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Oral history interview with Herman Volz, 1964 June 27

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Herman Volz on June 27, 1964. The interview was conducted at 251 Marion Avenue, Mill Valley, California by Mary McChesney and Robert McChesney for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

MARY MCCHESNEY: Herman, first I'd like to ask you where were you born and what year?

HERMAN VOLZ: Zurich, Switzerland.

MARY MCCHESNEY: What year was it?

HERMAN VOLZ: 1904.

MARY MCCHESNEY: 1904. And where did you get your art background, art training?

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, I learned to be a painter and decorator in Zurich, Switzerland. I had to go to art school or grade school and my Godfather, who was my boss, was an artist. He painted churches. I had to start in this direction. My father also had a background of art. He went to art school. He painted. Took me out weekends.

MARY MCCHESNEY: So you apprenticed then to this man?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. Our favorite Sunday walk was going to the museum. So that was my early education.

MARY MCCHESNEY: We were discussing your background in Europe and you were saying that you'd been an apprentice, in a sense, to your father and uncle . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: My godfather, I apprenticed to him as a painter and decorator. Well, some of my formal training as an artist probably was as a decorator. Evening schools I had drawing and some sketching. And that particular school I went to in Zurich, they would not let you paint, if they found out that you painted on the side they would kick you out of school. You had to learn to draw. I had an artist who I admired very highly for this. He was a marvelous guy.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: You mean they wouldn't let you do any painting?

HERMAN VOLZ: No.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: To earn money to go to school?

HERMAN VOLZ: No. I mean no pictures, no paintings.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I see. They wanted you to try and concentrate entirely on drawing.

HERMAN VOLZ: They felt drawing was the whole basis of everything. Earlier I couldn't draw a bit. In fact, today I'm not any good. But, they really worked you. You really learned to look and see. Then when I was eighteen, I tried to get on the Academy in Vienna. It was very difficult there. Out of eight hundred, they only took forty. The first elimination I got through. The second one, I was in with one hundred and sixty and the last day I refused to go on because they decided we had to do some designs of very commercial sounding slogans like "Coming home" and "Harvest" and, you know, all those kinds of things which I have no understanding about. Didn't know what we were supposed to do and I thought that this was not what I want, you know. I had no experience with a harvest and such. I felt like it was not what art really is. So I quit then and turned into writing more, poetry. Thought I'd write a book like most young people. But my greatest desire as a young kid was to be a sculptor and it is probably still my desire yet.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: To work in sculpture?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. This is - to be a painter was only a secondary form which I didn't want to have. But, as I said, as a decorator I learned the techniques, you know, I learned the skill. Then I kept on painting on my own and traveled in Europe a lot, France and Belgium, Holland. Traveled through Europe for a whole year from place to place without any money.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Just sort of bumming around.

HERMAN VOLZ: Was pretty rugged. Learned a lot. Went to every museum that I could get in and later on I went to Paris. In Paris I worked as a sculptor's helper to earn some money - plus I worked, painted a lot.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Doing your own painting?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. Then I won a prize which was from a German group of art writers and artists, plus Mrs. Scheidemann, Minister President Scheidemann's wife had a prize out for the best painter of German speaking painters. I won this, the first prize. They offered me a professorship in Hanover and an exhibit at the Nierdendorf Gallery. First, I didn't like Germany, and secondly I was only twenty years old and I figured they made a mistake. At twenty years you can't be a professor. I knew nothing about, nothing sufficient about art. Also, I worked for a period with an architect. He didn't do any architecture at all but I learned how to make lithography there. I had to work on stones. He made a living as a commercial artist and I had to work on stones. We had a marvelous library and he used to be teacher at Kunstgerwerdeschule in Dorfmann. So, I had a fine library to work with. Worked also in the theater before I was twenty. I worked with this group of people which came out of Munich, a very excellent designer.

MARY MCCHESNEY: You worked as a designer in the theater?

HERMAN VOLZ: I was an assistant. I didn't get any money but I got a place to eat when he was not eating. Usually he wasn't. He was either under alcohol or morphine. I slept in the theater so I learned something about the theater.

MARY MCCHESNEY: [Laughter]

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: When he wasn't eating, you were eating his meals?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. He lived in a pension. Well, that was a good arrangement. They were all actors and everybody knew that and they tipped me off before if he was not going to be there. When he saw me there, he walked away.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: He was the director . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: He was the art director.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Where was this? In Paris?

HERMAN VOLZ: In Zurich. But in Paris, as I said, I refused to benefit from this first prize I won. But, before that I had shown in a Kunsthaus, which was an exhibit, one man show, which I got really a shellacking by the art critics. In fact, the women's club got behind it and stopped the exhibit because they thought there were some obscene paintings there. Young girls which they thought were on the obscene side. So, they stopped the show and a big hassle started, grew calm and they opened the show again.

MARY MCCHESNEY: What town was it?

HERMAN VOLZ: Wintleterthur Kunsthaus.

MARY MCCHESNEY: It's in Switzerland?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. It's a very fine museum, one of the finest museums.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: That's a one man show.

HERMAN VOLZ: That was my first one man show.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Great! That's the way to start out, with a bang.

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, I didn't start the show. Somebody else arranged it. I was discovered. Then after I'd come back from the tramping trip, you know, all over Europe; I locked myself up for five months and painted. Some newspaper editor discovered me. Always people like to discover artists. And through him, I went up; I got in the lime light. So, from a bum I was somewhere. So they arranged everything for me. Then after this I had the gallery in Zurich, he was a man who loved art very dearly and every show we had he lost his shirt. He was just not a good businessman. Later on I had another gallery - Artaurius - which was a very big one. I had a contract with him.

MARY MCCHESNEY: That was also in Zurich?

HERMAN VOLZ: Four years and so I had one every year. The last show I had was in ' 31 - ' 33, just before I left. In

the meantime I lived in Spain, North Africa. Painted on wood sometimes, I had no money and had to use wood for canvas. Then I worked again as a sign painter. I worked in the theater; all kinds of things.

MARY MCCHESNEY: How did you happen to decide to come to the United States?

HERMAN VOLZ: I met my wife in Mallorca, in Spain. I followed her. We married in Switzerland. She studied there, she was an American girl. With her mother dead, she went to school, art school, studied with Leger and we went to Zurich to get married. Or I went there first and she came after and we lived there for two years and she got homesick. So, I decided to come here for a few years and I would go back. I am here since.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Did you come directly to San Francisco?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes.

MARY MCCHESNEY: That was her home town?

HERMAN VOLZ: Mill Valley.

MARY MCCHESNEY: This was in 1934?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah; '33.

MARY MCCHESNEY: What did you do when you came here? Did you establish yourself as a painter?

HERMAN VOLZ: No. First I looked for a job to make a living. I used to do for a living showing the displays, special display of Switzerland and of places of Europe. So, I figured I may just do the same thing here but I couldn't get anything. Well, one day I saw an ad in the paper, "Looking for a foreman, decorator." I thought this was a firm which made window displays so I went there. Wrote a letter to them, kind of an off key kind of a letter. Very strange style at that time. This man called me and says, "Come immediately over." And as I walked up to the place, there was a palette hanging outside saying painter and decorator. I began to turn around. I said, "I won't get started here."

MARY MCCHESNEY: [Laughter]

HERMAN VOLZ: It is what I very thoroughly dislike. But then my curiosity got me and I wanted to see how a painters house looks like. So, I walked in. It was Zelinsky.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh, Zelinsky.

HERMAN VOLZ: Then he showed me a stack of letters; about 200, a big stacks and stacks.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Applications?

HERMAN VOLZ: Applications for jobs as a decorator foreman. I tried to get myself out of it because I had no overalls and I had no tools and he says, "Here is money. Buy it." It fascinated me that this man who didn't know me said, "Here is money. Go buy some overalls. Buy some tools and something else. Come to work tomorrow." So, I got started to work as a decorator on a few routine things, gold leaf, silver leaf and all these fancy jobs. During the depression, there was no work so there were just a few of us working.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I was going to say, during that period, I mean, you were damn lucky to get a job of any kind.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah. I actually did not realize that. Well, I did but I was very arrogant.

MARY MCCHESNEY: This was in San Francisco?

HERMAN VOLZ: So, I worked for him for a year and a half.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Zelinsky is still in business, isn't he?

HERMAN VOLZ: Oh, yeah. Got fired and then I worked for what you might call his competition, another six months and after this I quit. In '35 I went to Hollywood and took over a job as scenic artist and set designer for MGM. I was something like the department head of the scenic artist. I started designing some sets in color, the first ones Paramount made experiments on.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Do you know Ralph Smith down there?

HERMAN VOLZ: Not then, well later on yes. In '35 it was rather bad down there and so I left one day without

saying good-bye. Went to Nevada and played cowboy for half a year.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: You mean you actually worked on a ranch?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah. Riding horses and I have horses here still.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yeah, I know you do.

HERMAN VOLZ: We caught wild horses, stole cattle.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Stole cattle!

HERMAN VOLZ: Rustled cattle which I didn't know anything about.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Were you very successful at it?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah, I was told to go and pick up the beef and ask for the brand and I said, "Well, any brand is alright with me." So, I went and one day I discovered that the ranch only had one brand but we had a choice of four or five different brands. I brought them down from the mountain and we slaughtered always at night and we discovered a whole mountain of hides with the brands cut out. I realized I was a cattle rustler. It was a very charming man who owned the ranch. He didn't own anything. He was just a squatter but he was "In" with the sheriff. You know how these things go on. Supply cheap meat for people in that area.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Who were they?

HERMAN VOLZ: Mostly miners.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: That's very interesting. I've never heard this. I've never heard you tell that before.

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, I always had a desire for things like that.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Where were you in Arizona?

HERMAN VOLZ: No, that was Nevada near Lovelock, about forty miles out of Lovelock, out in the desert.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: That's up . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: It's Pershing county.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Northern Nevada?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. Then I came back and, to my char grim, had to go house painting again, no money, and '36 or '37 I finally left. I was asked to get on the art project.

MARY MCCHESNEY: How did that come about? Was it through a friend?

HERMAN VOLZ: Through a friend. He knew I painted and knew my background as a decorator.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Allen?

HERMAN VOLZ: Allen, yeah. He was a neighbor and they were looking for somebody who knew the technical end of this business. They had nobody who could prepare a wall or anything like that. So, they hired me as a non-relief artist.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh, yeah. I understand that they did hire quite a few technical people.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. Then when I got on the project, they made me a supervisor. But, I had quite a lot of problems in the beginning. The problem which I did have in the beginning was that they gave me a mural to paint at City College on Haight Street, at State College at Haight Street.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: San Francisco State College?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah, and they asked me to make the designs for them which I did. I made the designs.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Was this on the project?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. That was the first mural, one of the first murals State decided to make, you know. There were hardly any murals done before. They'd like to get into the mural project. Mostly it was easel painting.

Anyways, this mural I designed showed the history of science and the contradictions in science of negative and positive forces and that kind of background. It told the story the way I felt about it.

MARY MCCHESNEY: What do you mean by science?

HERMAN VOLZ: Science like the history of science, Archimedes and Socrates, Harvey and you know.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh.

HERMAN VOLZ: So, I made designs, full scale designs in color for three walls and they were on eight walls. Then when they saw what I was doing, they were very worried about it. They thought it would be something similar to Diego Rivera, with an ideology.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Like the job back East in Rockefeller Center . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah. I had an ideology that my interpretation was making clear. What shall I say?

MARY MCCHESNEY: Too liberal for them?

HERMAN VOLZ: Too liberal for that particular period.

MARY MCCHESNEY: When you say "they" exactly whom do you mean?

HERMAN VOLZ: Well that was the project . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: The supervisors?

HERMAN VOLZ: The project, the supervisors. They got very frantic and they were slightly afraid of me, of my being a rough cat. I had what you call a reputation as a tough guy. I don't think I was. Maybe I was, I don't know. Anyway they were afraid of me doing this mural and immediately they formed the Art Commission in San Francisco to investigate what I was doing and leave it up to the Art Commission to decide yes or no. When the Art Commission saw it they . . . I worked on a Friday. On a Saturday the Art Commission came and Monday morning I came back and the scaffolds and everything were torn down. All my sketches, full scale sketches were torn down and the scaffold was torn down. The answer was; the Art Commission had said, "If we would know it was Daumier, we would have to say yes. But we don't know this man and his hands are drawn much too well anyway." And such things of this kind.

MARY MCCHESNEY: This is the Art Commission of the City of San Francisco?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. There was no Art Commission before but they formed immediately an Art Commission then. This was the beginning of the Art Commission. The first job the Art Commission had was to turn this particular job down. Then I went to the project and confronted the supervisors with what they were doing. And the funny thing is this, that the president of the school and all the teachers liked the mural and were willing to sign the contract to have it done and had the money on the table but the small, little politicians on the project were afraid of what the group in San Francisco which was the elite in the cultural field would have to say.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: The same type of person, I guess, that gave Refregier such a bad time.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. Same people, exactly the same. And, Noguchi, the same thing. Remember when Noguchi had a figure of lynching down in the basement in the art museum and the black was out of granite and it was slightly abstract, a lynching, a beautiful piece and Mr. Spneckles of the Art Commission walked down there wanting to inspect before the exhibit went up. He saw that and said, "Where does this go?" And they said that it goes upstairs to the exhibit and he says, "Oh no. It's not going to go." It was stopped from going up. That was during the war.

MARY MCCHESNEY: At the San Francisco Museum of Art?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes.

MARY MCCHESNEY: What year was that?

HERMAN VOLZ: During the war.

MARY MCCHESNEY: And this was the sculptor, the New York sculptor, Isamy Noguchi.

HERMAN VOLZ: Anyway, so it's this group that has tried to keep control. They were afraid they might get another Coit Tower, you know, that type of mural, which was slightly liberal. There were quite a few rebellious

artists at the time and they made some rebellious murals in content. By the way I was very active in this process of getting these Coit murals started. I couldn't get a mural because I was a foreign, non-citizen. So I was not eligible for doing a mural job at that time. Now, I got very angry at this refusal, the way they handled the whole situation and I discovered that two very good friends of mine, together with the supervisor, were designing the mural for this, you know, a very gentle plan. Well, anyway, they had a lot of fear of me or something since I had a reputation. Finally, they got an administrator of the 11 western states to put me straight.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Who was that?

HERMAN VOLZ: Joe Daynish. They intended to fire me and I was called to his office. He berated me and told me that I was not a good artist and that I had no business to insist that I wanted this mural because the people on the Art Commission knew better. So, I listened for about ten minutes and I told him he was a four flusher and knew nothing about art like most these politicians who got into the art project. Many of them were very small men - non-artists and they got themselves into positions of this kind. Well, anyway I told him what I thought about him. He just listened to me and didn't say anything. Two weeks later he called me up and wanted to go horseback riding. I refused and so this went on every time he came from Washington out here, he called me up and wanted to go horseback riding because I had horses. I loved riding. So, finally once I took him along. He told me that he respected me very highly and that I was right about what I said and he respected that I stood up for what I thought and he offered me his friendship. We did turn out to be very good friends.

MARY MCCHESNEY: What happened to the mural?

HERMAN VOLZ: The mural never was done. They gave me a whole stack of watercolor paper and a big bundle of brushes and a big box of watercolors and they said, "Disappear and don't come back, only once a month. Just paint watercolors. One or two, you do what you want." I came every week with a stack of watercolors that I had just painted for the day. Pretty soon I had so many watercolors that I didn't know what to do with it.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: That's what Johnny Saccaro said he did, you know. He was turning them out like mad. He'd go out and paint ten or fifteen paintings every time he went on a trip which was every day. They got frantic. He was just turning in too many paintings.

HERMAN VOLZ: So, then I started lithographs. Finally, I did break through, if you want to come to the point of the murals that I did.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Treasure Island. First I'd like to ask you a question, though, about the San Francisco State College mural which was never done. At this time you were a non-relief artist on the WPA Project. You mentioned money, that the college people had the money raised and were going to put it up. Now, how did this work? Did the government meet their money or what was the arrangement?

HERMAN VOLZ: The government provided the labor and the sponsors provided the money for the materials.

MARY MCCHESNEY: I see. So they would have to raise the money for the paint and the other materials.

HERMAN VOLZ: Scaffold and whatever.

MARY MCCHESNEY: The mural that you had planned to do there which was never done, was that to be in the fresco technique?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Painted on the wet plaster? Did you have experience with such a technique?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes.

MARY MCCHESNEY: In Europe?

HERMAN VOLZ: When I was an apprentice, we did frescos for churches, seraffito, fresco secco.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Let me just finish this about murals. Even though it was never done, we are interested in finding out some details about it. What part of the building of the Old San Francisco State College was it to be in?

HERMAN VOLZ: The main entrance on Haight Street.

