Smithsonian
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Oral history interview with Milford Zornes, 1965 June 30

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Milford Zornes on June 30, 1965. The interview took place at his home in Claremont, California, and was conducted by Betty Lochrie Hoag for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

BETTY HOAG: This is Betty Lochrie Hoag on June 30, 1965 interviewing Milford Zornes at his home in Claremont. Mr. Zornes, do you use a middle name?

MILFRED ZORNES: No. I just sign my name Milford Zornes.

MS. HOAG: Do you have one officially for the record?

MR. ZORNES: My middle name is James, my first name rather is James, but I stay away from that or people call me James.

MS. HOAG: Well, in case anyone is ever hunting for a birth certificate or something we have that. Mr. Zornes is not only one of the leading artists in California today and has been for a long time, but he also has achieved the interesting accomplishment of having done more paintings under the Federal Art Project than any other artist in America, and he assured me this is because they are watercolors. I don't know. We're going to ask him more about it later. He also did some of the post office murals which we'll talk about. Mr. Zornes, will you tell us about when you were born and where?

MR. ZORNES: Well, I was born on January 25, 1908 in western Oklahoma and I've realized since that I really was born in the sticks because my birth was never recorded. I've had reason to have to get a delayed birth certificate since then.

MS. HOAG: In one of the "Who's Whos" I believe it was I found that it was in Camergo. Was that...?

MR. ZORNES: Camargo, Oklahoma.

MS. HOAG: Is that the name of the river there, then?

MR. ZORNES: No. Well, yes, there is a Camargo River, but this is a little town, a little ranching town.

MS. HOAG: Sounds like an Indian name.

MR. ZORNES: I suppose it was.

MS. HOAG: And were you reared in Oklahoma, or did you leave there...?

MR. ZORNES: Well, I spent my early childhood there. My people were in cattle and wheat business, and I lived there until I was seven or eight years old. And then we moved to Idaho. I went to high school in Boise, Idaho, and came to California to finish my last year of high school. I've lived in Southern California ever since.

MS. HOAG: I see. And when you came to California, that was about-?

MR. ZORNES: 1925.

MS. HOAG: 1925. Did you come to the Los Angeles area?

MR. ZORNES: Well, yes, we came to San Fernando. I finished high school in San Fernando High School [San Fernando, CA].

MS. HOAG: Were you already painting at that time?

MR. ZORNES: No. I suppose every artist can cite some interesting circumstances by which he became an artist. But when we lived in this ranching country, my sister and I were the only children in a big ranching area. My mother had been a school teacher, and in order to look after me and keep me quiet, she taught me to read and to draw before I went to school. So that when I did go to school, I was the kid who could draw. And this was pretty much true all through my school days. And I didn't think at all about becoming an artist. I wanted to do

everything else-I wanted to go to sea, I wanted to be an explorer. I thought of everything else as a career rather than to become an artist. I'm sure that it was the depression that was responsible for my becoming an artist because I couldn't get a job, I couldn't go to school, and I busied myself painting and began winning a little recognition as a painter. And then I was lost to it, I had found what I wanted.

MS. HOAG: I see. Well, had you had no art training at the time the depression came?

MR. ZORNES: Well, no, other than, as I say, my mother taught me the rudiments of drawing and I did a lot of drawing as a child. Actually there was one circumstance leading up to the idea of becoming an artist. I went to a junior college up at San Marina and I was working and going to school and living in the home of one of the art teachers up there, a Mr. Brenizer [Brenallen?]-what was his name, Pat?

MS. PAT ZORNES: I don't know, but that sounds-

MR. ZORNES: He's in San [inaudible], Mexico. But at any rate when he found that I had some talent for drawing, and it came about simply because I took a course with him, and his enthusiasm surprised me and gave me a kind of lift and I started drawing. I really should say that he was responsible for my starting.

MS. HOAG: It must be a thrill for a teacher to have someone who is a success be able to say that about them.

MR. ZORNES: Well, as a teacher I can vouch for that.

MS. HOAG: You are teaching today?

MR. ZORNES: Oh yes. I teach a great deal. Right after the way-let me rephrase that-before the war I taught at the Los Angeles Art Institute [Los Angeles, CA]-or the Otis Art Institute [Los Angeles, CA]-after the war I came to teach at Pomona, where I had gone to school in Claremont. I taught for three years in the college program but this seemed like such a heavy program of teaching, and I hadn't really intended to get into an academic world, and so I decided to resign and follow other directions. But I've always taught, I've been teaching ever since I started painting almost. I taught children's classes before I had much recognition as a painter. And then while I was teaching at Otis-or the Art Institute-I studied with other teachers. I have thought at times of not teaching any more, but I would really miss it. I don't' like to teach too much, I think it gets to be too heavy and you get too involved, and you get to the feeling as though you envy your students because they're working and you're not. But when I wasn't teaching at all I missed it because I think that I personally needed this contact to a certain extent with people and I think it's necessary for me, at least, to talk art theory some, and the only logical person to talk about art is to students; otherwise, you're kind of a bore, I suppose.

MS. HOAG: When you try to explain art theory, it certainly helps you to interpret it to another.

MR. ZORNES: Yes, and I keep telling students of mine that I teach out of pure selfishness because it's a creative thing in itself. You feel that when you're working with students, you're furthering your understanding of seeing in attempting to enable them to see, you see. And so I find it a necessary thing for me, to a certain extent. I teach a couple of days a week.

MS. HOAG: But is this in your studio, you mean?

MR. ZORNES: Well, no, I teach at the Riverside Art Center [Riverside, CA]. And I have a class during the summer, a class of my own that I teach at Laguna Beach [CA]. And then this summer, late this summer, I'm going to be taking a workshop class at my studio at Mt. Carmel, Utah. This is a kind of new venture. We hope to stay there more and more as time goes by, and I have some idea that instead of starting a school there, I may carry on a series of workshop classes enabling people to combine vacation and some art study. The place is beautifully picturesque.

MS. HOAG: Is this Maynard Dixon's old home?

MR. ZORNES: Yes, it's Maynard Dixon's old studio. It's just east of Zion National Park, sort of in a hub-Zion to the west, Bryce to the North, Grand Canyon to the south, Monument Valley and all these other wonderful places which offer so much in the way of form and color. And then I have some ambitions as a painter there, too. This may be just a little far-fetched but I was in China during the war and one of the things that impressed me most out of this whole experience was the fact that we were in a country which has inspired Chinese painters for centuries, and I realized at last that the things I had seen in Chinese paintings, beautiful stylizations and form was not, was based very much on actual landscape. In Yunnan Province you actually see those fantastic limestone cliffs and waterfalls and caves, and so forth.

MS. HOAG: The receding mountings that appear-

MR. ZORNES: The receding mountains. And so that I've had some kind of an ambition fever since to see if our

own Western landscape doesn't offer something in the way of fine stylization. I think that it has been painted and painted and painted in a realistic way until many responsible artists are sort of turning away from it. But the forms are still there and the beauty is still there, and it may not work out this way, but at least I'm going to have a try at it.

MS. HOAG: Mr. Zornes, I think it's a very exciting idea. Sounds like it will . . .

MR. ZORNES: The impressive thing about this China experience, too, was that actually when you stop to think, when you were there the mountains looked very much like our own mountains, that is, in Western China, the parts where I was. But it was just through the years, or centuries actually, of seeing these things in terms of design that these things have evolved. And we really haven't seen our country in that way, as yet, I'm sure. So this is one of the ambitions I have for this place, and it may not work out that way.

MS. HOAG: Do you intend to have other artists at this workshop at Mt. Carmel?

MR. ZORNES: Well, as time goes on-one close friend of ours is Robert Ortley [?], who is a sculptor and we have already talked about the idea of his teaching sculpture there in the summer, as well. But we haven't gotten to any concrete plans. I haven't been able to let go of things here enough to actually get down to do anything about it. But we are experimenting with this workshop class in July.

MS. HOAG: And this would be completely private?

MR. ZORNES: Yes.

MS. HOAG: You'd have no foundation grant or school affiliation?

MR. ZORNES: Well, we haven't as yet, or we have nothing of this in view. Whether anything like this is possible, I have no idea.

MS. HOAG: Well, these things come afterward.

MR. ZORNES: Yes, it probably has to be established before-

MS. HOAG: Well, that sounds very interesting. I tried to do a little research about you before I came over, and I notice from something I read that you studied with Millard Sheets. Is that correct?

MR. ZORNES: Yes, that is certainly true. I was going to school here at Pomona, and I had a friend name Tom Craig, you may have come in contact with his work.

MS. HOAG: Oh, yes.

