down there. By that time repeal was with us and it was possible to get very good Brandy so I promised all the people who worked on the Long Beach mosaic that when it was up we would have a party. I purchased two cases of thirteen year old Brandy and told them that it would be opened only after the last tile was on. Ha ha ha I kept those on the Project who might have dropped out.

**BH:** Was that the first one that you did?

**AK:** No. . .

**BH:** I have many tile mosaic murals which you supervised; I don't know whether you just supervised them or worked with them. I wanted to ask you about them. I suggest that we talk about those and then get to the Long Beach one last because there is so much. . .

**AK:** All right. After we had worked on this two by two foot test one, Mrs. Leibeg gave McDonald-Wright a commission to design a mosaic fountain for her garden.

**BH:** Up Mandeville Canyon, wasn't it?

**AK:** Yes. And so we had another chance on it to find out more about the problems of applying the mosaic to vertical surfaces rather than like the one we made for an experiment which was lying flat of course; we didn't stand it up to apply the tile. Then the first mosaic was put into the Hooper Avenue School, a high school in Los Angeles. LK: (wife) In Belmont.

**AK:** Belmont High School! in Los Angeles; that's correct. Stanley Sponh, a former student at the Art Center School, designed it. This is where we first really tried the idea of texturing.

**BH:** Now, was this a fountain or a . . .?

**AK:** It was a fountain. It was a wall mural around a very crude drinking fountain which was nothing nor less than a long cast-iron enamelled, sink with spigots along the line of it. Ha ha ha.

**BH:** In my notes I have that it was done in petrachrome in 1939.

**AK:** No. It was not petrachrome, and it was done in '36.

**BH:** Some of the information gets \_\_\_\_\_.

**AK:** Well, the dates and everything are in here [Mr. King indicates scrapbook] and a photograph of that particular one, the first one, I think, is in here. I don't know whether it is or not, but anyway it was not too successful. We hired a tile-setter to put this up and after the tile-setter got through we had to reset practically all the tile again. So, from then on out we decided the artists could do a better job than the standard professional tile-setter. Then one was made for the Santa Monica Public Library which was a small mosaic behind a single drinking fountain on the exterior.

**BH:** That's still in the Childrens' Court?

**AK:** Yes. Then there was a possibility Long Beach City would sponsor a mosaic for the Auditorium down there, because of the large expanse which never been decorated and which had called for a decoration originally. \_\_\_  
On rainbow: what did they call it?

**AK:** Ah. . ."Rainbow Pier." And so after considerable discussion Long Beach decided to sponsor it. So we started on the Long Beach mosaic. In the meantime, a great number of other requests for mosaics came into the Project, so the Long Beach one was being worked on while a lot of smaller ones were also being produced.

**BH:** Like the lunettes in University High School, West Los Angeles?

**AK:** That's right, and out at \_\_\_ etc. The original idea for texturalized mosaic really began with the Long Beach mosaic because of it's expanse and the fact that if one person laid the tile in one area, that would have his particular stamp on it; and another area, that particular stamp and it would not held together. So, this resulted in coming up with the idea of the texturized mosaic as the only alternative.

**BH:** Who decided on the \_\_\_\_\_ "Recreational Activities of California?"

**AK:** Well, the original design was made by Henry Allen Nord. However it was not considered to be too practical for the purpose, so it was redesigned by Wright, myself, and Nord working together.

**BH:** Where did he come from? Was he a local man?

**AK:** Yes. He was, to the best of my knowledge, living in Long Beach; and this was the reason why he first started possibly. . .I'm not too sure of this. . . The Long Beach City people possibly had the original idea, but I never did find out just who did. \_\_\_\_\_

**BH:** The original conception was that this could be seen for thirty miles down American Street and . . .

**AK:** No, it's a straight street right down American to the Pier, so for at least three and one half miles you can see it (providing there isn't smog of course!) Ha ha ha \_\_\_\_\_

**BH:** How tall are these figures? I know they were of heroic size!

**AK:** I would say they are eight to ten. . .no, they are a little taller. They'd average ten feet in height.

**BH:** What about. . .? the over-all height of the mosaic?

**AK:** The height is oh. . .the fire department came down and measured it for us originally and they were only a quarter of an inch off in their measurement we found when we finally go the scaffolding down and could measure. It's forty-nine. Oh! The people with the designing I notice here are King, Nord, Hubley and Spohn. Hubley and Spohn both worked on this.