MARY MCCHESNEY: That's Haight and Market, isn't it?

HERMAN VOLZ: No. It's Haight and I don't know. Is it Laguna or Buchanan? It's on the west corner of the old campus.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Zackheim put a mural in there too, didn't he?

HERMAN VOLZ: No.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Did Reuben?

HERMAN VOLZ: Reuben did one in there. Reuben Kadish. He got one in.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Reuben Kadish did one there?

HERMAN VOLZ: After I was through there, some fella from Oakland put one in. They hired him to do another one. I've forgotten his name.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Boynton?

HERMAN VOLZ: No, no, I can't remember.

MARY MCCHESNEY: This design then, was to be at the main entrance of the Old San Francisco State College on Haight and we don't know which other street [Laguna or Buchannan] and it was to be three walls?

HERMAN VOLZ: Oh no, there were eight walls.

MARY MCCHESNEY: What was the total size?

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, I think they were twenty feet high and one wall was approximately ten foot long.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, so it was a very large job?

HERMAN VOLZ: It's a big hall yes. Kind of octangular. Some were narrow and some were not. Maybe it was not 20 feet, maybe it was 16.

MARY MCCHESNEY: But it was a large project?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes.

MARY MCCHESNEY: And you had done colored cartoons on paper which have now been destroyed?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. They were all torn up.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Whatever happened to those?

HERMAN VOLZ: They were all torn up.

MARY MCCHESNEY: You never got them returned to you or anything?

HERMAN VOLZ: No, they tore them off and threw them away.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Was this the usual policy of the Art Commission at that time.

HERMAN VOLZ: No, no, it was not. They were very arbitrary. The Art Commission at that time did not function. It was just this one supervisor who called in some of these people and asked them to come check on it. He didn't want to take the responsibility himself. He was scared. Actually the responsibility was the president of the schools. They wanted it. The day before they were there to sign for it and the supervisor refused to have it signed. He said, "I forgot the forms and you come back next Monday." And then he called a few people from the genteel group here.

MARY MCCHESNEY: What year was this, Herman? '34?

HERMAN VOLZ: No, it was '36.

MARY MCCHESNEY: '36.

HERMAN VOLZ: I think so. '37, '36.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Not 1937.

HERMAN VOLZ: That's right, '36 it was. Maybe it was seven - no, '35 or '36. I came up from Hollywood. It was probably '36 or '37.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: '37 is when they began the fair.

HERMAN VOLZ: No, '36 it was. I know it was '36, the beginning of '36.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: '37 is when they began the Treasure Island.

HERMAN VOLZ: That's right. Well, maybe it was '35.

MARY MCCHESNEY: That mural that you had designed was to depict the history of science all over the world. Ah, what did they particularly object to? You said, something about it being too liberal. It seems strange in this period to me to think that anybody could find the history of science treated in almost any way, objectionable.

HERMAN VOLZ: In a case like Galileo and the oppression of Copernicus, you know. The oppression at the time was the particular powers that be to these findings and there was science. The opposition to the forward motion in science. I showed that. I showed the scientist Harvey with helpers on a vivisection of a dog. And the ones who opposed and wanted the status quo. It also showed the constant force of man who works and being not conscious of this, moves after the individual. That's the farmer, the worker, you know, the artisan.

MARY MCCHESNEY: It was the general tone then.

HERMAN VOLZ: It was the general tone and it was not, it wouldn't be propaganda of any kind. It's just content, the way I felt about things.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Yeah. I was curious about that because you know there was that big

HERMAN VOLZ: There was a contradiction of development of science. You can see it right now.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Well, it's a continuing thing.

HERMAN VOLZ: A continuous process.

MARY MCCHESNEY: It seems a little strange now when Arthur Miller wrote that very successful play which is based around Galileo's difficulty with the people who were trying to stop his ideas from becoming known.

HERMAN VOLZ: I made a lot of research on this question, on the different stages.

MARY MCCHESNEY: The reason I asked so many questions also was, you know, at Coit Tower there was a big beef because somebody put a little hammer and sickle on one of the ceiling beams and I was wondering if you had used any overt symbols like that?

HERMAN VOLZ: No, absolutely not. I don't think propaganda has much to do with art because I had occasions before to get involved in this stuff.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Zackheim put a complete Marxist library in his mural. [Laughter]

MARY MCCHESNEY: In the Coit Tower mural the only books you can read titles of are Karl Marx's Das Kapital or others like it. The others are all faked in, buzzed up. [Laughter] I guess that covers the San Francisco State College job. Do you want to ask something, Mac?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: You said that you did lithographs. Were you in that group that started the lithograph project?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes, I was one of the ones.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: To me actually the lithograph project turned out more interesting stuff than any other group.

HERMAN VOLZ: I think so too.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Was Ray Bertrand in that?

HERMAN VOLZ: Raymond Bertrand, he was the head of the project. I learned lithography from him. We used to work together. I helped him painting. It was a very exciting project.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Where was the project located in San Francisco?

HERMAN VOLZ: It was in a building on Potrero near the hospital.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: That was the old building.

HERMAN VOLZ: That was the original, yeah.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: That old red brick building. You remember most the people who were on that?

HERMAN VOLZ: Oh, there were all kinds of people on that project.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I've been trying to remember this gal's name who lived on Potrero Hill. In fact, I have one of her lithos here. A very nice thing. Can you name some of the people on that project?

HERMAN VOLZ: This is very hard off hand.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Was Barbara Kadish on? She couldn't have been on that.

HERMAN VOLZ: No, no.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I think she did some work, didn't she?

HERMAN VOLZ: No, no. She never did. She never was on. All the artists were asked to make some lithographs. This is - sorry that I - could you stop for a minute?

MARY MCCHESNEY: It's on.

HERMAN VOLZ: Ah - what were we on?

MARY MCCHESNEY: We were talking about the lithography project.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. I did quite a few lithographs on the project and they were all social themes, my experiences as a working man and my experiences in Europe and coming over to America. Things I originally wanted to make anyway. Things I'm still making.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Did they have any shows of these things? Did they have an exhibition of these things?

HERMAN VOLZ: You mean lithographs? Never just straight lithographs. WPA art shows with lithographs in them, yes, they did have those.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: And was there any distribution of these around to the schools?

HERMAN VOLZ: Oh, yes. They were heavily distributed. Cahill, who was director of the Federal Project was very interested in the lithograph project and he came out and took bundles of them back east and they are in many government buildings today. You still find them. He was the one who really was very excited about many of the things we were doing out here.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Actually lithography was rather a dead business around here until the project.

HERMAN VOLZ: One, actually, we can thank is Bertrand who was an excellent technical. He was a marvelous technician.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: George Harris was on that.

HERMAN VOLZ: They all did some. George Harris, Kadish, Spohn; Clay Spohn.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: They all did some, for that matter.

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, also, what's-his-name, over in Mendocino?

MARY MCCHESNEY: You don't mean Dorr Bothwell?

HERMAN VOLZ: No. A painter married to Emmy Lou Packard.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Byron Randall?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: He was up in Oregon.

MARY MCCHESNEY: He was on the project in Oregon but I don't believe he was down here at all.

HERMAN VOLZ: I forget now. He wanted to get on here and they wouldn't take him on.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yeah.

HERMAN VOLZ: That's right. They showed some paintings of his somewhere. I was a supervisor then and I wanted to get him on.

MARY MCCHESNEY: How did the lithograph project actually work? Did you go to the building near the County Hospital to do the work?

HERMAN VOLZ: We took the stones home.

MARY MCCHESNEY: You were living in San Francisco?

HERMAN VOLZ: Took the stones home and worked there.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Did they . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: Some of them worked there, yes. They had tables and everything. They had a room where people could work.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Where you could work if you wanted to?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Carleton Williams did one too, didn't he?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. I think every artist was asked to make some. They have countless lithographs and some very beautiful things.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: They never asked me to do one.

HERMAN VOLZ: They never did?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I can't remember. Maybe I didn't want to and they did ask.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Maybe asked and you refused. Did the government provide the materials or give you the stones?

HERMAN VOLZ: They had all this.

MARY MCCHESNEY: And, Bertrand was the one who trained you to be a lithographer?

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, I originally learned it in Switzerland.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, you already knew it.

HERMAN VOLZ: I didn't know printing. I learned printing. I did know how to work in stone.

MARY MCCHESNEY: We were talking about the promotional scheme that Arthur painter, who was the publicity head of the WPA project in San Francisco, organized in conjunction with the San Francisco Chronicle, I believe. The Chronicle mass reproduced these lithographs. Is that the way it worked?

HERMAN VOLZ: No. The Chronicle would, each week, put an ad in the paper for one artist's lithograph to be sold at, I think, some book store in the city and at the Chronicle: It was printed in the paper with the story of the artist and the deal was; it sold for five dollars and the seller got a dollar or two, I forget now, the printer got fifty cents a piece and the artist was supposed to have gotten, I don't know how much. I never really saw a contract. It was a verbal thing and the artists, mostly artists who already had standing in the area, participated. Like Haley, John and Loren, Beck Young

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: That's Haley and . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: Loren.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Earl Loran. Were they both on the project?

HERMAN VOLZ: No. That was not project. That was something on the side they did.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, this was not connected?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I thought this was part of the project.

HERMAN VOLZ: No. It had nothing to do with that. We did something of this on the side. Some of us were on the project and some of us were not.

MARY MCCHESNEY: I see.

HERMAN VOLZ: No. That was a private enterprise but Arthur Painter was on the project at that time and so was I. I helped Bertrand printing when I learned how to print.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Well, the other lithographs that were done on the project, you said that Holger Cahill, the director from Washington, came out and took many of them back to the east coast.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah, yeah. They are all other the country.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Were any of them distributed in San Franciso through the project?

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, I'm sure that the San Francisco Museum has some but generally there weren't too much sold, not much sold here. See, they would have to buy. They would have to pay some money for them.

MARY MCCHESNEY: What kind of prices did you charge, five dollars or more?

HERMAN VOLZ: I don't know what the project charged. Probably very little, just a minimum.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: You're getting two things mixed up aren't you?

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, I see.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah. If you're only interested in the project this big scheme of the Chronicle was not that.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Of course, the project. The stuff they did get out went to schools and other places.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah. Government agencies, offices. I remember somebody told me that they saw one in New York in a Maritime office, a federal office, a lithograph of mine.

MARY MCCHESNEY: How did they arrange for the framing of lithographs? Or did you do it?

HERMAN VOLZ: Just framed it ourselves. They had a framing project also.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I didn't know that.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah. We had a project where all the paintings were framed and matted.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Where was that located?

HERMAN VOLZ: Same building.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, in the same building?

HERMAN VOLZ: If they moved to another building, they all moved along. Allen originally used to work for an art dealer and that's what he was doing, framing and making mats. That was his hobby. They had a couple of people constantly making frames and making mats.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Did artists do the frames themselves or were there artisans and craftsmen to do them?

HERMAN VOLZ: There were craftsmen.

MARY MCCHESNEY: But, they were WPA craftsmen.

HERMAN VOLZ: That's right.

MARY MCCHESNEY: After you were on the lithography project, you became a supervisor.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah.

MARY MCCHESNEY: How did that come about?

HERMAN VOLZ: How this came about, I don't know.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, you were hired first as a specialist.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah, I was hired first as a specialist.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Which was actually non-relief.

HERMAN VOLZ: Non-relief and then they put me as supervisor. Yeah, they made me supervisor to try to develop the mural project. To have somebody who would know what to do about the technical angle and help other people to get murals out. People who had never done anything and had to make designs. Then after the designs, get them executed and see that they could do it. Help them and guide them, see?

MARY MCCHESNEY: Um hum.

HERMAN VOLZ: Which was done in a few instances. Not too often.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Which ones did you arrange to have done?

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, I did one for Shirley Staschen once, a mosaic.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Where was that?

HERMAN VOLZ: It was in San Jose at the junior high school. Then also I organized the finishing or the execution of the mural at Aquatic Park, the mosaic mural at the Aquatic Park.

MARY MCCHESNEY: That's the one in the back?

HERMAN VOLZ: That's outside, yes. They had a Moroccan there, who was a mosaic man from many generations back, and he had twenty men working with him and at the rate he moved along, it would take him about 27 years to finish the mural' and that's what he intended to do. So, they had to get rid of him because there was no more money for him. I was offered to organize the project so they could do the job quickly.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I understand that was never finished.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes, it was.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Was it then? Somebody was saying the other day that it never was completed.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah, this is what I came in for, I had this completed.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Who finished the job?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah. Well, Sargent Johnson designed it originally and so I figured out how to do the job. This Moroccan was marvelous with the hammer and knew how to cut. He could take a tile and cut a star out of it without a chip off, perfect. But, he had twenty other men honing it and filing it to make a perfect fitting. So, I developed a saw and a grinder to do this with machines. Three people did the job in four months.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Completed this mural for you?

HERMAN VOLZ: People who never did anything like this before. One woman and two other men. What's his name - one guy named Clark and the girl I don't remember and some Chinese.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Alden Clark?

HERMAN VOLZ: No, Robert Clark.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Bob Clark. There were three Clarks on the project here.

HERMAN VOLZ: Bill Clark was a designer back in New York, remember, a textile designer. I think it was Bill and the three did the whole job in less than four months. Then I had a tile man put it up. In fact a tile man and later on, we got the Moroccan back to put it up. He was off, but you know, to make a compromise.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Bob Clark, I don't think you have his name down.

MARY MCCHESNEY: This was William Clark or Bill Clark.

HERMAN VOLZ: This was William, yes.

MARY MCCHESNEY: What year was this Herman? Do you remember?

HERMAN VOLZ: I don't remember the year. '39, '40, I don't remember.

MARY MCCHESNEY: This was after you'd been on the lithography project.

HERMAN VOLZ: Oh, yes. I was hired as the mural supervisor and then later I got a title as Assistant State Supervisor for the Northern California Project.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Assistant to the state supervisor?

HERMAN VOLZ: Assistant Supervisor or Assistant State Supervisor for the California Art Project. That was a title I don't know about. They just gave me more money.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Who was the . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: I wasn't really interested in any administrative business at all. I didn't care. I attempted to help out with my technical knowledge.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: You were never on relief then?

HERMAN VOLZ: Only once I had to go on relief. I had quite some enemies on the project. They kind of finagled that I would get off, you know. Then I found out and I had to go on relief once for a short while and then after that, they made me a supervisor.

MARY MCCHESNEY: When you were Assistant State Supervisor of Northern California, who was the supervisor? Was it still Joe Danish?

HERMAN VOLZ: It was Allen.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Joseph Allen was then supervisor.

HERMAN VOLZ: I was a technical supervisor, I was Assistant State Supervisor. It just gave me five dollars more per month.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Is that all? Just five dollars.

HERMAN VOLZ: I think it was $135 or $145 per month.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, that was more than five dollars more. Before you were getting $94.

HERMAN VOLZ: That's right but I mean as a supervisor you got $125.

MARY MCCHESNEY: What were your responsibilities as a supervisor? You said that you had arranged for Shirley Staschen to do a mural or mosaic mural in San Jose. Did you have to contact the building, the school or wherever these murals were to be put?

HERMAN VOLZ: No. Sometimes I did that, yes, but mostly what I did was try to get the artists involved to do the job.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, you already would have had a commitment from some school that they wanted a mural?

HERMAN VOLZ: Actually, it never got off the ground, this project. It was always handled with some kind of patronage. If you were nice to the office downtown, you were one of the guys that got pretty good jobs.

MARY MCCHESNEY: I see.

HERMAN VOLZ: Then, they had a problem of selling some of it, very difficult.

MARY MCCHESNEY: You mean the schools were not anxious to have murals?

HERMAN VOLZ: No, they were not anxious to have murals. The city was not very anxious to give much money and there were some very nice designs made and very few of them actually were made for the amount of artists we did have. The young artists, if we had plenty of wall space, would have taken very little money to do the job. It was very shameful, I thought.

MARY MCCHESNEY: They only had to provide the materials; it was very little money.

HERMAN VOLZ: That's all they had to do, yes. But, somewhere, where the hook was I don't know. There was always the ones that decided the design was not good enough. This was the big problem. I had nothing to do with this. I kept my nose out completely. I felt if a young man, an artist, wanted to do something, that's his privilege to do it that way. I come from a background like this. The European artist very rarely interferes with the other ones as to what is good and what is not good. In fact, I come from background where they back you up against the lay-man. Here the lay-man took over, see?

MARY MCCHESNEY: Did you, as a supervisor, select the artists that you'd give an assignment to? For example, when Shirley did this mosaic assignment, did you pick her out?

HERMAN VOLZ: No, I had nothing to do with it. I just didn't want to do that. There are certain responsibilities I didn't want anything to do with, like selecting the artists or what they should do.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Well, how was it arranged, Herman? I'm just curious about how the thing actually worked. Now, suppose a high school in Petaluma, California wanted to have a mural done, they would approach you, then, as supervisor of the mural project and ask you?