MR. ZORNES: Yes. He was a student at Pomona, and I was. I was excited about painting and I was taking courses. Tom had just come back to school after recuperating from an illness. He was involved in completing college for a science degree, but he had gotten excited about painting and we used to paint a great deal. I almost flunked out of college. Of course Tom was a good student and he could manage both ends of things. But we were constant companions and very much excited bout painting. And it was that year that Millard Sheets came out to teach at Scripps [Scripps College, Claremont, CA]. And because we were probably the only two men students he had met, he was rather interested in us, and I was one of the first students at Pomona to really push to go up to Scripps to take courses.

MS. HOAG: Just a moment. Isn't Scripps a girls' school?

MR. ZORNES: Yes. Scripps is a women's college. But Millard Sheets came to teach at Scripps and Millard isn't one to just be quietly a teacher in a women's college-he was going to build an art department, which he certainly did. And as he saw the possibilities of it, it became a more or less a Claremont Colleges [Claremont, CA] art department. While it's on the Scripps campus, the work there isn't for Scripps students alone.

MS. HOAG: Do the Pomona students all come over to a workshop?

MR. ZORNES: No. Well, there's still an art department at Pomona. But art majors go up there and people wishing to extend their art training go up to Scripps to round out their program. And graduates of Claremont Colleges who get an M.F.A. in art do the work at Scripps and Pomona. It is interesting that when I came to Pomona to teach there was some-I think at that time there was probably some idea of having everything go up to Scripps, and I probably could be identified as one who held out for keeping the Pomona department intact because I think that while the Scripps art department is very important, but still it would have been a mistake to lose the Pomona art department because many people would not take art courses at all if it was a matter of going up to Scripps. They would choose others in the college course-of course there are the humanities courses, and I think

some of these courses can be satisfied in art theory or music appreciation or something like this. But having an art department there, we got a good many of these people as art students and, of course, I think this is important in education.

MS. HOAG: I do, too. You can probably clarify something that's bothered me for many years. When that building was first built we drove by and were very curious one day and sort of prowled around and discovered girls up on ladders working on murals, and I wondered if this is part of-

MR. ZORNES: Was this at Scripps, you mean?

MS. HOAG: Well, it was where Mr. Sheets is today.

MR. ZORNES: Yes. Well, yes, there is-I know there is a mosaic there that was done quite a long time ago. I remember when that was put up.

MS. HOAG: This was a painting mural, and I wondered if this was-if they offered a mural course or something.

MR. ZORNES: Oh, I'm sure-I don't-while we live here in town, not being directly connected with the colleges, I'm not always aware of the programs but they certainly have carried on all kinds of work there and it has won a reputation as an art center in this area and has been a very versatile art school, actually.

MS. HOAG: Mr. Zornes, I've lost out chronologically here. You and Tom Craig were there in about what year?

MR. ZORNES: Well, this would have been between 1930 and '35. I think I probably got acquainted with Tom in about 1932.

MS. HOAG: This was just before the Project?

MR. ZORNES: Yes.

MS. HOAG: And then the other teacher of yours I wanted to ask you about, I imagine it was F. Tolles Chamberlain?

MR. ZORNES: Yes. F. Tolles Chamberlain was very important to me. He was a very fascinating man and I'm sure in your research you're going to run across his name many times.

MS. HOAG: Yes. And I just missed him. He passed away recently.

MR. ZORNES: Yes.

MS. HOAG: I just missed him. I was so sorry.

MR. ZORNES: Actually, he was teaching at the old Otis Art Institute when Mrs. Chouinard was there and Mrs. Chouinard and F. Tolles Chamberlain founded Chouinard Art School [Los Angeles, CA]. But Chamberlain was a very independent man and when he felt that things weren't working exactly to suit his ways of teaching, I think he withdrew. He was a fine gentleman and if he didn't-he never destroyed anything, never criticized anything out of existence, he simply withdrew. And I never heard him speak ill of anything. He didn't get along with Mrs. Chouinard, he didn't get along with some of the precepts there, but he certainly gave his blessing to that school always. When I met him-I met him through Millard, too, actually-he had been Millard's teacher at Chouinard. And Millard had a great deal of respect for him. I believe the first time I ever met Chamberlain was when a group of us here in Claremont-Millard, Manker-what was his name?

MRS. ZORNES: Bill.

MR. ZORNES: Bill Manker, who was a good friend of Millard's-he had a ceramics business-

MRS. ZORNES: M-a-n-k-e-r.

MR. ZORNES: William Manker.

MS. ZORNES: He's a color consultant.

MR. ZORNES: He had a ceramics business here at Padua. He and Millard, and some friends Millard had from the studios, and David Scott-

MS. HOAG: Now is he the man that's at the Smithsonian?

MR. ZORNES: Yes. He was a very young fellow then. Dave used to study with me in those days. And because I

was going over to study with Chamberlain he went at that time, and . . .

MS. HOAG: I've been in correspondence with him. The Santa Monica Library [Santa Monica, CA] is not using Mr. Wright's murals. Do you remember those?

MR. ZORNES: Oh, yes. I-

MS. HOAG: Mr. Wright thought they were going to be destroyed, so I wrote to Mr.-Dr. Scott.

MR. ZORNES: Oh, I see. Yes, Dr. Scott.

MS. HOAG: It's a small world.

MR. ZORNES: Yes.

MS. HOAG: He said he knew Mr. Wright and . . .

MR. ZORNES: Yes. Dave became a painter, but he is important as an art historian and I think probably he has found a good niche for his directions there at the Smithsonian. I haven't heard from him or talked to him since he's been there.

MS. HOAG: He put on our day of culture, you know, the other day.

MR. ZORNES: Yes, and I know his name is on the program for this show we have here now-this exhibition of Dead Sea Scrolls. I notice he is represented in that.

MS. HOAG: Oh, is he? Well, the thing that I'm excited about is that he heads the group at Smithsonian who are trying to locate all the things from the project. You know they've just been scattered and dispersed.

MR. ZORNES: Oh, I see. Well I think this would be in line with his thinking, too. I think he has a real concern for what actually did go on, and-

MS. HOAG: I didn't mean to cut you off in the middle of telling about . . .

MR. ZORNES: Well, that's all right, to get back to our subject. This little group of us would go on, I think it was one night during the week, we'd always pick up Chamberlain and have dinner and then go study in life class with him. I probably found in Chamberlain the first real honest-to-goodness teacher. Millard was-I got a lot of-Millard was very valuable to me and I won't say that I didn't learn directly from him but Millard's influence was one of enthusiasm. You couldn't be around him without wanting to paint, or thinking it was important to paint. But Chamberlain-it wasn't easy always being with him, you felt completely tied up and restricted in some ways because he was pretty sharp in his discipline. But, as I've told students of mine many times, I don't think a day passes but I don't remember something that he said.

MS. HOAG: Well, did he insist on having a good academic basis and all the rest?

MR. ZORNES: Well, I could say that, and yet he had an openness of mind which would be important for any student; no, it wasn't an academic approach, it was-he could imbue you with the importance of structure, the importance of skilled craftsmanship, and so forth, but it wasn't academic in that this was the whole end. He was truly creative in his teaching.

MS. HOAG: I'm wondering if you were in on something that Arthur Millier was telling me about that sounded-an amazing story. Siqueiros-the fog that was down at Chouinard?

MR. ZORNES: No, I guess not.

MS. HOAG: Or at Chamberlain's. It was done down on Oliviero Street. They both, well-

MR. ZORNES: Oh, yes. Siqueiros, yes, sure.

MS. HOAG: Were you in that?

MR. ZORNES: This is interesting too that at Pomona, our teacher at Pomona was Thomas Beggs. Now you-now he has been-I don't know whether he's retiring from the Smithsonian-

MS. ZORNES: No, he is still there-

MR. ZORNES: But Dave is his assistant. Tom Beggs was our teacher at Pomona, and actually Tom Beggs was responsible for my coming to Pomona after the war, because-

MS. ZORNES: You'll find things in the scrapbook, we have a couple of scrapbooks that have clippings on-

MR. ZORNES: Yes. And he-I lost my train of thought there a little bit-oh, I recall now. He brought some students to Chouinard when Siqueiros came there to give a course in mural painting. I believe that's the first time I ever met Millard Sheets, because he was working there, he was studying action art at that time, or teaching, I guess he was teaching at that time. But at any rate, there were several, there was Paul Sample, Millard Sheets-

MS. HOAG: Incidentally, is Paul Sample around here? I can't find him.

MR. ZORNES: No, he lives in the East, or if he-I don't know-if he's still alive-

MS. HOAG: I've looked madly through phone books trying to find him.