**BH:** Who is Hubley?

**AK:** Hubley? He is the boy who recently won the award for the short subject. . .

**BH:** Oh. . .UPA artist. . .?

**AK:** Well, yeh, he worked with UPA later. Now he is on his own and he has \_\_\_\_\_ "Story Board" and. . .

**BH:** "Story what?"

**AK:** "Story Board." And. . .

**BH:** What is it, a TV show?

**AK:** No, this is a motion picture. Moon Bird is the title of it. It won an Oscar.

**BH:** Thank you for telling me about that.

**AK:** Well, I don't the measurement for the height of it. I think it's forty nine feet eleven inches, something like that.

**BH:** We can check it later. The number of people working on it varied from time to time.

**AK:** Yes. From a very small group to fifty or more. \_\_\_\_\_

**BH:** I noticed in some of the catalogues, they talk about little scale models done in an inch for every twenty five feet, which were presented and shown and exhibited.

**AK:** that's right. In fact one of the photographs is from the model of the building and the painted original first-sketch for the final mosaic.

**BH:** Were you required to turn in progress-models, or was it done just to show the public or what was the purpose of the thing?

**AK:** Well, mainly to sell the idea and to get the design okayed by the "city fathers"; plus also for exhibition purposes, to show other prospective sponsors. The government would pay the salaries of the artist but some tax supported institution had to pay the cost of the materials. And after all, Long Beach was a sponsor for a considerable number of mosaics ah. . .ha ha, in a sense. But the thing was that the city of Long Beach got the tile back later on; the tile that was originally allocated to Long Beach Mosaic got used on other mosaics. Ha ha. It took oh, I don't know how long, a little over a year, to finish the Long Beach mosaic. This may seem \_\_\_\_\_ like a long time, but the thing was that where were alot of other mosaics being made at the same time.

**BH:** I wanted to ask you about some the other ones before I forget them. You did all the work on the one that Mr. Wright designed at Santa Monica High School. . . \_\_\_ "The Viking."

**AK:** That was actually put up after I left the Project. Yeh, that was when I became Supervisor for the entire Project and Louisa took over the job as the Supervisor for the mosaic Project.

**BH:** Oh I see. You had already met each other by this time.

**AK:** Oh yes. LK: No, we weren't married.

**AK:** No, we were married later.

**BH:** Then another one at Thomas Edison Junior High School. LK: That was also the Project. . .

**BH:** And did you work on that one?

**AK:** Yes\_\_\_\_ but by the time it was completed, no I was no longer on the Project. LK: You were on the . . .

**AK:** I was Supervisor of the Project. LK: He was Supervisor of the whole works, murals and everything else, and I was on as the. . .

**AK:** As the Mosaic Supervisor.

**BH:** Before this, mr. King, you had done the Whittier one with Casper Duchow. Is he still around? LK: I don't know.

**AK:** I'm not certain.

**BH:** Before any of the tile work began, at least I think it was before, you had some things for the project I wanted to ask you about\_\_\_\_ one in 1934 that is called Dawn. . .young girl. Isn't that the plaster cast model which was to be done in porcelain, and was broken?

**AK:** Yes it is. That's correct.

**BH:** What happened to her?

**AK:** Oh, she never was completed in porcelain because the Project itself folded up. What they got out of it was all the drawings, a plaster cast of both the panel and the figure. What happened to it I don't know.

**BH:** What would happen to it? I can't imagine. I mean, paintings I understood get stored away in a basement; but you can't store away a thing like that.