HERMAN VOLZ: That is what was supposed to be done.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh? And they would tell you the space they had available.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes, but then usually the other supervisors arranged who was going to get it, make the design, etc.

MARY MCCHESNEY: It was already pretty well worked out then.

HERMAN VOLZ: It was worked out and I was always asked at the last, "How do you like the idea of this one doing the mural?"

MARY MCCHESNEY: Why was this, do you think? Because there was a shortage of people wanting murals?

HERMAN VOLZ: No. I think it was simply that the office force, the non-artists, patronized certain people. They wanted to run the whole show. Remember when we were down at Lombard Street? This is where, actually, I started developing all the artists who worked on the Fair to come down there and have their own little booths and a place to work where they could work out designs for murals.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: You mean the Pickle Factory?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. This is what I was after at that time. I was basically the artist representative on the project. I took the position of, and for the interest of the artist against the lay-supervisors.

MARY MCCHESNEY: I see. How did you get the artists that worked with you? Were these people assigned to you or did you make any selection?

HERMAN VOLZ: No. They were just assigned.

MARY MCCHESNEY: They were on WPA?

HERMAN VOLZ: I had a few who I selected. When they got fired, I got them back.

MARY MCCHESNEY: But, most the time they were people who were given to you from off the easel project or from some other project?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah, they just sent me the people.

MARY MCCHESNEY: How many people did you have? How many artists did you have?

HERMAN VOLZ: When?

MARY MCCHESNEY: Well, how did it go? Did you used to have hundreds under your supervision?

HERMAN VOLZ: No.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, well, what number?

HERMAN VOLZ: Twenty.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: The biggest job you had was the federal building.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. There I had twenty or twenty-five.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Twenty or twenty-five. I'm sure more worked on that than any other project.

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, that was the biggest project ever done.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Of course, this was, I guess, if you actually counted the artists that were on it from beginning to end. It varied all the time.

HERMAN VOLZ: At all times.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Remember that big loft you had there at the beginning where we did all the cartoons?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: That was Number One something

HERMAN VOLZ: I don't remember. We were on First Street.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh, it was First Street, yes, that's right. I don't know what the number was on First Street. Yeah, that's where they were, you know a lot of girls working there. Why was it we never had any girls over on the scaffold?

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, they didn't allow them to come over because of safety measures.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, is that why? Well, they were all men who worked on the Treasure Island Federal Building.

HERMAN VOLZ: I was responsible at that time. If any accident happened, they would have taken my wages away and everything else.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Really? You mean there was no insurance or anything?

HERMAN VOLZ: No. If there would be anything where I put a man and the situation was not absolutely safe or a man says I put him there and he didn't want to go, I'd be responsible.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh?

HERMAN VOLZ: It was rough. That's why I always had to have the Federal Building Inspector come over every week if anything was slightly wrong.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Of course. Before we get to more discussion of the Treasure Island mural, I'd like to ask if you did any murals before that around San Francisco? As a supervisor did you supervise any?

HERMAN VOLZ: No. I made countless designs and they all were turned down too.

MARY MCCHESNEY: None of them went through?

HERMAN VOLZ: I was a supervisor with absolutely no murals or any project of my own and I had it not too easy even to get that one on the Worlds Fair. Would you like me to tell how I got it?

MARY MCCHESNEY: Yes. Please do.

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, I designed a mural for a mosaic which I also made, an interesting mosaic out of semi precious stone and all kinds of materials for Timber Lodge up in Washington.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh. Byron Randall mentioned that. He did something up there.

HERMAN VOLZ: I designed a thing there, a mosaic there for a fountain and when I did this, it was deer and bear and the supervisor said, "Now, you are doing the right thing. Why weren't you doing this kind of thing earlier?" Make deer and trees and stumps and you would have had a long time ago a mural. Then came the question. One day Joe Daynish came to me and said, "Herman, would you like to do a mural. We have a job to do, a mural, would you like to work with another man, an artist, on this mural? And split it, you know, work together like a collective?" And I said, "Who is the man?" He said, "I cannot tell you." So, I said, "In this case, you either give it to him or give it to me. I waited so long for a mural, this time I'm going to do it the way I want." I sensed that they wanted me but they were afraid, you know, because of something.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Why in the world wouldn't they say who it was?

HERMAN VOLZ: Anyways, they never did tell me for a long time after. So, I said, "Will you give it to this other man or will you give it to me?" He says, "Well, you know, that other man he would like to work with you but he's a very good man and a well known man but he thinks he can't handle a job so big. It takes, most likely, an ex-house painter like you."

ROBERT MCCHESNEY/MARY MCCHESNEY: Laughter

HERMAN VOLZ: Anyway, finally they decided that they would give it to me because of the size, 3,000 feet.

MARY MCCHESNEY: 3,000 square feet.

HERMAN VOLZ: Considered the biggest mural in the world?

MARY MCCHESNEY: In the world?

HERMAN VOLZ: Oh, yeah. So, I had to make designs and see the commissioner, George Creel who was the United States Commissioner.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Now, this is the Federal Building mural?

HERMAN VOLZ: That's the federal mural. I had to see him about what had to go into the mural and he gave me a quick run over of what he wanted to see. He wanted to see Indians coming down from the mountains and cowboys roping steers and the pony express and some of the characters of the West. You know, sailing ships and so on. He was a literary man and he told me this in a very literary sense and also he wanted portraits of some of the outstanding people of the day of the West.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Just a minute, Mr. Creel?

HERMAN VOLZ: George Creel.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Who was a U.S. Commissioner and he was in charge because it was a federal building?

HERMAN VOLZ: It was a federal building.

MARY MCCHESNEY: I see.

HERMAN VOLZ: He was in charge of having it built and at the same time writing speeches for President Roosevelt. Some way to pay him, he made him a commissioner. He also was boss of the Democratic Party.

MARY MCCHESNEY: For this area.

HERMAN VOLZ: And, so I started making designs for it, very small ones, just to get an idea, an understanding of what he was talking about. What are you getting there?

MARY MCCHESNEY: We're going to run out of tape.

HERMAN VOLZ: You might as well give me a rest for a while. This is funny. You probably won't know this story.

End of Side One, Tape One
Side Two, Tape One

MARY MCCHESNEY: We were just talking about the beginning of the Treasure Island federal building mural which Herman Volz designed and executed. You were telling us about how you got the job to do it.

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, I was told to design it in a few days.

MARY MCCHESNEY: You were told by George Creel?

HERMAN VOLZ: By the supervisors and by George Creel. Just make a quick sketch and design it in a few days. My first sketches were terrible but they showed that I understood what George Creel wanted, Indians and things like that. He wanted something like Remington.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, the Montana cowboy artist?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. That's what he wanted but I just couldn't see myself being a Remington.

MARY MCCHESNEY: I can see why. That would be pretty difficult.

HERMAN VOLZ: No.

MARY MCCHESNEY: [Laughter] Even Remington would have trouble on this.

HERMAN VOLZ: Also, the problem was of knowing no skilled help of any kind who ever did a job, worked on a job like this and so I had to design it with the idea that it could be executed, that it could be done physically without hiring professional people from the outside. So, I did make this sketch and George Creel went to Washington to a commissioners meeting and told me please send me the design just to get an idea what you are after. So, I did. And, I wrote him, "Please don't show it to anybody. Particularly not the Treasury Department." Because the Treasury Department had an eye on the mural. It was really their job. The Treasury Department usually handled these kinds of jobs and the WPA stepped in because George Creel hoped to get it cheaper. George was a skinflint. He wanted to save money for the government and so this way he actually did. Joe Daynish got involved in this and sold him the idea that we have artists who can do the job. Not more than $10,000 otherwise it might cost him a hundred, see. That's how George Creel was a very thrifty man. Anyway, I sent him this sketch, just a pencil sketch like a memo to show that I understood what he was talking about and again said not to show it to anybody. I get a telegram the next day back, "Stop work immediately." He had showed it to (I forgot the man's name), head of the Treasury Department in art. He thinks it's terrible which I agreed that it was. It was never really meant to be a mural. It was a form of communication with George Creel. I sent a telegram back "It's very unfair of you to show it, you promised me. I asked you not to and I shall continue working, ignoring your stop orders. I will continue to make designs and in a week I will have them finished. When you come back take a look." I worked day and night on the designs, an original sketch for the whole thing.

MARY MCCHESNEY: How large were the designs?

HERMAN VOLZ: Oh, they were only five foot high, very small. Six foot high, maybe, or even three foot, for that matter. I have only photographs of them. I thought in terms of the architectural layout and all this what to do with it, plus the story, plus the color. He loved blue very much and said he wants the whole thing in blue.,

MARY MCCHESNEY: Blue cows?

HERMAN VOLZ: He was in love with blue. So, he wanted a blue mural there and I knew I wanted to get that mural done because I saw that George Creel is a guy who if he doesn't get what he wants, he just gets somebody else to give him blue. I said, "I'm going to get that mural." And that was it, you know? So, I made all my sketches mostly in blue. [laughter] But the original patterns showed through and then after he came back, he saw it and was just crazy about it and signed the contract and everything was fine. From that time on I began to work on it, on the problems of designing the mural. And the more and more I thought about it, I realized what I'm up to. It's a big, big, enormous thing. They wanted to see the mural from far away, and to make it look beautiful from far away, at the distance across the lagoon there.

MARY MCCHESNEY: How far would that be?

HERMAN VOLZ: Four hundred feet - four hundred yards.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Four hundred yards, at least that.

HERMAN VOLZ: So, I used to go around with a pad and color around the city and check on posters, bill boards for a particular blue and how it would look from ten foot, from a hundred foot, from five hundred foot, from a thousand foot, you know, how the blue looks, how the atmosphere diminishes the colors. I finally arrived that I would have to use straight primary colors and then I realized that with a balance of primary colors alone, I will need a balance of grays. You see primaries would not give me a gray. Otherwise it would just explode into nothing. Also, to be so big I felt I had to organize to such a point and I got very theoretical which I never was before. The type of geometry I had in the design, I used only four angles of a thing in motion. A leg, so the same angle, maybe, repeated itself, maybe fifty feet down. Or up in such patterns, nearly like abstract geometric patterns, I used. I did the same thing with the color too and I never told anybody how I did this, how I arrived at that. With the colors, I had four values, four grays; light, medium, dark and very dark. I measured them with a light meter. I built the machine to measure the grays. I built a machine to measure the yellow equal to the first gray. The light red equal, maybe, to the second gray. And so I had, through the whole mural, four values. No more.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I remember that machine you had. Alden Clark was working on that.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah. I felt that if I would use too many of these different values that the whole thing would completely get disorganized. And I hoped to keep it down to a minimum and I did the same thing with the angles, the motions of legs and things like that, repeated a kind of a pattern and then I had the problem of the type of paint which would hold up. Also, how to design it so that men who never did anything of this kind, they could do it. I had designed everything one inch to a foot. But four by eight panels, the whole lot.

MARY MCCHESNEY: These were plywood panels?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: And green.

HERMAN VOLZ: Huh?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Green plywood too.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes, it was green, it was a new form of preparation they had. They rolled it with hot resin when the plywood was made, they rolled it with the machine hot and they could be submerged in water and wouldn't swell. It was originally made for places in Alaska, for Army set-ups and all that. So, it had a resin top to it which was like glass and it was difficult to make anything stick to it.

MARY MCCHESNEY: This was because it was going to be used outside on the building.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. I worked with some chemists down on this to see what we could bring up. They decided something, some formula which we thought would be good.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: It wasn't the fault of the plywood being green, this was because of the resin.

HERMAN VOLZ: The resin was insoluble, plastic resin. So that's why it was popping up. There just was no adhesion, there was nothing.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: No tooth to it.

HERMAN VOLZ: No tooth to it, nothing.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Very slick.

HERMAN VOLZ: And as a house painter I know this; you start at the surface. The painting principle is very simple. You have to have a tooth, you know. And each coat has to have a tooth which sticks it to the other one. And I was told, also, at that time to get as many people involved as possible because they have money coming this way for so much material and they had to keep people busy. They had nothing else for them. So, I was, many times, overloaded with people which I didn't know what to do with. In fact, I got to be just kind of like a foreman which kept people busy sending them to libraries to do nonsense, to make sketches of costumes you know? It was one of these catch-all projects at that time.

MARY MCCHESNEY: A minute ago, you said something about working with chemists too, to work out a formula for the paint, was it?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes.

MARY MCCHESNEY: To apply to this resin surfaced plywood. Who were the chemists? Did you work with WPA chemists or others?

HERMAN VOLZ: No. I met the one head chemist at Sherwin Williams and I discussed the problem with him and he told me what I could use best and he gave me a formula and I had that formula made somewhere.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: You got all the paint from Goldberg.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. Well, Goldberg is the one who was the dealer.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Handling Sherwin Williams?

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, they got it through him. So, it was not Goldberg, maybe it was Goldberg.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yeah.

HERMAN VOLZ: Anyway, it was somebody who was a contributor to the Democratic Party.

MARY MCCHESNEY: [Laughter] Interesting. Who was this Goldberg? Did he sell paint or what?

HERMAN VOLZ: I was told who to get the paint from, him. So, from this man I just ordered and he ordered from Sherwin Williams.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Were the paints actually made from this special formula?

HERMAN VOLZ: They were made by Sherwin Williams from the formula. Sherwin Williams and many of these outfits are dealers in raw materials.

MARY MCCHESNEY: I used to work for the California Ink Company in the laboratory.

HERMAN VOLZ: Oh. The next step, you know, Mac, when the paint bounced off, when the first sun came out, it just blistered right off. So, we repainted the whole thing again. [Laughter]

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Practically, yeah.

HERMAN VOLZ: We got other paint which I decided myself to do. There is an old stand oil type of a paint which they used hundreds of years ago. And it stuck.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh. Did you size the plywood? Or could you put a size on it?

HERMAN VOLZ: No, we did prime it, yes.

MARY MCCHESNEY: What did you use for that?

HERMAN VOLZ: Some synthetic resin material that they use today, but at the time, this was very new. It still didn't mean much.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I still have some of that paint down in the studio.

HERMAN VOLZ: You have? I have some too. [Laughter] Do you still paint with it?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: No, I haven't used it.

HERMAN VOLZ: It's difficult, it's stiff.

MARY MCCHESNEY: It must be pretty stiff by now.

HERMAN VOLZ: They were all marvelous paints. They were pure cadmiums, pure everything. In fact, this was the first time ever any of these materials which DuPont made, the phthalocyanines is what they call it, were used. At that time, you couldn't buy them anyplace. I got this direct from DuPont for this particular job. It was not even on the market. They had not experimented enough with it and the blues were tones. Everything was cadmium but the blues.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, the green and blue were phthalocynines.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I know the blue was but I'm not too sure about the green.

HERMAN VOLZ: Boy, that blue was powerful. That's what they used . . . .

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: We had to cut it down a little bit, remember? You used buttermilk on it.

HERMAN VOLZ: No, the buttermilk was because it was too glossy, remember?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: That's what I mean.

HERMAN VOLZ: It was like a mirror, you couldn't see anything. The sun just bounced off. Mac was my number one man on this job.

MARY MCCHESNEY: On the buttermilk detail.

HERMAN VOLZ: No. All the way around.

MARY MCCHESNEY: We should start at the beginning probably. When your design for the Federal Building mural at Treasure Island was approved, then what was your next step in production? You said something about a place where you set up and had artists working for you, working on the cartoons.

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, this was a peculiar thing. Actually, if I were to think back, it was nonsense as I said, I was the employer of many people. I had to employ and keep people busy. Many times I just kept everybody going somehow, somewhere and some people worked on the cartoons, on one figure or another you know. Sometimes I worked nights again on it; erased it and changed it and sometimes somebody, you know, I told them "This figure goes like that." I had some ideas of collectivity, you know, which really didn't work out. I was really on the

confused side. I should have done it all by myself. Locked myself up for two, three months but this way I was an administrator which was the downfall of guys like Bufano when, as I say, you got to be just an administrator. Everybody was in the shop doing his own work for Bufano and there was hardly anything for him to do. He hardly touched his hand, which was very sad. I can tell you stories that will make you hair stand up.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: On Bufano's end of it, he was on the project and that studio he had out there, was that furnished by the project?

HERMAN VOLZ: Which one was that? On Natombe Street?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I don't know where it was but he had a hell of a big studio. I think it was his own private studio.

HERMAN VOLZ: That was his private studio. All the stones and everything else were provided and all the help. He was then one of the great masters at the time which was also at the same time a publicity point and he'd always use it in the paper.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Yes. He was very good at that.