MR. ZORNES: No, he was here in California for a long time, but I believe that he went back and was-I may be completely mistaken about this-but it seems to me that he was at one of the universities back there. But he was an Easterner actually.

MS. HOAG: Mr. Zornes, was Siqueiros here after the Orozco mural was done here in Pomona?

MR. ZORNES: Yes, yes. I came to Pomona College two or three years before I came here as a student for the particular purpose of seeing the mural. So it was probably done in 1928 or '29.

MS. HOAG: What I'm trying to get at is indirectly whether you felt that Orozco and Siqueiros had influenced your work. I know you did the two murals that we'll come to a little later.

MR. ZORNES: I don't suppose they had much influence on me directly. At least I've never felt it. I think that possibly their murals and the excitement of working on walls and so forth probably stirred up some concern for murals here in the area-

MS. HOAG: Stylistically I couldn't see it in the one in the post office-

MR. ZORNES: No, I'm sure of it. If I'd been a little more of an artist at that time I probably would have been more influenced, but you know there's a difference-when you're a green kid there are a lot of things you miss, pass you by.

MS. HOAG: Well, and then if you were not with either one of them at least that did murals you didn't learn the technique of mural painting.

MR. ZORNES: No. We just looked in one day. I was impressed by Siqueiros himself. He was a big man, he wore a big black hat, he didn't speak English, but he seemed to be able to make his meaning clear. I did learn one thing from him, and I learned it very definitely; it didn't leave me. He was explaining-when these people were working on the murals, and working with figures-he was explaining not to have elbows out and places where you would have holes through the pattern, and so forth, and-

MS. HOAG: He didn't believe in negative spaces-

MR. ZORNES: Negative spaces. He said that a sculptor wouldn't do this and for the same reason a painter wouldn't do it, and that always stuck with me. But he was rather a forceful person and I can readily see why he probably has had the bombastic career that he's had.

MS. HOAG: Well, you know, come to think of it, I guess all the Mexican painters do mass their figures in groups without any space, don't they?

MR. ZORNES: Well, it seems to be. At least this is one of the impressive things I believe is that they are very, very strong and boldly patterned and you have this feeling of strength, and I suppose it's achieved in this way to a certain extent. And I have certainly always been impressed by the Orozco mural we have here at Pomona. It is an interesting thing to me that while-when I came here as a student this College hadn't quite gotten over the shock of it, there was a great deal of criticism of it still. And since then I've traveled all over the world and there hasn't been a place in China, or India, or in Europe where if I mentioned I came from Claremont that someone isn't going to remember that this is where the great Orozco mural is. Pomona College is probably more famous for that mural than anything else and they could hardly take it when it was put up there.

MS. HOAG: Well, I've seen photographs of it many times, you know, but I've never seen it. It's one of the things I'm going to do on this trip, while I'm down.

MR. ZORNES: Oh you should see it while you're up. Oh yes, yes, I was over there the other day to take a friend over there. I hadn't seen it for years, and I was still impressed by it.

MS. HOAG: I have all kinds of lists where your works are in collections, and of awards that you've had, and different associations that you're a member of, and honors, and I believe that will all be in any "Who's Who of Arts" that a student could look up, and you have a bibliography that you're going to let us microfilm, so I don't think there's much point in reading it all off on the tape. But is there anything particularly that you want to that has happened to you since the time of the Project before we go back?

MR. ZORNES: Well of course, there was-since the project, you say?

MS. HOAG: Well, I know that you went into the armed forces and had some fascinating experiences. Maybe we should bring up this along after the Project where it fits in to it.

MR. ZORNES: Yes, let's do that.

MS. HOAG: How did you first learn about the Project work here, and did you go into easels or murals first?

MR. ZORNES: Well, I'm sure again the name Millard Sheets keeps cropping up in my experience, but again he was appointed a regional director, and the first I heard about it was when he called me or spoke to me about it, and told me that he could arrange to have me work on the Project. I'm sure this is the first I heard of it.

MS. HOAG: And you went right on the easel project then?

MR. ZORNES: Yes, I did. As I said, I painted watercolors.

MS. HOAG: You still do watercolors predominantly?

MR. ZORNES: Yes, this is a-I always explain that I am a watercolorist by default. I've painted oils, and I keep looking forward to the time when I will settle down in the studio and paint oils more because I keep thinking that oil painting is a more studied way of working, but because of the circumstances of having traveled a great deal, I've carried watercolors and am best known as a watercolorist, and then the fact is that you never lick watercolor painting, and you can't very well give it up as long as you feel you haven't conquered it, and you never will, and the only cure for watercolor is to paint another one, so you become a watercolorist and you remain a watercolorist, I guess.

MS. HOAG: Forever a watercolorist.

MR. ZORNES: Forever a watercolorist because you never give up.

MS. HOAG: Well, it's interesting. I find myself confused here because most of the post offices that were done were under the Treasury Department, and the Treasury Department work ordinarily came before the WPA. They were usually '34 to '35 and '36, some into '38, and I wonder if those weren't both Treasury Department commissions.

MR. ZORNES: Well, I'm probably a little confused about this, too. The first things that I did were watercolors, and whether or not there was, what the tie-up was, I'm not altogether sure. I know that some of these projects came about as competitions, though I believe the Claremont Post Office, if I could recall, probably if we look through these letters we could discover, but whether simply because I was on the rolls and they offered me the opportunity-but I think this is what it was-to do this mural in the post office, this is the way the Claremont Post Office came about. But I did a little mural for the El Campo Post Office.

MS. HOAG: That's in Texas?

MR. ZORNES: Yes, at El Campo, Texas. This was more or less a runner up award for me. I had entered a competition to do a mural for a St. Louis post office, I believe it was, which was to be a rather large project, and I didn't win the competition but I, along with several others, I suppose, won smaller competitions as a kind of a prize, a reward for making a try. And this is the reason I did this one at El Campo, Texas.

MS. HOAG: I wish you'd tell me about it because I haven't found any material. What was the subject matter?

MR. ZORNES: Well, I made a trip to Texas to-it was more or less a chance to take a trip, and I visited the area and talked to some of the people there and they took me out around through the ranching country and I saw the cattle raising and the industry and so forth, and then came back and tried to evolve a scheme for the mural. And the only thing I could arrive at as a landscape showing the flat countryside, Texas countryside. I more or less evolved a design out of a deliberate two point perspective showing these long roads and fields receding into the distance, and the cloud pattern above following pretty much the same scheme. Then through the use of tree forms and buildings, I evolved a design. The amusing thing about it was that when I took the mural down, the old gentleman who was postmaster there said that when he found out that they were going to have a mural painting he wrote and asked the fellows in Washington if they wouldn't let him put in a ventilator instead. But he

was quite gracious bout it and seemed pleased after we got the mural up.

MS. HOAG: You did this in oil on canvas?

MR. ZORNES: Yes.

MS. HOAG: And you had it put up.

MR. ZORNES: Then I took it down and mounted it on the wall.

MS. HOAG: You did that yourself?

MR. ZORNES: Yes.

MS. HOAG: Or did you have to call in paperhangers or something?

MR. ZORNES: No, I did that myself. Those were the days when the paperhangers union didn't, weren't so insistent that you not do it yourself.

MS. HOAG: How many murals were there for this?

MR. ZORNES: Well, this was just a small mural for a post office the size off-it fitted in one end of the foyer of the post office.

MS. HOAG: I imagine from the subject matter it sounds a little bit like where you were raised as a little boy in Oklahoma with the cattle and flat spaces.

MR. ZORNES: Yes, that's quite true; it wasn't altogether unfamiliar territory for me.

MS. HOAG: I just had the pleasant experience this morning of going down to this little Spanish post office in Claremont and seeing your murals there, and they're just beautiful, the colors are delightful.

MR. ZORNES: This design caused a little controversy between me and the men in Washington. The original idea was that I do a full design from the wainscot to the ceiling. But it seemed to me that that was such a narrow foyer that this would be a little heavy-

MS. HOAG: Would overpower the room?

MR. ZORNES: Overpower the room and I conceived this idea of using a frieze-like decoration, and I still believe this was a good choice for a small room of that kind. And, of course, this subject is based upon our local scene here. I attempted to depict the farmlands and Chino to the South, and the mountains to the North, and the Colleges to the East, and then on the West side I developed the idea of the orange groves.

MS. HOAG: I see. Now the orange groves are over the door on the West.

MR. ZORNES: Yes.

MS. HOAG: Then to the right of that you have some of the rocks of our hills. And then the Spanish dances, that must be the Padua's festival.