**AK:** Well, I haven't the slightest idea.

**BH:** I'll keep my eye out for it. Could you do her in porcelain now from the plaster \_\_\_\_\_. I'm just curious.

**AK:** Well, I tried eight times after the Project folded up I had made it in the particular design it's supported on three points. The thing is these have to pull in \_\_\_\_\_ when its fired, and there is shrinkage. . .yes, one-third in volume shrinkage. This is when the material itself is in a jelly-like condition. Something happened everytime. I tried eight times to complete it, even through I was no longer on the Project.

**BH:** I hope \_\_\_ find time some time to . . .try again.

**AK:** Well, I now have the technical knowledge so that I could do it. But at that time I didn't.

**BH:** Another one probably done about the same time was the "Eagle Head" of glazed red-brick.

**AK:** Yeh, that was the one that was exhibited in conjunction with the , so called, World's Fair in San Francisco.

**BH:** we have pictures of this that you showed me, which I'll have filmed for the Archives The Tower of Light is something that is to often. I believe you did it with. . .

**AK:** George Stanley.

**BH:** George Stanley.

**AK:** That's correct. Would you mind telling the whole story about this?

**AK:** Well there was an effort on the part of hollywood (as, of course -- , there have been a number of times) to glamorize it, to make it look the way people expect it to look. So, the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, in conjunction with the Federal Art Project and the Bureau of Power and Light, had a combined idea of having two fountains of light and water at the two ends of Hollywood Boulevard. One was to have been down at La Brea and the other one. . .at Vermont, right where Barnsdall Park is. There is a little traffic area in the center that could have been utilized for this, and also one the other end. So this was designed to be a transparent, reticulated, open-structure under which the traffic could pass so it would not be a traffic hazard.

**BH:** Oh, that large? Sort of like the Eiffel Tower?

**AK:** Yes. It was. . .oh I've forgotten how high. . .it was to have been one hundred feet high and to be so designed that it could be dismantled and erected again at any place they decided to have been a World's Fair in Los Angeles.

**BH:** Very ambitious.

**AK:** But a very grand ultimate design. In order to try and sell the project, a small scale-model was built using lucite carve to simulate what would be cast-glass in the actual, final structure, one of the features designed into it (which I have always wanted to see tried) was to use the glass brick which was just coming on the market. So, the reflecting pool in from of the tower itself was to have been a quiet, placid pool with a glass walk, level with the water, across which people would walk to go to the tower and to have the feeling of walking on water. The water would stand out in the reflection from this illuminated tower. . .

**BH:** You wanted to use glass brick for the paving?

**AK:** Yes. So. . .

**BH:** How exciting that would have been!

**AK:** So, you actually would have had the sensation of walking across ice rather than water, in this sense. The lower. . . well it was actually the second story because it was opened underneath on the tripod so the traffic could pass underneath. . . the main floor which lead right off the pool was to be a museum for motion picture industry. This was the first motion picture museum idea in this sense.

**BH:** I'm just wishing they could have used this model when they did get around to building a motion picture industry museum this year. Did anyone suggest it?

**AK:** No, I think it had long since been forgotten. It wouldn't be appropriate in the location where they have it now. George Stanley was the one who ultimately (among other things) did the "Muse of Music" that is in front of the Hollywood Bowl. . .

**BH:** And originally there were going to be three muses weren't there? "Drama" and "Dance" and. . .

**AK:** Yes.

**BH:** What happened to those? Did World War II stop the work?

**AK:** No, this was partially a matter of appropriation, and John Ansen Ford was the person who was so cooperative on the Board of Supervisors at that time. The Hollywood Bowl wanted to put in a structure there for an entrance and a tea room in Mission-style architecture. And it took a lot of persuasion to convince other people except John Ansen Ford that since the freeway was going to go through (which had already been planned) there would be a lot of concrete and modern structures; and any false impression of Early California would be completely inappropriate to the location. And I do feel that the design worked out quite successfully with the freeway.

**BH:** Getting back to the Tower of Light, I know what happened but the tape doesn't.

**AK:** Ha ha. . .Oh! On that, there was the usual thing that has happened so many times when trying to get a whole community to back a project.

**BH:** This was the city of Holly wood?

**AK:** Hollywood itself, yes, as that particular district. . . END OF TAPE VIII