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, it did the project very good to have ,people like this to continue their existence. Not really the work although some of it came out all right. Well, anyway on this, the sketch, when I made the final designs, it was - I hardly even remember the details. My mind is a great confusion. I was very concerned on the question of would the mural hold together merely in an abstract sense.

MARY MCCHESNEY: In a visual sense, not physically?

HERMAN VOLZ: No.

MARY MCCHESNEY: I meant to ask you...

HERMAN VOLZ: In a visual sense because . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: A physical problem has occurred to me, how did you join the plywood to the wall?

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, that was already there. That was part of the building.

MARY MCCHESNEY: I see. What about the cracks between the plywood?

HERMAN VOLZ: We ignored it.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Because the mural was so large? You said you were very concerned with the visual problem of how the mural would hang together. Especially from this distance.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah, that's right. I merely moved into an abstract pattern already. I did a lot of research at the time, probably more than designing it and I learned a lot from the Renaissance painters and I dissected what they were doing. Like Mantegna, Botticelli, people of this kind which build styles of their own, what Raphael was doing, developing the construction. A mural is something quite different from an easel painting. In my opinion, you have to be concerned about the building, the architecture of the building, many, many facets rather than to just made an emotional kind of expression.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Who was the architect?

HERMAN VOLZ: You are bound, you are really bound by physical limits. Tim Phleuger.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Timothy Paleuger?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. Which I think was a very great guy. He knew nothing about art but he loved it. He just loved it. He had a great love for it.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: He worked . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: He said he didn't know anything about art but personally he was a wonderful guy.

MARY MCCHESNEY: He was very influential in having Rivera come to San Francisco.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes, sure he had a great love for art.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Very active in the Art Association too?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. He was the president.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Did Born? Somehow I had the idea that Born was in this (S.F. architect)

HERMAN VOLZ: Born?

MARY MCCHESNEY: Ernest Born. You didn't know him?

HERMAN VOLZ: No.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Did Timothy Phleuger have anything to do with the mural, or any connection with you during the time you did it?

HERMAN VOLZ: On those murals? Oh yes. That's right. He was the builder and since he didn't care about it, he never interfered with the artist. Never! The only thing we had problems with was the color of the building. I was also the one who was supposed to decide the color of the building and when I saw the building finished in that lumber, brown and plywood and beautiful color plywood plus the columns, I liked it. So I thought I'd leave it raw. It stood out against all the gray buildings in the Fair. So, we had quite a battle. Do you remember that battle? No, it was probably before your time. I was supposed to design the color and every day Tim Phleuger came and wanted a sample of the color for the building and he took some artists to lunch and asked, "How do you like that?" And they always agreed with him. So every day we had another color. He had pink, green, blue and every few days he asked me again. "Herman did you change your mind?" I says, "No. The way I see it, it stays like it is. It's beautiful, with the structural beauty of lumber, of steel, leave it that way." He'd say, "You don't want to make it gray like the rest of the buildings?" He wanted to use this artificial sand stone paint which they had. He was very unsure of himself. He kept asking us. Finally he arrived to tell me one day, "Well, I agree with you because you never give up. Every other artist always agrees with me and you did not. So, I guess you must be right." [Laughter] Then we came to the column and he wanted the column orange and I just didn't want any orange there.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: You mean those columns running down the center. They looked like a forest.

HERMAN VOLZ: No place for it. There were forty eight columns tied together with steel and I suggested to leave them as they were or maybe stain them dark and make them very dark.

MARY MCCHESNEY: They were made of wood?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah. Big timber, they were 12x12 timber, beautiful things.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Those columns were wood?

HERMAN VOLZ: No, eight by eight or ten by ten. They were tremendous clusters of big square timbers and they were tied together with steel.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Isn't it amazing how I had the impression that they were steel pipe columns.

HERMAN VOLZ: No, no. They were lumber - well, what happened is - you were right. Finally I wanted them dark you know. I could have probably compromised on that point, one should anyway, off and on, so I insisted on having them darker and the battle began. We fought very hard with each other and finally George Creel stepped in and said, "You two Dutchmen square heads can't get together on this. I'm going to make a decision. It's going to be gold." Imagine these gold columns. So, I wasn't satisfied. At that time I was only in charge of finishing the building. The architect, who was - what you call it - the supervising architect there, had a nervous breakdown and I was asked to take over and help finish the building, the different exhibits. Keep things going. Then I was in charge of ordering the materials and making specifications. So, I made a specification for this bronze gold which George Creel wanted which made it so impossible to buy, knowing George Creel being so stingy, he would not buy it. He'd change his mind. So, I got a hold of a bronze which DuPont put out which was very expensive. One pound at twenty dollars. The contractor who got the job bid on it but never read the specification or checked on it. When he started painting, I looked at the barrel of what he had there and I said, "What have you got here?" He told me and I said that that was not the specification I wanted. He says, "I'll get it, that's alright. If you want it that way, I'll change it." So, he came back the same day furious. He says, "I can't afford it. I'll loose everything I have." So, he offered me a thousand dollars if I would change the specifications and I told him, "Go to hell. I'm not a citizen anyway."

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: The contractor tried to bribe you! [Laughter]

HERMAN VOLZ: Anyway he says, "If you don't change it, somebody else will." We changed that specification. He was right, it was changed. Somebody else changed it and told me later on to turn it over to the founder of the Democratic Party. It was changed. But, I did know that if they were painted bronze, that it would be, in a few

weeks, black. Bronze of this kind will oxidize very fast.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Bronze paint will?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. So, this type of bronze will, it turned very black, green, very ugly, just miserable.

MARY MCCHESNEY: This was the group of columns that separated the two sections of the mural?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: They had the state seals on them.

HERMAN VOLZ: They had the state seals on each one of them.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, you mean in relief?

HERMAN VOLZ:

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: They were painted on wood plaques.

HERMAN VOLZ: Wooden plaques,

MARY MCCHESNEY: Like shields?

MARY MCCHESNEY: You were talking about what Mr. Creel wanted.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah, he wanted a conquest of the West by sea and by land. One mural was by sea and one by land. So, we started out from the right by land and on the right was Cortez and the West Coast. Spaniards moving into California and then finally the Yankees arriving and finally the rest of the emigrants.

MARY MCCHESNEY: This is working from the right to the left?

HERMAN VOLZ: The right to the left and then we start again from way left to the sea with Drake. We had a figure of Drake and some early English sea people, Indians. The main principle of the whole thing was, what I had tried to do before. Avery similar thing to what I tried to do in the mural designed for the State College, showing the key figures, the historical figures - like Drake and Huntington, Freemont and others. All kinds of these outstanding people who played individual roles in history plus the ones in front who did not play individual roles but the role of the Harvest who showed the motion of the masses of people. And, the same thing in back. I tried to show the groupings very straight and very static which probably was wrong. I felt that from a design standpoint it looked pretty good to get points of vision here and there, a group here and there. There were four definite groups in each mural. Just like pyramids you know, I'd build them up in patterns of design like pyramids. In fact, when I made the design, I constructed it without figures a few times just to try to get a geometric pattern and then finally got the figures involved in this pattern.

MARY MCCHESNEY: This was the history of California?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Who was Huntington?

HERMAN VOLZ: Huntington was one of the early developers of California in gold mining and banks. Then I had made a lot of research on faces and made drawings of the faces of the different characters. I had Mark Twain in it with a plow.

MARY MCCHESNEY: With a plow?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah. It just felt like he should have a plow in his hand. In fact, there was a magazine in L.A. that had a great stink about that I was Bolshevik and that I had Stalin with a plow in the mural.

MARY MCCHESNEY: [Laughter] And it was Mark Twain?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. It was with a mustache like Stalin.

MARY MCCHESNEY: [Laughter] That's marvelous.

HERMAN VOLZ: One of the problems as I was doing the mural was that George Creel wanted his portrait in the mural. You know, himself portrayed in the mural. I asked him what he would like to be portrayed as. He said he wanted to have a jack hammer. One of these powerful men with a jack hammer.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Was that George Creel.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. He was a man from Missouri, you know, which grew up without shoes until he was eighteen or sixteen. He had a hard life.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Creel?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Came from Missouri?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah. He was a wonderful guy. I really liked him. He was as tough as nails. He was originally in the first World War. He was the press aide of this country. He was responsible for the stories of the Belgium kids being mutilated by the Germans. You know, he played a tremendous role in 1917 under Wilson.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: He was responsible for those stories? And were those stories true?

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, actually these atrocities didn't happen. They don't know. They probably didn't happen but he just hated Germans, and he hated the Kaiser. He was an old Lefties. One day when I discussed with him some problems, I told him I had a magazine at home which he had an article in, "The Masses" in 1917. So, I said to him, "I know where you stood in 1917 before you were the Czar. I have an article at home by you." [Laughter]

MARY MCCHESNEY: He had been a writer then.

HERMAN VOLZ: He was delighted. He said, "Well, you know I was a radical too, once. But, you know, how you get, after a while, you change. This is probably the right way."

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, it seems to be the general trend.

MARY MCCHESNEY: It certainly happens to an awful lot of American writers. Look at Dos Passos.

HERMAN VOLZ: Anyway, this guy - where was I?

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, you were talking about putting Creel into the mural.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. He wanted to have his portrait in and I felt very ornery for some reason about putting his portrait in. In the beginning and at the end when we were finished with the murals, he asked me where was his portrait, and didn't I do it yet. I said, "I did it. It's over there on the end, the man with the jack hammer." He had a hard hat on so you couldn't see his face. He was looking down.

MARY MCCHESNEY: [Laughter]

HERMAN VOLZ: He was furious.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Did you have many requests from local people to have their pictures put in?

HERMAN VOLZ: Oh, yes. I didn't put anybody.

MARY MCCHESNEY: You were under no obligation. From the project, I mean nobody told you or asked you to do it?

HERMAN VOLZ: No. No, no, they were pretty fair. Actually I thought very highly of him because I moved so far away from the original sketch and he left me complete freedom. It was very exciting.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Of course, some of those faces you did, you used photographs to get the character.

HERMAN VOLZ: Oh, yeah, sure like Mark Twain.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: But they were historical characters, not local people.

HERMAN VOLZ: They were all historical people.

MARY MCCHESNEY: How did you do that? Did you actually blow up the photographs? These were very large. Somebody, I guess it was John Sauaro, said he was working on a face there - was it Kit Carson - and the moustache was six feet across. [Laughter] He's never gotten over that.

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, for me as a scenic painter and a billboard painter like I used to be, it was no problem. Before I used to paint billboards in North Africa and Algiers. They were a block long. It was no problem to do that. You get used to it but the way we had it was each man had like a blue print, you know. And he knew where to draw the lines. You didn't know where the line was going. You just knew the lines started three feet from here

and ended seven feet over there. In scale.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: In scale.

HERMAN VOLZ: So, it finally ended up in a moustache six foot wide. That's the way these billboards were painted. You don't see in front what you are doing. You work from scale drawings.

MARY MCCHESNEY: In order to get a likeness though, did you use any method of blowing up a photograph?

HERMAN VOLZ: No, no. Just make a small drawing and a drawing of the cartoon and later on, I think I used to go up once in a while to change the faces a little bit.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: And try to get the characteristics. It was very formalized.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah, very formalized. I mean you had a mustache, a big chin, a small chin, you know, and we tried to find the essential without making a cartoon out of the persons. Find an essential in the face and the clothes, you know. We'd make it as simple as possible. Nearly two dimensional. That's right, wasn't it?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yeah.

HERMAN VOLZ: I tried to stay on a two dimensional plane, just use light and dark. So, it would give a light and dark pattern and the pattern itself would be nearly abstract - I was already in the tendency of going into abstract painting. The patterns were actually abstract patterns. I was always fascinated by that, you know; that a pattern itself could stand without having to look like a curve in a sleeve.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: We used pigment cut way down in paint thinner.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah, we glazed it. By the way this is where, Mac was marvelous. He was the only one who could ever handle that, the glazing of the colors, for feeling. You get depth through glazing.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, um hum

HERMAN VOLZ: And it is a very subtle kind of a feeling too. It looses its harshness.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Put it on and then stipple it.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. Put in on and stipple it. If we could have gone along with the mural, painted it longer, we probably would have made something pretty good out of it, finally. You know, actually with a big mural like this it's very difficult to do anything outstanding artistically.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Tremendously difficult.

HERMAN VOLZ: I never questioned it anyway. I just did what I thought was best. But, I do think even my worst enemies later on liked it. Remember? Like Gaskin who fought me tooth and nail one day.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Gaskin did?

HERMAN VOLZ: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I didn't know that.

HERMAN VOLZ: Gaskin fought me. He was a very sensitive painter, more orientated to this oriental art, Japanese art. He was a very gentle guy. He didn't like my roughness. Anyway he once walked across to the lagoon and he said, "I take it all back. It's very beautiful." I remember that was one time I was really pleased. He said, "It really looks good." He said, "I give up." [Laughter] It did look nice remember?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yeah.

HERMAN VOLZ: It looked like . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: It was very successful. This was William Gaskin who was a supervisor?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Do you have color reproductions of the mural?

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, there is a movie, by the way, in existence, which a decorating firm which makes all the fancy decorations in the country in Los Angeles, made and I can't remember the name. I would have to look it up

in the phone book. They made a movie during that time, every day they came with a movie camera and made a sixteen millimeter movie to see what I was doing. Of course, I was a great controversy then. The billboard painters in the pictorial painters union wanted the job and they felt that nobody else could do the job. We just couldn't. It takes experts to do the job they said. Then I had the desire to do the job without any so called experts, using the men who I thought were best. In this case, naturally, I was always in trouble. I would say maybe the whole mural someone suffered because - from the view point that I couldn't use as much freedom. Everything had to be just so. Nearly mechanical.

MARY MCCHESNEY: This was the billboard and sign painters union of San Francisco?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah. That's the Pictorial Sign and Scenic Arts painter of San Francisco. Which wanted jurisdiction of the job and wanted to get some of their men on the job.

MARY MCCHESNEY: They were a union?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah, they were a union. They wrote in the paper that it can't be done and that it wouldn't be done on time and that's why I got to be quite a pushy guy. I intended to have it done on time and it was done on time. We pulled the scaffold down when the first trumpet started playing the Star Spangled Banner.

MARY MCCHESNEY: You were set a time limit, then, to be finished?

HERMAN VOLZ: Oh, yes.

MARY MCCHESNEY: How did you ever . . . . [Laughter]

HERMAN VOLZ: It was fun. It was like a game, you know, it really was. It was just like a fun game.

MARY MCCHESNEY: I haven't talked to anyone who hasn't got very good recollections of working on that job.

HERMAN VOLZ: My wife still says that I was a real bastard then. I guess I was.

MARY MCCHESNEY: I was going to ask you something about the beginning of the project, about the process. Suppose you are at the point where you have the cartoons completed and you are ready to go. You are going to move, then, from your building in San Francisco where you've been working on cartoons with many artists, and to go to the Treasure Island in the bay and begin actual work. What happened then? Did you select the number of painters to take over with you? You gave me the impression that you had too many people. How did you work this out?

HERMAN VOLZ: Oh, I selected them. I very quickly found out which ones were the most talented ones and skilled ones to help and they really pulled the job through. There were actually very few. The rest of them actually were surplus in other words. They worked here and there. And out of many of them just a few men, four or five of them maybe, don't you think, were there more than that?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I don't know.

HERMAN VOLZ: Maybe more.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I didn't get on the project until all the cartoons were traced over there. You put them up with paper and then you used those things.

HERMAN VOLZ: The steel bands, huh?

MARY MCCHESNEY: Maybe you should tell us something about the actual process.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: This was a perforated paper and there you pounced(sp) it, didn't you?

HERMAN VOLZ: That's only for the faces.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Was that only for the faces?

HERMAN VOLZ: That's right. I did the faces big, I blew them up. That's right I blew the faces up big and made pounces for them and then we pounced them from that. Yes, I'd forgotten.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: The rest of was put in drawing.

HERMAN VOLZ: The faces and some of the hands I did with pounces or I went up there and drew it. As I say, some of the men never were on the scaffolds. Some of them were stopped on the first landing and wouldn't go sixty feet in the air.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Some of them never would go up.

HERMAN VOLZ: They sat frozen. We had some others just climb around like monkeys, like Williams. Do you know?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yeah, Julian would never come down the ladder; you know he'd come down the bars.

HERMAN VOLZ: He'd come down the steel bars. And Carleton (Williams). It was bad because he looked like an old hillbilly up there, in old clothes, you know. [Laughter]

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Johnny Sacarro and I used to be up on top, you know, and you could just give a little push and the scaffold would start rocking and Jose Ramis down below was having a fit and saying, "I'm going to tell Mr. Volz."

HERMAN VOLZ: I used to slowly cajole them up a little higher and say, "Try one more." Because everybody was on the first level except just a few like Mac and Sacarro who were up there higher. Well, at first, actually most of the time, I worked at night when nobody was there on the original design.