MR. ZORNES: Yes. Padua's was in existence then-our theatre here-and I used this as representative of Claremont as one [inaudible].

MS. HOAG: And then, let's see, opposite that you have-besides eucalyptus trees, you have some of those wonderful trees that kind of hang down-are those cypresses that you have over here?

MR. ZORNES: Yes. Yes.

MS. HOAG: I wasn't sure of their real name.

MR. ZORNES: Actually this is rather interesting too, that Hartley Burr Alexander was the man who founded Scripps College-

MS. HOAG: I'm trying to find him, too.

MR. ZORNES: Millard will tell you a great deal about him because he took a great interest in Millard and I think he felt that young artists should have a more philosophical attitude toward art, and through his friendship with Millard, he used to, or as a result of his friendship with Millard-being on the staff together-he used to hold open

house at his home and we used to go there, many of us, and discussion would go on with Dr. Alexander more or less leading them and feeling people out and drawing them out. These were very, very stimulating and in this mural I have depicted the old Alexander house that used to stand above the Foothill Boulevard.

MS. HOAG: Is that the one with the arches or is it the Victorian house?

MR. ZORNES: No, it's an old, square, Victorian house. And I think the cypresses you speak of are the trees that stood near the house.

MS. HOAG: I see. And they're on that same wall with it?

MR. ZORNES: Yes. Yes.

MS. HOAG: Well then, what is the one with the very tall arched windows? Is that the-?

MR. ZORNES: Oh, this is Bridges Auditorium, this is on the Pomona Campus, it's called Bridges Auditorium. There are two auditoriums on Pomona campus, both given by the Bridges family. The old Bridges is surrounded by the studios where music training is carried on at Pomona. And then this huge auditorium was given to the College. And it's very important in the area because most concerts and important musical events take place there.

MS. HOAG: And then following that same wall around you have goats, and was that an industry or-?

MR. ZORNES: Well, that's an indication of our little Mexican village to the east of town which has in the past and still adds a little color to Claremont life.

MS. HOAG: And then following around on the left wall you have the barn, the man standing with two horses-

MR. ZORNES: Well, our country to the South, Chino area to the South, is one of the last really pleasant farming areas that we have. It's still a rather nice place to go to paint and to see ranching going on.

MS. HOAG: That's certainly interesting to know about those pictures that you-of course, I didn't know that they were pointing out the directions of things that happen. The one thing that I think is very, very beautiful is your stylization of the sky. I have never seen one treated that way. I love it.

MR. ZORNES: Well, actually this was quite a little technical stunt. These canvases had to be stretched on stretchers and then later mounted to the wall, so that in order to get this gradation I had to start with a color and move all the way around this set of canvases and then around and around again and just keep coming down and blending colors while they were still wet. And actually it turned out quite well. In the corners you can see slight mismatching but it isn't noticeable. And actually I based quite a bit of the decorative effect on the sky.

MS. HOAG: And it's very interesting architecturally because-I should tell the tape that it starts with a bluish-green at the horizon and moves upward through a kind of glow into shades of tan and then beige and almost chocolate brown where it hits the top.

MR. ZORNES: Yes.

MS. HOAG: And this does something to the-well, it takes you right up and around that room in such an architectonic way, I don't know whether it's the contrast or what that does it.

MR. ZORNES: Well, I'm glad it makes that impression because that was definitely the intent. Actually the colors in the foyer of the post office were established. There wasn't much we could do about it so I adapted the picture to this. And of course it's just as logical to have a red sky as any other kind of sky; it was deliberately designed to fit the room.

MS. HOAG: It has a lovely effect. Did you have any dictation about subject matter, or painting? I know you had project sketches probably to send to Washington.

MR. ZORNES: Well, I know that if you were to look through some of these files, and I don't know whether we can lay hands on them, but, as we see here, there were many letters. And possibly very quickly we might pick up something here. Well, let's see- [reading from letter] "…We are all feeling here that if you feel as strongly as you do about this mural job, there is no reason why you shouldn't do it…"

MS. HOAG: Well, had you voiced something that-?

MR. ZORNES: Yes I had probably-they are referring to the plan I had-

MS. HOAG: Now is this Claremont, or the one in-

MR. ZORNES: At Claremont. It says, "…the work is extremely competent and we know it will undoubtedly be well-executed. The only reason it has been held up is that as a group we have a higher opinion of your work than these renderings seems to show. It looks to us all as very much like advertising work and might be back of any magazine." I shouldn't have read that. But, let's see, it says: "…the sketches have been approved by the Treasury Department Art Program and the supervising architect and I am sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Ruffburg so that we may start negotiations…"

MS. HOAG: To go ahead.

MR. ZORNES: This is Mr. [Olin] Dows who wrote this. And I think what he was referring to-he felt that the renderings were so pat that to him they looked almost like an illustration.

MS. HOAG: Well, if these were project renderings they would be that-

MR. ZORNES: Yes, and I think I visualized very well what I would do, and I felt, and I probably being a bit young and rather inexperienced, I probably went overboard in making these renderings, and took them aback with it a little bit, I suppose. As I look through here, there were a good many letters back and forth, and I know they did arguing the advisability of covering the whole wall or just doing that. I don't see the letter here now but I know they were rather critical of the frieze idea. But I'm still glad we did it that way.

MS. HOAG: As far as what subjects you used, did they tell you, or did the postmaster tell you, or the community? Do you remember how that-?

MR. ZORNES: No, I think I simply evolved the idea of using the subject matter and then wrote describing and indicating my sketches that this was the plan, and it was accepted.

MS. HOAG: And it was the same in Texas?

MR. ZORNES: Yes, yes, this was all approved by the people in Washington. I don't think the community was consulted. I think we did go down there and they were courteous in showing us around, showing us what was available, but I don't know that they were ever consulted about the mural.

MS. HOAG: Did you have any assistants helping with either of them?

MR. ZORNES: Not, actually. I think that for a time on these Claremont murals a young fellow who used to study with me, Clifford Lewis, helped me a little bit on this.

MS. HOAG: Was he on the Project?

MR. ZORNES: No, he wasn't. He was simply a friend and he came in and, oh, I know, he helped me stretch canvases and I think possibly he helped me in some of this long, tedious painting of that sky.

MS. HOAG: He was a real friend then.

MR. ZORNES: He was a good friend. He isn't a professional artist, though; he lives in Germany now and is connected, has rather high connections there in charge of government printing, or printing of Army aides in Frankfort, Germany. I think this includes all kinds off-or training aids, I should say-Army training aids. All kinds of posters and pamphlets and book sets and so forth, that have to do with the training program.

MS. HOAG: That's very interesting. Well, actually, you didn't have much to do with other people on the Project, then? You probably did your watercolors at home and turned them in, didn't you?

MR. ZORNES: Yes, did them at home and all over the country. I was, and still am, very prone to do my watercolors on the spot, and this was one of the exciting things about the Program-

MS. HOAG: Sometimes they froze.

MR. ZORNES: Yes. I like to paint watercolors and have them freeze on the paper.

MS. HOAG: Well, were you traveling at the time of the project doing [inaudible] or weren't you?

MR. ZORNES: In this area, yes, I went all over Southern California painting watercolors everywhere. One hobby that I had was to pick out places of some historical interest. I have documented a good many places that have long since disappeared, old adobes and this sort of thing.

MS. HOAG: How wonderful! Now were any of those done and kept by the government, do you suppose?

MR. ZORNES: I don't know just what-I know that every once and a while I have run across them in schools here in California. And I think there are letters here showing the disposition of some of these pictures. How many of them remained in the government collection, I don't know. I think they were distributed to schools and libraries for the most part.

MS. HOAG: If these were of interest to the state, and not to Washington, probably be appreciated like they would have been under a state project, historically, I mean.

MR. ZORNES: Yes. I know that when I worked under Mr.-I'm sure this was Ruffburg-it was a state project. And on this project I'm sure that the office worked out all kinds of ideas to keep it going. And I remember doing one series having to do with the carrying of mails. I even went so far as to do a watercolor showing the camels on the Arizona desert carrying the mail. And early activities in carrying the mail by air, and all these things, the star route, and anything that I could think of that had to do with the history of carrying the mails.

MS. HOAG: What was the star route?

MR. ZORNES: Well, the star route-there are still star routes in existence. I think these are in the post office system-a star route is where someone has a contract for carrying the mail, usually in some out of the way place where they simply turn it over to private operation. I can't give you a good example, but I'm sure that, oh, there are places possibly in Alaska where a man would have to carry the mail by dogsled someplace. This might be designated as a star route.

MS. HOAG: I wonder how it got that name?

MR. ZORNES: I just don't know. And I may not be giving you the right indication as to what the star route was, but I know it was-there's the rural route, and there's the regular city delivery, and all these different systems and among, in all of these, there's also the star route, and I think this has to do with contract carrying of the mail.

MS. HOAG: Well, that's a very interesting thing to learn. Thank you. Can you make an estimate of how many watercolors you did under the Project?

MR. ZORNES: No. It seems to me there was some bulletin at one time that sums this up. [looking at papers] And this announces competitions here. There was some kind of a publication at one time telling what had been accomplished on the project and actually citing different artists and the number of things they had contributed, and so forth. But I have no idea what the bulletin was. It may be in these scrapbooks of ours. I haven't seen them for years. My wife looked through them yesterday, but whether or not this is in there I don't know. But it would be in some file someplace.

MS. HOAG: Well, I don't know anything about the state project because I just don't happen to run into anyone who was connected with it and I haven't, you know, that's one reason our work is so important because you can't go and read about it anyplace, no one has written anything...

MR. ZORNES: Well, undoubtedly you've run across this-If I find-

MS. HOAG: I can't find Ruffburg-

MR. ZORNES: Well, now, Wright-S. Macdonald-Wright.

MS. HOAG: Do you think he had something to do with it?

MR. ZORNES: I'm sure that he was-I met him in the offices in town when we were on the state project, and I'm sure that he had something to do with that.

MS. HOAG: Well, maybe it came before the Federal Project-

MR. ZORNES: No, it was after. I had almost forgotten about the difference and it's just possible that Wright didn't recall that there was a difference in the administration of it.

MS. HOAG: The project came to an end for most people because of the war. They were siphoned off for war industry or going into the services, and you, too, went in as an army artist, did you not?

MR. ZORNES: Well, I'm sure-I have the feeling, I'm not sure about this, but it seemed to me that the projects had pretty much ended quite a while before the war. Isn't that true?

MS. HOAG: Yes, I think it is.

MR. ZORNES: I know that-and I don't know just why they ended or what the circumstances were, but I know that they just came to an end, funds were no longer available for them, at least the ones I was connected with. Now the work that I did during Army service came about in this way: I had been drafted into the Army, and I was training up here at March Field [now March Air Reserve Base, Riverside, CA]. I had made only feeble gestures to get on to some kind of an art program; I didn't know what was available. The amusing thing about our battalion up there was that I think they didn't know what to do with stagehands, stage designers, window dressers, painters, and this whole crew of creative people in one field or another, so they put us all in camouflage. I often wished during those days of training that I'd been stuck in the infantry and gotten away from the rather erratic, temperamental atmosphere I was in.

MS. HOAG: Well, how did-did they recruit these people all from Los Angeles? Is that how they happened to get all artists?

MR. ZORNES: Well, from-mostly from the Southern California area. At least, we were the 932nd Camouflage Battalion, I believe it was, formed at March Field. And it was while I was in training up there that I received word that I had been selected as one of the forty-two, I believe, artists who were to go overseas as army artists. I heard later that, oh, names slip me-Biddle-

MS. HOAG: George Biddle?

MR. ZORNES: George Biddle was probably as much responsible as anyone for my being on the project. And it's rather strange; I didn't know him particularly well. He was out here for a while, he taught at the Art Institute in Los Angeles-or Otis-for some time. I know that during the time I did know him, he was responsible for the Los Angeles Museum buying a picture of mine. He indicated that he wanted me to take his classes when he left Otis, and it turned out later that he was responsible for having me on this program. But at any rate, I was a private with not many prospects for being anything else and then word came through that I was to be made a tech sergeant and sent on this project.

MS. HOAG: You must have been thrilled.

MR. ZORNES: It was quite a thrill, and amusing for our company. I know that the boys went out and bought stripes so they could put them on me quickly.

MS. HOAG: What kind of sergeant did you call yourself?

MR. ZORNES: I became a tech sergeant. I went from private to tech sergeant, technical sergeant.

MS. HOAG: Oh, I see.

MR. ZORNES: This is a rating between staff sergeant and first sergeant. It's a rather high rating in the non-com category and some of my buddies in the army were a little disgruntled to have a character who wasn't making a great deal of progress to suddenly become a tech sergeant.

MS. HOAG: Mr. Zornes, did this have anything to do with a pharmaceutical company that worked with the Army on getting pictures that they used for advertising and the pictures ended up in the War College back in Washington?

MR. ZORNES: I just-I don't believe there was any connection, at least I don't know of any connection. This is most-unless they possibly selected things that had been done by the army artists.

MS. HOAG: You were immediately sent right into the center of activity, weren't you?

MR. ZORNES: Yes, I was sent to Asia. Went first to India, and I was in India, Burma, and China. I was overseas for 28 going on 29 months all told.

MS. HOAG: And what did you do? Just go on with the fighting and make sketches, or…?

MR. ZORNES: Actually, we were more or less serving in the category, along with our army correspondents. Though I was in the army, and I had to follow army directions, when the correspondents would be ordered out, then we would often be sent. However, since there was no one in the theatre who knew a great deal about what we were there for, we were able to direct ourselves quite a little bit. In other words, if we were interested in some direction-for instance, when I wanted to go to Burma, I simply indicated my desire to go, and what I felt was the need to go, and I could usually get my officers to write orders so that I could go. So we were a little bit independent in our activities.

MS. HOAG: A while ago we mentioned your watercolor paintings as freezing, and I was referring to something I read that you had some kind of an engineering job at Thule Air Base in Greenland. Now was that part of this

thing?

MR. ZORNES: No, this was long after. When I decided to resign from Pomona College-that was in 1951-I left myself a little bit out on a limb as far as having a job. I worked at drafting for a little bit and then through a rather odd circumstance was doing a portrait for friends of mine in Pasadena-I did a portrait of a daughter who had just graduated from Pomona College, and while I was at their home doing this portrait, they were interested to know what I would be doing now hat I had resigned from the college. And in more or less an offhand way, I told them I wished that I could take off and go on a construction job overseas that I had had done before and gone to Alaska. It just happened that I didn't know that this man was in foreign construction at all. I thought he built houses in California. But at any rate his wife and daughter persuaded him to talk to me and it turned out that he simply sent me to Greenland. It was there. And I worked up there. It was rather amusing, too, and interesting that I-when he interviewed me at his home and asked me to fill out forms I told him, I said, "Well, look, the only experience I can cite for many years has been teaching or painting, and I don't know whether this would be interesting to a construction firm." And he said, "By all means, put everything down. We're discovering that in these out of the way places in the world where men have to live for a long time in isolated conditions, sometimes men with outside interests work out better." And this turned out this way, too. Of course, being a painter and artist and always interested in places and situations I, along with a good many people who had other interests, made good construction people. I was on the engineering staff and during the summer we did survey work laying out the base. And then in the winter I was assigned to an office job, and because of hard work and wanting to make good because I had been recommended, I stepped up in this work and eventually got into fields of work which kept me in offices.

MS. HOAG: You were really expendable, weren't you?

MR. ZORNES: Yes. But it was a great experience. For one thing, I had always wanted to go to the Arctic and I can go back to my boyhood now and say that during those years when I thought I'd be an explorer, I once had the temerity to write to [Filhjalmur] Stefansson, the famous Arctic explorer, and after a long time I got a rather kind letter and he rather surprised me by asking what field of science I was studying.

[Interruption to admit guest]

MS. HOAG: Stefansson asked you what kind of science you were in?

MR. ZORNES: Yes. This, of course, was startling to me because my idea of Arctic exploration was driving sled dogs and mushing through the snow, and this sort of thing. Then he said that, of course, to be an explorer you had to have something to explore for. And then he made a rather prophetic remark, and I wish I had his letter, but he said I had to remember that explorers, inventors, and artists had to do what they did for the sake of the candle, as he put it.

MS. HOAG: For the sake of the candle-to keep it burning?

MR. ZORNES: Well, that is-no, for the experience of doing it, for what it was worth in itself. And he said it was only those who came after who made the money. And I've always kept this in mind. That we were all in the same boat-inventors, explorers, and artists-all have to do what they do for the sake of doing it.

MS. HOAG: That's a wonderful thought, isn't it?

MR. ZORNES: Later when was in Greenland, I mean a young man who was a godson of Stefansson's and he had a plan all worked out whereby I was to go back to Vermont when we came out that season, meet Stefansson, and do a sketch of him. But he died that fall or spring, so that never came about and I've always regretted that I didn't meet him.

MS. HOAG: Yes, he must have been a very fine person.