MARY MCCHESNEY: That's when you were transferring the design to the plywood which was already in place?

HERMAN VOLZ: No, when I made the original design on canvas.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, I see. I was wondering about the process.

HERMAN VOLZ: When I made it on plywood?

MARY MCCHESNEY: Yeah, the process, when you go to Treasure Island and here is this huge expanse of plywood and you have a design, now what is your next step? What do you do? Do you put paper up?

HERMAN VOLZ: I had scale tracings of the original and they were simply scaled up.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Now, how do you do that? You put the paper over the plywood?

HERMAN VOLZ: No. You just have a piece of it.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: You have a scale design here and then you have a corresponding scale on the wall.

HERMAN VOLZ: See, you had the four by eight panels.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: It corresponds to the block . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, you scaled the panels.

HERMAN VOLZ: And I had maybe a four inch by eight inch drawing. Oh, we had it bigger than that - we had two inches to a foot. So, we simply knew that and we worked from panel to panel. We had it numbered one, two, three and I had each panel marked, numbered. And he, one person, maybe, would work on panel 32 and there was a line starting one foot from the right going in a curve down to three foot from the left. So, that's all there was to it. It likely continued down through the next three or four panels below. Finally we got down a long leg.

MARY MCCHESNEY: You did put the drawing up in charcoal?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes, with charcoal we had these long steel bands which made perfect curves, you know. They were kind of stiff and you had to bend them. I got them from a metal place so we didn't have to freehand but just used these.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Not freehand?

HERMAN VOLZ: Like a straight edge, see?

MARY MCCHESNEY: Hold them together and you could get any curve you wanted. How long did it take for the artists you had employed to get the drawing up on the wall? This was all done first I suppose.

HERMAN VOLZ: If I remember, we did the whole thing in a fantastic short time. The original drawing only took two months. This is why everybody said we couldn't do it.

MARY MCCHESNEY: That was a huge job.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah. We did it very, very fast.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Once the charcoal drawing was up on the wall, you began painting?

HERMAN VOLZ: Then you start laying in the color and I used to stand with a megaphone below and watch that they put it in the right spot, you see.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Neininger (Urban) was doing all the paint mixing.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: We had a fire in that barrel out there on those cold mornings. It was really cold!

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes, it was miserable out there.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: The paint was like syrup.

HERMAN VOLZ: The paint was sticky. It was hard to get out.

MARY MCCHESNEY: This was Urban Neininger who was a supervisor later?

HERMAN VOLZ: Later on. Everybody who worked on this project diligently got, later on, a better job out of it; they were supposed to. It wasn't my idea, you know.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: What do you mean everybody?

[Laughter]

HERMAN VOLZ: Supposed to, everybody was supposed to. You were supposed to have gotten a mural.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Or one to design.

HERMAN VOLZ: No, he was supposed to have gotten a mural. This I insisted, that they give everybody a chance to do a mural but they did not. What it actually was, see, to the project this was the biggest publicity stunt they could have had. It was an enormous project and Cahill, when I just got a hold of the project, came out here and talked to me when I was weakening, you know, wondering if I could do it, you know. I was wondering maybe I wasn't the kind of guy who could do it. Because there would have been a black mark for him if it failed. That would be against the existence of the WPA. It would be against his policies. So, anyway we had a long talk when he came up here. He sized me up. I had dinner with him and he was confident. He trusted me and I figured we'd pull through for the sake of the project. I 1iked the idea of the project. The project to me was a fantastic experience. It is the first subsidized form of art, subsidizing of art. Maybe it was a poor form, could be much better but I feel this was very important. Particularly for many young people who never had art school training, who never had a chance to do anything later. They had a chance this way. It could have been terrific. I'm very sorry it was stopped. It was like a renaissance in this country.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Actually it never got off the ground. Never had a chance to really get going.

HERMAN VOLZ: No, it was sabotaged from right at the beginning. I'm very sad about this, about these little people who got in the project, playing the little politician role and they started roping artists into it too. Some of the artists fell for it, you know, and got themselves titles. They got to be supervisors and pretty soon they played the same role.

MARY MCCHESNEY: This was one of the largest murals done under WPA in the whole United States.

HERMAN VOLZ: It was the largest in the world ever done, they said.

MARY MCCHESNEY: That's why Cahill was so concerned.

HERMAN VOLZ: It was a fine thing for the publicity department of the WPA.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: There seems to be a little inconsistency in some of the recordings we've made about the size of it. My opinion was it was 120 x 80.

HERMAN VOLZ: No, it was 180 x 60.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: 180 x 60, well . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: Two of them.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yes. Of course - but - it was sixty feet high?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I thought it was eighty.

HERMAN VOLZ: No, it was sixty.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, Ernest Lenshaw was right, but 180 feet long . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: Sixty is pretty high on a scaffold. That is four stories high.

MARY MCCHESNEY: What has happened to it?

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, originally the commanding captain of Treasure Island in the beginning wanted to save it. When he started taking it down, he loved it for some reason and then this captain was removed and another one came and started using the panels for something else. It was never made for survival. It could never survive because of the reason of paint. It was a one occasion thing.

MARY MCCHESNEY: The captain you spoke of, this was after Treasure Island became a military base.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah, an army or navy post.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Station.

HERMAN VOLZ: During the war.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Is the building still standing? The federal building?

HERMAN VOLZ: No, no.

MARY MCCHESNEY: That's been torn down too?

HERMAN VOLZ: He is the one who tried to save it for a long time. It was amazing, for around two years he stored it. He loved it.

MARY MCCHESNEY: He stored it really?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah. He had it first covered up and then they tore the building down and he stored it. Well, they were talking about putting it up in the Golden Gate Park. I never felt that it was, you know so important. Just that size is immaterial. There is a certain harm in size.

MARY MCCHESNEY: How long were you working on the mural?

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, actually, as I said we finished within two months and before I worked four months on it. Six months I think it was.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, of course . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: Then for a year and a half after we stayed on the payroll because I got paid by the month. I got - how much did I get? $350 per month, I think. There was $10,000 in for the job, and I wanted to get the job on my own so I could get $10,000 for myself, see? Or maybe $8,000. I would do the job for two months or six months and then I could disappear for two years and paint. I hoped to do that, but they were very small about this. In fact, I wanted more money for it. This is where Joe Danysh could have gotten much more than $10,000. He didn't want me to get even $350 because that was more than he made. Even George Creel did not want me to get so much. That was a lot of money at that time. So, I simply stayed on until the $10,000 was used up and that was a great mistake for me too. I was bored to death and later on kept some of the gang going, doing this or doing that.

MARY MCCHESNEY: You had a problem with the paint too, replacing it.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah, well, that was not that much.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, the second year you got that mosaic job. That was the second year, wasn't it?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah, that was the second year. So, actually, maybe I worked two years on it. I worked one whole year on the Worlds Fair, the first year I was on it and then even after the World Fair closed I stayed on the payroll and the second year started. Then I was off for a few months.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I guess it was between the first year and the second that I worked with Clay Spohn on

that Indian thing.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Where was the mosaic that you mentioned? Was this also at Treasure Island?

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, I got that started on Treasure Island - did I? - no, I did this originally in my studio . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: You did the design for it?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah.

MARY MCCHESNEY: It is still in existence at San Francisco State College?

HERMAN VOLZ: City College. This is a job we did a bit later. Yeah, that was later. Could I tell you about that?

MARY MCCHESNEY: Yes, please do.

HERMAN VOLZ: You want to talk about these murals?

MARY MCCHESNEY: Yes, we'd like to hear about that too. This is still WPA.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yeah. Tim Phleuger, who designed the federal building, also designed this mural or the building at City College out on Ocean Avenue. He had told me about the building and he wanted me to do a mural. So, I waited for him for a few months and nothing happened. Somebody else got in, got in between and wanted the job. Finally I pinned everybody down and asked who was going to get it. So, Tim Phleuger never doubted that I would do the job. He felt that maybe not from an artistic point of view I would be the best but he can trust me to get it done. He could rely on me to get it done, not because I was a better artist. So, Tim told me to work on a design, so I did and I showed the first designs to give an indication. The theme of the design was the interaction of science, organic and mechanical science; forty feet high, forty two feet wide. I showed him my idea and what I was after in a very simple layout. I thought they were rather nice drawings at that time but they didn't like it and the said no. Well, they didn't understand what I was talking about. They didn't even know the word interaction. They were like morons, these guys. It was fantastic. So, they turned it down. It was very insulting and Tim Phleuger was very upset about it. I told him that I would start in again. Don't give up. So, I built a model of the building, exactly a replica of the building and then I made another design. The same one but all in grey and grey-greens, grey yellow. Everything just grey and every detail painted very carefully, every moustache, every hair and then I sprayed the whole thing with sand so it looked very lovely and gentle. So, we took it back again to the Board of Education and this guy said, "Gee, that's a nice looking model. Did you do this yourself?" I said, "Yeah." "That's swell. Oh, that looks like Joe Brown, the principal of the junior high school, down on so and so and - are you going to have his portrait in there?" I just kind of grinned foolishly. [Laughter] In fact, the painting I had in there was Darwin so I couldn't tell him who Darwin was because they maybe would say no to the mural. So, I let him think it was Joe Brown. It is dishonest but what are you going to do with guys like him?

MARY MCCHESNEY: That's a pretty fantastic situation.

HERMAN VOLZ: They loved it and I got the job. Then, when I started working on the designs, it was at the Worlds Fair, kind of an exhibit again. One side was the Palace of Fine Arts and you maybe heard of this "Art in Action?"

MARY MCCHESNEY: Yes.

HERMAN VOLZ: Diego Rivera was on one side and I had my scaffold on the other side and I was working on the final drawings for the mosaic. Then I moved away in style and it became quite different from the original model with every hair in the moustache. I also had similar problems to those I had in my first mural; the architectural design of the building and the problems I had, with the materials, the ability to do the job in two years. Can you do it? In a conventional style or not. I came completely off the conventional style. Decided on a completely different type of a technique which, by the way, up to today was never done again and never was done before. When Mendelsohn, the architect who built Tel Aviv, came up and saw it he gave me credit for a first step in history in this direction, technically again.

MARY MCCHESNEY: What was it?

HERMAN VOLZ: Of using marble relief, well first it is in relief, the whole thing is a low relief, which was never done before. If it was done and it looked like a relief, it was because they couldn't make it flat. The early artists did not have the ability to make a mosaic slick and flat like the modern mosaic technician. I tell you, this point because it was a big high wall and I felt a flat wall was too dull, you know? It looked kind of dull. It didn't look right so I made it in a low relief.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Was it out of stone?

HERMAN VOLZ: It is all in marble.

MARY MCCHESNEY: In marble?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. And then there was the problem of weight. On the whole job I used twenty to thirty tons of marble anyway to cut. I mean I bought that much. I don't know how much was up there. I sliced each piece of marble in half so it got to be a thin piece, maybe three eights thick, three eights of an inch think and instead of being 7/8 inch thick. They come 7/8 inch thick. And I sliced them in half.

End of Tape One
Side One, Tape Two

MARY MCCHESNEY: Mary Fuller McChesney interviewing Herman Volz who lives at 251 Marion Avenue, Mill Valley, California. The date is June 27, 1964. This is tape two, side one. Herman, we've been talking about the marble mosaic which you did at Treasure Island. You worked on it at Treasure Island on the Art in Action Project there, and which is now at the San Francisco City College.

HERMAN VOLZ: City College . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: . . . . at City College. Which building is it on?

HERMAN VOLZ: Ocean Avenue, on the main building.

MARY MCCHESNEY: The main building of the college?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. There are two sides, the east and west porticos.

MARY MCCHESNEY: And these mosaic panels are 40 by 42 feet?

HERMAN VOLZ: 40 by 42.

MARY MCCHESNEY: And it was the first time, you said, that marble had been used as relief. And we're talking about cutting the pieces for the panel . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, no. I was told that. I was never conscious of what I was doing. Really, it came again out of not knowing much about the conventional process of mosaic, being told that I had no more than two years to do the job, both murals, and then certain limitations with the building, with the design of the building. There were some columns which looked like nearly square Greek columns, pseudo-Greek classic kind of columns, nearly like a Mussolini building. So I had to place groups in there again and also the way I went about this job. Didn't I tell you before how I got the job? The Board of Education . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, Timothy Pflueger, yes, and you were talking about the Board of Education, your difficulty with presenting a design to them

HERMAN VOLZ: Oh, yes, with the mustache . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: I think we went through that. And you were just telling about how you sliced the marble in half and the tools you used.

HERMAN VOLZ: Oh, the tools for the job.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: What you did, you used thick marble and thin marble to give a kind of relief . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: What I did was this. The marble comes 7/8 inch when it's sawed - what they call gang sawed. When it's cut from the block, it comes around 7/8 inch thick and I had an idea that it was too hard to handle, to have it this heavy and I needed small pieces. In a conventional pattern for mosaic it would take me years to do the job, you know, really to do it like, say, Pompeii or the ones at Antioch. It would take me years and years, or dozens of workers to do it. And I figured, again, the physical problem of getting it done in two years and ready to hang it so it would stand. So I got the idea of cutting that marble in half and, I got a diamond saw, a big powerful diamond saw, and had one man (doing) nothing else but cutting this. First the marble came in big slabs. Which we bought, scrap marble, and at the marble yard you could buy a ton for five dollars. When they found out I was doing mosaic, they charged me fifteen. But then I collected a few men out of skid row, guys who were marble workers way back and who later on worked as laborers. Some were winos and I found one, two people, Brader, two Brader boys. Their father, grandfather always were mosaic people in Italy and later on in France and then in America. And so I collected a few elements around me and worked with this older man to solve the technical problems. They taught me how to do the conventional way and I finally arrived at the way I did it through recognizing the conventional way just would not be practical. So we had a guillotine first and cut the marble slab

into squares, maybe two and a half inches by eight or twelve inches, strips 'like that. The guillotine would do that. And after that, I had a man on a saw cutting them, slicing it, you know. It was like slices of bread, cutting it in half so they were maybe 3/8 inch or a little bit more. So the thickest widths I had were three and a half inches. And I tried to make a combination of opus sectile and mosaic. Opus sectile is a form of mosaic which was made during the Roman period; opus sectile (section) work, you know. You cut marble in sections and fit them, in fact the Florentines are still doing this today. You can see it on table tops and things like this and so on. They are marvelous. And it's very thin, really like veneer. Well, I tried to make a combination and tie it together for reason of covering space, you know, and also I kind of liked the idea of big pieces. And why I liked the big pieces, say now, if I made a globe of the world, the big pieces were in the middle and the small pieces on the end. So the grouting from the big piece to the small pieces gave a third dimension, without shading, made a shading just like black and white, just a solid shade, but the shade itself did not give any feeling of roundness and I didn't want to be naturalistic about it, but this way through the grouting I got a third dimension with the different sizes of marble. Like on the sleeves, in the middle of the sleeves where you can see direct to it was a big piece and as I went to the side of the sleeve, they got smaller and smaller and smaller. And if you looked at it through the grouting, which is like drawing, it gave a feeling of third dimension. And I am sure you can find it no place in the world.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: It's like modeling, actually.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. This is why it's unique. I'm not trying to brag about this but I might as well benefit the students. This is the point. Now another thing I did on this at that time is: so I sliced the marble. I was thinking in terms of weight, you see, because the problem of hanging it was not very easy if you have big pieces. So I sliced them in half, and I had plenty of labor on this. Actually not many, five or six men worked on the job in the studio, in a workshop. One slicing and polishing at the same time. I built a machine to slice and at the same time I had the same guy just with the other hand push it against the wheel to give it a honing, not polished, but honed, you know. So this went pretty fast. And these guys were marble men who had done nothing else all their life. They loved to work with marble at just this kind of job.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Were they on the WPA, too?

HERMAN VOLZ: They were on WPA, yes. And so the technical problem was solved that way. I made the drawings, the big cartoons. Every day I worked enough for the man to work on from the drawing. I had a master drawing. The minute I did not like it, I merely ripped sections out of it again and we made it over. And I had two or three of the old marble men working with me who were very good at cutting the marble, you know, real marble men, which was marvelous.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Was all this cutting and honing done at the Fair?

HERMAN VOLZ: No. Well, at the Fair actually what we did there was just an exhibit. Just an exhibit for people to show them how a mosaic is made, what marble looks like. They had an exhibit of marble and where it came from. We had marble from all over: Nubian, African, Swedish, Irish, all kinds, from Alaska, everywhere. So we had an exhibit of marbles, we had an exhibit on how to cut marble. It was more like an exhibit. The thing wasn't actually done much there.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Most of the technical work, the cutting and that sort of thing was done over at the pickle factory.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes, the pickle factory. That's right. The pickle factory was where we went into production there. When we started at the Fair, we had a couple of men cutting, you know. And people were very interested. It was very exciting. I used to sign those rocks, you know, with my name on it . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, your autograph?