MR. ZORNES: He was. And he was outstanding as an explorer because he took a kind of a creative approach to Arctic exploration, and working out ways to survive in the Arctic. His book The Friendly Arctic was interesting.

MS. HOAG: The Friendly Arctic?

MR. ZORNES: Yes.

MS. HOAG: You had been interested in science, however, because I know that you've illustrated some books and away back in 1935 you illustrated a manual on Southern California botany.

MR. ZORNES: Yes, for Dr. [Philip A.] Munz. Dr. Munz-

MS. HOAG: Pardon me, we're off-

[END OF TAPE]

MS. HOAG: This is Betty Lochrie Hoag on June 30, 1965 interviewing Mr. Zornes, Reel number two. You were just going to tell me about the manual of Southern California botany that you illustrated in 1935.

MR. ZORNES: Yes. Dr. Munz was then a professor of botany at Pomona College. He's retired now and lives right on our street, just a few doors down.

MS. HOAG: Is that M-a-n-n-e-s?

MR. ZORNES: M-u-n-s, I believe it is. Maybe it's M-u-n-z.

MS. HOAG: I'll look on the mailbox.

MR. ZORNES: At any rate, he was teaching at Pomona at that time and he was preparing this manual of Southern California plants. I was taking botany and this again through the influence of my friend, Tom Craig, who was a botanist. I was selected to work along with Tom and a fellow by the name of Rodman Cross to illustrate this book. This was a completely new field of endeavor for me and an important once because it's disciplined drawing in pen and ink.

MS. HOAG: Was it stipple or hatching or. . .

MR. ZORNES: Oh, we did all kinds of things, and I think this was rather important to me because these thing shad to be scientifically useful. We had to choose techniques that actually delineated and it seemed to me that doing this little job impressed me with the possibilities of drawing that actually, that you work realistically because this is necessary to illustrate, but even so you have to develop a style because you cant' say everything and you have to by emphasis achieve style and in so doing, you-or by your emphasis-you have to achieve good illustrative quality and by doing so you achieve style.

MS. HOAG: And also probably eliminating a lot, too.

MR. ZORNES: Yes, this is necessary by emphasis or selection and you naturally eliminate what isn't pertinently necessary so that-and this it seems to me, is what a style amounts to-simply eliminating what you don't need to the point of making statements which are significant for the purpose for which they are made.

MS. HOAG: Otherwise we'd all be photographers instead of artists.

MR. ZORNES: Yes. A friend of mine, Helen Wright, who lives in New York-her father was Stephen Wright, an important scientists, and I believe at one time was president of the American Scientific Society-I forget just what it was. But at any rate she had often remarked to me that this had been one of his regrets, that scientific books had become steadily uninteresting as they had become more definitely illustrated by photographs and that science lost a great deal when they lost artists in the illustrating.

MS. HOAG: That's interesting. That's what I studied for.

MR. ZORNES: Oh, is that so? Scientific illustrating?

MS. HOAG: Yes. At Stanford. I did a lot of it there.

MR. ZORNES: Well, this is-Tom Craig and I visited Stanford and I think one of the things that was exciting to me-and this was before we did this work too-there was a young man there, he had a Scandinavian name, I can't think of it now, but he was doing some beautiful illustrations in wash and ink, botanical illustrations.

MS. HOAG: Probably past my time.

MR. ZORNES: Kalmquist, or something of that kind. [Palmquist?]

MS. HOAG: Balmquist.

MR. ZORNES: Kalmquist, it seems to me. But I was really impressed with his little drawings.

MS. HOAG: Well, you know, our old president at Stanford-oh dear, I've forgotten it. I guess I'll have to dub it in the tape later-David Starr Jordan-

MR. ZORNES: Oh yes!

MS. HOAG: Illustrated things. Have you ever seen his fishing?

MR. ZORNES: Yes, I have.

MS. HOAG: That's one of the most illustrative jobs that I ever saw, and I did work for Dr. Twitty. He was writing a book on transplants on embryo salamanders.

MR. ZORNES: Oh yes.

MS. HOAG: And I did a lot of scientific things directly, using a panograph for that book, but then he also had commissioned me under-with the same as the project work-evidently he called it the CCC or something with the students at the time to do watercolor, tempera, and pen-and-ink full-size life drawings of the gorgeous salamanders, and the California salamander is orange or lemon, great colors, and it was just a thrill. I did a lot of those plates, and then, of course, he never could afford to have them reproduced.

MR. ZORNES: I think this is the exciting thing about such work: That you have to come directly in contact with the real thing. Now working in this botanical file we had to boil up specimens and bring them back to their shape and get down and illustrate the tiny seed using a microscope and so forth. And to me, of course, not being a scientist, and not being much of a botanist, these things were very impressive to me for the design aspect.

MS. HOAG: That's very thrilling.

MR. ZORNES: And some way or another, this is the thing that disappoints me a little bit about contemporary trends in art. It isn't that I'm equipped to be critical of contemporary trends; it's simply that I can't help but feel that a great deal is being missed. I have never been able to even begin to exhaust my interest in what actually is, you know, and anyone who has any concept of design learns, of course, that dealing with truth isn't a matter of dealing with just literalness, it's a matter of significant truth. And even these very tightly scientific drawings were exciting simply because here again you had to simplify these in order to make a good illustration, and you had to deal with what was significant. And I just feel that there's so much, we're losing a great deal of sensitivity toward nature and toward what we're surrounded with, simply because there's this insistence upon getting away from rather than becoming sensitive to what is actually, to what we're actually surrounded by.

MS. HOAG: Well, don't you imagine the pendulum will swing back? It always has.

MR. ZORNES: I'm sure this is true. And I think that there are benefits to come out of these contemporary efforts. I know that when I see a show of contemporary painting, I get a certain thrill out of the audacity of some of these things, the colorfulness and bold designing, which will in the long run contribute and I know while I still rather stick to my own particular bent of an interest in subject matter. Still, these things have their effect of sort of waking you up to the design possibilities.

MS. HOAG: Great design line is evident in all of those.

MR. ZORNES: Yes. I've rather held to a philosophy of a concern for subject matter over the idea of self-expression.

MS. HOAG: Even the communicable subject. It seems to me that's the crux of this.

MR. ZORNES: Yes, I think so. It seems to me too that what you're doing as an artist is saying, "Look, now, isn't this beautiful, isn't this?"

MS. HOAG: Can you see what I see?

MR. ZORNES: Yes. Yes. And I can't help but believe that this is what the artist's mission is. I have a rather amusing story: during the depression years, my parents had lost a great deal in money and property, and my father had to make a completely new start. They rented a place for a time in Northern California and later did well and bought this property. But during the years when they were renting it, they had a very sour landlady, and when I used to go up there and sponge off my folks, when I had to go up there to paint, she had a rather disdainful attitude toward my painting but she was curious and it got to be a regular pattern that when I would show them my sketches before I came home, she would always be included, and finally she wanted to buy a painting of mine, and did by one. And what seemed to not be interested at all-but she told my mother one time, she said, "You know, I wondered why I bought that painting but I know now that when Mr. Fowler brought me up here, out here when I was a young woman and we had this property and I sat here for twenty years looking at these brown hills and being disgusted with my lot, and your son came up here and painted and then I bought this painting and now I'm beginning to like these hills."

MS. HOAG: Oh, isn't that wonderful!

MR. ZORNES: So I think that in a simple way that's a kind of a triumph for a painter because what you're doing actually is simply helping people to see. And when I mentioned that I rather-I'm not particularly concerned about

self-expression because I don't think you can help this. I tell my students I couldn't walk across the room without somebody saying, "There goes Zornes," they can tell by the way he walks. In other words, if you draw and paint in an honest way, you'll be self-expressive; you can't help it, you're caught with your-you're stuck with this. But my concern has always been, whether I've accomplished it to any degree or not is another thing, but what I've always wanted to do is be expressive of subject matter. Whatever skill or ability I have, if I'm able to do this, if I can be expressive of the spirit of a tree or a mountain and so forth, then I've accomplished what I want. And such things as self-expression and design and all these things of self-expression comes in to it design-design is a means to an end. I've never felt of design as a complete and in itself. Though this is not a criticism of people who are concerned with design in abstract terms.

MS. HOAG: I think it's wonderful that fruit can be your landlady's reaction.