HERMAN VOLZ: Autograph. And I gave hundreds of them away. And one day I was on a fishing trip in Montana and there was a boy there and he said, "I think I met you once before." And he told me that I gave him a rock with my name on it, you know.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Probably a baseball player now, signing baseballs.

HERMAN VOLZ: I played the game along with them. I really was not very serious about it but it was kind of fun. Everybody enjoyed themselves.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: You had Peter Lowe working with you down there.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes, Peter Lowe was my favorite. Was he Chinese?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yes.

HERMAN VOLZ: And a most talented guy. He was much more talented than I ever was.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: He quit painting.

HERMAN VOLZ: He was fantastic, this guy. He was marvelous. But he was a guy who had no talent, according to the supervisors you know, the bureaucratic supervisors. They didn't like him and I saved him many times from being fired. They didn't like his personality. I don't know what there was they didn't like about him.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I think Pete was a great painter.

HERMAN VOLZ: He was a marvelous painter. I don't know whatever happened to him.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: He's running a grocery store in Oakland.

HERMAN VOLZ: He is!

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: He's got a little store down there.

HERMAN VOLZ: I'll look him up.

MARY MCCHESNEY: He'd like to see you.

HERMAN VOLZ: Oh, I'd love to see him because I'm very fond of Pete. To me I think the guy was outstanding. He was the kind of a man if he had the business background of some of the guys who got places today, you know, he'd be up there.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: He quit painting altogether, you know.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, the first thing he had this terrible experience with getting his wife into the country.

HERMAN VOLZ: Into the country?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yes. Don't you know she had so much trouble. Maybe this was later.

HERMAN VOLZ: Is she the one that jumped off the ___

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: No, no, no, but she was in there - Pete said they kept her in there for six months, I think, or something like that.

HERMAN VOLZ: It took him years to get her into the country.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Yes, twelve or fifteen years.

HERMAN VOLZ: It was horrible.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Then Pete went to sea during the war, made two trips, and the discrimination was so bad he just couldn't take it. He flipped. He had an apartment there right down the street from me.

MARY MCCHESNEY: His telephone is in the book in Oakland.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: And these friends of his were storing his paintings. And he came ashore one day and went down and poured kerosene all over them and set them on fire. He had a brand new apartment then so of course he was sent to the jug for being an arsonist. A lot of people up there got together, I was out to sea at the time myself, but they got together and hired a psychiatrist and got Pete out. He was in a jam there.

HERMAN VOLZ: I taught him how to do the mosaics, you know. He made some beautiful things. You know, he had a real feeling for everything he was doing: he felt all the time. He was probably more feeling than thinking. This was actually his way.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, he's an emotionalist.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes, he's completely emotionalist. I don't think that's right you see. Art, in my opinion, cannot be completely emotionalist either. It was to be both. This emotionalist is basically a telepath and stays a telepath, and he has to go beyond that, we have to use our heads. But anyway, I do think very soft of Peter. We were

always together. I'm glad I can present this now. Anyway, so the process was cutting with the guillotine, then slicing it with the diamond saw, polishing with a kind of a big wheel on a motor with silicon paper, silicon carbide paper, or oxide, silicon oxide. And then the mosaic man cut it on the end with a hammer and put it in place on paper. So there were big enormous sections of the floor, I remember at the Fair we had a big, enormous section in reverse, you know. And people walked by and saw how it was handled . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: It was done in reverse, and then what?

HERMAN VOLZ: It was done in reverse, yes . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: How did you actually place it on the wall?

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, what we did then from the Fair on we moved it over to the pickle factory, do you remember that?

MARY MCCHESNEY: That was the building on Columbus?

HERMAN VOLZ: Columbus, yes. And I pulled a bad one on a friend of mine that time. I was kind of annoyed at this particular friend of mine. That was Reuben Kadish, by the way, who I helped, he got to be a supervisor remember. He used to come over to the Fair and check up on everybody; when they were late he would make a little note in his notebook, you know. He bought a hat, he wore a hat you know. He suddenly turned out to be a bureaucrat. I was stunned he turned out like this. So naturally I tried to get even with him some way, do something about it. You know, I thought it was very disappointing - I figured he would just represent the artists, you know, and fight for them, and here he started turning them in. He'd go to Allen and say this guy was not here. I remember once I asked all the guys to hide, do you remember this, and he looked all over and he went back and he said nobody was there. He couldn't find anybody, nobody was there. So I was confronted by the office supervisor, who said, the men are not working. "Oh yes," I said, they were. "I was there at eight o'clock. Everybody was there at eight. They didn't even have to be there at eight. But they're always there at eight. They love their work." And so on, you know. But at that time Reuben was in charge of the pickle factory. I wrote him a letter, a kind of an official-looking later saying that I would like to move my mosaic project into the pickle factory. In the building there were big concrete columns around twelve inches thick, concrete columns, you know, every sixteen feet. It was a big, big factory, you know. And I said, to get my mosaic down you will have to cut six inches from the floor up, cut the columns up, you know, so I can shove the stuff beneath. And explained that I would like to have this done very soon. And as soon as you have it done, let me know so I can take the mosaic over and shove it underneath these columns. He took this very seriously, an official letter like this, you know, an official signature, and he took it very seriously and I understand his wife told me that all week long he went to the library and got books on engineering and he got himself a chisel and a hacksaw and started to chisel the columns, to find that he just couldn't get any place, because, you know, he cut into steel, and then he started to hack on steel. And I also told him at the end, "If you can't do it, if you worry about the roof sagging, you can always use a sky hook." He had never heard of a sky hook. He should have because his father was an old house painter, an old Jewish, wonderful man out of Bernal Heights in Los Angeles, a very great guy.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Is Reuben from Los Angeles?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes, in Bernal Heights. Around there. And he didn't know what a sky hook was. But Rueben was pretty serious about his position as supervisor. Well, anyway, I moved in anyway and there was never a word mentioned about those columns.

MARY MCCHESNEY: How did you get the mural in just sideways?

HERMAN VOLZ: Oh, he hated me for that later on I'm sure. Still probably does. Well, anyway we had fun. A few of us were watching people like Lauber, you know. Then, you know how mosaic is made. It's glued, the stones are glued on paper in big sections and then before you start putting it up you cut it into smaller sections so you can handle it. This is done with a knife

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Following the contours of the design.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes, of the design more or less. This is up to the discretion of the one who hangs it, you know.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Did you do the actual hanging?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes, well . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: Did you take WPA artists to go to work on the building at the Fair?

HERMAN VOLZ: I had two men there. First we hired a professional man who also decided he was going to have a 40 year job there to hang it. For a hundred square feet, it would take him around three months to hang a

hundred square feet. I asked him once if he could not improve and devise a system whereby he could go faster because we would never get it up and I wanted to see it up. He told me to go to hell, said, "I can't do anything about it anyway. It's a union job." Then I agreed on that but I told him that I wanted the job up. He said, well in that case I quit and you can't find anybody do to it. And he had an in with the tops of the union at that time. He was a kind of politician so nobody would have taken a job after him. So I started myself to hang it. And I was able to hang a hundred square feet a day later on.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, boy, quite a difference.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Herman, I'd be very interested to know how you hang that stuff?

HERMAN VOLZ: Well see, as I told you, the whole thing was done in relief, in low relief, maybe two and a half to four inches in relief, the whole wall. As you look at it you don't feel it's just a complete, flat wall. It has a kind of feeling of texture, not much, but sufficient so it wouldn't look boring. See a big flat wall may look boring. I tried to get around this. So I built it up with cement, first with mortar, areas which had to come out I built them up, you see, with mortar. And the way you do it, you prepare, first the mortar of lime - and it has to be slacked lime which should be old, around a year or two years old, that's lime putty, and cement and sand. You make a butter out of this. And so then you put that mortar up on the wall. In this case I had to build it up, sometimes in relief kind of, higher here, lower there. And then it sets slightly for an hour or so, kind of - you have to feel it and the moisture is kind of set a little bit. You have a board where you cut. You have pieces maybe a square foot or one and a half square foot of sections of this paper with the stones on. You put this on a board, on a mortar board and butter it, put mortar in butter on the back of the mosaic. And then you stick this, hang it up and stick it against, into the mortar, gently touch it like this, and leave it. The moment you touch it once more the water starts working in the mortar and it starts falling down and crumbling. It's a job you have to really watch. And if there's too much mortar, maybe it will never set in back but just sets in front and the whole thing will collapse. And it's what happened to this other guy, see. He started. I told him I wanted this here and a figure there, so he spent tremendous time in repairing, stones fell out and it took him a week to repair them again, to get them back in. And I repaired everything as I went along, you see. When I had a section up, it was finished and was touched no more. Then you put it in and when it starts setting you take a block of wood and a hammer and start hammering it, see, slightly, lightly. And then when it's set enough, you wet the paper and the paper comes off. The stone is glued on the paper with gum Arabic, you know, or mucilage and the water dissolves it very readily, and the paper comes off. Then you start pounding it slightly into shape where you want it. You then move the stones up and down, you know, right to left, one is turned, or doesn't fit right or doesn't look right, put another one in, you know, and so it goes.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: The application of the first mortar, do you actually build it up?

HERMAN VOLZ: I build it on the wall . . . .

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: It fluctuates.

HERMAN VOLZ: That's right, yes. And that's the difference of how they made mosaics - you see them in Italy, like the ones in Ravenna, which I saw this spring again, which I always see when I go over. They are fantastic by the way! You have to see them sometime. But they are slightly undulating. of course, they did not know how to make it slick. The modern tile maker or artisan is fantastically slick; he can make it really perfect. But the old guys did not. They did not glue it on paper. They set it right into the mortar on the wall. So they could not make it so perfect.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: In other words, they would put a little in at a time, like frescos put a little mortar in at a time . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: That's exactly right. So in my case I consciously built it up. Which is taught painters because if you have too much mortar, you may collapse the setting.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Was the wall actually reinforced with metal?

HERMAN VOLZ: No, sometimes I built it the day before.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, so you'd have the last coat on . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes, you just put it on, you know, a little mortar, it'll hold. Naturally for the mortar, first I put a scratch coat on, you know. Underneath you've got a very rough coat, the scratch coat - so I was told this by this marble man, Ustino, do you remember, he traveled all over and he followed a lot of this work. He told me the story that it was never done before, plus Mendelsohn.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Who is the architect who built Tel Aviv.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. He is the one who was very excited about the mosaic.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Very interesting.

HERMAN VOLZ: So, I'm only speaking here from a technical viewpoint, from an artistic viewpoint, use your own judgment on that. But, anyway, then when it's set, then you wash it out, you see, and then the next day or two or three days later, you grout it, you build, you put in grout, you see. And then I, later on, polished some more, the parts did not look too good, polished with a flexible shaft, polished and honed it some more and treated it so it got nice and colorful. And it was very beautiful then. It was fresh, and now it looks terrible.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Who was assisting you on it?

HERMAN VOLZ: I had Juan Brada . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: Brada, one of these old guys, you know.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: He was working at the pickle factory?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. Brada. He used to be an alcoholic and he stopped drinking. Then I had another guy, a marble sculptor. I've forgotten his name, an old Italian. And I had a laborer, that's all, three of us who did the whole job. I had just a guy who, well, to help us get water and things like that. Brada mixed the mortar, you see. He was very fussy about this

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I remember there was a - they always brought their jug of wine with them every day they worked.

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, you know how this went there, see. They used to hide it when they heard I was coming. They used to hide the wine, you see, and one day I bawled them out because they were not hiding it properly. Because I was responsible that no alcohol could be consumed on the premises. They could drop me for good and the way I had friends, you know, they would have really dropped me all right. In fact, they chased the FBI on me once because they said I stole a hundred and fifty dollars worth of brushes. I had a whole sack of old brushes from the World's Fair and they were theirs. I showed them to the FBI and they were expended already, see, and I had the right to expend them. Somebody trumped up something. Oh, they were terrible. They had the phone tapped. They were awful.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Really! The phone tapped, too?

HERMAN VOLZ: Oh, sure - not tapped, but there was always someone listening - if anybody called me, it went direct to the lady who was in charge, they had a spy.

MARY MCCHESNEY: In your office?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes, so and so, yes. And they always brought some people in there who would squeal and go back. And the funny thing is I never did anything about it but the rest of the guys always knew right away, you know. One day one guy came in there and said, "Well, I was sent from the office to help you." He said, "I am an expert man in marble and everything." I said, "You're an all around man?" He said, "I'm very good at everything." And I knew that he was sent by this gang, see. Not only this, one guy walked up to me, one of these older men, and said, "Watch out for this guy, we've known him for years, he's a stool pigeon." They worked with him for years. So I asked him, "If you're an all around man, would you mind washing these windows?" So he refused so I had a good occasion to say I don't want him, because if a man refused I could send him back, you see. He made the mistake of doing that. So I sent him back. And the guys used to tip me off, you see. In fact, a very interesting thing happened. You know we always had thefts

MARY MCCHESNEY: Of materials, you mean?

HERMAN VOLZ: Of tools.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, tools.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. Well, we had one stock clerk, he was very, very good and once there was something, around sixty dollars worth of something missing, tools and stuff. So I told the guys there was sixty dollars worth of tools missing. Next day they were back again. And one guy was completely cowed for the whole week. No, not the next day! It was for a whole week there was one man there nobody wouldn't talk to. I knew there was something in the air, nobody would talk to this man. And a few days later the tools were back. There was one guy had kleptomania, see. And all his friends knew it and they refused to talk to him when he did that until he brought the tools back. Then it was wonderful all these guys with their wine. And then they had a party. Then they got a jug of wine and salami and bread and they were brothers again. And it was wonderful. And once in a

while they brought a bottle up and put it under the bell and then they'd say, "Who in the hell brought that bottle of wine? It wasn't there yesterday." So I liked it. It was real fun. One guy - remember that old man, Brada, who we built a chair for?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yes.

HERMAN VOLZ: He had a stroke.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: A big guy with a real pale face?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes, he had a stroke, this guy. And he was a real good mosaic man. And perhaps three or four months later, he tried to get back on the project. I got him back but he could hardly walk so I sent him to the library to read. You know the guy could hardly read or write, in fact, I think he couldn't read. I know his brother couldn't read and write. So I had him assigned to Research for a few months. Finally we got him back and I got him back on my job. Finally John wanted to come so we built a chair for him so he could sit - he couldn't stand, you see. We built the chair so it would look like he was standing. He didn't want to sit. He was too proud. And he could hardly lift his hand. You know, in a few months he began to chop stone again and walk around. It was wonderful period with those guys. What they taught me, you know! They taught me the trade of mosaic. I mean it. These guys were the experts in the city, maybe in the country. Some of the few left.

MARY MCCHESNEY: It's amazing, that you were able to find them.

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, old Breda worked on the Post Office on 7th Street in San Francisco doing mosaics. They go to look at them. They're fantastic technique. Over here they work on them. They did them in 1902 or 1908, lots of them.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: The other day I was in the city, I was a little early, I was going up to the art school, so I decided I needed a coffee and brandy and I stopped in at La Rocca's Corner, you know that's still in existence, some cats are running it.

HERMAN VOLZ: Oh yes.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yes. Someone named Leo was there and I said, "Do you remember me?" He said, "Oh, hell, yes, I remember you." And we got talking about the pickle factory. Every once in a while, maybe on Thanksgiving or Christmas or so, we'd all go to La Rocca's corner to have a drink. You know the only reason we didn't spend more time there was because we didn't have enough money to buy drinks. At least on those occasions, we could afford to drink without worrying. He said he remembered all the chaps.

HERMAN VOLZ: He did! I have to go in there sometime.

MARY MCCHESNEY: They have a Hiler mural there, don't they.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: No, it's been removed.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, has it?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: He said it just went all to pieces. The ropes rotted and so forth, it is gone. There is a big painting there by some artist who lived upstairs.

HERMAN VOLZ: So I worked two years on this job there. Now this year I'm trying to clean them.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Are you doing it right now?

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, no. I have to make an offer to the Board of Education, of how much I want for it.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: For cleaning them?

HERMAN VOLZ: For cleaning them, yes. And I'd like to get somebody to make a movie of it when I do the job.

MARY MCCHESNEY: When you do the job?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Good idea.

HERMAN VOLZ: Just close-ups. I don't have the money to do it now. That's why I'm holding back. You see, I'll have it made by somebody. A friend of mine is a cameraman and I'll approach him to do it.

MARY MCCHESNEY: It's a very good idea.

HERMAN VOLZ: You know, I never got a line on that mural. Never.

MARY MCCHESNEY: You mean no publicity on it?