MR. ZORNES: Well, at least this was one aspect of it. And since I've always been interested in people, I've never been able to discriminate a great deal among people; I'm not impressed with people simply because they have more cultural advantages than others. I appreciate these things, and recommend them for accomplishments and so forth, yet for some reason I've always been fundamentally interested in people as they come, and reactions of people are always interesting to me. I've always remembered a quote by Horace Greeley, I believe it was, the great newspaper man who told his reporters to "never overestimate people's knowledge but never underestimate their intelligence." Now I think this is a pretty good rule to go by because in the long run, I believe that people-uneducated, uninitiated, or unsophisticated people are going to recognize the truth of your work some way or another if it's there. And if it isn't there, they're going to catch you out too.

MS. HOAG: My husband has said this so many times about principles of design. He's an architect. He feels it very definitely.

MR. ZORNES: That it's a means to achieving a good structure?

MS. HOAG: Well, yes, but even the people who come to him and say they don't know anything about architecture, they still-when they see good architecture, they have the intelligence to understand it and they do appreciate it.

MR. ZORNES: I believe this. I know we're thrown off a great deal by peoples' attitude toward our work as artists, and we feel that they lack understanding, but I believe we can always take this back to our own work because lack of understanding, maybe it's because we aren't quite saying what we should be saying.

MS. HOAG: I have a couple more questions about your illustrating. I know you did the Ford Times magazine. And then another thing you did in 1952, you illustrated a book called Palomar, which doesn't sound like a botany book. What was that?

MR. ZORNES: Well, this was-Helen Wright, I mentioned her a while ago as an astronomer, one of the few women astronomers in this country-she had written a very interesting book called Sweeper of the Skies. I believe this had to do with the life of Maria Mitchell, who taught at Bryn Mawr, I believe it was, for many years. She had been an astronomer and her notes were there, and Helen had access to them and had written this book about Maria Mitchell and this was followed by a Guggenheim grant to do a story on Palomar.

MS. HOAG: I bet that's an interesting book.

MR. ZORNES: Well, the grant included the story of Palomar and then the life of Dr.-I can't think of the man, at the moment, who was responsible for Palomar, but at any rate, she's still working on this project. And this book was designed to sell at Palomar primarily. It's a book describing the telescope and its history. The book was republished in England-I think the English publication is called The Great Telescope. My illustrations are used in both publications.

MS. HOAG: Are they wood blocks?

MR. ZORNES: No, they have the appearance of being word blocks but they were done on scratch board, you know the technique of coating a clay surface paper and then you scratch-you coat it with India ink and you scratch white lines in it.

MS. HOAG: Is that sgraffito?

MR. ZORNES: Well, no, because sgraffito is actually a fresco technique. This is simply a way of achieving a precise drawing in white line by scratching out these lines with measuring instruments, and so forth. So that they have the appearance of being rather exact wood cuts, but they were done in this way. It seems to me all these experiences have come along for me in fields that I am not actually connected in, but they have been a part of my education because in the effort of doing some drawings I have learned form these people and from

these jobs, so they've all been exciting experiences for me.

MS. HOAG: It certainly sounds like it. I always like to ask the artist what they feel about he Federal Art Project as far as its influences on American history went, your observations on what it contributed to art in this locality, or nationally-or didn't. How do you feel about this anyway, generally?

MR. ZORNES: Well, first, I'll tell you from a personal point of view and say that it was an exciting experience for me and probably is responsible for my being an artist; therefore, I have to be very thankful to it for that reason. And I thoroughly believe that it was a very important thing-I've had occasion to come in contact with the results of the Writing Projects that went on, and I can't say much about the Music Projects or Drama Projects because I don't' know a great deal about these fields, but I'm sure that it was a very, very-what is the term I want to use?-it was a stimulating thing. It was for me personally and I feel certain that it was for a great many people. The only sad thing about it, I think, is an attitude that as taken toward it. Some way or another-

MS. HOAG: By the public, you mean?

MR. ZORNES: By the general public. It seemed to me that as time went on, there was the idea that the government was sort of feeding artists by supplying these projects. Actually, I think the artists fed the-did something for the public. And for the money spent, I think it as a wonderful investment. . .

MS. HOAG: You think they got their money's worth.

MR. ZORNES: I thoroughly believe it, and I'm sorry actually that there isn't something of this kind going on as a continuous thing, because say what you will, it's all very well to say that artists develop because of having to meet difficulties and so forth, I'm sure this is true, and I'm sure there are many people who are like I am, they're lazy and if they didn't have to beat it out in order to be an artists they probably wouldn't be one. Bu t I still think that we as a country have arrived at the point where we could well afford to be investing in these creative efforts. If we don't do it, I think we're going to miss a great deal.

MS. HOAG: We're the only major country that doesn't.

MR. ZORNES: I believe this may be true. . .

MS. HOAG: It's been true for a long time. Before that, of course, the church and state did.

MR. ZORNES: There's always been some kind of sponsorship and we certainly have evidence through the art of the past that sponsorship of art by the church and by powerful rulers in Europe and during the Renaissance times-these things resulted in the beautiful things that we have as a legacy, and I think it leads to some kind of tradition of art being formed. This is one of the things I think we're missing is a feeling for tradition in art and this may be very well for the individual but I think in the long run art is going to suffer from it because no one individual can do the whole thing.

MS. HOAG: Actually the only indigenous American art, I think, that we have is probably the post office mural work that's representative of subject matter being from the country and the artists being from the country and their techniques being so much of it felt for the first time.

MR. ZORNES: Yes. I feel that this is important and it certainly resulted in at least something in the way of the work of art existing in many out-of-the-way parts of the country, and who knows how many young people could be influenced by this, and who knows how rich this could become if it was followed up.

MS. HOAG: I'm surprised about what you said about the feeling of the public at this time because they were getting, for instance, your watercolors for their schools and for public buildings.

MR. ZORNES: I think I may be doing an injustice here, but some way or another as the thing dropped out of existence, you felt that it did simply because there was a general feeling, possibly there was an exploitation of this by possibly by a certain political politician who said, "Well, this is a waste of government money," and so forth. It would have been an easy tag to put on this. I know I am sure that during the war there was criticism of the program during the Army, "This is the way we're spending money to fight a war?" Well, actually, it was a very, very small amount of money compared to money that is spent in many other directions. So that you can't really feel that there was any great waste connected with it. And I suppose in your research that something, somewhere, some pattern will develop showing what the general attitude of the public was.

MS. HOAG: One thing which has come to me lately which I find rather interesting is that when I looked up the history of the record of an artist, which I try to do before I talk to them, if I can possibly work it in, if they're working today and I have been working through this period, in the Who's Who and different biographies, it almost completely skips that period of the 30s to the 40s that I know from talking to artists that they usually

give this information out themselves, you know, when they write and ask you for your life story. So possibly some of this one the part of the artists that they don't want to say, "I was working in Chicago at this time." They just don't put it in there and you think that they all disappeared or something.

MR. ZORNES: This may be. This may be. I think this may be. I know that I have never felt any reticence about talking about it, and was actually very proud of it. I know that when it happened, you know, as a young artist, I say that's possibly one of the best parts of my life. I had just been married and we, like young people, we didn't have a dime-at least I didn't-and this was exciting. I think I was paid 23 dollars a week, and this was it, 23 dollars a week to live on and all you have to do is paint...

MS. HOAG: Do what you want to do.

MR. ZORNES: And I've never really hit it quite so good since. Nowadays the picture changes altogether, but if you want to come right down to what really was important, you had it then. And I would do it all over again if it was possible. And if something would come about and it was possible to shift your life around and be able to do it, I would do it all over again gladly. Because when you come right down to it as far as I am concerned, the only thing I really want to do is paint, and I'm sure that when you're doing this with all the energy you've got and all the excitement you've got, and the excitement, it builds up through doing one picture after another, I think it's a good thing for the growth of art. And the disappointing thing about it is that it should ever have the connotation of being a sort of a doling out. It might have been a way of putting artists tow work along in programs where other people were put to work, but that's neither here nor there. What was accomplished is the important thing.

MS. HOAG: Well, there probably were some of them who weren't playing fair with it and doing the work that they should have, but this would be true in any field, private industry, or anything else-you have some hangers-on.

MR. ZORNES: Yes. You think about this quite a lot, any artist you have your days when you're disgusted and you say, "If I could just know that I'm considered rather an accomplished artist, why isn't it possible for me to just paint. Would it be worth it?" and what kind of sponsorship would work. I suppose that if there was some system whereby an artist could gradually win a place, win a station where he would be entitled to sponsorship and this could come about as he proved himself that he would arrive at it with a mature attitude which would enable them to take full advantage of it and give his best. This would probably eliminate the so-called hangers-on.

MS. HOAG: I think that's a very unique idea. I never heard it before.