HERMAN VOLZ: Nothing. Never. No mention. No paper ever was done.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Strange. It probably would have been a very exciting thing to write about.

HERMAN VOLZ: But it never was done. Well, it was finished at the beginning of the War and art was no good, see. And when something is old, you can't write about it, see.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, that's what fouled up Refregier, you know.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: He started the whole thing and had all the cartoons done and the War came along and all these big patriotic organizations, such as the Daughters of the American Revolution and so forth and so on they put the hammer on him and said, "You can't be painting a mural with a war on." So Refregier had to wait. Of course, he got back on again but in the meantime he had spent a lot of his dough. And he had a hard time making ends meet. He ended up with nothing.

MARY MCCHESNEY: This is Anton Refregier who did the Rincon Annex Post Office mural in San Francisco. Was this marble mural the last project for the WPA that you worked on, Herman?

HERMAN VOLZ : Yes, this is the last project there was. In fact, I was probably the last man on the project.

MARY MCCHESNEY: So, you were working after the war had begun?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes, after the war just in '42. Yes it was just a few months.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Herman, maybe you could tell us, give us come clue as to what happened to all the paintings, and stuff that the project had. You were on there so late, nobody else seems to know anything about it.

HERMAN VOLZ: I wish I knew what happened to them.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: It's really weird. Not only that but there are no records. Isn't that true. The records have disappeared too?

MARY MCCHESNEY: We can't even find a personnel list of who was on the project. Very peculiar.

HERMAN VOLZ: I'll tell you the one to get in touch with is (Dorothy) Collins.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Collins, yes, I'm going to get in touch with her.

HERMAN VOLZ: She will not say a dammed thing anyway. And Allan. He is just a little fink, he will smile, and will not say anything. What happened I really don't know. A lot of things the museums took over, paintings, I know that. And I have a hunch a lot of them were destroyed.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I think it would be interesting to talk to Bud Painter.

HERMAN VOLZ: But I also think . . . .

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Bud loves to talk, you know.

HERMAN VOLZ: But if you don't - if you kind of get curious and get Bud he may start and move along and don't push him, you know, just once in a while come in on it . . . .

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Gee, you don't have to push him, do you?

HERMAN VOLZ: No, no, no. Bud loves it - but Bud is a guy who - Bud and I didn't get along at all. That's one thing I'm sorry about because I probably would have had much better publicity and everything. Bud just didn't ask me. He wanted me to flatter him, but I'm nice to him, you know, but not flatter him. I don't like publicity people, for one thing. I don't care for them. It can only be my downfall. He offered to do publicity for me, everything . . . .

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: He's the talkingest man I ever ran into.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. He's living in Marin County: He lives in Marin County.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: No, he lives in Vallejo.

MARY MCCHESNEY: In Vallejo, California. (Actually Novato, Marin County)

HERMAN VOLZ: He is?

MARY MCCHESNEY: He's publicity director for the Kaiser Hospital in Vallejo.

HERMAN VOLZ: He is. Is that right?

MARY MCCHESNEY: I've written to him and I haven't heard yet. I'll have to telephone him.

HERMAN VOLZ: He knows quite a bit. Let's see now. Another one who has a good memory is Urban Neininger who you probably can't get a hold of

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: He's in New York.

MARY MCCHESNEY: He's in New York.

HERMAN VOLZ: No, he's in Dallas, Texas.

MARY MCCHESNEY: He is?

HERMAN VOLZ: And get the whole - I think he's at a museum there now.

MARY MCCHESNEY: I have a New York address for him.

HERMAN VOLZ: I don't know if he's curator or assistant curator . . . .

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, he was in New York.

MARY MCCHESNEY: I have a New York address . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: He's not there any more. Ask the museum in Dallas. I think - I'll get you the address, by the way. I know somebody who knows it.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Say, another . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: He's married and has a child.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: No kidding?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. You know Jeanne Reynal, so one day she said, "Well, if you go again hunting, if you ever want a new girl, you come back and I will shack up with somebody else." She didn't want to lose any fun. He knocked on the door and Jeanne said, "Well somebody else lives here now."

MARY MCCHESNEY: Did he go away for a long time?

HERMAN VOLZ: I think she gave him some funds, you know, so he could survive.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: That was for hunting? He was going hunting?

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, yes, he had to have some rest, after all. As Jeanne Reynal told me once, she said, "I have only so many years to screw and I'm going to get all I can." Well anyway, so she put him out but I think she gave him up some money I believe, I think he lived later on like a gentlemen in Europe. He always was like a gentleman.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yes.

HERMAN VOLZ: So

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Where did Neininger come from?

HERMAN VOLZ: Oh, Jesus, I should have not said that.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: What was Neininger's background?

HERMAN VOLZ: He came out of Michigan, Saginaw, Michigan. He worked in steel mills and had no artistic background of any kind. An all around man, helping here and there . . . .

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: He was a fabulous guy.

HERMAN VOLZ: He wanted to be an English country gentleman and he used to buy these big shoes, you know . . . .

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I know he dressed meticulously like a sportsman . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: I used to go with him to hock shops. When he found a nice English coat with leather patches on it, he - he got all excited. He stuttered - and he just had to get that coat. And then he had a cane. He looked like an English country gentleman. That's what he wanted to be. And he finally did.

MARY MCCHESNEY: And went and lived there? In England.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. Everything from Abercrombie and Fitch, you know. Oh, he was marvelous. I taught him, I got him involved in hunting and fishing, had great times with him. He was funny. He stuttered very heavily. I remember once he saw a guy who was stuttering. He said, "Look at this guy, he stutters." He laughed and laughed! At another stutterer.

MARY MCCHESNEY: He was the color technician on your project at the fair.

HERMAN VOLZ: No, he was an assistant.

MARY MCCHESNEY: No!

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: He mixed paints.

HERMAN VOLZ: He mixed paints. Oh, color technician, that's fine, yes.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Color technician is what I have down here from somebody, I don't know where I got it, paint mixer is really closer.

HERMAN VOLZ: You'd better put titles, it's so important sounding. Later on he got to be a supervisor, kind of an estimator something like that - no, ordering materials . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh!

HERMAN VOLZ: And he got quite efficient and officious, both. But I was very fond of him. He tried to keep me in check all the time. He started to criticize me . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: We had been talking earlier about the group of the artist union which was organized in San Francisco during the WPA project days. Is this right?

HERMAN VOLZ: Oh, yes.

MARY MCCHESNEY: About what time was that?

HERMAN VOLZ: The first artists union got started in 1933.

MARY MCCHESNEY: In '33?

HERMAN VOLZ: '33. '34. It came out of the John Reed Club that was an artists and writers union. I had just come to this country and somebody brought it up at the meeting to vote against something, you know, to pack the votes, you know, and I disagreed and I started talking against it. Imagine in my poor English, you know, and so they elected me to the executive board right then and there, see . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: This was in San Francisco?

HERMAN VOLZ: In San Francisco. So I was in my first, you know, activity in this country involved in this artists and writers union, which was involved in getting the Coit Tower murals going. It was before WPA - it was THE PWA. It was in a critical period of time. So we started the writers and artists union which was the nucleus later on for the projects in San Francisco for the writers, music, and artists project. Many of the potent people in these projects belonged to this particular organization . . . .

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, this was an offspring of the John Reed Club?

HERMAN VOLZ: This was an offspring of the John Reed Club . . . .

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I didn't know they had a branch up in San Francisco.

HERMAN VOLZ: There were people like Kenneth Rexroth.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Rexroth is the man who brought painting, labor unions, Marxism, music, dance, and a few other things to San Francisco. Is that right? Is that the same Rexroth?

HERMAN VOLZ: Is he the one who talks over the radio like that? Yes, it's the one, yes.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Kenneth Rexroth, the well-known West Coast poet . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: He's the great cultural genius of the West.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: This is true of the boondocks out here in San Francisco.

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, we had great times at the time with Rexroth. I could tell you stories that were wonderful, that may contradict Rexroth a little bit.

MARY MCCHESNEY: You said you were active in trying to get murals placed in Coit Tower. What form did this activity take?

HERMAN VOLZ: We made committees to go to the city. We formed citizens committee to go to the city to get jobs, money, etc. And get influential people involved in it. At the time there were people in this union who were very distinguished people, well-to-do people, one like Mac. (Howard Mack)

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Who?

HERMAN VOLZ: Mack . . . .

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Mack or Mickie?

HERMAN VOLZ: Mackie.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Spencer Mackie?

HERMAN VOLZ: No, no. Mack, it was Mack. (Howard Mack)

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh!

HERMAN VOLZ: And it was very interesting at that time and we simply tried to have a subsidy for art. We recognized it would come sooner or later, a subsidy for art. And this was the first subsidized art project in San Francisco, the Coit Tower. And money was raised directly here, not Federal money. And later on it was pushed into the direction of PWA, but that's where it got started.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Walter Heil, the director of the DeYoung Museum, was active in it.

HERMAN VOLZ: He was active, yes. The interesting thing is we got, as I say, we had people from the financial elite in our organization, too, you see. And so there was a pull and tug, which way to go and . . . .

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: The actual artists union as I knew it was strictly for artists.

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, when this got started, we had trouble once. They made a cut on the wages, on the income of the artists, I think it was nine dollars or fifteen dollars or something a month. Nobody got that you see. We lost it. So I went around to ask, to get a meeting with everybody, you know at the counter where they got the checks, got the money, and asked them - upstairs we had a hall, and there were some of the writers union and some other writers Project and other projects there and I was trying to get a few artists together to go up there to make a protest against this cut, see. It was some mistake they made or something. I've forgotten what it was. So I couldn't get anybody. Everybody took the check and went home. So I went up there and said, "Well, I am one of them and I am their representative." So we immediately formed a committee. We went down to Fourth Street to the headquarters of the Northern California Administration and I was representing artists, we decided, you know. There were some writers there, musicians, actors, and when it came to my turn to speak up, I pointed out that I am from the artists union. I'm representing the artists. Which was quite a lie but in my mind, we had formed an artists union. He laughed and he said well he didn't know that the artists had organized themselves. He was quite cynical about it. I said, well, they're getting started. Next payday we got the money. So I started working on a few of the people and the next time they got the money I asked for a meeting, you know, again. We

got four or five people together. And thus slowly we got involved in activities like that without being really a union. The writers had a union. And I think the actors, I don't know but I think also had a union. So we slowly got started and we began to be active and demand things. They had the lowering of the percentage, hire more people, get more people onto the project. What else did we do. We used to go from house to house to get signatures . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: There was some difficulty at one time on the project with some kind of a loyalty oath. Were you involved in that?

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, yes. That was later on.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, it was later on.

HERMAN VOLZ: For a while we always had projects like trying to get a Secretary of Culture in the Cabinet. That was one thing we were pushing for. We tried to get signatures from all kinds of people, schools for this.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, to have one in the Federal Government . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. And to have direct representation in the Cabinet and this came, I think, even from Biddle. He was one of them, you know there was a group back in New York who pushed this. And we picked it up here, see, and I was working on this.

MARY MCCHESNEY: This was George Biddle?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. And I was at that time helping, doing the organizing out here, then I couldn't get very far with it. So we had an organization but off and on, you know. People came and people disappeared; they had no really formal organization. As I said, the artists and writers union disappeared, you know. The 1934 strike got them, you know, they completely disappeared, the ones from the right went away and the ones from the left went away.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Was this the artists union?

HERMAN VOLZ: Writers Union.

MARY MCCHESNEY: This was during the '34 strike?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. The '34 strike there were some attacks on our headquarters. In '35 the police came and wrecked our joint.

MARY MCCHESNEY: This was during the 1934 general strike in San Francisco.

HERMAN VOLZ: After the general strike . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: After the general strike.

HERMAN VOLZ: There was a real kind of a move against anything of this kind. Then this disintegrated. But then the project, when the project came about, as I say, then a few of the people began to help along to organize this union. But, as I say, we couldn't get any place at all . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: You mean, you couldn't get any place getting people into the union or was it something else?

HERMAN VOLZ: We couldn't get (people) into the union or in real active participation. Then friends of mine from L.A. came up and asked me to help organize the American Artists Congress. And I agreed if they would help me organize an artists union. And I always hoped to get the artists organized, not only the artists who were on the project - we had a project organization, a union - but as I say it was hardly functioning. I felt the economic basis of the union was in the field of commercial art. So I hoped to get this organized, the commercial artists plus the artists even on the project, you see. So they did promise to help me. And I was active in organizing here in town together with Andre Rexroth the American Artists Congress, which as you may know, was an anti-Fascist organization.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Was this a national organization?

HERMAN VOLZ: It was a national organization started in New York. Davis, I think, was the head of it.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Stuart Davis?

HERMAN VOLZ: Stuart Davis. So here we got going. You know, you were supposed to be an artist of caliber, or of name, who was taking a position on Fascism and the very first meeting had forty, fifty people, teachers on the faculty of art school, and we got very, very active and then after that, started the artists union. And in the artists union we had a few run-ins. First, we got quite a few commercial artists involved and we discovered some of the people who were commercial artists were contractors for the bosses, you know, and they started turning the constitution into a guild, into something which they could control. And then we stopped again. And finally we got off our feet and we got a very good organization. During the time we were working on the murals, the organization was actually in best shape when we did the big murals there. And Hilaire Hiler was elected president and I was vice-president . . . .

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Hilaire Hiler?

HERMAN VOLZ: Hilaire Hiler was the first president . . . .

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Was he really?

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, he accepted without intending to. You know how these things go and I was the vice president. And at that time, I applied for a charter with the A.F.L., which I knew I wouldn't get. So I met with the vice president of the A.F.L. Painters International, whom I knew from before. I carried a card in the Painter's Unions, you know. When I came to this country, I joined the union here, and I was known, you know, as a decorator in San Francisco. So this guy said, well, I don't know what we can do. But he gave us life space not to be attacked during the World's Fair, not to attack the work on any of the jobs, to leave us alone. And at that time, started applying to the C.I.O. and then we got the charter from the C.I.O. We got a C.I.O. charter .

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, you did! So you were actually chartered as a C.I.O. union, I mean the artists union was?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yes. What was it called? What was the union called?

HERMAN VOLZ: Artists Union of San Francisco. Artists Union.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: No, it was something else. Don't you remember, there was an emblem, a design and everything?

HERMAN VOLZ: No, I don't know . . . .

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: No?

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, anyway - you're coming to the loyalty oath. I think that was the Smith Act, then, I believe.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, one question before you go into that. At the peak of the artists union's power, how many members did you have? Just roughly, would there be three or four hundred people?

HERMAN VOLZ: No. No.

MARY MCCHESNEY: It would be much smaller than that? Like a hundred . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: Forty, fifty, sixty.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, it was very small then. Forty, fifty or sixty.

HERMAN VOLZ: I don't think it was more than that, maybe on the list we had probably around fifty, sixty.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh!

HERMAN VOLZ: We had big meetings . . . .

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Yes, we had fairly big meetings. I remember in the headquarters there was a paint store, too. A cooperative paint store. Ray Strong ran it.

HERMAN VOLZ: Sixty, eighty people - Ray Strong, yes, oh, this is another story. Like Gerstle there you know. And I could tell you a few names that would kind of surprise you.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: William Gerstle, eh?

HERMAN VOLZ: Foster and Kleiser.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Foster and Kleiser. What were they making?

HERMAN VOLZ: That was their wages.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: That was their wages! Oh, I see what you mean. Those were the standards that you demanded for the artists?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. I asked the standard wage. Well, in fact, they didn't even get as much as that. They got what the standards were for the Scenic Artists of America, see, that was Hollywood standards. And it was three dollars, and I think they only got around two dollars at that time here in San Francisco. The master always got three dollars and the helper got two dollars. Two dollars at the time was a lot of money.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Yes.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. And when I hired people on the World's Fair for exhibits, quite a few guys, remember some guys I got off the project, and I had special projects going on, I got money from Washington to do it, and they all got three dollars an hour. So we had a base to work on. I felt if you have a union, you have to have an economic base, you know, you have to fight for something economic . . . .

End of Side One, Tape Two
Side Two, Tape Two

MARY MCCHESNEY: This is Mary Fuller McChesney interviewing Herman Volz. This is Side Two of Tape Two. The date is June 27, 1964. Present also is Robert McChesney. We were just talking about the artists union, Herman.

MARY MCCHESNEY: And I was going to ask you: with having three artists organizations existing in San Francisco at the time - the Artists union, and the . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: American Artists Congress . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: American Artists Congress and the San Francisco Art Association - was there any conflict . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: Council - the Council - the Artists Council, which was separate from the Art Association, was a part of it but separate from the Association.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Separate from the school . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: Separate from school, yes . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: Was there overlapping of membership . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. They were all the members to the same organizations.

MARY MCCHESNEY: I was thinking it was likely but there didn't seem to be any conflict of purpose? I mean the different organizations had different purposes?

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, the purpose of American Artists Congress was antifascism, to fight. It was during the period of Spain, you know, and recognizing what Spain was and collecting money, and also fighting German Fascism. What the American Artists Congress did at that time, we didn't do very much but what actually they did, was to organize an exhibit from Los Angeles and San Francisco in the Modern Museum in San Francisco. All of members of the American Artists Congress, just to simply show where they stood. And there were paintings of all kinds of painters; there were Biberman who painted roofs, landscapes. There were people who painted flowers, there were people who painted abstract, there were people who painted landscapes. It was an expression of artists who were against Fascism, and they united in one exhibit, and showed their stand. Which I think, to me, is one of the finest things that did happen in San Francisco. And on all kinds of levels. I mean most of them, many of them were teachers already, you know. They had social standing and also such a show is very important for our cultural people in this country to make such a stand. I don't know of any other country where the cultural people made such a stand. They did not make it in Germany. And the only place where they made it was maybe in France and in Switzerland in the earlier period; other countries I don't know about. But I do think this - I always feel very proud of that period when they took a real stand . . . .

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: The American Artists Congress never really developed very far here in San Francisco, did it?

HERMAN VOLZ: No. It was actually mainly by name. We had meetings, we sent letters of protest. Most of the people were excluded. You had to be a known artist of some standing, otherwise you would not be a member,

see.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, evidently, in Los Angeles they were more active.

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, in Los Angeles they were more active. But we had too much overlapping with the organizations so actually we did the same thing. Sometimes through the Artists union, sometimes through the Artists Council, sometimes all three together. I remember we had many meetings in my house of the executive boards of all three of them and it was quite something.

MARY MCCHESNEY: How long did the Artists Union last before it folded up?

HERMAN VOLZ: I don't remember any more. I gave up slowly on this. See, I was a supervisor and I was supposed never to participate in any of these things because I came under the Smith Act .

MARY MCCHESNEY: You mentioned this earlier. What was the Smith Act?

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, if you were a government employee, you were not allowed to work politically.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, when was this passed?

HERMAN VOLZ: I'm not sure if it was the Smith Act or not but it was passed in '39? '38? I don't remember any more, '38, '39? It's one of the things Roosevelt did put over all right. It eliminated all people who worked in a supervisory or any kind of position from political activity. And I didn't strike.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, wasn't the Smith Act, wasn't that primarily aimed at any radical elements?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes, that's right. Well, that's what I meant.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Not particularly any Democratic or Republican administration.

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, they thought anti-fascism at that time was premature, anti-Fascism was radical . . . .

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, the Smith Act was . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: Even in the shipyards when I worked later on down on the waterfront, as a pile driver I was concerned a premature anti-Fascist, even during the War still.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Everybody who was an anti-Fascist at that time was a premature anti-Fascist . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: . . . . according to the government.

HERMAN VOLZ: And he was a radical and even a dangerous radical.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Has this law been repealed?

HERMAN VOLZ: No, no.

MARY MCCHESNEY: You mean government employees still are not allowed to participate in politics?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, I think some other laws have been passed recently that take precedence over the Smith Act.

HERMAN VOLZ: I don't know, I didn't follow it through. I remember when I signed the paper, you see, that you are, you know, that's when this kind of question came up: are you, or aren't you subversive? This or that? They could get you for perjury, that's the main thing, see.

MARY MCCHESNEY: This was when you were on the project that you had to sign a loyalty oath?

MARY MCCHESNEY: Of loyalty to the Federal Government?

HERMAN VOLZ: And they could naturally pin something on you and you'd be perjured. With perjury which is very bad.

MARY MCCHESNEY: How important were politics in the WPA? Do you think that they played any kind of a crucial role in the development of different projects, and was there any kind of a windup and tension between those who were liberal and those who were more conservative.

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, let me get this question straightened out. The influence of what?

MARY MCCHESNEY: Of politics in the WPA project, or on the WPA project, was there any kind of tension existing between people who worked on the project as far as their politics was concerned? Did this political tension manifest itself in any way in the project work? It's not very clear.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: I don't think it did among the artists. I don't think there was any problems.

HERMAN VOLZ: No, no. We had a wonderful cohesion with us really. I would think that the period when we were on the WPA was one of the nicest periods I have spent in America with artists. There was a friendship there, there was a kind of a direction everybody went, you know. I think it was a very decent period.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Even though you were considered by many people to be a pretty 'left' person, you weren't Red-baited or made to feel uncomfortable because of this?

HERMAN VOLZ: No. Well, I was even called a Nazi, too, because probably of my German accent. I mean that's how it was. No, I don't think - no.

MARY MCCHESNEY: It wasn't that kind of situation . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: No, not during that period there, no. There was not much of that.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, I remember - of course, a lot of times there was a lot of discussion. The artists took part in politics. They were interested in it. Certainly their security was involved and I don't think they do today they were involved both in national and local politics.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. We wanted subsidies. And today subsidies are the only form under which culture can function in this, in any country. Without subsidy, culture has a very difficult chance to grow. It's very difficult. And this we recognized, that the subsidies through the WPA project were a real upheaval for our lives. It was a very important thing. We could learn, we could develop, and when this stopped it was, you know, the old story. And this shows in many other countries, like in my own country, music is highly subsidized, and they still have one of the finest symphony orchestras in the world in Zurich. The theatre is subsidized. Opera is subsidized. What they have to do is go out in the outlying country somewhere, some village, and play an opera, you know. And they have the best theatre I ever saw. They have wonderful theatre. And they are subsidized. This is a form of Socialist subsidization. Like our school system is here, you know. Same thing. And I saw the theatre over there, I was amazed how wonderful it was, just fantastic material there. I mean we recognized this at the time: the artist needs this formal subsidy to continue our desire of expressing ourselves.

MARY MCCHESNEY: In Switzerland the subsidization does not extend to the visual arts?

HERMAN VOLZ: In a way, yes, they do. In some cities all depends where it is. Some cities will give an enormous amount of jobs to artists. Even in my time, say now in Basle, when they needed work when the artists were hard up, they got church windows, they got all kinds of jobs. You can walk around in my home town, Zurich, and you find more sculptures and art work there than you will find maybe in all of California, or maybe half of the West. Every corner has some.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: But the artist wasn't constantly subsidized? For instance, they weren't pensioned . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, not the artists, the artists did not get pensioned. The musician gets pensioned. The actor gets pensioned, yes. They do have all that. I think after twenty-five years or something like that - I don't know what it is. Well, I do think that our period in America of the WPA was a glorious period. I think it's one thing we don't have any more today. I feel most artists today don't recognize this any more

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Do you think that if something ever came up in that respect, like government-subsidized art, that many of the artists would go for it?

HERMAN VOLZ: Artists have not much to say about it. It's the ones, the elite who control culture who will have to say about it. And they will choose the ones they want to choose. And in our period we hoped that we had the choice of what had to be done, and what direction we were going to go. And this is nearly impossible today. You can see this already now as the handwriting on the wall. There will be a few people . . . . When the Art Commission was founded, as I pointed out to you, it was already the beginning of the elite deciding what is going to go up and what's not going to go up. Every design was shown to these people and all the supervisor had to say was, "Well, this guy is a little bit to the left here, you know, maybe he is not so good." I know some real scoundrels who were talking like this. You know, they have a kind of subtle way of killing the character of another person. I've seen so much of that going on, see, which only stopped - these people only were stopped by these kind of actions through the artists union. They're a little bit afraid of that . . . .

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Originally, Herman, when the Art Commission was set up, did they have artists on it?

HERMAN VOLZ: No, no. They were citizens, not artists.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well they do now, you see.

HERMAN VOLZ: They were citizens, they were the Fleisshackers, they were the Crockers, they were, you, various people like that.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Very wealthy people of San Francisco?

HERMAN VOLZ: Very wealthy people of San Francisco which you see on all the sponsored lists of the museums, life members for a hundred dollars, and they're the great contributors to culture . . . .

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Recently - and you probably heard of it - when John Garth for instance was going to do the new city jail, you know put a mural in there, I think it was there, isn't that it?

HERMAN VOLZ: I don't remember.

MARY MCCHESNEY: He did put a mural in the city jail. It's in there.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, wasn't this opposed by the Art Commission? The Art Commission made a big beef about it . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: Well, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe they didn't finally go through with it.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: The beef was due to one or two painters that were on the Art Commission objecting to a (pg36) like Garth.

MARY MCCHESNEY: That's right. I remember that.

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, it's good, I mean I hope they do have artists on. Now the question is, you know, what side the artists who are on the Art Commission are on.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, if they have to have an Art Commission, it's good that they can get artists on it.

HERMAN VOLZ: Well, in fact an Art Commission should be composed of both, of artists and lay. In fact, the lay members most of the time in Europe the lay members are minimal in any kind of a commission like this.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: You mean when it comes to art?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. They're not so important.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: It's the way it should be . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: It should be this way because who the hell is the one who is the creative element should be the one who has the most to say. And I would say the element which is the appreciative element is also very important. Both cannot exist without the other. But in this case I think our appreciative element uses their economic whip so often that artists who are on a commission of this kind will be whipped into line so fast it's not even funny. This is what I have always felt that in any art commission where there are artists on, when the one who seizes the control of the finances, the economy, has a particular direction of votes, I doubt the artists would go against it, generally. But if there are a majority of artists, then they do. That's why I feel that artists should have guilds for their own protection, associations - but you know it takes more than that. They're having it now. They're having now, small little cliques. Like now, you know, they have small little cliques, protective little cliques. They last for five years and then the next clique takes over and then in another five years the third clique comes in. So you have a chance for five years, maybe ten years if you're lucky to be with the clique, and after that, you're wiped out. You have a period where you were very popular, and then the next clique comes in, they wipe the next one out and so.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, that's what we've been trying to do in the Art Association, trying to point out some of these cliques. You see now they have it so that anybody who doesn't show in certain famous museums throughout the U.S. is out. How many times during the period?

HERMAN VOLZ: Six times.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Six times during a period of three years, I think it is or you can't run for office, you can't hold any elective job.

HERMAN VOLZ: You can't be in the Association.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Well, you can be in the Association, I think.

HERMAN VOLZ: No, they told me in a letter I can't be. I have to have six exhibits in so many years to get in.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Oh, I know what you mean. That's for the entrance.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: But this also applies to the person who is already in. For instance, I have to show, I have to show in competitive shows to run for office.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Continually?

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: You have to show a certain number of times to run for office or-not run for office - you don't run for office - to be elected for office, or to be nominated for office even. And I, for instance, and I think a lot of our other artists feel the same way: why should I compete? I feel today that I don't have to. I'm not going out and compete with other artists. There's no need for it.

HERMAN VOLZ: That's right.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Maybe we could sum up -on the WPA very briefly. Since you had so much experience, HERMAN , on the WPA project, and since you had some difficulties in various aspects, I wonder if you would tell me what you think would be the best kind of changes that could be made if a new government project were set up for the artists? What suggestions would you make for having it run more smoothly or more efficiently, or to further culture more effectively in the United States?

HERMAN VOLZ: First, establish a Cabinet post . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: In the United States Federal Government?

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. This is highly necessary and we worked for this during our period in the artists union. We worked politically for that at that time; there was a bill up once by a Senator from Florida . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh, Pepper!

HERMAN VOLZ: Pepper. The Pepper Bill. And we went around, you know getting support. This is, I think, the first thing. What form it basically takes, it would have to take a form of subsidy, and a form of subsidy where artists themselves have to be organized to desire and demand the type of subsidies they want, and for what. Not that they're just handed out, like patrons do, you know. But this is a very difficult thing. As competitive as artists are, as Mac just pointed out, you know, it's hard to insure that a small clique doesn't get in, that a small group of the appreciator clique and they would run the whole darn show, see. At that time we were in, it was fortunate that we had small, little, nothing politicians, little nothing politicians actually is what they were, and they were not too skilled, you know, but we have much more skilled characters today who could take hold and do practically what they wanted to. But I would say a Cabinet post is a very important step, because in a Cabinet post you can directly appeal to the public, you know, and making it on a Federal basis is very, very important. And put a certain amount of money aside for a cultural development subsidy, millions of it. It would have be

MARY MCCHESNEY: Do you think it would be a good idea to have . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: . . . . and establish schools, establish, you know, teaching facilities for many of the artists today who are not competitive any more, are not interested in being competitive, but where the subsidy form of teaching maybe, maybe one day teaching is enough, or two days teaching is enough, maybe two half-days teaching is enough for them to live on. This kind of subsidy where their abilities are passed on to others, non-competitively, see. This competitiveness is something else today. The guys want to make a cleanup, he hopes to sell a painting for five thousand, you know make forty thousand a year. If he makes it one year, he maybe doesn't make it the next year so he's struggling hard and sooner or later he gets there. And I knew of friends of mine who decided to paint certain ways to hope to get there to clean up. And it's still done today. And some - most of the guys are still just one step behind what the clique really is planning to do . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: Its hard to know which way they are going to move . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. And this is not only here. This is in Germany today exactly the same. In Germany today it is the steel industry, the heavy, big industry today who controls the culture, who controls who is going to exhibit in foreign shows like the one I saw in Paris this spring. And it is not only this; it's also the daughters and the cousins of the steel magnates, the great magnates there, who are today the artists . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: Oh! Curious!

HERMAN VOLZ: And the paintings sure look like steel, or sure looks like hard cash, I assure you.

MARY MCCHESNEY: You said it was very cold.

HERMAN VOLZ: Yes. And the one thing you see today is that the humanistic process in art is nearly eliminated. And it will be eliminated if this sharp, cruel competition is continued. Naturally - I'm just reading now Michelangelo, this book came out and his letters, and there was competition that time, too, no question about it . . . .

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: There was big competition then too.

HERMAN VOLZ: But again, we don't have the farseeing art patrons today as we had then, the ones who gave freedom to the artists, we don't have them. There's a different spirit of the new, modern man that we have today. Well, anyway I would like to see first a very simple subsidy, a simple subsidy, and how it's going to be worked out should be both by the decent elements of the laymen, I would say the appreciative, plus the artist. I am not saying the art director, the museum directors; I feel they have too much control already. I think they should get really lay people who really love art, you know, who really love it. It's a vocation with them. And it's not the one who is, not the Barr, not the d'Harnoncourt, you know. Today this particular taste, in my opinion, is made by just a few people, and I saw it being made in the 30's. In fact, d'Harnoncourt told me exactly which way it was going to go. I know d'Harnoncourt well, I had discussions on these questions. He knew which way it was going to go - his way. His own way.

MARY MCCHESNEY: What would you say the influence of the WPA period was on yourself as a creative person?

HERMAN VOLZ: Very exciting! I think I grew tremendously. I would never have missed it. It was the most wonderful time I had in my life. It was a great time for me, all the way around. And I know for others too. I've seen men growing out of nothing into artists, you know. It was exciting. It was very exciting.

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: It certainly kept a great number of artists participating in art. I think that was the main thing during a period where, if they had not had the project, they would have been hopelessly lost in some other field . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: That's right. And also they're appreciated too. We had little galleries all over. We had them in small towns. Kansas City was for a while the heart of graphic art, you know. Who ever thinks of Kansas City being an art center? And these art centers were built everywhere - in Sacramento, everywhere. And they were very exciting. They had wonderful people running them, you know, who were dedicated to art. Some of them were artists, some of them were not. And it had a tremendous effect on the population. I say again: without culture, a nation will not move forward. We need the superstructure in any society, if this gets depleted it's very dangerous. And I would say America had better wake up. And I don't mean a controlled kind of culture by the politician or by the - I don't know exactly the word - you know the kind of person . . . .

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: By the taste makers.

HERMAN VOLZ: By the pacemakers. Not the ones who make the pace as it is today

ROBERT MCCHESNEY: Taste . . . .

HERMAN VOLZ: By the tastemakers, yes, the critics, the art directors, the ones who have control. I read today Frankenstein's article on the Biennale in Venice, the great surprise about Italian art. And he's another one in this town who knew nothing about art. Did it for a job to make himself some money, a little bit more wages. He told me himself that he knew nothing and he was very unhappy that he had to write about art. Now he's the great expert in the country. And he has no love for it. If you read any line he ever wrote, he does not love anything about art. He has no love. He has absolutely no love, that man . . . .

MARY MCCHESNEY: That's true of many critics, isn't it?

HERMAN VOLZ: And this is one most necessary thing that you love another man's activity and you know and creative activity and process and - it takes more interest too. Well, how you're going to do this, I don't know. But I would like to see artists, I would like to see another project, I think we have today many talented young artists around. Maybe you know more about it, you're more in contact with it than I am.

MARY MCCHESNEY: Thank you very much, Herman Volz, for giving the Archives of American Art this interview.

END OF INTERVIEW

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