MR. ZORNES: It seems that-now for instance, anyone who like myself, and there are many of us, who are going to be an artists anyway. My wife and I, we've had-anyone who is buying homes and doing things of this kind has his moments when he wonders if he's going to make the payment and so forth, and one night we were talking, "suppose we should just lose every last thing that we've got, just how would we take it?" And we both agreed that it wouldn't really bother us a great deal, you'd just start over again, you' d probably start the whole thing over again, but you'd be painting. It wouldn't make such a great deal of difference. You really aren't so dependent on this whole business of having things. The important thing is that you work.

MS. HOAG: Well, I think that you artists are very lucky that you know paintings and things and good things that there are always people who are going to want them and spiritually need them, really.

MR. ZORNES: Well, you do. It's a little hard to say this about your own work-you usually re-phrase it and say the work of artists but, of course, you have your own ego and your own experience places you among these people-you're at least making this effort. And you know from experience, whether you can voice it or not, you know that these things are important. And I have known this actually in selling pictures, fortunately I sell a great deal of work because, again, I do watercolors-they're not really very expensive. People in almost any income bracket can buy paintings and the experience of selling paintings is a very rich one because you-I've known people who assumed that they couldn't afford more than a print, and they didn't understand anything more-they didn't understand art, and so forth, but they'd buy a painting and pretty soon they began to realize what an original work of art in a house does for them, and they become collectors. I've started with people and they bought one little watercolor of mine and now they own maybe two or three watercolors of mine, and they own sculpture by friends of mine, and they have bought many other paintings. It's just this idea of understanding and having the sense that this thing was created, and since they own it they feel it's creative for them, and it becomes important, and this is growing, I'm sure. I think that-

MS. HOAG: I think that stems from the Federal Art Project period, too.

MR. ZORNES: To a great extent it could, because more people became aware of paintings. Now even tot his day I meet people who know my work because of seeing a picture in a school and possibly in many cases I'm sure this had led to an interest. And I believe that there is, regardless of how it comes about-through government sponsorship or the persistence of artists in being artists anyway and people gradually buying and acquiring these things, and nowadays I'm sure that it's expanding. People who right after the war would have a $10,000 or

$12,000 home, now the same people are buying $15,000 and $20,000 homes and it is not uncommon at all for people to be furnishing a $30,000 or $40,000 home and then they are beginning to think that with their home they can't be entirely satisfied with stereotyped furniture and stereotyped decoration, so they venture into owning works of art. And this grows and I-it will have to come about because we really haven't the physical frontiers experience any more, we haven' the roads to adventure that we had in the past, it's going to have to come from within if we're going to have to search themselves for spiritual needs, and art in many cases is going to be the answer. I believe for this reason that those of us who have persisted in beings artists through thick and thin are coming into our own more or less because we definitely have something to contribute.

MS. HOAG: I certainly agree with this. I can't think of any more questions to ask you about the Project. Do you have anything that you would like to say before we-?

MR. ZORNES: Well, let's see, I know this must be a rather rambling thing. I suppose these tapes are edited down to where they'll have some kind of continuity. But the interesting thing about the conversation is that it's so like the conversation you get into with students or friends. You find yourself rambling clear across the whole scene of what you've done, what they've done, its importance, and why do it, and you usually wind up with the same conclusion: that you're pretty glad you're an artist.

MS. HOAG: Isn't that wonderful!

MR. ZORNES: You're perfectly willing to find out the pitfalls of it. And I do this, I look at people around me at the same age group and get the college rolls, and see who's president of this company and that, and so forth…

MS. HOAG: Check your happiness against their happiness.

MR. ZORNES: Then you say, "It's not a cinch, this business of being an artist, but still you wouldn't really trade it."

MS. HOAG: Have you ever heard of any other one that was a cinch? I don't know of any.

MR. ZORNES: Well, I suppose not. I suppose that if you spoke with someone who has reached some kind of goal in the business world or any other field, he would be amused if he thought you were considering him a cinch.

MS. HOAG: Well, that's one nice thing about artists-they never reach their goal. I think if you find an artist who says that he's done what he wanted to, he isn't an artist.

MR. ZORNES: Well, that's very true.

MS. HOAG: I've never seen one yet who was good who didn't say, "Well, I didn't-if I could do it just once more I would."

MR. ZORNES: This is true. You're beginning every day. You really start your life every day. Because you never can really feel, as is aid a while ago, you never feel that you've licked it, you can't possibly. And then there's another thing: you never retire from this job. You reach retirement age and you may be lucky and find you have time to work.

MS. HOAG: Except like dear old Dr. Schwankovsky down at Laguna Beach. Do you know him?

MR. ZORNES: I don't know him; I've heard the name.

MS. HOAG: He's awfully nice. I taped him, and he lost most of his sight…

MR. ZORNES: Oh, that's too bad.

MS. HOAG: He's been painting right up until the end-he's eighty-something. That really makes you sad because he's still thinking painting all the time.

MR. ZORNES: Yes. And one important thing about the whole business of being an artist that I suppose-since our subject has been this Project, I think this got rooted in my thinking away back during that time, and that is that as a whole philosophy, it has its advantages. I often think that artistic thought is the most complete way of thought. I'm sure that…

MS. HOAG: Because it embraces so much.

MR. ZORNES: It embraces so much. The scientist, for instance, carries on his work but he can never be sure of the final result of his research. He isn't in control of it. The artist is in control always because regardless of how simple his effort is, he is the boss throughout the whole thing, and it has to be a balance of many things-it has to

be the balance of technique, of concern for the source of subject matter, and it has to be designed, it has to be a rounded and complete idea, a complete thought, and this is a great deal of satisfaction in itself.

MS. HOAG: Well, you weren't active in any of the group things on the project, but I think that some of those certainly were a wonderful fulfillment in helping a great many people. For instance, the Long Beach Auditorium that was done in tile-

MR. ZORNES: Oh, yes, yes, I remember that.

MS. HOAG: -employed some 125 people. And it's a beautiful achievement really.

MR. ZORNES: And while this didn't affect me directly, I think that I felt then, and I still do, that there are some things that simply in scope would not be possible unless it was carried on in this way, where a great many people could enter into it and where it could be done for public use in that way. And I really hope that there will be some kind of a program come about whereby this will become part of it, not just an experiment, not just as-

MS. HOAG: One day of culture.

MR. ZORNES: One day of culture, but definitely part of our whole way of life. I don't see why it shouldn't be. That is, those of us who are artists considered it important enough that it should be, and I believe there's a growing public who will accept this idea.

MS. HOAG: I feel that there is and I hope we're both right. Mr. Zornes, I think you so much for this interview. I enjoyed it and I'm sure the Archives are going to be very happy with our tape.

MR. ZORNES: Thank you very much for coming.

MS. HOAG: Surely.

[ADDENDA]

MS. HOAG: Mr. Zornes started to look at his notebook and was reminded of something that certainly should be in the tape. Will you tell us about it?

MR. ZORNES: Well, it was pleasing to me, of course, that when examples of our work were shown in Washington, D.C., President and Mrs. Roosevelt were present at the exhibitions and were asked to choose things to be permanently housed in the White House. One of my watercolors was chosen for the White House collection. It was called The Old Adobe. I believe here are some clippings. It says, "Zornes' Painting Chosen by President Roosevelt-At a formal opening of the PWAP [Public Works of Art Project] exhibition at the Corcoran Galleries of Washington, D.C., Milford Zornes' watercolor painting The Old Adobe was one of the thirty chosen by the President and Mrs. Roosevelt to be hung in the White House." It says, "…Zornes, former Pomona College student…" and so forth. At any rate, that was exciting and then at one time years later when I was in Washington, we went to the White House and found it hanging in one of the executive offices in the White House.

MS. HOAG: Are we going to be able to borrow this for microfilming, or do you feel it's too big a book to keep…

MR. ZORNES: Oh, if you'd like to take it, you're perfectly welcome, if it isn't too unwieldy-

MS. HOAG: No. I'll be very careful of it.

MR. ZORNES: -and would like to do it, here is a reproduction of the section of the mural in a college magazine, and there are several clippings here that have to do with the Project actually, so that it might be generally useful to you-

MS. HOAG: Oh no-

MR. ZORNES: -but I certainly would be glad to have you-

MS. HOAG: I would like to very much.

MR. ZORNES: -make any use of it at all.

MS. HOAG: It's also a record for you incidentally-it's a good thing to have these things on microfilm back at the Archives because, heaven forbid, if your house ever burned up you'd have a record at least-

MR. ZORNES: Well, I certainly would be pleased and I'll be glad to cooperate by picking them up if that would be

a help or whatever.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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